

Affording a Surveying Education

by

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I am a faculty member in the surveying program at the University of Maine and a parent of three college educated children. I am often asked, mostly by parents, what financial aid is available for their children. I will share the guidance I provide on the subject of how to afford a quality four-year surveying education.

Apply for Surveying Scholarships — Almost every state surveying society has scholarships available for aspiring surveyors. National professional societies such as the National Society of Professional Surveyors have scholarships available to students (<http://www.nspss.us.com/?page=Scholarships>). Scholarship committee members often lament how few scholarship applications they receive. The fact is that a majority of surveying students do not apply for the numerous surveying scholarships that are available.

In order to encourage students to apply for scholarships, I will often suggest to students that the hour or two that may be required to prepare a complete and quality application will often garner some of the best hourly pay the student will ever earn. To obtain a \$2,000 scholarship for two hours of effort is equivalent to \$1,000 per hour.

My advice is usually ignored. (I suspect if the parents heard my advice, more scholarship applications would be forthcoming from their children.) Accordingly, those students that do apply for a scholarship have an excellent chance to obtain a scholarship. The odds of receiving a scholarship are much better than any lottery.

Apply for Work Related Scholarships — Many employers offer scholarships to employees. In the past, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) provided educational funding for students that worked for the BLM as summer survey interns. Several private surveying firms often provide scholarships to summer interns upon their return to college after working for the firm during the summer so long as there is a commitment to work for the firm in the future.

The most notable work related scholarships available to employees are National Guard and military reserve scholarships. Serving one weekend a month and two weeks a year will often provide a student with full tuition toward a four-year degree.

Apply for General Scholarships — Numerous colleges offer general scholarships to students. Scholarships are often available to students that are in certain disciplines, the residents of certain towns, members of certain minority ethnic groups, or have achieved notable academic standards.

Community College — Students can save considerable tuition expense by attending a community college. Tuition is often considerably less at community colleges when compared to the tuition for similar courses at a four-year university. Students should be encouraged to take as many credits as possible at a community college.

Mathematics, English, speech, physics, and many other general subject classes can be taken at a community college. These courses will usually transfer to a four-year surveying program. If there is some doubt, check on transfer credits at the four-year program before taking the course at a community college.

Students that are intending to embark on a surveying career should consider getting an associate degree in surveying at a community college before transferring to a four year surveying degree program. In the alternative, the student can take almost all their general course work at a community college and take the engineering and surveying courses at a four-year college in order to complete a degree requirement leading to a bachelor of science degree in surveying.

Advice to My Children — While I have given this advice to many students and parents, parents are curious and have asked me what advice I gave to my own children. How did I handle financing my children's education? My advice to my three children was simple and direct. They could go to any college they could afford.

I see so many young students enroll in university programs that have very little future for employment (not so in surveying). Students enrolled in majors without future employment prospects will pile up debt with little hope for paying off the student loans in a reasonable period, if at all. At least half of the students at the campus where I teach would have a much brighter economic future and more rewarding career had they gone to a technical school and learned a trade rather than attend a university where they majored in, for example, Medieval Literature.

To further compound their future financial difficulty, many students attend expensive private colleges where the students enroll in majors with little prospect for future employment.

My advice and opinions were communicated to my three children. My daughter and son became engineers. My youngest son is a nurse. All are gainfully employed without student loan debt. Two financed their education with Army scholarships. One financed her electrical engineering education with a merit scholarship that covered all four years of her education.

In closing, you might ask how I funded my own education. I used the G.I. Bill (Marine Corp veteran). I followed the advice I gave. I earned a two-year degree before transferring to a four-year program. My graduate degrees were funded by my employment as a teaching assistant. I will also give credit to my wife who also worked to support the family while I attended college.

I hope this advice helps prospective students and parents. We need more surveying students. In 2016, surveying graduates had at least three employment offers each. Surveying is a great major and rewarding career. Encourage more students to enroll in a surveying program and give the prospective students and parents my advice.