



## After the FAFSA is Submitted

The information provided here is accurate in most situations, however, financial aid rules can be complicated and do change, and not every statement is absolutely correct or complete for every situation.

### Processing the Submitted FAFSA

Once all required FAFSA information has been entered and the *SUBMIT* button has been pressed, the federal student aid processor conducts number crunching and data edits (checking info against that already in federal computers such as social security number matching). A confirmation page is displayed on the student's computer screen and it is stated that processed results will be sent to the colleges listed on the FAFSA.

The student's **EFC (expected family contribution)** is computed and shown on the confirmation page. The EFC is the federal government's determination of how much the student's family can reasonably contribute toward the cost of the student's college education for one year. It is also an indication of the degree of the student's Pell Grant eligibility. Because college attendance costs are not related to a federal formula, the EFC should not be viewed as the actual amount the student will have to pay to attend college.

A few days after the FAFSA has been submitted, the student may log into his/her FAFSA account to view/print his/her **Student Aid Report (SAR)**. The SAR lists the information the student (and parents) entered on the FAFSA and contains a narrative explaining the student's eligibility for federal aid.

### Correcting FAFSA Data

Once processed, the FAFSA may be corrected by logging into the student's FAFSA account. Corrected FAFSA data is reprocessed, and updated eligibility information is sent to the listed colleges. Students/parents should be cautious about making changes to FAFSA data, and corrections should be limited to actual entry mistakes. Asset amounts such as bank account balances are meant to be accurate as of the date the FAFSA is originally processed and are not meant to be updated afterwards.

It is understood that financial situations can change and that a family's ability to pay for college may not be accurately represented by data on the student's processed FAFSA. Students should not update FAFSA data that was correct when originally entered, but rather should contact their college's financial aid office to learn how a change in family circumstances can be accommodated.

### What Financial Aid Offices Do

Aid offices receive processed FAFSA data and determine what steps are needed to complete a student's request for financial aid file. If data or forms in addition to the FAFSA are needed, the office notifies the student by email or postal mail. Once all material is received and processed,

the office sends the student a financial aid *Offer Letter* which explains the student's aid eligibility. Financial aid will not be processed for a student who has not been accepted for admission or whose aid file is incomplete. Students are encouraged to contact their college's aid office with any questions or concerns.

Some aid applicants are selected for **Verification**, a process of validating certain information entered onto the FAFSA. From one-fifth to one-third of FAFSA filers are selected. The student's FAFSA-listed colleges will contact the student if s/he has been selected and will explain what is required to complete the process.

## Financial Aid Offer

Offer letters state the types of aid and eligible amounts of each. Note that offers are made subject to rules and conditions, and that an aid offer may change. Questions about aid eligibility should be directed to the college's aid office.

Aid generally fits into three categories: grants/scholarships, loans, and student employment.

- Grants/scholarships are “free” forms of aid meaning that they only rarely have to be repaid.
  - Sources of free aid include federal and state governments, colleges attended, and private sources. While the FAFSA is usually the only application needed for government aid, privately provided scholarships often require unique applications. Students are encouraged to seek private scholarships and should ask their high school guidance counselor for application assistance.
- Loans are money borrowed now that do not have to be repaid until the student ceases half-time enrollment at his/her college.
  - Federal government loans
    - *Subsidized student loans* do not accrue interest charges nor is repayment due while the student is enrolled.
    - *Unsubsidized student loans* accrue interest as soon as funds are released, although no repayment is due while the student is enrolled.
    - *Parent PLUS loans* are made to parents of dependent students to help with their son's/daughter's college expenses. A parent borrower must pass a credit check to be eligible.
  - *Private student loans* are not provided by the federal government, but by commercial lenders. They generally have higher interest expenses than federal loans and a credit-worthy co-borrower is often required.
- Student employment is a job (usually) working on campus. Students are paid at least the federal minimum wage for hours worked, and the amount on an offer letter is an *eligibility* and not a guarantee of earnings.
  - *Federal Work-Study* is considered financial aid because the student must have FAFSA-demonstrated financial need to be eligible.
  - *Regular student employment* is not financial aid, it is funded by the college and only requires that the employee be a currently enrolled student.

## Cost of Education

To determine whether a student can afford to attend a particular college, it is essential that s/he understand the college's cost of attendance. Determining a college's actual cost, however, is not always easy.

The primary college charge is *tuition and fees* (T&F). Private colleges usually make T&F information easily accessible and display the information on financial aid offer letters. On the other hand, it is not often easy to determine an accurate T&F amount at public colleges prior to the student receiving his/her enrollment bill. There are reasons for this. One, the amount charged at public colleges is based in part on funding from the state, and the state may not make funding decisions until close to the start of classes. Two, fees charged by public colleges can be numerous and hefty and may vary by a student's major and actual courses taken.

The second major college cost is *room and board* (R&B)...living in one of the college's residence halls and eating in its cafeteria. Costs can vary by type of residence (double or single room, suite, apartment, etc.) and by food plan (number of meals per week). Most students probably agree that living on campus is not inexpensive.

Textbooks must be obtained by the student for each class, either by buying or renting them, and having a personal computer is a must. Some academic programs require students to purchase uniforms or to obtain specialized equipment. Book and supply costs can be significant.

Travel and miscellaneous costs can add up. A student attending a distant college needs to account for the costs of getting to and from campus. A student commuting (living at home) to campus may need to purchase a vehicle.

## Can I Afford to Attend?

A student's out-of-pocket college cost can be estimated by subtracting his/her financial aid from his/her college's cost of attendance.

Things to consider:

- Paying for college is usually a significant expense for most families, but investing in a college education can be the best possible use of family financial resources.
- Free aid is better than borrowed aid. Two colleges may have the same out-of-pocket expectation, but the one that includes more free aid is the better financial deal.
- Student employment eligibility cannot be used to pay up front college charges (T&F and R&B).
- A less expensive college may not be the better choice. Reputation, quality of education, and personal fit may be worth paying for.
- The many aspects of paying for college can be confusing for students and families. High school guidance counselors and college financial aid officers are eager to help, reach out to them if you have any questions. Don't make assumptions, get the facts from those who know.