

TOP 10 FAFSA filing Frequently Asked Questions

Q. I'm pretty sure my family and I have money set aside to pay for college. Why should I still file a FAFSA?

A. The FAFSA information is used to decide if you are eligible for federal aid. But some school & states also use this data to award aid from their programs as well. Also, if you later decide you might need to use financial aid award funds, this application will already be processed. Filing the FAFSA does not mean you will accept all the financial aid you are offered; it's only used to determine what you are eligible for. The schools will then offer it to you and then you will decide what you want to accept or decline. There is no fee to file this form and you have the option of declining all aid offered financial aid if you choose to do so.

Q. Should I apply for admission to the schools I'm interested in before or after I file the FAFSA?

A. You should apply for admission to the colleges you are interested in BEFORE filing your FAFSA. Once you are accepted to the colleges you have applied to, you can add those schools to receive financial aid award offers from when you file your FAFSA. It is possible to file your FAFSA before applying for admission to a college, but the schools will generally not package an award offer for you until you have been admitted to their school. So the FAFSA information will be sent to the colleges but you will not receive an award offer until you are admitted.

Q. Why do I, and at least one parent, both need a PIN?

A. Because there are separate sections within the FAFSA which require signatures; one for student and one for parent. The PIN is an electronic signature tied to a person's name, DOB, and SSN. FAFSA requires one signature from the student and one from a parent so each will need their own.

Q. Why do I have to include my parents' income in addition to my own even if they are not going to be helping me pay for college?

A. Parental information is required if you are considered dependent (answer "no" to questions 58-92) because the Dept. of Ed's EFC calculation, determined by a congressional formula, uses information from this part of your application to determine what portion of your parents' income & assets should be available to contribute to your educational costs. Filling the FAFSA in no way obligates your parents to pay for your schooling. This information is required to figure out how much you are eligible for.

Q. Why does it ask what level of schooling my parents completed?

A. Because some states and colleges offer financial aid based on this. This does not affect your eligibility for financial aid. You are considered to be a "First Generation" college student if neither of your parents holds a bachelor's degree.

Q. What is work-study and what if I'm not sure if I am interested in it at this time?

A. Work study is earning financial aid through working a part-time job. These jobs are usually working for a department on your college campus, or if the job is off campus, you will work for a non-profit company within the city your college is located. Answering "yes" to this question

doesn't obligate you to working; it only means you are interested in seeing if you are eligible at this point in the application process. You can decline these funds if you are awarded and later decide you do not want it. If, however, you answer "no" to this question schools will not include this in your financial award offer. And if you later decide you want these type of funds, the schools might not have any to award. So it's better to answer "yes" and decline it later than to answer "no" and risk not having access to this type of fund later.

Q. My parents are divorced so how do I decide what information to put in the parent section?

A. You will use information on the parent who you lived with most during the last 12 months of the date you are filling your FAFSA. It does not matter if one parent claims you as a dependent for tax purposes. You will not report ANY information for the non-custodial parent (the parent you did not live with most within the last year). If you didn't live with one of your parents or lived with both parents equally in the last 12 months, you will use the parent who you lived with most recently or provided the most financial support within the last 12 months. The financial aid office at the college can help you with this if you are not sure whose information to provide.

Q. The parent that I lived with most within the last 12 months is remarried to my stepparent. How do I report parent information?

A. Regardless of how your parent and your stepparent file their federal taxes, BOTH of their information must be included on your FAFSA. No information is included from your non-custodial parent (the parent you do not live with).

Q. My FAFSA has been submitted. When do I know how much I'm eligible for?

A. After you submit your FAFSA to the Dept. of Education you will receive a confirmation page that will tell you how much you may be eligible for in the Federal Financial Aid programs: Pell Grant, Work-Study, and Student Loans. The DOE processes your application within 3-5 business days and then sends it electronically only to the schools you listed on your FAFSA. The schools use this information to package your financial aid offer. Or, sometimes the schools are required to obtain more information from you and your parents before they can proceed. They will notify you if any more information is needed. The schools will also notify you when your award offer is ready for you to review and respond. This will happen at different times since schools are not required to send your award offer to you at the same time. This can take anywhere from 1 week to several months depending on the size of the school. The award offer will tell you exactly what and how much you are eligible for from that school.

Q. A scholarship, or another agency, I'm applying for needs to see my Student Aid Report (SAR). How can I get a copy of that?

A. If you provide an email address when you file your FAFSA you will receive an email with a link to access your SAR. If you don't receive that email or decide not to list an email address, you can access your SAR at www.fafsa.gov after your FAFSA has been processed.