

► **FINISH YOUR DEGREE AT WKU**



Getting Started:

A Guide to Financing Your Education &
Choosing a School That's Right for You





► CHOOSING THE RIGHT SCHOOL

Education has become much more customizable over the past few years. The diversity of course delivery methods, including face-to-face, online and on-demand opportunities, allows students to balance work, family life and other activities with school like never before. In addition, degree programs that were out of reach before are now readily available.

decisions you will make. This decision is often based on a variety of factors, including personal fulfillment, desire to compete more readily in the job market, gain a promotion or get retrained for a new career, and financing your education (see page x). Regardless of your reasons for considering school, it is more important than ever to be well-informed.

Even with the increased flexibility of educational opportunities today, returning to school is one of the biggest

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1. Regional Accreditation: Accreditation is very important because it ensures that an institution meets or exceeds an established set of educational standards. As a result, courses from an accredited university are transferable to other colleges, and degrees from an accredited university are more likely to be valued by both current and future employers. ***Not all accreditation is the same!*** Beware of accreditation claims. Many questionable “accrediting agencies” exist. Look for the words “Regionally Accredited,” as regional accreditation is approved by the United States Department of Education.

2. Financial Aid: Investigate your financial aid options. You may be pleasantly surprised by the financial aid, loans, and scholarships available to you. In addition, many colleges and universities offer tuition installment plans which help make college more affordable. Ask about such programs. You can get started today by filling out your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at fafsa.ed.gov.

3. Degree Programs: Be sure that the colleges and the degree program(s) you are considering “fit” with your long range educational plans. For example, if you are thinking about enrolling in an online associate program and later hope to earn a bachelor’s degree (online or on-campus), find out how likely it is that your associate degree coursework will count toward your bachelor’s degree.

4. Student Resources: Does the school you’re considering have a student services office dedicated to assisting prospective and current students? Are research materials easily accessible? Is there a career services center? Tutoring? Technology support? All of these things are essential to your success! Also, if these things are available, how easily accessible are they?

5. Flexibility: Occasionally, a student wants to take a class but finds it impossible due to scheduling conflicts. Education has made great strides in the past few years to ensure flexible scheduling options. Compare the flexibility you need for your lifestyle with the flexibility offered by schools you are considering.



**5 Rules
To Follow**

► PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Financing your college education may be hard to envision, but it is possible! You may be pleasantly surprised at the options available to you, including grants, scholarships, federal and private loans, work study, and employer reimbursement programs. The information that follows focuses primarily on federal student aid, because eligibility is based on need, not credit score.

Types of Federal Student Aid

Financial Aid includes grants and loans for educational purposes. The U.S. Department of Education awards about \$150 billion every year to help millions of students pay for college. This federal student aid is awarded in the form of grants, work-study funds, and low-interest loans. **Grants** are typically awarded on the basis of need and generally do not have to be repaid. There are four types of federal student grants:

- **Federal Pell Grants** are usually awarded to undergraduate students who have not yet earned a bachelor's degree. (In some cases, students enrolled in postbaccalaureate teacher certification programs may receive Federal Pell Grants.) The maximum Federal Pell Grant award for the 2015-2016 award year is \$5,775; however, the actual award depends on the student's financial need, the college's cost of attendance, the student's enrollment status, and the length of the academic year in which the student is enrolled. Students can receive the Federal Pell Grant for up to the equivalent of 12 semesters.
- **Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG)** are awarded to undergraduate students with exceptional financial need. The amount of the award is determined by the college's financial aid office, and depends on the student's financial need and the availability of funds at the college.
- **Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants** are awarded to students who intend to teach in a public or private elementary or secondary school that serves students from low-income families. If the service requirement is not fulfilled, it could turn into a loan.
- **Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grants** are awarded to students whose parents or guardians were members of the Armed Forces and died as a result of performing military service in Iraq or Afghanistan after Sept. 11, 2001. To qualify, a student must have been under 24 years of age or enrolled in college at the time of the parent's or guardian's death.

The Federal Work-Study Program enables students to earn money during the school year while also gaining valuable work experience, typically in part-time, career-related jobs.

Loans consist of money that the student borrows to help pay for college, and must be repaid (plus interest). There are two federal student loan programs:

- **The Federal Perkins Loan Program** is a campus-based program that provides low-interest loans to undergraduate and graduate students. The amount of the award depends on the student's financial need, the amount of other aid the student receives, and the availability of funds at his/her college.
- **The William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program** enables students and parents to borrow money at low interest rates directly from the federal government. The Direct Loan Program includes Direct Stafford Loans, which are available to undergraduate and graduate students, and Direct PLUS Loans, which are available to parents of dependent students and to graduate and professional-degree students. A Direct Stafford Loan might be subsidized or unsubsidized. Direct PLUS Loans are always unsubsidized. Subsidized loans are based on financial need and are available only to undergraduate students. The federal government pays the interest on subsidized loans while the borrower is in college and during deferment. Unsubsidized loans are based on the student's education costs and other aid received. The borrower must pay all accrued interest on unsubsidized loans.



WKU at a Glance

WKU is Regionally Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In addition, several of our degree programs have received discipline specific accreditations. We provide the ultimate flexibility, with more than 80 degree programs available through Distance Learning and four campus locations: Bowling Green, Glasgow, Elizabethtown-Ft. Knox, and Owensboro - allowing you to choose what works best for you.

You may elect to attend face-to-face, online, on demand or a combination of the three. Regardless of your choice, you have access to dedicated faculty, advisors, student support staff, and online and face-to-face services designed to help you succeed in your classes.

Other Forms of Financial Aid

- State government aid. For more information, contact the state's higher education agency. You can find the state agency's contact information at www2.ed.gov/about/contacts/state.
- Aid from the college.
- Scholarships. Some states, local governments, colleges, community organizations, private employers, and other organizations award scholarships based on academic ability or other factors. For more information, visit StudentAid.gov.
- Tax credits for education expenses. For more information about the American Opportunity Tax Credit and Lifetime Learning Tax Credit, visit studentaid.ed.gov/types/tax-benefits.
- Aid for the military. For more information, visit studentaid.ed.gov/types/grants-scholarships/military.

Eligibility

Federal financial aid eligibility is based on need + part-time/full-time enrollment. To be eligible to receive federal student aid, you must:

- Be a citizen or eligible noncitizen of the United States.
- Have a valid Social Security Number. (Students from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau are exempt from this requirement.)
- Have a high school diploma or a General Education Development (GED) certificate, or have completed homeschooling. If you don't, you may still be eligible for federal student aid if you were enrolled in college or career school prior to July 1, 2012. Go to studentaid.ed.gov/eligibility/basic-criteria for additional information.
- Be enrolled in an eligible program as a regular student seeking a degree or certificate.
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress.
- Not owe a refund on a federal student grant or be in default on a federal student loan.
- Register (or already be registered) with the Selective Service System, if you are a male and not currently on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces. (Students from the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau are exempt from registering; see www.sss.gov for more information.)
- Not have a conviction for the possession or sale of illegal drugs for an offense that occurred while you were receiving federal student aid (such as grants, work-study, or loans). If you have such a conviction, you must complete the Student Aid Eligibility Worksheet to determine if you are eligible for aid or partially eligible for aid.

Many types of federal student aid, such as the Federal Pell Grant or subsidized loans where the government pays the interest while you are in college, also require you to have financial need. Additionally, once you have a bachelor's degree or a first professional degree, you are generally not eligible for Pell or Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG).

Other requirements may apply. Contact the financial aid office at WKU for more information at fa.counselors@wku.edu or **270-745-2755**.





► HOW TO APPLY

To apply, you must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Filling out the FAFSA® can be a straightforward and easy process, especially if you're applying online. The online application is faster and easier for three reasons:

- FAFSA on the Web has built-in help to guide you through the application process.
- Skip logic in FAFSA on the Web guides you to answer key questions and may allow you to skip other questions and complete the application faster.
- The schools you list on your application will receive your processed information faster..

Before you start the application process, it's important to have all required items on hand (see steps below) – this will help make the process easier and avoid delays.

Step 1

Establishing an FSA ID: If you do not have an FSA ID, you'll need to fill out an online request (the FSA ID replaced the PIN). The FSA ID is a username and password combination that allows you to sign your FAFSA electronically. Your FSA ID also can be used to sign loan contracts and to access certain information online. You can get your FSA ID as you fill out the FAFSA, but you also have the option to get it ahead of time.

The FSA ID request is simple. It requires basic information, such as your email address, a unique username, and password, your Social Security number, name, and date of birth, and mailing address. To get started, visit fsaid.ed.gov/npas/index.htm. You will receive your verified FSA ID in one to three days.

Step 2

Gather the records you will need to file your FAFSA, including:

- Your Social Security Number
- Your Alien Registration Number (if you are not a U.S. citizen)
- Your most recent federal income tax returns, W-2s, and other records of money earned. (Note: You may be able to transfer your federal tax return information into your FAFSA using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool.)
- Bank statements and records of investments (if applicable)
- Records of untaxed income (if applicable)
- An FSA ID to sign electronically. If you do not have one, you may request one at fsaid.ed.gov/npas/index.htm.
- The Title IV School Code. You can choose WKU from a dropdown menu, or enter 002002 for WKU.

Step 3

Complete the FAFSA.

Now that you have your FSA ID and required documents, you're ready to fill out the FAFSA. You can access the online FAFSA at fafsa.gov. The online application guides you through the process, providing instructions and helpful hints as you go. Simply refer to the right side of the page as you work your way through the application to learn more about the section you're working on.

Questions?

If you have questions as you're filling out your application, you can select the "Help" icon at the top of any page of the application. The "Help" page lists all of the available options for getting additional assistance, including a live help option that is available through a secure online chat session with one of our customer service representatives. You can call us at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). TTY users can call 1-800-730-8913. Lastly, you also can email federal student aid with any technical issues you may have while you are completing the application. The address is FederalStudentAidCustomerService@ed.gov.

Before You Submit

- Verify your answers to make sure they are complete and accurate. Be sure you have provided the necessary signatures electronically using your FSA ID
- Print a copy of your application for your records.
- Once you submit your application, you will receive a confirmation page. Wait for this page to appear to ensure that your application was submitted without interruption.



What Happens Next?

Once your application is processed, you will receive a copy of your Student Aid Report (SAR), which summarizes the information you provided on your FAFSA. Review your SAR and make sure all of the information is complete and accurate.

If there is any missing or incorrect information, then you should complete or correct your FAFSA as soon as possible.

Your SAR will include your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC determines your eligibility for a Federal Pell Grant, and the college uses the EFC to assess your eligibility for other federal and nonfederal student aid.

Once your FAFSA is processed by Federal Student Aid, your SAR is sent to the colleges that you listed on your FAFSA. Each college will use the information on your SAR to determine your eligibility for federal and nonfederal student aid. The colleges you listed are responsible for creating your award package and disbursing your financial aid.

Please watch your email for communication from WKU about your financial aid package.

Receiving Student Aid

WKU will officially notify you of your financial aid package, and issue your aid from federal student aid programs. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- All Financial Aid must be accepted or declined by you through your **TopNet** account. The offer of Financial Aid IS NOT an automatic acceptance. Instructions on accepting or declining financial aid will be in the email with the offer. Go to TopNet, select: "Student Services" then "Financial Aid" then "Award".
- First time borrowers are required to go to **www.kheaa.com** and complete the "Entrance Loan Counseling" form. You will need your FSA ID to complete this step.
- After accepting your award, the Office of Student Financial Assistance at WKU will apply the award to your student billing account. Government regulations require that the aid cannot be awarded to your account until 10 days before the semester begins. To see what award is expected and whether or not there is a remaining balance even before the award is applied, go to **Topnet** and choose "Account Summary by Term". This will show your remaining balance once the award is applied.

Additional information may be viewed at www.wku.edu/financialaid/applyfa.php for first time applicants and renewal of financial aid.

SUMMARY OF APPLICATION PROCESS

Speed Up the Process

1

Go to **fsaid.gov/npas/index.htm** to request your FSA ID. With your FSA ID, you can apply and sign your FAFSA online.



2

Gather Documents

Gather your income tax returns, W-2s and other documents that you will need to complete your FAFSA.



Complete FAFSA

3

Complete the FAFSA at **fafsa.ed.gov** as soon as possible.



4

Review SAR

Review your Student Aid Report (SAR) for accuracy. Make corrections and resubmit, if necessary.



Turn in Documents

5

Turn in any other documentation WKU needs to verify your application for financial aid.



6

Double Check

Double check with the WKU's Office of Financial Assistance to make certain they have received everything needed to determine your eligibility and award amount.



Review Email

7

Review your email award notification from WKU.



8

Accept Award

Accept your award through TopNet at **topnet.wku.edu**



▶ HELPFUL RESOURCES

- WKU Student Financial Assistance - email: facounselors@wku.edu, phone: **270.745.2755**, website: wku.edu/financialaid
- WKU Transfer Scholarship Information - wku.edu/scholarship/transfer.php
- Guide to Financial Aid - www.finaid.org
- Scholarships - How to find them, how to apply, and types of scholarships: studentaid.ed.gov/types.grants-scholarships/finding-scholarships
- WKU Online's article on filing your application early to reduce long-term debt: goo.gl/99EHBM



WKU Adult Learner Services

Email: finish@wku.edu
Call: 270-745-3575
Visit: wku.edu/adultservices

WKU Online

Email: learn.online@wku.edu
Call: 270-745-5173
Visit: wku.edu/online

WKU On Demand

Email: ondemand@wku.edu
Call: 270-745-4158
Visit: wku.edu/ondemand

WKU Elizabethtown-Fort Knox

Email: etown-ftknox@wku.edu
Call: 270-706-8870
Visit: wku.edu/etown-ftknox

WKU Glasgow

Email: glasgow@wku.edu
Call: 270-659-6900
Visit: wku.edu/glasgow

WKU Owensboro

Email: owensboro@wku.edu
Call: 270-684-9797
Visit: wku.edu/owensboro

WKU Military Services

Email: military@wku.edu
Call: 270-745-2180
Visit: wku.edu/veterans

WKU Transfer Center

Email: transfer@wku.edu
Call: 270-745-2178
Visit: wku.edu/transfer