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College Goal Montana: SAF offers free FAFSA help

“My parents make too much money.”

“My grades aren’t very good.”

“It takes too long, and I don’t think I would qualify anyway.”

These are just some of the reasons students give for not completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), according to Rhonda Safford, state-wide coordinator of College Goal Montana.

“Each year these misconceptions result in many Montana students missing out on financial aid to help them pay for school,” she said. “The truth is, the FAFSA is for everyone who wants to pursue higher education. The only thing for certain is you won’t get any financial aid if you don’t apply!”

Beginning on Jan. 1, Montana students and their families can begin completing the FAFSA for the 2014-15 Academic Year and nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation is here to help.

College Goal Montana is an annual campaign to encourage FAFSA awareness and to help students and families complete the important form. 2014 will mark the ninth year that SAF has organized the effort for Montana.

Visit SmartAboutCollege.org to access videos explaining the FAFSA completion process step by step, beginning with getting a FAFSA PIN, through signing and submitting the application. In addition, FAFSA filers can watch the videos on SAF’s YouTube channel, SAFTube4U. Should students or families need one-on-one assistance, the SmartAboutCollege.org website provides email, phone and chat options.

Students and parents who want to access additional FAFSA completion resources can:

- Like FAFSA-What’s in it for me? on Facebook.
- Follow us on Twitter @GetFAFSAHelp.
- Text FAFSAHELP to 41411 to receive free texts with FAFSA tips and deadline reminders.
- Visit SmartAboutCollege.org and click on “Calendar” in the top right-hand corner to learn about SAF activities, including College Goal Montana events, in your community.

- Email us at FAFSAhelp@safmt.org or call us at 877-COLG4ME (265-4463).

SAF's campus outreach managers also are available to assist with the process at no charge. Plus, SAF will be providing guidance to schools and communities who want to host their own FAFSA completion event, so students and parents should watch for information about those opportunities in their area.

“About \$150 billion in federal grants, loans and work-study funds is available each year, and that doesn't include the state and institutional aid that is out there,” said Safford. “Financial aid professionals in Montana will tell you that the return on the investment of taking half an hour or 45 minutes to complete the FAFSA is worth it.”

Safford reminds students that many postsecondary institutions have priority deadlines for completing the FAFSA. At most Montana schools, that deadline is March 1, with the exception of The University of Montana which has a deadline of Feb. 15.

Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to pursue and fund 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 \$27 million. For more information, visit www.safmt.org or www.SmartAboutCollege.org.

Sidebar

In order to complete the FAFSA, students and parents should have the following information available:

- FAFSA PIN — to get your PIN, log on to www.pin.ed.gov. Both student and parent (if the student is under the age of 24) will need a PIN.
- Social Security numbers (students and parents)
- Last year's federal tax returns for estimating purposes (or 2013 if complete). You can go back later to confirm numbers after you finish your 2013 taxes. If you need free help with your taxes, click on the Montana Free File link on the bottom of the College Goal Montana page on SmartAboutCollege.org.
- W-2s, tribal income, other aid information (TANF, child support, other benefits)
- Additional asset information (money market funds, stocks, other investments)