

# Financial Aid Glossary

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**Award letter or notification.** A document or online notification telling an admitted student about the financial aid the college is offering. The award notification describes the types and amounts of aid offered, as well as the student's responsibilities and conditions governing the awards.

**Cost of attendance.** The combined expenses of attending college, including tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and living expenses. These expenses vary because no two colleges have the same costs. The cost of attendance is compared with the student's expected family contribution to determine the student's need for financial aid.

**CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®.** A web-based financial aid application provided by the College Board and used by some colleges and private scholarship programs to award their private financial aid funds. It can be completed online at [student.collegeboard.org/profile](http://student.collegeboard.org/profile).

**FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).** The form that must be completed by everyone applying for federal financial aid. It can be completed online at [fafsa.gov](http://fafsa.gov).

**Financial aid package.** The total financial aid offered to a student by a college, including all grants, scholarships, work-study, and loan opportunities.

**Financial need.** The difference between the total cost of attending a college and a student's expected family contribution (EFC).

**Grant.** A monetary aid award given to a student that does not have to be paid back. The terms "grant" and "scholarship" are often used interchangeably, but grants tend to be awarded solely on the basis of financial need, while scholarships may require the student to demonstrate merit.

**Independent student.** An independent student is one of the following: at least 24 years old, married, a graduate or professional student, a veteran, a member of the armed forces, an orphan, a ward of the court, someone with legal dependents other than a spouse, an emancipated minor or someone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The McKinney-Vento liaison serving the school district can help you navigate issues homeless students may encounter. Independent students don't need to provide

parental information to be considered for federal financial aid programs; however, some private institutions may require independent students to provide parental information to be considered for nonfederal funding.

In rare circumstances, a student who is dependent by definition could be made independent at the discretion of the financial aid office. Examples are situations when the student has been abused by the parent(s) or the parents are not and have not been in the student's life. These cases should be brought to the attention of the individual financial aid offices as soon as possible, and the student will have to clearly document the situation.

**Merit aid.** Financial aid awarded on the basis of academic qualifications, artistic or athletic talent, leadership qualities, or similar attributes. Most merit aid comes in the form of scholarships.

**Need-based aid.** Financial aid given to students who have demonstrated financial need. It is calculated by subtracting the student's expected family contribution from a college's total cost of attendance.

**Priority date.** The date by which applications for financial aid must be received in order for a student to be given the strongest possible consideration. Thereafter, applications are considered on a first-come, first-served basis, and only to the extent the college still has aid money left after all the priority offers have been made.

**Self-help aid.** Student financial aid that requires repayment or employment (e.g., loans, part-time jobs).

**Subsidized loan.** A need-based loan in which the entity awarding the loan pays the borrower's (student's) interest while he or she is in college at least half-time, thereby subsidizing the loan.

**Work-study.** An arrangement by which a student combines employment and college study. The employment may be an integral part of the academic program (as in cooperative education and internships) or simply a means of paying for college.