

Minnesota Office of Higher Education Tips for Completing the 2012-2013 FAFSA

Most errors on the FAFSA are made because students and/or parents fail to read the instructions or don't fully understand the instructions. Please read ALL of the FAFSA instructions carefully. If you are still unclear, contact your college financial aid office or any of the following offices for assistance:

1 (800) 433-3243	General questions about financial aid, completing the FAFSA, duplicate Student Aid Reports, application status
1 (800) 730-8913	TDD version of the above
(651) 642-0567	MN Office of Higher Education - FAFSA assistance, questions about Minnesota state financial aid
1 (800) 657-3866	MN Office of Higher Education - Toll-free number
1 (800) 627-3529	MN Office of Higher Education - TDD number

- Complete your 2012-2013 FAFSA on the Web after January 1, 2012 at: www.fafsa.gov. Try to submit the FAFSA as early as possible in order to maximize your chances for college scholarships. You and your parents should try to complete your 2011 income tax returns prior to completing the FAFSA. If this is not possible, file your FAFSA using estimated tax figures and make corrections after you have filed your tax returns.
- The FAFSA on the Web allows families to transfer information provided on federal tax returns from the IRS database to the FAFSA on the Web. If you filed your tax returns electronically, the tax data will be available for transfer to the FAFSA after two weeks. If you filed paper tax returns, the tax data will be available for transfer after eight weeks. If you completed your FAFSA before the IRS tax information was available for transfer, you can later transfer the IRS tax data as a FAFSA correction at: www.fafsa.gov. Transferring tax information from the IRS to your FAFSA will cut down the amount of time the college needs to verify the information supplied on your FAFSA.
- If you and/or your parents would like to attend a workshop where a presenter helps families complete the FAFSA and learn about how to pay for college, check for locations here: www.mafaa.org (click on Students and Parents) or at www.mncollegegoalsunday.org.
- When there is no monetary value to report for an item, use -0- (zero). Do NOT leave the item blank unless you are instructed to skip a section. Blank responses can delay the application because the processor sometimes assumes you overlooked the item.
- Be very careful when reporting your social security number and name. An error in either of these can cause significant delays. Make sure you report your name on the FAFSA 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 do 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).
- Be careful when reporting your date of birth. This information is used for several database checks, and an error can create delays. A common mistake is to report the current year instead of your year of birth.
- If you are a male between the ages of 18 and 25, be sure to register with the Selective Service. You can do so within the FAFSA on the Web, or directly with the Selective Service at: www.sss.gov. In most cases, failure to register with the Selective Service will make you ineligible for federal financial aid.
- Students sometimes answer questions about degrees and grade levels incorrectly. Common errors include reporting a professional degree when the student is pursuing a vocational program at a technical school. "Professional" generally means a degree to practice medicine, dentistry, or law. Another common error is for high school seniors to report their grade level as 5th year, when their college grade level should be reported as first year undergraduate. High school seniors sometimes mistakenly report having a degree, when that item refers to a bachelor's degree earned by college students and not a high school diploma.

- One of the most common errors on the FAFSA is for students to leave the student or parental asset fields blank. If there is no monetary value to report for assets, use a -0- 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.
- When completing Step Three to determine dependency status, you will have to provide parental information on the form if you answer "no" to all items under Step Three. If there are unusual circumstances that would prevent you from reporting parental information on your application, you should submit the FAFSA on the Web without parental data and then contact your college financial aid office to inquire about a dependency override.
- If your parents are divorced, you will only have to provide information about the parent you lived with the most in the last year. If you lived with both parents for an equal amount of time in the last year, provide information about the parent who provided the most financial support to you. If that parent has remarried, you will need to report parents' marital status as 'married' on the FAFSA and provide income and asset information for your stepparent.
- When completing items about household size, be sure to read the instructions for that item on the FAFSA. Also, make sure you do NOT include parents in the number of people in your parents' household who will be college students. It is no longer allowable to include parents in this item.
- If your family has unusual circumstances (such as divorce, death of a parent, loss of employment, loss of income or benefits, homelessness, unusually high medical expenses, active military service, natural disaster, foster care placement, etc.) that might affect your need for student financial aid, please be sure to consult with the financial aid office at the college you plan to attend. The financial aid director may be able to use professional judgment to adjust your financial aid eligibility.
- Sign the FAFSA and have at least one parent whose information is provided on the form sign the FAFSA. You and your parent can apply for PIN numbers while completing the FAFSA on the Web so you can sign the form electronically. Missing signatures cause delays in processing. (Note: There are special exceptions for parents unable to sign due to active military duty or natural disaster. Contact your college for further information.)
- If you completed a paper FAFSA, carefully review the form to look for errors or any items you may have overlooked. Make a copy of the FAFSA for your records before you mail it to the processor. Mail the original of pages 3-8 of the FAFSA to the processor, and keep the instructions at home. Do NOT mail in copies of tax forms with the FAFSA (they will be shredded!) but keep them available in case your college requests them to verify the information you had on the FAFSA. If you completed a FAFSA on the Web, carefully review the information on the summary page before submitting the application.
- After the FAFSA is submitted, you should receive an output document called the Student Aid Report, or SAR. If you provided an email address on the FAFSA, you will receive an email with a link to this information within three to five days. The SAR will indicate your family's Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and tell you if you are eligible for a Federal Pell Grant. Carefully review the SAR to look for any errors. If corrections need to be made, you can make corrections on-line at: www.fafsa.gov.

If you would like more information about financial aid or would like to use a calculator to estimate your EFC and eligibility for financial aid, please visit our Agency web site at: www.getreadyforcollege.org.