

New Changes to financial aid scholarship application in the 2007-2008 academic year.

by Kim Gilbert

USF St. Petersburg- In an effort to choose exemplary students, the application process for USF St. Petersburg financial aid scholarships has become more competitive for the 2007-2008 academic year.

Students will be required to submit an application, collect two letters of recommendation, write a 250-500 word essay, have a higher GPA and a section has been added for additional financial considerations. The change in requirements detects those students that stand out based on effort, academic success and/or financial need. The application is available on USF St. Petersburg's financial aid webpage.

"The word scholarship means excellence and it needed to stand for that," said Campus Director of Financial Aid, Erin Dunn.

Scholarships can be divided into two types, academic merit and financial need.

Recent changes to the scholarship application brochure and online website make it easier for students to find scholarship sources. The website, a comprehensive database, contains the most up-to-date information and divides scholarship opportunities by class standing.

The website provides links to the various scholarships offered by USF St. Petersburg, departmental scholarships from the Colleges of Business, Education and Arts and Sciences, State of Florida scholarships, and outside source scholarships which can be based on such things as field of interest, parent history, cultural heritage and sports.

In the past students were required to have a 2.0 GPA when applying for and maintaining financial aid scholarships. This year with the recent changes, first-time-in-college freshman entering USF St. Petersburg will be required to have a 3.2 GPA, continuing USF students/incoming transfer students require a 3.0 GPA and graduate students require a 3.0 GPA. "A 2.0 is not excellence," Dunn said, "A 3.0 is saying that I am trying harder, I want to be a better student, I want to be a better person, I want to put more into it."

As new freshman become more comfortable with their USF St. Petersburg campus, professors and faculty, it's important for students to get an early start on gathering recommendation letters. The deadline for applying for the 2007-2008 academic year USF St. Petersburg financial aid scholarships is March 30, 2007.

"The deadline is not until next year but if students have made a connection with a professor or faculty/staff member get to them before you break for the holiday," Dunn said. "It's a good habit for a student to start gathering these kinds of letters, any outside organizations will require these same things."

A short 250-500 word essay is required. Each year a significant amount of scholarship money goes unclaimed because students fail to write these short essays, Dunn said.

The USF St. Petersburg Scholarship Committee, which is made up of USF St. Petersburg faculty and staff, awards yearly scholarships to eligible recipients. The 13 member committee wanted more information for the selection process and the new additional considerations section of the online application does this.

"It's another piece of the puzzle for the scholarship committee, but it also helps personalize the student," Dunn said. The FAFSA is more of a generalization of need; it does not let the committee see the big picture of that particular student's life or their need.

In the 2006- 2007 academic year \$125,578 was awarded to 95 students. The average award amount per student was \$1,321. This amount is slightly above the full-time, 12 credit hours, tuition of \$1,200.

The scholarship process is a competitive one. Every year there is more money available to students and scholarships play a role in attracting talented students to USF St. Petersburg.

“We had two National Merit finalists start on this campus this year,” said Director of the Prospective Student Outreach Center, John Vassel. “Our goal here is not only to get the National Merit finalists but also those students that do have outstanding high school backgrounds, excellent test scores, and excellent GPAs.”

Scholarships come from a variety of sources, to see a complete listing of available scholarships go to <http://www.stpt.usf.edu/finaid> and click on scholarships. There are a lot of outside sources for scholarship money and eligibility is based a varying criteria. Applying for one scholarship does not mean applying to all.

“I encourage everybody to apply, even if they don’t get it one year they may get it the next,” Dunn said. The scholarship committee rotates and changes on a regular basis. “One student will stand out one year, the next year they might not or vice versa.”