

# MONEY LEFT ON THE TABLE:

Thousands of students across California are not receiving the financial aid they deserve.



## THE PELL GRANT IS CRITICAL TO STUDENTS' SUCCESS

The Pell Grant opens the door to opportunity for low-income students, and is vital to the academic success of almost half a million community college students in California. Beyond tuition, there is a lot that students have to budget for, such as books, school supplies, rent and food if they're living away from home. The federally funded Pell Grant helps financially eligible students cover these necessary costs, allowing them to focus on their studies and earn their degree.



*The Pell Grant has allowed me to stay in school while working and supporting myself. Being a young adult and paying life's expenses is not easy, but being fortunate enough to be awarded the Pell Grant keeps me motivated!*

Veronica Sole, 20, student at Mt. San Antonio College

## TENS OF THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS ARE MISSING OUT ON AID THEY DESERVE

The Wheelhouse Center for Community College Leadership and Research at the UC Davis School of Education conducted a study that shows:



There is nearly \$130 million being “left on the table” in a single semester.



More than 20 percent of California community college students who are **eligible and successfully apply** for financial aid still do not receive Pell Grant aid.

That leaves tens of thousands of students in California without the financial help they need to pursue their education and potentially change the course of their lives.

Housed at the UC Davis School of Education, **Wheelhouse: The Center for Community College Leadership and Research** conducts, translates and disseminates timely, relevant and rigorous third-party research to inform policy development for community college leaders and state and local policymakers. Wheelhouse also supports California community college leaders through annual professional learning institutes and independent, actionable research on relevant topics and trends.

## WHAT'S PREVENTING STUDENTS FROM RECEIVING THE PELL GRANT?

The rates of students receiving the Pell Grant vary widely by campus – even after controlling for factors like student demographics and campus size. This suggests that school administration and financial aid leaders on community college campuses play an important role in ensuring that eligible students receive the federal support they deserve.

Wheelhouse suggests four factors may be at play:



**Campus policies and practices** may influence whether students can successfully navigate the sometimes confusing, multistep process to verify if they are eligible.



**Students may not know they could be eligible** for additional financial assistance.



If students think their higher education path may take longer than six years, they may opt to **save aid for a time when it could have more value to them**. For example, they may defer the aid to help cover higher tuition and expenses if they eventually transfer to a four-year university.



**Students who appear eligible in the available data may not actually be eligible** due to factors researchers were unable to observe, such as selective service requirements or changes to students' Expected Family Contribution – which determines their financial eligibility.

*California community colleges have the lowest fees in the nation and a generous fee-waiver program that covers fees for half of all students. Yet, with rising costs of living, books and transportation, our students continue to struggle to make ends meet. The federal Pell Grant program provides a vital resource to offset the full costs of attendance and help our students be successful. The Wheelhouse findings are a call to action for our system, to ensure students are receiving the aid for which they are eligible and that financial aid offices are adequately funded to perform these duties.*

California Community Colleges Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



Wheelhouse will examine the relative importance of each of these factors and explore what practices drive cross-campus differences in Pell Grant take-up. The Center also plans to assess the impact of not receiving Pell Grant aid on students' academic outcomes.

In the meantime, district and campus leaders and financial aid administrators should examine their own Pell Grant data and processes. By strengthening financial aid advising and removing unnecessary barriers, we can better ensure California students get the financial assistance they deserve and are put on the path toward academic success.



To view the full report visit: [education.ucdavis.edu/LeftOnTheTable](https://education.ucdavis.edu/LeftOnTheTable)

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