



Most eligible Latino students at community colleges don't know they qualify to receive financial aid

LatinaLista.net -- When it comes to Latino students opting to go to college versus going straight to work out of high school or enlisting into the military, the deciding factor, too many times, is money.

It's because of money, or more precisely the lack of it, that the vast, vast majority (55%) of young Latinos choose starting their college path on the most affordable route -- at the community college.

While tuition rates are lower at community colleges than at four-year colleges and universities, for families who live from paycheck to paycheck, any amount can tax a family's budget to the breaking point.

One would think that eligible Latino students would apply for the financial aid that is out there. Sadly, that's not the case.

Maybe it has something to do with Latino students are usually awarded far less financial aid than any other ethnic group, as well as, white students, according to a 2005 report by Excelencia in Education.

Or it could be that low-moderate income Latino families really don't understand the nuances between grants and loans or comprehend the paperwork involved in applying for financial aid.

At any rate, because not enough of these students are applying for financial aid, the College Board reported in May that millions of dollars in financial aid at the community college level go unused.

Last month, the College Board released the report: [The Financial Aid Challenge: Successful Practices that Address the Underutilization of Financial Aid in Community Colleges.](#)

The report's authors offer a series of quick solutions community colleges can do to combat this problem, such as:

- **Provide bilingual services and materials**
- **Offer evening and weekend office hours**
- **Apply multiple approaches to convey financial aid information to all students**
- **Use multilanguage media, online resources and local opinion leaders to drive awareness**

- **Involve the families of students when providing financial aid materials and activities**
- **Conduct workshops or information sessions for students interested in college and communicate financial aid opportunities in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate**
- **Build a list of community organizations that already help students with the application process**
- **Partner with other education institutions or community organizations to offer financial aid counseling to all students**

All of these suggestions have the potential to reach the intended audience but it's the authors' analysis of independent programs making a difference in local communities that is worth the attention.

For example, California has the "I Can Afford College" program; New York has "At Home in College;" and St. Paul, Minnesota has "Admission Possible."

Admission Possible, based in St. Paul, Minn., is an intensive mentoring initiative that concentrates on low-income students. It joins with the AmeriCorps network and its volunteers to deliver free weekly after-school sessions, ACT/SAT® preparation, college admission guidance and financial aid counseling. The program currently serves more than 3,600 students and program alumni as they make the transition to college.

It's clear community colleges cannot work by themselves to get the message out there that college is affordable for everyone. It has to be a community-wide collaborative effort with the end-goal being that those students who want to go to college are shown how to do it.

Yet, it has to be done before these students get so frustrated that they quit before starting and miss out on a great opportunity for themselves, and their community loses out on any future contributions they would have made as a degreed professional.

"Community colleges are a critical part of the U.S. education system and Latino communities. Today, community colleges serve nearly half of all undergraduates in the United States. It is essential that the education community provide the counseling necessary to increase the number of deserving students who receive need-based financial aid so that they can become part of the educated and skilled workforce our country requires to compete in the global economy." -- College Board President Gaston Caperton

Posted by [Marisa Treviño](#) on 16 de Junio 2010 2:59 PM | [Permalink](#)