

Don't Fear the Early FAFSA

Submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is often a frustrating process; especially for families of high school seniors who are going through it for the first time. However, some changes are on the way that will hopefully ease and improve the financial aid application process in the future. These changes will impact not only the timing of the FAFSA, but also the data requested.

You may now submit the FAFSA beginning on October 1st. This moves the filing date up by three months from the historical January 1st filing date. The Early FAFSA will also use the completed tax return from the previous year so there is no need to estimate income or wait for taxes to be completed as in the past.

While none of us likes the experience of completing federal forms, I think it is terribly unfortunate when a family delays or completely avoids this particular task simply because they expect it will be too difficult or because they think it won't make a difference in their student's financial aid package.

My advice to families is don't delay in filing the Early FAFSA. By submitting the FAFSA in October, you and your family will have an earlier and more accurate idea of your anticipated financial aid and college costs. For example, at St. Bonaventure we



will begin sending financial aid award letters in December to those who complete the Early FAFSA in October and November. It's important to note that some colleges and universities offer grants to some families who complete the FAFSA – even if the results indicate the family does not qualify for Federal aid.

Finally, the best news is that college and university financial aid officers are there to help you. Many schools host financial aid meetings, conference calls and webinars to offer advice and assistance to families on the completion of the FAFSA and the financial aid process in general. St. Bonaventure hosts several such sessions each year. You can learn more about these opportunities at www.sbu.edu/finaid. You can also call your school's financial aid office at any time to ask specific questions.

So, in short – don't fear the Early FAFSA. All colleges and universities that accept Federal and state (TAP) aid sources will access every dollar that they can for your college student. However, the only way to ensure that you receive the maximum federal and state aid possible is to complete and file the FAFSA. (Note: Take care to find out if the schools to which you are applying require any other applications in addition to the FAFSA.) And, if you're considering St. Bonaventure University, be assured that those of us in the Financial Aid Office will be there to support you every step of the way.



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