Financial Aid Resources and Scholarships

General Information

Although the price of a college education can be daunting, many colleges and universities award financial aid to enrolled students. The two major forms of financial aid are merit-based and need-based. Merit-based aid is another term for scholarship and is awarded to students as a way of recruiting top applicants or students that will add something unique to the campus community. Need-based aid is awarded to students who have demonstrated financial need. Demonstrated need is determined by the federal government when families complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and/or the CSS (College Scholarship Service) Profile. For more information on either of these forms, please use the links below:

FAFSA – www.fafsa.ed.gov
CSS Profile – www.collegeboard.com

Don't assume you can't afford a specific school

Many families immediately eliminate the higher priced institutions, believing that they cannot afford to pay the tuition. It is important to note, however, that many of the high-cost institutions also provide the most money in grants and scholarships.

Financial aid safety schools

Many students know that they cannot attend college without receiving financial assistance. It is a good idea for these students to select one or two schools that assure a good financial aid package. In addition, it may be wise to choose a school that the family knows they can afford without financial assistance. Please make sure that all schools on your list are schools that you want to attend. If you are wait listed for admission to a school, do not assume that you will receive financial aid from that school!

Financial Aid officers are your friends

Make sure to contact the Financial Assistance Offices after you have narrowed down your choice of schools. Financial Aid Officers have tremendous expertise and are happy to help prospective students with the entire process. They understand that families have many questions and concerns. They may make suggestions or provide an estimate of the financial aid package that may be offered.

Financial Aid Forms

As you may have heard from friends and family members, the forms can be difficult to fill out…but don't let that stop you. Many schools have the policy that they WILL NOT AWARD ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP MONEY unless the federal financial aid forms have been submitted. Even if you know that you will not qualify for need-based assistance, the schools don't! Many institutions provide grants or scholarships to students who do not qualify for the need-based awards.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

The FAFSA is the government's financial aid form, and is utilized by the majority of colleges/universities in the country. Please make sure you provide answers for every question asked on this form; if you don't, the processing will be delayed. The earliest that a family can submit this form is January 1st of the student's senior year. Students should make sure to include an Illinois school in their list of schools on the FAFSA. By doing this, students are assured consideration for any Illinois state aid in addition to federal aid. This process takes two steps; a family must first apply for a PIN number before they can complete the FAFSA. The time it takes to receive a PIN number is often much faster if applied for on-line.

The CSS Profile (sponsored by the College Board)

The CSS Profile is an additional financial form used by many private colleges around the country. This is not a government form. The College Scholarship Service, a division of the College Board, administers this service. Filling out the Profile is a two-step process. Registering for the CSS Profile is the first step and can only be completed on-line at http://www.collegeboard.com. The second step is completion of a customized form that will be available based on the information provided during registration.

Supplemental/Institutional Applications for Financial Aid

Some schools require their own supplemental forms or tax returns in order for a student to qualify for academic and financial assistance. It is up to you to inquire as to whether the schools that you are interested in mandate the completion of another form.

How colleges use financial aid forms

In order to provide a student with financial assistance, it is mandatory for schools to know a family's EFC—Expected Family Contribution (the EFC is calculated by filling out the FAFSA and/or CSS Profile.) The EFC is the amount that a family is expected to pay annually for a student's education. To calculate the particular "need" of each student, the Expected Family Contribution is subtracted from the institution's total cost. After this is done, each school will submit to you their Financial Aid Award Letter. Some will meet a student's need, others will not. For example, if you submit a FAFSA, you will receive a SAR—Student Aid Report. The SAR will provide the EFC, the amount of money each school will expect a family to pay for one year of education. If an institution requires the CSS Profile or another supplemental form, they may use these methodologies to compare the EFC's and then provide a Financial Aid Package. WATCH THE CALENDAR – Each college/university has its own deadline for financial information. The earlier you submit the forms, the better!

Types of Financial Aid

Financial Aid comes in five basic forms. Most financial aid packages offer a combination of the following:
- Scholarships – gift aid awarded to recognize academic merit or a particular skill
- Grants – gift aid generally awarded based upon financial need

- College Work Study - allows the student to work either on or near campus in a job arranged by the financial aid office
- Loans – typically have a low interest rate; sometimes interest accrues immediately and sometimes it is differed
- Self-help – the amount of money expected that a student will contribute through employment or savings

Colleges typically use the following formula to determine financial need for a family:
Cost of attendance (COA): includes tuition, room, board, books, etc
Expected Family Contribution (EFC): Determined by the FAFSA, this is the amount that a college expects a family to contribute annually to their student's college education. Some colleges use additional forms, such as the CSS Profile and/or institutional forms to determine the EFC.
COA – EFC = Financial Need

Timeline

Spring of Junior Year:
- Discuss the various sources of financial aid with the schools in which you are interested.
- Families can use a financial aid calculator to estimate how much financial aid they will be eligible for in the upcoming year. Click on www.collegezone.com for more details.
- Register with www.fastweb.com.
- Never pay a scholarship service to "find" scholarships for you!

Fall of Senior Year:
- Apply for a pin number for the FAFSA at www.fafsa.ed.gov .
- Complete Part 1 of the CSS Profile by registering on-line at https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/ .
- Many colleges and universities provide financial aid estimates in the fall. This can be helpful in determining a family's contribution for college. Check with the schools in which you are interested to see if they provide this service.

Winter of Senior Year:
- Complete the FAFSA and submit it in January. The earliest the FAFSA can be mailed is January 1st. Many colleges have deadlines for receiving financial aid information; be sure to keep track of them.
- Research scholarship opportunities and complete scholarship applications.

Spring of Senior Year:
- Maintain communication with the colleges of your choice. You will receive financial aid award letters, make note of the deadlines for responding to financial aid offers.

- May 1st is the national deadline for submitting a tuition deposit to the school you choose to attend. Make sure all financial aid is finalized by this date.

Scholarship Opportunities

College-sponsored scholarships are just one example of how you can get help in paying for college. Corporate-sponsored scholarships and community-based aid can supplement the opportunities available from colleges and universities. Scholarships vary in many ways – some have specific criteria, others are open to the general student population. It is always important to read the details of the scholarship to see if you are eligible. If you have questions, please see your guidance counselor.

Helpful Tips

- Do not utilize any scholarship service that asks you to pay! You can find the same information by checking with the Counseling College and Career Lab, your local library or searching the Internet.
- Stay in contact with Financial Aid Officers, especially if there is a change in family circumstances and income.
- Many schools provide installment tuition payment plans. Ask for the different options that are offered in order to pay tuition and fees.
- Tax information can be extremely helpful when completing financial aid forms. Schools are required to randomly verify the information families provide on their financial aid forms. This process is called Verification. If your family is chosen for Verification it is <u>mandatory</u> for you to provide copies of your tax forms before the financial aid money is applied to the student's bill.
- Photocopy all completed forms and worksheets.
- Financial Aid forms must be completed each year!
- Remember that some scholarships are non-renewable after the first year of college. Make sure to plan ahead to ensure a four-year experience.

Resources

In addition to the websites mentioned above, you may want to check out:
- www.studentaid.ed.gov
- www.finaid.org
- www.brightstartsavings.com