

# LAMORINDA WEEKLY

[Home](#) | [Read Online](#) | [Archive](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

[printer friendly](#)

[download pdf](#)

Published January 7th, 2009

## **Paying for College in Hard Economic Times**

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

The economic downturn is adding stress to what is already an anxious time for seniors applying to college. Since stress often leads to procrastination, I urge you to move quickly and meet all financial aid deadlines. Most aid is distributed on a first come first serve basis, so early is better. Let's start with some basics.

Financial aid is any grant, scholarship, loan, or paid employment offered to help you meet college expenses. Financial aid is provided by various sources such as federal and state agencies, colleges, foundations and corporations. Grants are funds that are not repaid; loans must be repaid. Student loan interest rates and repayment terms vary by program. Employment (work-study) is based on an hourly rate for work performed. A Financial Aid Package is a combination of different types of aid combined to meet your financial need.

Know the forms. FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The federal government uses it to determine eligibility for financial aid (including grants, scholarships, work-study, loans, etc.). All colleges require this form, and it is best to file the FAFSA online.

To start the financial aid process and file online you must get a PIN which allows you to sign electronically. You will need two PIN numbers (one for you and one for your parent/guardian). Apply for a PIN at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov). Save these pin numbers as you will need them each year you are in college to apply for financial aid. Next, complete a FAFSA online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). Parents and students should try to complete their income taxes and file a FAFSA as close as possible to February 1. If this is impossible, use estimated income to complete the FAFSA. You will need to update these estimates with actual income once your tax returns are completed.

Be certain to answer all questions and list the colleges you are considering. You should have already filed applications to these schools. However, do not wait until you receive responses regarding admission, or all available aid may be gone. "Financial Aid Award Letters" are only sent to admitted students.

Be sure to save a copy of your FAFSA. After you submit it, you will be given a confirmation number. Save this as well. Watch for your SAR (Student Aid Report) to arrive a few weeks later. Review the SAR and make corrections and updates if needed.

The California priority deadline is March 2. The deadlines for your state or schools may be different and you may be required to complete additional forms (for example, Cal Grant GPA Verification form for California students). Make sure to check deadlines for specific colleges you are applying to in addition to noting state deadlines.

CSS (College Scholarship Service) PROFILE is a financial aid form that some private colleges require. PROFILE asks additional questions in order to get a more detailed picture of family finances. Students register online for the PROFILE service, then a customized PROFILE form is completed online and submitted to a central processor. The financial information is then sent to colleges listed in your account. Register for PROFILE online at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) as soon as you know what schools you will apply to. After registering for PROFILE, you will receive a personalized PROFILE form to submit online, usually by February 1st.

Note: Some colleges require additional forms. Consult each college's instructions to verify the forms required and deadlines.

A few thoughts are important to bear in mind for the Class of 2009.

- Many private school application deadlines are in mid-January, so it is too early to say how the tough financial climate will affect where students apply, what aid will be offered and where students will ultimately choose to enroll.

- Public colleges face a state budget crisis and private institutions face declines in income from endowments and reduced research funding. As a result, many counselors report that students are applying to more schools than usual and having more public schools in the mix. This is a sound strategy.

- Undoubtedly, most families will review offers of admission, financial aid packages and their own resources with great care. Families with more economic strife, such as job loss, will likely turn to public schools; this includes community colleges located closer to home.

- Continue to assess colleges on the basis of fit-how well the academic and social climate matches your interests and needs. This investment will shape your future for many years to come. Shopping for a bargain at the expense of fit may be more costly in the long run.

On a positive note, this is a great time to get educated about financial aid.

Financial aid should never be an afterthought. As you become more acquainted with the process, you will be better positioned to take advantage of the aid that is available. As the economy improves, this will prove to be an asset that helps you better manage the costs of your college education.

Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is a certified college advisor who lives and works in Lafayette. Dr. LaScala draws on 20 years of higher education experience to help guide and support the college admissions process for students and their families. She has 3 children-one a graduate of Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo), one a sophomore at MIT and the youngest, a junior in high school. Contact Dr. LaScala at (925) 891-4491 or [elizabeth@doingcollege.com](mailto:elizabeth@doingcollege.com).

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[Home](#) | [Read Online](#) | [Archive](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

[back to top](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA