

Editorial: Bringing the tuition-free dream to Ohio

It's the college student's dream: going to school without having to worry about covering the costs of tuition or paying off loans after you graduate. Some people will do just about everything to cover their dream of earning a higher degree.

For students in the state of New York, this dream is becoming a reality. By 2019, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo estimates 940,000 families will be eligible for the Excelsior program, the state's free public college tuition program. That's 940,000 high school students who will have a chance to go to college for free.

The funding for the program comes from a combination of federal and state governments. New York has already appropriated \$87 million for the program's first year.

Discussions so far show that the Excelsior Scholarship is going to be groundbreaking. It has already attracted a lot of attention across the country. The question, however, is whether this program will be effective or if it will become a tangle of red tape. Is it practical?

The basis of the program is that you must be an New York citizen, you must maintain full-time status (30 credits per year), you must stay in-state for the same amount of time after graduation (four years of scholarship = four more years of living in-state) and you must qualify (determined by familial income of up to \$100,000). The income limit will go up to \$110,000 in 2018 before rising to its ultimate cap of \$125,000 the following year.

The Excelsior Scholarship is a program that bridges the gap between tuition costs and available state and federal aid. It will be available to students who are New York residents and

attend public four-year colleges and universities and community colleges.

We wonder what this would be like if it went into effect in the state of Ohio.

Ohio's median household income is \$49,429 per year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey. The New York Times also estimates the median family income of a student from University of Toledo at \$72,300 per year. Less than 24 percent of students are from families that make about \$110,000 or more per year.

This means that almost three-fourths of UT students may qualify to apply for this program, using their household income alone.

This isn't the first time a college has grants or scholarships that come with a residency requirement. Arkansas, for instance, requires its grant recipients to work in Arkansas. Additionally, Maine offers tax credits to reimburse students who lived in the state after graduation. Many states, including New York, already have loan forgiveness programs for graduates if they work in certain professions and in certain geographic areas.

But what if the state you go to school isn't the best state to live in?

Only 26.1 percent of Ohio's population holds a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the 89.1 percent that have a high school education or equivalent.

According to a University of Minnesota study, generally, Rust Belt and Midwest states like Ohio, Michigan and Iowa, and Plains states like South Dakota and Nebraska have the largest net losses in younger, college-educated people. The flows of young college graduates out of a state can often be replaced by flows of young college graduates moving in. The problem

that many interior states face is that young college graduates moving into the state aren't keeping up with those that are leaving.

In 2011, Governor John Kasich stated that one-third of Ohio's college graduates leave within three years.

It's possible that Ohio could fix this problem by enacting a program like New York's. Students that make the cut will earn their degree for free and, in return, stay in Ohio for a commensurate number of years that they held the scholarship. Maybe at the end of four years, they'll like it so much they'll stay for another 10. This would increase the number of people with higher education degrees and probably contribute to the pool of highly skilled and educated residents in the state.

Ohio has agreements in place with other states, including Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana and West Virginia, that make students from other states considered Ohio citizens for tuition purposes.

Students from nearby counties in Michigan (such as Monroe County) can study at UT at in-state tuition rates due to an agreement between the two states. Would these students still be considered in-state and qualify for free tuition? Many are commuters and don't live/work in Ohio. Would they be required to move across state lines for four years? Or would Michigan want to keep them as their own?

Still, we envisage some problems that this program could pose to the state. Not all college graduates are Ohioans. Many students even here at the University of Toledo are from out-of-state and even from other countries.

As college students, we like the idea of free tuition. The residency requirement is an issue for students who can't find a job in their field in this state. But if Ohio worked to create a larger job market for graduating students, then we

can start talking.