

TJ's College Career Center (CCC)

Financial Aid Newsletter – Winter 2012

Financial Aid 101

Affording college is a huge responsibility, both for parents and students. Discussions may focus around the financial aspects of attending college, as well as the academic “fit” of a school. Families may even discuss the possibility that loans and financial burdens become the student’s responsibility after graduation. Better understanding your family’s financial situation and how it affects eligibility for aid is an essential component of the college decision-making process.

February is traditionally Financial Aid Awareness Month and it is a good time to assess your family’s ability to manage the additional expense of college. Many seniors and their parents are now completing the FAFSA form (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and/or the CSS PROFILE form. Colleges and universities use these forms to determine a student’s financial need at their institution.

After receiving the FAFSA information from the Department of Education, the financial aid offices at the prospective colleges determine the expected family contribution. If a student is determined to be eligible, they will receive an award letter detailing their financial need. It will list the types of aid offered for the academic year for which the student has applied. The letter usually arrives during April and the document is identified as the Financial Aid Award package.

February is typically the month that financial aid forms are due, but please check the specific financial aid deadlines for each college. By March or even earlier, the student receives a Student Aid Report known as SAR from the federal government. If a student has not received the SAR four to six weeks after completing the FAFSA, they should check the FAFSA website at www.fafsa.ed.gov. If your FAFSA was completed online, you will receive your SAR online. You may even want to follow-up with the financial aid office at each prospective college just to make sure that it has received all the necessary paperwork. As with all college application and financial materials, it is essential to keep copies of all submitted documents for your records.

FAFSA

Before a college or university will consider need-based financial aid, one must first file a FAFSA form (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Distributed by the federal government, this form requires financial information from the projected 2011 tax filing and determines whether your family qualifies for federal and/or state financial assistance. Once this determination is made, the college is free to examine whether or not the student qualifies for aid from the college itself.

FAFSA paper copies will no longer be sent to schools. Instead students may request up to 3 copies by calling 1-800-4-FED-AID or visiting www.edpubs.org. However, the form cannot be filed until January 1, 2012. A .pdf of the FAFSA can downloaded after January 9, 2012 at www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov. If possible, you should file as soon as possible after January 1 in order to obtain possible financial aid from the college. Please check with the college’s financial aid office or its website for its definitive deadline for filing the FAFSA form. Many deadlines are February 1, but, once again, check with each college for its specific deadline.

There is no charge for completing the FAFSA and you can mail-in your form, but the easiest way to complete it is online. The federal government strongly encourages families to file online. Families can file online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. FAFSA on the web includes worksheets, online assistance, detailed instructions, and internal audits that help prevent errors. You will need a PIN (personal identification number) to electronically sign your online FAFSA form. Before you begin to complete your FAFSA online, you will need to visit www.pin.ed.gov and apply for a PIN. If you are a dependent student, both you and your parents should apply for separate PINs so you can electronically sign the FAFSA.

A FAFSA form must be re-filed every year a student is applying for financial aid in college. A renewal FAFSA has preprinted much of the data from the previous year’s FAFSA form, so only the current tax information needs to be updated. If you need more information about federal student aid, visit www.studentaid.ed.gov, which has information on everything from college preparation to student loan repayment. A student guide is also available on the same website for parents and students to learn more about federal student aid programs.

The federal government uses the data on the FAFSA to calculate your EFC (expected family contribution). Each college will use the information to determine a student’s financial need, as well as how much federal aid they may receive. Additionally, most colleges use this data to calculate out how much financial aid they will give a student from their own funds. Soon after a FAFSA is submitted, the student will receive a SAR (student aid report). This reports the information on the FAFSA and provides a student with their EFC. Check it over as soon as possible and, if necessary, update the information with the family’s latest tax return information.

CSS PROFILE

The College Scholarship Service (CSS) distributes and processes the **PROFILE** form that is required by many private, as well as some public, colleges in addition to the FAFSA form. PROFILE is a program of the College Board. Many college and scholarship programs use the information collected on the PROFILE to help them award non-federal student aid funds. Students may register and complete the PROFILE online at <http://profileonline.collegeboard.com>. The PROFILE can be filed online before January 1, which helps colleges get a head start on estimating financial aid packages. Only the colleges listed on the PROFILE registration guide require a PROFILE form to be completed. Check the website listed above to see if your college requires the form. It is important to check the college website for filing deadlines for all required financial aid forms.

College Specific Aid Forms

In addition, some colleges require families to complete an institutional aid form specific for that college. As stated previously, carefully check the specific requirements for each college and be aware of what forms and deadline dates are necessary for college financial aid.

Other useful financial aid websites are:

- Finaid: The SmartStudent Guide to Financial Aid at www.finaid.org
- Department of Education at www.ed.gov
- FAFSA4caster at www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov
- FindTuition at www.findtuition.com
- The College Board at www.collegeboard.com

A parent program titled *Money for College* was held at TJ on December 7, 2011. Our guest speaker was Joe Re, author of several books on financial aid, and the Executive Vice President of Octameron Associates. He discussed financial aid, loans and provided an overview of the financial aid process.

Comparing Financial Aid Letters

Students receive financial aid award letters after college acceptances are mailed. Various financial aid options may be offered. It is suggested that you keep in mind the following information before your student makes a final college decision:

- Carefully read the award letter. Letters from different schools will most likely have their figures and costs in different formats. Compare award letters in order to see how each offer measure up. Don't be afraid to ask if outside scholarships will affect your aid.
- Compare loan offers. Interest rates, how the interest compounds, repayment terms, and cancellation provisions can vary widely from loan to loan.
- Look beyond the sticker price – the school with the lowest cost of attendance may not be the most affordable. The amount and the type of aid offered will influence affordability. Don't accept an offer just because it has the lowest unmet need. If the aid package offers scholarships, grants, and work-study instead of loans, you may save more money by accepting an offer with a higher unmet need.
- Compare affordability of aid offers over time and ask if your financial aid package will change over time. In fact, the aid package made available to you in your senior year of college may look very different from the one you were offered freshman year.

Scholarship Information

Have you or your student checked the College and Career Center's scholarship listings lately? The Center maintains over 400 merit-based and financial need scholarships in a scholarship database. You can access the listing online at www.tjhsst.edu/supportingtj/careercenter/scholar.htm. Scholarships are listed in two categories: General Scholarships (listed alphabetically by deadline date) and College Merit Scholarships (listed alphabetically by college name).

Furthermore, Fairfax County Public Schools has an excellent searchable scholarship database. The database lists all available scholarships for Fairfax County high school students. The scholarship data base can be found on Family Connection or Blackboard.

Seniors might also consider applying for a ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) Scholarship. The ROTC program provides an opportunity to attend a civilian college while studying military leadership as part of a total undergraduate program. One to four year scholarships are available with an obligation for military service after graduation. The program pays for tuition within limits, books, and fees, and provides a monthly allowance. The program is highly competitive and applications are available during the spring of the student's junior year. Applications are also available upon request from college ROTC units or on the following websites:

Army ROTC: www.goarmy.com/rotc/

Air Force ROTC: www.afrotc.com

Scholarship Scams: What You Need to Know

Seminars and consultants often charge fees for services and information regarding scholarship resources that you can obtain for free. Paying a fee to a financial aid service in order to help you apply for aid may be an unnecessary expense. The claims of "we will help you complete complicated forms" or "we will find different ways to report your assets and obtain more aid" can lead to more problems than it is worth. In fact, reporting certain financial information inaccurately is against the law.

Many families receive invitations to attend financial aid seminars which promise "free financial aid advice" if you attend a seminar. They may even guarantee scholarships if you provide a credit card number to sign up for the service. If you are contacted and offered an award for which you never applied, **BEWARE!** Don't allow yourself to be pressured into applying for a scholarship if the sponsor is asking you to pay a fee. An official sounding name of an organization or endorsement does not automatically mean legitimacy. If you use a financial aid consultant, consider his/her qualifications carefully. Find a consultant who has previously worked as a financial aid administrator, CPA, or CFP.

If you suspect a scam...

Save all of the forms and/or paperwork received from the suspect company and keep copies of detailed written information about the offer, as well as any correspondence and/or emails. Immediately contact your credit card company if you feel that your account has been compromised. Fraud can be reported to any of the following organizations:

Federal Trade Commission (FTC)
www.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams
1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357)

Better Business Bureau (BBB)
www.bbb.org
1-703-276-0100

National Fraud Information Center (NFIC)
www.fraud.org

Utilizing College Career Center Resources

TJ's College Career Center (CCC) is open daily from 8:00 am - 4:00 pm and 9:00 am - 4:00 pm on JLC days. Parents are welcome to utilize the Center's resources, but please contact Mrs. Kobick before you plan to come by, to see if the Center is being used by a class, outside speaker, or visitors. Because of its size, the room is often used for special events and is not always available for drop-in use. The Center is open for student-use before school, between classes, during lunch, 8th period, and immediately after school. Mrs. Kobick can be reached at 703-750-8377 or by email at lbkobick@fcps.edu in order to schedule an appointment.