

# DE COLLEGIO

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## **A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...**

Last year, the Federal Government changed the rules about applying for financial aid. This threw the galactic college counselors into a tailspin.

Up until then, the government used prior year tax information and so the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) could not be filed until the tax/calendar year was complete (i.e., for the class of 2018, that would be 2017).

In a sweeping move, the government now requires the use of Prior-Prior year tax information (i.e. 2016 tax/calendar year for the class of 2018). This allows families to have more complete tax information sooner and to link their FAFSA with their federal tax returns.

And the galactic college counselors as part of their alliance are pushing their financial aid newsletters and information nights earlier.

## **DINAR WARS**

### ***Episode I: The Phantom Money***

At a time when you are (hopefully) focused on the application and essay for admission, there is at the same time the need to gather the information to help make college affordable. In addition to the FAFSA – which is in the

next “episode” – you may want to consider applying for independent scholarships.

We have posted on our web site a list of several independent scholarship opportunities, which is in no way exhaustive. There are so many that I don't know what to do with them. There are thousands of scholarships for which you may be eligible, but are merely unaware.

If you do your own scholarship search, DO NOT PAY FOR IT! Naviance has a free scholarship search, plus there are plenty of other free scholarship search engines online, such as [fastweb.com](http://fastweb.com), [meritaid.com](http://meritaid.com) or [collegeboard.org](http://collegeboard.org). No search that you pay for will give you better results than free searches of this type. And if you find that is not in our list, let me know so we can add it.

While most colleges will automatically consider you for merit scholarships when you apply for admission, you should also check with the schools to which you apply to see if there are any special scholarships, or any forms, nominations or interviews required for consideration for their standard scholarships. They may also have endowed scholarships for upperclass students who meet certain criteria.

## **DINAR WARS**

### **Episode II: Attack of the Loans**

If you plan to apply for financial aid, nearly all colleges require that you submit the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**. This form is available online at <http://www.fafsa.gov> (not *fafsa.com*). You may file the form anytime beginning October 1 (rather than January 1 as in prior years), and most schools have a priority deadline. Typically this has been somewhere around February 1-15, but that may change with the earlier filing capability. Check with the individual admissions offices.

Fill out the form completely, and **estimate if necessary!** It is better to meet the deadline and make changes later than to miss the deadline and potentially miss out on financial aid. If the form is incomplete, that will also delay the processing of the FAFSA. However, the ability to populate the form with last year's tax information should minimize the need to estimate.

Before filling out the FAFSA, students and parents must first register for a PIN, which will serve as your electronic signature. This PIN will stay with you throughout the financial aid process through college, and it is available at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov).

Schools may also require that you fill out either their own financial aid supplement or the **College Scholarship Services (CSS) Profile**. If they give you a choice between the two, use the college's form. It will not only speed up processing, but it will save you money. There is a non-refundable application fee for the

Profile, as well as a fee for each school to which you send the information. The CSS Profile will likewise require prior year information.

Note that you can only fill out the Profile online at <http://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile>.

All colleges should now have cost of attendance estimators on their web sites as well. Even if you do not think that you will be eligible for need-based aid, I would still encourage you to apply. The FAFSA is free, and you may be pleasantly surprised. In the worst-case scenario, it will open up to the doors to several low-interest loans.

You may or may not want to take out loans. That is a decision that you should discuss with your family. Keep in mind, though, that college *is* an investment, and higher average salaries usually correspond with higher degrees.

## **DINAR WARS**

### **Episode III: Revenge of the Sith**

I really couldn't come up with a pun to relate to college guidance for this one. But since I should write *something*...

While there are a lot of positives that come from the change in the financial aid processing timeline, there will be some challenges as well, mostly from the college side. So I expect there may be some growing pains as colleges try to figure out how to solve some of these challenges. These include:

Even though federal financial aid reports are available sooner, colleges may not be able to put together a

financial aid package sooner. Some of the reasons for this are that they may not have set their tuition and fees; Pell Grants aren't set until January; and state grants and Perkins loans will need to be estimated in the initial review. So just because you can apply for financial aid sooner, it doesn't mean that financial aid offers will come sooner from the colleges.

Another challenge is that the earlier Financial Aid deadlines may cause college admissions offices to move forward their application deadlines, so that is something to keep an eye out for. Also, colleges may be tempted to pressure you to submit your enrollment deposit sooner than next May 1. (Let me know if this happens to you!)

Finally, sometimes families' circumstances change and there is a need for you to ask colleges to review your financial aid package. It is unclear at this point how the earlier deadline will affect financial aid reviews.

### ***DINAR WARS Episode IV: A New Hope***

Keep in mind that family situations change all the time. Your older brother or sister may have applied for financial aid and not been eligible. However, if they are still in college, that is a major change to the family's financial situation.

You and your sibling will be reconsidered with a lower estimated family contribution, increasing your likelihood for financial aid. The same holds true if you do not receive aid this year, and you have younger brothers

and sisters preparing to apply for college in the next couple of years.

Some schools also will consider excessive medical bills, private school tuition and more when evaluating you for financial aid. The CSS Profile or the school's own financial aid form asks for information such as this that is not collected on the FAFSA.

### ***DINAR WARS Episode V: The Enroller Strikes Back***

Since the financial aid process is now sooner, I am working to have our annual Financial Aid Night sooner. I have been in discussion with Joan Hock and Jesse Randall from the Financial Aid Office at Delaware Valley University, to once more give her Financial Aid presentation at Solebury. I'm still working on the date, but it will likely be in September or October, instead of December as in previous years.

Their presentation will provide an overview of the financial aid process and answer any questions you might have about this key aspect of the college search.

Some of the topics will include how to apply for financial aid, different types and sources of Aid, Estimated Family Contribution, Financial Aid philosophies and more. They should be able to guide you through the process with examples of different financial aid packages and helpful websites for your financial aid search.

This event is designed for parents, but if any students want to attend,

particularly boarders whose parents can't make it, they are welcome.

### **DINAR WARS**

#### ***Episode VI: Return of the Deadline***

As we go through the college guidance process, you will find an abundance of deadlines. It is important that you meet these deadlines as colleges can afford to deny applicants for being late and you might miss out on the chance to improve your scores on standardized tests.

I will keep you abreast of any upcoming deadlines in these newsletters. For now there are only two:

**Jul. 28:** Registration deadline for the August 26 SAT. Since this is before school starts, we will not provide transportation for boarding students.

**Aug. 4:** Deadline to register for the September 9 ACT. Transportation for boarders will be to Council Rock High School North (Newtown, PA) *only*.

Avoid late fees: register on time. Avoid missing out on your first choice for a test center: register at least a week before the deadline. You can register for the SAT at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) or for the ACT at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org).

### **DINAR WARS**

#### ***Episode VII: The Course (to college) Awakens***

As the new school year is about to begin, so too do the college visits awaken. I have gone through the lists of colleges where you have expressed interest and reached out to several

dozen colleges to see if they can visit Solebury this fall.

I will be adding these college visits to Naviance, and in our next newsletter look for more information about registration and expectations for these visits. I also plan to continue offering transportation to area college fairs so look for notices about that as we get closer to the dates.

Remember, too, that it's a good idea to visit any college before you enroll. And if you need to miss classes to do so, you have to get the visit permission slip (available on the college counseling web page) signed before you visit, and when you're at the college get a verification note to hand in to Tim when you return.

### **DINAR WARS**

#### ***Episode VIII: The "Test" Jedi***

Speaking of tests, you should all be aware of the changes to the SAT and the ACT. I've tried to keep you abreast of these changes over the course of the two years. If you have any questions about either test, feel free to ask.

Also, don't forget that Solebury will once again be sponsoring an SAT prep course this fall. For more information on this class, please contact Britta or Hanna.

### **THE LAST WORD**

The financial aid process can be tedious. However the rewards can be great. The scholarship and need-based aid can help make colleges that seem unaffordable be within your reach.

Just as I will be asking of your admissions decisions, I am also interested in knowing your scholarship decisions. Please let me know if you are awarded any college-based or independent scholarships, by providing a copy of your scholarship award letters to me.

- *Tim*



May the fortunes be with you.

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