AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A GRANT PROGRAM FOR PERSONS TAKING ACADEMIC COURSES ON THE INTERNET; TO PROVIDE THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM IS TO ENCOURAGE MISSISSIPPI RESIDENTS TO FURTHER THEIR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION; TO AUTHORIZE GRANTS UNDER THE PROGRAM FOR COURSES TAKEN OVER THE INTERNET IN FURTHERANCE OF A HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREE; TO REQUIRE THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF STATE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING TO ADMINISTER THE PROGRAM; TO REQUIRE THE BOARD, ACTING JOINTLY WITH THE STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES, TO PROMULGATE RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM; TO ESTABLISH INITIAL ELIGIBILITY GRADE POINT AVERAGE REQUIREMENTS; TO PROVIDE THAT GRANTS MUST BE AWARDED ON A FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED BASIS; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

SECTION 1. (1) There is created a special grant program for persons participating in academic courses available on the Internet in furtherance of an associate, baccalaureate, graduate or specialist degree. The purpose of the program is to encourage eligible residents of Mississippi to further their education by offering such persons, particularly nontraditional students, a financial incentive for availing themselves of postsecondary academic courses accessible by computer away from campus.

(2) Any legal resident of the state who enrolls in an academic course or courses made available on the Internet by an accredited community or junior college or institution of higher learning in furtherance of an associate, baccalaureate, graduate or specialist degree may apply for a grant under this program. Grants may not exceed the actual tuition or enrollment costs for the specific course or courses in which a student is enrolled, plus any required fees imposed as a condition for the enrollment. Subject to the availability of funding, the Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning, in its discretion, may
authorize grants to be applied toward the cost of books and other materials required for a course. However, no funds awarded under this program may be used for the purchase of computer equipment or for Internet services made available to the public by subscription, membership or other affiliation with an Internet service provider. The maximum annual grant that may be awarded to a student under this program shall be One Thousand Dollars ($1,000.00) per academic year. For purposes of this section, the term "academic year" means August 1 through the next succeeding July 31.

(3) The Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning shall administer the grant program established under this section. The board, acting jointly with the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, shall promulgate rules and regulations necessary to carry out the purposes and intent of this section, which must include provisions addressing the following:

(a) The application process and deadline;
(b) Initial eligibility requirements, which may vary depending on the degree being sought by the applicant;
(c) The documentation required from an applicant to establish the person's enrollment in the Internet course and that the course is required for the degree being sought by the applicant;
(d) The accreditation requirements for community and junior colleges and institutions of higher learning offering courses on the Internet;
(e) The maximum amount which may be awarded to a person and the maximum number of years which a person may receive awards under the program; and
(f) Any other provisions deemed necessary by the boards for the proper administration of the program.

(4) A person who has a baccalaureate degree may receive grants only in furtherance of a master's, doctorate or specialist
degree. A person who has a master's degree may receive grants only in furtherance of a doctorate or specialist degree. Persons possessing a doctorate degree or specialist degree are not eligible to receive grants under the program.

(5) As a requirement for initial eligibility, an applicant for a grant must have a cumulative minimum grade point average of 2.50 calculated on a 4.00 scale for all coursework attempted in the two (2) years preceding the date of application. As a condition for additional grants, an applicant must make steady academic progress toward the degree being sought and must maintain a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.00 calculated on a 4.00 scale.

(6) If funds are insufficient to fully fund grants for all eligible applicants, the board shall award the grants to first-time students on a first come, first served basis; however, priority consideration must be given to persons previously receiving grants under the program who are making steady academic progress toward completion of the degree being sought.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after July 1, 2001.