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## Take advantage of Millions in Financial Aid that Go Unclaimed at Community Colleges

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*You're still in time to avoid being part of the large number of Latino students who fail to enter college because they did not apply for financial aid, partly due to a lack of a basic understanding of the process. Low and moderate-income students lack the advice that could bring them into the U.S. workforce. Even though they are eligible for need-based federal financial aid, these students are the least likely to apply for funds.*

Latinos could have greater access to these funds, especially since more than half (55 percent) of Hispanic undergraduate college students go to community colleges, according to a 2008 College Board Report from the National Commission on Community Colleges. A report created by **Excelencia in Education** called "*How Latino Students Pay for College: Patterns of Financial Aid,*" published in 2005, states that Latinos receive less financial aid rewards than other ethnic groups, and less than whites.

A report released by the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center in late May found that millions of dollars are left on the table each year by low and moderate-income students attending community colleges.

The new College Board study, "The Financial Aid Challenge: Successful Practices that Address the Underutilization of Financial Aid in Community Colleges," conducted in collaboration with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) showed that:

- In the 2007-08 academic year, 58 percent of Pell Grant-eligible students who attended community colleges either full or part-time applied for federal financial aid, compared with 77 percent of eligible students at four-year public institutions;
- During the two-year period from fall 2007 to fall 2009, full-time enrollment at U.S. community colleges increased by 24.1 percent;
- Students are reluctant to apply for aid partly due to a lack of basic understanding, inconsistent or inaccurate information, distrust of government agencies, difficulty using resources during designated hours and a lack of human or technological resources on campus.

Amongst many other issues highlighted in the report, several point to cultural and linguistic factors affecting students' ability to access financial aid. To read the full report, which highlights community college programs that have been successful in providing financial aid information to Latinos, click here or visit <http://advocacy.collegeboard.org/publications>.

College Board President Gaston Caperton said, "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."

The study was released recently at a news conference held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., where higher education advocates, community college leaders and policymakers came together to talk about the challenges, obstacles and solutions facing community college students.

"Community colleges are being called upon to increase college access and student completion rates. That means that we will need to do everything that we can to make college affordable to students," said George Boggs, president, American Association of Community Colleges. "The challenge is clearly laid out in this report: community colleges serve the most financially disadvantaged students in all of higher education, yet too many qualified students are not getting the financial help they need. I hope this 'call to action' will make financial aid a higher priority for all of us in community college leadership."

The first in a series of community college initiatives from the College Board's new Advocacy & Policy Center, the study highlights information on successful programs, policies and approaches and provides valuable recommendations on financial aid administration for leaders who are seeking to increase the number of students applying for and receiving financial aid.

It references a dozen programs making strides in increasing the number of community college students accessing financial aid. Programs cited include: Nevada P-16 Advisory Council; Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE); College Foundation of North Carolina (CNFC); Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation; Puente Project in California; I Can Afford College program in California; At Home in College in New York; Admission Possible in Minnesota; College Forward in Texas; Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC) in Kentucky; the Connecticut Community College System and College Goal Sunday in Indiana.

"The value of community colleges is most apparent in times of high unemployment, when those who have lost jobs enroll in college for additional education or training so that they may re-enter the job market," said Ronald Williams, vice president of the College Board. "Our hope is that this report, through its identification of successful financial aid practices, will help community college leaders around the country to respond more effectively to the challenges facing students who are seeking to gain access to available Federal and State financial aid."

The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center was established to help transform education in America. Guided by the College Board's principles of excellence and equity in education, the Center works to ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to succeed in college and beyond. Its priorities include: College Preparation & Access, College Affordability & Financial Aid, and College Admission & Completion.