

Financial aid checklist for students and parents

Use this sheet as a personal record and as a reminder of the steps to take to obtain financial aid. Check off each step as you complete it.

For you and your parents or guardian

- If you are in doubt as to whether or not to apply for aid, apply!
- Obtain a social security number if you do not have one.
- Do not wait for college acceptance letters before filing for aid. File in January or February — the earlier the better. You do not have to have completed your tax returns prior to filling out the FAFSA or the PROFILE. An estimate of income is adequate. You cannot file the FAFSA until after January 1, but complete it before February 1 if at all possible.
- Fill the FAFSA out online. Get worksheets to fill out prior to filing the FAFSA at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Filing online is much faster than by mail, and the website has prompts that help you avoid making mistakes. You will need a PIN, or electronic password, before completing the form — available at www.pin.ed.gov. Get your PIN well in advance of your deadline because it must be assigned and emailed back to you before you can begin.
- If you are applying to colleges that require PROFILE, try to file that form in late November or early December — as soon as you know the colleges to which you plan to apply. If you are applying under an Early Decision plan, complete your PROFILE in October or early November.
- Income tax forms should be filed as soon as possible (preferably in January) in order to provide accurate data on financial aid forms. Some colleges have early February deadlines.
- Inform each college about your interest in applying for aid. Make a list of the financial aid priority dates and deadlines at the colleges to which you are applying. Ask each college if it requires supplemental forms, and obtain them as needed.
- Apply for federal and state funds by completing the appropriate questions of the FAFSA.
- Check for scholarships for which you might be eligible:
 - each college/postsecondary institution (your best source)
 - those posted in the counseling office
 - local and state scholarships
- Begin your Stafford student loan application by checking appropriate boxes on the FAFSA.

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Details to remember

- In all written communications to financial aid offices, put the student's name and Social Security number on every page.
- Keep your financial aid worksheets. Always make photocopies for your records.
- If you have questions about an item, do not guess. See your counselor or an accountant, or speak with the college financial aid officer directly.
- Do not leave blank spaces on the forms. Use zeros instead.
- Proofread! And again, make copies of everything!

After you've filed the forms

- If you properly complete the FAFSA, you will receive a Student Aid Report that will give you your eligibility index for federal and state aid.
- If there are errors or incorrect information on the SAR, you can make corrections online.
- Financial aid offers are sent by colleges either with, or shortly after you receive, a letter of acceptance. You will be asked to sign an acceptance of the amount received, and the money will be sent to the college/postsecondary institution.
- Ask your counselor for assistance if you have general questions. Specific questions should be directed to the college financial aid officers.

Sources: Glenbrook High School, Illinois, and Amherst Regional High School, Massachusetts