

Tips for Completing the FAFSA

If you are having difficulty completing the FAFSA, consider attending Minnesota College Goal Sunday. This event is held at various sites throughout the state, January through April, to help families complete the FAFSA. For more information, visit www.mncollegegoalsunday.org.

- Submit the FAFSA as early as possible after January 1 to maximize your chances for institutional aid. Students and parents should complete their income tax returns prior to completing the FAFSA, although you do not have to actually file your income tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service before completing the FAFSA.
- Use a black ink pen and write clearly. Many applications are delayed due to illegible data.
- When there is no monetary value to report for an item, enter 0 (zero). Do not leave the item blank.
- Report your name and social security number as it appears on your social security card. If the name on your social security card needs to be updated, do that before you complete the FAFSA. If you report the wrong social security number on the FAFSA, it is best to complete a new FAFSA using the correct number rather than correcting the number on your Student Aid Report (SAR).
- Make sure you provide your year of birth, not the current year, when reporting your date of birth.
- Be sure to complete the item about drug convictions (#23). Leaving this item blank may result in delays. If you have questions on how to answer the question, call the Federal Student Aid Information Center (1-800-433-3243).
- Make sure you enter your college grade level correctly (#27, #28 and #29). For example, you would enter "0" if you are a first-year college student who has never attended college. "Professional" generally means a degree in medicine, dentistry or law.
- When asked for student (#37) or parent (#87) income tax paid, take the figure directly from your income tax return form, not the W2.
- Do not leave the student (items #41 - 43) or parental (#91-93) asset fields blank. If there is no monetary value to report for assets, enter 0 (zero) rather than leaving the item blank. The family's home should NOT be reported as an asset under "net worth of investments", nor should a family farm (family lives on and operates the farm) or family-owned business with fewer than 100 employees be reported under "net worth of business and/or investment farms". Certain other types of investments do NOT have to be reported under net worth of investments, such as the value of retirement plans, non-education IRAs, annuities, life insurance or pension funds. However, investments DO include other real estate, 529 college savings plans and Coverdell savings accounts, trust funds, UGMA and UTMA accounts, money market funds, certificates of deposit, stocks, stock options and bonds.
- Provide parental information if the student answers "no" to all items under Step 3. Contact your college financial aid office if you have unusual circumstances that prevent you from reporting parental information.
- Only report information for one parent on the FAFSA if parents are divorced, widowed or separated but filed a joint tax return for the previous tax year.
- Do not include parents when asked for the number of people (#76) in the parents' household who will be college students.

- Contact your financial aid office if you or your family have unusual circumstances (such as divorce, death of a parent, loss of employment, homelessness, unusually high medical expenses, active military service, natural disaster, foster care placement, etc) that might affect your need for student financial aid.
- Sign the FAFSA and have at least one parent whose information is provided on the form sign the FAFSA. Missing signatures cause delays in processing.
- Apply for PIN numbers while completing the online FAFSA so you can sign the form electronically. Missing signatures cause delays in processing. There are special exceptions for parents unable to sign due to active military duty or natural disaster. Contact your college for further information.
- Make a copy of the FAFSA for your records before submitting it online or by mail. Do not mail copies of your tax forms with the FAFSA, but keep them handy in case your college requests them to verify the information you provided.
- You'll receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) within three to five days if you applied online and provided an e-mail or within four weeks if no e-mail was provided. The SAR will indicate your family's Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and will indicate Federal Pell Grant eligibility. Review the SAR for errors. If corrections need to be made, you can make corrections online at **www.fafsa.ed.gov**.