Simplifying and Consolidating Your Financial Aid Communication

Alyssa Takatori

Assistant Director, Student Financial Management Center,
Georgia State University

Zach Taylor

Institutional Support Consultant,
Trellis Company

TRELLIS®
C O M P A N Y

Federal Student Aid Jargon

TRELLIS®

Institutional Financial Aid Jargon

APPLY NOW FOR FREE

W Western Illinois University
Your potential. Our purpose. • Macomb • Quad Cities

About WIU | Academics | Admissions | Arts | Athletics | Alumni | Giving | Student Life

Financial Aid	WIU Home > Student Services > Financial Aid > Getting Started

Financial Aid News

Getting Started

Financial Aid Process

Cost of Attendance

Types of Aid

Special Programs

Money Management

Financial Aid Jargon

A - C   D - E   F - H   I - K   L - N   O - P   Q - S   T - Z

Lender

A bank, credit union, savings & loan association, or other financial institution that provides funds to the student or parent for an educational loan.

Loan

A type of financial aid which must be repaid, with interest. Federal student loan programs are a good method of financing the costs of your college education as they have lower, fixed interest rates, do not require a credit check, and provide a variety of deferment options and extended repayment terms.

Master Promissory Note (MPN)

A binding legal document that must be completed (visit www.StudentAid.gov) by the student borrower before loan funds are disbursed by the lender. The MPN represents an agreement by the borrower to repay the debt according to the specified terms and conditions (repayment schedule, interest rate, fees, deferments, forbearances, etc.) The student should keep this document until the loan has been repaid.

TRELLIS®

Verification Jargon

Financial Aid Award Letter Jargon

Reality of Applying for Financial Aid

- Students bounce from federal to institutional multiple times throughout process.

- Jargon throughout.

- Students may receive communication through text, email, mail, and through multiple portals (federal and institutional).

Overview

- Why is financial aid communication difficult?
- Readability and college students
- The financial aid communication funnel
- The ICARE Model of Student Support
- Befores and Afters
- Best practices for simplifying and consolidating financial aid communication
- Q&A

TRELLIS®

Georgia State's Journey to Simplicity

- Examined communications = prospective student admissions through continuing student financial aid.

- Including email, text messaging, website, social media, phone calling, etc.

- Takeaways:
  - Messaging was not consistent from admissions to financial aid.
  - Messaging too complex.
  - How did we know? Student feedback and behavior.

Readability and College Students

- Grade-level readability measures
  - Measures difficulty of sentence structure and word choice; produces a grade-level of reading comprehension required to read text.

- Used extensively by U.S. Department of Defense (Carver, 1974; Fry, 1986; Johnson, 1972; Kniffin, 1979; McClure, 1987; Sticht, 1970; Sticht & Zapf, 1976).

- Average U.S. resident = 7th-grade reading level (Clear Language Group, 2018)

- Only 37% of high school graduates read at the 12th-grade level in the United States (National Assessment Governing Board, 2020).

- A lot of material in higher education is unreadable by its intended audience (students and support networks).
  - Financial aid communication ranging from 12th to 19th-grade English reading comprehension levels.

- Most prospective and current U.S. college students cannot read and comprehend financial aid communication.

TRELLIS®

The Financial Aid Communication Funnel

1.) Institutional: tell students how to complete the FAFSA

2.) Federal: complete the FAFSA

2a.) Federal: complete Verification

3.) Institutional: read award letters

4.) Federal: read and sign MPN

5.) Federal: read and complete entrance counseling

6.) Institutional: read and complete SAP requirements

7.) Renewal

Modes of communication:
- Website/student portal
- FAFSA.gov
- Text message
- Phone call
- Email
- Print mail

TRELLIS®

Reality of Applying for Financial Aid

- Students bounce from federal to institutional multiple times throughout process.

- Jargon throughout.

- Students may receive communication through text, email, mail, and through multiple portals (federal and institutional).

- <u>Most prospective and current U.S. college students cannot read and comprehend financial aid communication.</u>

FAFSA Completion: Before and After

FAFSA Completion Before:

«MAIL_DATE»

«FNAME» «LNAME»

«STR1» «STR2»

«CITY_ST_ZIP»   Panther   ID:
«ID»

Hello <FName>,

We see that you are registered for Spring 2018 and you have not completed your 2017-2018 FAFSA. If you are planning to utilize federal funding please complete the 2017-2018 FAFSA application at www.fafsa.ed.gov.

Sincerely,

Office of Student Financial Aid

FAFSA Completion After:

submit a FAFSA
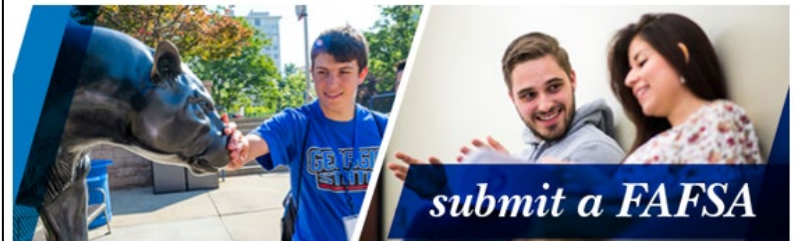
2 APPLY

You probably qualify for more federal aid than you think! Each year billions of dollars are left on the table by students who don't apply for aid. So take advantage and begin your FAFSA today; your wallet will thank you later!

You can start your FAFSA now, click here. Georgia State's Federal School Code for the FAFSA is **001574**.

Watch the video below for information on How To Fill Out a FAFSA.

Verification: Before and After

Verification Before:

Georgia State University | **STUDENT FINANCIAL SERVICES**

Congratulations! You have Completed the First Step.

Dear Jacqueline,

The GSU Office of Student Financial Aid has received your 2018-2019 financial aid application. You have been selected for a process called verification. Your next step is to submit additional information to complete the verification process. Afterwards, we will be able to award your financial aid. We ask that you submit your verification information within **14 days** of this notification. If you have already submitted your information for the 2018-2019 financial aid year, thank you and your information will be reviewed shortly.

To simplify the process, Georgia State uses a web-based application called Verify My FAFSA. This application is interactive and will guide you through the process. We believe it will be very helpful as you complete the next step of your application process.

We encourage you to begin the process now by following the 5 easy steps below.

1. Log onto PAWS at http://paws.gsu.edu,
2. Choose the Financial Aid tab,
3. Find the outstanding requirements section,
4. Click on the Verify My FAFSA option, and
5. Begin answering the questions asked.

It is simple to get started, no need to delay. Just click the link below and begin.

http://paws.gsu.edu,

Thank you for beginning the next step of the financial aid application process for the 2018-2019 award year, if you need any assistance, please visit one of our Student Financial Management Centers or contact us at (404) 413-2600. Or, you can ask a question through Panther Answer.

Student Financial Services
Georgia State University
financialaid@gsu.edu

Verification After:

check your *PAWS*

3 ────────── **CHECK**

Dear Cameron,

Thank you for beginning the financial aid process. Georgia State University has received your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and you have been selected for a review process called **Verification**. The next step is to submit additional information to complete verification and afterwards, you will be awarded any eligible federal aid. It's important you submit all requested information within **14 days** of this notification.

To help guide you through the process, GSU uses an interactive web-based application called **Verify My FAFSA**.

Begin the process now by following the **5 easy steps** below:

1. Log into **PAWS**
2. Choose the *Financial Aid* tab
3. Find the *Outstanding Requirements* section
4. Click on the *Verify My FAFSA* option
5. Begin answering the questions asked

It is simple to get started, no need to delay. Just click the link below.

PAWS

TRELLIS®

Award Letters: Before

Award Letter Before:

«MAIL_DATE»

«FNAME» «LNAME»

«STR1» «STR2»

«CITY_ST_ZIP»   Panther   ID:

«ID»

«AIDY_YR_DESC» Financial Aid Award Letter

We have reviewed your financial aid application for the «AID_YEAR» academic year. You have been awarded financial aid based on the information you reported on your financial aid application (FAFSA). The amount and type of aid awarded is based on your eligibility, full time enrollment (12 hours or more), and meeting financial aid Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP). If your enrollment, eligibility, or SAP status changes, your financial aid awards **MAY** be adjusted, and a balance may be due on your account.

AWARD	Status	Fall	Spring	Summer	Total
«AWARD_DESC»	«OFFERED_ACPT»	«TERM01_AMT»	«TERM02_AMT»	«TERM03_AMT»	«TOT_AWARD_AMT»
Total Awards:		«TERM01_FORMATTED_TOTAL»	«TERM02_FORMATTED_TOTAL»	«TERM03_FORMATTED_TOTAL»	«GTOT_AWARD_AMT»

Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized loans are subject to a loan origination fee.

Any grant aid awarded is already accepted on your behalf and requires no further acceptance action. All aid that has been accepted will be recognized as pending towards your balance due.

As a condition of your award, you are required to report all outside scholarships to the Office of Student Financial Aid. The receipt of additional financial funding from outside agencies may affect your eligibility for the financial aid awarded.

Federal Shopping Sheet

The Federal Shopping Sheet is a consumer tool that Georgia State University uses to notify students about their financial cost to attend. You may view your Federal Shopping Sheet on your PAWS account (http://PAWS.gsu.edu):

1. Click on the *Finances* tab.
2. In the *Financial Aid Information* section, click on Access My Financial Aid Information.

---

3. Click on Federal Shopping Sheet and select *Aid Year «AIDY_YR_DESC»*.

Email   &   PAWS

Please be advised that this award letter will be the only award notification that you will receive via mail. All future notices will be sent to you through your GSU student email account. It is your responsibility to monitor your GSU student email periodically throughout the academic year for important information regarding your financial aid account. Additionally, updates and messages will be on your PAWS account at http://PAWS.gsu.edu. To check the status of your financial aid file login to PAWS, and please use the following steps:

STEP	ACTION
1	Click on *Finances* tab.
2	In the *Financial Aid Information* section, click on Access My Financial Aid Information.
3	Click on My Overall Status of Financial Aid and select *Aid Year «AIDY_YR_DESC»*.
4	Click on awarded in *You have been awarded* financial aid. . .
5	Review each tab on the Award Package by Aid Year «AIDY_YR_DESC». • The *Terms and Conditions* tab provides additional requirements for certain funds. • Offered aid may be accepted in full, reduced, or declined. • Loans will always be split into two semesters. Please contact the Office of Student Financial Aid for any adjustment that cannot be performed in PAWS.

For information on enrollment status, eligible coursework, and student rights and responsibilities, please visit Student Financial Services at www.SFS.gsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Office of Student Financial Aid

Award Letters: After

Award Letter After:

review your award

4 ━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━ **ACCEPT**

Dear ,

Your financial aid package has been prepared and is ready for you to review. Log in to your **PAWS** account now to learn more about your financial aid award and to accept your offer.

Steps to View Your Award

1. Log into **PAWS**
2. Click the **Finances** tab
3. Go to the **Financial Aid** information menu (bottom right)
4. Click the **Access My Financial Aid Information** link
5. Select **Award Information** and then **Award by Term**

Panther Tip: Before you accept your financial aid offer, watch the short video below to learn more about the financial aid programs available.

WORK-STUDY
GRANT
SCHOLARSHIP

We also encourage you to check out our **glossary** of higher education terminology, including information on different types of loans and other financial aid language.

Make sure you continue to check PAWS and your email regularly to stay updated on the status of your progress as an admitted student. You can always contact our Student Financial Management Center at 404-413-2600 for individualized answers about your student record and financial aid.

1 LEARN   **2** APPLY   **3** CHECK   **4** ACCEPT   **5** COMPLETE

TRELLIS®

SAP Letters: Before and After

SAP Before:

Dear Jacqueline,

A Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) evaluation has been performed on your academic record and the results are:

- You are not meeting at least one of the SAP standards. All students must meet the standards defined in the Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy: GPA, 66.66% pace of completion, and maximum timeframe.
- Students who fail to comply with these standards lose their eligibility to receive federal and state financial aid aid.

SAP APPEAL

You have the ability to appeal for reinstatement of your financial aid. If you had a mitigating circumstance beyond your control that affected your ability to meet SAP standards, you may an appeal. To appeal for reinstatement of aid, you must complete a Georgia State University SAP appeal and submit supporting documentation. The documentation must be directly related to the events that affected your ability to meet SAP standards. You may obtain the appeal online at the Georgia State University financial aid forms webpage.

Submitting an appeal does not guarantee approval. If your appeal is not approved or you do not have a mitigating circumstance, you must pay for your next term of enrollment and improve your academic progress standing.

We encourage you to contact the University Advisement Center at the campus you attend to discuss your educational plans. Have a great semester.

Sincerely,

Office of Student Financial Aid

*NOTE: Federal regulations require students to comply with standards of academic progress as defined by the Office of Student Financial Aid in the Satisfactory Academic Progress policy. All students must meet the standards defined in the Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy: Cumulative GPA, 66.66 percent pace of completion, and maximum timeframe. It is your responsibility to monitor your Satisfactory Academic Progress standing. For more information regarding Satisfactory Academic Progress please visit http://sfs.gsu.edu/sap.

SAP After:

"A champion is defined not by their wins, but by how they can recover when they fall."
Serena Williams

Dear Student,

At Georgia State University, we are very proud of our students' accomplishments. Many have experienced challenges along the way and overcame those challenges to graduate. We believe you will be successful as well. We want to help.

A review of our records show that you did not achieve Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP). As such your financial aid may be in jeopardy if you don't begin the appeal process now.

To start the appeal, Login to PAWS and follow the appropriate prompts.

Still have Questions?

We are here to help.
Use the link below to view our contact options.

PANTHER ANSWER

Your Financial Aid Status: Maximum Time Frame

Our records suggest that you will not complete the degree before reaching the maximum time frame allowed to complete your degree. An appeal and a graduation plan are needed to continue receiving financial aid for the following term.

All students who receive federal financial aid must achieve a minimum GPA and pace of completion to maintain satisfactory academic progress. You may review our SAP policy at https://sfs.gsu.edu/the-financial-aid-process/policies/satisfactory-academic-progress-sap/

We look forward to your success,

Director of Financial Aid

GSU's 2021-2022 FAFSA Communication

- Trying a different approach:

- From content-heavy communication to one-click communication.

- We split populations (students and parents).

- We sent three types of emails.

- Known as "A/B" testing or "A/B/C" testing.

- Drives at communication differentiation and best practices.

TRELLIS®

FAFSA Renewal: Before and After

FAFSA Renewal Before:

Dear %%First Name%%,

Did you know? Students who complete their FAFSA are twice as likely to continue their journey to graduation!

The 2020-2021 FAFSA form opens today! Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and use Georgia State University's school code: 001574. We would love to see you complete it by October 31st!

Here are some of the benefits of applying early:

1. Some aid is first-come, first-served. Applying early gives you a better chance at getting more aid.
2. Early completion can give you a head start on securing your funding for next fall so you get done early and don't have to worry next August.
3. There is no reason to wait. Concerned about needing your taxes? The 2020-21 FAFSA will be using your (and/or your parents) 2018 taxes.

Getting the application done early is one thing you can check off your list as you prepare for next year.

Thank you,

Director Student Financial Management Center

TRELLIS®

FAFSA Communication: 1ˢᵗ Example

To view this email as a web page, go here.

Dear %%First Name%%:

The 2021 - 2022 FAFSA is now open!

Complete your FAFSA early. Get the application out of the way now, so you don't have to think about it later!

Complete your 2021-22 FAFSA today at **fafsa.ed.gov.**
Use Georgia State school code: **001574**

Need help? Check out these trending topics!

Thank you,

Student Financial Management Center

TRELLIS®

FAFSA Communication: 2nd Example

FAFSA Communication: 3rd Example

TRELLIS®

GSU's 2021-2022 FAFSA Communication

- Initial results as of 10/5/2020

Email Subject	Student Population	Parent Population	Total	Unique Opens	Open Rate	Clicks	Click Rate
2021-2022 FAFSA is now open!	14137	9282	23419	3052	13.03%	345	1.47%
Pounce on your Financial Aid!	13971	9092	23063	6736	29.20%	1018	4.41%
PAWS and complete the FAFSA!	14148	9304	23452	6860	29.28%	1099	4.69%

Best Practices for Financial Aid Communication

- Consider each level of the funnel.

- Embed contact information into every mode of communication.

- Minimize jargon, acronyms, and sentence length.

- Assume unfamiliarity.

- Assume an 8th grade level of reading comprehension ability.

- Use graphics to cut text but maintain ADA compliance.

Contact Information

Alyssa Takatori

Assistant Director, Student Financial Management Center,
Georgia State University

atakatori@gsu.edu

Zach Taylor

Institutional Support Consultant,
Trellis Company

Zach.Taylor@trelliscompany.org

TRELLIS®
COMPANY

Proven Services.
Extraordinary Support.