Scholarship Strategy

Creating a Successful Approach

One of the best things about scholarships is that for the most part, they reward the applicants who put forth the most effort. Like teachers who can instantly spot a sloppy homework assignment, scholarship judges can identify poorly composed applications without lifting a finger. Depending upon the award and how many students participate, the process of eliminating under qualified students can be competitive at best ... and downright ruthless at worst. You may already be thinking "They won't pick me, so why waste my time?" Not true: The financial assistance obtainable through scholarships is worth it, even if you don't receive an award from each and every scholarship that you apply to.

Most of the students who succeeded in earning scholarships did so for two reasons:

1. **They met the criteria outlined by the scholarship sponsor.**
2. **They approached the application process strategically and were selective in their pursuit of scholarship opportunities. It's that simple.**

There is no magic recipe that will help you win a scholarship. What there is, however, is a time-tested strategy that many students find incredibly helpful in organizing their scholarship search. The students who apply these techniques usually come out ahead in the end.

Make a list.

Gather the information for all of the scholarship offers that you are qualified to apply for. The latter part of this suggestion is essential — do not spend valuable time applying for scholarships for which your GPA, major, community involvement requirement or any other criteria does not meet the standard. There are likely hundreds of awards for which you specifically qualify, so focus your attention on those. Read through your list and eliminate all awards that you are not qualified for.

Assess each individual opportunity.

This will take time but your investment will pay off. After narrowing down your list so that it only includes the scholarships that are most relevant, consider the following categories:

- *Deadlines.* How long do you have to complete the scholarship?
- *Difficulty of preparation.* Considering the deadline, do you have time to thoroughly prepare for this award?
- *Award amount.* How much is the award worth? If it is only worth a few hundred bucks, consider whether or not you are willing to spend your time on it. Keep in mind that every little bit does help and that you have a greater chance at receiving slightly smaller awards as opposed to full tuition grants simply because they are less competitive.

Prioritize your opportunities.

Now that you have determined the value of the scholarships that you have selected based on when the deadline is, preparation required, and the amount of the award, create a rating system. A simple way to do this is to rate each scholarship with a (+) or (–) sign next to the award. For example, an award with three plus signs is a scholarship for which you must apply. The deadline is far off, average preparation is required and the reward is $2,000. On the other hand, a scholarship with two minus signs might cause you to reconsider before taking the time to apply. It could be that amount of preparation required simply exceeds the amount of effort you are willing to exert because the scholarship award in only $100.

Begin applying.

Alright, you've determined what scholarships you are actually interested in applying for. Chances are your list is a good bit shorter now and much more feasible. Begin submitting to the scholarships that you have ranked highest in priority. Good luck!