Myths About Financial Aid

Don’t fall for these myths about federal student aid and the application process!

“Federal student aid is just ‘free money’ like grants.”

Reality: Federal student aid includes three different kinds of financial help: grants, low-interest loans, and work-study funds (a part-time job on or near campus). To learn more about the different types of federal student aid, visit **StudentAid.gov/types**.

“My parents make too much money, so I won’t qualify for aid.”

Reality: There is no income cut-off to qualify for federal student aid. Many factors—such as the size of your family and your year in school—are taken into account. And remember: when you fill out the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) form, you’re also automatically applying for funds from your state, and possibly from your school as well. In fact, some schools won’t even consider you for any of their scholarships (including academic scholarships) until you’ve submitted a FAFSA form. Don’t make assumptions about what you’ll get—fill out the FAFSA form and find out.

“Only students with good grades get financial aid.”

Reality: While a high grade point average will help a student get into a good school and may help with academic scholarships, most of the federal student aid programs do not take a student’s grades into consideration. Provided a student maintains satisfactory academic progress in his or her program of study, federal student aid will help a student with an average academic record complete his or her education.

“I don’t have good credit, so I can’t get a student loan.”

Realty: You don’t need to get a credit check for most federal student loans (except for Direct PLUS Loans). Also, you won’t need a cosigner to get a federal student loan in most cases.

“My ethnicity or age makes me ineligible for federal student aid.”

Reality: There are basic eligibility requirements (which you can find at **StudentAid.gov/eligibility**), but ethnicity and age are not considered.

“My parents aren’t U.S. citizens, so there’s no way I’ll get aid.”

Reality: Your parents’ citizenship status is NOT a factor, and the FAFSA form won’t even ask you about it. If your parents don’t have Social Security numbers, they must enter 000-00-0000 when the FAFSA form asks for their Social Security numbers.

“The FAFSA® form takes forever to fill out, and it’s really hard to do.”

Reality: If you’ve got 30 minutes to spare, you’re good. Because that’s about how long it takes to fill out the FAFSA form. It’s also not nearly as hard as you might think.

“I support myself, so I don’t have to include parent information on the FAFSA® form.”

Reality: This is not necessarily true. Even if you support yourself and file taxes on your own, you may still be considered a dependent student for federal student aid purposes. If you are considered dependent, you must provide your parents’ information on the FAFSA form. The form asks a series of questions to determine your dependency status. You can preview the questions at **StudentAid.gov/dependency**.

“I can’t file my FAFSA® form in October because I haven’t applied to any schools.”

Reality: Actually, you CAN complete your FAFSA form before submitting any college or career school applications. You’ll need to list at least one school on your FAFSA form, but go ahead and add every school you're considering, because some schools have early deadlines to apply for their limited funds. Then later, you can add or delete schools on your FAFSA form.

“I’ll have to update my FAFSA® form after I file my taxes in the spring, won’t I?”

Reality: Nope! Just enter the tax information the form asks for—or better yet, transfer it directly from the Internal Revenue Service if you’re offered that option while applying—and you’re good to go. No need to update later.

Remember: The FAFSA form asks for your and your parents’ tax information from the tax year that was two years prior to the start of the school year for which you’re applying for aid. For example, the 2018–19 FAFSA form asks for 2016 tax and income information, while the 2019–20 FAFSA form will ask for 2017 tax and income information.

“I didn’t qualify for financial aid last year, so filling out the FAFSA® form again is just a waste of time.”

Reality: It’s super important to fill out a FAFSA form every year you’re in college or career school. Why? Because things can change. For instance, your school or state might create a new grant or scholarship, or the factors used to calculate your aid could change from one year to the next. Either way, if you don’t submit a new FAFSA form, you’re out of luck.

So what’s next?

Go to **fafsa.gov** and fill out the form. If you applied for admission to a college or career school and have been accepted—and you listed that school on your FAFSA form—the school will receive the information from your FAFSA form, calculate your aid, and send you an electronic or paper aid offer telling you how much aid you’re eligible for at the school.

Have questions? Contact or visit the following:

- **StudentAid.gov**
- a school’s financial aid office
- **studentaid@ed.gov**
- 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) toll free
- TTY for the deaf or hard of hearing: 1-800-730-8913