



StudentAid.com appoints new president

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A former executive vice president of Sallie Mae Corp. has joined StudentAid.com as president.

John "Jeff" Whorley joins StudentAid.com after leaving Sallie Mae in early 2007. After his departure Whorley co-authored "Getting College Right" with a former Washington Post reporter. The book is slated to publish next year.

During his time at Sallie Mae Whorley led the company's debt management operations for seven years; he joined the company in 2000 when it acquired USA Group. Previously Whorley was a senior vice president at USA Group.

He's also served as chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon, and Whorley was the democratic nominee for the Fourth Congressional District in his home state of Tennessee. He received a bachelor's degree from The University of The South and his MBA from the University of Indianapolis.

Based in Sacramento, Calif., StudentAid.com provides net cost calculation technologies to post-secondary institutions as well as prospective students and their families. The company provides personalized, side-by-side comparison of the costs of college and student aid eligibility to help students choose the college that best fits its needs, both academic and financial.

Whorley spoke with DailyVista on his new role at StudentAid.com and the company's challenges and needs.

Last month StudentAid.com launched its Student Aid Estimator project, and since joining the company Whorley said he's been traveling extensively across the country to promote and demonstrate the company's calculator to higher education institutions.

"With the net cost calculator launch, we have a pretty straightforward message, which is an institution doesn't have to make a choice between user friendliness and accuracy," Whorley said. "I think we're having to overcome the perception at institutions that you can't have a sophisticated, accurate calculator that is also functionally easy to use."

StudentAid.com spokesperson Mary Fallon told DailyVista that the company has also been meeting with high school counselors in face-to-face meetings, as well as attending conferences to promote this new tool. She also added that StudentAid.com has been leveraging direct mail to promote as well.

Whorley said that consumer misconception is also one of the challenges he'll be addressing as president of StudentAid.com.

"Students that are Pell (Grant) eligible often let the sticker price of a college education prevent them from pursuing some schools," he said. "By offering the functionality of the service on StudentAid.com for free, I think we are showing them that college might be more affordable."

The amount of information available online to students and parents is "overwhelming," Whorley said, adding that there are hundreds of calculators available to prospective students.

"Our challenge is to get the word out that the product we offer really is different," he said. "I don't think that there's a calculator that has the user-friendliness, validation technology and output options our calculator has, and getting that message to colleges is very important as well."