

[https://richmond.com/zzstyling/view-oped-sig/navigate-fafsa-delays-financial-aid-admissions/article\\_3ea341b0-fa7d-11ee-b911-6393742116da.html](https://richmond.com/zzstyling/view-oped-sig/navigate-fafsa-delays-financial-aid-admissions/article_3ea341b0-fa7d-11ee-b911-6393742116da.html)

TOPICAL

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

## Commentary: FAFSA changes are stressing college students. Here's how to navigate

By BRENDA POGGENDORF AND JASON FERGUSON

Apr 17, 2024



Students walk through Virginia Commonwealth University's Monroe campus in March 2021.

DANIEL SANGJIB MIN, TIMES-DISPATCH

---

By BRENDA POGGENDORF AND JASON FERGUSON

**V**irginia's college-bound high school seniors and families each spring decide which college or university to call home for the next four years. Typically, students choose between in-state or out-of-state and whether to attend a large public university or a small nonprofit private college. While this selection process is complex enough for a high school senior, in 2024 prospective students and families are also **experiencing new concerns about affordability** brought on by complications from the latest, so-called "better FAFSA," which stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The admissions process naturally combines excitement with anxiety and even some celebration or disappointment, but the federal government should not make it more difficult.

Please make no mistake: As career admissions officers, we applaud Congress' policy initiative to streamline FAFSA. With fewer complicated questions and a new calculation called the Student Aid Index (SAI), millions more students, including first-generation students and those from lower incomes, will qualify for federal aid and loans and access greater social mobility through higher education. However, when the federal Department of Education revised the FAFSA form following the passage of the 2020 FAFSA



Brenda Poggendorf

Simplification Act, the result was a delayed application unavailable until Dec. 31, 2023. Subsequent delays and unanticipated technology snafus meant that colleges and universities only now started to receive applicant financial information, causing a rush to assemble competitive aid packages for timely and informed decision-making.

---

**People are also reading...**

- 1 2 charged in fire at Carytown Burgers & Fries Lakeside**
  - 2 Youngkin appoints new leaders at key government agencies**
  - 3 Richmond School Board member Jonathan Young resigns after 'awkward' interaction with student**
  - 4 Ukrop's congratulates Mama J's on fried chicken bracket win**
- 

In prior years, students filed the FAFSA as early as October, and colleges and universities sent financial aid award notifications in late fall. Once spring arrived, students compared each college's award to discern the best "financial fit" among other decision-making factors. Many students have not and may not receive financial aid award notifications until later this month or even into May. Those of us who have long worked in the college admissions and financial aid field expect that every year will



Jason Ferguson

bring new challenges, so we work to incorporate flexibility into processes. Still, this "improved" application delivery has left colleges, universities and families in limbo.

While neither public nor nonprofit private institutions created the current predicament, admissions and financial aid offices are working overtime to help bring this cycle to a successful conclusion for students to make the best financial choice and the best match for their interests, talents and aspirations.

What can students and families do while waiting for financial aid awards? If one has not filed the FAFSA, do it as soon as possible, then use this time to visit colleges, even a second time. To ease anxieties, Virginia's public and nonprofit private institutions are committed to transparency and communication during these trying times,

including timely updates and resources to help students and families navigate the process with as much confidence as possible. So stay connected with the colleges still under consideration, and watch websites, emails and texts for updates on how to navigate the aid process best and learn the timelines. Many institutions offer flexibility around the May 1 deposit deadline to ease anxieties.



In August, incoming freshman move in before the semester begins at Virginia Commonwealth University. Last fall, VCU welcomed more than 4,500 first-year students.

Daniel Sangjib Min, TIMES-DISPATCH

Meanwhile, our institutions are preparing financial aid packages to produce offers for thousands of students with a more compressed schedule. This task would normally occur over months, but now must be ready in a few weeks. We must also complete the financial aid awarding process for all returning students before billing occurs. Applicants will remain the top priority over the coming weeks, and soon, everyone

will have a campus family in the fall, along with a roommate and residence hall assignment, faculty advising pairings, first-year course offerings, and orientation program schedules.

To students and parents dealing with FAFSA delays and feeling like everything is falling apart, please know that we in colleges and universities have been through tough times and have always made it through.

We encourage you to lean on the available support systems. Students and families do not have to endure this alone, but patience is vital. Soon, financial aid offers will be sent to emails and mailboxes. We hope families and schools can be understanding and kind to each other. Despite the challenges of FAFSA, Virginia colleges and universities are working hard to help every student find the best college for them.

---

**Saving for your kids' college education? Everything you need to know about 529 plans**

**Saving for your kids' college education? Everything you need to**