College event focuses on financial aid

Deadline nears to have forms filled out

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APTOS — For current and future college students, nothing is more important than filling out financial aid forms before the deadline.

That's the message and focus of Saturday's "Cash 4 College" event at Cabrillo College.

"We want students to have knowledge about what school they go to but how to pay for it," said Antonio Alarcon, outreach coordinator and financial aid adviser at Cabrillo College.

The goal of the day was making sure future college students registered for FAFSA — Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The form is a blueprint for the U.S. Department of Education and colleges to find out information about a student's income, assets and other information used to determine financial aid.

Deadlines to register vary by state, but California's deadline of March 2 and registering before then was heavily repeated.

"That deadline is a big deal, especially at universities because you can get thousands of extra dollars," Alarcon said.

While the event usually draws 20 people, Saturday's attendance only had about 20 people by 11 a.m. The weather likely hindered the number of possible attendees, Alarcon said.

But that doesn't matter so long as students are helped.

"Maybe they're not even coming to Cabrillo," said Alarcon. "That doesn't matter to me. I want them to pay for school as best as they can and have a choice."

There was an array of attendees there, from high school seniors to parents of future college students to older college students.

Monique Alonso, a senior at Aptos High School, attended with her grandmother.

"I don't really know about it and what it is," said Alonso, 18.

Alonso's grandmother had talked to her about FAFSA since she was a freshman in high school and Alonso didn't object when her grandmother brought her to the financial aid event. Alonso, who would be the first in her immediate family to go to college, didn't know about the process but knew filling out the financial aid forms was a critical step.

"I mean paying for college is pretty hard and the more help, the better," Alonso said.

Fox said. While Fox has done research about how to fund his son's college education, he was unsure of what his self-employed status meant.

Adriana Pacheco, a financial counselor from Cal State Monterey Bay who was on hand to help, fielded questions from attendees as she helped them fill out financial aid forms.

Some of the unusual questions that crop up are for students who are adopted, students who are wards of the court, students of divorced parents, students who own houses and students who own businesses.

Pacheco was helping one man that lived off of a social security. Despite that, he likely qualified for financial aid because his income level was so low, she said.

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