

FAFSA FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

DEFINITIONS

What is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)?

The FAFSA is the application used to apply for federal student aid such as grants, work-study, and loans. You may also use the FAFSA to apply for most state and some private aid.

What is the Expected Family Contribution (EFC)?

The Expected Family Contribution (EFC) measures your family's financial strength, and is used to determine your eligibility for federal student aid during one school year. You receive an EFC based on the processing results of your FAFSA.

What is a Student Aid Report (SAR)?

A Student Aid Report (SAR) is a document you will receive after your FAFSA is processed. Your SAR will list all of the answers you provided on your FAFSA. You should review these answers carefully to make sure they are correct after the FAFSA has processed.

Your SAR will contain your Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which measures your family's financial strength and is used to determine your eligibility for federal student aid. Your school will use this number to determine how much financial aid you are eligible to receive based on your school's cost of attendance and their ability to award aid.

If you did not provide electronic signatures or paper signature pages with your FAFSA, you must sign the paper SAR you will receive and mail it back to the address provided for final processing.

What is a PIN?

A PIN is a 4-digit number that is used in combination with your Social Security Number, name, and date of birth to identify you as someone who has the right to access your own personal information on Federal Student Aid Web sites, such as FAFSA on the Web. When you first apply for your PIN, it is considered to be conditional until your information is verified with the Social Security Administration (SSA). You may sign FAFSA with it, but nothing else. Once verified with the SSA (1-3 days from the date you first apply), you will be able to use your PIN to access your personal information on any of these Federal Student Aid Web sites:

- FAFSA on the Web at www.fafsa.gov:
- The National Student Loan Data System Web site at www.nslds.ed.gov:
- Direct Loan Servicing Online at www.dl.ed.gov:
- Federal Direct Consolidation Loans Web site at www.loanconsolidation.ed.gov:
- Federal Student Aid's Student Loan Web site at www.studentloans.gov:
- Agreement to Serve (ATS) at www.teach-ats.ed.gov:

Do I need a PIN?

We encourage you to utilize a PIN. You are not required to have a PIN to complete a FAFSA, but it is the fastest way to have your FAFSA processed because it allows you to sign your application electronically and allows for corrections to be made electronically. Your PIN also gives you access to your Federal Student Aid information on the Internet.

What is a Data Release Number (DRN)?

Your Data Release Number (DRN) is a four-digit number assigned to your application by Federal Student Aid. It will appear close to the top right hand corner on the first page of your paper or electronic Student Aid Report (SAR).

ELIGIBILITY & DEADLINES

Who is eligible to receive Federal Student Aid?

To receive federal student aid, you must meet certain requirements. You must:

- Be a U.S. citizen or eligible noncitizen.
- Have a valid Social Security Number (unless you're from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, or the Republic of Palau).
- Be registered with Selective Service if you are male and 18 to 25 years of age (go to www.sss.gov for more information).
- Have a high school diploma or a General Education Development (GED) Certificate or pass an exam approved by the U.S. Department of Education.
- Be enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a regular student working toward a degree or certificate in an eligible program at a school that participates in the federal student aid programs.
- Not have a drug conviction for an offense that occurred while you were receiving federal student aid (such as grants, loans, or work-study).
- You must not owe a refund on a federal grant or be in default on a federal student loan.

Who is an eligible noncitizen?

Generally, you are an eligible noncitizen if you are:

- A permanent U.S. resident with a Permanent Resident Card (I-551);
- A conditional permanent resident (I-551C); or
- The holder of an Arrival-Departure Record (I-94) from the Department of Homeland Security showing any of the following designations: "Refugee," "Asylum Granted," "Parolee" (I-94 confirms paroled for a minimum of one year and status has not expired), "Victim of human trafficking," T-Visa holder (T-1, T2, T-3, etc.) or "Cuban-Haitian Entrant."

I probably don't qualify for need-based aid. Should I apply for aid anyway?

Yes! Many families mistakenly think they don't qualify for aid and prevent themselves from receiving financial aid by failing to apply for it. In addition, there are a few sources of aid, such as unsubsidized Federal Direct Loans, that are available regardless of need. Also, some merit based awards require the FAFSA to be on file before aid is disbursed. There is no good excuse for not applying- everyone should!

What are the requirements to qualify as an Independent Student?

To qualify as an Independent Student, you must be able to answer 'Yes' to one of the following questions:

- I was born before January 1, 1987
- I will be working on a master's or doctorate program
- I am serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces
- I have children and I provide more than ½ their support
- Since I turned age 13, both of my parents were deceased
- I am married
- I have dependents (other than children) who live with me and I provide more than half of their support
- I am a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces
- I was in foster care since turning age 13
- I am currently or I was an emancipated minor
- I am homeless or I am at risk of being homeless
- I am currently or I was in legal guardianship

If you cannot answer 'Yes' to one of these questions, generally you will need to file as a Dependent Student and are required to provide information regarding your Parent'(s) finances, assets and other dependents. If you do not qualify as an Independent Student, but cannot provide your parent'(s) information then you will need to contact the financial aid office at the college(s) where you wish to receive financial aid.

What are the deadlines for applying?

The FAFSA is the federal application for financial aid, but it is also used to apply for aid from other sources, such as your state or school. **TIP:** The deadlines for your state or schools may be different from the federal deadlines and you may be required to complete additional forms.

Pay close attention to deadlines! Ask your school about their definition of an application deadline - whether it is the **receipt date and time** or the **process date and time** of the application.

- Federal student aid deadlines: You should apply as early as possible. Submitting your FAFSA is only the first step in applying for federal student aid.
- State student aid deadlines: State deadlines may be earlier than the federal deadlines. Your state may also require an additional form.
- School aid deadlines: Schools may have their own deadlines and applications for awarding student aid. Check with your school's financial aid office for information.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Do I need to be admitted before I can apply for Financial Aid?

No. You can submit the FAFSA any time after January 1st. However, to receive a financial aid award you must first be admitted to the college.

What Information is needed to submit the FAFSA?

- Your Social Security Number. Be sure it is correct!
- Your W-2 Forms and other records of money earned from previous year
- Child support received from previous year
- Worker's compensation from previous year
- Your driver's license (if any)
- Your untaxed income records from previous year
- Veterans non-education benefit records from previous year
- Your current bank statements
- Your (and your spouse's, if you are married) Federal Income Tax Return from previous year
- Your Parents' Federal Income Tax Return (if you are a dependent student) from previous year
- Your current business and investment mortgage information, business and farm records, stock, bond and other investment records
- Your alien registration or permanent resident card (if you are not a U.S. citizen)

Is my application safe on the Internet?

Yes. Your application is safe on the Internet. FAFSA on the Web, working with a supported browser, uses Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) protocol to create a secure session between your browser and the FAFSA on the Web server. All information passed by you to the FAFSA on the Web server will be "scrambled" through a process called encryption.

Do I need to submit the FAFSA every year?

Yes. The reason is because if your financial situation changes, you may get more or less aid. Renewal of your financial aid package also depends upon your making satisfactory academics progress toward a degree, such as earning a minimum number of credits and achieving a minimum GPA.

Is electronic filing really faster?

Yes, electronic filing is faster than filing a paper form. In fact, it may be as many as 14 days faster if you sign your application with your PIN as soon as you complete it rather than using the paper form or FAFSA signature page.

TIP: FAFSA on the Web also edits your application before you submit it. This helps ensure that the data you submit is ready to be processed.

Why does the application ask for last year's tax information?

The Department of Education has found that verifiable income information from the prior year is more useful for calculating the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) than asking you to project income information for the current year. This allows more accuracy; many times when asked to project income, most overestimate their income, which would inflate their EFC.

Why is it important to submit accurate information?

If you get federal student aid based on incorrect information, you will have to pay it back. You may also have to pay fines and fees. If you purposely give false or misleading information on your application, you may be fined \$20,000, sent to prison, or both.

WARNING: You must fill out the FAFSA accurately. The information that you supply can be verified by your school, your state, or by Federal Student Aid. You may be asked to provide U.S. income tax returns and other information. If you cannot or do not provide these records to your school when asked, you may not get federal student aid.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

When should my FAFSA be submitted?

You can submit the FAFSA starting on January 1st of the year you will attend college (starting the fall semester) until June 30th of the next year.

For example: If you plan to attend college for the 2012- 2013 school year you can submit your FAFSA using FAFSA on the Web from **January 1, 2012 until midnight Central time June 30, 2013.**

When should my FAFSA be updated?

When you file a FAFSA, you provide a "snapshot" of your family's financial situation as of the date you sign the original application. If the information on your Student Aid Report (SAR) doesn't accurately show the situation as of the signature date, then corrections may be needed.

The most common correction/update is in regard to tax information. A common practice is to submit the FAFSA using estimated numbers then update when the taxes for the target year are complete.

- You can also use Corrections on the Web to correct errors and add or remove schools
- You can make corrections to any information you have submitted, except for your Social Security Number.

TIP: You should not update your financial information on your FAFSA if those answers were correct when you filed your FAFSA, even if your financial situation has changed since then. Instead, if the change is significant, you should contact your school's financial aid office for assistance.

When will the schools on my FAFSA receive my information?

Any school you have listed on your FAFSA will receive a copy of your Student Aid Report (SAR) electronically once your application has been processed. It can take 1 - 10 days to process electronically (depending on volume). If you send a paper copy or elect to sign the signature page instead of using a PIN processing time can take up to 14 days longer.

To find out whether your application has been processed, select **Check Status of a Submitted FAFSA** under the **FAFSA Follow-Up** section of the home page.

I got an e-mail with a link to my online SAR, but when I click on the link, it doesn't take me to my SAR. What should I do?

Try this:

- Copy the full URL link from the e-mail we sent you,
- Paste it into the address or location line of your Web browser,
- Hit enter.

TIP: Make sure you copy and paste the entire link; this may appear as multiple lines in your e-mail.

You can also go to www.fafsa.ed.gov and click **View and Print Your Student Aid Report** under the **FAFSA Follow-Up** section of the home page. Then follow the site instructions.

RECEIVING FINANCIAL AID

How will I receive my financial aid?

Your federal student aid will be paid to you through your school.

- An award letter from your school will notify you of your aid package.
- Your aid will likely be distributed each semester, quarter, or other payment period.
- Your school will first use the aid to pay tuition, fees, and room and board, if necessary. Money left over for other expenses will be paid to you directly.

Who figures out how much aid I will receive?

- Your school's financial aid office will prepare a financial aid package for you to help meet your financial need.

Financial need is the difference between your school's **cost of attendance** and your Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

- Financial Aid will depend on the amount of financial resources the college has available; not all colleges can meet 100% of your need.
- The amount of your financial aid also depends on whether you are a full-time or part-time student and whether you attend school for a full academic year or less.

TIP: If you believe that you have unusual circumstances that should be taken into account, such as unusual medical expenses or a large change in income, contact the financial aid administrator at the school you plan to attend

You can also check out these resources:

- www.studentaid.ed.gov
- www.students.gov
- Your high school counselor's office
- Your local library

Information about other non-federal assistance may be 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. Lastly, a great free scholarship search engine is www.fastweb.com.