

The 5 Most Asked Questions About The FAFSA Form

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Some of the most common questions I get about filing the annual FAFSA form, including great information about family changes and their effect on filing.

1. How do I file the FAFSA financial aid form?

You may choose any of these three methods to file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):

- Apply online at www.FAFSA.ed.gov (Recommended), or
- Complete a PDF FAFSA (Note: PDF FAFSAs must be mailed for processing), or
- Request a paper FAFSA by calling the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) or 1-319-337-5665. If you are hearing impaired, please contact the TTY line at 1-800-730-8913.

2. How soon after January 1 should the FAFSA form be sent in? Is it better to wait until the income tax forms have been completed?

Send in the form as soon as possible after January 1. Do not wait until your taxes are done. Although it is better to do your taxes early, it is ok to use estimates of your income, so long as they aren't very far off from the actual values. You will have an opportunity to correct any errors later on the Student Aid Report. If you wait too long, you might miss the deadline for state aid. Most states require the FAFSA to be submitted by March 1, and some as early as mid-February.

3. My parents are separated or divorced. Which parent is responsible for filling out the FAFSA?

If your parents are separated or divorced, the custodial parent is responsible for filling out the FAFSA. The custodial parent is the parent with whom you lived the most during the past 12 months. Note that this is not necessarily the same as the parent who has legal custody. If you did not live with one parent more than the other, the parent who provided you with the most financial support during the past twelve months should fill out the FAFSA. This is probably the parent who claimed you as a dependent on their tax return. If you have not received any support from either parent during the past 12 months, use the most recent calendar year for which

you received some support from a parent. Note, however, that any child support and/or alimony received from the non-custodial parent must be included on the FAFSA.

4. My parents are divorced, and the parent I'm living with has remarried. Does my step-parent have to report his or her income and assets on the FAFSA?

Yes, provided that the parent you're living with is the one filling out the FAFSA (your custodial parent). If the step-parent is married to your custodial parent at the time you fill out the FAFSA, they must report their income and assets, even if they weren't married to them in the previous year.

5. My custodial parent remarried and signed a prenuptial agreement that absolves the step-parent from financial responsibility for my education. Why does my step-parent have to provide financial information on the FAFSA?

Prenuptial agreements are ignored by the federal need analysis process. After all, two individuals (parent and step-parent) cannot make an agreement between them that is binding on a third party (the federal government). The federal government considers the step-parent a source of support regardless of any prenuptial agreements to the contrary. If a step-parent marries the parent, he or she is considered responsible for supporting the parent and children, even if he or she is unwilling to do so.

Tags

FAFSA, divorce, step-parent, custodial parent, Student Aid report, student loans, financial aid, need-based aid.