

# What is included in the Cost of College?

College costs include more than tuition and room and board. Here are common costs:

Tuition	The cost of taking courses. Course costs vary by school.
Room and board	Lodging and food costs vary by school.
Books and school supplies	Books can be expensive. School supplies include book bags; notebooks; pens and pencils; paper and computer paper; and desk accessories such as folders, trays, and pen holders.
Fees	Fees depend upon your school. Examples include activity fees and parking fees. Schools can provide a list of fees.
Equipment and room materials	This category might include a computer and printer; reading lamps; a microwave and refrigerator; and sheets, towels, etc.
Travel and miscellaneous expenses	If you commute to school, include transportation costs. If you live on campus, include travel during school breaks. You may also want to include clothing and mobile phone costs.

## Make sure colleges and career schools give you a clear statement of their tuition and fees.

### How can I lower the cost of college?

- You may be able to get school credit based on your knowledge or life experiences, and you can manage your course work to reduce costs.
  - Ask your school whether it's possible to "test out of" any classes. If you don't take a class, you may not have to pay for the credits.
  - Some colleges give credit for life experiences, thereby reducing the number of credits needed for graduation.
  - Most schools charge a set price for a specific number of credits taken in a semester. If academically possible, take the maximum number of credits allowed. This strategy reduces the amount of time needed to graduate.
  - Some schools offer combined degree programs or three-year programs that allow you to take all of the courses needed for graduation in three years, instead of four. If you can graduate in three years, you don't have to pay a whole year's educational expenses.
  - Take College Credit Plus classes in high school from the college you plan to attend after high school, if possible.
- Colleges and career schools may offer discounts on tuition if
  - you are a child of an alumnus or alumna (i.e., if your parent went to the school);
  - more than one family member is enrolled at the school;
  - you are an adult student;
  - your family's main wage earner is unemployed; or
  - you or a member of your family works at the school.
- Housing costs can add up. Here are some tips for reducing your housing costs:
  - If you go to a college or career school near home, consider living with your parents or other family.
  - If you live off-campus, consider sharing a house or apartment with multiple housemates to cut down the cost of rent, and carpool to save on gas and parking.
  - Most colleges and universities have resident advisor programs that offer reduced tuition or reduced room and board costs if you work in a residence hall.
  - Most young adults can stay on their parents' family health insurance plan until they turn 26, even if they are married or still living with their parents.
  - You can work part-time to pay part of your costs. Be sure your work and school schedules don't conflict and that you have enough time for studying. Here are a couple of options:
    - The [Federal Work-Study Program](#) provides an opportunity to earn money while going to school. Ask schools if they participate in the program.
    - Cooperative education programs allow students to alternate between working full-time and studying full-time.
    - Most schools have placement offices that help students find employment and personnel offices that hire students to work on campus.
- Taking small steps can add up. For example, you can lower the cost of textbooks if you buy used books or rent textbooks (if you won't need the books once you finish the class).

## How can I compare the costs of colleges?

You can find information about whether the cost of a college is low, medium, or high by using the [College Scorecard](#). Keep in mind that a higher-priced school might have more financial aid available to help you pay for your education, so take a look at the school's [net price](#) if you want an idea of how much it might cost you after financial aid is taken into account.

## FAFSA4Caster

[FAFSA4caster](#) gives you a free early estimate of your eligibility for **federal student aid**. This information helps families plan ahead for college. You must use the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA®\) form](#) to apply for aid once you've decided to apply for admission and attend college.

## Who should use FAFSA4caster?

[FAFSA4caster](#) is for anyone who is not yet ready to submit a FAFSA form—it's recommended for high school juniors, and even as early as middle school. Parents of younger students can use [FAFSA4caster](#) to receive early estimates, create scenarios based on future earnings, and then establish college funding strategies. Adult students also can use [FAFSA4caster](#) to get an idea of what aid they might receive.

## How do I use FAFSA4caster?

In [FAFSA4caster](#), you answer financial and other questions that are used to estimate your federal student aid eligibility. You may be able to answer most of the questions easily, but some of the questions may ask you to reference your personal records (for instance, your federal tax information or your bank statements). Be sure to answer all the questions on [FAFSA4caster](#), even if you have to estimate or guess.

## What information does FAFSA4caster provide?

When you submit FAFSA4caster, the screen displays a worksheet to help you determine the net cost of attending your chosen school. Here's what you can expect to see on the worksheet:

- At the top of the page, you can enter the school's cost of attendance (there is a link to the *College Scorecard* in case you need to look up the cost).
- Next, a number of sources of college funding are listed. FAFSA4caster indicates your estimated **Federal Pell Grant** amount (if any), **Federal Work-Study** amount (based on the average nationally), and maximum **Direct Subsidized Loan** and **Direct Unsubsidized Loan** eligibility.
- There are fields where you can fill in the amounts of state and college aid and private scholarships you expect (or hope) to get.
- Once you select "Calculate," FAFSA4caster summarizes the cost, the total aid entered, and the difference (the net cost of attending college). Your estimated **Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** also appears. You can compare schools by changing the cost of attendance, deleting **state aid** if you will be an **out-of-state** student at a particular school, amending the amount of aid available from the school, and so on.

*\*This flyer adapted from [www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)*