

Financial Aid for Students

This Information Web page, prepared by the Congressional Research Service for Members of Congress, guides students through the process of locating and applying for financial aid.

The basics: getting started

Start gathering information early.

Free information is readily available from:

- High school counselors
- College and career school financial aid offices (where you plan to attend)
- Local and college libraries
- U.S. Department of Education Web page
- Other Internet sites (search terms student financial aid OR assistance)

Ask questions: counselors may know if you have exceptional circumstances that affect your eligibility.

Be organized: use calendars to keep on track.

Keep copies of all forms and correspondence: you must reapply for aid each year.

Parents of students: save money long before your child attends college.

College Savings Plan Network (state "Section 529" plans)

FinAid: for Parents

Tax incentives for higher education expenses

Good overviews:

Cash for College

FinAid: The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid

Financial Aid: You Can Afford It

Looking for Student Aid

Mapping Your Future

Paying for College

Beware of scholarship scams -- don't pay for free information!

Department of Education

Federal Trade Commission

Basic assistance categories:

- Financial need-based

Remember that students and their parents are responsible for paying what they can-- financial aid is a supplement, not a substitute, for family resources.

- Non need-based

Factors include academic excellence, ethnic background, or organization membership. Corporations may also offer assistance to employees and children.

Federal Student Aid:

- Provides nearly 70% of student aid under Loans, Grants and Work/study programs.

- Available to all need-based applicants; some loans and competitive scholarships for non need-based.

- Free information from the United States Department of Education:

- Funding Your Education

- Student Guide

- Loans are the most common federal aid and must be repaid when you graduate or leave college.

- Stafford Loans include:

- Federal Family Education Loans (FFEL) from private lenders, such as banks and credit unions, guaranteed by the federal government.

- William D. Ford Direct Loans (DL) directly from the federal government.

- Federal PLUS Loans parental loans, not need-based.

- Perkins Loans for the most needy undergraduates; through participating schools.

- Scholarships/grants are mostly need-based and require no repayment:
 - Pell Grants
 - Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG)

 - Other grants, scholarships, and fellowships, mostly graduate level: search the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) by Beneficiary, such as "Student or Trainee" or "Graduate Student".
 - "Congressional" scholarships:
 - Named for Member of Congress or other prominent individual (such as Byrd Honors Scholarships, Fulbright fellowships)
 - Merit-based and highly competitive
 - Members of Congress do not play a role in selecting recipients
 - Search by Beneficiary in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

 - Work study programs allow you to earn money while in school:
 - Federal Work Study Program: college campus jobs
 - Student Educational Employment: jobs with the federal government

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

States offer residents a variety of scholarships, loans, and tuition exemptions.

- Check with your state higher education agency and guarantee agency.
- Consider prepaid tuition and college savings ("Section 529") plans: College Savings Plans Network.
- Search your Internet browser under terms such as student financial aid or assistance AND your state.

Colleges and universities provide some 20% of aid, most need-based. Check university Web sites and the institution's financial aid office when you apply for admission.

Private foundations, corporations, and organizations offer scholarships or grants:

Scholarship Search

FastWeb

Free Scholarship Search

Grants for Individuals

SRN Express

Targeted aid for special groups

- African Americans: Scholarships (UNCF)
- Disabled students: HEATH Resource Center [Download a free PDF reader]
- Financial Aid for Law School: Law School Admission Council
- Foreign students: Financial Aid for International Students
- Grants for Minorities: Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, Latinos, Native Americans, and Other Ethnic Groups
- Hispanic Americans: Scholarships (HSF)
- Medical students: Association of American Medical Colleges
- Native Americans: American Indian College Fund
- Study abroad (for U.S. and non-U.S. citizens): International Education Financial Aid
- Veterans: Education Benefits

Interested in public service?

Federal assistance programs seek to encourage people to work in geographic areas or professions where there's a particular need (such as doctors in underserved areas); encourage underrepresented groups to enter a particular profession; and provide aid in exchange for services provided (such as military service).

- AmeriCorps

Volunteers who complete one year of service receive an education award for current higher education expenses or to repay student loans.

- Army Continuing Education System

Additional benefits for Army personnel.

- Bureau of Health Professions

Scholarships and loans to needy health profession students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- e-Scholar

Scholarships, grants, fellowships, internships, and cooperative education with federal agencies.

- Indian Health Service

Scholarships for American Indian/Alaskan Native health profession students and loan repayment for persons working in IHS facilities.

- Military academies:

United States Air Force Academy

United States Coast Guard Academy

United States Merchant Marine Academy

United States Military Academy

United States Naval Academy

- 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 two years of service in areas with critical nursing shortages.

- Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC)

For students who want to be commissioned as officers after graduating from college.

United States Air Force ROTC

United States Army ROTC

United States Navy ROTC

Aid for private K-12 education: No direct federal assistance, check with schools themselves:

- Coverdell Education Savings Accounts: for elementary and secondary school expenses as well as higher education.

- Children's Scholarship Fund: partial tuition assistance to low-income students.

Repaying your loans

After college, the federal government has ways to help you repay your loans.

- Eligibility depends upon the type of loan, when it was made, and whether it's in default. Check with your loan officer to find out if you qualify.

- Loan Consolidation: combine your federal loans into a single loan with one monthly payment.

- Sometimes loans may be canceled in exchange for public service.

Teachers: Cancellation/Deferment Options

Health professions: National Health Service Corps

Federal employees: Federal Student Loan Repayment Program

- If you are having problems with your loan and all other approaches fail, contact the Department of Education's Office of the Ombudsman.

States, schools, and some private employers provide help in repaying loans in exchange for public service.

- Law school graduates: State Loan Repayment and Forgiveness Programs

- Medical school graduates: State Loan Repayment Program