



The FAFSA Simplification Act: Planning for the future

How colleges and universities can succeed without having all the answers

The FAFSA Simplification Act has been anything but simple. Delays, technical errors, confusion, and ambiguity have significantly affected enrollment management staff, forcing them to change nearly everything about how they work.

Despite extending enrollment deadlines and shifting operational priorities, many institutions have found it difficult to serve students and their families expeditiously, forecast enrollment accurately, and plan for the future with confidence.

Now is the time to reflect, evaluate, and prepare for what comes after the dust has settled and a new financial aid cycle begins.

Create the new normal

Although this transitional period has been challenging, institutions can use this disruption to reset workplace and operational norms for people, processes, and technology. A good starting point is an evaluation of strategies and tactics employed to date, excluding factors beyond the institution's control and examining multiple areas of inquiry.

IN BRIEF

- The FAFSA Simplification Act has been challenging for enrollment management staff at colleges and universities.
- Institutions can use this disruption to reset workplace and operational norms for people, processes, and technology.
- Supporting staff, communicating effectively, and planning strategically for the future can also help institutions move forward with confidence.

Sample evaluation questions include:

- What outreach strategies increased FAFSA filing rates?
- What operational changes contributed to addressing student and family questions and concerns?
- How did technology enable staff to overcome challenges?

Put people first

It's no secret that financial aid staff are working harder than ever. Long hours, staffing shortages, and the lack of clarity are taking a toll. In a recent survey, more than half of financial aid professionals indicated they would likely seek [other employment opportunities](#) within 12 months.

Institutions will benefit from considering ways to ease the administrative burden of financial aid staff, such as rewarding them for extra efforts, offering them flexibility in how and when they work, and bringing in additional help — in the form of people or technology — when possible. Empathy and communication are also critical for fostering employee morale and productivity.

Communicate effectively

Colleges and universities have the opportunity to serve as a trusted source of information for students and families. When there are no answers to share, many hesitate to provide any, believing a message without clear direction will exacerbate frustration. But a lack of information can breed confusion and anxiety. In evolving situations, colleges and universities should engage early and often with students and their families, especially prospective students.

By keeping a regular cadence of consistent messaging, institutions can inspire confidence in their leadership and ability to support students and their families through challenging circumstances.

Define and plan for success

The goal of introspection is to determine the ability to complete unexpected tasks while looking for ways to be more effective. To measure effectiveness, institutions should consider redefining metrics for student, employee, systems, and financial success and exploring ways data and analytics can help. These metrics, coupled with regular feedback, can help enrollment management offices set realistic goals and track progress in achieving them.

Equipped with a new outlook and goals, colleges and universities should collaborate with campus leaders on a strategic plan that builds resilient operations across business units, addresses the unpredictable, and provides a clear path forward — no matter what challenges the next financial aid cycle may bring.



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