

Applying for Financial Aid

4 out of 5 Florida college students (83%) use financial aid to pay for college.

To qualify for financial aid, you must apply. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the most important step to take to access most forms of financial aid. All federal financial aid, some state aid and most aid offered by colleges require you to complete and submit the FAFSA. If you do not have a Social Security number or have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, you should complete the Florida Financial Aid Application (FFAA). Complete the FAFSA and FFAA as close to October 1st as possible because some financial aid dollars are limited and are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

Types of Aid

Very few students get all of their financial aid for college from one source. When you are searching for financial aid, consider a wide variety of options and apply to as many programs as possible.

- **Grants:** Grants do not have to be repaid if you successfully complete the courses in which you were enrolled. Most grants come from the federal and state governments. The Pell grant is the largest federal grant program and is designed to help students from low-income households attend college. Over 50% of Florida college students come from low-income households and qualify for the Pell grant.
- **Scholarships:** Scholarships do not have to be repaid if you successfully complete your coursework. They are awarded for a variety of criteria: good grades, cultural or religious background, sports and special talents. Most scholarships come from organizations and colleges.
- **Work-study:** Work-study helps you to earn money to pay for your education by working a part-time job offered through the college.
- **Loans:** Loans for students have lower interest rates than most other types of loans. Unlike grants or scholarships, loans must be repaid with interest when you finish college, even if you do not graduate. Student loans are offered through banks, colleges, and other institutions.

You can complete, submit, and track your FAFSA application at studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa. However, if you do not have access to the internet, you can request a paper copy by calling 1-800-4-FED-AID (433-3243). There is also an online chat function to answer any questions that students or parents might have.

You should complete the FAFSA every year that you attend college.

It opens on October 1 every year.

What Do You Need to Complete the FAFSA?

- ❖ Student and parent(s)' driver's license number(s)
- ❖ Student and parent(s)' social security number(s)
- ❖ (Alien registration number if you are not a U.S. citizen)
- ❖ Parent(s)' date(s) of birth
- ❖ Parent(s)' Federal Income Tax Return from 2 years ago (if filed)
- ❖ Student's Federal Income Tax Return from 2 years ago (if filed)
- ❖ Parent/student income information (if tax return was not filed)
- ❖ Your current bank statements
- ❖ Student & parent FSA ID (username & password). If you have lost your information, visit fsaid.ed.gov

Your Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID)

Creating an FSA ID is the first step to completing your FAFSA. Your FSA ID serves as your legal signature when completing the FAFSA. Create an FSA ID using your own personal information and for your own use.

To create your FSA ID, go to fsaid.ed.gov. This information should be kept confidential and stored in a safe place; you will need this every year when you file your FAFSA.

FSA ID Reference Sheet: fsaid.ed.gov

Username: _____

Password: _____

Email address: _____

Cellphone number: _____

Answers to challenge questions:

Answer #1: _____

Answer #2: _____

Answer #3: _____

Answer #4: _____

FAFSA Save Key: _____

For your records only—keep in a safe place!

I've Submitted the FAFSA. Now What?

Once you submit your FAFSA, you will receive a confirmation email. It will list the school(s) you've requested your FAFSA be sent to for financial aid and the aid you are likely to qualify for. It also lists what happens next in the FAFSA process:

- In 3-5 business days, you will receive an email notifying you that your FAFSA was processed.
- Your FAFSA information will be made available to your school(s), and they will use it to determine the aid you may be eligible to receive.
- Your school(s) will contact you if they need more information or when they are ready to discuss your financial aid award.

Student Aid Report (SAR)

When your FAFSA has been processed, you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR). **This is a summary of all the information you submitted on the FAFSA.** Check it for any mistakes, especially if you entered incorrect information or estimated your tax information. One of the most common mistakes students make is to enter their name or social security number wrong. Verify you've entered your legal name as it appears on your social security card. Your SAR will include estimated Pell grant eligibility and your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). You can access your SAR at studentaid.ed.gov using your FSA ID.

Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

Your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is part of your SAR. **The EFC is the estimated amount your family is expected to contribute toward your college education based on the information submitted in your FAFSA.** It is also used to determine your eligibility for federal student aid. 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.

Verification

Schools may require you to verify the information submitted on your FAFSA. This is called verification. If this happens, the school will tell you what information they need and what you need to do. This process must be completed before financial aid can be awarded.

Financial Need

Each college or university that you list on your FAFSA and that accepts you will determine your financial need based on **the cost of attendance (COA) at that school minus your EFC.** While cost of attendance varies by school, your EFC will remain the same in a given year (unless an unusual family situation arises) regardless of which college or university you attend. The COA will include tuition, fees, books, housing and meals. The amount of aid you receive cannot exceed the total cost of attendance.

Award Letter

Once you've been accepted to a college or university, you'll get an award letter from the school's financial aid office outlining the federal, state, and college-based aid being offered to you. If you've applied to more than one school, compare your award letters from each school. This financial aid award package is designed to cover your financial need by closing the gap between the cost of attendance and your EFC. Your financial aid award package may include grants, scholarships and loans you are eligible for.

To accept the financial aid award offered, follow all instructions provided by the school. This might involve entering aid amounts you intend to accept in an online form, or signing and returning a paper award letter by a specified deadline—usually May 1. Talk to the financial aid office at the college or university if an unusual circumstance delays your response.

Changes in Financial Circumstances

If you or your family's financial situation has changed recently, contact the financial aid office at the college or university as soon as possible to discuss your options. Each school has its own method for documenting new financial situations and reassessing a student's financial need.

Swift Student

[SwiftStudent](#) is a new, free digital tool for requesting changes to college financial aid award packages. This tool carefully walks users through the process to appeal the financial aid they were initially offered, focusing on numerous special circumstances that may justify a student requesting an adjustment to their financial aid, such as recent job loss of a parent, a medical crisis, loss of childcare or housing, etc. It also produces 14 customized templates for specific types of appeals. SwiftStudent is free to use, available to all current and prospective college students receiving federal student aid, and does not share or sell personal data.

[Explore how you can use SwiftStudent to prepare any financial aid appeals.](#)