
Process Guide for
Student Web Application Products

FAFSA4caster
FAFSA on the Web
PIN Web Site

2009-2010

U.S. Department of Education



F E D E R A L
S T U D E N T A I D

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Overview

Preface

The *Student Web Application Products Process Guide* is designed to provide financial aid administrators (FAAs) with detailed information about changes and enhancements to Federal Student Aid's Web-based products for students: FAFSA4caster, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on the Web, and the PIN Web site.

Using the FAFSA4caster Web site, students and parents can receive an early estimate of eligibility for federal student aid. This Web site provides users with an opportunity to increase their knowledge of the financial aid process, become familiar with the various types of federal student aid that are available, and investigate other aid sources, such as grants and scholarships. To access FAFSA4caster or Spanish FAFSA4caster, go to federalstudentaid.ed.gov and click the FAFSA4caster link on the upper right corner of the page. A link to FAFSA4caster is also available on the FAFSA on the Web home page.

Using the FAFSA on the Web site at fafsa.ed.gov, students can apply for aid using FAFSA on the Web or Spanish FAFSA on the Web. Using their Federal Student Aid PINs, students can check their financial aid application status, view their Student Aid Report (SAR) information, correct their application data, and electronically sign their applications. Parents can also use their PINs to sign their children's financial aid applications electronically.

Using the PIN Web site or Spanish PIN Web site at pin.ed.gov, students and parents can apply for a PIN, request a duplicate PIN, or change their PINs. Students and parents can create their own PINs, request that Federal Student Aid generate and display PINs on the Web page in real-time, request that PINs be e-mailed in real-time, or have PINs sent through postal mail. For all options except postal mail distribution, we issue PINs in real-time so the student or parent can use it immediately to sign an original application electronically, decreasing processing time dramatically.

The following sections describe changes to these 2009-2010 Federal Student Aid Web products.

Important Note: The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), P.L. 110-315, was enacted on August 14, 2008, and reauthorizes the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA). Information about the HEOA can be found at ed.gov/heoa. Policy and operational guidance can also be found on the IFAP Web site (ifap.ed.gov). Watch these Web sites for details about the steps we are taking to implement the HEOA for the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 award years.

What's New for 2009-2010?

Suggestions from the Financial Aid Community

Federal Student Aid continually seeks new and innovative ways to make applying for financial aid over the Web easier and more convenient for students and their families. We are making numerous enhancements to our student Web application products for 2009-2010, as detailed in this process guide. You, your colleagues, and student aid applicants suggested some of these changes.

If you have ideas for additional enhancements, let us know by sending an e-mail to FederalStudentAidCustomerService@ed.gov.

Demonstration Site

The FAFSA on the Web demonstration site can be used as a training tool for students, parents, and your financial aid staff. The demonstration Web site is available for use at fafsademo.test.ed.gov and will be updated for 2009-2010 by early December 2008.

Use the following login information to access the Web site:

- User Name: eddemo
- Password: fafsatest

Note: The user name and password fields are case-sensitive.

The demonstration Web site offers most of the features of the production Web sites for FAFSA on the Web and FAA Access to CPS Online.

FAFSA4caster

Since introducing FAFSA4caster in April 2007, we have continued to enhance this federal student aid estimator to make it even more useful for students and their families. While enhancements to the paper- and Web-based FAFSA application process predominately occur at the beginning of a new processing cycle, updates to the FAFSA4caster Web site are implemented throughout the year.

We recently implemented changes that make the award year transparent to FAFSA4caster users. These changes include removing the year references from the form questions and replacing them with “the last calendar year” or other appropriate text. Although FAFSA4caster uses award year-specific expected family contribution (EFC) formulas and award year-specific grant and loan limits to estimate financial aid eligibility, a non-cyclical approach provides the flexibility we need to maintain one financial aid estimator while processing concurrent award years. Using this approach, we can implement timely revisions to the EFC formula and grant and loan limits.

FAFSA on the Web Changes and Enhancements

In this section, we describe changes and enhancements to the FAFSA on the Web site for 2009-2010, including changes resulting from the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA), P.L. 110-84.

FAFSA Redesign

Provisions of the CCRAA required that Federal Student Aid change some of the data collected on the FAFSA form. Implementing the CCRAA changes provided an opportunity to review the FAFSA question order and address other form issues. We recommend that you review the information provided in the *2009-2010 Summary of Changes for the Application Processing System* guide, posted in October 2008 to the IFAP (ifap.ed.gov) and FSAdownload (fsadownload.ed.gov) Web sites, for a complete description of the FAFSA redesign. Here we describe the FAFSA redesign as it relates to the FAFSA on the Web site.

Dependency Status Questions Added

The definition of an independent student for federal student aid purposes has been expanded to include individuals who were in foster care, individuals who are emancipated minors or are minors in legal guardianship, and individuals that have been verified as unaccompanied youths who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. A description of the new questions that collect this data can be found in the *2009-2010 Summary of Changes for the Application Processing System* guide.

To accommodate the new questions, we display the dependency status questions on three new Web pages. To simplify the process for the applicant on the Web, the dependency status questions that are most commonly answered “Yes” are displayed first. If an applicant answers “Yes” to at least one dependency status question on a page, we skip the subsequent pages and the remaining dependency status questions. Responses to the skipped questions are not required. We determine that the applicant is independent and display the next available page for an independent student. If all the dependency status questions on each page are answered “No,” we determine that the applicant is dependent and display the next available page for a dependent student.

Collection of Worksheet Data Revised

The CCRAA mandates that we no longer collect the untaxed income information in Worksheet A. As a result, we deleted Worksheet A. To make it easier for FAAs to verify the Student’s and Parents’ Total Amount from Worksheet B and C, we also deleted Worksheet B and C. Instead, we collect each individual data element from the former worksheets on the FAFSA itself and,

when we process the application, we calculate total values for Additional Financial Information (former Worksheet C) and Untaxed Income (former Worksheet B).

In Corrections on the Web, the Worksheet C and Worksheet B buttons are replaced with Additional Financial Information and Untaxed Income buttons respectively. When the applicant selects a button positioned next to a calculated total, we display the individual values he or she entered for the line items in the selected category. The calculated total is corrected by changing the itemized values and the new total is displayed.

Dislocated Worker Questions Added

We added two questions to determine if a student (or spouse) or parent of a dependent student is a dislocated worker. For dependent students who provide parental data, the Parents' Dislocated Worker Status question is displayed before the parents' income questions. For independent students, the Student's Dislocated Worker Status question displays before the student's tax information questions. We added text that identifies conditions that qualify someone to be considered a dislocated worker and informs the applicant that an FAA at his or her school may require proof of the dislocated worker status.

Special Circumstances

In prior cycles, a dependent applicant who was unable to provide parental information on the FAFSA due to a special family circumstance was advised to use a paper application. To enable applicants in these situations to apply on the Web in 2009-2010, we are modifying certain FAFSA on the Web edits to allow a dependent applicant in this situation to bypass the parental questions. We recommend that you review the information provided in the *2009-2010 Summary of Changes for the Application Processing System* guide for a more complete description of the Special Circumstances option. Here we describe the prescreening an applicant may encounter when using FAFSA on the Web.

If an applicant is determined to be dependent in FAFSA on the Web, he or she is taken to a new Web page that informs the applicant he or she is required to provide parental data. The applicant can select "Next" to go to the parental questions. However, if the applicant feels he or she has a special circumstance that makes it impossible to provide parental information, he or she is given the opportunity to skip the parental questions and submit the application without having an EFC calculated. Advisory text on subsequent Web pages includes examples of what might constitute a special circumstance and what will not. The applicant is advised that only an FAA can approve a special circumstance and is urged to gather and provide all relevant written evidence of his or her situation to the financial aid office. If the student chooses to submit the application without providing parental data, a new Special Circumstances Flag, which is included in the Institutional Student Information Record (ISIR), is set to **1** and no EFC is calculated.

Renewal-Eligible Applications with Special Circumstances

If a renewal-eligible student indicates that he or she has a special circumstance and chooses to complete the FAFSA without providing parental data, a message displays to alert the applicant that because he or she has identified a possible special circumstance for the new award year, parental information provided on last year's FAFSA will not carry over. Advisory text informs the applicant that the application will not be considered complete until he or she follows up with a financial aid administrator at the school he or she plans to attend to complete the application and receive an EFC.

Correcting a Special Circumstances Transaction

If the Special Circumstances Flag is set to **1** when an applicant retrieves his or her transaction later in Corrections on the Web, we display a message to alert the applicant that the transaction he or she selected to correct was submitted without parental information because he or she identified a possible special circumstance. If the applicant chooses to enter parental information, the Special Circumstances Flag is set to **2** and the applicant is directed to Corrections entry with parental questions displayed. If the applicant chooses to continue without providing parental data, the Special Circumstances Flag remains set to **1** and the parental questions do not display in Corrections entry. We will continue not to calculate an EFC for this student until an FAA performs a dependency override.

Dependency Status Worksheet

On the standalone version of the Dependency Status Worksheet, we inform a dependent applicant that he or she may be able to complete the FAFSA without providing parental information if he or she meets certain special circumstances. The worksheet text includes links to the related "Frequently Asked Question (FAQ)" help topic and a printable version of the special circumstances fact sheet.

Self-Service Password Reset Option

To make retrieving a saved application easier, we added a self-service password reset option. This option enables the applicant to reset his or her password at any time without customer service assistance. If the applicant indicates that he or she has forgotten his or her password, he or she is prompted to enter his or her Social Security Number (SSN), last name, first name, date of birth, and zip code. If the information provided matches the saved application, we require the applicant to change his or her password before continuing to the last saved application page. If the information provided does not match the saved application, we display Customer Service contact information.

Social Security Numbers (SSNs) Masking

To enhance security, we are masking the student's and his or her parents' SSNs on Web pages and reports, including the eSAR, on which the SSN is not necessary for identification. We replace the first five digits of SSNs with "Xs" when the student:

- Chooses to pre-fill an application and parental information is carried forward (the parents' SSNs are masked, if the SSNs are carried forward from last year's FAFSA).
- Selects "View FAFSA Summary" from FAFSA on the Web.
- Selects "View Printable Page" in FAFSA on the Web or Corrections on the Web.
- Selects "Print this Page" in FAFSA on the Web or Corrections on the Web.
- Selects "2009-2010 SAR Print Summary" in Student Access or selects the link to the eSAR in his or her SAR e-mail, if the Social Security Administration confirmed the student's SSN, father's SSN, or mother's SSN during its match process. If a SSN was not confirmed, the complete SSN displays or prints in Student Access so the student or parent can review the number that was submitted.

We describe the masking of SSNs on the paper SAR and SAR Acknowledgment in the *2009-2010 Summary of Changes for the Application Processing System* guide.

Data Release Number Displayed on Confirmation Page

To make the Data Release Number (DRN) readily accessible to the student, we include the DRN as part of the information displayed on the 2009-2010 Confirmation page. For FAFSAs, renewal FAFSAs, Corrections entry, and standalone electronic signatures, the DRN displays immediately after the confirmation number.

Renewal FAFSA Data Elements

Beginning with the 2008-2009 processing cycle, we redefined the renewal application process in terms of the language we use with the students and the Web options and labels that are displayed. While the concept of Renewal FAFSA on the Web continues to exist, we no longer offer a separate Renewal FAFSA on the Web option or use the term "renewal" on student Federal Student Aid Web sites.

Just as with the 2008-2009 FAFSA on the Web, when a renewal-eligible student selects "Fill Out Your FAFSA" for 2009-2010, the student is prompted to provide his or her SSN, last name, first name, and date of birth. If the information provided matches a renewal-eligible record, we inform the applicant that our records show he or she filled out a FAFSA last year and ask if he or she would like to pre-fill the 2009-2010 FAFSA with data from that application. We pre-fill the

FAFSA with certain data elements from the 2008-2009 application if the applicant selects “Yes” and provides his or her PIN.

We made the following changes to the pre-filled data used for the 2009-2010 renewal application.

- We carry forward the 2008-2009 response to the high school completion status question for 2009-2010 because unlike the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 valid values, the valid values for 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 are the same and can be carried forward.
- We do not carry forward the 2008-2009 response to the orphan/ward of the court question for 2009-2010 because we have revised the question, in part to take into account students in foster care. To gather current information, we ask the applicant to answer the question again.
- We do not carry forward the previously reported value to the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant question (Are you planning to complete coursework to become an elementary or secondary school teacher, either now or in the future?) to pre-fill a 2009-2010 application. We ask the applicant to answer the question again to gather current information.
- We do not carry forward parental data to a renewal application for a dependent student who indicates that a special circumstance prevents him or her from providing parental information.
- We do not carry forward previously reported values for veterans education benefits because the questions have changed for the 2009-2010 application. In 2009-2010, we ask applicants receiving veterans education benefits to select the type of benefits they are receiving from a list.

TEACH Grant

We continue to implement changes and enhancements related to the TEACH Grant provisions in the CCRAA. The TEACH Grant question was added to FAFSA on the Web in 2008-2009. For 2009-2010, in addition to adding the TEACH Grant question to the paper FAFSA, we are implementing the following changes on the Web:

- We added the TEACH Grant question to Corrections on the Web, Student Access, and the eSAR.
- In the help text associated with the TEACH Grant question, we added a link to the Student Aid on the Web (studentaid.ed.gov) TEACH Grant page.

Reminder of Saved, Incomplete Applications

We are implementing a new process to notify students, and parents of dependent students, when an incomplete Web application is saved to our database without submission. Our data analysis shows that applicants who save an application but do not return within seven days to finish and submit the application are unlikely to return. By distributing these notifications, Federal Student Aid hopes to encourage more students to complete and submit FAFSAs that they may not realize are still pending and to help reduce student inquiries to FAAs regarding the status of unsent applications.

We send the first incomplete application notification when we cannot locate a completed application for the applicant in our database after seven days of inactivity. We send a follow-up notification at 14 days if no further activity has occurred.

We send the reminder to the student and parents of dependent students in the language the student used to apply. We send an e-mail if the applicant or parent provided a valid e-mail address. If the applicant did not provide a valid e-mail address, we print and mail the reminder. We do not mail a reminder to the parent: if the parent did not provide a valid e-mail address, we take no further action.

Samples of the e-mail reminder sent to the applicant and parent follow.

Sample Student Reminder

Subject: Your 2009-2010 FAFSA

Dear {FirstName},

This is to remind you that you have entered and saved a 2009-2010 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on the Web but have not yet submitted the application for processing. Before we can determine your eligibility for federal student aid, you must retrieve your saved application and complete the steps to submit it.

To retrieve your application, either select the link below or copy the entire link and paste it into the address or location line of your Web browser:

www.fafsa.ed.gov/FOTWWebApp/complete005.jsp

You may also use the FAFSA to apply for aid from other sources, such as your state or school. Check important state deadlines at www.fafsa.ed.gov under the “Before Beginning a FAFSA” link. Check with your school’s financial aid office for information about school deadlines.

If you have questions about your FAFSA, online help is available at www.fafsa.ed.gov. You can also contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) and a customer service representative can assist you.

Thank You,

U.S. Department of Education
Federal Student Aid

Sample Parent Reminder

Subject: Your 2009-2010 FAFSA

This is to remind you that you or your student have entered and saved a 2009-2010 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) on the Web but have not yet submitted the application for processing. Before we can determine the student's eligibility for federal student aid, you must retrieve the saved application and complete the steps to submit it.

To retrieve the application, either select the link below or copy the entire link and paste it into the address or location line of your Web browser:

www.fafsa.ed.gov/FOTWWebApp/complete005.jsp

The FAFSA may also be used to apply for aid from other sources, such as your state or your student's school. Check important state deadlines at www.fafsa.ed.gov under the "Before Beginning a FAFSA" link. Check with the school's financial aid office for information about school deadlines.

If you have questions about the FAFSA, online help is available at www.fafsa.ed.gov. You can also contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) and a customer service representative can assist you.

Thank You,

U.S. Department of Education
Federal Student Aid

PIN Web Site Changes and Enhancements

We have not made any changes to the Federal Student Aid PIN Web site for 2009-2010.

Getting Help

How Do I Get Help?

If you have any questions regarding the information in this guide, contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center for assistance by calling 800/4-FED-AID (800/433-3243), TDD/TTY 800/730-8913, or by sending an e-mail to FederalStudentAidCustomerService@ed.gov.