

Surviving the College Bill

Though it doesn't grow on trees, money is available through financial aid, scholarships, and work.

by Linda Piepenbrink

Unless you have rich and generous relatives, paying for college—especially a Christian one—can seem like a daunting task. Even if you've planned ahead and saved money, higher education is not cheap. Before you decide that a Christian college is out of the question, however, consider some ways to make it more affordable.

Finding Financial Aid

For the 2004-05 fall semester, 96 percent of the student body at Maranatha applied for some type of financial aid. Of those, 44 percent received Federal Pell grants, 20 percent received institutional scholarships, and 5 percent received designated scholarships. (Note: Grants and scholarships do not need to be repaid.) In addition, 70 percent received loans, including Federal Stafford loans (subsidized or unsubsidized) and PLUS loans (low-interest loans to parents of dependent undergraduate students). Parents may be eligible for tax credits, and veterans can get federal benefits through the GI Bill.

What should you do to receive financial aid? To apply for government grants and loans, fill out a FAFSA form. The easiest way to apply (and quickest way to get results) is to visit the FAFSA website (www.fafsa.ed.gov).

Working through college is another good way to cut costs. Maranatha employed 330 students with work-study jobs in 2004-05. Many off-campus jobs are also open to students.

Scholarships provide a significant source of money for college students who wisely take the time to apply and meet the requirements. When Matthew Bowers was a high school senior who wanted to attend Maranatha, he knew he would need financial help. He applied for ten scholarships through local banks, state scholarships, Coca-Cola, the Lions Club, and other sources, and was awarded with seven scholarships amounting to nearly \$40,000 over four years! "We didn't qualify for any-

thing need-based, but my high-school GPA helped," he says. Matthew learned a great lesson: To cut down on your college bill, diligence pays off. The Bowers family contributed some of the helpful tips below:

Locating Scholarships

To find national, state, and local scholarships, ask a high school guidance counselor, search the Internet, or check a local library or bookstore for books that list scholarships, such as the *College Board Scholarship Handbook 2006*. Search for scholarships at the following levels:

- **Federal/U.S. Department of Education/national:** Because so many people apply for government scholarships, the competition is greater, but scholarships based on minorities, ethnic background, military dependents, and nationwide stores are available.
- **State:** Most states offer scholarships; some have a toll-free help line for agencies.
- **Local:** Public high schools often have a scholarship compendium and applications on file in the guidance office. Many service clubs have scholarships (e.g., Lions Club, Elk's Club, Kiwanis, National Rifle Association). Banks and other businesses

may also set up scholarship funds. Through its Leadership Scholarship program, Chick-fil-A has offered financial assistance to 20,000 restaurant employees who have gone on to attend 2,138 colleges, universities, and other educational institutions throughout the country since the program was established. Wal-Mart Stores and SAM'S CLUBS award two \$1,000 scholarships to qualifying local high school seniors.

Applying for Scholarships

Start gathering information early to avoid missing deadlines. Busy high school seniors may have less time to search for scholarships, so plan accordingly. (Some applications can be sent in during the student's junior year.)



1. Send for applications and note the specifics (e.g., deadline, essay required, number of references needed). *Tip:* Keep track of each scholarship by placing its name, due date, and references in a clear plastic binder or folder. Put due dates on a master calendar.
2. Fill out each application and write a good, basic essay that can be revised easily to meet a specific requirement. Essays required by many scholarships often overlap in their requirements and can be used for more than one application, such as goal and career.
3. Make copies of the reference letter requirements and give them to the appropriate people to fill out, noting the due date. Get letters of recommendation from teachers, pastors, guidance counselors, or leaders in your community.
4. Get copies of high school or college transcripts as needed.
5. Apply for 10-15 scholarships, if possible. Try to get renewable ones, and don't overlook the smaller scholarships. Local communities are glad to stand behind their students!
6. Assemble packages for scholarship committees ahead of time. As information is completed, check it off and place it in the addressed envelope. Make copies of all documents before sending them out. Allow 2-4 weeks to complete an application and another 7-10 days for mailing. Consider sending application packets by registered mail. Make follow-up calls to banks, public schools, and other institutions to make sure your package arrived.
7. Never quit. "Try to stay in college, even if it means taking out a couple of loans," says Matthew. "The one thing that will remove you from a scholarship list is 'dropping out,' even if you know it's only temporary."
8. Renew every year. Keep copies of all acceptance letters to make renewals easier. You may need to write more essays and request more transcripts, but it's worth it. If the scholarship committee thinks they've made a wise investment, they are likely to keep investing in you.

The Lord Provides

Two years after high school, Deborah Mather was working as a preschool teacher and living without debt in a rented house with her cat. But as the desire to attend Maranatha Baptist Bible College for nursing grew stronger, she realized she would have to trust the Lord for her college finances.

"I didn't have a car, and my parents couldn't pay one penny toward my education," she says.

With three months' wages to cover the down-payment, she arrived at Maranatha. Although the first two years were tough financially (requiring her to take out \$4,000 in loans), she is thankful that through much prayer, campus jobs, and grant money, she took out no further loans!

It was humbling, she says, to clean bathroom toilets and scrub the carpet on her hands and knees as students walked by, but she learned to appreciate the work the Lord provided. An additional job as the night monitor for the Student Health Center took about \$1,000 off her school bill. She also joined an area church, which helped her to grow consistent in

tithing—one more way to trust the Lord.

Although she managed for four years without a car, in her fifth year of college, a nursing job opening was available in a nearby town. Deborah prayed, "Lord, I think it is finally becoming a need to have a car. You know all my needs, and I trust you will supply in your time." The next Wednesday, her mom told her that her aunt wanted to give Deborah a car! That same week, the Lord also provided the nursing position.

Deborah's financial testimony recounts the Lord's faithfulness. "He is the God of miracles who can turn our pennies into priceless investments," she says.

If the Lord is leading your child to Maranatha, take that step of faith and trust Him with your finances. "For with God, nothing shall be impossible."

