



ACHE seeks increase for ASAP funding, proposes 2 need-based programs

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education will ask lawmakers to include a 5 percent increase in the Alabama Student Assistance Program that supports students from families of the working poor.

Two new need-based programs, Career Promise and College Promise, would help students from low-income families earn postsecondary awards for careers in high-demand fields in their communities.

A top priority in ACHE's Higher Education Strategic Plan, Building Human Capital, focuses on developing Alabama's economy and workforce by aligning educational offerings with career pathways in high-demand fields.

ACHE records show that health care is the top producer among Alabama's public universities in bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees.

Next Gen FSA will combine USDE sites

Next Gen FSA, a U.S. Department of Education effort to improve how students and parents deal with Federal Student Aid, will combine several USDE websites into a single site: studentaid.gov.

When the site launches on December 22, students, parents and borrowers will be able to access all the information and tools they currently use through an improved interface.

A new [video](#), "The Digital Future of Federal Student Aid," describes what students and borrowers can expect from Next Gen FSA in the future.

During 2020, more tools will be introduced that will continue to improve the customer experience for students, parents and borrowers. They will be able to:

- Get personalized information about the aid they received.
- Compare loan repayment options to find a strategy that meets their needs.
- Receive counseling about their remaining loan and grant eligibility, make informed borrowing decisions and manage their existing debt.
- Access chats that will provide specific answers to their questions.
- Plan and maintain eligibility for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

Eventually, borrowers will be able to repay their loans through studentaid.gov so customers can manage every aspect of their federal student aid on one website.



Students should learn about credit scores

Students should be familiar with credit scores, three-digit numbers that have a long-lasting effect on buying power. When people apply for credit, their credit score will be checked. The higher their credit score, the better the chances they will be approved.

One thing to remember is that, in order to have a credit score, a person has to have some debt.

Although there are several scoring methods, the most widely accepted one comes from FICO. FICO scores range from 300 to 850. These items make up a FICO score:

- **35 percent is based on the borrower's payment history.** Early payments will have a higher number than on-time payments, which will have a higher score than late payments.
- **30 percent is based on outstanding debt.** This outstanding debt is how much people owe on car loans, mortgages, credit cards, etc. The number of credit cards they have and if those cards are near the maximum borrowing limit will hurt their score.
- **15 percent is based on the length of time borrowers have had credit.** The longer they have been borrowing money and paying it back in a timely manner, the better their score.
- **10 percent is based on new credit.** If people have opened several new accounts, that will have a negative effect on their score. Also, the more inquiries on a credit report in a year, the lower the borrower's score.
- **10 percent is based on the types of credit people currently have.** It helps to have a mix of loan types. If borrowers have a credit card, an installment loan will even the credit out.



Scholarship Spotlight

Alabama Municipal Electric Authority Scholarship

Eligibility: The applicant must:

- be a graduating high school senior
- attend a 4-year college/university, community college or vocational/trade school in Alabama
- have a parent or legal guardian who is a customer of the city electric department in Alexander City, Dothan, Fairhope, LaFayette, Lanett, Luverne, Opelika, Piedmont, Riviera Utilities, Sylacauga or Tuskegee

In addition, the applicant must submit:

- an application
- an official transcript, including ACT score if applying for academic scholarship
- ACT or SAT scores
- 2 letters of recommendation

Award: \$2,500

Number: 4 per city

Deadline: Feb. 12

ACHE approves 14 new degrees and 3 new certificates

At its Dec. 6 meeting, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education approved 14 new degree programs at Alabama's public colleges and universities. The new programs are:

Auburn University — bachelor's degree in international studies in liberal arts; master's degree in educational research, measurement and evaluation; and doctorate in building construction.

Bevill State Community College — associate's degree and certificate in advanced manufacturing technology.

Bishop State Community College — associate's degrees in airframe technology, power plant technology and avionics technology.

Drake State Community and Technical College — associate's degree in nursing.

Lawson State Community College — associate's degree and certificate in hospitality services management.

Shelton State Community College — associate's degree and certificate in advanced manufacturing technology.

University of Alabama — bachelor's degree in cyber security.

University of Alabama at Birmingham — bachelor's degree in engineering design.

University of South Alabama — bachelor's degree in supply chain and logistics management.

University of West Alabama — associate's degree in tutorial mathematics.



Pay attention to deadlines for financial aid applications

High school seniors should keep track of deadlines for applying for college financial aid. Here are some tips that may help:

- File the FAFSA as soon as possible.
- Check with the financial aid offices of the schools to which they've applied to determine if they require any forms other than the FAFSA.
- Look for scholarships KHEAA–Alabama's *Affording Higher Education* and a free online scholarship search. They can find a link to a free search site under the "Students and Parents" tab on www.alstudentaid.com. To find the book, click on the link to publications.
- Attend any college fairs and financial aid seminars offered at their high school or in their area. If a company charges a fee for helping with applications, remember that students and parents can do that themselves for free. If they decide to pay for help, they should make sure the company is reputable by checking with the state Attorney General's office or the Better Business Bureau in their area, as well as the area where the firm is located.