

Parent 2011-2012 College Funding Check List

If you are the parent of a Senior (2012), then by now, you should have a college funding plan to maximize your financial aid, minimize your out-of-pocket expenses, and make sure you have cash flow for all four + years of college. If you don't have a plan, you may be scrambling for money down the road. I remind parents all the time that there is no financial aid for retirement. I personally, can't tell you how important it is to me to see families taking control and saving all the money that they possibly can. This is why we extend free services and advice to the community that encourages families in the same situation as you to **DO EVERYTHING THAT YOU CAN TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.**

Smart Families are either doing these things or having them done for them... It doesn't matter as long as they are done. Implementation of these strategies will GUARANTEE you control of the financial aid process thus securing your financial future!

Personal note from: Senior Advisor Ronald Blanks Jr.

1. Learn about the CSS Profile and FAFSA.

Familiarize yourself very well with the CSS Profile and FAFSA and learn how to properly complete them. Do this to avoid errors, omissions and inconsistencies. Make sure you understand when you are in your "base financial year" so you can complete your financial plans before filing. Your base financial year is the year prior to your student's high school graduation year and is used to determine your Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

2. Accurately complete financial aid forms regardless of income level.

Complete the FAFSA, CSS Profile and any other required financial forms, regardless of your income or assets with 100% accuracy. Doing this ensures that your child will be considered for any grants, scholarships and low-interest student loans. It's very important that all forms are accurate, on time, and in a consistent manner or they may get held up and you will lose your aid (first come first serve). You must know what these questions are "really" asking you from the eyes of the data processors.

3. Look into merit scholarships.

Determine your child's eligibility for merit-based scholarships. Find schools where your child can be in the top 20 percent. Students in this percentage of the admitting class tend to receive more "free money" and need less student loan money.

4. Find schools where your child can be in the top 20 to 25 percent.

If financial aid is important and you want to increase your chances of receiving scholarships and grants, find colleges or universities where your student will be in the top 20 to 25 percent. The top percentage of an admitting class tends to receive more gift aid, reducing the amount of loans required.

5. Apply to colleges meeting 75 to 100 percent of your need.

Have your child apply to colleges that meet 75 to 100 percent of his or her "need," as defined by both federal and institutional guidelines. Once you identify schools where your child is in the top 20 percent, you should determine each school's success in meeting your family's Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Remember, the higher your chances of getting money that you won't ever have to pay back, the better.

6. Determine includable vs. non-includable assets.

If your assets are exposed to either the federal rules or institutional guidelines, it can significantly reduce your financial aid package. Be careful to properly and legally implement available strategies. These issues can be very complicated, and any mistakes made could cost your family. Make sure you know the rules!

7. Develop cash flow scenarios.

Families can get themselves so mired in short-term loan repayments that their children have to drop out of college. Convert short-term debt into long-term debt and take full advantage of low-interest student loans. These cash flow strategies should take full advantage of tax deductions, exemptions, credits and exclusions to lower the cost of your out-of-pocket college expenses.

8. Research tax savings.

Did you know that taxes are an expense in the financial aid formulas? Use a combination of several powerful tax strategies to reduce college costs that work over and above the Lifetime Learning Credit, Hope Scholarship Credit and student loan interest deductions. Our services can help you determine which options and strategies you can capitalize on.

9. Use the rules.

At this time your understanding of the financial aid system should be up to par. Therefore, knowing what it takes to maximize your financial aid eligibility should also be at the top of the "to know" list as January arrives. If this is not you, learn and use the rules and regulations that govern financial aid to your advantage. Know the best way to position your child to receive the maximum amount of gift aid so you'll have fewer loans to pay back.

10. Use resources you have that will help you save time and money.

Collegiate Financial Solutions is one the leading college financial planning practices in Alabama. At our FREE College Funding Workshops and Webinars, you will discover:

**How to legally arrange your finances to maximize your funding options!*

**How to select colleges that will give you the best financial aid packages!*

**How to maximize your eligibility for financial aid!*

**Exactly what you should and shouldn't do before applying for money for college!*

**Inside information on the financial aid and admissions process! And much more!*

Check out the FREE College Planning Section for information on our FREE College Funding Events!