

# How to Obtain State and Federal Aid

Paying for college doesn't have to be financially overwhelming. A combination of several types of aid that may include federal, state and institutional grants; scholarships from numerous sources; college savings plans; family savings; student loans; parent loans; and student employment will be available to help you pay for college. In fact, most students attending Iowa colleges and universities receive some form of financial assistance. To be considered for most financial aid programs, you must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Applying for admission is not the same as applying for financial aid - you need to do both. To obtain college financial aid, it is necessary to file a completed FAFSA and your admission applications to the colleges and universities that interest you most. Follow the steps in this brochure, and you will be considered for funds from the State of Iowa, the federal government, and the colleges or universities of your choice.

## FAFSA Deadlines

Some aid is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Check with your college or university to determine specific priority deadlines for that institution. Your completed FAFSA should be submitted as soon after January 1 as possible. July 1 is the application deadline for many grants funded by the State of Iowa. The FAFSA must be received at the processing center by the specified deadlines to be given priority status.

When you file your FAFSA electronically, be sure to provide the necessary signatures and print a confirmation page. You can sign electronically with your Personal Identification Number (PIN), or print, sign and mail the signature page to the federal processing center. Failure to provide your necessary signatures will cause processing delays.

# HOW TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID

## A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS



- ### THINGS TO DO
- ✓ Visit my top college choices and apply for admission
  - ✓ Research private scholarship opportunities online and ask my school counselor about local scholarships
  - ✓ Ask my college about scholarships and grants from the college
  - ✓ Get my PIN at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov)
  - ✓ File my FAFSA at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)



**IowaCollegeAid.gov**  
Your Financial Aid Connection

### Our Mission

We advocate for, and provide a continuum of services to support, Iowa students and families as they explore and finance educational opportunities beyond high school.



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Your Financial Aid Connection

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## MORE INFORMATION

Information on a range of financial aid programs offered through federal, state and private programs can be found on our website or call 877-272-4456 to request a complimentary copy of *Your Course to College - The Official Guide to Financial Aid and Directory of Iowa Colleges and Universities*.

[www.iowaCollegeAid.gov](http://www.iowaCollegeAid.gov)

# HOW TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID

## Step 1: Complete the FAFSA

### Free Application for Federal Student Aid

To qualify for most financial aid programs, you must first complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The colleges and universities use the FAFSA to determine your financial aid eligibility. Financial aid can be from federal, state, college, university and private resources.

### How to Complete the FAFSA

FAFSA on the Web is secure, easy, and accurate. Students are encouraged to complete the electronic version because it contains instructions, help features, built-in edits to reduce applicant error, and can be processed faster. To complete the FAFSA on the Web go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

You and your parents (if you are dependent\*) should apply for separate Personal Identification Numbers (PINs). You can apply for a PIN while completing a FAFSA on the Web application, or you can go to the Federal Student Aid PIN website at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) to apply. Department of Education PINs serve as electronic signatures for the FAFSA on the Web.

To file a paper application through regular mail, you may request a form by calling 1-800-4-FEDAID (1-800-433-3243), or visiting [www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/fafsa\\_options.html](http://www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/fafsa_options.html).

### Information Needed for the FAFSA

- Your Driver's license number
- Your alien registration number (if not a U.S. citizen)

### Gather the following for yourself, your spouse (if married), and your parents (if dependent\*):

- Social Security number (not required for student's spouse)
- The most recent federal tax return, W-2s and records of earnings
- Records of untaxed income
- The most recent bank and investment statements

## Step 2: Your Student Aid Report

After submitting your completed FAFSA, the U.S. Department of Education will process the data and compile your Student Aid Report (SAR). The SAR will be sent to you and the colleges listed on your FAFSA. It is usually sent within three weeks following the receipt of your completed FAFSA. You will receive your results sooner by filing electronically.

Read your SAR carefully and follow any instructions, especially if errors need to be corrected.

### The Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

Your SAR contains a key figure called the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC will be used to determine the types of financial aid you are eligible to receive for the academic year.

Variables that determine your EFC include income and net worth for you and your parents, family size, age of older parent, state and federal taxes, and number of family members attending college. An easy way to estimate your EFC is to use a free, online financial aid calculator. A good website with this service is [www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov) (the estimate is unofficial).

Students must file a new FAFSA each year. Changes to family finances and other variables will be reflected in the EFC annually.

### Determining Your Financial Need

The following formula determines financial need: Cost of Attendance (COA) - EFC = Financial Need. The cost of attendance is the total of tuition, fees, books, and living expenses. Your EFC is determined by the information you included on your FAFSA and the same EFC figure is sent to the colleges and universities you selected. The difference between the two is your financial need for the year.

## Step 3: The Award Process

### State and Institutional Financial Aid

If you have been accepted for admission, each college listed on your FAFSA will send an electronic or paper award letter describing the financial aid package it can offer. This will include state, federal, and institutional aid for which you qualify.

### Evaluating Aid Offers

It is important to thoroughly compare the figures from all colleges and universities. A financial aid award calculator is available in the student section of [www.lowaCollegeAid.gov](http://www.lowaCollegeAid.gov) to help you evaluate your aid packages. The largest financial package is not always the best – it may have the largest gap between your cost of attendance and the financial aid offered.

When reviewing aid packages, consider how much assistance is from scholarships or grants (which do not have to be repaid) and how much is loan support (which must be repaid). Note that scholarship and grant terms may vary – some renew automatically from year to year, some renew under certain conditions (i.e. maintaining a required grade point average), and others are one-time awards.

Be certain you understand the terms and obligations of each loan. Ask school officials about any terms or provisions that need clarification.

Look beyond the expenses to assess the type of campus environment and college experience you are looking for. There are a variety of student and parent loans available to meet the educational costs at the college of your choice.

### Dependency Status:

\* You are considered dependent unless you meet one of the following criteria: you are age 24 or older, a graduate or professional student, married, a student with legal dependents other than a spouse, a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces, currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed forces for other than training purposes, or an orphan or ward of the court (or were until age 18).

## Step 4: Accept & Finalize Your Award

As you analyze your financial aid packages, note the specified deadlines for your response. To accept the financial aid package offered, follow all instructions. You may need to supply additional information to college or university officials.

For the majority of students, scholarships and grants will not cover all college costs. Most students pay college expenses through various resources, including student loans. As you and your family budget for the expenses you will face as a student, you may wish to consider the government's low-cost loans available to both students and parents. Fortunately, Federal Stafford Loans (for students) and PLUS Loans (for parents and graduate students) continue to be offered at reasonable interest rates. Investing in your future is a wise decision, as long as you borrow sensibly. More student loan information can be obtained at [www.lowaCollegeAid.gov](http://www.lowaCollegeAid.gov), or by calling 877-272-4456 to request a complimentary copy of *Student Loans - a Guide for Students and Parents*.

## WHERE DO YOU GO FOR HELP?

There is no fee to complete or file a FAFSA. Even so, many families are solicited by unfamiliar businesses offering to complete applications for a price. Beware of these offers and remember that you don't have to pay anyone to review your financial information or complete your FAFSA. If you organize your financial data and invest a little time, you'll complete the process with ease. If you have questions or need guidance, call Iowa College Aid at 877-272-4456, or call the financial aid office on any college or university campus.

*"Education is not solely about earning a great living. It means living a great Life."* Brad Henry