

Frequently Asked Questions about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)

“What is the FAFSA?” The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the online application that allows a student to apply simultaneously for federal student aid (including the Pell Grant, work-study opportunities, and federal student loans) and the Illinois Monetary Award Program (MAP) grant. Many colleges and universities use it for their aid programs, too. The Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid is a similar application that provides a path for some students who do not qualify for federal aid to apply for state and school-funded assistance. The maximum state MAP grant for the 2020-21 school year is \$5,340. The maximum federal Pell grant for the 2020-21 school year is \$6,345.

“Isn’t the application too long and difficult to complete?” Most applicants complete the FAFSA in about 30 minutes. If you have questions, talk to your school counselor. Help is also available for FREE from the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (studentportal.isac.org).

“If I want to learn a trade, can the FAFSA still be of assistance to me?” The FAFSA isn’t just for associate’s or bachelor’s degree programs! Students can receive need-based Pell grants, federal student loans, and other federal student aid for technical, trade, and vocational programs at community colleges and at many other schools and training programs. Students can check with the school they want to attend or use the federal government’s online College Navigator tool to find out which institutions participate in the programs: <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

“Does my family make too much money to benefit from the FAFSA?” Financial aid is left on the table every year by students who didn’t apply because they erroneously thought they were ineligible. You really don’t know until you apply! Income and assets are factors in determining your eligibility, but so are things like the number of students in the family who are in school and the age of the parent(s). For students from families that **do** make too much to qualify for need-based grant aid, the FAFSA can still be helpful, since it’s needed for work-study, an AIM HIGH grant from one of our public universities, or a federal student loan (usually at competitive rates and with more borrower protections than private loans, including options for income-based repayment and forgiveness programs for some careers). Your college may offer aid based on your FAFSA info too, and your eligibility may be different depending on your school. Additionally, some scholarship programs use information from the FAFSA as part of the application process. As most financial aid is awarded in date order based on FAFSA filing date, it is a very good idea to complete the FAFSA as early as possible. This “place in line” can be used for opportunities that come up later, and also can be used if family financial circumstances suddenly change.

“What if I don’t want a student loan?” Filing the application **doesn’t** commit you to anything. You’ll just find out whether you might be eligible for aid!

“How is FAFSA data protected?” I don’t want my information sold, and I don’t want my school to have it.” By law, your personally identifiable Information (PII) in the FAFSA can only be used in furtherance of administering financial aid, including research. Although your high school will know whether you completed the FAFSA, it will not have access to the information that you provide on your FAFSA.

“If I choose to file an application, how will I know that my application is complete?” Once you submit the FAFSA or the Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid, you will receive a confirmation of receipt at the email address you provided in the application. This will allow you to demonstrate that you’ve met the requirement of filing an application even if there are circumstances that will need to be addressed with the college/university’s financial aid office later.