

# Financial Literacy

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## **Lesson #5 Grades 11 - 12** **FAFSA Process – It’s Not Just the Application!**

### **LESSON TARGET(S)**

- ▶ Description of the FAFSA (what is it?)
- ▶ Importance of FAFSA to financial aid options
- ▶ Steps to completing FAFSA and financial aid process

### **MEASURE(S) OF SUCCESS**

**Students will be able to:**

- ▶ Explain what the FAFSA does and its importance to paying for higher education
- ▶ Describe the steps in the FAFSA completion process through the acceptance of an award letter

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- ▶ Student Hand-out (see PDF – Note we are seeking permission from NELA to use their process and diagrams!)
- ▶ Class or student Board for FAFSA Process competition
- ▶ Student cards for team game
- ▶ Official FAFSA site: <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

### **FACILITATOR NOTES**

This workshop is an introductory workshop to a two-workshop set on the FAFSA. The workshop walks students through the importance, timeline and steps for completing the FAFSA in a game setting so that students can see the benefits and pitfalls of paying attention to FAFSA details. The follow-up lesson takes students through a sample FAFSA and what they need to do in preparation for completing the FAFSA. The lessons can be delivered in one setting if students have some background or if there is adequate time to make sure students understand the content.

This workshop creates a series of scenarios for the students so that they can see the importance of filing the FAFSA on time and working through the follow up steps. The lesson requires that the facilitator be somewhat of an “actor” as they walk students through the steps to complete a FAFSA.

**Preparation includes:** This workshop will require some preparation for it to go smoothly. Facilitators will need to make sure that all materials are available. It is recommended that the cards drawn for each step be in five different envelopes to avoid drawing a card from another step.

## CORE ACTIVITY

### Introduction

Explain that the FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. It is critical that students understand this is the key that unlocks financial aid no matter the higher education they seek. **Make sure that students know there is only one official FAFSA site, <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> and that applying for the FAFSA is always FREE! If they end up on other sites that charge, it is not an official FAFSA site!**

### Activity

1. Hold up a sign that says “Grants, scholarships, work study, loans.” Explain to the students that this is the end goal of the work during this class. Also explain that only those students who correctly follow the steps in the FAFSA process will be eligible for the \$. (If you are a truly dramatic type, you might even hold up fake money to engage the students.)
2. Organize students into five teams and assign each group of students a color or game piece. Have the students identify a person that will draw their “action card” at each step of the game or simulated FAFSA process.
3. Place the FAFSA process on the board or document camera so that you have an enlarged version of the game board visible to all students/teams. Explain that there are five basic steps in completing the FAFSA process each year. The point of the game is to avoid the pitfalls that keep students from completing the FAFSA correctly and increasing their eligibility for financial aid.
4. Next, explain that at each step of the game or simulated FAFSA process you will briefly explain the step to the students. Then each team will draw a card that will allow their team to move forward or stay where they are based on the actions each team has taken at this point in the process. A sample game board is provided that could be used on a document camera.
5. **Game Steps**
  - a. **Filing a FAFSA** – The FAFSA site opens at midnight each year on January first. There is great wisdom in filing early because some of the financial aid is limited and it is a first come, first served allocation. Students will need to have their own and their parent’s tax information

#### **See Student Worksheet for Cards:**

- Team filed on January 1 – Move forward three places.
- Team filed prior to February 1 – Move forward two places.
- Team filed prior to March 1 – Move forward one place.
- Team filed by June 1 – Move forward one place.
- Team did not file until August – Stay on start.

- b. **Making Updates:** The Federal Government sends students a report called the Student Aid Report or SAR. Students must review this report and make any changes requested in order to be eligible for aid.

**See Student Worksheet for Cards:**

- Team read the SAR carefully and did not find any mistakes. Move ahead 3 places.
  - Team read the SAR carefully and corrected a social security number. Move ahead 3 places.
  - Team read the SAR but didn't understand it nor asked questions. Move ahead one place.
  - Team didn't read the SAR and missed that a decimal point on their income was incorrect. This will cause them to be denied financial aid. Go back one space.
  - Team didn't check to see why they have not receive a SAR (usually arrives two weeks after filing). There is a mismatch with the name and social security number. This will cause them to be denied financial aid. Go back three spaces.
- c. **Completing financial aid information at the college:** Most colleges require additional paper work in order for students to be eligible for financial aid. Many students miss out on aid because they miss this step. In Washington, the technical and community colleges have financial aid portals that allow students access to all of their financial aid information and understanding the portal is critical at this stage.

**See Student Worksheet for Cards:**

- Team has sent in all of the college financial aid forms on time and has talked to a financial aid counselor at the college/university about their questions. Move ahead three spaces.
  - Team has sent in all of the college financial aid forms on time but hasn't connected with anyone in the financial aid office. Move ahead two spaces.
  - Team is working on the forms but just can't quite find the time with everything else that has to be done in the senior year to complete the forms. Stay in place.
  - Team has looked at the college financial aid forms but feels overwhelmed and has delayed sending them in. Stay in place.
  - Team doesn't remember seeing any forms. Go back two spaces.
- d. **Review Award Packages:** Students need to read the small details and between the lines on financial aid award letters. (See workshop on Financial Aid Award letters.) They need to know that looking at the total aid given is only the first step.

**See Student Worksheet for Cards:**

- Team reviewed the award letter with parents/guardians and matched the award to the cost of college budget the family created. They are excited that the award will pay for almost all of the costs without loans. Move ahead three spaces.
  - Team reviewed the award letter with parents/guardians and called the college because the information was confusing. They learned that most of their financial aid is in the form of loans directly to the student and other loans to the parents. Move ahead three spaces.
  - Team reviewed the award letter with parents/guardians and matched the award to the cost of the college budgets. They didn't understand the information about loans but checked them anyways. Stay in place.
  - Team members looked at the forms but didn't spend the time to really talk with their parents about what the award letter means. Go back one space.
  - Team was busy with senior activities and didn't think the letter was important. Go back two spaces.
- e. **Accept Financial Aid Award:** Students need to understand that there is a formal process requiring signatures indicating that the student and/or parents/guardians are accepting the financial aid. Students often do not know that they have a choice to accept the different kinds of aid and DO NOT need to accept loans if they do not wish to do so.

**See Student Worksheet for Cards:**

- Team has talked with the financial aid office at the college/university and clearly understands they are receiving several different kinds of financial aid including a small subsidized student loan. All forms are in on time. Move ahead three spaces.
- Team has talked with the financial aid office at the college/university and made the decisions to turn-down the student loans, accepting only the grants and work-study that were offered as part of the total package. All forms were in on time. Move ahead three spaces.
- Team sent in the forms on time but still feels confused about the loans. They feel like the money will be helpful. Move ahead one space.
- Team looked at the forms but didn't send them in on time. Too busy. Move back two spaces.
- Team didn't look at the forms thinking that filing the FAFSA was enough. Move back three spaces.

Closing

Engage the students in a discussion about what they learned about playing the FAFSA "game."

## Student Worksheet: The FAFSA Process Modified from Information Provided by NELA

### FAFSA Preparation

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Apply for a PIN for student  
And parent



Gather tax and other  
financial documents



January begins FAFSA Process

### FAFSA Filing



Fill out FAFSA online at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)



Submit FAFSA with PIN and send electronically

### AFTER Filing



Federal Processor  
Determines EFC

SAR

Student receives report








Results sent to Colleges



Financial aid  
disbursed to  
College/university

## Student Worksheet: Game Board

<i>Start</i>	<i>Team A</i>	<i>Team B</i>	<i>Team C</i>	<i>Team D</i>	<i>Team E</i>
<i>File FAFSA</i>					
<i>Make Updates</i>					
<i>Turn in financial info to college</i>					
<i>Review award package</i>					
<i>Accept Financial Aid Award</i>					
<i>Financial Finish Line</i>					

## Student Worksheet: Game Cards

<b><i>Filing</i></b>	Team filed on January 1 <b>Move Forward 3 Places.</b>	Team filed on January 1 <b>Move Forward 3 Places.</b>
	Team filed prior to March 1 <b>Move Forward One Place.</b>	Team filed by June 1 <b>Move Forward One Place.</b>
<b><i>Updating</i></b>	Team read the SAR carefully and did not find any mistakes. <b>Move Ahead 3 Spaces.</b>	Team read the SAR carefully and corrected a social security number. <b>Move Ahead 3 Spaces.</b>
	Team read the SAR but didn't understand it nor asked questions. <b>Move Ahead One Space.</b>	Team didn't read the SAR and missed that a decimal point on their income was incorrect. This will Cause then to be denied financial aid. <b>Go Back One Space</b>
<b><i>Additional Info to Colleges</i></b>	Team has sent in all of the college financial aid forms on time and have talked to a financial aid counselor at the college/university about their questions. <b>Move Ahead 3 Spaces</b>	Team has sent in all of the college financial aid forms on time but hasn't connected with anyone in the financial aid office. <b>Move Ahead Two Spaces.</b>
	Team is working on the forms but just can't quite find the time with everything else that has to be done in the senior year to complete the forms. <b>Stay in place.</b>	Team has looked at the college financial aid forms but feels overwhelmed and has delayed sending them in. <b>Stay in place.</b>

## Student Worksheet: Game Cards

### **Review Award Packages**

Team reviewed the award letter with parents/guardians and matched the award to the cost of college budget the family created. They are excited that the award will pay for almost all of the costs without loans.

**Move Ahead Three Spaces.**

Team reviewed the award letter with parents/guardians and called the college because the information was confusing. They learned that most of their financial aid is in the form of loans directly to the student and other loans to the parents.

**Move Ahead Three Spaces.**

Team reviewed the award letter with parents/guardians and matched the award to the cost of the college budgets. They didn't understand the information about loans but checked them anyways.

**Stay In Place.**

Team members looked at the forms but didn't spend the time to really talk with their parents about what the award letter means.

**Go Back One Space.**

Team was busy with senior activities and didn't think the letter was important.

**Go Back Two Spaces.**

### **Accept Award Packages**

Team has talked with the financial aid office at the college/university and clearly understands they are receiving several different kinds of financial aid including a small subsidized student loan. All forms are in on time.

**Move Ahead Three Spaces.**

Team has talked with the financial aid office at the college/university and made the decisions to turn-down the student loans, accepting only the grants and work-study that were offered as part of the total package. All forms were in on time.

**Move Ahead Three Spaces.**

Team sent in the forms on time but still feels confused about the loans. They feel like the money will be helpful.

**Move Ahead One Space.**

Team looked at the forms but didn't send them in on time. Too busy.

**Move Back Two Spaces.**

Team didn't look at the forms thinking that filing the FAFSA was enough.

**Move Back Three Spaces.**