

BURSARIES FOR AFRICA (Article 2)

by Estelle du Toit

A bursary can make the difference between a precarious existence and a success story in a child's life. Millions of rands' worth of educational opportunities are beckoning poor black and brown learners who have the potential to learn. But getting a bursary takes a lot of hard work - so start in good time!

The first step in getting a bursary is to visit the student advisory or bursary division of the institution at which the prospective student wants to study, to talk to the staff personally. They know of all the available bursaries for which the learner might qualify in his or her field of study. Do take the learner to more than one institution if there is any uncertainty, and compare the possibilities.

Actually, it's even better to find out, a few years before matric, what subjects are required for certain fields of study, as bursaries can obviously only be awarded to learners who qualify to follow a specific course of study, i.e. have the right subjects. Also remember that college or university expenses do not comprise only tuition fees, but should also cover board and lodging, books or practical equipment, transport and meals.

A national study aid scheme, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), makes government money available for studies at universities or universities of technology, but these bursaries are like low-interest loans and must be repaid in part when the student has completed his or her studies and starts earning a proper salary. All the relevant information is available at www.nsfas.org.za.

TECSAT is a study aid scheme only for technical training at colleges for education and training in the Western Cape. Its website www.tecsat.org.za contains the contact details of the six colleges in the Western Cape for which it offers bursaries, but these bursaries often apply only from the second year of study and do not require only academic performance, but also regular attendance of classes. No repayment or consideration such as compulsory employment for a specified period is involved in the case of TECSAT bursaries, but it is important to remember that these bursaries do not cover board and lodging, books, transport, meals or equipment.

A number of government and provincial departments (such as Agriculture) and large organisations such as the Industrial Development Corporation, Eskom and Telkom, municipalities, the Koeberg Power Station, and private companies such as Fidentia, Plessey and others also offer bursaries. But if you miss the advertisement in the newspapers in which these bursaries are announced, you need not worry, as the bursary divisions of the various colleges and universities will be able to give you all the details. A useful website on which to look for bursaries is www.uvf.org.za, where the

Umsobomvu Youth Fund makes a great deal of information available. Click on "Bursaries" on the right-hand side of the screen.

Bursaries are available for studying at universities, universities of technology, colleges of education and training, and private tertiary institutions, but in practical fields such as agriculture, apprenticeships are also available. These amount to sponsored in-service training. However, they are not for school-leavers, but for people who are already employed, such as on a farm. For these the admission requirements can be as low as grade 7.

Other apprenticeships are offered by the Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA) for the various industries. The Media Advertising Printing Packaging and Publishing (MEAPP) SETA, for example, offers apprenticeships that last 12 months and combine about 30 per cent theory with 70 per cent practical in-service training in typesetting and printing. Certificates that are recognised countrywide are awarded on the successful completion of apprenticeships. However, these courses are available only to people who are already employed and whose employers have sent them for further training, but it is a way of getting an education if you did not have the privilege of going to college or university.

Also try to benefit from the favouring of certain race groups, genders and vocations. For example, in a newspaper advertisement the National Ports Authority states that over the past 3 years 80% of its bursaries were awarded to black *women*! This government body is clearly trying to attract women to occupations such as marine engineers and skippers by awarding bursaries for the diploma in maritime studies at two universities of technology to *women* in preference to men. (Visit www.npa.co.za.) Please note, however, that grade 12 Maths and Science are required!

The national Department of Agriculture, on the other hand, has been awarding bursaries for so-called scarce agricultural fields of study for the past three years. And at the University of Stellenbosch students who manage to do well under extremely difficult circumstances qualify for a recently instituted bursary known as the Rector's Award For Succeeding Against the Odds. Recipients of this bursary are also introduced to the public at a gala event.

How do you get to know of all these special circumstances and opportunities for which you might be considered? The newspapers always carry information about them. So keep your eyes open, ask your friends to do the same and to let you know when they spot something, and don't hesitate to enquire at the college or university on which you have set your sights. Do not apply directly to TECSAT or NSFAS, but rather choose the course and the campus and apply for admission as a student. Once you are sure that you qualify and have been accepted, follow the necessary steps to obtain a bursary.