

# FEDERAL STUDENT AID FOR ADULT STUDENTS



## Are you an adult considering college? Do you need financial help?

Whether you are enrolling in college for the first time or returning to school after a break, apply for federal student aid. Federal student aid can help you cover your education expenses. This fact sheet provides information about the types of federal student aid available, how to apply, important deadlines, recommended do's and don'ts, important tips, and resources for more information.

### MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT FEDERAL STUDENT AID

- MYTH:** Adult students don't meet the age requirements to receive federal student aid.
- FACT:** There is no age limit. Almost everyone is eligible for some type of federal student aid.
- MYTH:** You need to pass a credit check to receive federal student aid.
- FACT:** No credit check is required to receive federal student aid, including most federal student loans.
- MYTH:** It costs money to apply for federal student aid.
- FACT:** Applying is free. It costs nothing to apply for federal student aid and therefore you should avoid companies charging a fee to complete the application.

### A BRIEF LOOK AT FEDERAL STUDENT AID

Federal student aid from the U.S. Department of Education is money to help you pay your education expenses at a college, career school, university, or graduate school. We have over \$150 billion in federal aid available for those who qualify.

### There are three categories of federal student aid:

- **Grants**—Student aid funds that do not have to be repaid.\* Most federal grants are based on financial need.
- **Work-study**—Money earned through a job on or near campus while attending school.
- **Loans**—Borrowed money that must be repaid with interest.

For more information about federal student aid, including eligibility requirements, visit **[www.studentaid.ed.gov/funding](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/funding)**.

### APPLY FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID

The quickest way to apply for federal student aid is online at **[www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)**. The application is called the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* or FAFSA<sup>SM</sup>. A paper version of the FAFSA is also available. To file a paper application or to check out alternatives to filing online, select "FAFSA Filing Options" at **[www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)**.

\*Grants do not have to be repaid unless, for example, you are awarded funds incorrectly or you withdraw from school prior to the planned end of a term or, if you have a TEACH Grant, you do not meet the terms of accepting it.



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## IMPORTANT DEADLINES

Know the deadlines. If you miss a financial aid deadline (federal, state, or school), you may miss out on aid.

### FAFSA deadlines

Remember this date—January 1. It's the first day you can submit your FAFSA, and it's the same every year (you will need to apply for federal aid every year). For example, for the 2012–13 school year, you can submit a FAFSA starting Jan. 1, 2012, but cannot submit it later than June 30, 2013 (no exceptions to either date). Don't worry if you haven't filed your tax returns or received your income information by the application deadline, as you can estimate your information and make corrections later.

### State and school financial aid deadlines

Many schools and states use your FAFSA information to award state and college aid, which have deadlines as early as February for the following school year. Search for a state's deadline at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov), then select "Deadlines." Contact schools for their deadlines. Note: Schools may use your FAFSA information to determine your eligibility for scholarships.

**Note:** If you file a federal tax return and you are using the online application or making corrections online, you have the option to have your income and tax information electronically transferred from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to your FAFSA.

### Did you know ...

In addition to using federal aid to pay for the usual expenses such as housing, transportation, books, tuition, and fees, you can use it to help pay for dependent care, costs related to a disability, the purchase of a personal computer, and more.

## REDUCING EDUCATION EXPENSES

Here are a few ways to reduce your education expenses.

- **Scholarships**—Check with the college to find out if it offers scholarships. You can also search for scholarships for free at [www.studentaid.ed.gov/scholarship](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/scholarship).
- **Tax breaks**—Read IRS Publication 970, *Tax Benefits for Education*, to see how you might benefit from federal income tax credits for education expenses.
- **Your employer**—Ask your employer if they offer a tuition assistance program; some employers will help pay for your education.
- **Community college**—Check into attending a community college. Tuition at community colleges can be significantly lower than at four-year colleges, especially for in-state students.
- **Choosing a program**—Assess your needs before you apply for admission or register for courses. Make sure your classes fit your goals or count toward your degree or certificate.
- **Part-time enrollment**—Consider part-time enrollment if you are having difficulty paying for a full-time program, or if you have other work or family obligations that limit the time you have to attend class and study.

## IMPORTANT TIPS

- **Military.** If you are a member of the armed forces or have a family member in the service, go to [www.studentaid.ed.gov/military](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/military) to find out more about grants and loan repayment options for military personnel.
- **Transferring credits from one school to another.** Before you pay for classes whose credits you plan to transfer to another school later, check with the registrar's office at that school to make sure the credits are transferable.
- **Returning to school after a break.** If you have previous college credits, check with the registrar's office at the school you plan to attend about transferring your credits.

- **In need of admissions testing.** Most colleges in the U.S. require that you submit scores from standardized tests as part of your application package. For information about which test(s) you should take, talk to the admissions office(s) at the college(s). You also may want to read “Take the Tests” at [www.studentaid.ed.gov/preparing](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/preparing).
- **Expecting to receive federal student aid.** Make sure the school you plan to attend participates in the federal student aid programs if you want to use federal student aid to pay for your education.
- **Planning to receive credit for life experience.** Many schools offer credit for life and work experiences. Check with the school to find out if this option is available.

## RECOMMENDED DO'S & DON'TS

### Do:

- Talk to an admissions counselor, and get to know the staff at the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend; they can help you with aid applications and explain the types of aid available.
- Look into getting a General Educational Development (GED) certificate if you don't have a high school diploma; try searching online for “GED certificate” and your state's name.
- Ask employers to recommend trade schools that provide training in the skills you will need for the career you choose.
- Be an informed consumer. Make sure the school you are planning to attend is accredited and learn how to avoid being scammed. To get a basic understanding of accreditation in the United States and to learn more about diploma mills, go to [www2.ed.gov/students/prep/college/diplomamills](http://www2.ed.gov/students/prep/college/diplomamills).
- Know the difference between federal student loans and private loans. Federal student loans offer low fixed interest rates and flexible repayment options, including deferment

after you graduate or if you take a break and then return to school. Generally, repayment of a federal loan does not begin until after you leave school. To read more about the differences between federal and private loans, go to [www.studentaid.ed.gov/aidinfo](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/aidinfo).

### Don't:

- Use all your retirement and emergency savings or risk losing your home with multiple equity loans.
- Assume the answer to your question is “no.” Ask questions.
- Borrow more than you need.
- Miss important deadlines.

## RESOURCES

If you are searching for a career or a school, or would just like more information about careers and training, see the following websites:

- Find a career that fits your goals and your life; use the free Career Finder tool at [www.studentaid.ed.gov/myfsa](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/myfsa).
- Find out about the training you will need for a particular job at [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org).
- Research careers and the demand for jobs in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* at [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco).
- Use the free College Matching Wizard at [www.studentaid.ed.gov/myfsa](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/myfsa) to find potential schools that meet your career needs.

**If you have been convicted for the possession or sale of illegal drugs:** If the offense occurred while you were receiving federal student aid, you will be ineligible for a period of time based on the type and number of convictions. If you have been convicted of a drug-related offense, it is very important that you complete and submit the FAFSA to determine your eligibility.

**If you are incarcerated:** You have limited eligibility for federal student aid while you're incarcerated. Generally, you're eligible only for a Pell Grant and then only if you're NOT incarcerated in a federal or state penal institution. Check with the financial aid office at the school you plan on attending. Contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center (see the “Contacts” section of this fact sheet).

- Learn more about the types of schools and the kinds of degrees and credentials they offer (associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, etc.); select "Choosing a School," then "Types of Schools" at **[www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)**.
- Find information about tuition and net prices of postsecondary institutions at **<http://collegecost.ed.gov>**.
- For details about education costs covered by federal aid, select "Choosing a School," then "Understanding the Costs" at **[www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)**.
- For information about accreditation, crime statistics, enrollment, tuition, fees, and more about a school, visit the U.S. Department of Education's College Navigator at **[www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator](http://www.nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator)**.

### **Additional information to explore**

Read the following publications, fact sheets, and more on our website at

**[www.studentaid.ed.gov/pubs](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/pubs)**.

- Get your money's worth from your education by following the tips in these fact sheets:
  - "Choose a Career School Carefully"
  - "Be an Informed Consumer ... when it comes to federal student aid"
- To get more information about money for college and to help you determine which loans to accept and how much to borrow, you may want to read the following:
  - *Funding Your Education: The Guide to Federal Student Aid*
  - *Your Federal Student Loans: Learn the Basics and Manage Your Debt*

You can order print copies of many of our publications at **[www.edpubs.gov](http://www.edpubs.gov)**.

## **CONTACTS**

### **Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC)**

P.O. Box 84

Washington, DC 20044-0084

**1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)**

TTY users can call **1-800-730-8913**. Callers in locations without access to 1-800 numbers may call **319-337-5665** (this is not a toll-free number).

### **Student Aid on the Web**

**[www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)**

At this website, you can find detailed information on federal student aid, sources of nonfederal aid, contact information, and more.

### **National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS)**

**[www.nsls.ed.gov](http://www.nsls.ed.gov)**

Use your Federal Student Aid PIN to access your federal student loan records.

### **Office of Inspector General Hotline**

**[www.ed.gov/misused](http://www.ed.gov/misused)**

To report student aid fraud, including identity theft, and waste or abuse of U.S. Department of Education funds, contact:

**1-800-MIS-USED (1-800-647-8733)**

**E-mail: [oig.hotline@ed.gov](mailto:oig.hotline@ed.gov)**

