

Financial aid checklist: Countdown to College

FALL

- Talk to your high school counselor about your college plans and money needs. Ask about scholarships offered by local organizations and businesses.
- Check out all the ways to pay for college, starting at www.csac.ca.gov, www.calgrants.org, www.going2college.org and www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov.
- Look into AmeriCorps at www.americorps.gov to learn how to earn money for college in return for volunteer service.
- Sign up to take the SAT or ACT, if you haven't done so already.
- Make sure you have a Social Security number.
- Check out colleges on the Web, starting with www.californiacolleges.edu, www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool and www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov/choosing. Also, meet with college representatives who visit your school.
- Keep a calendar of important deadlines for college admission and financial aid.
- Get started filling out forms and writing essays for college and scholarship applications.
- Ask your teachers, counselors, employers, friends and family for letters of recommendation.
- Make sure you have an e-mail address that's appropriate for corresponding with colleges, lenders and employers.
- Apply for a federal PIN at www.pin.ed.gov ahead of time so you can e-sign the FAFSA for faster processing.
- Visit your top college choices or take a virtual tour online.
- Keep up your grades.
- Complete the FAFSA on the Web Worksheet, which you'll find at www.fafsa.ed.gov or your school.
- Check to see if your school will submit your verified Cal Grant GPA electronically or if you need to submit it using the paper Cal Grant GPA Verification form, located at www.calgrants.org.
- Request any additional financial aid applications your college or financial aid program may require.
- Start applying for private scholarships. Some may have very early deadlines.
- Apply for a Cal Grant by September 2 if you're going to a community college and missed the March 2 deadline.

WINTER

- Attend your school's financial aid workshop.
- Complete the FAFSA at www.fafsa.ed.gov as soon as possible, starting January 1. Use estimates if you or your parents haven't completed your federal tax return. Provide the required e-signatures and an e-mail address for faster processing.
- Apply for a Cal Grant (www.calgrants.org) by submitting the FAFSA and your verified Cal Grant GPA no later than March 2.
- Attend a California Cash for College workshop in January or February for free help completing the FAFSA and other forms—and to apply for a \$1,000 scholarship. Visit www.californiacashforcollege.org for dates and locations.
- Be sure to meet all financial aid deadlines. Some may be earlier than the March 2 Cal Grant deadline.
- Keep a copy of everything you submit.

SPRING & SUMMER

- After you apply for a Cal Grant, track your application online using WebGrants for Students at www.calgrants.org.
- Review your Student Aid Report and make corrections, if necessary.
- Be sure you or your parents complete your tax returns so you can update your Student Aid Report, if necessary.
- If you receive a California Aid Report or a corrections letter regarding your eligibility for a Cal Grant, review it carefully and respond, if necessary.
- Watch for college acceptance letters and financial aid offers.
- Evaluate all financial aid offers carefully. Ask questions!
- Consider grants, work-study and other aid you don't have to repay before accepting a student loan.
- Decide on a college and send in all forms or deposits by the deadline (May 1 for most colleges).
- Let your college know the financial aid awards you're accepting and the ones you're declining.
- Look for a summer job, or consider summer school or an internship.
- Arrange for housing plans.