

Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) every year you hope to receive financial aid.

Just as the name says – it's free; there is no cost to apply.

- The FAFSA determines your need for state and federal financial aid for college.
- Apply as soon after January 1 as possible in the calendar year you will start or be in college. The online FAFSA is available at www.FAFSA.gov or via CFNC.org. For free help completing the form, register at CFNC.org to attend a February FAFSA Day.
- The fastest and most secure way to complete the FAFSA and get results from the U.S. Department of Education is to get a FAFSA PIN (an electronic signature), and then complete, sign, and submit your FAFSA online.
- Income tax information for the past year is one of the requirements on the FAFSA (for you and your parent or legal guardian, if you are a dependent student). For example, if you want aid in August 2012, you must provide 2010 income information.
 - To make it easier to complete your FAFSA, if at all possible, complete your income tax forms before you fill it out. That way you can use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to import your tax information directly into your FAFSA.
 - Estimate information if you haven't filed your tax return yet; however, you must update estimates with actual information when it is available, either going back to your FAFSA and using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool or filling in the final information yourself.
 - Your college or university, or the federal government, sometimes selects FAFSA forms for verification before approving financial aid. Make sure all the data you report is accurate.
- You, the colleges you list on your FAFSA, and your state agency, will all receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) after your FAFSA is processed. The SAR will show "Expected Family Contribution" (EFC) – the share of college costs it appears your family can provide.
- Check your SAR carefully since this report determines the amount of financial help for which you will qualify. If there are errors in your SAR, send corrections back to the federal processor as soon as possible.
- Your college or university may require other forms in addition to the FAFSA, such as separate scholarship applications or the College Scholarship Service PROFILE. Be sure and check. Keep track of deadlines for all aid applications.

To apply for financial aid, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at www.FAFSA.gov.

For more free information on financial aid, contact your school counselor, your college financial aid office, or College Foundation of North Carolina at CFNC.org or 866-866-CFNC.