

COMPLETING THE FAFSA: A Cheat Sheet for Students

HELPFUL HINTS & FAQs:

- ✓ You don't have to wait for your parents to file their taxes. Apply early and use an estimated income—you can go back and correct it later. The application is available online January 1.
- ✓ **SUPER IMPORTANT!** Make sure you are on the correct website...www.fafsa.ed.gov. There are lots of copycat websites that will charge a fee...Remember the FAFSA is FREE.
- ✓ Make sure you are completing the correct application – class of 2014 should complete the **2014-2015** application. (Note: your application will not be available until January 1).
- ✓ **PIN:** You and your parent must both have one in order to electronically sign the online application. You can apply for a PIN while completing the application. Keep your PIN private! Your FAFSA application will be held until name and SSN are verified (2-3 days). To retrieve forgotten PIN or new PIN go to www.pin.ed.gov
- ✓ Use NEXT and PREVIOUS buttons. DON'T use back or forward arrows or it will log you out and you'll lose data.
- ✓ Make sure when you are answering questions you NOTE WHAT SECTION YOU ARE IN! (*Student information or parent information*).
- ✓ If parents are undocumented, enter 000-00-0000 for social, even if they claimed income and file taxes. **DO NOT USE A TAX ID NUMBER FOR THIS PURPOSE** (TAX IDs start with a 9). *An error message will appear but just verify that it is correct (click 'check for errors' then click 'next' and it will allow you to move on).*
- ✓ If you are undocumented, but have a SSN via DACA (Deferred Action)—**YOU MUST COMPLETE DREAM ACT APPLICATION, NOT FAFSA.**
- ✓ Make sure to enter '0' for financial information if applicable. **DON'T LEAVE BLANK.**
- ✓ **Data Retrieval Tool:** You can use this tool if your parents have filed their taxes electronically at least two weeks before. The DRT allows you to pull tax information directly from the IRS—it prevents errors and avoids a request for a tax transcript. Use it if you can. If you can't, just can use your parents tax forms.
- ✓ **Selective Service:** All male students (18-25) **MUST** be registered. If not, **NO AID.** If you have not registered, just check 'yes, register me' on the FAFSA. Done.
- ✓ **High School Diploma:** You should indicate you have received a diploma if you expect to receive one by the end of this school year.
- ✓ **Work-study:** Best answer is yes! It does not obligate you to accept work, but if you check 'no' a work-study position may not be available if you change your mind.
- ✓ **Household size:** Household size and exemptions are not necessarily the same. Exemptions are counting PREVIOUS year and household size refers to school year for which you are applying for aid (2014-2015). Household size counts anyone living in the household who receives more than 50% of their support from a dependent student's parents.
- ✓ **Parents' Financial Information:** Only include information from parent, stepparent, or adoptive parents. **DO NOT INCLUDE** information from legal guardians, grandparents, siblings, aunts or uncles. If parents are divorced include income from parent you live with the majority of the time or who provides the majority of your financial support.
- ✓ **Eligible to file a 1040A or 1040 EZ:** YES, if your parent makes less than \$100,000. and does not itemize deductions. NO, if your parent itemizes deductions or makes more than \$100,000.
- ✓ **College Codes:** Limited to 10, list schools you are most interested in attending. If you want info to go to more than 10 schools, a) give DRN number to school you did not list (it's on confirmation page of FAFSA application), or b) list 10 schools, wait for your SAR to arrive, then correct the SAR by replacing some or all of the original schools with other schools. , or c) call **1-800-433-3243** and provide your DRN to request a change to your SAR, or d) use your PIN and go to www.fafsa.ed.gov. Click "Start Here" and login, and then click 'make FAFSA corrections.' NOTE: any changes/corrections to FAFSA will only go to second set of schools.

COMMON ERRORS:

- **NAME DOES NOT MATCH SOCIAL SECURITY CARD-EXACTLY.** If name has a suffix, such as Jr. or III, include a space between your last name and the suffix.
- **PUT SAME AMOUNT FOR AGI AND INCOME TAX.** On the tax form, the AGI is on 1st page of 1040 at bottom (line 37) and Income tax paid is 2nd page of 1040 toward middle of page under “other tax”. It will say in teeny print “total tax”. Yes, it can sometimes be a “0”.
- **NOT FOLLOWING UP WITH CORRECT TAX INFO.** Make sure if you are estimating income you **MUST GO BACK AND CORRECT AFTER FILING TAXES.** When you go back to make correction you can use the IRS Data Retrieval feature that automatically gets the required information from the IRS. Easy Peasy.
- **FORGOT TO SIGN AND SUBMIT FAFSA.** Remember, at the end of the application, you and your parent must sign with a PIN and click ‘submit’... you will see a confirmation page pop up—then you know it’s submitted successfully.
- **NOT MAILING IN SIGNATURE PAGE.** If parent doesn’t have SSN use 000-00-000, and print a signature page (they cannot apply for PIN). *Must be mailed within 14 days or application will be rejected.*
- **DIDN’T ENTER EXACT SAME NAME AND ADDRESS AND FILING STATUS IN IRS LINK:** You must enter the exact same name, address, and filing status that is on the income tax forms or it won’t allow it to transfer info. Also, **DO NOT** type over any of the information that is electronically transferred—leave it be.