

What Every NC High School Counselor Should Know About the Early FAFSA and Other Changes to the College Application Process

FAFSA Changes at a Glance:

In September 2015, President Obama announced a change in how and when students will complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The Class of 2017 is the first high school cohort impacted and there are two significant changes:

- 1) Families seeking federal aid for the 2017-2018 school year will be able to begin completing the FAFSA on October 1, 2016 (rather than January 1 2017).
- 2) In order to accommodate this earlier filing schedule, the FAFSA will collect income info from two years prior to the academic year for which the aid is intended (rather than the previous year). If a student seeks aid for the 2017-2018 school year they will use tax information from 2015.

This is exciting because it aligns the financial aid application process with the college admission application process. Counselors can utilize fall college access events to complete both admission and financial aid applications rather than having a push during College Application Week and then having to chase students down again to complete the FAFSA. Students will have earlier access to relatively accurate estimations of their financial aid eligibility. The hope is that they will apply to a wider range of colleges and make more financially informed decisions as a result. Families are able to use older tax information and won't have to worry about estimating their income and then changing it later. Many more families will be able to take advantage of the IRS data retrieval tool (which allows families to populate tax income questions on the FAFSA with answers from the pertinent tax return on file with the IRS).

Residency Changes at a Glance:

In North Carolina, these FAFSA changes coincide with a new, streamlined process for determining residency. Currently each individual college or university is charged with deciding if a student is a resident of North Carolina. Next year there will be a single state entity in charge of this. Students will answer questions online and receive confirmation of residency verification. Once the process is completed the student will be sent a residency certification number (RCN) through text and email. They can then provide this number to colleges as part of the application process. This process can be completed before, during or after submitting the college application. Students can get support in this process through the CFNC call center. This process will impact students applying for admission for the Spring 2017 semester and beyond. It will be available in late September 2016 on CFNC and at ncresidency.org.

What Counselors Should Do...

- Ensure that current juniors and their families receive information about the changes prior to leaving school for the summer so they are ready to roll in the fall.
- Schedule Financial Aid Nights for August or September and FAFSA Completion events in October/November.
- Think about how your school can maximize "Once and Done" events where students are encouraged to complete all parts of the application process (residency, admission and financial aid) at once. College Application Week events could be expanded to include FAFSA Completion.
- With the time you have freed up in the spring consider holding events to provide fit/match support that help them understand and compare the financial aid packages they have been offered.
- Attend SEAA or CFNC fall workshops to get additional information about the changes.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q** What will be the school counselor's responsibility for students completing residency determination?
- A** School counselors will have access to the link that students use to complete the form
- Q** Will College Application Week change as well?
- A** No, but you will be able to hold CAW and FAFSA completion events at the same time of year. CAW will be Nov 14th-18th, 2016.
- Q** Will there still be a FAFSA Day offered?
- A** Yes. School counselors will have a menu of choices to help with FAFSA completion but we want to encourage you to custom fit FAFSA completion events to your school and community. The financial aid community is ready to assist by coming to high schools, holding campus-based events, holding FAFSA Day, and participation in FINISH the FAFSA.
- Q** Will early FAFSA filing change when students receive their award packages?
- A** Some colleges will send out "estimated" award packages in December while others will send out award packages at the traditional time. It will be important to help students understand the difference between estimated aid packages and finalized offers of aid.
- Q** Will college admission deadlines change?
- A** While there may be some movement, the basic parameters will remain the same. No National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) member college may require a fall admission deadline prior to Oct 1st or require students to commit to attend prior to May 1st. This will ensure that the intent of the change will be honored and students will have more time to consider their options.

Changes to the CFNC College Application Process:

In addition to the FAFSA and Residency changes, CFNC has created an application hub to improve the experience of students applying to college through their website. The hub is designed to be used on any device which should make it easier for students trying to complete applications on their phones. They have also ramped up search features – students will find it easier to search by majors and there will be a google-powered campus search tool. Students will find updated campus profiles for all 110 NC colleges and universities. The new application system is scheduled to go live in August according to the following timeline:

August 19, 5:00 p.m.: current application system is taken offline. Students working on applications in the old system need to complete and submit applications prior to this date.

August 21: soft launch of new application system

August 22, 8:00 a.m.: new application system is officially live

Where can counselors go for more information?

Upcoming SEAA and CFNC Trainings

Meredith College	Thursday, October 6
Cape Fear CC	Friday, October 7
Queens University	Monday, October 10
East Carolina University	Tuesday, October 11
Guilford Technical CC	Tuesday, October 11
UNC Asheville	Monday, October 10

Register at CFNC.org later this summer.

For information, handouts and print materials about the Early FAFSA

National College Access Network –

<http://www.collegeaccess.org/EarlyFAFSAResources>

National Association of College Admission Counselors-

<http://www.nacacnet.org/issues-action/LegislativeNews/Pages/PPY.aspx>