

**Welcome to “College Prep News” – helpful tips on how to plan -- and pay for college from EducationQuest Foundation. Today we’ll talk to Les Monroe about some common mistakes people make when completing the FAFSA to apply for federal financial aid.**

**So Les, let’s start with an easy question; what types of financial aid can I get if I complete the FAFSA?**

The FAFSA is the application for grants (which are free money given to students based on their financial situation) and it is used to determine eligibility for work-study and loans. Students should also pay attention to scholarship application requirements because some scholarships also require the FAFSA results.

**Where can I go to get the application and what is the due date?**

Although paper copies of the form are available, we recommend completing the form on-line at F-A-F-S-A-.g-o-v. Filing on-line will be the quickest way to get the form processed and that can help the students meet important due dates. We refer to these as Priority Filing Dates and they vary between colleges and applications for scholarships. Students need to be aware of the earliest date that effects them and then file the form prior to that date.

**What will I need to complete the form?**

The FAFSA will address two categories of questions: Personal, and financial. While the personal questions ask about things such as: name, social security number, birthdates and address, the financial questions will be the easiest to answer as you follow their directions to reference line numbers of a federal tax return and a W2.

On our website (EducationQuest.org) we have a FAFSA checklist which will explain where to find additional information to help answer questions about untaxed income such as child support and worker’s compensation.

**Ok now let’s talk about some specifics. I know the FAFSA is grouped into about seven easy-to-complete steps, let’s go step-by-step to address some of the common problems.**

**The form begins with personal information about the student.**

**So what are some of the common problems you see in this section?**

We often find students using a nickname on the form, and since the FAFSA can only be processed after an identity check, the student must use their legally given name as it will match their birthdate and social security number.

Another problem we see relates to Email addresses. If a student wants the results from this form sent to them electronically, they must provide an accurate Email address and then be sure to watch for emails from the department of education since those messages are often caught in junk mail or SPAM filters.

### **How do I know if my parents' information is also required on the FAFSA?**

The form provides several questions that ask about a student's age, marital status, military status, and whether or not they have dependants or if parent support was released to the courts. Depending on how the student answers these questions will determine if parent information will be needed. Students should be aware that the college may require additional documents to prove situations involving a ward of the court, orphans or homelessness.

### **I know that if my parents are married or remarried I have to include information from both of them. What happens if I only live with one parent?**

If the parent is single, separated or divorced the FAFSA will request information from the parent who provides the majority of the financial support for that student over the past year. This support will make that parent the custodial parent and they are most often the parent the student lives with or last lived with.

### **What mistakes are commonly made regarding income and asset questions?**

The income questions are easy, if you have the tax forms from the previous year. The questions reference specific line numbers on a corresponding tax document and W2.

The asset questions are where we see the majority of issues, but it's because parents and students report information **that they shouldn't include report**, such as a farm that a family operates, a business that has fewer than 100 employees, or the value of retirement accounts. The instructions can be very helpful with this section since they clearly identify items to include and exclude.

### **After I enter all of this income, asset and demographic information how does the college get it? Do I have to take it to them?**

Toward the end of the form the student will be able to list as many as 10 colleges that they would like to receive the results. The colleges are identified by entering a 6 digit federal school code. If you do not know the codes, the computer will let you search for it by state, city, or college name.

### **Now I am done right? The government will send my colleges the information and I have nothing left to do, right?**

Before clicking submit you will want to print a copy to keep for your records, and then you will need to sign the form electronically using a PIN number for the student and one for a parent (if required). Once the form is signed, it can be submitted.

Les, thanks for discussing the FAFSA, I'm sure your comments will make it easier for people to complete the form.

**That concludes this segment of *College Prep News*. Thanks for listening!**

**For free help with college planning, visit [EducationQuest.org](http://EducationQuest.org) for information and resources - and to find the EducationQuest location nearest you.**

**EducationQuest Foundation is a nonprofit organization with a mission to improve access to higher education in Nebraska.**