

Best Practices: Aid Offers

Spring 2023

Aid Offers in the Spotlight

- GAO Report
- Media
- NASFAA Code of Conduct
 - Task Force
 - Consumer Testing

NASFAA Code of Conduct

3. Institutional financial aid offers and/or other institutionally provided materials shall include the following:

- Breakdown of estimated individual **Cost of Attendance** components, including which are **direct** (billed by the institution) costs vs. **indirect** (not billed by the institution) costs
- Clear identification and proper grouping of each type of aid offered indicating whether the aid is a **grant/scholarship**, **loan**, or **work program**
- Estimated **net price**
- Standard terminology and definitions, using NASFAA's **glossary of terms**
- Renewal requirements for each aid type being offered as well as next steps and financial aid office contact information

Paying For College Transparency Initiative

- Newly formed national task force
- Chaired by president emeritus of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Peter McPherson
- Will focus on creating a set of financial aid offer principles and standards to ensure students can easily understand how much a postsecondary education will cost and more readily compare aid offers from various institutions.
- Supported by ACE), NACAC) and NASFAA, and informed by financial aid, admissions, and enrollment managers from a diverse set of institutions.

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Paying For College Transparency Initiative

“College leaders agree that students need clear, accurate, and consistent information on aid offers, ” McPherson said. “The leadership of 10 associations of higher education have come together to find a way to achieve that goal.”

Aid Offer Issue Brief Takeaways

- Aid offers should be student-centric and transparent, using consistent terminology and clearly communicating all direct and indirect costs.
- Legislative efforts to bring greater clarity to financial aid offers are well-placed, while efforts aimed toward rigid standardization may miss the mark.
- Any attempts at modeling or standardizing elements and definitions of financial aid offers should be consumer-tested to ensure they achieve the intended results.

Standardization of Terms

- **Cost of Attendance:** The estimated total cost of attending an institution for one academic year.
 - Tuition and fees;
 - Books, course materials, supplies, and equipment (including the documented rental or purchase of a personal computer; see below);
 - Living expenses (including together both housing and food);
 - Transportation;
 - Miscellaneous personal expenses;
 - Federal student loan fees if the student is receiving federal loans of any kind (Title IV or otherwise); and
 - Professional licensure, certification, or a first professional credential costs if the academic program leads to a professional licensure, certification, or credential.

Standardization of Terms

- **Direct Costs:** Charges included in the Cost of Attendance that the student/family pays directly to the college.
- **Enrollment Status:** Academic workload (or course load), as defined by the institution, in which a student is enrolled for a defined academic period. This normally relates to the number of credit hours or clock hours taken by a student during a given academic period (e.g. full-time, three-quarter-time, half-time, less-than-half-time).
- **Expected Family Contribution (EFC):** An eligibility index that college financial aid staff use to determine how much financial aid you would receive if you were to attend their school. The EFC is calculated according to a formula specified in law and is based upon the information provided by the student and their family on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

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Standardization of Terms

- **Educational Loan:** A form of financial aid that must be repaid. Educational loans have varying fees, interest rates, repayment terms, and/or borrower protections.
 - **Federal Student Loan:** Federal funds made available to the student that must be paid back by the student. Students must complete Entrance Counseling and a Master Promissory Note (MPN) to receive these loans. Repayment begins six months after the student ceases to be enrolled at least half-time with options to delay payment available. To be eligible, the student must be enrolled at least half-time in an eligible program of study.
 - **Federal Direct Subsidized Student Loan:** Loan funds provided *to the student* by the U.S. Department of Education, through the school. Undergraduate students with financial need can qualify for a subsidized loan. The government pays the interest on the loan while the student remains enrolled at least half time and during certain periods when the government allows deferment of repayment. There are annual limits on the amounts that may be borrowed, which vary by the student's academic year in school and the student's dependent or independent status.
 - **Federal Direct Unsubsidized Student Loan:** Loan funds provided *to the student* by the U.S. Department of Education, through the school. Undergraduate students and graduate students regardless of their need, qualify for an unsubsidized loan, provided they have filed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Interest accrual begins immediately, and the student can choose to pay the interest while enrolled or upon entering repayment. There are annual limits on the amounts that may be borrowed, which vary by the student's academic year in school and the student's dependent or independent status.
 - **Federal Direct Graduate PLUS Loan:** Loan funds provided to *graduate students* by the U.S. Department of Education, through the school. This federal loan program allows graduate students with no adverse credit history to apply for a loan amount up to their Cost of Attendance each year, less any other financial aid received.

Standardization of Terms

- **Federal Direct Parent PLUS Loan (PLUS):** Loan funds provided *to the parents* of dependent undergraduate students by the U.S. Department of Education, through the school. This federal loan program allows parents with no adverse credit history to apply for a loan amount up to the **Cost of Attendance** each year, less any financial aid received by the dependent student. Repayment of principal and interest begins immediately once the loan is fully disbursed with some options to delay payment available.
- **Private Loan:** A student or parent loan from a commercial, state-affiliated or institutional lender used to pay for up to the annual **Cost of Attendance**, less any financial aid received. Private loans have varying interest rates, fees and repayment options and usually require the applicant to be creditworthy or have a creditworthy cosigner. Repayment generally begins immediately.
- **Family Financial Responsibility (FFR):** Many schools award institutional need-based scholarships and grants based upon a more comprehensive calculation of family financial circumstances using information provided on the CSS PROFILE or the institution's own financial aid form. This can result in a higher (or lower) figure than the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) might indicate with its **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** estimate.

Standardization of Terms

- **Federal Pell Grant:** A federal grant provided by the federal government to undergraduate students who demonstrate exceptional financial need and have an **EFC** below a certain threshold established by the federal government. The Pell Grant award amount is prorated based on **Enrollment Status**.
- **Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG):** A federal grant awarded by the institution to qualified undergraduate students who demonstrate exceptional financial need. Priority is given to Federal Pell Grant recipients.
- **Federal Work-Study (FWS):** A federal program offered and administered by the institution that provides opportunity for part-time employment to students with financial need to help pay their educational expenses. Students are responsible for finding qualified employment. Funds are paid out through a paycheck, as earned.

Standardization of Terms

- **Gift Aid:** Funds awarded to the student that do not have to be repaid, unless the student fails to meet certain criteria, such as a service requirement that is specified as a condition of the gift aid or not completing the period for which the aid was awarded. Gift aid can include awards with titles such as grants, scholarships, remissions, awards, waivers, etc. Gift aid can be awarded based upon many factors, including (but not limited to) financial need, academic excellence, athletic, musical, and/or theatrical talent, affiliation with various groups, and/or career aspirations.
- **Grant:** Gift Aid that is typically based on financial need.

Standardization of Terms

- **Income Share Agreement (ISAs):** A student's contract with their institution or a private entity to pay a percentage of their future earnings for a fixed period after graduation in exchange for funds to pay for their education while enrolled.
- **Indirect Costs:** Estimated expenses in the COA that are not paid directly to the institution.
- **Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant (IASG):** A federal grant to qualifying students with a parent or guardian who died as a result of U.S. military service in Iraq or Afghanistan after September 11, 2001. If a student is eligible for a Federal Pell Grant, he or she cannot receive an IASG.

Standardization of Terms

- **Need:** The student's COA minus their EFC , or Family Financial Responsibility (if applicable).
- **Net Price:** Amount of direct and indirect costs remaining after all Gift Aid is applied. Net price can be covered through a variety of sources, including savings, income, and education loans.
- **Program Level:** Level of the degree-granting program in which a student is enrolled. Program levels may include: undergraduate (students seeking an associate degree, an undergraduate certificate, or a baccalaureate degree); post-baccalaureate (such as teacher certification); or graduate (students working on a master's degree, graduate certificate, doctorate, or professional degree).

Standardization of Terms

- **Scholarship:** Gift Aid that is typically based on merit, such as, academic excellence, talent, affiliation with various groups, or career aspirations or a combination of merit and need.
- **Self-help:** An institution's expectation that a student contribute toward their education using a combination of loans, student employment such as Federal Work-Study, and/or summer savings.
- **Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants:** Federal grants for undergraduate and graduate students, awarded in exchange for specific future teaching service in designated high-need fields and low-income elementary and secondary schools. If a student does not complete the required teaching service, the grant becomes a Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan that must be repaid.

Standardization of Terms

- **Unmet Need:** The student's COA, minus their EFC or Family Financial Responsibility (if applicable), less any need-based aid received, such as Gift Aid, Federal Work-Study or Federal Direct Subsidized Loans.
- **Verification:** A federally mandated process to confirm the accuracy of data provided by selected applicants on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). To complete the verification process, the student, their parent(s), or spouse, if applicable, are required to provide certain documents to the school for review. If the documentation the student provides the institution doesn't match what was reported on the FAFSA, verification can result in changes to the student's financial aid eligibility, and/or financial aid offers.

Graduate Student Offer Example

SAMPLE UNIVERSITY RESOURCES GRADUATE STUDENT AID OFFER MODEL

Student Name
Student Address
Student City, State, Zip
Student ID

Estimated Annual Cost of Attendance (COA)

	Direct Costs		Indirect Costs
Tuition	\$32,210	Housing	\$8,491
Activity & Tech Fee	\$1,615	Books & Supplies	\$1,357
		Transportation	\$1,735
		Miscellaneous Expenses	\$2,970
Total Direct Costs	\$33,825	Total Indirect Costs	\$14,553
Total Estimated Cost of Attendance	\$48,378		

Scholarships and Grants

Aid Type	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Annual
Graduate Incentive Award	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$15,000
Total Scholarships & Grants	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$15,000

Estimated net cost (cost of attendance less scholarships and grants) for the 2022-2023 award year based on your anticipated full-time enrollment: **\$33,378**

Loans & Work-Study (Self-Help Aid)

Aid Type	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Annual
Federal Work-Study*	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$3,000
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan**	\$10,250	\$10,250	\$20,500
Total Aid Offered	\$11,750	\$11,750	\$23,500

*Federal work-study funds are contingent upon finding employment. Earnings are paid out bi-weekly.

**Federal loans are funds that can be applied toward your cost of attendance and must be repaid. You must accept or decline your loan eligibility by logging into your student portal.

Estimated outstanding costs not covered by scholarships, grants, loans and work-study: **\$9,878**

Other Financing Options

Federal Graduate PLUS Loan
Contingent upon application approval. Your debt-to-income ratio, credit score, and employment status are not taken into consideration; however, adverse credit typically results in a PLUS loan denial.

Private Student Loan
Contingent upon application approval from a bank, credit union, non-profit or state-based education finance organizations or online lender.

Payment Plan
Sample University offers a 3-Pay tuition payment plan for those students who need to spread their tuition and fees across the semester.

Outside Scholarships
You may be eligible for outside scholarships from businesses or organizations in your local community with which you have affiliations. You should never have to pay for a scholarship search. You should not apply for a scholarship that charges an application fee.

For more information on these additional funding options please visit: www.financialaid.edu

Next Steps

- **Accept or Decline** all aid offered in the finances section of your student portal.
- **Provide required documents** for verification if applicable.

Sample University is committed to helping you navigate the financial aid process. Please contact our helpful, experienced staff in the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships for help understanding your Financial Aid Offer.

We look forward to serving you at Sample University and wish you the best in your academic endeavors. Please visit www.sample.edu/admitted for other important next steps.

Dependent Student Offer Example

SAMPLE UNIVERSITY RESOURCES DEPENDENT STUDENT AID OFFER MODEL

Student Name
Student Address
Student City, State, Zip
Student ID

Estimated Annual Cost of Attendance (COA)

	Direct Costs		Indirect Costs
Tuition	\$15,915	Books & Supplies	\$820
Activity & Tech Fee	\$1,815	Transportation	\$1,735
Room Fee	\$6,510	Miscellaneous Expenses	\$921
Meal Plan	\$4,000		
Total Direct Costs	\$28,040	Total Indirect Costs	\$3,476
Total Estimated Cost of Attendance	\$31,516		

Scholarships and Grants

Aid Type	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Annual
Federal Pell Grant	\$3,248	\$3,247	\$6,495
Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant	\$300	\$300	\$600
State Grant	\$450	\$450	\$900
Merit Based Scholarship	\$5,500	\$5,500	\$11,000
Institutional Scholarship	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$3,000
Total Scholarships & Grants	\$10,998	\$10,997	\$21,995

Your estimated net cost (cost of attendance less scholarships and grants):

This is based on your zero (0) Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and anticipated full-time (12 credit hours per semester) enrollment.

\$9,521

Loans & Work-Study (Self-Help Aid)

Aid Type	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Annual
Federal Work-Study*	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$3,000
Federal Direct Subsidized Loan**	\$1,750	\$1,750	\$3,500
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan**	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000
Total Aid Offered	\$4,250	\$4,250	\$8,500

*Federal work-study funds are contingent upon finding employment. Earnings are paid out bi-weekly.

**Federal loans are funds that can be applied toward your cost of attendance and must be repaid. You must accept or decline your loan eligibility by logging into your student portal.

Estimated outstanding costs not covered by scholarships, grants, loans and work-study:

\$1,021

Other Financing Options

Federal Parent PLUS Loan

Contingent upon parent application approval. Parent must not have adverse credit history. Must be repaid by parent.

Private Student Loan

Contingent upon application approval from a bank, credit union, non-profit or state-based education finance organizations or online lender.

Payment Plan

Sample University offers a 3-Pay tuition payment plan for those students who need to spread their tuition and fees across the semester.

Outside Scholarships

Scholarships are available from many sources including high schools, places of worship, civic groups, and parents' employers. We recommend that you check with your high school guidance counselor, the reference section of your library, and organizations in your hometown. Receipt of outside scholarships could affect your eligibility for certain aid types.

For more information on these additional funding options please visit: www.financialaid.edu

Next Steps

- **Accept or Decline** all aid offered in the finances section of your student portal.
- **Provide required documents** for verification if applicable.

Sample University is committed to helping you navigate the financial aid process. Please contact our helpful, experienced staff in the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships for help understanding your Financial Aid Offer.

We look forward to serving you at Sample University and wish you the best in your academic endeavors. Please visit www.sample.edu/admitted for other important next steps.

Gen 21-70 : Issuing Financial Aid Offers–What Institutions Should Include and Avoid

- **Avoid calling your financial aid offer an “award” and avoid calling it a “letter.”**
- **Always include cost of attendance in a financial aid offer.**
- **Break down cost of attendance in ways that help students understand costs.**
- **List grants and scholarship aid, loans, and Federal Work-Study separately.**
- **Explain and calculate the estimated net cost for students in the financial aid offer.**
 - Students should be able to easily understand how the calculation was made, and institutions should provide this standard estimate of students’ out-of-pocket and debt-financed costs.

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Issuing Financial Aid Offers–What Institutions Should Include and Avoid

- **Separate out other options for repaying the net cost.**
 - Provide a list of other options available to students, which may include tuition payment plans; state, institutional, or private loans; or federal Parent PLUS loans, for which a dependent student's parents may apply, among other possible options.
 - Note that students need to separately research the terms and conditions of each.
- **Describe critical next steps in the financial aid offer.**

College Financing Plan

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/guid/aid-offer/index.html>

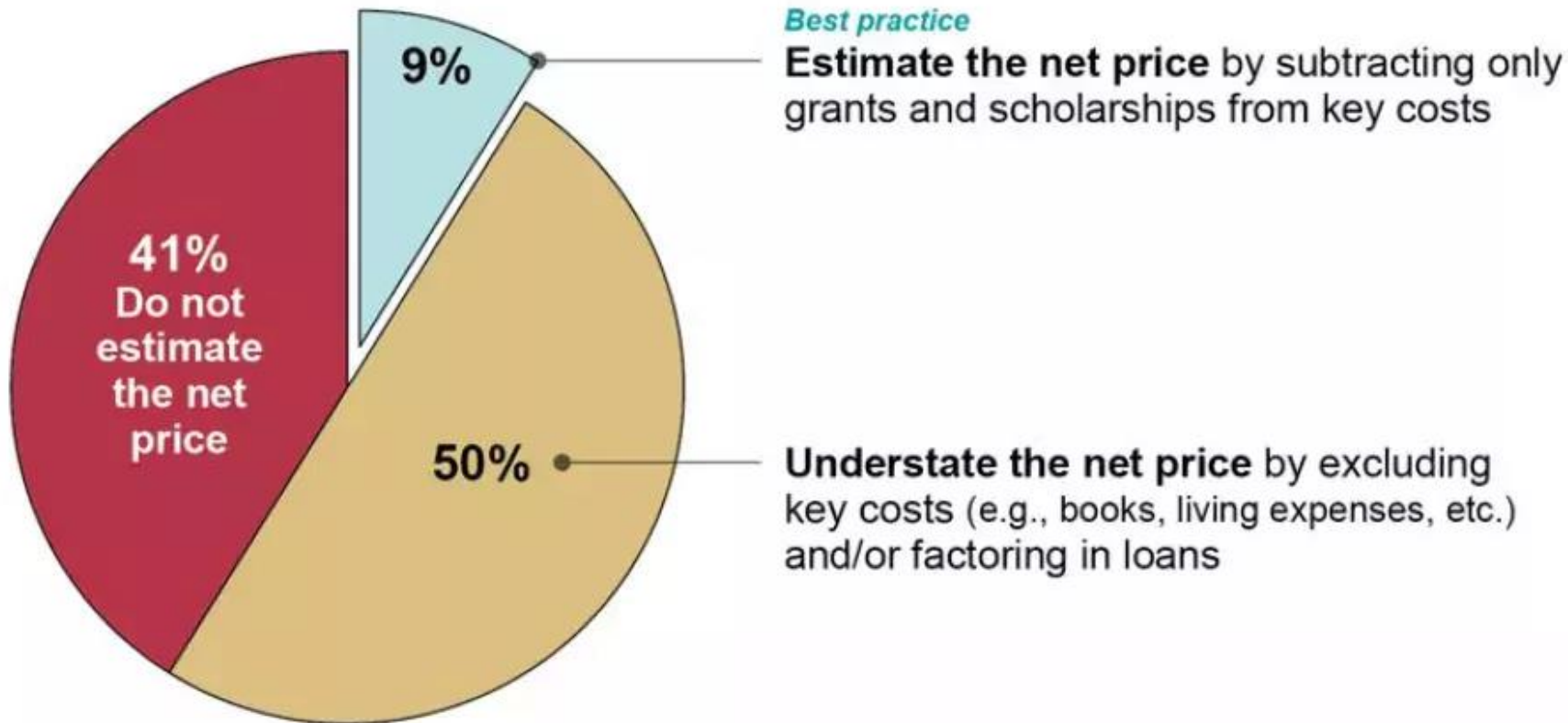
Student name/ identifier; date issued (right side)	University of the United States (UUS) MM / DD / YYYY Undergraduate College Financing Plan Student Name, Identifier																					
Individual student's cost of attendance	Total Cost of Attendance 2023-2024 <table><thead><tr><th></th><th>On Campus Residence</th><th>Off Campus Residence</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Tuition and fees</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Housing and meals</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Books and supplies</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Transportation</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Other education costs</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td><td>\$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Estimated Cost of Attendance</td><td>\$X,XXXX / yr</td><td>\$X,XXXX / yr</td></tr></tbody></table>		On Campus Residence	Off Campus Residence	Tuition and fees	\$X,XXXX	\$X,XXXX	Housing and meals	\$X,XXXX	\$X,XXXX	Books and supplies	\$X,XXXX	\$X,XXXX	Transportation	\$X,XXXX	\$X,XXXX	Other education costs	\$X,XXXX	\$X,XXXX	Estimated Cost of Attendance	\$X,XXXX / yr	\$X,XXXX / yr
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Expected Family Contribution based on FAFSA and Institutional Methodology	Expected Family Contribution <table><tbody><tr><td>Based on FAFSA As calculated by the institution using information reported on the FAFSA or to your institution.</td><td>X,XXXX / yr</td></tr><tr><td>Based on Institutional Methodology Used by most private institutions in addition to FAFSA.</td><td>X,XXXX / yr</td></tr></tbody></table>	Based on FAFSA As calculated by the institution using information reported on the FAFSA or to your institution.	X,XXXX / yr	Based on Institutional Methodology Used by most private institutions in addition to FAFSA.	X,XXXX / yr																	
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	Scholarship and Grant Options Scholarships and Grants are considered "Gift" aid - no repayment is needed. <table><thead><tr><th>Scholarships</th><th>Grants</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Merit-Based Scholarships</td><td>Need-Based Grant Aid</td></tr><tr><td>Scholarships from your school \$X,XXXX</td><td>Federal Pell Grants \$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Scholarships from your state \$X,XXXX</td><td>Institutional Grants \$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Other scholarships \$X,XXXX</td><td>State Grants \$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Employer Paid Tuition Benefits \$X,XXXX</td><td>Other forms of grant aid \$X,XXXX</td></tr><tr><td>Total Scholarships \$X,XXXX / yr</td><td>Total Grants \$X,XXXX / yr</td></tr></tbody></table>	Scholarships	Grants	Merit-Based Scholarships	Need-Based Grant Aid	Scholarships from your school \$X,XXXX	Federal Pell Grants \$X,XXXX	Scholarships from your state \$X,XXXX	Institutional Grants \$X,XXXX	Other scholarships \$X,XXXX	State Grants \$X,XXXX	Employer Paid Tuition Benefits \$X,XXXX	Other forms of grant aid \$X,XXXX	Total Scholarships \$X,XXXX / yr	Total Grants \$X,XXXX / yr							
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NET PRICE	College Costs You Will Be Required to Pay <table><tbody><tr><td>Net Price To You (Total cost of attendance minus total grants and total scholarships)</td><td>\$X,XXXX / yr</td></tr></tbody></table>	Net Price To You (Total cost of attendance minus total grants and total scholarships)	\$X,XXXX / yr																			
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	Loan and Work Options to Pay the Net Price to You You must repay loans, plus interest and fees. <table><thead><tr><th>Loan Options*</th><th>Work Options</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Federal Direct Subsidized Loan (x.xx% interest rate) (x.xx% origination fee) \$X,XXXX / yr</td><td>Work-study \$X,XXXX / yr</td></tr><tr><td>Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan (x.xx% interest rate) (x.xx% origination fee) \$X,XXXX / yr</td><td>Hours Per Week (estimated) XX / wk</td></tr><tr><td>Total Loan Options \$X,XXXX / yr</td><td>Other Campus Job \$X,XXXX / yr</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>Total Work \$X,XXXX / yr</td></tr></tbody></table>	Loan Options*	Work Options	Federal Direct Subsidized Loan (x.xx% interest rate) (x.xx% origination fee) \$X,XXXX / yr	Work-study \$X,XXXX / yr	Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan (x.xx% interest rate) (x.xx% origination fee) \$X,XXXX / yr	Hours Per Week (estimated) XX / wk	Total Loan Options \$X,XXXX / yr	Other Campus Job \$X,XXXX / yr		Total Work \$X,XXXX / yr											
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	Total Work \$X,XXXX / yr																					
Federal loan amounts you are eligible for	For More Information University of the United States (UUS) Financial Aid Office 123 Main Street Anytown, ST 12345 Telephone: (123) 456-7890 E-mail: financialaid@uus.edu																					
	* Loan Amounts Note that the amounts listed are the maximum available to you. To learn about loan repayment choices and calculate your Federal Loan monthly payment, go to: https://studentaid.gov/h/manage-loans .																					
	Other Options You may have other options to repay the remaining costs. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Tuition payment plan offered by the institutionParent PLUS loans, which your parent can apply forNon-Federal Private education loan, which you or your parent can apply for after passing a credit checkOther Military or National Service Benefits																					
	Customized Information from UUS																					

The sum of each grant sub-category appears here; campus-based FSEOG and TEACH Grants would appear here under "Institutional Grants"

Aid awarded by school but earned through work

School contact details for more information and next steps

GAO Findings



Source: GAO analysis of school year 2021-22 aid offers from a nationally representative sample of colleges. | GAO-23-104708

Latest from the GAO

- According to best practices, colleges should also let students know:
- The differences between gift aid, loans, and work-study,
- That some loans are for parents, not students. This type of loan has fewer protections and requires a credit check,
- The conditions for keeping a scholarship or grant,
- The next steps to take to accept, decline, or adjust the aid in the offer.

What Financial Aid Offers Don't Tell You About the Cost of College. Published April 4, 2023

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What would ChatGPT say about Aid Offers?

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ChatGPT Best Practices

- Needs assessment: Conduct a thorough needs assessment to identify the specific needs of the affected population. This will ensure that aid is targeted to the most vulnerable and that the aid offered is appropriate for their needs.
- Transparency: Be transparent about the aid being offered. Provide clear and concise information about the type of aid, the quantity, and the duration of the aid. This will help build trust with the affected population and ensure that aid is distributed fairly.
- Accountability: Set up a system to monitor the distribution of aid to ensure that it reaches the intended recipients. This can be done through regular reporting and feedback mechanisms from the affected population.
- Partnership: Work in partnership with local organizations and communities to ensure that aid is culturally appropriate and meets the specific needs of the affected population.

ChatGPT Best Practices

- **Sustainability:** Ensure that aid is sustainable and does not create dependence on aid. This can be done by providing aid that supports long-term development, such as education and skills training.
- **Respect for dignity:** Ensure that aid is provided in a way that respects the dignity of the affected population. This means providing aid in a way that preserves their privacy, autonomy, and sense of agency.
- **Flexibility:** Be flexible in the delivery of aid to respond to changing circumstances and needs. This will ensure that aid remains relevant and effective in addressing the needs of the affected population.

By following these best practices, aid providers can ensure that their aid is effective, efficient, and meets the needs of the affected population.

Questions?

