

Don't Fear the FAFSA

College and university financial aid officers don't need to look at the calendar to know it's January 1. It is one of those times of year in our business when our phones begin ringing off their hooks as college students and their parents realize it's time to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, more commonly known as the FAFSA.

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.

First, I am pleased to report that the Federal government has made improvements in the application that make the completion process easier than it has been in the past. And, second, 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.

Another reason why families often delay completing the FAFSA is that they think they have to include the current year's tax information. My advice to families is don't delay. Complete the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1 because many schools award some limited aid funds first



to those who complete the application early. At St. Bonaventure, for example, we give priority consideration to applicants who complete the FAFSA by February 15. You can estimate your tax information and update it later once you actually file your tax return.

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 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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