

COMPARING FINANCIAL AID AWARDS

CRUNCH SOME NUMBERS AND PLAN AHEAD

After you've received your financial aid awards, use this chart to make comparisons. Look at the type of aid on the award. If an award includes loans, determine how much you really need to borrow and what your monthly payments might be.

SCHOOL NAME			
A. Costs*			
Tuition & Fees			
Room & Board			
Books & Supplies			
Transportation			
Other Expenses			
TOTAL A			
B. Family Contribution			
Student Contribution			
Parent Contribution			
TOTAL B			
C. Grants			
Pell Grant			
FSEOG			
State Need Grant			
Scholarships			
Other Grants			
TOTAL C			
D. Work Study			
Federal Work-Study			
State Work-Study			
TOTAL D			
E. Loans			
Federal Perkins Loan			
Subsidized Stafford Loan			
Unsubsidized Stafford Loan			
PLUS Loan			
Other Loans			
TOTAL E			
TOTAL FINANCIAL AWARD (C+D+E)			
FINANCIAL NEED NOT COVERED BY FINANCIAL AID AWARD (A-[B+C+D+E])			

**Remember that the Cost of Attendance is determined by each college and contains estimates. If you figure out that your costs will be more or less than what the college determines, use those amounts in section A instead of the amounts published by the college so you can get a more accurate picture of your financial situation.*

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All award letters are different, but they should all provide the same type of information. Make sure you are comparing apples to apples by identifying common items on each award letter and asking yourself guiding questions to evaluate the contents of the award letter.

ANATOMY OF AN AWARD LETTER: Look for these things

- **Cost of attendance:** Sometimes called the “budget.” The amount the college estimates it will cost to for a year of enrollment. This cost includes tuition, fees and other necessities like books, food, housing, transportation and personal costs. The amount listed on the award letter is the college’s estimate. Students can make personal decisions about where they live, what they do and how they budget to lower their personal cost of attendance.
- **Estimated Family Contribution (EFC):** Sometimes called “resources.” The amount the FAFSA determines a family should be able to contribute out-of-pocket toward a student’s college education that year.
- **Need:** The difference between the cost of attendance and the EFC. This is the amount that financial aid officers try to match with award packages.
- **Award package:** A line-item breakdown of the different types of financial aid and amounts offered to the student.
- **Total award:** The sum of the different types of financial aid being offered to the student that year. Ideally, this amount equals the need.
- **Gap:** The difference between the cost of attendance and the total award or the unmet need. This indicates the amount not covered by financial aid that the family will have to pay out-of-pocket or secure in external funding to cover the cost of attendance. Ideally, this amount equals zero. Typically this amount equals the EFC.
- **Option to accept, reject or reduce:** The choices students have to control the aid they are offered. They may accept, reject or reduce each item. Each school may have a different method of confirming these decisions, but they are always options.

POINTS OF CONSIDERATION: Ask yourself these questions

- **How final is the package?** Is there anything outstanding that I need to submit or are any pieces contingent on anything? How might external scholarships or other factors affect the package offered?
- **What are the components of the package?** How much of the package is in scholarships, grants and work study vs. loans? Are any loans subsidized?
- **Are the items recurring?** Can I count on receiving certain aid year-after-year or is it a one-time thing? What might I have to do to continue to be eligible for recurring aid?
- **Does it meet my need?** If I accept this package, will I be able to continue schooling here? What personal choices can I make to lower my cost of attendance or avoid taking out as much in loans?
- **What do I need to do respond to this package?** How do I communicate if I want to accept, reject or reduce each item? What do I need to submit and by when?