



Seniors- you are ALMOST there!! Now that you have applied, been accepted, and filled out your FAFSA you will begin to receive Aid Award Letters start deciding which school you will attend in the Fall. We are going to look back to some of our FTF (Find the Fit) guidelines to help you make your decision. If you need additional help looking at your Aid Award Letters and picking a college speak with your Educational Specialist.

## **Remember... FACTORS OF FIT?**

**ACADEMIC MATCH-** Look for graduation and retention rates, make sure it has your major, and does it offer study opportunities such as study abroad, internships, and/or further education (master or doctorate program) in your major if that is your plan. If going to a community college is it an easy process to transfer to the 4-year school you are interested in?

**INSTITUTIONAL OFFERINGS-** Does the college offer resources that you are interested in? This covers a broad range including facilities (housing/meal plans, library, student center, computer labs) and academic help (SSS program, free tutoring, support for freshmen, counseling services, the course offerings you needs, student advisors, evening classes, online classes, weekend classes etc.)

**PERSONAL PREFERENCES-** Is the campus size, location, and atmosphere one that you will enjoy being at? Does it have the extracurricular activities, clubs, sports etc. that you are interested in? Even community colleges have student activities, sports, and clubs to join.

**AFFORDABILITY-** Remember to review your SCOOP sheet, aid award letters, stay up to date on TN Promise etc. (all the things we will discuss today). Remember to look at per year cost as well as at how much you will pay out of pocket for the lifetime of your degree. If you are looking at a community college first also work out how much it costs at the 4 year school you are interested in (or compare several) so that you can get an idea of how much it will cost you to get your degree. If you are looking at getting a master's degree after your bachelors see if your college offers a 3 yr. bachelor program that leads into a masters as it will take 5 years total instead of 6 years.

## **Remember... SCOOP SHEETS?**

Here is where you can find a lot of the financial information. Some schools may have sent you aid award letters, while others haven't yet. Until you get all of your letters you can use your SCOOP sheets to compare costs, graduation rates, school size, etc.

## **Remember... MY COLLEGE SEARCH?**

You will need to look at this with your advisor. You may have additional schools you applied to after you filled it out early this fall or the end of last year. This information is similar to the SCOOP sheet but includes your individual information such as family income, how many years you want to graduate in, and what is important to you (which could be different for you now).

## **AID AWARD LETTERS**

Typically aid award letters include all the aid you are eligible for and how much of it the school can offer you. It is a handy and convenient way for the school to show you all your aid in one place. This includes federal aid (Pell, work-study, federal loans), state aid (lottery, TSAA grant etc.), and institutional aid (scholarships offered by the school). If you have won an outside scholarships this may or may not show up on the aid award letter. It will depend on how the money is awarded. Sometimes, you receive a direct check but most of the time they ask which school you would like it to be sent to. If you have won a scholarship and it isn't shown on the aid award letter remember to add that to the college cost comparison sheet when you fill it out. One important thing to remember about aid award letters is that it is also a way for your school to find out what aid you are accepting. Check to see if there is a deadline for accepting/declining. Also, if you are being offered a loan, but do not need or want to take the full amount out then contact financial aid and see what they need to do to alter the aid award letter.

\* Remember subsidized vs. unsubsidized when looking at federal loans. Subsidized means that you exhibit financial need and you will not have to pay interest while in school or for 6 months after because the Dept. of Education pays your interest during those times. So always pick this one first if it is an option.

## **COLLEGE COST COMPARISON**

This form should help you by allowing you to organize the cost, aid awarded and actual cost to you between four colleges. This should allow you to see which the better financial choice is for you and make sure that if you were awarded state or federal aid at one school it shows up on the other aid award letters. This is a good form to sit down with your parent/guardian and fill out so that they can have input as well. Sometimes this is helpful if you are considering a four year and find the cost to not be as much or that different from a two year (or a private vs. public etc.). Do this step even if you are pretty sure you will be taking advantage of TN Promise and attending a community college. It will help you figure out what you are likely to receive after you transfer to a four year and better estimate the cost of your entire degree

## **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER.....**

It can be confusing so just remember to look at the factors of fit, compare costs, estimate the cost of the entire degree and then make the best choice for YOU. Also, something to consider is to look up how much your future job makes on average in TN to make sure you aren't spending \$80,000 on a degree where you will only make \$30,000 a year. You will probably have some debt, of course, but be sure you will be able to pay it off afterwards.

As always, you may talk to your advisor or contact me if you or your parent/guardian(s) have any questions about any of the above information. You can contact me via my work cell (423) 223-6308 or email me @ [amybrown@douglascherokee.org](mailto:amybrown@douglascherokee.org) .