Summary of Changes to
2003-04 Student Web Application Products

U.S. Department of Education

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This summary contains information about changes we have made to Federal Student Aid's (FSA) 2003-04 Web application products for students. From the FAFSA on the Web site at www.fafsa.ed.gov students can apply for aid using FAFSA on the Web or Spanish FAFSA on the Web, or they can reapply for aid using Renewal FAFSA on the Web. In addition, students can check the status of their financial aid application, view their Student Aid Report (SAR) information, and correct their application data.

From the PIN Web site at www.pin.ed.gov students and parents can apply for PINs, request that we resend a PIN, and update their mailing and e-mail addresses in our PIN database.

2003-04 Changes and Enhancements

FSA is continually looking for new and innovative ways to make applying for financial aid over the Internet easy and convenient for students and their families. To further increase the already tremendous number of students using the Web to apply for aid, we have made the following enhancements to our student Web application products for 2003-04. You, your colleagues, and student aid applicants suggested many of these changes.

- **FAFSA on the Web Questions.** Application questions now specifically indicate whether they apply to the student or the parent. In addition, we added and revised questions on our Web-based financial aid application products to correspond with changes we made to the paper 2003-04 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). For details about changes to the paper FAFSA, see the 2003-04 Application Processing Changes announcement that was posted to the Information for Financial Aid Professionals (IFAP) Web site on 11/29/02.

- **New skip logic added to FAFSA on the Web for Students Who Qualify for an Automatic Zero Expected Family Contribution (EFC) or the Simplified Needs Test (SNT).** As announced at various national, regional, and state financial aid meetings held around the country this past summer and fall (including the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Conference and ED's Electronic Access Conferences), on January 1, 2003, FSA implemented a streamlined version of FAFSA on the Web (and Renewal FAFSA on the Web) that provides students who qualify for an Automatic Zero EFC or the Simplified Needs Test (SNT) the option to skip answering certain income and/or asset net worth questions on the application.

  When developing the 2003-04 version of FAFSA on the Web, ED worked closely with the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) to determine if skipping questions on the form would preclude an applicant from being considered for state aid. We learned that many states require applicants to provide all FAFSA information for their state aid programs. Therefore, students who indicate on the online FAFSA that they are

legal residents of one of these states will not be presented with the option to skip income and/or asset net worth questions on the form. All other students who qualify for an Automatic Zero EFC or the SNT will be given the option to skip questions; however, the online FAFSA tells these students that they may need to provide all FAFSA information to be considered for institutional aid at their school and that they may want to check with their school before proceeding.

The following are other changes related to the 2003-04 streamlined FAFSA on the Web for students who qualify for an Automatic Zero EFC or the SNT:

– The questions have been reordered so that the form first asks the questions needed to determine if the student qualifies for an Automatic Zero EFC or the SNT.

– The questions on the online FAFSA are no longer numbered, but the paper FAFSA question numbers are referenced at the end of each question.

– Once a student's eligibility for an Automatic Zero EFC or the SNT has been determined, the online FAFSA gives the student the option to skip questions (unless the student is a legal resident of a state that requires all FAFSA information – see above).

Students who qualify for an Automatic Zero EFC have the option to skip the following items:

o Student income taxes paid (and parent's income taxes paid, if the student is dependent);

o Number of exemptions claimed (and parent's number of exemptions claimed, if the student is dependent);

o Student Worksheets A, B, and C questions (and parent's Worksheets A, B, and C questions, if the student is dependent);

o Student asset net worth questions (and parent's asset net worth questions, if the student is dependent).

Students who qualify only for the SNT will have the option to skip student asset net worth questions (and parent's asset net worth questions, if the student is dependent), but cannot skip any of the income questions.

Students who qualify for an Automatic Zero EFC or the SNT can also elect to complete the entire FAFSA and not skip any questions. Students who do not qualify for an Automatic Zero EFC or the SNT are automatically presented all questions on the online FAFSA, unless they are eligible for other built-in skip logic (see below).

- **FAFSA on the Web Pre-Application Worksheet.** Many students like to complete a FAFSA or FAFSA-like worksheet before completing their online FAFSA. However, because the order of the questions on the 2003-04 version of FAFSA on the Web differs from the paper FAFSA, you will want to encourage Web filers to fill out a *FAFSA on the Web Pre-Application Worksheet* instead of a paper FAFSA. Students can print a Pre-Application Worksheet from Section 1 of the FAFSA on the Web Home Page.

The *FAFSA on the Web Pre-Application Worksheet* presents the application questions in the same order as FAFSA on the Web, but only those questions students will not know off the top of their heads are included. Also, for convenience, the worksheet references the paper FAFSA question numbers.

- **Improved FAFSA on the Web Home Page.** The general look and feel of the Home Page has been retained for 2003-04, but we made the following improvements:

  - *New FSA logo.* Throughout the application we replaced the old FAFSA on the Web logo with FSA's new FAFSA logo.

  - *Dynamic News Section Added.* We added a dynamic news section called *FAFSA Alerts* to the FAFSA on the Web Home Page where we can quickly post timely information applicants will want to know about applying for financial aid.

  - *New PIN Graphic.* We added a new PIN link graphic to the Home Page so that applicants can more easily see the link to FSA's PIN Web site.

  - *"Fill Out a FAFSA" Button More Prominent.* We changed the color of the "Fill Out a FAFSA" button on the Home Page so that applicants can more easily see where they need to go to fill out their online FAFSA.

  - *Moved "Make Corrections" Option.* We moved the "make corrections" option from Section 2 to Section 3, since Section 3 contains the kinds of things student can do after they have submitted their FAFSA to us for processing.

- **Improved Help Search.** Using a product called Autonomy, we have significantly improved the Help Search functionality in FAFSA on the Web. Students can use the expanded search functionality from the Help Page and the Help Table of Contents. Automony enables students to search on whole key words or combinations of whole words. For example, if students want information about the FAFSA, by typing the word "FAFSA" into the search field they will be presented with a list of help information that contains the word FAFSA.

- **New Introductory Information.** We added new introductory information to the application that explains how to use the navigation buttons on the site, how to save an application, and where applicants can print out a copy of the Pre-Application Worksheet.

- **More Skip Logic Used.** We used more skip logic in the application so that students are not asked to answer questions that don't apply to them. For example, students who indicate they are U.S. citizens will not be presented with the question that asks them to provide their Alien Registration Number (ARN).

- **Some Fields Pre-populated Based on Earlier Answers.** FAFSA on the Web will pre-fill answers in some of the fields based on answers to questions asked earlier on the form. For example, if a student tells us that his marital status is "married," we'll pre-fill a "yes" in the answer field for the dependency question that asks if the student is married. Or, or if a student indicates that her date of birth makes her 24 years old or older, we'll pre-fill a "yes" in the answer field for the dependency question that asks the student if she was born before 1/1/80.

- **Improved Save Function.** Like last year, students will be asked to provide their Social Security Number (SSN), date of birth, first two letters of their last name, and a self-selected password at the beginning of their FAFSA on the Web application. Doing this sets the applicant up for a very simple save process, where data is saved to a secure temporary server for 45 days from the last date the application was last accessed. Students can access their saved application by clicking on the "Continue working on a saved application" button in Step 2 of the FAFSA on the Web Home Page.

  In addition to current save features, for 2003-04 we removed the navigation bar from the login page, relabeled the "Save for Later" button to "Save," and will automatically prompt students to save their data at the end of each Step in the application.

- **Prompt Added for Student to Check E-mail Address.** Renewal FAFSA on the Web will prompt students to carefully review the e-mail address field and --

  – Provide an e-mail address, if they haven't already, or

  – Update their e-mail address if it's changed since they last applied for aid or made a correction to their application information.

- **Improved "Submit" Instructions.** We have added additional instructions at the end of the Web applications to help students successfully transmit their application data to the Department of Education (ED).

- **System Edits.** We have once again included all Central Processing System (CPS) edits in our Web products, including updated and new assumption edits. These built-in edits have been successful in helping applicants detect and correct errors before transmitting data to us, and have significantly reduced the number of applications rejected by the CPS.

- **Application Summary Feature.** By clicking on a command button called "View FAFSA Summary" at any point during application entry, applicants can see a summary of all of the questions they have been asked, and will be asked, and the answers they have provided so far. In 2003-04, the questions will display in the order they were presented on the FAFSA on the Web application. If the student qualified for an Automatic Zero EFC or the Simplified Needs Test, and opted to skip answering certain income and/or asset questions, the skipped questions will still appear on the Summary -- in the order that they would have been asked on the Web application had the student not opted to skip them -- but the answers will be blank.

- **Improved Signature Instructions.** We added additional clarification and instructions to FAFSA on the Web, Renewal FAFSA on the Web, and Corrections on the Web to make the signature process and options easier for applicants to understand. Students and their parents can also select different options for signing the application. For instance, a student might want to sign their application electronically and the parent may want to sign a paper signature page. Our Web applications offer this flexibility.

- **Barcode Added to Signature Page.** We added barcodes to the signature page that students can print from FAFSA on the Web. The barcode includes the student's Social Security Number (SSN) and Name ID and it enables the FAFSA processor to quickly and accurately scan in the student's ID for signature page processing.

- **Print Summary Page.** The print summary page, which is displayed after applicants tell us how they will sign their online FAFSA and right before they submit it, displays questions and answers in the same order as the paper FAFSA and as they will appear on the applicant's Student Aid Report (SAR).

- **Personalized Confirmation Page.** We personalized the Confirmation Page applicants receive once they transmit their online application to the Department of Education so that it addresses them by their first name.

- **Enhanced Application Status Check.** By clicking on the "Check status of a submitted FAFSA" in Section 3 of the FAFSA on the Web Home Page, paper and electronic filers can check on the status of their application. In 2003-04, applicants can see more detailed information about where their application is in the processing cycle. By entering their SSN, first two letters of their last name, their date of birth, and the type and year of the application, we can search the database to see if we have received an application for the student and, if so, tell the student where it is in the process. Possible application status check results include:

  - FAFSA not found.

  - Paper FAFSA received, but not yet processed.

  - Paper FAFSA could not be processed.

  - FAFSA being processed.

  - FAFSA in the Signature Hold File awaiting receipt of signature(s). Students who receive this message are given the option to electronically sign or print out a signature page to sign and mail in to the Department of Education.

  - FAFSA processed. If the student's FAFSA was processed but rejected, a link will be provided to Corrections on the Web or to a signature options page on the Web, depending on the reason for the rejection.

- **Simplified Renewal FAFSA on the Web.** To further simplify the renewal application process for our most needy applicants, Renewal FAFSA on the Web will display student and parent financial information from the applicant's 2002-03 FAFSA if he or she qualified in 2002-03 for an Automatic Zero EFC.

- **Improved Student Access on the Web.** From the "Student Access" button in Section 3 of the FAFSA on the Web Home Page, paper and electronic filers with PINs can see Student Aid Report (SAR) information for the transactions we have on record for them at the CPS. For 2003-04, we made the following improvements to Student Access on the Web:

  - Students can now see full SAR comment text instead of SAR Acknowledgement text;

  - More "Make Corrections" buttons are located in the comment text area so that students can conveniently go to Corrections on the Web to correct data, if necessary;

– The printable PDF and HTML versions of SAR information in Student Access contain all of the same information that appears on full paper SARs, including the applicant's Expected Family Contribution (EFC);

– Because Student Access displays financial aid history information associated with the specific transactions on file for a student, Student Access directs students to the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) Web site to see a complete, and possibly more current summary of their Federal Pell Grant and loan history information.

- **Enhanced Corrections on the Web Functionality.** Like last year, paper and electronic filers with PINs can use Corrections on the Web to change their financial aid application data (except SSN and date of birth) via the Internet. We made several changes to Corrections on the Web for 2003-04 that will improve the corrections process for students. These are:

  – ***Real-time Corrections on the Web.*** Many students will be eligible to make real-time corrections in 2003-04. By clicking on the "Make Corrections to a Processed FAFSA" button in Section 3 of the FAFSA on the Web Home Page, students can use the Web to correct their applicant data. Once an applicant transmits the corrections via the Web, the CPS will immediately check to see if --

    o All necessary signatures were received, and

    o Any database matches other than NSLDS are necessary.

  If all signatures were received and no matches other than NSLDS are required, the CPS will immediately --

    o Apply all system edits to the corrected transaction, including assumption and reject edits,

    o Calculate an official EFC,

    o Transmit an official EFC back to the student in real time, and

    o Send a new ISIR to all schools listed on the corrected transaction the next day.

  An NSLD match will not be conducted at the time of the real-time correction, but NSLDS postscreening will occur no more than one week later and both the student and school will be notified if a change in NSLDS affects the student's eligibility.

  Students whose corrections were processed in real time can immediately go to Student Access on the Web to view SAR information that resulted from the real-time correction.

  Students who are not eligible for real-time corrections will immediately receive an estimated EFC, instead of an official EFC, and a message on the Web screen telling them that their corrections are being processed and that they will receive the results in several days.

  – ***Change in Automatic Zero EFC or SNT Eligibility.*** In 2003-04, Corrections on the Web will automatically detect if a correction changes a student's eligibility for an Automatic Zero EFC or the Simplified Needs Test. If it does, applicants will be required to provide the additional information (income and/or asset net worth) needed to recalculate an EFC.

- – ***E-mail Review Prompt:*** Corrections on the Web will prompt students to carefully review their e-mail address and update it, if necessary.

- – ***Strengthened Warning When School Has Made Corrections:*** To reduce the number of unnecessary corrections made by applicants, we have strengthened the pop-up message that appears when a student tries to correct a transaction that resulted from a correction made by a school.

- **Improved E-mail with Links to PINs.** We made the following improvements to the e-mail message we send to students that allows them to view, one time only, their PIN on the Web:

  - – If students do not access the link in their PIN e-mail message within 14 days of receiving it, we will remove the PIN from the Web and send a paper PIN mailer to the student's permanent mailing address.

  - – We added instructions to the PIN e-mail that explains what to do if the link to the PIN on the Web does not work. The new instructions tell students to paste a copy of the URL into the address bar of their browser and access the PIN that way.

- **Improved PIN Web Site.** When individuals apply for a PIN from the PIN Web site at www.pin.ed.gov they will be asked how they want their PIN sent to them. They can choose to receive an e-mail with a link to their PIN on the Web, or they can request that we send a paper PIN mailer to their permanent address.

References

CPS/WAN Technical Support

1-(800)-330-5947; TDD/TTY 1-(800)-511-5806

Representatives are available Monday-Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central Time.

E-mail: cpswan@ncs.com

Federal Student Aid Information Center

1-(800)-4-FED-AID (1-(800)-433-3243); TDD/TTY 1-800-730-8913

FSATECH Listserv

For more information, see: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/services/fsatechsubscribe.html

FSA Customer Service Call Center (CSCC)

1-(800)-433-7327

Representatives are available Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern Time.

E-mail address: fsa.customer.support@ed.gov