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College Goal Montana: New, Online Format More Accessible to Montanans, Still Free

It's almost time for Montana students and families to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and thanks to Student Assistance Foundation (SAF), they won't need to travel any farther than their living rooms.

"Our society is becoming increasingly digital," said Rhonda Safford, who has coordinated the statewide College Goal Montana event for SAF for the past several years. "So, in order to reach more Montanans than ever through this program, we are re-focusing our efforts from hosting physical events in communities throughout Montana, to delivering FAFSA completion help using the most convenient method possible — your computer."

Beginning in November, students and families will be able to access videos from our SmartAboutCollege.org website that provide step-by-step instruction on how to get a FAFSA PIN and complete the FAFSA, section by section.

The FAFSA for the 2013-14 academic year will be available at fafsa.ed.gov after Jan. 1, 2013. This form is the first step in applying for federal, state and campus-based aid like scholarships and grants, work-study opportunities, and student loans.

"FAFSA filers will be able to get detailed FAFSA completion instruction on SmartAboutCollege.org, 24 hours a day, seven days a week," Safford said. "In addition, our knowledgeable staff is still available to help students should they require free, one-on-one assistance via our College Goal Montana hotline (877-COLG4ME) or by emailing FAFSAhelp@safmt.org."

She added that SAF's campus outreach managers are also available to provide FAFSA completion help. Check SmartAboutCollege.org to find an office in your area.

For those school counselors and financial aid professionals who want to host a traditional College Goal Montana event in their community, SAF has developed a how-to handbook, complete with a timeline, sample flyers, press releases, reminder emails, media talking points and more. This free handbook is available for download on SmartAboutCollege.org.

"Plus, SAF staff is here to answer any questions and offer support to help community organizers make the event in their community a success," Safford said. "It's our hope that more Montana students than ever before complete the FAFSA and access the financial aid they need to pursue postsecondary education."

For more information about College Goal Montana, contact Safford at rsafford@safmt.org, or (406) 495-7750.

In addition, “like” SAF on Facebook (www.facebook.com/StudentAssistanceFoundation) to receive reminders and tips about how to prepare for College Goal Montana and more. Also, subscribe to our YouTube Channel (SAFTube4U).

Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to finance and pursue their postsecondary education. Funds generated by SAF are returned to Montanans in the form of education grants and public benefit programs - to date more than \$25 million. For more information, visit www.safmt.org or www.SmartAboutCollege.org.

Info Box

In order to complete the FAFSA, have the following items available:

- FAFSA PIN number — to get your pin, log on to www.pin.ed.gov
- Social Security numbers (students and parents)
- 2012 federal tax returns (or 2011 tax returns if 2012 are not complete)
- W-2s, tribal income, other aid information (TANF, child support, other benefits)
- Additional asset information (money market funds, stocks, other investments)