

Federal Financial Aid for Higher Education: Programs and Prospects

Abstract

In recent years, Congress has augmented traditional financial aid programs for higher education with tax-based subsidies. The tax subsidies can be very helpful to middle-income students who may not have been eligible for aid through traditional channels, but may be worth little or nothing to students from low-income families. This report reviews financial assistance for higher education available through both traditional spending programs (grants, loans, and work-study) and tax assistance (credits, deductions, and tax-preferred savings plans). It summarizes recent research findings on the effectiveness of this aid and interactions among the various programs. It also discusses the role of future tax and fiscal policy choices in determining the level and nature of resources available for higher education needs.

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