Admissions Guide and Timeline

Junior Year

- Start to think about your college choices. Make an appointment with your guidance counselor to talk about your options. Conduct a free college search at www.fastweb.com.
- Take the ACT and/or SAT in the spring. High scores increase your chance of winning scholarships. You may want to take the tests again in fall to try for a higher score.
- Talk to your parents about college costs. Visit: www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov and www.finaid.org/calculators/.
- Request applications and brochures from your top college choices and visit their websites.
- Visit prospective colleges over the summer. Ask college friends about their college experiences.
- Include a "financial aid safety school" which is a safety school (a college that will definitely admit you) where you could attend even if you did not receive financial aid.
- Consider the out-of-pocket cost (cost of attendance minus any scholarships or grants) as opposed to net cost (cost of attendance minus the financial aid package) when evaluating college costs. Net cost counts loans, which need to be repaid, while out-of-pocket cost tells you how much the college is really going to cost you.

Senior Year - Fall

- Organize applications, create files for each of the schools you are interested in. List all requirements and deadlines.
- Retake the ACT and/or SAT if you are looking to improve your score.
- Request letters of recommendation as soon as possible from teachers, counselors and community leaders (at least one month before the application due date).

- Visit www.fastweb.com to find scholarships. Check out www.finaid.org and www.fastweb.com/financial-aid/ to learn more about financial aid and paying for college.
- To save money on application fees, consider applying early action to a college where you have a good chance of being accepted early, so you avoid the need for a safety school *Note:* Early decision requires a decision and early action does not require action.

Senior Year - Winter

- Work on your college applications. Many applications are due in early January, unless early decision.
- Register for a PIN so you can complete and sign the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online at: www.pin.ed.gov.
- File the FAFSA: www.fafsa.gov, ASAP after January 1st.
- Check with your prospective schools about additional financial aid application forms, deadlines & requirements.

Senior Year - Spring

- Check email/mail regularly for admissions decisions (generally late March/early April); a thin letter does not necessarily mean you are rejected.
- Compare your admissions offers. Ask your guidance counselor and parents to help you weigh your options.
- Review your Student Aid Report (SAR) for any mistakes and report them to your prospective school. Your SAR You should receive your SAR in 1-3 days if you filed electronically (paper filing: 2-3 weeks).
- Time for a decision! Most schools ask that you choose your school by May 1st, unless early decision
- Check college's deadlines for housing, financial aid, etc.

Glossary: Key Terms You Will Encounter

Award Letter: A notification telling you what financial aid your college is offering to you (including estimated costs, financing information, types of aid, amounts offered, specific program information, etc.). You may choose to accept some or all of what is offered. Unfortunately, colleges do not increase the grants in the financial aid package if you turn down the loans.

Credit/Unit (or Credit Hour): A unit of measurement for fulfilling course requirements. Most colleges require that you complete a certain number of credits/units in order to graduate.

Cost of Attendance: Includes all costs associated with attending college: tuition & fees, room/board, books, supplies, transportation, personal computer, and personal expenses. Ask the school about increasing your cost of attendance if you have dependent care or disability-related expenses.

Enrollment Status: Indicates you attend school full-time or part-time. In general, you must attend at least half-time to qualify for financial aid.

Expected Family Contribution (EFC): Amount a student and his or her family are expected to contribute financially toward the cost of attendance each year.

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): Students must fill out the FAFSA each year to find out how much federal/state aid they are eligible for - www.fafsa.gov.

Open Admissions: Students are admitted regardless of their academic qualifications. Most community colleges have an open admissions policy.

Out-of-State Students: Generally applies to students attending a public university outside of their home state. Out-of-state students must pay a higher tuition rate unless they establish legal residency for the state where they attend school or a reciprocity agreement is in place with the state they live and the state of the school.

Rolling Admissions: There is no set admissions deadline date; qualified students are accepted until classes are filled.

Student Aid Report (SAR): This notifies you that your FAFSA has been processed. Your EFC also appears on the SAR.

FAFSA: Step by Step

What is it? FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The federal government uses this form to determine your eligibility for federal financial aid, which may include: grants, scholarships, work-study and loans.

Why fill it out? The FAFSA is used to apply for financial aid from the federal and state government and from all public and most private colleges. Private colleges may have their own supplemental forms. Less than 250 private colleges require a similar form called the CSS Financial Aid PROFILE.

EFC stands for **Expected Family Contribution.** According to the government's calculation, your family should be able to contribute this amount in the coming year to your college costs.

How does it work? Your prospective college will try to meet your financial need with a package of different types of aid from multiple sources, including federal, state, school and private sources. This may include grants, scholarships, student employment and loans.

> **How is financial aid determined?**
>
> Cost of Attendance
>
> - Financial Need
>
> _____
> Estimated Family Contribution

PIN: Your Key to Online Identification

- The Personal Identification Number (PIN) is the code used by the U.S. Department of Education to identify you online. It allows you to do the following on a FAFSA:
  - Check the status
  - Make corrections
  - Fill out an online renewal form next year
  - Electronically sign your FAFSA to speed up the process
- To obtain a PIN, eligible students AND parents should visit www.pin.ed.gov (students and parents should get their own PINs). Click on "Apply for PIN" near the top of the page. Allow 4 hours for PIN instructions to be sent via e-mail.
- Do not reveal your PIN to anyone. The PIN allows you to electronically sign federal student aid documents and access your confidential information.

FAFSA Process: 1-2-3!

Step 1: Assemble forms needed to complete FAFSA

You'll need the following to fill out the form:
- Social security number
- Current bank and brokerage account statements
- Driver's license (if any)
- Current mortgage and investment records (if any)
- Alien registration card (if not a U.S. citizen)
- 2009 federal tax return (estimates are OK on tax questions, if you or your parents haven't filed)
- 2009 untaxed income records (if any)
- 2009 W2 and 1099 forms and other record of money earned
- Parents' 2009 income tax return (if considered dependent)
- PIN

Step 2: Complete the FAFSA
- Complete a FAFSA on the Web at: www.fafsa.gov The online version is used by 99% of the applicants since it
- includes skip logic to avoid asking you unnecessary and redundant questions.
- In order to maximize your amount of aid, fill out the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1.

- Once finished, print the FAFSA summary as well as the "Submission Confirmation" page (or write down your confirmation number and date). If you complete the paper version, make a copy for your records.

Step 3: Review your Student Aid Report (SAR)
The SAR is proof that your FAFSA was received. You should receive your electronic SAR in 1-3 days if you filed electronically (paper filing: 2-3 weeks).

What if I find errors on my Student Aid Report (SAR)?

- Report errors immediately to your financial aid office. You can also make corrections online at: www.fafsa.gov.
- If you don't receive your SAR in 3-4 weeks, call 1-800-433-3243 (1-800-4-FED-AID).

Additional FAFSA Tips

- Remember that the FAFSA is FREE! If you need help completing the FAFSA, ask your financial aid office or call the FAFSA Help Desk at: 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).
- Fill out the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1, and each successive year once you're in college: Early submission maximizes chances of receiving aid.
- Fill out a "FAFSA on the Web" worksheet: Click "Before Beginning a FAFSA," then "Print a Pre-Application Worksheet.' Use the print-out as a guide before committing answers online.
- DO NOT enter online answers directly from the paper FAFSA! Online FAFSA questions are in a different order than the paper version!
- Sign the application: If you are filing as a dependent, make sure your parents sign too. You can use your PIN if signing electronically.
- Save your FAFSA online if you can't finish it in one session: Click the "Save" button at the bottom of each step to save info for 45 days.
- Don't leave a field blank. If a question doesn't apply, enter "0."
- Make or print a copy of your FAFSA for your records.

Introduction to the Student Aid Report (SAR)

What is the Student Aid Report (SAR)?

The SAR is a summary of the information you entered on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). It tells you how much federal student aid you are eligible to receive, and how much the government thinks you and your family can pay for your school expenses. The SAR also notifies you if you are eligible for a Pell Grant.

You will receive a SAR in 1-3 days after you filed an Electronic FAFSA or 2-3 weeks after you filed a paper version. Check immediately for:

- Your EFC (on upper right portion of page 1)
- Any mistakes or errors (pages 5-8)

What is the Expected Family Contribution (EFC)?

The EFC is the amount your family will be expected to pay based on your economic situation.

How is the EFC calculated?

The U.S. Department of Education uses the Federal Methodology (FM) to calculate your aid eligibility. The FM takes into account your family's income, the number of family members (in college or not), net value of assets and your enrollment status, among other factors. To estimate your EFC, click on the "Expected Family Contribution Calculator" at http://www.finaid.org/calculators/finaidestimate.phtml.

What happens after I receive my SAR or updated figures?

Look for any mistakes or errors. Any colleges you listed on your FAFSA will also receive an electronic copy of your SAR. If you do find an error, notify your school's financial aid office immediately to let them know. Errors can also be corrected online.

What if I find mistakes on my SAR?

Make sure to let your college know.

Then, on the Web and using your PIN: Go to www.fafsa.gov and under "FAFSA Follow Up," click "Make Corrections to a Processed FAFSA." You will be able to check off the items you want to change and make corrections accordingly.

On paper: Flip to the last pages of the SAR and find your original FAFSA info. Make changes in the spaces provided. Only fill in the areas that need to be changed and/or corrected. Once finished, you must mail it to a central processor or send to each school applying to for admission.

Highlights of each page in your SAR:

Page 1	Intro: Tracks the aid process for you. If there is an asterisk next to your EFC, you have been selected for verification (see below)*.
Page 2	Confidentiality information: Includes other reminders

Highlights of each page in your SAR: (continued)

Page 3	EFC, other info: EFC is listed at the top, along with other information, such as any issues with aid eligibility.
Page 4	Summary of loans: Refer to your records and make sure your totals are accurate.
Pages 5-8	FAFSA summary: Review the summary. Make corrections or changes in the spaces provided. You can also make changes online at: www.fafsa.ed.gov.

SAR Information Acknowledgement: If any information is wrong, you can correct it on pages 5 through 8 of the SAR or online.

When do I receive my financial aid?

Once your college reviews your SAR and verifies your eligibility, it will assemble an aid package and send an award letter. You do not need to accept all of the aid that's offered to you; accept only the aid you want. Rejecting one form of aid, however, will not result in increases in the other forms of aid.

Federal aid will first be applied to certain school charges, such as tuition, fees, room and board. Any excess will then be disbursed to the student.

*Why is there an asterisk next to my EFC?

An asterisk means you have been selected for verification. You must provide documents to your college to verify that information submitted on the FAFSA is correct. Even if there is no asterisk next to your EFC, your school may still select your FAFSA for verification. If your college asks for verification documents, send them as soon as possible to avoid a delay in the aid process. All colleges are required to verify at least 30% of the FAFSAs. Some colleges verify 100% because they find that this increases the accuracy of the information used to award financial aid.

What if I don't receive my SAR?

Call 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) if you do not receive your SAR in 3-4 weeks.