FINANCIAL LITERACY

LESSON 12-4 ▲ THE FAFSA PROCESS: PREPARING FOR THE FAFSA

**LEARNING GOALS/OUTCOMES**

* Knowledge of the FAFSA process and timeline.
* Awareness of the materials needed to complete a FAFSA.
* Familiarity with the FAFSA website.
* Obtain an FSA ID.

**MATERIALS NEEDED**

* **Computers or tablets with internet access for each student** so they can browse the official FAFSA site (<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>)
* **Computer with projection and internet access** to display your screen so that students may follow along.

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

1. **Share with students that they should apply for financial aid regardless of whether or not they think they will qualify or not.** It does not cost anything and it takes less than an hour to apply on line (if prepared in advance). Many colleges and scholarship organizations require that students file the FAFSA before they will award any aid. Explain that this lesson is a guided exploration of the official FAFSA site, a review steps to applying for the FAFSA, the resources that are available and the ability to obtain an FSA ID, if they don’t already have one.
2. **Pull up the official website** [**www.fafsa.ed.gov**](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)**.** Share with students that there are other sites that look similar but that this is THE OFFICIAL site. The FAFSA should **never** cost money to complete.
3. **Help students become familiar with the FAFSA homepage and its features.**
   * Have students first look at the two green buttons in the middle of the page. Students will use the “Start a New FAFSA” only the first time they input data at the site. All other work on the site will be through the “Login” button.
   * Next have students review the top bar. The “About Us” section has very valuable information about financial aid in general. Another help page in this section is the “Who Gets Aid” section. Many students do not think they qualify and this is helpful, factual information that will let them compare their own situations. Students should also explore studentaid.ed.gov website for similar, important background information.
   * One the lower, left-hand side (below the “Start a New FAFSA button”) there are three additional useful links. “Deadlines” will give students tools to help them with critical deadline information, “School Code Search” provides codes for colleges they are applying to (part of the application) and “FAFSA Filing Options” identifies different ways to complete a FAFSA.
   * The bottom, right-hand side (Under “Thinking About College?”) has two critical tools. The first is the *FAFSA4caster,* which allows students to estimate the financial aid they may receive. If there is time or as an extension of this lesson, you may want students to complete the *4caster*. Below this, there are equally valuable YouTube videos that will allow students to go view the information multiple times.
4. **Pause to answer questions or to go back and look at any of the resources available on the site**. Students should feel like this is one of the most important sites they will use their entire college career!
5. **The next step is for students (if seniors) to get an FSA ID (formerly called a PIN).** Before doing so, make students aware that this is their electronic signature for submitting their FAFSA. Both the student and at least one parent will need an ID if the student is a dependent student. Share that getting their ID is a short process of answering questions to identify them. **The FSA ID is like a social security number and should be kept somewhere secure and should not be shared!**

Students will need to have their Social Security number to get their FSA ID. For seniors in the class that know/have their Social Security number available and do not already have an FSA ID, help guide them through the process of obtaining their FSA ID.

1. **Review the important FAFSA timelines:**
   * **October 1st |** FAFSA Application Opens – try to submit it as soon as possible (ideally by December 1st!)
   * **3-5 days following FAFSA submission |** You will receive an SAR from the FAFSA Administration – Review and submit any changes ASAP
   * **January 1st |** Submit information for Washington State Aid as soon as possible following the first of the year
   * **Be sure to check with each individual college or university’s Financial Aid office to complete and submit any additional forms for aid specific to the school.**
   * **Once an award package arrives, carefully but expediently review the package with parents/guardians and submit acceptance paperwork on time.**

**STUDENT PRODUCTS**

* **An individualized FSA ID** for completing the FAFSA

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND OTHER INFORMATION**

* **SUPPLEMENTAL FACILITATOR NOTE**

This lesson is the second in a three-lesson series on the FAFSA. This lesson reviews the importance of and timelines for completing the FAFSA, helps students get more familiar with the FAFSA site and assists them in obtaining an FSA ID. This lesson can be facilitated as a guided exploration of the [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) site as a whole group or as a direct instruction piece individually in a computer lab. The last lesson in the series takes students through a sample FAFSA and what materials they will need to have on hand to complete their FAFSA. The lessons can be delivered in one setting if students have some background or if there is adequate time to make sure students understand the content.

There were two major changes to the FAFSA application that took effect in 2016 which are reflected in the three-lesson FAFSA series:

* The opening date for the application has been moved up from January 1st to October 1st each year.
* Because of the earlier opening date, filers can no longer have to estimate their tax information for the current year, but can utilize tax returns from the prior year. So, for example, students who are completing the application in October of 2016, seeking aid for the 2017-2018 school year, may utilize information from their/their parents 2015 tax returns.

In recognition and anticipation of additional changes that may take place to the FAFSA process in the future, please be sure to visit [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) prior to instruction of each lesson for the most recent information.

* **Washington Student Achievement Council**

[www.wsac.wa.gov/sfa-overview](http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sfa-overview)

Overview of financial aid in WA State

* **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

Official site for information and FAFSA application.

* **WASFA – Financial Aid for undocumented students**

**Ready, Set, Grad’s Washington Application for State Financial Aid**

<readysetgrad.org/WASFA>

* **FAFSA Information for Counselors and Mentors**

[financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/resources/2017-18-fafsa-updates-counselors.pdf](https://financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/resources/2017-18-fafsa-updates-counselors.pdf)

New financial aid timeline for Seniors

* **National College Access Network**

[www.collegeaccess.org/EarlyAwarenessMiddle](http://www.collegeaccess.org/EarlyAwarenessMiddle)

Early Awareness for Middle Grades

* **National College Access Network**

[www.collegeaccess.org/Early\_Awareness](http://www.collegeaccess.org/Early_Awareness)

Early Awareness for Grades 9-10