

7 Evaluate Your Financial Aid Offers

The financial aid office at each college you list on your FAFSA (that you have been or will be accepted to) will provide you with an evaluation of your eligibility for financial aid if you submitted the required financial aid applications and met the deadlines. If your college asks for additional information, be sure to respond promptly.

Your offer may list your college's annual COA, the amount that will be covered by a mix of grants, work-study, loans or other aid, and the amount you'll have to contribute. It may also explain the terms and conditions for receiving student aid and the deadline for accepting or declining it.

Your offers will typically vary from college to college, so you may want to wait until you've heard from each one before making a decision—but don't wait so long that you miss deadlines. Or you may want to accept one college's offer while waiting to hear from the school of your choice. Just be sure to let the first college know if you decide later to decline its offer.

Keep in mind that **you don't have to accept your entire student aid package but can pick and choose the aid you want**. If you do decide to decline aid, however, that aid may not be available later if you change your mind. If you're offered a loan, remember that accepting a loan means accepting the responsibility of repaying it. To help you evaluate your financial aid offers, use the worksheet on page 34.



Financial Aid Offers: Questions to Ask When Comparing

- What deadlines should you be aware of?
- What is the college's annual COA? (If you have any special circumstances, let the financial aid office know.)
- How much have costs increased in each of the last three years?
- How much of the aid is grants and scholarships? Are they renewable each year? Will the dollar amount increase if your tuition or other costs go up? Are there specific terms and conditions for renewal?
- Are merit scholarships available? If so, how do you apply?
- If you're offered work-study or student employment, how many hours will you need to work each week? What is the hourly pay rate and the availability of jobs? Are there jobs related to your major or career goal?
- How much loan aid is offered? What's the interest rate? What are the terms and conditions of each loan?
- What fees will you have to pay on your federal student loan? Origination or federal default fees of up to 1 percent may be deducted from each loan disbursement.
- If grants, scholarships or federal student loans don't cover your total calculated financial need, can you dip further into savings, get a part-time job, look into other options and/or cut your expenses? Or do you need to borrow more?
- Does the college offer a payment plan that will let you spread your payments over the school year?
- What is the average loan debt of the college's graduates overall—and of graduates in your program of study?
- What happens to your financial aid if you receive an outside scholarship?
- What would your award look like in subsequent years?

evaluate your financial aid offers **carefully**

A quick way to compare offers and determine your net costs is to subtract all your grant, scholarship and other free aid from your cost of attendance. Keep in mind that colleges have different ways of awarding financial aid as well as different costs of attendance.¹

COLLEGE	_____	_____	_____
Cost of Attendance			
Tuition and fees	_____	_____	_____
Room and board ²	_____	_____	_____
Books and supplies	_____	_____	_____
Computer allowance	_____	_____	_____
Transportation	_____	_____	_____
Other costs	_____	_____	_____
Total College Costs	A	_____	_____
GRANTS			
Federal Pell Grant	_____	_____	_____
Federal Academic Competitiveness Grant	_____	_____	_____
National SMART Grant	_____	_____	_____
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant	_____	_____	_____
Cal Grant	_____	_____	_____
Other grants	_____	_____	_____
Scholarships	_____	_____	_____
Total Grant/Scholarship Aid	B	_____	_____
Your Net Costs (A – B)		_____	_____
LOANS			
Federal subsidized Stafford loan	_____	_____	_____
Federal unsubsidized Stafford loan	_____	_____	_____
Federal Perkins loan	_____	_____	_____
Federal Parent PLUS loan	_____	_____	_____
Federal Graduate PLUS loan	_____	_____	_____
College loan	_____	_____	_____
Private loan	_____	_____	_____
Total Loan Aid	C	_____	_____
Total Financial Aid (B + C)	D	_____	_____
Your Out-of-Pocket Costs (A – D)		_____	_____
Work-Study or Student Employment	E	_____	_____

¹ Not all colleges participate in all of the financial aid programs listed here.

² If room and board aren't part of your housing contract, check with the college's housing office or look in the local paper for rental costs.