



## USA Funds Life Skills Helps Maui College Focus on Student Success

Cathy Bio at Maui College believes the financial aid office should do more than simply put money in students' hands to help them pay for college.

"We also need to teach students responsible money management," she says. Bio, financial aid officer, is using USA Funds® Life Skills® to accomplish that goal.

Maui College, part of the University of Hawaii system, has been using USA Funds Life Skills since 2009 and has been one of the biggest users of the program. As a result of a dramatic increase in student borrowing, the college felt that promoting financial education was critical. "USA Funds Life Skills helps expand the role of the financial aid office from simply providing access to promoting student success," Bio says.

### Maui College's current use of USA Funds Life Skills:

- ◆ All freshman students who are first-time student loan borrowers must complete specific lessons assigned by the school so they learn how to live on a budget while in school, how to manage their personal life and school life, and gain an understanding of credit reports. "Before USA Funds Life Skills was available, we had students attend in-person workshops at the beginning of the semester, but we weren't capturing everyone," Bio says. "USA Funds Life Skills allowed us to implement financial education on a much larger scale to include all students in our target groups."
- ◆ All students who are not making satisfactory academic progress are required to complete three of six USA Funds Life Skills life lessons about time and money management as part of their appeal process.
- ◆ Student Support Services, a campus TRIO program, uses components of USA Funds Life Skills to meet its financial literacy requirement.
- ◆ Kuina, a campus program designed for at-risk youth ages 16-21, uses some of the life lessons in its programming.

Starting in fall 2012, the Educational Opportunity Center, a TRIO program to promote access to the community, and Title III, a program to encourage Native Hawaiian student success, will begin using USA Funds Life Skills. In addition, the budgeting component of USA Funds Life Skills will become a mandatory portion of new student orientation.

"Budget Girl shows students how to do a budget. Students get to make choices about how to spend money, and they see if they have any money left at the end of the month," says Francine Ching, student life coordinator in student affairs.

**"It is hard to manage money and save money when my sister and I support the whole family of five. It's hard to keep up with finances when working at a snack shop for \$7.25 an hour. This program (USA Funds Life Skills) really worked. It taught me how to manage my money for school."**

**"The USA Funds Life Skills content was very interesting and very helpful. I now have a clearer vision of the differences in the types of loans and terms."**

**"Good for students who struggle and don't have the support from family members or friends."**

**"This website is a very useful tool for learning how to budget your money. I learned valuable lessons throughout this course."**

— Comments from Maui College students after completing USA Funds Life Skills lessons

Budget Girl, as Ching refers to it, is the “Live for a month” interactive budget game included in the life lesson, *How Do I Live on a Budget While I’m in School?* Students are given a monthly income and face decisions related to life expenses. At the end of the game, the guide totals the expenses related to the choices students make, adds some unexpected expenses such as a flat tire, and compares the amount of expenses to the amount of monthly income.

“It’s a great tool and it’s interactive and keeps their attention,” Ching says.

The school’s website also posts information about accessing all available USA Funds Life Skills life lessons for any student who wants to complete them.

## Educators give USA Funds Life Skills high marks

Bio and Ching say they appreciate many features of USA Funds Life Skills. In particular, they point to the built-in assessment tool that tells them the specific lessons students are completing and how they score on post-lesson quizzes. The assessment piece helps us demonstrate and measure student-learner outcomes.

“It makes it very easy to document what students are learning,” Ching says.

Other features of USA Funds Life Skills they rate highly include the following:

- ♦ Teachers – not a financial institution – designed the life lessons. “This fact makes it easier to market to faculty and other areas on campus,” Bio says.
- ♦ The life lessons are easy to use. “Students are doing more lessons than we require them to do,” she says.
- ♦ In developing the program, USA Funds used students to test the lessons and incorporated their feedback into the design of USA Funds Life Skills.
- ♦ USA Funds support is continuous and consistent. “We’ve had continued support implementing different phases of USA Funds Life Skills,” Bio says. “We receive great advice from our USA Funds consultant, and she listens to our suggestions.”

## What students say

USA Funds Life Skills includes an evaluation tool associated with each lesson for students to provide their opinions about how easy the life lessons are to use and whether the content is meaningful to them.

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest score, students responded with an average score of “6” to the following questions:

- ♦ Directions were clear and easy to follow.
- ♦ The lesson was easy for me to use.
- ♦ Material presented was easy to understand.

Students gave an average score of 6.1 to this question:

- ♦ I found the information relevant and important.

The survey results came from students who completed a total of more than 6,000 lessons. Twenty-three lessons were included in the survey, and the rankings represent the average of all the responses for each question.

## Plans to bring USA Funds Life Skills to all students

Although Bio and Ching are pleased with the progress they’ve made so far in incorporating USA Funds Life Skills into the campus’ financial aid and student services areas, they believe strongly that all students should experience some components of USA Funds Life Skills.

“Our biggest challenge is how to expand to all students,” Ching says. “The classroom is the answer.”

Maui College has a variety of different “student success” classes that are remedial in nature. As part of the school’s Achieving the Dream initiative and with the help of Title III, Ching and Bio are supporting a proposal to implement a 100-level class so students can receive credit for the class.

“USA Funds Life Skills will play a big part in this class,” Ching says. The two are building support throughout the campus and plan to take the idea to the academic senate soon.

## Lessons learned

As Ching and Bio work to try to incorporate USA Funds Life Skills campus-wide, they have a few suggestions for others implementing USA Funds Life Skills on their campuses:

- ♦ Make it mandatory. If you think the life lessons are good for students, make it mandatory for them to complete. They won’t complete the lessons if they are optional.
- ♦ Take the lessons yourself. “Every college student, everybody should do these lessons,” Bio says. “They are eye-opening, helpful and relevant.”
- ♦ Start small, generate relevant data, and then expand. The built-in assessment tool makes it simple to track the lessons students are completing and how much they are learning.

## About Maui College

Maui College is part of the 10-campus University of Hawaii system that educates more than 57,000 students; about 84 percent of them call Hawaii home. More than 4,400 students attend Maui College. Since 2006, Maui College has undertaken an initiative to increase access to financial aid for native Hawaiian students. Many of these students are first-generation college students from families in lower socio-economic levels. Between 2006-2007 and 2008-2009, the school increased the percentage of native Hawaiian students receiving financial aid to 74 percent from 58 percent. The school has used USA Funds Life Skills to introduce these students to money and time management principles.

## About USA Funds Life Skills

USA Funds Life Skills is a Web-based financial literacy and student success program designed to help students learn to manage their money and time wisely while in school and after graduation. The content is organized into easy-to-use life lessons that can be customized for a specific audience. Topics include managing credit card debt, living on a budget, and managing school and personal life. USA Funds Life Skills incorporates post-lesson quizzes to help measure knowledge of key personal finance concepts. Visit the USA Funds website at [www.usafunds.org](http://www.usafunds.org) or contact your USA Funds representative for more information about USA Funds Life Skills.