

Finding methods to improve the quality of Robert C. Byrd Scholarship Application

in the New York State

BY

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lewis J. Hall", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is contained within a light gray rectangular box.

Abstract

The constant occurrence of errors in Robert C. Byrd Scholarship application is a national wide problem, especially to the New York State Education Department, Pre-Collegiate Preparation Programs and Scholarships Unit. This study consisted of interviewing seven states scholarship program supervisors as to how they administrate Byrd scholarship in their state, and five New York State high school counselors/scholarship coordinators with respect to their practical experience with preparing Byrd Scholarship application. Research results show the utilization of technology and enrichment of different type communication and diverse understanding of information in the Byrd information bulletin are the major reason for generating a high quality of scholarship application. Recommendations for eliminating errors in Byrd Scholarship application in future are given.

Improve the quality of Robert C. Byrd Scholarship Application v

Dedication

To my parents and grandparents

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## **Introduction**

Academic merit-based scholarships are award to students based on their overall academic performance during high school. These scholarships aid college-bound students by paying for all or portions of their college tuition. In many cases, they can be renewed each year as long as student recipient maintain good academic performance and make satisfactory progress toward their degrees. By assisting with higher education financing, merit-based scholarships provides incentives for college enrollment (Heller& Rasmussen, 2001).

According to the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (n.d.), in 1969, U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd established a scholarship program, which uses U.S savings bonds and certificates to award young people from his home state of West Virginia's and the rest of the United States with excellent academic performance during their high school years. This program was so successful that it was enacted as a national plan to provide college scholarships to high –performing student graduating from high school and GED program in every state. Today, the Robert C Byrd Honors scholarship is a federally-funded merit-based scholarship program.

Operating under the Office of K-16 Initiatives and Access Program (KIAP), the New York State Education Department's Pre-Collegiate Preparation Programs and Scholarships Unit (the Scholarship Unit) aims to

foster the development and implementation of collaborative partnerships among and between colleges, schools, community-based organizations, parents, students, business, industry and government to ensure that all students in New York State, especially those in programs administered by the Unit, have every opportunity to be

successful learners in an environment that honors the uniqueness of each individual.(KIAP, n.d.)

In order to do so, the Scholarship Unit provides programming and support services to eight scholarship programs in New York State. The Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship (Byrd Scholarship) is one of the most important among them. It is designed to promote student excellence and achievement and to recognize exceptionally able students from New York's high schools and GED programs who show promise of continued excellence after graduating from high school or earning a high school equivalency diploma. Byrd scholarship offers scholarships up to \$1,500 per year for four years to approximately 400 new undergraduate students in New York State. Scholarship recipients must maintain satisfactory academic progress at their institution for renewal of the award. For the school year 2009/2010, the United States Department of Education (USDOC) provided New York State a total of \$ 2434,500 for the Byrd Scholarship, where were awarded to a total of 1,595 students(KAIP, n.d.).

Subjected to the availability of Federal funds, the Byrd Scholarship is a very competitive scholarship. An scholarship candidates must meet several eligibility requirement: New York State legal residents, and graduate from high school by the end of each year's academic school year, or earn a New York State high school general equivalency diploma, and be accepted as a full time, matriculated student as an approved postsecondary institution for each year's fall semester (the Scholarship Unit, n.d.). More importantly, the Byrd Scholarship is awarded based upon a combination of the students' Assessment Test (SAT) scores and the converted Byrd grade point average (GPA) from either high school academic units or the General Educational Development (GED) test scores.

### **Problem Statement**

Every year, starting in October, the Scholarship Unit distributes an Information Bulletin for candidates and a certain number of scannable application forms to high school principals. Scholar counselors are responsible for gathering the data of eligible students', and filling out the application forms. Applications are sent back to the Scholarship Unit between November and March. If schools need more scannable forms during the application process, they have to send a request to the Scholarship Unit. Once all the applications are gathered in the Scholarship Unit, forms are scanned and entered into a database. The Information Technology Support (ITS) division then runs an error check. Applications with errors are detected and returned to the Scholarship Unit. Usually, staff members call or mail problematic applications back to the schools and ask them to correct them. From March to April, the Scholarship Unit's supervisor allocates the scholarships, and award letters are sent to both students and their school principal.

This application process runs every year; but recently the scholarship Unit realized that it does not work efficiently and that recurring errors hinder its ability to truly ensure that all students in New York State have a fair opportunity to receive this scholarship.

In the application form, there are eleven basic items asked:

- Personal information: Last name, first name, middle name, legal residence, city or post office of legal residence, zip code, county code, social security number, date of birth, race/ethnicity and gender, and school telephone number,
- Eligibility information: test scores (SAT, ACT), converted Byrd grade point average ( Byrd GPA), High school Basic Education Data System (BEDS) code,

- Additional information: the Byrd Scholarship requires all male students over 18 years old on or before March 1st of the award year to register with the selective service to be eligible to receive an award.
- School confirmation: Students and school counselors must sign the forms and affirm that the scores listed on the application are accurate.

According to the Scholarship Unit’s data, errors in applications generally fall into two categories: Wrong information and missing information. In terms of wrong information, if the circles on the bubble sheet are incorrectly filled, the machine does not read the information correctly, and SSN, personal information, birth date, and selective services information (question 15) are not matched, students cannot be properly identified. A wrong county code, SAT, or Byrd GPA scores, can make an applicant ineligible. Outright missing information, also result in students losing their qualification to compete for the Byrd scholarship.

As can be seen in Figure 1, there were a total of 4,609 errors recorded in the past five years. Each category on the form did generate errors though not in the same proportion.

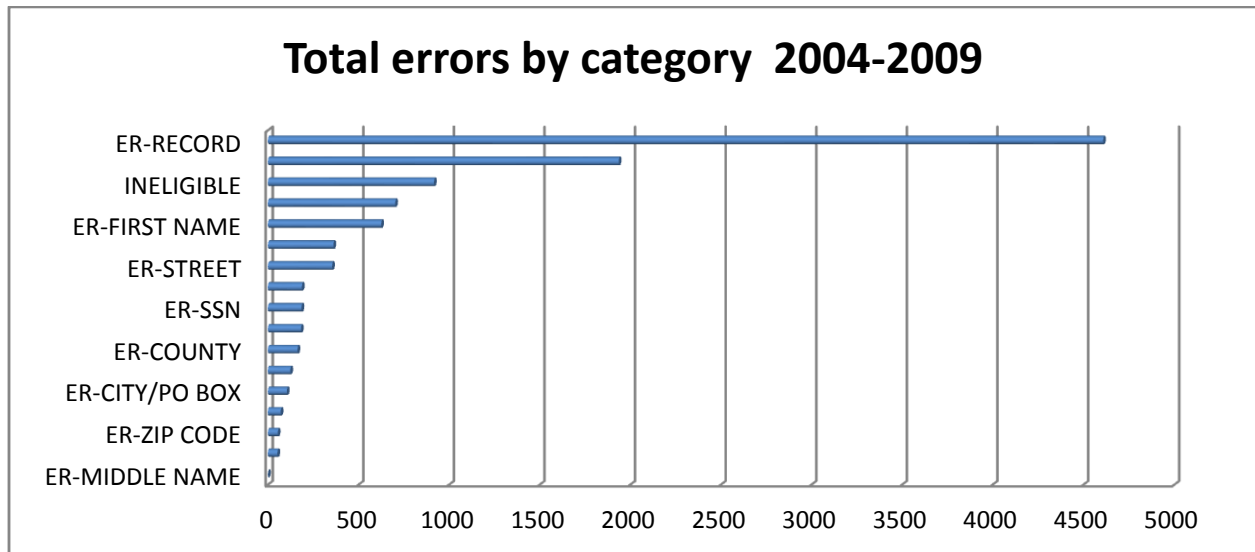


Figure 1 Total Byrd application errors by category from 2004 to 2009

Figure 2 and Figure 4 show that from the school years 2004 to 2009, the annual number of applicants for Byrd Scholarship decreased from 5,597 to 4,575, while the number of applications with errors is 539 in 2004, 876 in 2006 and 1,033 in 2009, despite a dip to 415 in 2005. In many cases, simple errors could be corrected from the Scholarship Unit's database. However, staff members still have to contact schools and send them new forms.

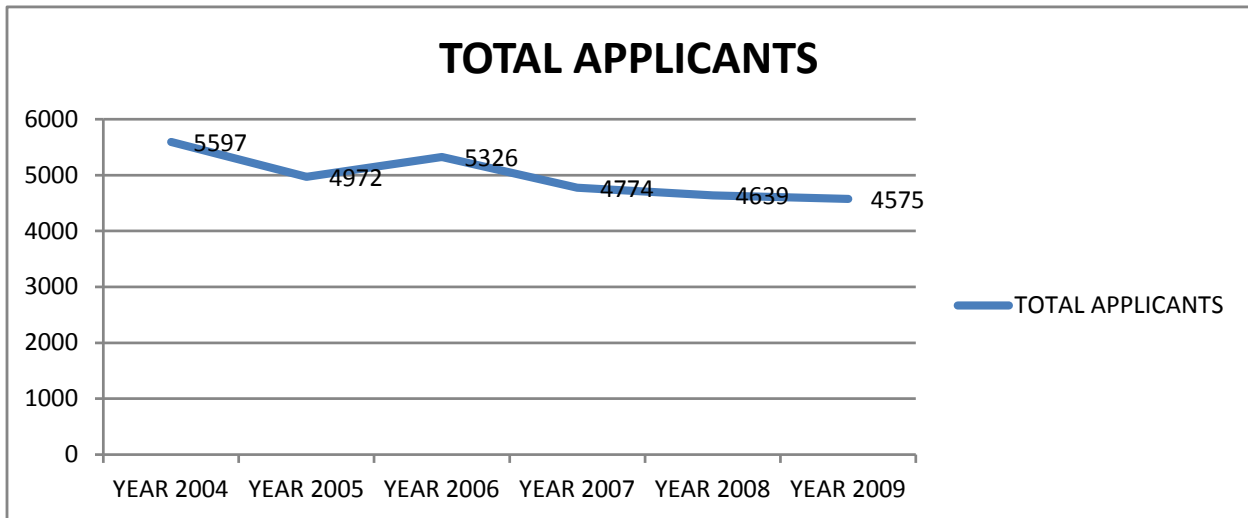


Figure 2 Total number of Byrd Application from 2004- 2009

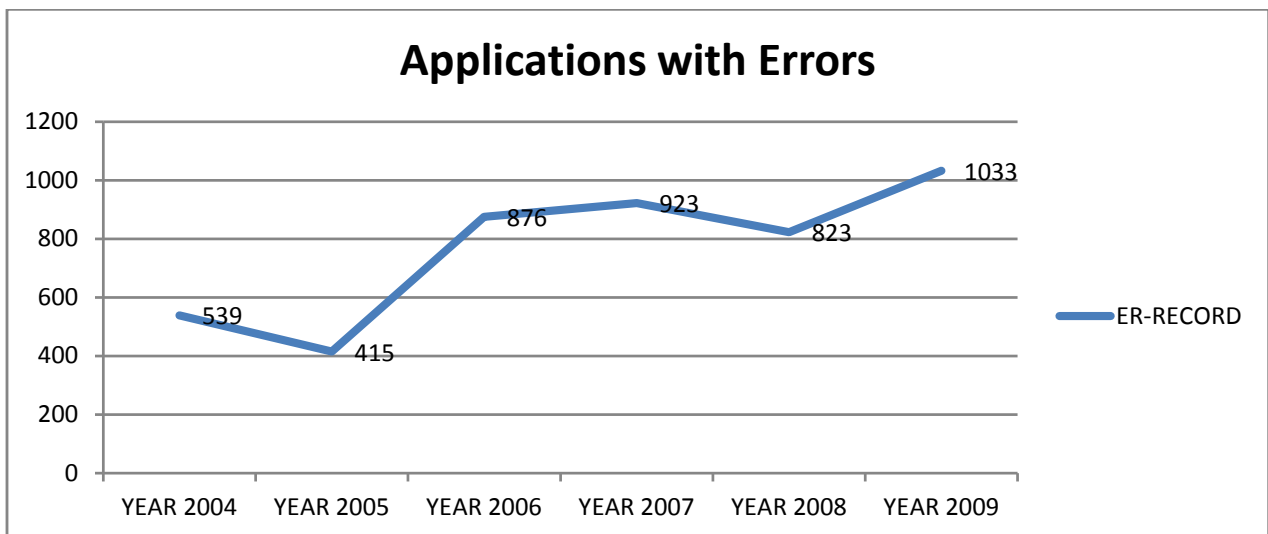


Figure 3 Byrd Applications with errors from 2004 to 2009

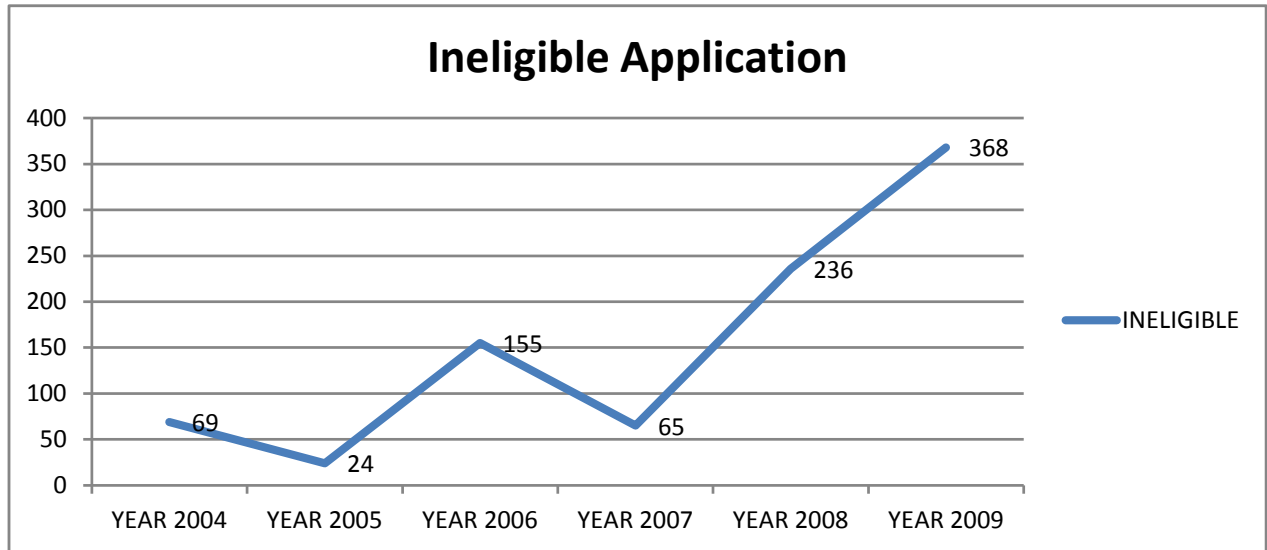


Figure 4 Ineligible Byrd Applications from 2004 to 2009

After interviewing Scholarship Unit staff member Donya Jackson and ITS staff member Yayin Chu-Reimer, it appears that reasons for these errors the following: In New York State, scholarship applications are filled out by school staff members, usually school guidance counselor. Besides their daily duties, they have to deal with many applications each year, and so people are simply to make mistakes. On the other hand, we cannot neglect structural case for many errors: In a survey that was conducted in 2009, school counselors responded that information bulletin contains much complicated information, and that especially the conversion of the regular GPA or GED scores to the Byrd GPA .Next, school counselors think it takes too much time away from their daily duties, especially for schools have many students. In addition, survey results reflected that question 15 creates lots of problems for school counselors as they have to tell some of the 17-year old students to register early with the selective service in order to be eligible for the scholarship. Last but not least, since the scholarship information package is

only mailed directly to school principals, counselors sometimes receive the forms and the information late, and the short deadline leads to mistakes.

Errors that occur during the Byrd scholarship application process cause problems for both the Scholarship Unit and the students. First, staff members have to contact schools again and again to inform them about errors, send new application forms, and scan the revised forms when they are returned. This increases staff's working time and also the budget for mailing. In 2009; the Scholarship Unit ordered 12,000 scannable forms for a total amount of \$651, and it increases year by year. Moreover, an experienced staff member retired in 2008. Meanwhile, New York State suffers from a hiring freeze; the Scholarship Unit's budget is too tight to hire an extra staff member. Errors checking and communication procedures with school are not currently efficient. It is possible that the deadline for the scholarship application has passed by the time corrected applications are returned to the Unit. Therefore, qualified students automatically lose their chance to compete for the scholarship. The consequence of repeated errors and delayed information is that many qualified students becoming ineligible for the Byrd scholarship, which prevent an important scholarship from being fairly distributed. This can also cause negative attitudes among students towards applying for scholarships. The Scholarship Unit faces the challenge of ensuring that it is doing its mission.

In 2006, about 4,000 students in New York State who took the SAT received lower scores than they should have been due to technical problems in the scoring process (Arenson, 2006). This incident was attributed to the scanning of answer sheets and undermined students' chances of college admission, financial aid or even scholarship receipt. This problem did cause the scholarship Unit to review the application for all the affected students, which is a "time-consuming" procedure.

Application errors not only disqualify students from scholarships, they also impede the Scholarship Unit's efficiency. To resolve this problem is critically important to the Scholarship Unit. To tackle this issue, the project will investigate the research question:

1. What measures will help the Scholarship Unit reduce the number of errors on the Byrd Scholarship applications?

### **Conceptual Framework**

To generate a high-quality scholarship application could involves many elements: Whether school counselors fill the forms carefully, proofread for accuracy, understand what was requested correctly. Another angle would be logistics: was the application package was delivered on time to the counselors, with enough application, and sufficient instructions. To identify the appropriate strategy for generating better application results, the Communication Model of Intergovernmental Policy, cognition in policy implementation, and information technology in data management for higher education, will be studied.

### **Literature Review**

Research on policy implementation has gone through three generations since 1970s. The third and the most recent generation of policy implementation research is directed by the goal of assimilating the macro world of policy makers with the micro world of individual implementers (Mclaughlin, 1987). A successful policy implementation generally requires a combination of a variety of elements, such as a clear goal setting, specific policy design, leadership, resource, support, governmental interaction, policy pressure, agency capacity, collaboration, motivation and effective authority. Over the whole process of policy implementation, diverse information flows through different actors from federal to state, and from state to local levels. Each

individual requires different kinds of information about the goals, constraints, or incentives of a particular policy for their organizational setting (McLaughlin, 1987).

*Communication Model of Intergovernmental Policy Implementation*

The communication model of intergovernmental policy implementation (CM) developed by Goggin and his research fellow researchers conceptualizes state-level policy implementation, and its outputs and outcomes. It is the result of the choice of a state. A single policy or message is likely interpreted in different ways by different states actors (Goggin, Bowman, Lester, & O'Toole, 1990). As the CM model points out, there are two conditions exist before implementation occurs: a decision to implement and the capacity to act (Goggin et al., 1990). Once the state actor interprets the policy, the capacity structure shall act with the purpose of convert a policy into action (Schofield, 2004). In CM model, organizational capacity is essentialized into three elements: personnel, financial resources, and organizational structure. Goggin explains those three elements serve for information flows; for example, simple organization structure is praised by transmitting information. Similarly, Rodrigue, Comtois, and Slack (2009) list several important elements of policy implementation, and they believe that adequate time, staff and resources are compulsory to carry out the policy. With these elements, guidelines and standards are enforced. Higher levels of system performance originate with organizational capacity, especially high tech and specialized personnel (Corrigan, McNeill, 2009).

Policy researchers frame the intergovernmental policy implementation, especially on the state and local level, as the product of negotiation and communication. CM emphasizes the idea of implementation as a system “full of messages, messengers, channels, and targets operating within a broader communication system” (Goggin et al. 1990, p.33). It follows that clear messages between policy makers and implementers matter for success of implementation. For

example, if the implementer has an unclear understanding of the policy, and “has limited guidance, or realizes that there is inconsistency between reality and expectations, then the orders or the assignment might be resisted” (Birkland, 2005, p.188).

Bottom-up messages are either written or verbal communication; they must be received and understood (McGuire, 1973). Implementation demands that each layer of government agency share the same information base, interpret it in the same way, and communicate well with each other (Rodrigue et al., 2009). Clear, consistent, credible messages do not only easily gain recipients attention, but are also more likely to be accepted and carried out. The channel selected to communicate message is equally important, especially in bottom-up structure. They can be personal contacts, telephone calls, comments, or agreements (Goggin et al., 1990). Furthermore, interaction among agencies within the top-down framework asks for high level of clarity and consistency, which will foster the likelihood of agreement in the execution of policy. Second, communication often leads to cooperation and trust building, and encourages communication implementers be positively involved in the process (Cline, 2000). Conversely, any misinterpretation, misunderstanding or distortion of the message or signal, and lack of interaction between agency and implementer may create form constraints (Goggin et al., 1990).

#### *Policy Implementation and Cognition*

As discussed above, the clarity of a policy message does vary time from time and place to place. Messages that contain vague terms and lacks straightforward procedures can produce different implementation result (Goggin et al., 1990). Many studies of policy implementation have developed various explanations for why policy implementation is sometimes a success and at other times a failure. Honig (2006) argues that, in the education arena, even though teachers, school staff, and administrators heed policies in detail and attempt to implement them as best as

they can, implementation failures still persist. Hence, examining attention to cognitive perspectives on implementation especially in the education arena is necessary.

Spillane, Reiser, and Gomez (2002) draw the conclusion that human cognition affects what knowledge individual use to understand policy implementation processes. Different versions of human cognition can generate unintentional failures of implementation. “What a policy means for implementing agents is constituted by the interaction of their existing cognitive structures (including knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes)” (Spillane, Reiser, and Gomez, 2002, pp.388). Many studies use cognitive frames to study policy implementation. Those frames integrate “interpretation,” “cognition,” “learning,” “sense-making, “and “reading,”(Ball, 1994; Cohen&Hill, 1999, 2000; Spillane, 2004; Weiss, 1989, 1990, 1993; Yallow, 1998). Accordingly, they believe that in what way local implementers comprehend and interpret policy shapes their action or practice.

Generally, cognitive theory deems that people are more prone to understand new information based on their prior knowledge and experience. This process involves a strong “reconstruction of existing knowledge than passive absorption of knowledge” (Anderson& Smith, 1987; Confrey, 1990). Social, physical, and outside situation also influence people’s thinking and comprehension. In addition, implementation can be caused by failure to local resistance, individual incompetence, or organizational incapacity, and neglect of the communication model’s principle.

In reviewing the literature on implementation, it becomes apparent that policy ambiguity and human cognition manipulates the success of implementation at the local level. In addition to individuals’ experience and prior knowledge, people also tend to interpret an ambiguous message on basis of what they expect to know. Moreover, Hoing (2006) figures that even when

people share a similar strategy or learning style, they do not have the same idea interpretation of a given instruction. They might be misled by surface features of a message and neglect the core values or deeper relationships involved. Additionally, how implementers interact with the external environment, people, resource, time, or change would also affect their cognition of policy (Hoing, 2006).

From these ideas, it seems that an implementation involves cognition, a successful implementation could be perfected through knowing the underlying function of human cognition and how cognition interacts with the world. The cognitive perspective on implementation could also be an approach to resolve challenges observed in implementation.

#### *The Role of Technology in Data Management*

Research by Alexandropoulou, Angelis and Mavri (2008) supports that higher education agencies face challenges resulting from constantly developing information technology knowledge and the reduction of government support, knowledge within an organization is either “tangible (data, records, curriculums and research results) or intangible (individual expertise, organizational knowledge kept in human minds, interactions and knowledge)”. In today’s information society, it is critical to integrate those two elements since the goal of an educational agency is to promote knowledge diffusion and their main method of deliver services rely on people (Alexsndropoulou,Angelis,& Mavri, 2008).

Information technology is not new to the public administration arena. A Long time ago, schools recognized that they can no longer rely solely on experience, intuition, and tradition to manage their data and deliver the quality service they. Many scholars believe that understanding and using data plays a very important role in improving the quality of schools (Wade, 2001).

Studies have shown how the use of data-driven services has become increasingly necessary for state educational agencies. They systematically gathered data such as student scores, enrollment numbers, drop-out statistics, student surveys or feedback and put them in an electronic environment was found generating enhanced productivity and reduced cost. Electronic data can be easily upgraded, “readily created, easily amended, fast traced, and can be shared much more widely” (McLeod, Hare, & Johare, 2004, para 7).

In addition, in 1998, the U.S Department of Education’s annual plan for student financial assistance already called for the increased use of electronic student aid applications as an approach to achieve more effective program management. This plan also said a mutually agreed-upon standard for data exchanges shall be used. Subsequently, data quality and integrity were set as an objective for education agencies (USDOC Office of Postsecondary Education, 1998).

To develop this idea, Shulruf and Tolley (2009) noted that the absence of effective data management was not only “due to lack of skills, capacity, or resources, but also to a lack of understanding about how data can be helpful in improving the organization’s operation ...” (p.1199). Thus, electronic records management does not only need the involvement of key decision makers and IT personnel, but one also has to ensure they share a common sense to establish a credible system that keeps authentic and reliable record .

Faces with great challenges and declining resources, higher education agencies need to reexamine and redesign their management strategies for their resources and data.

### **Methodology**

Case study is a commonly used research method when attempting to understand “complex organizational and managerial processes” within a real-life context, using “How” and “Why” question (Yin, 2003, p.6). As Yin identified in his book, case study has its advantage to

examine “How and Why questions” and “direct observation of events being studied and interviews of persons who involved in the events” (p.9). This study will use these techniques to find the reasons causing repeated errors in scholarship applications, and how the occurrence of such errors could be eliminated.

In order to understand how different state education agencies administrate the Byrd Scholarship program and could manage their performance better, this project will use a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is not only helpful for solving process-oriented questions, but also is useful for obtaining “insights into regular or problematic experiences and the meaning attached to these experiences of selected individuals and groups” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 558). It will shed light on differences and similarities, and providing an innovative solution for the Scholarship Unit.

To ensure their reliability, these case studies will be analyzed and then evaluated by three models identified in the literature review: communication, cognition, and technology in data management. Thus, a chain of evidence will be established about how these three models play an important role either in the educational agencies with different sizes and capacities, or assisting school guidance counselors with scholarship applications.

#### *Data Collection*

This research will primarily adopt three tools to do data analysis. Thematic analysis as one of them, involves starting from someone else’s theory and then proceeding to develop the researcher’s own theory (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis is composed of three stages: Stage 1, sampling and design issues; stage 2, developing and code; and stage 3, validating and using the code.

In terms of the first stage, the thematic analysis sampling decision determines reliability and validity; this decision requires a sound foundation of good raw materials. An *organizational setting* sampling, discussed by Mason (1996) was considered one type of sampling. There are four types of sampling: setting, events, people, and relationship. An organizational setting could be a company, an agency or professional association.

State agencies that administrate Byrd Scholarship and New York State high schools were the two types of organizational settings in the sample for this study. Scholarship supervisor and school guidance counselors or scholarship coordinator within each type of organization were randomly picked to increase the level of generalizability,

Once the sample was identified, data was collected through interviews and secondary analysis of data. Given that interviews allow exploring people's experience and feelings, and assuring direct access to interviewees, it is a very productive way to obtain insights from people who are in special positions and possess real-life experience in the subject (Denscombe, 2003). Data collection was conducted through email, telephone, and personal interviews. Meanwhile, an alternate list of interviewee was prepared in case some people were not available to participate.

By interviewing Byrd scholarship program administrators in several states, this researcher was able to access first hand administrative experience regarding dealing with application errors, and compared differences and similarities. As populations and education status/ resources vary across states, the guidelines for awarding Byrd scholarship differ, especially scholarship quotas and selection criteria. In order to maintain the consistency of observation, this project divided state agencies into three levels based on agency size and scholarship recipient numbers in the academic year 2009/2010.

The first level includes California and Texas, whose awards are approximately 3000 and 2000 scholarship each year, as well as New York, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, whose allotments are greater than 1000. The second level includes Michigan, Georgia, New Jersey, Virginia, and North Carolina with up to 600 scholarships. The rest agencies that awards less than 600 scholarships, are placed in third level. Ideally, this research aims to only interview first level agencies, who award similar number as New York State, and pick one to three agencies from each other two levels to compare.

State	Agency	Award Number
Texas	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	2315
California	California Student Aid Commission	3,358
Ohio	Ohio State Department of Education Center for Students	1,007
Illinois	Illinois Student Assistance Commission	1,153
Maryland	Maryland State Department of Education	490
Arizona	Arizona Department of Education	585

Table 1 State Byrd Scholarship award numbers and program supervisor

After dividing the state agencies, the next step is to decide how to divide local schools for the sampling. School guidance counselors and scholarship coordinators fall under the category of people sampling and, to interview them will assist this research by obtaining the perspectives of the users of these forms. “The number of scholarships per county is determined by dividing the

number of twelfth graders in the county by the total number of twelfth graders in the State for the previous academic year” (The scholarship unit, n.d.). According to the Scholarship Unit’s 2009 data, Brooklyn, Suffolk, Nassau, Queens, Manhattan, Erie, Westchester , and Bronx County, had each more than 20 Byrd scholarship scholarships. Monroe, Onondaga, Richmond (Staten Island), and Orange County had between 10 and 19. Rockland, Dutchess, and Albany, and Broome-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) had at least seven Byrd Scholarships. Therefore, high school guidance counselors from those counties will be selected for interview, Face-to-face interviews will be conducted in schools in Broome County (See Table 2).

The pre-determined questions will consist of general orientation questions and of levels of questions. General questions, as Yin defined, are accompanied by a list of likely sources of evidence. (p.74) For example, documentation and research on the current administration of the scholarship program in selected states will be conducted prior to interviews, and findings from this preliminary research will shape questions to be asked. Yin also divides questions interview questions levels. There are questions to be asked from specific individuals, questions asked from every individual, questions asked from findings across multiple cases, questions asked based on literature review or documents. Such specific levels will also be used in follow-up questions from in-person interviews, or follow-up emails.

Ensuring validity through the interview process requires from the researcher to continuously maintain an unbiased manner and avoiding asking presumed questions. Therefore, the interviewer will continually address the research goal and explains the questions during the interview. This project will also stick to the line of inquiry while asking friendly questions in an open-ended interview environment, as well as embracing interviewees’ own insights.

<b>Awards Number</b>	<b>Schools Chosen</b>
<b>Awards &gt;20</b>	Stuyvesant High school, Townsend Harris High School, Williamsville East High school, Roslyn High school,
<b>5&lt;Awards &lt;20</b>	Guilderland High school, Goshen Central High school, Half Hollow High School East,
<b>Awards&lt;5</b>	Bishop Grimes Junior-Senior High School, Niskayuna High school, Glens Falls High School
<b>Broome county</b>	Seton Catholic Central High School, Union Endicott High School , Vestal Senior High School

Table 2 New York State Byrd scholarship award numbers and schools

### *Limitations*

This project has several limitations, mainly related to timing constraints, a possible low response rate, and staff changes. The data for the preliminary description of regarding different states' scholarship administrations was available only online. As I am not able to travel to each site to conduct in-person interviews, it is hard for me to gather more information. Then, administrators and school counselors have their daily duties, and may not respond to my interview requests in a timely manner. Because the state education agency supervises schools, school counselors might also be reluctant telling their actual opinions. Finally, scholarship administrators or school counselors might change or retire during the period understand study, and it is possible that the current staff is not very familiar with the Byrd Scholarship application.

### *Data Analysis*

One of the most important steps in the research process is the analysis of data. Qualitative research allows the researcher understanding how things occur. In this research data will be studied and analyzed through triangulation analysis, thematic Analysis and inductive reasoning.

Triangulation analysis is on a basis of “gathering and cross-checking of information from multiple sources,” and it ensures external validity because the observation from recourse can be generalized to another (Aberle-Grasse, n.d).

Next, the thematic analysis identifies data that relate to the already classified pattern (Aronson, 1994). Consistencies and differences will be discovered through interview, and patterns and themes will be identified and described from perspectives of interviewees. Findings that emerge from the explanations of such patterns and themes will be used to address initial research questions. In addition, inductive reasoning method hypothesizes that three models play a positive role in high quality scholarship applications. If findings differ from models in literature review, they will be considered as alternative solutions.

### **Findings**

The analysis of survey data in this project aims to locate, obtain and integrate usable information to provide a useful comparison with the data from the interview, therefore determine whether or not the primary information from interview address the research question.

This series of data adopts the result from a survey completed in November 2009. This survey includes New York State local level educational agencies’ opinion about two scholarship programs with respect to certain aspects in information package. Total around one hundred survey was distributed through emails to New York State School superintendents. By eliminating some expired email address, 45 effective questionnaires have been received.

In this study, the researcher chunks the data into smaller parts, leave the data only relate to Byrd Scholarship.

Total 39 questionnaires indicate respondents have worked either only with the Byrd Scholarship or the Byrd and other scholarship. 13 of respondents are from private schools and 26

from public schools. 90% of them worked with scholarships for more than 4 years. Most of the respondents are school counselors and guidance. Among all the respondents, 21 agree that the wording or description in the scholarship bulletins is clarified, and all of which are school counselors. However, there are still four school counselors think differently. The other 14 takes neutral as the answer.

Certain results of analysis indicate two findings and, which lead to this research to focus on specific questions in interview data collection.

Finding 1: Local educational agencies feel that the content of information in the scholarship bulletin needs to be improved

The most important question in this survey is “In what area do you think these two scholarship programs need improvement?” This survey offered six options for respondents: Clarify of expression, paragraph organization, Reader-Friendly design, emphasis of important messages, supplementary information like Q&A, and other. Table 2 shows the descriptive results of this question. Four of them agree that nothing needs to be improved in the information bulletin. In contrast, among 35 respondents do think there is the room for improvement in various aspects, Reader-Friendly Design receives more concerns with respect to changes, while people who selected it also agree supplementary information like Q&A are in needs of improvement as well. Other concerns contain different suggestions regarding improvement: Two suggests the selection process should be streamlined, one argues that the Byrd GPA conversion needs reconsideration, as well as other two show their ideas of incorporate diverse test scores in eligibility criteria (See Figure 5) .

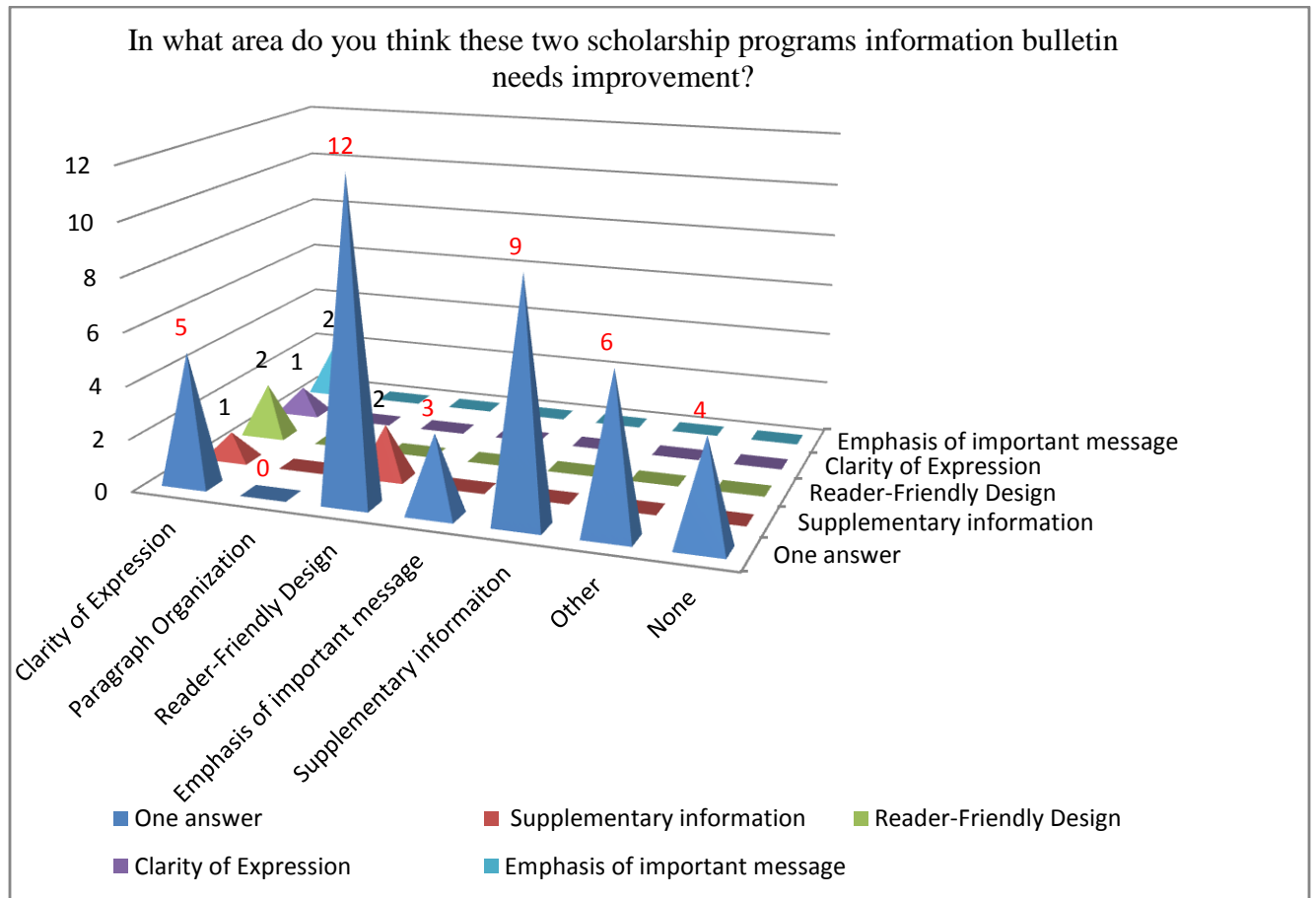


Figure 5 Statistical result of survey question regarding improvement in Byrd information bulletin

Finding 2: School administrators need extra assistance during the application process

Similarly, this survey also proposed five approaches to improve the scholarship process: sample application forms with notification of particular information that needs double check, creating an online application, adding an online score calculator, and adding a web seminar that includes a bulletin information presentation and online Q&A. Nineteen of the respondents share a positive attitude toward the idea of an online application, a sample application form and an online score calculator (See Figure 6).

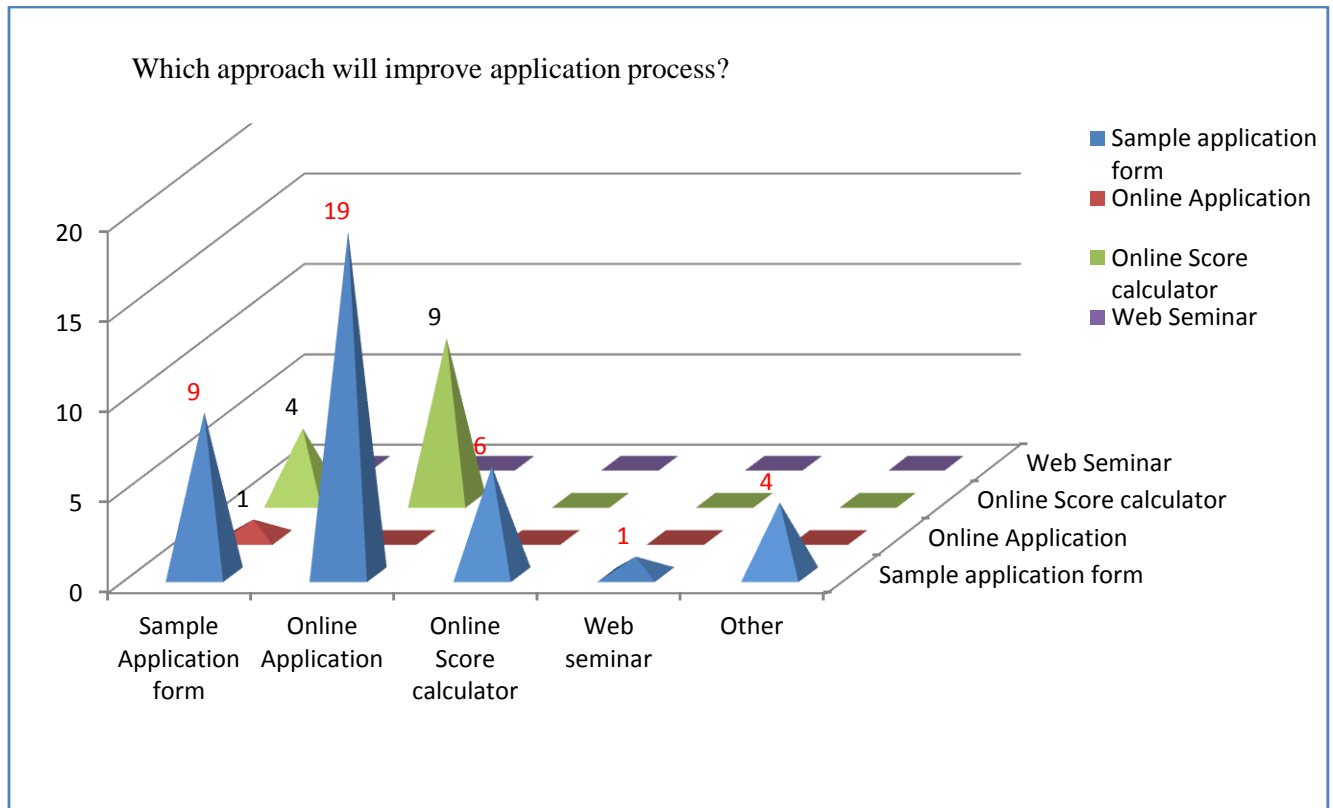


Figure 6 Statistical result of survey question regarding approaches to improve application process

*Analysis of Interview with school counselor, director of guidance, and scholarship coordinator*

The findings of the survey data have made it evident that certain question, such as clarity of information or Reader-friendly design need to be consulted with school counselors or guidance, to see whether they affect the quality of scholarship application. This research was able to talk to five people in different schools. Their positions are mainly school counselors; while three of them were identified as specifically work with all the scholarships.

Finding 3: All of the interviewees are confident that they are able to fill out the Byrd Scholarship application accurately (See table 3).

<b>Schools</b>	<b>Years with Scholarship</b>	<b>Reasons of generating good quality of scholarship application</b>
<b>Seton Catholic</b>	1 year	<i>“I have sat down and read this information bulletin again and again, and I double check with student many times.”</i>
<b>Glens Falls</b>	3-4 years	<i>“I am a pretty organized person, I like putting everything on my schedule, and finishing them beforehand, I do find converting GPA is cumbersome, but I can do it and finish them carefully.”</i>
<b>Niskayuna</b>	3 years	<i>“My position is scholarship coordinator, I specifically work with scholarship. This gives me more time and obligation to prepare scholarship application.” “I usually alter student to check their information.”</i>
<b>Union Endicott</b>	20 years	<i>“I have been working with Scholarship for almost 20 years, everything is familiar to me, however, I still double check students’ application every time, I even asked another counselors to help me go through them.”</i>
<b>Vestal Senior</b>	1 year	<i>“Even though this is my first year with Byrd Scholarship, I not only have sat with previous counselors go through all the information in the bulletin, I also double check again and again to make sure all the information accurate.”</i>

Table 3 Schools counselors’ feedback regarding how to generate high quality Byrd application

Regarding high quality scholarship application, the scholarship coordinator in Niskayuna High school specifically reinforces his point of how to generate accurate application.

*The advantage of our school is we have a person like me specifically working with scholarship, and I have been given a lot of resources to do it, such as a secretary. I think if other schools have difficulties with scholarship application, they probably do not have scholarship coordinator, and school counselors do have many daily duties.*

Finding 4 Most of the interviewees accept the original wording and phrasing in the scholarship information bulletin. However, they believe different people may interpret the wording in different ways (See table 4).

This question chooses four parts in information bulletin that used to cause more errors in Byrd application to consult interviewee. Although interviewees prefer the original design more, they do point out that others may prefer different options.

Questions	Q8 (1)	Q8 (2)	Q8(3)	Q8(4)
<b>Schools</b>				
<b>Seton Catholic</b>	A ( Both)	A	A	A
<b>Glens Falls</b>	A	A	A	A
<b>Niskayuna</b>	A (Both)	A	B	A
<b>Union Endicott</b>	A	A (both)	A	A
<b>Vestal Senior</b>	A (maybe both)	A	A	A

Table 4 School counselors’ preference on reading Byrd information bulletin

A staff in Vestal Senior high school shares *“that information is pretty self-explanatory to me, I prefer reading notes rather than reading diagram, however, I think the combination of these two options would be good.”* One of Seton catholic high school’s counselors shares a similar argument: *“I feel more comfortable of reading notes. At the same time, scholarship coordinator said he prefers option B for question 8 number 4, and he explains “it really depends on different people and their habit of understanding.”* Counselors in Union Endicott points out: *“I have been working with this scholarship for 20 years, I am just use to read what I always read, but I do like graphs and diagrams, and I am sure young fellows may prefer them too.”*

Finding 3 clearly tell us that these schools have done a good job on preparing Byrd scholarship applications. Their efforts come from responsible workforces and resource support. In contrast, schools that have low quality applications might not have similar personnel capacity and resources to conduct scholarship application. In addition, diverse individual capability also prevents schools from generating same quality of application because certain information is not easier for them to grasp or comprehend quickly. Finding 4 testifies that different person has a

dissimilar cognitive framework to understand the message, they usually will do good job when they work with things they are comfortable or familiar with.

*Analysis of Interview with State Byrd Scholarship program supervisors*

The data obtained from the interviews with State Byrd Scholarship program supervisors were analyzed through the application of thematic analysis. Table 5 shows the patterns, common themes that were consistent in the development of a better and effective Byrd Scholarship program.

Questions	Patterns and common themes
What factors caused occurrence of errors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools has different scoring process</li> <li>• School gives application forms to student to complete, which affected the credibility of the student data being reported.</li> <li>• The incompleteness of applications, such as missing signatures, or invalid data resulted in many applications being returned to the schools to be properly completed.</li> <li>• The amount of time taken to deal with errors and in contacting the schools for correction was approximately one month's work for more than one staff persons</li> </ul>
How to generate and keep a good record of scholarship application?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electronic on-line application system</li> <li>• Electronic process</li> <li>• Design an interactive system that meets the needs for all stakeholders</li> <li>• Will ( have considered, have tried )implement electronic process next year</li> </ul>
Communication with schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quick response</li> <li>• Numerous contact with schools ( phone call)</li> <li>• Email/newsletter notification/announcement</li> <li>• Provide mid-period update</li> <li>• Final week reminder</li> <li>• Site visit</li> <li>• Sufficient information available on website online</li> <li>• Good relationship with schools</li> </ul>

Table 5 Thematic Analysis Finding

The result of the thematic analysis focus on finding what cause scholarship errors, what approaches has each state adapted to main scholarship quality and how well they communicate with schools. The findings are relative to the concepts that were recognized in the literature review.

Finding 5 Most of the organizations take advantage of technology to maintain the accuracy of the completed scholarship applications; others will or have considered using technology. They believe this is a smart move to produce high quality scholarship applications.

Ohio and Illinois are currently using an electronic system to gather applications; both of them maintain good records of accurate scholarship application. Texas will implement an electronic process next year, and Arizona is considering the use of an online application, but they are facing budget constraints. California has tried using an online-application, but decided to use paper application this year. Maryland agrees that creating an online application is a smart move for producing high quality scholarship applications.

As Byrd program supervisor from Ohio said: *The Byrd Scholarship Program in Ohio has one of, if not the most, efficient and accurate systems in the country, requiring less than one full-time equivalency staff person to oversee the program that this year shows 1,050 scholarship recipients. Just as an example, in Ohio we will receive over 900 nominations by our deadline date of 4/31, with a 100% accuracy rate in the number of nominations available to be submitted by schools, based upon the senior class enrollment. We will have a 99.5% accuracy rate on specific student data, such as properly spelled street names and cities, dates of birth and first name/last name submitted in to the proper data filed.* As Byrd program supervisor from Illinois Student Assistance Commission said: *In Illinois, roster review and data collection process is electronic. This upcoming award cycle will be the first (I believe) in which everything must be electronic.*

Finding 6 State Scholarship program supervisors value communication with schools and share a common belief that it will help them to improve the quality of the scholarship application.

Byrd program supervisor from Maryland told researcher: *I have been working at this position for almost 10 years, because Maryland is relatively smaller scale in terms of Byrd scholarship, I usually call schools to verify information, I sometimes do on-site visit to help them.*

Byrd program supervisor from Arizona explained: *We have developed good relationship with school administrators through the state which helps us ensure that Byrd Scholarship is on their radar screen. We rely in the school counselor to provide us with the most accurate information. Mr. Scipio Brown said: we usually help them figure out percentage of student in their schools.*

After analyzing each state scholarship supervisor's feedback individually and then collectively, this research found these state educational agencies all value the and good relationship with schools, furthermore, they also preserve constant contact with schools.

### **Recommendations**

By cross-analyzing these three sources of data and reflecting upon the literature review and findings, solutions were developed to address the research questions in the problem statement. Three recommendations were formulated to help the Scholarship Unit deal with the challenges within Byrd Scholarship application process.

*Recommendation #1: Implement an online scholarship application and perfect the scholarship website*

Recommendation 1 is concluded on the basis of finding 5. As discussed above, a web-based system or electronic application process is widely accepted and welcome in many states, their successful experience and good record of application provides a possible solution to New York State. Ohio achieved an amazing accomplishment of errors-free Byrd scholarship thanks to relying on information technology.

The implementation of an online application demonstrates a great step for educational agencies in 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, especially while most of the schools are very much involving in technology in New York State. The trend of creating a web-based system or electronic process is widely accepted in various places in Public Administration.

This web-based system could enable school staff to log into a secure website to complete nominations online. It could guide the nominator through the necessary prompts and assures accuracy in the number of nominations that a school may submit. Therefore, it reduces the paperwork. To be more specific, this web-based system will warrant that each required field is completed and provides basic information into the system to enable selected Byrd winners to access to their information at a later date. Byrd winners, once were selected, are also provided with an access to this secure system, where they can renew their record. Another advantage for this system could also be the easily communication among colleges and high schools. Colleges can review all the New York State Byrd winner information who attends their school, they may approve or disapprove (if necessary) the winner's information to enable the scholarship payments to be processed. Next, this web-based system could not also allow the scholarship administrator pull out the reports quickly, such as a nomination list or federal report, but also offer an easy way for the administrator to establish dates and timelines, and generate payment requests, tracking and maintain student records. Last but not least, this work could be easily done by less staff members.

It is noteworthy that even an online scholarship application can reduce the workload for either state educational agencies or local schools; it is inevitably a long term process. Any change takes time for practitioners to digest, especially for people who prefer working with paperwork.

Byrd program supervisor from California made his point regarding electronic process: *California used to use electronic application process, however some schools respond differently; while they could not locate the right information in the system, they find some information from another state's website and do as what the other states said. It turns out the electronic thing does not really change anything better.* Byrd program supervisor from Illinois also indicates that *getting the schools away from away from paper rosters and to electronic processing has taken*

*time and would not have been possible for a certain time when schools simply do not have capacity to complete projects like this.*

Moreover, an online application also facing the challenge of getting more technology support involved, and it takes time to link to interface with New York Education Department's information system and directory system.

Therefore, this requires a comprehensive scholarship website, with supplementary information, items that need to be paid attention to, and Q&A session. It could allow schools staffs have a place to go for double confirm information if they are not clearly about certain part. However, the website information has to be reviewed regularly to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

*Recommendation #2: Establish a wiki database for communication use between the scholarship program staff and school staff*

Finding 6 approves the previous assumption drew from literature review: an efficient communication is a positive element in terms of generating better quality scholarship application. Recommendation 2 proposes a creative way to solve the lack of communication among schools and the Scholarship Unit.

Cunningham and Leuf (2001) elaborate the concept of Wiki as the simplest online database that allows anyone creates or editing information via a web browser. The essence of Wiki is to produce many virtual communities and collaborative environment for different types of the knowledge management system. The Scholarship Unit could initiate a web-based Wiki database. Staff members could enter their practical experience during daily work, or input important message anytime and anywhere. Consequently, information flows among the scholarship Unit smoothly; and new staff members would take advantage of this database and

quickly start their new jobs. Moreover, the Wiki database could also embrace ideas and feedback received from local schools.

The Wiki database makes the collaboration and communication simpler and more flexible. Information can be well organized and categorized by general information, eligibility information, GPA conversion, and supplementary Q&A. Compare to a web-based application, a Wiki database is relatively easy to set up and maintain. Today, a variety of business corporations had their day-to-day Wiki page embedded within their intranet, and those pages could be just a simple web browser plug-in component. With the help of this Wiki database, schools staffs who have to deal with numerous daily duties could straightforwardly locate the information they need and consult ideas from both the Scholarship Unit's side and other schools' side. This would save the time and inevitably increase the efficiency of the scholarship application that has been previously overlooked.

*Recommendation #3: Add more communication and notification to the scholarship application process*

Currently, the Scholarship Unit only sends the information bulletin at the beginning of scholarship application, then answering phone calls from schools, and notifies schools if they have errors. However, the Unit may consider adding several more ways to communicate with schools during the application process. Sufficient communication has proven to be a good source of increasing the quality of scholarship application according to interview data. The Scholarship Unit could send out email announcements before the opening of scholarship application, follow on a mid-period update to schools on the number of applications that Unit has been received, plus errors alter, and at the end of the application cycle, a final week reminder could be distributed.

It is also important in a communication cycle to know how to develop the right message and which tools to use to reach the target person in schools. For example, as it was reflected in the survey, sometimes the information bulletin to school goes directly to school superintendents, and it is just a regular mail in superintendents' office. Thus, when the information bulletin was given to school counselors, the schedule became too tight. This alerts the Unit to mark or add special sign when they deliver the notification to schools.

*Recommendation # 4: Increase the Advertisement efforts of the Byrd Scholarship by using volunteer resources*

Besides enrich the communication among the Scholarship Unit and schools in different approaches, this project would like to think the problem in another scale. By combining feedbacks from different states, it is obvious that getting money from federal government at this time is becoming more and more difficult, due to the financial crisis. State educational agencies have less money to utilize technology or hire extra personnel. It is extremely important that the Scholarship Unit advertises the scholarship, which requires a significant volunteers' resource.

Both California Byrd program supervisor and Maryland Byrd program supervisor mentioned in their interview that volunteers in local community, library or nonprofit organizations also assist students with their applications in daily life. California Byrd program supervisor thinks that federal government usually "only gives state educational agencies money to award students, the absence of funding for advertising the Byrd scholarship place obstacles to policy implementers." New York State has a very rich community power and nonprofit resource, a word of mouth reminder or library assistance services are much more likely to involve local capacity with a scholarship application process.

*Recommendation #5: Redesign the information bulletin (incorporate sample application form, etc.) and direct people to the website for alternative formats*

Finding 3 clearly tells us that most of guidance counselor interviewees have done great jobs on preparing Byrd application. Then comparing to the large number of errors in the stated in the Scholarship Unit's data, one can tell that not all of schools in New York State have capacity to have a full time scholarship coordinator, and their staff obvious do make mistakes in assisting student with Byrd application. Finding 4 testifies that diverse cognitive framework does affect school counselor producing different quality of Byrd applications.

Considering to change the information bulletin's design aims to accommodate different school staffs' preference. According to literature review, and multiple sources of data, findings discovered that school staffs' performance with scholarship application varies depends on their cognitive preference and level of support. Younger generation is inclined to read visual information. California Byrd program supervisor agrees with some anonymous data deprived from the scholarship improvement survey, that school counselors have many daily duties; the lack of time prevents them from devoting time to miscellaneous information.

The Scholarship Unit could change some of the design in information bulletin or application forms. For example, move question 15 (which caused a lot of troubles to school counselors) to upper position in the application form, or redesign it into a similar pattern as other questions. The Scholarship Unit could also incorporate a sample application form or add some diagram to the information bulletin.

Additionally, the Scholarship Unit may come up with alternative formats of information bulletin and put them on scholarship websites. School guidance counselors can visit the sites and choose their favorite formats to work with.

### **Conclusion**

Again, the errors that occur during the Byrd Scholarship application process area major problem across the country, especially at the New York State Scholarship Unit, which is facing great budget constraints and a shortage of staff members. On the other hand, local policy implementation agencies also undergo their own challenges and constraints. The quality of the scholarship application directly determines the quality of the scholarship nomination. This research study helps to explore potential approaches that will assist New York State to distribute the Byrd scholarship equally and efficiently, and will benefit New York State schools and their students in general.

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Appendix A:

Human Subject Research Review Approval

Date: July 14, 2009  
To: Dongxiao Liu, DPA  
From: Anne M. Casella, CIP Administrator  
Human Subjects Research Review Committee  
Subject: Human Subjects Research Approval

Protocol Number: 1209-09

Protocol title: *NYS Education Department (NYSED) Scholarship and Grants Administration Unit Scholarship Program Improvement Project*

Your project identified above was reviewed by the HSRRC and has received an Exempt approval pursuant to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations, 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) .

An exempt status signifies that you will not be required to submit a Continuing Review application as long as your project involving human subjects remains unchanged. If your project undergoes any changes these changes must be reported to our office prior to implementation, using the form listed

below: [http://humansubjects.binghamton.edu/2009\\_Forms/012\\_Modification%20Form.rtf](http://humansubjects.binghamton.edu/2009_Forms/012_Modification%20Form.rtf)

Any unanticipated problems and/or complaints related to your use of human subjects in this project must be reported, using the form listed

below, <http://humansubjects.binghamton.edu/Forms/Forms/Adverse%20Event%20Form.rtf>

and delivered to the Human Subjects Research Review Office within five days. This is required so that the HSRRC can institute or update protective measures for human subjects as may be necessary. In addition, under the University's Assurance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Binghamton University must report certain events to the federal government. These reportable events include deaths, injuries, adverse reactions or unforeseen risks to human subjects. These reports must be made regardless of the source of funding or exempt status of your project.

University policy requires you to maintain as a part of your records, any documents pertaining to the use of human subjects in your research. This includes any information or materials conveyed to, and received from, the subjects, as well as any executed consent forms, data and analysis

results. These records must be maintained for at least six years after project completion or termination. If this is a funded project, you should be aware that these records are subject to inspection and review by authorized representative of the University, State and Federal governments.

Please notify this office when your project is complete by completing and forwarding to our office the following form:<http://humansubjects.binghamton.edu/Forms/Forms/Protocol%20Closure%20Form.rtf>

Upon notification we will close the above referenced file. Any reactivation of the project will require a new application.

This documentation is being provided to you via email. A hard copy will not be mailed unless you request us to do so.

Thank you for your cooperation, I wish you success in your research, and please do not hesitate to contact our office if you have any questions or require further assistance.

cc: file

Allison Alden

***Diane Bulizak, Secretary***

*Human Subjects Research Review Office*

*Biotechnology Building, Room 2205*

*85 Murray Hill Rd.*

*Vestal, NY 13850*

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Appendix B

Human Subject Research Review: Individual Consent Form

Project Director of Principal Investigator: Dongxiao Liu

Title of Project: New York State Education Department Scholarships and Grants Administration Unit Scholarship Improvement Project

You are invited to participate in a research study of two scholarship improvement program for the New York State Education Department (NYSED) Scholarships and Grants Administration Unit; the scholarships are Robert C. BYRD honors scholarship and the Scholarship for Academic Excellence. The Unit hopes to learn your feedback about several changes that we are going to make regarding these two programs. We want to hear your opinion about how to improve them. As your school has been working with NYSED Scholarships and Grants Administration Unit on these two programs for many years, you were selected as a possible participant in this study. Your identity and responses will be completely anonymous and confidential.

As the summer intern within NYSED Scholarships and Grants Administration Unit, I am conducting this survey on behalf of the Unit, in order to fulfill my requirement to obtain my Master of Public Administration at Binghamton University. The research results may be used in my Capstone and will be shared with my Capstone committee as well as Lewis, J, Hall, my internship supervisor and the supervisor of NYSED Scholarships and Grants Unit.

All identifying records and data will be aggregated, coded, anonymous, and confidential. Respondents will not be identified through the process of the research project or my capstone project. Therefore, I endeavor to maintain the confidentiality of data collected to the greatest extent. As a participant, your personal risk will be minimal. Information that links your personal identification information and data obtained during this study will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.

If you decide to participate, please complete the attached survey to the best of your knowledge and ability. When complete please click the submit button. All completed surveys are confidential and will only be shared within the Unit and through my capstone project. The survey attempts to: 1) understand your feedback regarding various changes that Unit intends to make. 2) To measure scholarship program improvement, 3) to gain knowledge for scholarship improvement program. The survey should take you no more than 10 minutes to finish. The information gathered from the survey is intended to benefit all registered high schools in New York State and to aid in holding schools accountable regarding accomplishing the goals of the Unit.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relation with my capstone research NYSED Scholarships and Grants Administration Unit. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

Please feel free to ask questions on any aspect of the study that is at all unclear to you prior to signing the form. If you have any additional questions later, I, Dongxiao Liu (Office number (518-486-5778).email: dliu3@binghamton.edu) will be happy to answer them. If at any time you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject you may call Binghamton University's Human Subject's Research Review Committee at (607) 777-3818. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

**YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED AND MADE THE DECISION TO PARTICIPATE.**

Appendix C:

Human Subject Research Review: Survey Question

Do you wish to take part in this research?

- Yes
  - No
1. What is your role in your school?
    - Principle
    - GED program counselor
    - Program Counselor
  2. Which scholarship program are you working with?
    - Robert. C. Byrd program Scholarship Program
    - Scholarships for Academic Excellence
    - Both
  3. How long have you work with the program?
    - 1 year
    - 2 years
    - 3 years
    - 4 or more
  4. Do you think the wording or phrasing in scholarship bulletin needs improvement?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Somewhat
  5. In what aspect you think Byrd scholarship needs improvement (If you indicated “ No” in previous question, please skip this question)
    - Clarity
    - Organization
    - Reader-Friendly
    - Emphasis of important message
    - Supplementary information like Q&A
  6. Which part of the Byrd scholarship’s bulletin do you needs improvement ( If you indicated “ No” in previous question, please skip this question) ( please select as many as you want)
    - General Information
    - Byrd Conversion Table Information
    - Eligibility Requirements

7. Which scholarship for academic excellence needs improvement? ( If you indicated “ No” in number 5 question, please skip this question) ( please select as many as you want)
  - General information
  - Deadline Date
  - Eligibility Requirements
  - Allocation of scholarship to the high schools
  - Selection Criteria
  - Directions for completing the nomination summary form
  - Directions for completing the student application form
8. Do you think blurb or wording information affect the efficiency of your selection process?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Somewhat
9. During the process of preparing application, did you contact a representative from the Unit regarding question? (If you indicated “No” in this question, please skip next question.)
  - Yes
  - No
10. During the process of preparing application, when you ask question, do you usually get clear and immediately response?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Sometimes
11. If the Unit were to provide a sample application form with matters requiring attention, would you feel it is helpful for you to do your job?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Doesn't matter
12. If the Unit implements an online application, would you think it is helpful or easier for you to do your job?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Somewhat
13. If the Unit provides an online Byrd scores calculator and Regents test scores calculator, would you think it is convenient?
  - Yes
  - No

- Somewhat

14. Do you think a web seminar that includes include bulletin information presentation, Q&A is necessary?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

15. Please indicate which schools, if any, you have collaborated with regard to this application process in 2009 or before. Please type "N/A" if the question does not apply to you.

16. Thank you for taking the time to answer the questions found within this survey. It is my hope that the data from this research will improve scholarship programs in the NYSED Scholarships and Grants Administration Unit. Please use the box below to indicate any additional comments you have.

Appendix D

Human Subject Research Review Approval Modification

Date: March 26, 2010

To: Dongxiao Liu

From: Anne M. Casella, CIP Administrator  
Human Subjects Research Review Committee

Subject: Modification Approval

Protocol Number: 1209-09

Protocol title: *NYS Education Department (NYSED) Scholarship and Grants Administration Unit Scholarship Program Improvement Project*

Your project modification, which involves revising the recruitment location, procedures and human subject population, was reviewed by the HSRRC and has received an exempt approval pursuant to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations, 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) .

An exempt status signifies that you will not be required to submit a Continuing Review application as long as your project involving human subjects remains unchanged. If your project undergoes any other changes, these changes must be reported to our office prior to implementation.

Please notify this office when your project is complete by completing and forwarding to our office the following form:  
<http://humansubjects.binghamton.edu/Forms/Forms/Protocol%20Closure%20Form.rtf>

Upon notification we will close the above referenced file. Any reactivation of the project will require a new application.

This documentation is being provided to you via email. A hard copy will not be mailed unless you request us to do so.

Cc: file

Allison Alden

Appendix E:

Human subject Research Review: State Robert C. Byrd Scholarship Program supervisor  
consent form

I am a summer intern for New York State Education Department and a master of the public administration program at State University of New York at Binghamton. I am conducting a research on behalf of New York State Education Department (NYSED) Scholarships and Grants Administration Unit (the Scholarship Unit). This research will be reflected as my capstone paper that aims to help the Scholarship Unit to reduce scholarship application errors.

You are being contacted because you are supervising Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship in your state.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with New York State Scholarship Unit. If you decide to participate, you are not obligated to answer all questions, and may stop at any time.

If you agree, I would like to ask you some questions about your practical experience of Byrd scholarship administration such as communicating with schools, reducing applications' errors, and using information technology. The interview should take you no more than 30 minutes. Your responses will be grouped with other people who are called and used for qualitative analysis for my capstone.

The entire process of this research will be supervised by the Unit supervisor Lewis J. Hall, and my faculty advisor Pam Mischen in Public Administration Program of Binghamton University. If at any time you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject you may call Binghamton University's Human Subject's Research Review Committee at (607)777-3818. Do you have any questions about the research project? May I proceed with the first question?

Appendix F:

Human Subject Research Review: Interview Questions: Question to State Robert C. Byrd  
Scholarship Program supervisor

1. During the time that you supervised the Byrd scholarship, what factors affected the occurrence of errors? (Errors indicate missing information or wrong information in Byrd scholarship application, such as a wrong social security number, ACT/SAT scores, or missing students' personal information, etc. Those errors will directly result in the Byrd Scholarship's candidate becoming ineligible.)
2. During the process of Byrd scholarship application, have you find that school guidance/counselors called and asked extra explanations regarding certain information that need to be completed in scholarship application?
3. Does your department/unit utilize information technology in collecting scholarship application data?
4. What other ways did your department/unit use ensure application data's accuracy?
5. Does your department hold training session or webinars for schools, with a tutorial or questions-answered session regarding the Byrd applications?
6. Is there any practical experience that you find helpful to maintain high-quality scholarship applications?
7. Is there anything you would like to add regarding improve accuracy of scholarship application?

Appendix G:

Human Subject Research Review: High school counselors, director of guidance or scholarship coordinator Consent Form

I am a summer intern for New York State Education Department and a master student of public administration at State University of New York at Binghamton. I am conducting a research on behalf of New York State Education Department (NYSED) Scholarships and Grants Administration Unit (the Scholarship Unit). This research will be reflected as my capstone paper that aims to help the Scholarship Unit to reduce scholarship application errors.

You are being contacted because your school has been working with the Unit on Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship for many years.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with the New York State Scholarship Unit. If you decide to participate, you are not obligated to answer all questions, and may stop at any time.

If you agree, I would like to ask you some questions about your practical experience of tackle Byrd scholarship and obtain your thoughts about certain information in the scholarship application form. The interview should take you no more than 30 minutes. Your responses will be grouped with other people who are called and used for qualitative analysis for my capstone.

The entire process of this research will be supervised by the scholarship Unit supervisor Lewis J. Hall, and my faculty advisor Pam Mischen in Public Administration Program of Binghamton University.

If at any time you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject you may call Binghamton University's Human Subject's Research Review Committee at (607)777-3818. Do you have any questions about the research project? May I proceed with the first question?

Appendix H

Human Subject Research Review: Interview questions to high school counselors, director of guidance or scholarship coordinator

\* Have you ever completed or assisted others complete the New York State Robert C. Byrd Scholarship application before?

- Yes, shall we proceed to question 1?
- No, please review attachment first: (Robert C. Byrd Scholarship information bulletin and scholarship application form)

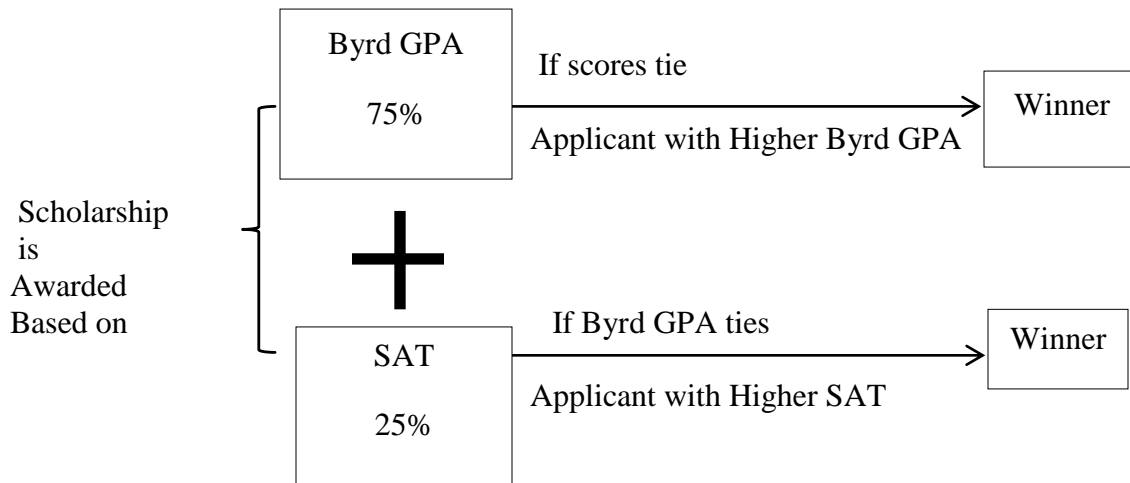
1. Have you encountered the situation when Byrd scholarship applications happen to contain missing or wrong information that has been returned?
2. According to your experience or prior employees, what obstacles create difficulties for you to complete accurate applications for students?
3. Have you contacted the Scholarship Unit for explanation on certain information? Do you find it is necessary and helpful
4. Do you think a regular scholarship application Q&A webinar or tutorial session is helpful for generate better quality application?
5. Do you think you are confident of filling out information accurately?  
Yes.  
No.  
Why?
6. Regarding the scholarship information package's wording or phrasing, do you see there is a room for revision or improvement?  
Yes  
No.
7. If answering yes to question 6: if the wording/phrasing remains unchanged, do you think an online scholarship application system that incorporates with an errors-checking function is helpful to generate high quality applications?

8. If answering yes to question 6 , would you please answer the following questions:

- **Question 9 Test Scores**, which of the following options for instructions for completing question 9 is easiest for you to read and comprehend: **(option A is the original information in Byrd information bulletin)**

A. The 2010 series scholarships will be awarded on the basis of combined scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores and the converted Byrd grade point average (GPA) from EITHER the high school academic units indicated below OR the General Educational Development (GED) test scores. The SAT scores will be weighted 25 percent and the converted Byrd GPA will be weighted 75 percent to determine scholarship winners. Ties will be broken first on converted Byrd GPAs and then, if necessary, on SAT scores.

B.

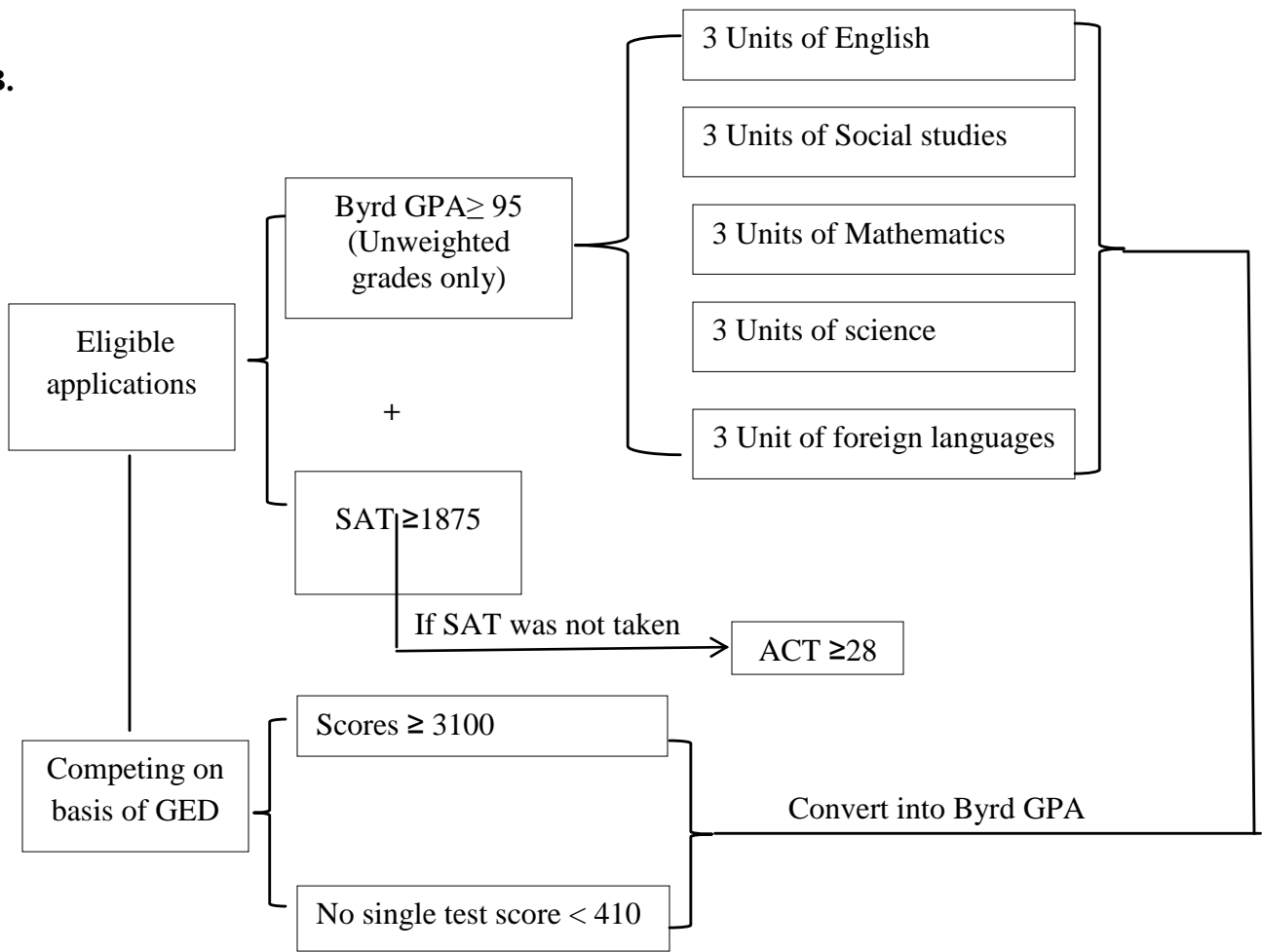


- **Minimum scores requirement**, which of the following options for instructions for completing question 9 is easiest for you to read and comprehend: (**option A is the original information in Byrd information bulletin**)

A. The Byrd GPA for candidates' enrolled in high school must be based on the 12 highest of 15 academic units completed by August 31, 2009. The Byrd GPA must be computed on the basis of unweighted grades only. **The 15 units are: 3 units of English, 3 units of social studies, 3 units of mathematics, 3 units of science, and 3 units of foreign language.** Candidates competing on the basis of GED scores must have scored a minimum total of 3100 ( with no single test score lower than 410) and have their scores converted to the Byrd GPA by their GED program manager )

In order to be eligible to file an application for the 2010 competition, a candidate must have a **minimum Byrd GPA of 95.00 *and* a minimum score of 1875 on the SAT ( critical reading PLUS writing PLUS math scores from a *single* administration).** An ACT score will be allowed *only if the SAT was not taken*, and a **minimum composite score of 28 is required.**

B.



- **Question 10 Byrd Conversion** which of the following options for instructions for completing question 10 is easiest for you to read and comprehend (**option A is the original information in Byrd information bulletin**)

**A. IMPORTANT L All final grades from the 15 units listed above must be converted to a Byrd Score using the Byrd Conversion Table below. This is mandatory for all high school students competing and should be completed by guidance personnel or some other authorized person.**

After each of the 15 grades has been converted to a Byrd Score, drop the three lowest Byrd Scores. Then average the remaining 12 Byrd Scores. This number is the Byrd GPA. The Byrd GPA should be rounded to the hundredth decimal place (e.g., 98.75)

**MANDATORY CONVERSION TABLE  
FOR COMPUTING A BYRD SCORE FROM A HIGH SCHOOL GRADE**

A+ Grading System	A Grading System	4.5 Grading System	4.0 Grading System	5.375 Grading System	5.0 Grading System	Numerical Grading System	Byrd Score
A+	A	4.50	4.00	5.3	5.0	97-100	100
A		4.00		5.0		94-96	96
A-		3.50		4.6		90-93	93
B+	B	3.25	3.00	4.3	4.0	87-89	89
B		3.00		4.0		84-86	86
B-				3.6		80-83	83
C+	C		2.00	3.3	3.0	77-79	79

B.

**IMPORTANT:** Please follow Table below to convert grades from the 15 units into a Byrd Score. **MANDATORY**

**MANDATORY CONVERSION TABLE  
FOR COMPUTING A BYRD SCORE FROM A HIGH SCHOOL GRADE**

A+ Grading System	A Grading System	4.5 Grading System	4.0 Grading System	5.375 Grading System	5.0 Grading System	Byrd Score	Numerical Grading System
A+	A	4.50	4.00	5.3	5.0	100	97-100
A		4.00		5.0		96	94-96
A-		3.50		4.6		93	90-93
B+	B	3.25	3.00	4.3	4.0	89	87-89
B		3.00		4.0		86	84-86
B-				3.6		83	80-83
C+	C		2.00	3.3	3.0	79	77-79

- **Question 15** , which of the following options for instructions for completing question 15 is easiest for you to read and comprehend (**option A is the original information in Byrd information bulletin**)

**A.** Selective Service: The Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship is a Federal program . Therefore, if you are a **Male student who will be 18 years of age or older on or before March 1, 2010**, you must be registered with Selective Service to be eligible to receive a scholarship. Otherwise, leave this space blank.

**B.**

**18 years old MALE** student whose birthday is before or on **March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010** **MUST** registered with **Selective Service** to be eligible Byrd Scholarship Candidate.

9. What else do you want to add that you think might be helpful to improve scholarship application's accuracy?
10. What else obstacles have you encountered that prevent you from working efficiently towards prepare Byrd applications for students? ( lack of time, too many daily duties etc. )

*This is the end of interview*