

# What Does Your School Want You To Know?

We asked financial aid advisors from around the country what they would tell students filling out their FAFSAs. Here's what they said:

## Read the form!



Many questions on the FAFSA are straightforward, like your Social Security Number or your date of birth. But many require you to read the instructions to make sure you answer the question correctly. Words like "household," "investments," and even "parent" all have common meanings, but are specifically defined for purposes of student financial aid. So be sure to read the instructions.

You may have unique family situations that may cause you to have additional questions. You should then contact a financial aid administrator at a school you wish to attend for clarification.

## Apply early



Deadlines for aid from your state, from your school, and from private sources tend to be much earlier than deadlines for federal aid. To make sure that any financial aid package your school offers you will contain aid from as many sources as possible, apply as soon as you can after January 1, 2003.

The U.S. Department of Education will process your 2003-2004 FAFSA right up until July 1, 2004. However, to actually receive aid, your school must have your correct, complete information before your last day of enrollment in the 2003-2004 school year. So it is important to apply early to make sure you leave enough time for your school to receive your information and to make any necessary corrections.

## You don't need to file your tax return before you submit your FAFSA

Filling out your tax return first will make completing the FAFSA easier. However, you do not need to submit your tax return to the IRS before you submit your FAFSA. Once you file your tax return, you must correct any income or tax information that may have changed on your FAFSA.

## You can file your FAFSA electronically

You can fill out and submit a FAFSA over the internet. This is the fastest way to apply for financial aid. Also, your information is edited before you submit it, so, if you made any errors or left out any information, we can call this to your attention before you submit your information. This reduces the chance that your data will be rejected for some reason and makes it less likely that you will have to correct your information later. To submit your application using FAFSA on the Web, go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

## There may be additional forms

The FAFSA is the one application for federal student aid. Many schools and states rely solely upon this information. However, your school or state may require you to fill out additional forms. These additional forms may have deadlines that are earlier than the federal student aid deadlines, so be sure to check with the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend.

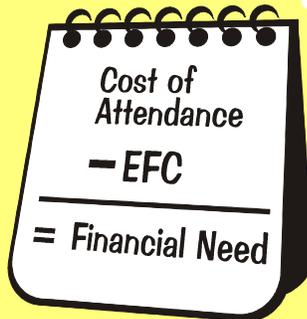


**FAFSA**  
FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID  
*We Help Put America Through School*

# What is the FAFSA?

This form, the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid*, or **FAFSA**, is used to apply for federal student financial aid, including grants, loans, and work-study. In addition, it is used by most states and schools to award non-federal student financial aid.

## How does it work?



*Filling out the FAFSA, and applying for student financial aid is **free**. You should be wary of mailings or websites that offer to submit your application for you, or to find you money for school if you pay them a fee. Some of them are legitimate, and some are scams. But generally any information or service you pay for can be had for free from your school or from the U.S. Department of Education.*

Completing the FAFSA is the first step in the financial aid process. Once you submit it, we process your information. Then we send an electronic copy of your information to all of the schools you list in Step Six. We send a report, called a *Student Aid Report*, or **SAR**, to you through the mail or the internet. It is important to review your SAR when you receive it to make sure all of your information is correct and to provide any necessary corrections or additional information.

We enter your information into a formula from the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, and the result is your Expected Family Contribution, or **EFC**. The EFC measures your family's financial strength, and is used to determine your eligibility for federal student aid. If your information is complete, your SAR will contain your EFC.

The schools you list in Step Six receive your EFC along with the rest of your information. They use the EFC to prepare a financial aid package to help you meet your financial need. **Financial need** is the difference between your EFC and your school's **cost of attendance** (which can include living expenses), as determined by the school. If you believe that you have special circumstances that should be taken into account, such as unusual medical or dental expenses or a significant change in income from one year to the next, contact the financial aid office at the schools to which you are applying.

Any financial aid you are eligible to receive will be paid to you through your school. Typically, your school will first use the aid to pay tuition, fees, and room and board (if provided by the school). Any remaining aid is paid to you for your other expenses.

You may receive a Federal Pell Grant from only one school for the same period of enrollment.

## Where can I get more information?

The best place for information about student financial aid is the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend. The financial aid administrator can tell you about student aid available from your state, the school itself, and other sources.

The internet is an incredible resource for financial aid information. Many schools have information about financial aid on their websites. You can also get free information from the U.S. Department of Education's website at [g](http://www.g), including access to free publications such as *Funding Your Education* and *The Student Guide*, or from [www.students.gov](http://www.students.gov).

You can call our Federal Student Aid Information Center for information at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) seven days a week, from 8:00 a.m. through midnight Eastern time.

You can also find free information about federal, state, institutional, and private student aid in your high school counselor's office or local library's reference section (usually listed under "student aid" or "financial aid"). There may be information available from foundations, religious organizations, community organizations, and civic groups, as well as organizations related to your field of interest, such as the American Medical Association or American Bar Association. Check with your parents' employers or unions to see if they award scholarships or have tuition payment plans.



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