Reaching the Magic Number

In Part 2 of a Q&A with David Southern '76, Director of Financial Aid Alina Olson describes how Antioch strives to preserve affordability for students while meeting its revenue target.

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SEP 11, 2026

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David Southern: In Part 1, Alina and I discussed the responsibilities of the Financial Aid Office, the FAFSA application process, and the federal and state grants available to prospective students.

Part 2 picks up with our discussion of the administration of scholarships and the college's philosophy about how much students should be expected to pay for their Antioch education.



DS: I wanted to ask you a question on scholarships. I know there are two science alumni scholarships for around $30,000. How do those kinds of scholarships work?



AO: The goal is to provide the scholarship for four years, or however long they stay, and maintain the donor's specific criteria such as majoring in a STEM field, maintaining academic progress, or meeting financial need guidelines. We currently have two students receiving alumni science awards. Many donor agreements specify that the award must go to a student with demonstrated financial need. If the recipient's financial status changes significantly, we evaluate whether we can continue the award or if we must reallocate those funds to another qualifying student. With an alumni science scholarship, if a recipient changes majors outside the science division, transfers, or leaves the college, the scholarship funds do not disappear. We reallocate the remaining multi-year funds to another student.

A Balanced Package

I keep track of the donor scholarship funds coming in and scholarships being awarded. This requires constant collaboration with the advancement team. Our goal is to have a balanced financial aid package for every student that combines federal aid, state grants, donor funding, and institutional aid. We provide three main categories of institutional funding. A Merit Scholarship is awarded at the time of admission based on high school GPA. It operates on a tiered structure and stays with the student throughout their enrollment. A Tuition Grant covers a portion of the student's tuition cost, and a Room & Board Scholarship covers a portion of the living expenses.

We intentionally structure institutional aid to cover portions of tuition, fees and housing rather than offering single "full-tuition" or "free room and board" waivers. This ensures that if a student's status changes--for example, if they transition from a residential student to a commuter--their entire financial aid structure does not alter significantly. It also keeps students invested in their cost of attendance across all categories.

External Scholarships

DS: In exploring a couple of different foundations, I find there are some scholarships out there that are easily visible. But the process looks pretty competitive. I was curious how much support they got from Antioch
scholarships or whether that's just kind of

AO: Finding external third-party scholarsh
sometimes share external legit scholarship
student makes an effort to earn external fu
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for highly competitive $10,000 national sch
their parents to inquire at their place of en
assistance available. The only scenario where we adjust institutional aid is when an external award creates an "over-awarding," which means the total financial aid exceeds the student's actual cost of attendance. Most outside scholarships restrict funds to direct educational costs and prohibit cash refunds to the student for excess balance. In these situations, we adjust institutional grants accordingly to maintain compliance with federal guidelines.



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Middle-income Challenge

DS: Is there a target for what students are expected to pay? I'm trying to think of the bridge between the retail quoted rate, and what the college actually receives in terms of money.

AO: Our packaging model works backwards in a way; we determine what a student should pay and then structure aid to cover the remaining balance. For our $0 Student Aid Index (SAI) students, who make up the majority of our student body, our target net derived revenue per student typically ranges between $12,000 and $20,000 annually. So, our goal is to be able to receive at least $12,000 per student in net derived revenue. At

Antioch, no student pays the full sticker price without receiving some form of institutional aid. For high-income families whose household income exceeds $300,000, the actual out-of-pocket cost caps at roughly $20,000 to $25,000 per year. Middle-income students are the most challenging applicants to package, especially when they fall just outside of Pell eligibility. For example, those with an SAI of around $6,000 do not qualify for need-based federal grant aid, which leaves a significant funding gap. For these middle-income students, we attempt to match their expected out-of-pocket payment to their financial capacity and rely heavily on donor-funded endowed scholarships to make up the remaining balance. Without donor support, packaging middle-income students to meet both our net tuition revenue targets and their affordability needs would be nearly impossible.

> *"Without donor support, packaging middle-income students to meet both our net tuition revenue targets and their affordability needs would be nearly impossible." - Alina Olson*

DS: So that $20,000 target for student derived revenue, does not include donor-provided scholarships?

AO: No, it doesn't include donor-funded scholarships. That would be extra, I guess. We don't include donor funded scholarships in student income because I believe that is recorded in advancement income.

DS: I'm trying to figure that out, looking at the financials, exactly where these things get bucketed.

AO: Right. So, we don't want to count that twice. It's still the sense that we are the ones procuring the scholarships, right? However, when a student brings in an outside, third-party scholarship, those funds count directly toward out net student-derived revenue.

Risk to Federal Student Aid?

DS: It's not entirely clear looking at the financial statements how each of these different revenue sources is categorized. Thank you for helping make sense of that. With the conversations in Congress about the education department and Pell grants and stuff like that, do you foresee any changes? Could there be something like maybe reducing the level of allocated dollars, and the number and-or size of the Pell grants?

AO: I have a hard time watching the news because it's so fluid right now. It could be, is the Department of Education getting dismantled? Are we going to get less funding, more funding? I think if Pell were to go away, there's definitely going to be an issue for all the colleges, not just us. Do I foresee it happening? I don't, because it is something that's been around for so long. I think the only thing people are worried about is federal work-study grants. While FWS is a valuable tool for supporting student employment, our total institutional allocation is modest. If the FWS program were to be cut, it would not jeopardize our institutional financial viability.

DS: And that's different from being a federal work college or is that the same?

AO: It's similar, but I don't see federal work college funding going away. The representatives who visited us recently seemed anxious, but that's understandable given that it's their entire model. The majority of concern is around FWS potentially going away. Regardless, because our school requires every student to work, losing that program wouldn't be a major issue.

DS: Do we ever refuse students that can't pay given that our primary objective is to enroll as many students as possible? And presumably, there are some students who, because of financial aid, choose not to come. Does the college ever make a decision not to admit somebody on a financial aid basis?

AO: We don't explicitly reject students based on need, but some may turn down admission based on financial aid.

We do have students or parents try to negotiate to bring down the cost. When that happens, our first step is checking their circumstances. The FAFSA uses prior year tax data, so if a family's financial situation has changed due to job loss or retirement, they can submit proof and I can manually adjust their income in the system to increase their federal aid eligibility.

That said, if a student simply refuses to take out a loan on principle, I won't artificially lower their cost of attendance. It wouldn't be fair to students who do rely on loans to cover their balance. I remind them that loans are optional, they can work or find other means to cover the difference. However, the cost remains their responsibility. I try to reassure them that an Antioch degree is an investment in their future.

Change in Approach

Previously, as discussed in the interview, our model worked somewhat backwards. We would determine what a student could pay and then utilize federal, state and institutional aid to bridge the gap. Now, we use a structured, predictable system where every dollar is tied to clear rules.

We've made three big strategic shifts:

1. While all residential students received the $4,500 Antioch Works Program Grant in previous years, it is now intentionally used as the foundational starting point for packaging every single award letter. By applying a $4,500 discount right off the bat, no student is ever quoted full price. For wealthier families, this eliminates initial "sticker price shock". For high-income families, this $4,500 work grant may be the only institutional aid they receive, but it immediately signals affordability, respects our work-college identity, and drives enrollment without requiring negotiations.
2. To ensure a smooth rollout, we are handling high-income packaging through a clear transition phase. Because 2026-2027 Merit awards were already assigned prior to launching this framework, we honored those existing awards. This effectively caps out-of-pocket costs at around $30,000 for this incoming class. This cap will be formally re-evaluated before recruiting for the 2027-2028 cycle begins, moving us closer to our long-term target where high-SAI families pay closer to the full $40,000 ceiling.
3. Instead of guessing what middle- and high-income families should pay, institutional aid now scales on a strict 1-to-1 formula. For every $1 increase in a family's ability to pay (their Student Aid Index), the college gives $1 less in institutional aid. Families can see that aid is clearly tied to data rather than arbitrary decisions, while high-income families will cap out at paying $40,000.

Under this updated approach, every seat in the classroom contributes directly to the college's bottom line. Even our highest-need students generate $12,000 to $16,000 through state and federal aid, as well as out-of-pocket cost. By establishing a $4,500 baseline for everyone going forward, the college stays financially stable, hits its average target of $14,500 in net revenue per student, and remains deeply faithful to its accessibility mission.

(This interview has been edited for clarity.)

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A guest post by

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David Southern is a life-long learner and astute observer of the rapidly changing work world. He is the author of Business Apocalypse and the Evolution of Today's Organizations.

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