

## 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 financial aid, which includes: grants, work-study, scholarships and loans.

**Why fill it out?** The FAFSA is used to determine how much aid you're eligible for. Think of it this way:

**FAFSA -> EFC-\* Financial Need-\* Financial Aid**

**EFC** stands for **Expected Family Contribution**. Your family must contribute this amount in the coming year to your college costs, according to the government's calculation.

**How does it work?** Your prospective college will try to meet your financial need through aid made up of funds from federal, state, school and private sources. This may include loans, grants, scholarships and student employment.

### FAFSA Process: 1-2-3!

The three steps to apply for federal aid:

#### Step 1: Assemble forms needed to complete FAFSA

You'll need the following to fill out the form:

- Social security number
- Current bank statements
- Driver's license (if any)
- Current mortgage and investment records (if any)
- Alien registration card (if not a U.S. citizen)
- 2006 federal tax return (estimates are OK on tax questions)
- 2006 untaxed income records (if any)
- 2006 W2 forms and other record of money earned
- Parents' 2006 income tax return (if considered dependent)

#### Step 2: Complete the FAFSA

- Complete a FAFSA on the Web at: [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).
- 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 completing 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 signed with your PIN (paper: 2-3 weeks).

#### What if I find errors on my SAR?

- Report errors immediately to your financial aid office. You can also make corrections online at: [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.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, ask your financial aid office or call the FAFSA Help Desk at: 1-800-4-FED-AID.
- 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.

### PIN: Your Key to Online Identification

The Personal Identification Number (PIN) is the code that the U.S. Department of Education uses to identify you online. A PIN allows you to do the following on a FAFSA:

- Check the status
- Make corrections
- Fill out an online renewal form next year
- Electronically sign to speed up the process

To obtain a PIN, eligible students AND parents can visit [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) (students and parents can each receive 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 anyone to electronically sign federal student aid documents and access your confidential information.

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## Introduction to the Student Aid Report (SAR)

The Student Aid Report (SAR) is a summary of the information you entered on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The SAR also notifies you of your Expected Family Contribution (EFC), see EFC on right, and if you are eligible for a Pell Grant.

After completing your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), you should receive a SAR in 1-3 days if you filed electronically or 2-3 weeks if you filed a paper version. Check immediately for:

- EFC (on upper right of pg 1)
- Any mistakes or errors (pgs 5-8)

### Why is the SAR important?

- Your SAR is the form that tells you how much student aid you are eligible to receive from the federal government, and how much the government expects your family to pay.

### What happens after I receive my SAR?

- Immediately check for any mistakes or errors. Any colleges you listed on your FAFSA will also receive a copy of your SAR. Notify your prospective school's aid office immediately to make corrections. A delay could mean less 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.

### When do I receive my aid?

- Once your prospective colleges review your SAR and verify your eligibility, they will each construct 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.

### Highlights of each page in your SAR:

- 1- Intro: Tracks the aid process for you. If there is an asterisk next to your EFC, you have been selected for verification.
- 2- Confidentiality info: Includes other formal reminders.
- 3- EFC, other info: EFC is listed at the top, along with other information, such as issues affecting your aid eligibility.
- 4- Summary of loans: As a high school student, you probably do not have any loans yet. If you have not taken out any loans, the totals should read zero (0).
- 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](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

**SAR Information Acknowledgement:** A summary of your FAFSA. If any information is wrong, financial or otherwise, you can correct it on pages 5 through 8 of the SAR or online.

### Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

The EFC is the amount your family will be expected to pay based on your situation. It is found on page 1 of your SAR.

#### *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), the net value of assets and your enrollment status, among other factors.

#### *Why is there an asterisk next to my EFC?*

It means you have been selected for verification and must provide documents to your prospective college(s) to verify the information submitted on the FAFSA. About 1 in 3 are selected. If there is no asterisk, you have not been selected.

#### *What should I do if I was selected for verification?*

If your college asks for verifying documents, send them as soon as possible to avoid a delay in the aid process.

#### *What if I find mistakes on my SAR?*

Inform your prospective college(s) financial aid office of any mistakes. Be sure to make corrections as soon as possible. On the Web, using your PIN: Go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.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 in.

### Financial Planning Tool from Making It Count!

The Making College Financial Planning Count online tool provides an interactive overview of the college financing process. You can work at your own pace and save your work as you go.

This free online program will help you:

- Plan for and manage college costs.
- Understand the FAFSA, including critical tips and deadline dates.
- Learn more about the types of financial aid available, including scholarships and grants.
- Create your own personal college funding strategy using our College FundPath™ Worksheet.

This valuable tool can be accessed anytime at: <http://www.elearning.makingitcount.com>.

An in-school, assembly-style version of this program is also available for high school students and their parents from September through April. For more information, visit <http://mcfc.makingitcount.com>.