



FSA *Now*

The Monthly Newsletter for FSA Staff & Operating Partners

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New Name Official Today: Federal Student Aid (FSA)

Today SFA officially becomes FSA, or Federal Student Aid. Deputy Secretary Hansen announced the new name today at the FSA Spring Conference in Baltimore, Maryland.

The new name better fits our role in the higher education community. It also aligns perfectly with the name Congress gave to our key product — the FAFSA or Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

To complement our new name, we have a new graphics package. The new graphics will bring a professional and consistent look to our publica-

tions and Web sites. You can download the new graphics and Style Guide, which tells you how to properly use each graphic, from FSANet at http://sfanet/sfa_communications/sfa/intro.html.

The new name will also bring changes to our Web sites. Web sites with "SFA" in the URL will have new addresses (the old URLs will continue to work as well). To save money, publications will incorporate the new name and graphics as part of their regular production schedules.

For questions about the new name or graphics package, email FSA Communications.

The Newsletter Formerly Known as *InStep*

As our new name, Federal Student Aid, takes center stage, we here at *InStep* figured we might as well give the newsletter a new name, too!

So without further ado, we'd like to introduce *FSA Now*. Not only does the new look incorporate our new name and cool graphics, but we've added some new features as well. Fun facts make a debut in "Did You Know?" and "Extra! Extra!" takes the place of the old "Newsstand," with quick news updates (look for "Extra! Extra!" to debut next month). Take note of the "FSA Milestone" on the front page — we'll celebrate FSA's successes in this feature. In upcoming issues, you'll find new sections like "Spotlight On," which will highlight new products or systems, and sidebars on the history of education and financial aid.

Before you read on, we'd be remiss if we didn't thank the many staff who helped us pick our new name. And now, enjoy *FSA Now*!

FSA Milestone

On February 26, we received the one-millionth FAFSA on the Web for 2002-2003. It's the earliest we've ever hit that mark — last year we reached one million on March 19 and the year before that it was May 3.



See FAFSA on the Web at
<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

COD Finds Common Ground

On April 1, FSA will reach another milestone in the streamlining of the financial aid process by launching the Common Origination and Disbursement (COD) system, which integrates the Pell and Direct Loan processes. The new system will replace the Pell Grant (RFMS) and Direct Loan Origination (DLOS) systems, which will be phased out after this year, and offers the financial aid community a simple, accurate and convenient method of processing Pell Grants and Direct Loans.

"COD is the most complex modernizing effort that the Schools Channel has been involved with. Our electronic promissory note initiative broke new legal ground, but COD actually changes the way schools interact with FSA everyday," said Rosemary Beavers, project lead for COD.

The new COD system will offer many benefits. Schools will be able to send a "common record" to report both Pell and Direct Loan data. FSA has also been working with the FFELP industry to ensure that schools can use the common record to report FFEL information to lenders and guarantors. In addition, COD improves monitoring of school reporting, increasing accountability and program integrity. COD provides faster processing time, eliminates duplicate data, expands reporting capabilities, integrates account statements and is fully Web-enabled.

Rosemary said, "We have a great team of FSA and modernization partners working together to make this system a success. We hope it all pays off in April with something that really improves our service to schools."

Ambassadors Take the Show on the Road

In January, Student Aid Awareness provided Ambassador Toolkits containing information on applying for student aid to FSA employees nationwide. The toolkits enable FSA staff members to easily answer questions and distribute information about the availability of education, financial aid and the application process. "All staff members should be able to help in FSA's effort to spread the word about student aid," said Hazel Mingo, a member of the Student Aid Awareness team.

FSA employees often get questions about education and financial aid and come to Student Aid Awareness looking for information. The Student Aid Awareness team wanted to provide a cost-effective and convenient way to ensure the staff always had the answers they needed. "Most importantly, we wanted to allow all staff to be part of our mission of spreading the word about the ability to use financial aid to go to school," Hazel said.

The toolkit flyers are easy to reproduce and staff members are encouraged to hang them in community areas or use them for discussions with local community groups. The response to the toolkits has been very positive.

Pat Walker couldn't wait to help spread FSA's message. "My neighbors know I work for the Department in Financial Aid and are constantly asking me about what they need to do in planning for their children. This toolkit is another tool to use in assisting them. This is very cool!"

Charles Brinkley was thrilled to get his toolkit. He said, "This is a wonderful tool — I contacted my church, told them what I had and asked for permission to distribute the information to our youth — we have a membership of just over 3,000 members."

Linda Hall, director of Student Aid Awareness, wants the toolkits to grow with FSA. "We will continue to develop new information in response to staff and community needs," said Linda. Student Aid Awareness hopes staff members continue to use the toolkits to bring FSA's message into local communities to ensure that everyone who wants to go to school knows they can.

Find more information on Student Aid Awareness and all of the publications included in the toolkit at: http://sfanet/students/products_services/ps1_saa.html.

Can't Get Enough FSA News?

Check out the Success Stories on FSANet, including the latest on the Financial Partners Data Mart: http://sfanet.ed.gov/sfa_communications/success_stories/index.html



Did You Know?

The first school buses of the 1920s came in all shapes, sizes and colors. In 1939, school leaders, state officials and bus engineers decided upon school bus standards — including the color that we've all come to know as school bus yellow.



FSA Now

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My FSA

My FSA sat down with Sandra Hunter of the Kansas City Case Management Team in the Schools Channel to talk about the rewards and challenges of her work with FSA.

Q: How long have you been with FSA?

A: I've been with [FSA] for 10 years, six of which have been as a member of the Kansas City Case Team. I have worked for the government a total of 30 years.

Q: What does your job consist of?

A: I determine the initial eligibility of higher education institutions that apply for participation in Title IV. I also review and process applications for ownership changes, mergers and address changes, and monitor institutional accreditation and state licensing status.

Q: What are the challenges and rewards of working with a team in a regional office?

A: Working with staff in the regional office involves close coordination with many team members who are separated by over a thousand miles. These relationships are rich in cultural diversities that pose challenges in communicating and applying the multi-disciplinary skills necessary to create a well-functioning team. We found that, on the whole, the sum of the parts exceeds individual effort.

Q: How do you see yourself as being part of the PBO?

A: Working as a member of the PBO, with the benefit of training, has given me a broader scope and perspective of the entire operation. I more fully understand our organization and mission in the context of [FSA's] mission. As a result, we are more informed and work closer with other organizations both within and outside the Department.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you face in providing customer service?

A: The biggest challenge in case management is trying to be respon-

sive and helpful while accomplishing our primary mission of enforcement. We need close working relationships with many organizations, such as schools, state agencies and auditing firms, to [help] them maintain their participation.

Q: How do you help a school maintain program integrity?

A: We continually monitor school performance and provide guidance through program review, audit compliance, eligibility, financial and administrative capability, as well as technical assistance. These reviews ensure compliance and assist the institutions in identifying issues than can adversely affect the education process.

Q: How have schools responded to case management efforts?

A: In most instances, the responses have been very positive. The key to this process is our own responsiveness, timeliness and diplomacy. While we inform schools of problems, we strive to closely work with the schools in resolving these issues.

Q: Have there been any changes in FSA that help you do your job?

A: Yes, the streamlining of our processes in conjunction with training, enhanced software and equipment have permitted us to review more schools in a quicker and more informed manner.

Q: What do you enjoy most about your job?

A: I am a people person so I enjoy the daily contact with all people. If I've helped one person or school to help a disadvantaged student it makes me feel as though I've made a contribution to that person's future and the Department's mission.

Coming Next Month...

*A History Lesson on the Higher Education Act
&
All the Latest FSA News*