

Dear Friend:

It is no secret that the cost of college is rising faster now than at any point in history. Because of that, it is important that students and parents plan in advance to figure out how they will pay for the costs of higher education.

I've put together this guide to give you information on the process of applying for college and the various types of student financial aid that might be available for you. As you will see, there are a number of possibilities available, including grants, loans, and work-study programs. Many – but not all – are based on your economic need, and this guide includes information that will help you determine your eligibility for assistance.

Students increasingly rely on student loans to meet the cost of college attendance. In 2013, Congress passed the Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act which changed federal student loan rates from fixed interest to adjustable interest rates based on 10-year Treasury notes. While that change provides short-term relief to students, we must pass a long-term solution that makes college costs and student loans more affordable.

I hope this Guide is helpful to you. If you have more questions, or if I can be helpful to you in any way, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me.

Questions to Begin the College Search

How can I pay for college?

Without knowing which schools you wish to attend, there is no way to determine how much your post-secondary education will cost since each college, university, community college and technical school charges different prices and offers different institutional aid packages.

Colleges and universities provide some 20% of aid through institutional financial aid offices, most of which is need-based. Check university websites for interactive Net Price Calculators and the institution's financial aid office when you apply for admission. This will give you an estimate of what you should expect to pay at that given institution. The University of Texas maintains a comprehensive [database](#) of accredited 2- and 4- year colleges and universities. I also want to provide a word of warning about for-profit colleges. While there are some for-profit colleges that provide a quality education to their students, there are many that take advantage of students, charging high tuition, graduating few students, and providing those who graduate with limited job prospects. I recommend you research graduation rates, loan default rates, and job placement rates for any for-profit college that you are thinking of attending.

Next steps include: Speaking with your high school's college counselor, visiting colleges' websites and attending college fairs to gather as much information as you can.

Where can I go for information?

There are many places where you can get information on paying for college. Here are some good places to go for general information – all of which are free.

- U.S. Department of Education ([Federal Student Aid Website](#))
- [Federal Student Aid Preparation Resources and Guides](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education College Affordability and Transparency Center](#)

For questions not covered by the Department of Education website, call the **Federal Student Aid Information Center** at 1-800-433-3243.

The [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#) provides information on aid specific to students and institutions in the state of Illinois.

Information about financial aid programs offered in the state of Illinois and federally can be found at www.collegezone.com/416_866.htm.

Here are some other sources of general information for you.

- [Overview from the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators](#)
- [Financial Aid: for Parents](#)
- [Financial Aid: The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid](#)
- [Mapping Your Future](#)

Finally, you can get information directly from the college or career school you want to attend. Upon admission, most colleges will also include information about individualized financial aid packages. These will most often be composed of a variety of forms of student aid, based on what you qualify for and your institution's unique policies.

Do I have to pay for that information?

You should be able to get all the information you need for free. Beware of people trying to sell you information that you can get for free. To get information on how to avoid scams, you can go to these sites:

- [U.S. Department of Education Scam Prevention Website](#)
- [Popular Loan Scams \(Federal Trade Commission\)](#)

Am I eligible for federal student aid?

U.S. citizens and eligible non-citizens may receive federal student aid. Eligible non-citizens include:

- U.S. nationals;
- U.S. permanent residents with a Permanent Resident Card, Resident Alien Card, or Alien Registration Receipt Card;
- Individuals with Arrival-Departure Records (I-94) from USCIS showing refugee, asylum granted, Cuban-Haitian Entrant (Status Pending), Conditional Entrant (valid only if issued before April 1, 1980), or parolee;
- Individuals with T-visas or whose parents' hold T-1 visas;
- Individuals who are 'battered immigrant-qualified aliens'; or
- or Citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, or the Republic of Palua.

More information can be found at [Federal Student Aid](#).

For those who qualify for federal student aid, you may qualify for some form of federal student aid, including Pell grants, loans, and work study. Basic eligibility criteria can be found at studentaid.ed.gov/eligibility/basic-criteria. Additional information can be found by talking to your prospective colleges' financial aid offices.

What is the FAFSA?

The FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, is used to determine what student aid options are available to you. It is a tool that looks at your income to determine whether you are eligible to receive federal financial aid, such as Pell grants. Most states and institutions will use the FAFSA to determine your eligibility for other financial aid awards. Most importantly, it is FREE.

If you are in the Class of 2014 or an applicant planning to attend college during the 2014-2015 school year, it is highly recommended that you apply as soon as possible. Assistance is available throughout the school year (including during summer school), but the longer you wait, the amount of aid for which you qualify may go down. The deadline for submitting the FAFSA for the 2014-2015 school year is June 30, 2015 at midnight CST. For individuals planning to attend in future years, you can submit your FAFSA as early as the January 1 that precedes the academic year that you are requesting financial aid for and as late as June 30 of that academic year. Please note that the FAFSA must be completed each academic year.

Some awards are made until funds are depleted, so you may be eligible for additional types of aid if you apply earlier. Individual institutions also set their own deadlines, so it is important to be aware of your prospective colleges' timetables.

If you have not done so already, go to www.fafsa.ed.gov/ to fill out your FAFSA right now.

It is important to maintain periodic contact with your college's financial aid office throughout the application process. Their job is to help you navigate the waters of student aid, so utilize these resources.

What else do I need to do to be eligible?

Most colleges require some form of standardized test, generally the SAT or ACT, not just to decide whether to admit you but to decide whether you are eligible for a scholarship. You can get information from your high school counselor about which tests to take and when to take them. Students whose primary language is not English may be required to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam. Information on these tests can be found online:

- SAT: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/home>
- ACT: <http://www.actstudent.org/>
- TOEFL: <http://www.ets.org/toefl>

I'm eligible for aid, but which types?

There are many forms of federal student financial aid including grants, scholarships, work study and loans that come from a variety of sources.

- **Loans**, the most common federal aid, must be repaid when you graduate or leave college.
 - [General Information](#)
 - [Stafford Loans](#)
 - [Federal PLUS Loans](#) parental loans, not need-based.
 - [Perkins Loans](#) (Campus-based Aid) for the neediest undergraduates dispensed through participating schools.
- **Grants** are most often awarded based on (your family's income) and require no repayment:
 - [Pell Grants](#)
 - [Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants](#) (FSEOG)
- **Named scholarships:**
 - There are a number of scholarships (such as [Byrd Honors Scholarships](#), [Fulbright](#) fellowships) that are based on merit and are highly-competitive
- **Work study** programs allow you to earn money while in school:
 - [Federal Work Study Program](#) allows for additional aid through college campus jobs

What are Pell Grants?

Unlike student loans, Pell Grants are a need-based award that does not need to be repaid by the student. Eligibility to receive Pell Grants, and the amount awarded, is based on your financial need determined by your FAFSA. For more information visit studentaid.ed.gov/types/grants-scholarships/pell

What is a MAP grant?

The Monetary Award Program (MAP) grant program is a state specific need-based financial aid program for eligible Illinois students attending an approved Illinois school. Like the Pell Grant, this grant does not need to be repaid by the student. Like federal grant programs, determinations of financial need are based on information provided by the FAFSA. Detailed eligibility requirements, award limits, the list of approved institutions and instructions on how to apply can be found on the Illinois Student Assistance Commission's website at <http://www.isac.org/students/during-college/types-of-financial-aid/grants/monetary-award-program.html>

Are there other grants available?

Yes, in addition to Pell Grants the federal student aid program offers Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) for students with exceptional financial need, Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants for students who are pursuing careers in elementary and secondary education, and Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grants for students whose parent or guardian served in the U.S. Armed Forces and Died in Iraq or Afghanistan. The eligibility requirements and award values for these grants vary. More information can be found at <http://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/federal-grant-programs.pdf> In addition, private entities and non-profit organizations also offer scholarships.

Here are some sites that will help you identify sources of grants and scholarships.

- [College Board Scholarship Search](#)
- [Illinois State Based Scholarships](#)
- [FastWeb](#) (Scholarship Search)
- [Grants and Scholarships for Individuals](#)
- [International Financial Aid](#) :Study abroad (for U.S. and non-U.S. citizens)

What are student loans?

There are multiple types of student loans, but the main distinction is a federal student loan versus a private student loan. Federal loans are offered by the federal government and generally offer benefits, such as lower interest rates and more flexible repayment options, compared to private student loans offered by a bank or financial institution. If you decide to take out loans to finance your college education, it is important to read the terms and conditions of the loan carefully before signing so you understand your obligations. When you receive a student loan, you are entering into a binding legal contract that you will be responsible for fulfilling long after you graduate from college. Unlike other forms of consumer loans, federal and private student loans are rarely dischargeable in bankruptcy. Additional information can be found at studentaid.ed.gov/types/loans.

I'm interested in pursuing a career in the armed services, where do I start?

If you are interested in attending one of our nation's military academies, the appointment process requires a Congressional nomination. For more information regarding this process, visit my [Service Academy Nominations page](#).

For additional information, visit the academy's websites:

- [U.S. Air Force Academy](#)
- [U.S. Coast Guard Academy](#)
- [U.S. Merchant Marine Academy](#)
- [U.S. Military Academy](#)
- [U.S. Naval Academy](#)

I'm a veteran who wishes to pursue post-secondary education, how do I take advantage of my benefits?

Our commitment to our nation's heroes does not stop once their active service is over. To help them take the next step into their civilian careers, the federal government offers numerous educational benefits through the GI Bill.

- Information about these benefits can be found at gibill.va.gov/

I'm interested in pursuing a career in health care, is there specific aid for me?

Aid is available to students wishing to pursue a career in health care. These programs often require students to serve in underserved communities across the nation following the completion of their degree.

- [Bureau of Health Professions](#)
Scholarships and loans to increase the diversity of health professionals and the number of health professionals serving in underserved communities.
- [Indian Health Service](#)
Scholarships for American Indian/Alaskan Native health profession students and loan repayment for persons working in IHS facilities.
- [Association of American Medical Colleges](#)
Provides information to prospective and current medical students on their funding options.
- [National Health Service Corps](#)
Scholarships and loan repayment for health profession students who agree to work in underserved areas.
- [Nursing Scholarships](#)
Offered in exchange for at least two years of service in areas with critical nursing shortages.

[I'm interested in public service, what programs are available to me?](#)

Federal assistance programs seek to encourage people to work in public service careers.

- [AmeriCorps Education Award](#)
Volunteers who complete one year of service receive an education award for current higher education expenses or to repay student loans.
- [Student Educational Employment](#) (OPM)
Employments, internships, cooperative education, scholarships, grants, and fellowships with federal agencies.
- [Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program](#)

[Are there programs available for underrepresented minority groups?](#)

Yes. Many organizations offer financial aid to help students from different backgrounds or with special needs who are often underrepresented, including: African-Americans, Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, and Other Ethnic Groups

- [Grants and Scholarships for Minorities](#)
- African Americans: [For Students: Scholarships](#)
- Disabled students: [Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities](#)
- Foreign students: [Financial Aid for International Students](#)
- Hispanic Americans: [Scholarships](#)
- Native Americans: [American Indian College Fund](#)

If I get a loan, what should I know about repayment?

After college, the **federal government** has several options to help make repaying your loan more affordable.

- Eligibility depends upon the type of loan, when it was made, and whether it's in default. Check with your loan officer or loan servicer to learn more.
- [Loan Consolidation](#): allows students combine federal loans into a single loan with one monthly payment.
- [Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program](#): Individuals employed by qualifying public service institutions may be eligible for loan forgiveness on the balance of their student loans after making 120 payments and meeting other program requirements.
- [Income-Based Repayment Program](#): For those that qualify, it allows you to pay back your loans based on what you earn, not what you owe. After fulfilling the repayment plan, the remainder of your loan will be forgiven. This program offers substantial benefits to students and can make the prospect of paying back your loan debt more manageable.
Teachers: [Cancellation/Deferment Options](#)
Health professions: [National Health Service Corps](#)
Federal employees: [Federal Student Loan Repayment Program](#)
- If you are having problems repaying your loans, contact your loan services to see what other [repayment options](#) may be available to you.
- [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Student debt repayment assistant](#)

What is Congress doing to make college more affordable?

Congress must pass a long-term solution that makes college costs and student loans more affordable. In Washington, I am supporting several pieces of legislation aimed at lowering the economic barriers to attaining a post-secondary education. I am a cosponsor of H.R. 1330; the Student Loan Relief Act, which would change the subsidized Stafford student loan rate to a 3.4% fixed-rate and create a new income based repayment system so that all graduates have a more affordable loan repayment option. I voted for the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act which will increase the maximum Pell Grant award of \$5,550 based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the 2013-2014 school year through the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

Some Closing Tips:

- **Start gathering information early.** There are many options and resources available – take the time to look at them and consider whether they are right for you.
- **Free information** is readily available – make use of it.
- **Make sure you talk with counselors there to help you,** both at your high school and at financial aid offices of the universities, community colleges or the career schools you are considering. You can also do research at local and college libraries. **Ask questions of counselors:** your individual circumstances may affect your eligibility.
- **Consider tax implications.** There may be tax benefits for you – you can find out at [Tax Benefits for Higher Education \(IRS\)](#)
- **Keep copies** of all forms and correspondence: *you must reapply for aid each year.*