Paying for the Next Move

Fill in the actual first page of the FAFSA, then compare two offers on the real award-letter template.

Name: _____ Date: _____

OBJECTIVE

See what the FAFSA actually asks for on the real form, then compare two mock award letters on the U.S. Department of Education's own standardized template — grants vs. loans, not just a total.

1. What the FAFSA actually asks first

The next 2 pages are the real Student section (pages 7–8) of the 2026–27 FAFSA form — the actual questions every applicant answers first. Fill it in with a made-up identity (never a real Social Security number on a classroom worksheet). The full form runs 23 pages with four more sections (Student Spouse, Parent, Parent Spouse, Preparer) most students won't need — see studentaid.gov for the complete version.

Source: Federal Student Aid (U.S. Dept. of Education), 2026–27 FAFSA Form, studentaid.gov — a U.S. government work, public domain.

July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027

Federal Student Aid
An OFFICE of the U.S. DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

FAFSA® Form

Free Application *for* Federal Student Aid

OMB No. 1845-0001

For help in filling out the FAFSA form, go to StudentAid.gov/fafsahelp or call 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).

Student

► ***The student must complete this section.***

Questions 1–24 apply to the student. ***All questions are required*** *except in some circumstances (see "Can I skip any questions?", on page 4).*

1 Student Identity Information

[See Notes page 21.]

The student's full legal name, for example, as it appears on their Social Security card.

First name

Middle name

Last name

Suffix *(e.g., Jr. or III)*

Date of birth
MM / DD / YYYY

Social Security number (SSN)

Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN)

If the student does not have an ITIN, leave this field blank.

2 Student Contact Information

[See Notes page 21.]

Mobile phone number

Email address

Continue on next line.

Permanent mailing address

Continue on next line.

Include apt. number.

► *If you are currently incarcerated, enter your inmate identifying number at the end of your permanent mailing address.*

City

State

ZIP code

Country

3 Student Current Marital Status

[See Notes page 21.]

○ Single (never married)
○ Married (not separated)
○ Remarried
○ Separated
○ Divorced
○ Widowed

4 Student College or Career School Plans

When the student begins the 2026–27 school year, what will their college grade level be?

- ◯ First-year undergraduate (freshman)
- ◯ Second-year undergraduate (sophomore)
- ◯ Other undergraduate (junior year and beyond)
- ◯ Master's, doctorate, or graduate certificate program (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, etc.)

When the student begins the 2026–27 school year, will they already have their first bachelor's degree? ◯ Yes ◯ No

Will the student be pursuing an initial teaching certification at the elementary or secondary level? ◯ Yes ◯ No

5 Student Personal Circumstances

[See Notes page 21.]

Select all that apply.

- ☐ The student is currently serving on active duty in the U.S. armed forces for purposes other than training.
- ☐ The student is a veteran of the U.S. armed forces.
- ☐ The student has children or other people (excluding their spouse) who live with the student and receive more than half of their support from the student now and between July 1, 2026, and June 30, 2027.
- ☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were an orphan (no living biological or adoptive parent).
- ☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were a ward of the court.
- ☐ At any time since the student turned 13, they were in foster care.
- ☐ The student is or was a legally emancipated minor, as determined by a court in their state of residence.
- ☐ The student is or was in a legal guardianship with someone other than their parent or stepparent, as determined by a court in their state of residence.
- ☐ None of these apply.

6 Student Homelessness

[See Notes page 22.]

At any time on or after July 1, 2025, was the student unaccompanied and either (1) homeless or (2) self-supporting and at risk of being homeless? ◯ Yes ◯ No

If the answer is "Yes," did any of the following determine the student was homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?
Select all that apply.

- ☐ Director or designee of an emergency or transitional shelter, street outreach program, homeless youth drop-in center, or other program serving those experiencing homelessness
- ☐ The student's high school or school district homeless liaison or designee
- ☐ Director or designee of a project supported by a federal TRIO or GEAR UP program grant
- ☐ Financial aid administrator (FAA)
- ☐ None of these apply.

7 Student Unusual Circumstances

▶ *See "Can I skip any questions?", on page 4.*

Do unusual circumstances prevent the student from contacting their parents or would contacting their parents pose a risk to the student? ◯ Yes ◯ No *This information will help us evaluate the student's ability to pay for school.*

A student may be experiencing unusual circumstances if they:

- Left home due to an abusive or threatening environment;
- Are abandoned by or estranged from their parents;
- Have refugee or asylee status and are separated from their parents, or their parents are displaced in a foreign country;
- Are a victim of human trafficking;
- Are incarcerated, or their parents are incarcerated, and contact with the parents would pose a risk to the student; or
- Are otherwise unable to contact or locate their parents.

If the student does not have a safe, stable place to live because of such circumstances, they may be considered a homeless youth and should review the answer to question 6 about being unaccompanied and homeless.

8 Direct Unsubsidized Loan Only

▶ *See "Can I skip any questions?", on page 4.*

Are the student's parents refusing to provide their information on this FAFSA form? ◯ Yes ◯ No

This response must be "No" for the student to be eligible for a Federal Pell Grant and most other types of federal aid. If the answer is "Yes," a financial aid administrator at the student's school will determine their eligibility for a Direct Unsubsidized Loan ***only****. If the student is approved for this option, they will not qualify to receive other types of federal student loans (including Direct Subsidized Loans), federal grants, or Federal Work-Study programs.*

9 Family Size

▶ *See "Can I skip any questions?", on page 4.*

How many people are in the student's family?

☐☐ *Include the student (and spouse), the student's dependent children (even if they live apart due to college enrollment), and other people living with the student now. Include these dependent children and other people only if the student will provide more than half of their support between July 1, 2026, and June 30, 2027.*

Paying for the Next Move

Fill in the actual first page of the FAFSA, then compare two offers on the real award-letter template.

Name: _____ Date: _____

2. The real award-letter template

The next 2 pages are the U.S. Department of Education's own "College Financing Plan" — the standardized layout many colleges are required to use for an award letter, shown blank with placeholder values (X,XXXX). This is the exact format a real offer would follow. Look for where net price, grants, and loan options each appear before moving on.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, College Financing Plan Template (2027-28), ed.gov — a U.S. government work, public domain.

University of the United States (UUS)

Undergraduate College Financing Plan

Student Name, Identifier

MM / DD / YYYY

Download

Estimated Cost of Attendance 2027-2028	On Campus Residence	Off Campus Residence
Tuition and Fees	$X,XXXX	
Housing and Food	$X,XXXX	$X,XXXX
Books and Supplies	$X,XXXX	
Transportation	$X,XXXX	
Other Education Costs	$X,XXXX	
Estimated Cost of Attendance	**$X,XXXX** / yr	**$X,XXXX** / yr

Student Aid Index

Based on the FAFSA As calculated by the Department of Education and/or the institution using a formula prescribed by law.	**X,XXXX** / yr
Based on Institutional Methodology Used by many private institutions in addition to the FAFSA.	**X,XXXX** / yr

Grants, Scholarships, and Other Gift Aid

Scholarships and Grants are considered "Gift" aid - no repayment is needed.

Scholarships

Merit-Based Scholarships	
Scholarships From Your School	$X,XXXX
Scholarships From Your State	$X,XXXX
Other Scholarships	$X,XXXX
Employer Paid Tuition Benefits	$X,XXXX
Total Scholarships	**$X,XXXX** / yr

Grants

Need-Based Grant Aid	
Federal Pell Grants	$X,XXXX
Institutional Grants	$X,XXXX
State Grants	$X,XXXX
Other Forms of Grant Aid	$X,XXXX
Total Grants	**$X,XXXX** / yr

VA Education Benefits

VA Education Benefits	**$X,XXXX** / yr

⚠ Important: Estimated College Costs You Will Be Required to Pay

Net Price To You Total cost of attendance minus total grants and total scholarships	**$X,XXXX** / yr

Loan and Work Options to Pay the Net Price

You must repay loans, plus interest and fees.

Loan Options*

Federal Direct Subsidized Loan (x.xx% interest rate) (x.xx% origination fee)	$X,XXXX / yr
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan (x.xx% interest rate) (x.xx% origination fee)	$X,XXXX / yr
Total Loan Options	**$X,XXXX** / yr

* For federal student loans, origination fees are deducted from loan proceeds.

Work Options

Work-Study Hours Per Week (estimated)	$X,XXXX / yr XX / wk
Other Campus Job	$X,XXXX / yr
Total Work	**$X,XXXX** / yr

Other Options

You may have other options to pay the remaining costs. These include:

- Tuition payment plan offered by the institution
- Parent PLUS loans, which your parent can apply for
- Non-Federal Private education loan, which you or your parent can apply for after passing a credit check
- Other Military or National Service Benefits

For More Information

University of the United States (UUS)
Financial Aid Office
123 Main Street
Anytown, ST 12345
Telephone: (123) 456-7890
E-mail: financialaid@uus.edu

Customized Information from UUS

*** Loan Amounts**

Note that the amounts listed are the maximum available to you. To learn about loan repayment choices and calculate your Federal Loan monthly payment, go to: Federal Student Aid – Repayment Plans.

Next steps

Glossary

Cost of Attendance (COA): The total amount (not including grants and scholarships) that it will cost you to go to school during the 2027–28 school year. COA includes tuition and fees; housing and food; and allowances for books, supplies, transportation, loan fees, and dependent care. It also includes miscellaneous and personal expenses, such as an allowance for the rental or purchase of a personal computer; costs related to a disability; and reasonable costs for eligible study-abroad programs.

Direct Subsidized Loan: Loans that the U.S. Department of Education pays the interest on while you're in school at least half-time, for the first six months after you leave school (referred to as a grace period*), and during a period of deferment (a postponement of loan payments).

Direct Unsubsidized Loan: Loans that the borrower is responsible for paying the interest on during all periods. If you choose not to pay the interest while you are in school and during grace periods and deferment or forbearance periods, your interest will accrue (accumulate) and be capitalized (that is, your interest will be added to the principal amount of your loan).

Student Aid Index: A number used by your school to calculate the amount of federal student aid you are eligible to receive. It is based on the financial information provided in your Free Application for Federal student Aid (the FAFSA). This is not the amount of money your family will have to pay for college, nor is it the amount of federal student aid you will receive.

Federal Work-Study: A federal student aid program that provides part-time employment while the student is enrolled in school to help pay his or her education expenses. The student must seek out and apply for work-study jobs at his or her school. The student will be paid directly for the hours he or she works may not automatically be credited to pay for institutional tuition or fees. The amount you earn cannot exceed the total amount awarded by the school for the award year. The availability of work-study jobs varies by school. Please note that Federal Work-Study earnings may be taxed in certain scenarios; however the income you earn will not be counted against you when calculating your Student Aid Index on the FASFA.

Grants and Scholarships: Student aid funds that do not have to be repaid. Grants are often need-based, while scholarships are usually merit-based. Occasionally you might have to pay back part or all of a grant if, for example, you withdraw from school before finishing a semester. If you use a grant or scholarship to cover your living expenses, the amount of your scholarship may be counted as taxable income on your tax return.

Loans: Borrowed money that must be repaid with interest. Loans from the federal government typically have a lower interest rate than loans from private lenders. Federal loans, listed from most advantageous to least advantageous, are called Direct Subsidized Loans, Direct Unsubsidized Loans, and Parent PLUS Loans. You can find more information about federal loans at StudentAid.gov.

Net Price: An estimate of the actual cost that a student and his or her family need to pay in a given year to cover education expenses for the student to attend a particular school. Net price is determined by taking the institution's cost of attendance and subtracting any grants and scholarships for which the student may be eligible.

Non-Federal Private Education Loan: A private education loan is a loan issued expressly for postsecondary education expenses to a borrower (either through the educational institution or directly to the borrower) from a private educational lender, rather than as a Title IV, HEA loan offered by the Department of Education.

Origination Fees: An upfront fee charged by a lender for processing a new loan application. It is compensation for putting the loan in place. Origination fees are quoted as a percentage of the total loan.

Parent Plus Loan: A loan available to the parents of dependent undergraduate students for which the borrower is fully responsible for paying the interest regardless of the loan status.

Teach Grant Program: Provides grants of up to $4,000 a year to students who are completing or plan to complete course work needed to begin a career in teaching. If you do not meet the requirements of your service obligation, all TEACH Grants you received will be converted to Direct Unsubsidized Loans. You must repay these loans in full, with interest charged from the date of each TEACH Grant disbursement. Service obligation information can be found at Federal Student Aid – TEACH Grant Service Obligation.

Tuition Payment Plan: A tuition payment plan offered by an institution may allow students to spread out their payments. It includes an extension of credit of 90 days or less in which the educational institution is the lender, or of one year or less where an interest rate will not be applied to the credit payment.

VA Education Benefits: Benefits that help Veterans, service members, and their qualified family members with needs like paying college tuition, finding the right school or training program, and getting career counseling. You can find more information here: VA.gov – Education Benefits.

For more information visit StudentAid.gov.

Paying for the Next Move

Fill in the actual first page of the FAFSA, then compare two offers on the real award-letter template.

Name: _____ Date: _____

3. Now compare two offers

Two fictional award letters for the same college, filled into the template's numbers. Fill in the blanks.

Line item	Offer A	Offer B
Cost of attendance (1 year)	$28,000	$24,000
Grants & scholarships (don't repay)	$9,000	$14,000
Work-study (you earn it)	$2,000	$1,500
Federal loans offered	$6,000	$4,000
Net price (cost − grants − work-study)	_____	_____
Money you'd borrow just this year	$6,000	$4,000

4. Which offer is the better deal?

Is it the school with the bigger total aid package, or the smaller net price? Explain your answer.

5. Discuss

DISCUSS

A $6,000 federal loan doesn't feel real on move-in day. What would make it feel real before anyone signs for it?

Paying for the Next Move

Fill in the actual first page of the FAFSA, then compare two offers on the real award-letter template.

STANDARD NOTE
SSEPF1c/d: builds on the "paying for it" step of the decision grid on the SSEPF1 worksheet. TN PF 3–6 (a practice FAFSA and an education-cost comparison) and VA EPF.18 (award letters, grants vs. loans) both name this as a standout skill.