

Frequently Asked Financial Aid Questions

WHO SHOULD APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID? HOW CAN I TELL IF MY FAMILY MAKES TOO MUCH MONEY TO QUALIFY?

If you think you will need help paying for your college expenses, you should apply by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Prior to going online, you can obtain a *FAFSA On The Web Worksheet* from any college or most high schools. The worksheet will help you with completing your FAFSA online.

The calculation which determines eligibility for aid is complicated. There is no easy, straight forward "income cut-off" or other method to help you anticipate whether you'll be eligible – the only way to find out for sure is to apply. If your family circumstances change, the financial aid office is in a better position to help if your application is already on file.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO GO TO A WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE?

Here are estimates of how much it costs to attend various schools. These figures include tuition and fees for 9 months and an estimate for room and board, transportation, books and supplies, and miscellaneous personal expenses. Living expenses will be adjusted down for those students living with their parents.

Public Community/Technical College	\$14,500
Public Four Year College/University	\$16,500
Public Four Year Research University	\$17,900
Independent Four Year College/University	\$37,000
Private Vocational Schools	Cost varies - contact individual schools

HOW MUCH FINANCIAL AID WILL I RECEIVE?

You can receive financial aid equal to your "financial need." Financial aid is not intended to replace your family's contribution toward educational costs but rather to help fill the gap between what your family can pay and your total educational costs. Financial aid not based on need is also frequently available to those who apply for financial aid (i.e., those who go through the application process for "need-based" aid).

HOW IS MY FINANCIAL NEED DETERMINED?

A standard analysis is used to determine financial need. **The amount your family is expected to contribute (the Expected Family Contribution, or EFC)** is calculated based upon the information reported on your FAFSA. The EFC is then subtracted from the cost of education at the school to which you're applying. The difference between the two is your *need for financial assistance*.

You can estimate your EFC up front by using an online calculator at www.finaid.org/calculators

WHEN SHOULD I APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID?

Contact the financial aid office of each school you are considering attending as soon as possible and ask for their application procedures and deadlines. Provide all information and forms by the deadlines the school specifies. If your application is late or incomplete, you may not be considered for all the aid programs available or you may not receive your aid in time to meet the tuition deadline. Don't wait to be admitted – meet the deadlines even if you don't plan to attend until Winter or Spring because many schools' deadlines apply for the whole year, not just Fall.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID?

Start by obtaining a *FAFSA On The Web Worksheet* to help you complete your FAFSA online. Worksheets can be obtained from your college or high school, or printed from the FAFSA website (fafsa.ed.gov). Since you will be completing your FAFSA electronically, it is recommended you start by registering for a PIN (your parent should also register) by going to www.pin.ed.gov. Once you receive your PIN, complete the FAFSA at www.fafsa.ed.gov. If you prefer not to complete your FAFSA online, you must call the federal processor and ask to have a paper FAFSA mailed to your home (800-4FEDAID). Remember that FAFSAs cannot be submitted before January 1.

DO INCOME TAX RETURNS NEED TO BE COMPLETED BEFORE COMPLETING THE FAFSA?

It is a good idea to have completed the federal tax return before completing the FAFSA since exact tax information can make processing faster and simpler. If this cannot be done in time for you to meet the priority filing date at the school(s) in which you are interested, use estimated figures when completing the application. If at a later date the estimated figures differ from the actual figures, make corrections on your Student Aid Report (SAR) or contact your school's financial aid office to find out how you should correct the information.

Keep a file with copies of all application materials for each year including a U.S. income tax return and W-2s in the event you need to provide a copy to your school.

WILL AN OFFER OF ADMISSION BY A SCHOOL BE COORDINATED WITH AN OFFER OF FINANCIAL AID?

Not necessarily. Many schools offer admission long before they can make financial aid awards. Check with each school about their refund policies for "enrollment fees" in case the school cannot offer you enough assistance to attend.

Q: I'M MOVING OUT OF MY PARENTS' HOUSE AND WILL SUPPORT MYSELF FROM NOW ON -- DO MY PARENTS STILL NEED TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE FAFSA?

A: Yes. Students under 24 years of age are considered dependent on their parents by federal law no matter where they live (there are limited exceptions -- please note them in the FAFSA instructions). If your parents do not provide their information on your application, you probably cannot be considered for aid. If you have special circumstances which make it impossible for your parents to complete the FAFSA, contact the school's financial aid office and discuss it with them.

Q: MY PARENTS ARE SEPARATED OR DIVORCED. WHOSE INFORMATION SHOULD BE GIVEN ON MY FAFSA?

A: Information should be given for the parent you lived with the most in the last 12 months. If you don't live with either parent or lived with both parents for an equal number of days, information should be given for the parent who provided the greater amount of support to you during the last calendar year. The FAFSA instructions have information that will be helpful if you have questions about providing information from separated or divorced parents.

Q: WHAT IF MY FAMILY HAS UNSUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR MY SITUATION CHANGES AFTER WE APPLY FOR AID?

A: Contact the financial aid office of the school you will attend. They can determine if the change will affect your eligibility for assistance. Letters of explanation should **not** be sent with your FAFSA, as it will only delay processing and will be destroyed.

Q: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I FILE THE FAFSA?

A: After you complete your FAFSA, you will receive your Student Aid Report (SAR). This document may give you some guidance about expected contribution toward college cost, but it is not the final word. Wait to hear from the financial aid office of the school or college where you've applied; they make the final determination of your eligibility for assistance. You can ask the school when it expects to send out award notices (this may range from early spring to mid-summer).

Q: WHAT KIND OF DOCUMENTS MAY THE SCHOOL REQUEST TO VERIFY THE INFORMATION ON MY APPLICATION?

A: You may be asked to provide documents to verify any item on the application. Make sure you and your parents keep a photocopy of your completed federal tax returns and W-2s used to complete the application.

Q: WHAT KIND OF PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE?

A: There are four basic kinds of aid: scholarships, grants, loans, and work study programs. Most students naturally prefer scholarship and grant programs because they do not have to be repaid, but there is not enough of this "gift" aid to meet the need of all students eligible for aid. Usually gift aid is offered with loans and/or work study funds which is commonly termed "self-help" aid.

Q: HOW CAN I FIND OUT ABOUT SCHOLARSHIPS?

A: Your first contact should be your high school counselor. Local organizations typically work with high schools to award scholarships. Many colleges and universities offer scholarships. Materials provided by admission or financial aid offices will include this information or you can visit their websites. There are also a number of national scholarship search services available. The majority of these services are provided for free. If you choose to pay for these services, be cautious and confirm the organizations are legitimate before paying. Scholarships usually represent only a small portion of the total funds available for financial aid, so even if you don't qualify for a scholarship, you may be offered other aid. If you expect to receive a scholarship from an outside source, it is important to inform the financial aid office.

Q: CAN I APPLY FOR A LOAN IN ADDITION TO RECEIVING FINANCIAL AID?

A: A loan is financial aid and your eligibility is established with the information on the FAFSA. The financial aid office is the best source of information about whether you are eligible to apply for a loan in addition to other aid. There may be an additional application process and separate application form. For more information, contact your school's financial aid office.

Q: SHOULD I SEND A LETTER OF EXPLANATION TO MY COLLEGE'S FINANCIAL AID OFFICE IF MY CIRCUMSTANCES ARE UNUSUAL?

A: Yes, correspondence that explains your family's special circumstances should be sent to the college you plan to attend.

If your questions are not answered here or in the FAFSA instructions, please contact the financial aid office at your local college or university or check out the following web sites.

FAFSA on the Web – www.fafsa.ed.gov

FastWeb – www.fastweb.com

All About College – www.allaboutcollege.com

Mapping Your Future – www.mapping-your-future.org (available in Spanish)

Dept. of Ed PIN Registration – www.pin.ed.gov

Federal Student Aid Guide – http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student_guide/index.html

ACT – www.act.org

College Board – www.collegeboard.com

College Opportunities – www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool

Student Gateway to the U.S. Government – www.students.gov

The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid – www.finaid.org

Higher Education Coordinating Board – www.hecb.wa.gov