Money. Matters.

On-demand financial guidance by Dupaco

Paying for college: Where to start

Student debt will likely become one of the largest financial obligations of a student's life, impacting future choices like buying a home or starting a family. That's why it's important to research your options and develop a financial plan. Read on to learn tips on how to finance a college education and identify which financial "offers" to avoid.

FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)

You might need financial assistance in addition to your personal contributions to your college education. The FAFSA determines whether you're eligible for financial aid such as federal loans, grants or work-study. In addition, many colleges require a FAFSA to be on record to determine their financial assistance packages. *Even if you don't think you'll qualify for need-based aid, other things like federal student loans or college-based need might require a FAFSA to be completed.*

You should submit your FAFSA as soon as it's available, beginning on Oct. 1 for the following school year. This helps increase your chances of getting assistance, because some federal student aid programs have limited funds. Apply at **studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa**.

5 WAYS TO LOWER THE COST OF TUITION

If you're considering taking out a student loan, the smartest thing you can do is to only borrow what you need. Take a bite out of the total education costs with these tips:

1. Do the Two-Step

Consider splitting studies between two schools. Can you earn an associate's degree at a community college and then transfer into a bachelor's degree program at a university? This way, you save some money on introductory-level courses and reserve the big bucks for the specialized instruction.

2. Go for Extra Credit

Find out if there are any opportunities to earn college credits in high school. Beyond reducing college tuition costs, advanced college credit programs help you explore interests more seriously.

3. Seek Out Scholarships

Visit scholarship search engines and online resources. Reach out to your current employer and your family members—there might be some form of tuition subsidy or grant opportunity available through an employer or alumni network. Be exhaustive in your search. It's free money!

4. Location Scout

Geography can play a significant role in determining total education costs. A single school might have different tuition rates for in-state, out-of-state and international students.

5. Double Down

Some schools offer accelerated programs that enable you to complete a four-year degree in just three years. This is a great option to consider—that's one less year of tuition to pay!—but you squeeze more classes into a shorter period of time.

IS TAKING OUT A STUDENT LOAN WORTH IT?

Paying for college with student loans is a popular way to finance education. But many students jump into student loan debt without a real understanding of what lies ahead.

It's not an easy question to ask, but it's one worth considering: Will the amount of money you'll likely make at a job be enough to pay off your student loan debt?

For example, some lower-paying jobs might not be worth the price you'll pay in the end.

Before you sign on to any loan, do the math. Determine how long it will take you to pay back that loan at the average salary you'll likely earn and decide whether you're willing to be in debt for that amount of time.

AVOID COLLEGE APPLICATION SCAMS WITH THESE TIPS

Watch out for scams like these that target the college-bound:

College test prep material "offer"

Scammers contact parents of high school students, claiming to be from the College Board, which is responsible for the PSAT and SAT tests.

The Federal Trade Commission and the College Board say you can avoid scams like this by following these steps:

- The College Board never asks you to give credit card, bank account or password information over the phone or email.
- Before you give up your money or personal information, research the company online. Search for its name plus the word "scam" or "complaint," and read about others' experiences.
- Credit cards have significant fraud protection built in. So, if you find out you paid a scammer, you might be able to get your money back if you paid with a credit card and report it quickly. If anyone asks you to pay by wiring money or by using a reloadable card or gift card, it's a scam.
- Remember: If the offer seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Charge fee for FAFSA

Many websites have been designed to look like the real FAFSA site, except the user is charged a fee to complete the application. Never pay the fee.

If you have questions about the online form, go directly to the FAFSA website at studentaid.ed.gov or talk to the financial aid office of the college or university you're considering.

Guaranteed scholarship or financial aid

Any claim of guaranteed scholarship money or financial aid also is a big red flag.

Charge a fee for scholarships

Avoid applying for any scholarship that charges an application fee or a redemption fee. Other unscrupulous companies charge applicants a fee to send them a list of scholarships to apply for.

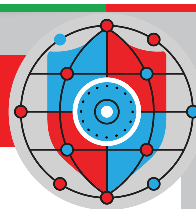
Don't forget …

When you apply for financial aid, you're submitting confidential information. Always make sure you're on the official, secure website to safeguard your private information. And never give out personal information to someone who initiates contact with you.

Also, keep tabs on your credit to make sure nothing is amiss during and after the financial aid season. With Dupaco's Bright Track credit score monitoring service, you have free access to both your credit report and credit score within Shine Online and Mobile Banking.

Download Dupaco's free Education Planning Toolkit at dupaco.com/ExploreYourOptions

STEPS TO HELP KEEP YOUR ACCOUNTS AND IDENTITY SAFE



In a world where your personal information is stored digitally everywhere you turn, it's nearly impossible to ensure all of your private information remains private. Here are steps you can take to defend yourself and stop identity thieves in their tracks.

Monitor your credit

Keep tabs on your credit report using Dupaco's free Bright Track credit score monitoring within Shine Online and Mobile Banking.

Use safer online log-ins

Protect your Shine account with two-step verification. In addition to your username and password, two-step verification requires a second form of authentication.

So, even if someone manages to get your username and password, two-step verification prevents that person from accessing your accounts without that unique code.

Use identity theft restoration coverage

Dupaco members have access to Family ID Restoration, special coverage designed to help you recover from identity theft.

If you or an immediate family member fall victim to identity theft, the coverage provides you:

- Personalized help from a Certified Resolution Specialist.
- Assistance restoring your identity.
- Up to $25,000 in expense reimbursement assistance.

The service costs $1.95 per month.

Set up activity alerts

Set up eNotifier alerts to receive instant notifications via text or email. This way, if there's fraudulent activity on your accounts, you'll be the first to know.

Remember the Card Security feature

If your Dupaco debit or credit card has been lost, stolen or compromised, you can take swift action to protect your account.

Within Shine, you can easily disable your card to prevent unauthorized purchases. Go to Account Safety, then Card Security to get started.