

**H.B. No. 5332 (RAISED) HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT**  
**'AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM'**

February 25, 2016

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My name is Heather Hamilton, I am the Director of Graduate Financial Aid at Quinnipiac University. I had the pleasure to serve as a member of the Planning Commission for Higher Education Student Financial Aid Working Group co-chaired by Representative Haddad & Mr. Maroney. In addition, I am the President of the Connecticut Association of Professional Financial Aid Administrators (CAPFAA). Our members represent over 50 institutions including community colleges, state and private institutions and proprietary schools.

For your information, CAPFAA was established in 1969 to serve the interests and needs of the students and their families through the financial aid process. We are concerned with the support and administration of student financial aid. Specifically, we assist in promoting and developing effective programs for student financial aid for our institutions, which enroll over 200,000 students annually. Additionally, CAPFAA facilitates communication and cooperation among postsecondary institutions and sponsors of student aid funds by organizing conferences and training sessions on important issues related to student financial aid.

I am here today to support **HB-5332**, an Act to make changes to the Governor's Scholarship program. Several of the proposed changes in this bill are also reflected in a recent survey that CAPFAA generated this past fall (the results are included in this written testimony). The survey, sought members' opinions on the operation and effectiveness of the scholarship program. The results showed that while the program is very beneficial, modifications could make it more robust.

The modifications that are beneficial include:

- **Simplifying the program into one need-based program**, allows schools greater flexibility in awarding and students a better understanding of what is available to them without the additional confusion of both need and merit awards.
- **Pro-rating the maximum grant award for part-time students**, will provide a clear and easily calculated award that everyone can understand. Overwhelmingly, our membership felt this modification will have a significant impact both for the students and the administrative aspect of this program.
- **Publishing the exact formula used for allocating fund to each institution, including the number of FTE needy students being served**, will allow schools to have a clear understanding of their funding levels and those of the other schools within the state.

I wish to extend my appreciation for everything that Representative Willis and her colleagues have done to bring this bill today and ensure our students have a choice in the colleges they select within our state. By supporting this bill, I believe it will have a positive impact on our students and schools alike. Thank you for your time and commitment to educating our Connecticut residents.

**Connecticut Association Professional Financial Aid Administrators (CAPFAA)  
Survey Results -Connecticut Governors Scholarship Program Operation & Effectiveness**

Using the Planning Commission for Higher Education’s Student Financial Aid Working Group as a basis for change and discussion, CAPFAA’s State & Federal Relations Committee felt it was an appropriate time to conduct a survey of our membership in relation to the current Governor’s Scholarship Program operation and effectiveness.

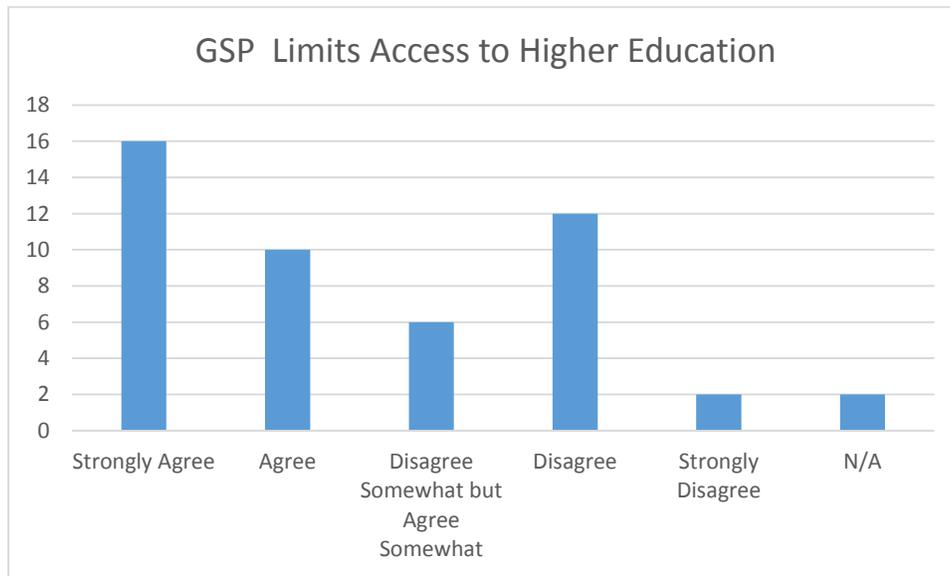
Purpose

The purpose of this outreach is to test our state financial aid administrators’ experiences related to the administration of this state financial aid program. There are four parts to this survey, each of which did not require a response to move to a subsequent portion.

Specifications

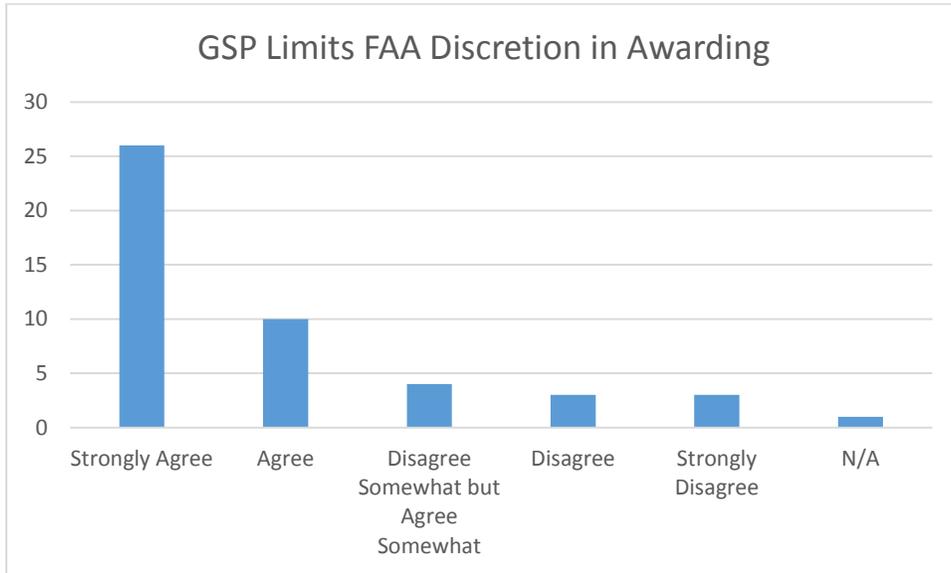
This survey was conducted from November 16, 2015 through December 4, 2015 on a condition of complete anonymity from all respondents; it was delivered through CAFAA’s listserv tool. All percentages have been rounded. At the conclusion of this survey’s response period, 22% of CAPFAA’s institutional membership (48 out of 216 members) responded to at least one part of the survey. It should be noted, based on the topic generally the directors/associate directors would be responding. Therefore, the response rate based on institutions would be approximately 75%.

1. The current Governor’s Scholarship Program limits Connecticut student access to Higher Education.



This statement received a 100% response rate. 54% of responders either agreed or strongly agreed that this program limits access to higher education within our state. 29% of responders either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement provided, while 12% remained neutral. 4% of responders indicated the question was not applicable to them. The takeaway from the responses to this statement, although it represents a small population of our state’s financial aid administrator population, is that the majority believe the program does more harm than good in providing access to higher education in Connecticut.

2. The current Governor’s Scholarship Program limits a Financial Aid Administrator’s discretion in awarding State Aid.<sup>1</sup>

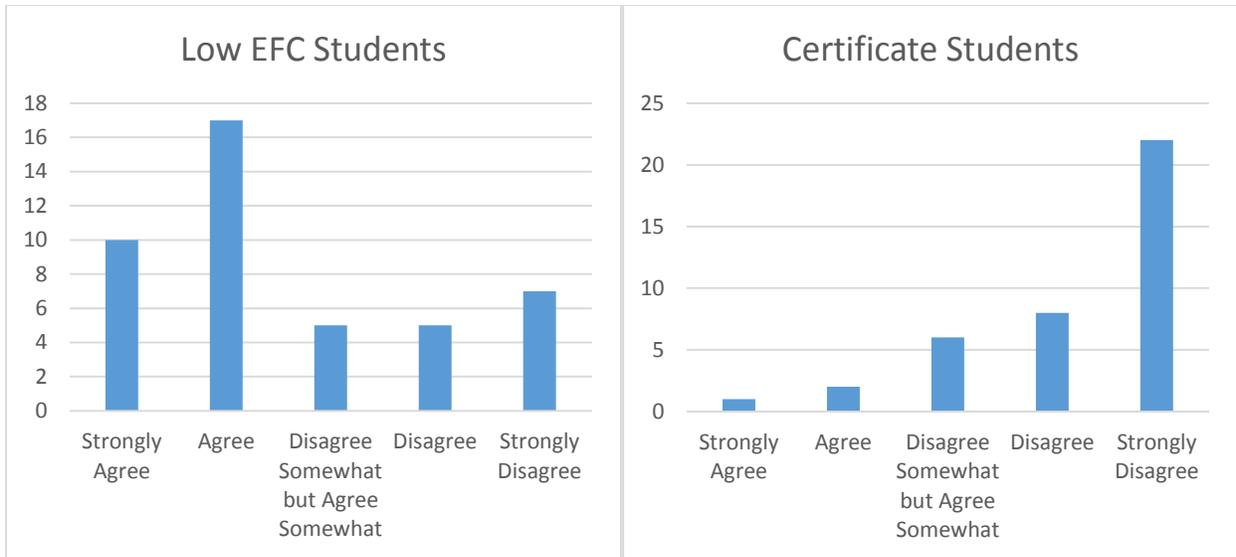


This statement received a 98% response rate. 77% of the responses indicate that administrators believe this program limits a financial aid administrator’s discretion in providing a program award to students. 15% disagree with the statement, while 6% remained neutral and 2% felt the question was not applicable to them.

3. The current Governor’s Scholarship Program has a positive impact on the following student populations:

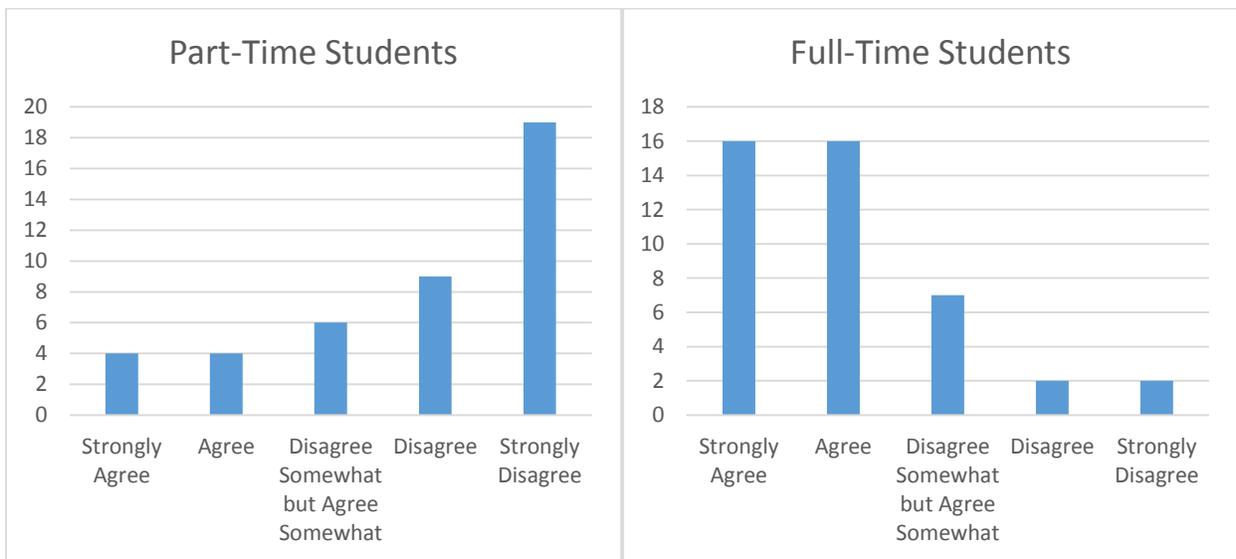
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<sup>1</sup> The interpretation of this question is in the eye of the beholder; there was no distinction made between providing an award in general to a student (determining the pool of eligible students) versus providing a dollar amount at the discretion of the financial aid administrator (providing an award to students without being bound to an amount cap). The intent of this question was to determine if financial aid administrators felt they were being too restricted in providing a need-based award to students they know could use funding when other need-based opportunities had been exhausted.



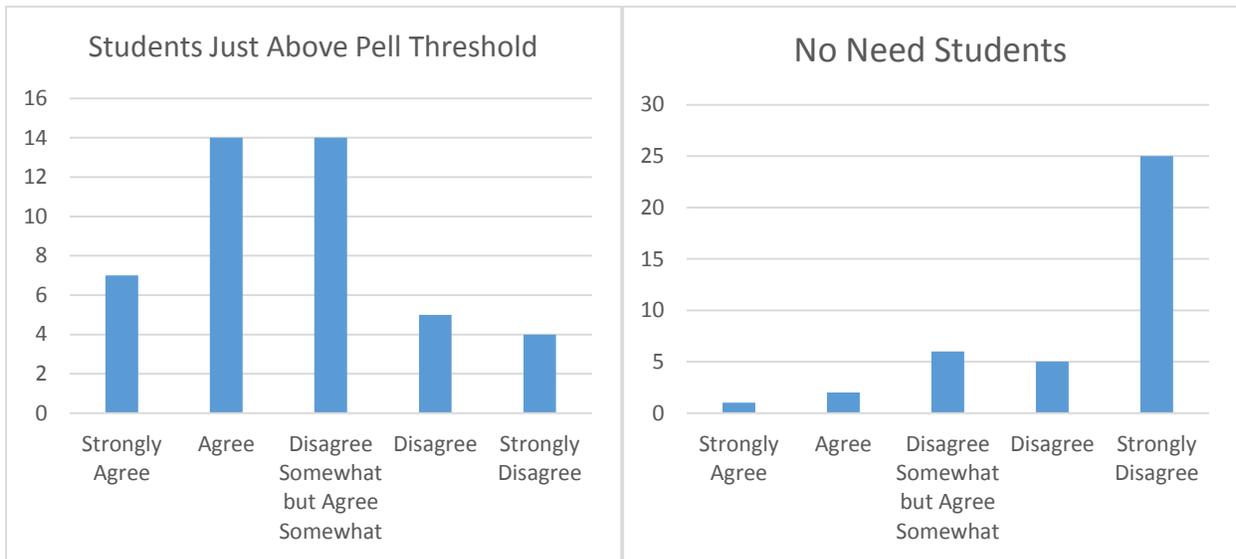
92% of participants responded to the “**Low EFC**” statement. Of the responses, 61% agreed or strongly agreed that the program has a positive impact on this student population, while 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program was positive in this respect. 11% were neutral in response.

81% of participants responded to the “**Certificate Student**” statement. Of the responses, 8% agreed or strongly agreed that the program has a positive impact on this student population, while 77% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program was positive in this respect. 15% were neutral in response.



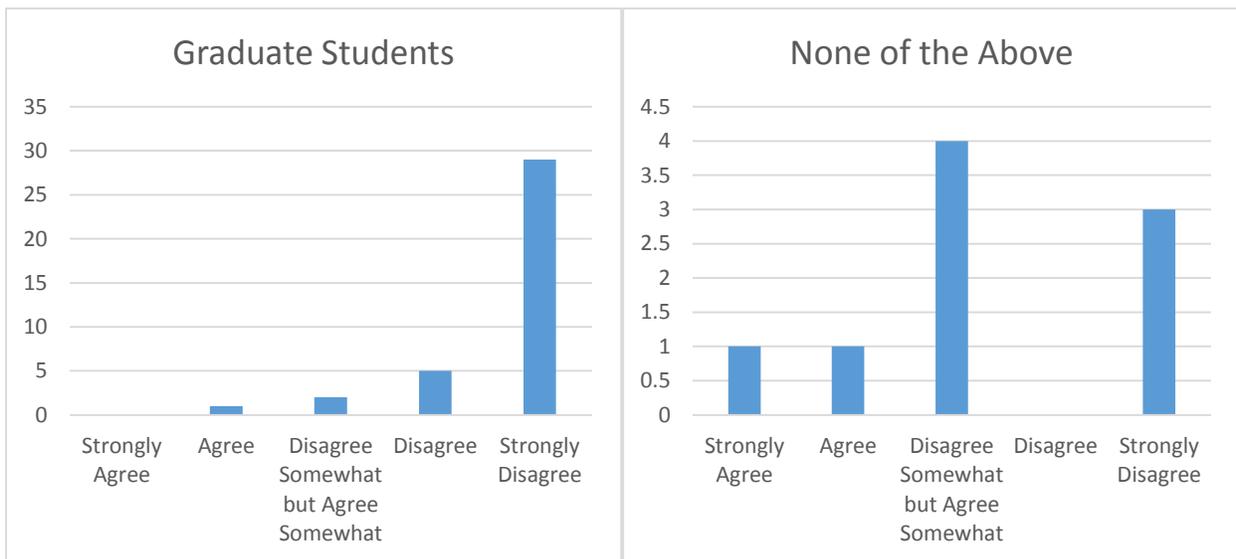
88% of participants responded to the “**Part-Time**” statement. Of the responses, 19% agreed or strongly agreed that the program has a positive impact on this student population, while 67% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program was positive in this respect. 15% were neutral in response.

90% of participants responded to the “**Full-Time**” statement. Of the responses, 74% agreed or strongly agreed that the program has a positive impact on this student population, while 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program was positive in this respect. 16% were neutral in response.



92% of participants responded to the **“Students Just Above the Pell Threshold”** statement. Of the responses, 48% agreed or strongly agreed that the program has a positive impact on this student population, while 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program was positive in this respect. 32% were neutral in response.

81% of participants responded to the **“No Need”** statement. Of the responses, 8% agreed or strongly agreed that the program has a positive impact on this student population, while 77% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program was positive in this respect. 15% were neutral in response.



77% of participants responded to the **“Graduate”** statement. Of the responses, 3% agreed or strongly agreed that the program has a positive impact on this student population, while 92% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program was positive in this respect. 5% were neutral in response.

19% of participants responded to the “**None of the Above**” statement. Of the responses, 22% agreed or strongly agreed that the program has a positive impact on this student population, while 33% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the program was positive in this respect. 44% were neutral in response.

To **Part 3** of the survey as a whole, an open-ended comment section was offered. Two unique comments were suggested (in italics and unaltered):

1. *It has a very negative impact on part-time students who are just above the Pell threshold. It punishes those students working and going to school.*
  2. *This question should have a N/A category. Grad students and no need never could qualify.*
4. In a few words, what would be the most impactful change that could be made to the current Governor’s Scholarship Program?

In **Part 4** of the survey, we provided an optional comment section where participants could offer anonymous, yet meaningful suggestions to the program without the fear of judgment or scrutiny by peers in the profession. 63% of participants offered a comment, all of which are listed below (in italics and unaltered).

1. *Create parameters that can reward part-time and higher EFC students, such as Pell ineligible.*
2. *We need to band together, all institutions that receive these funds, and demand more money for the program. These issues are huge but our state grants have been cut by more than \$20M over the last several years. That's what we need to focus on*
3. *Increase the limits for part-time students*
4. *Merge all state grant programs to one! Multiple rosters are tedious to reconcile. Like all other states, Connecticut should have created an on-line, password protected grant processing site years ago. Paper/email rosters are a thing of the past and are not secure enough to include social security numbers which causes time consuming processing of rosters to match names with student's home addresses. This is a very silly, inefficient program that lacks sophistication with today's technology.*
5. *Flexibility, focus on need rather than merit, extend reconciliation date beyond February 15, and restore funds.*
6. *Enrollment weighting in the fund allocation formula should be proportional to enrollment status; it currently punishes colleges with large part-time enrollments. Award amounts for part-time students should use the pro-rating method that Pell uses.*
7. *Allow the fund to be pro-rated for 3/4 and 1/2 time students.*
8. *Please make it more available to more student. Less stringent criteria.*
9. *Help the middle class more as they are not Pell eligible but often just as needy.*
10. *Create additional EFC ranges and give a little less to each student. This would allow more students to receive state scholarship money.*
11. *Make the reporting easier and the administrative burden less.*
12. *Student’s right to choose university type such as private in using funds. Include Graduate/Professional students.*

13. *Open up awarding to certificate-seeking students if the focus truly is completion; eliminate the half-time/three-quarter time standard awards and replace with a proration of what that student's full-time award would be (75%, 50%); eliminate the February 15 "obligation" date, especially since data reports are asked for many months later; or more simply, create a standard award that is fully portable and administered by OHE - the award should be the same dollar amount for any qualifying student at any institution, private or public.*
14. *Return aid to block grant to allow institutional flexibility*
15. *Allow part-time students a proportionate amount of the amount students would be eligible for as a full-time student.*
16. *To allow Gov. Scholarship to be awarded to higher range of EFC student who have needs. To allow the institution to pro-rate the Scholarship, so the awarding process can be automated. To allow the institution to determine the maximum award like the CAPCS used to be.*
17. *Reductions in state aid under the Governor's Scholarship program have severely impacted community college students in a negative way as compared to previous CAP allocations. If our community colleges are truly seen as one of the economic drivers of the State of Connecticut, then the criteria for the Governor's scholarship must be reexamined to address the needs of this important population, many of which are part time, working and supporting families as they pursue their education.*
18. *Require students to take a minimum 15 credits a semester and prorate based on the number of credits. This will keep progression toward graduation in 4 years*
19. *None*
20. *Award a more proportionate amount to 1/2 and 3/4 time students.*
21. *Go back to the robust dollars; The cuts are a hindrance*
22. *Increasing the overall state appropriation to the program.*
23. *Award less than fulltime with a straight proration of funds by number of credits, like CAP was.*
24. *A bigger budget for the program. NYS has TAP awards up to over \$5000 without school budget limitations. CT could benefit from increasing the individual award amounts and the amount available to each school.*
25. *Allow pro-rated award amounts for students who attend half-time and three-quarter time attendance. Allocate funds much earlier so that GS can be packaged along with other sources of aid. Early availability promotes an awareness of the program which does not exist at present.*
26. *Flexibility in awarding amount (like the old CICS awarding)*
27. *Flexibility with award, early funding level notification, a better prorated award for part-time students so that change in enrollment does not cause such a loss of eligibility that results in a bill.*
28. *Discretion being given back to the aid directors with funds from the merit scholarship being reduced and put in the need-based scholarship*
29. *Fully fund the CAP Program and do away with the Governor's Scholarship Program and all of the needless restrictions. Call it the Governor's Aid Program (GAP)*
30. *The most impactful change would be to increase the EFC range requirement.*

### **Commentary**

The goal of this survey, based on state financial aid administrators' (public, private, and proprietary; two-year and four-year; undergraduate and graduate) first-hand experience in administering the Governor's Scholarship Program, was to achieve an unbiased look at the program in general terms. While we did believe that the response rate was low at less than one-quarter of membership participating, meaningful information may still be salvageable from data that may be questioned as being too skewed due a low number of responses. Based on the topic, it is important to note in general this type of survey would be based on responses from our higher level members specifically Directors and Associate Directors. In particular, we thought that the information provided in Part 4 (free-form comments) assigns true character to where our membership believes changes may be best implemented to the program, if at all.

We hope that this survey may be used as a tool to represent a climate for change within this state financial aid program.

Disclaimer: The viewpoints of CAPFAA members outlined in this survey do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of CAPFAA. Neither CAPFAA, nor its State & Federal Relations Committee, has an official position on the structure and implementation of the Governor's Scholarship Program.