

# Michael Alexander: To unlock student aid for college, students and families should act now

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If I asked you to fill out a form for the chance to qualify for financial assistance to pay your mortgage, the groceries, and the heating bill, would you do it?

That's essentially the question facing high school and college students when it comes to financing a higher education. Yet, only one of every two Wisconsin high school seniors fills out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

That means Wisconsin students who qualify for federal financial aid may be leaving up to \$50 million in Pell Grants on the table by not filling out the FAFSA. Moreover, completing the FAFSA is the first step in qualifying for the new Wisconsin Tuition Promise, which will ensure students who come from families earning less than \$62,000 annually can attend a University of Wisconsin System campus without paying tuition or fees.

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Now, I join my chancellor colleagues across the University of Wisconsin System in urging students and their parents to fill out a FAFSA for the 2023-24 academic year.

This is how it works: Starting Oct. 1, students and their parents navigate to the federal FAFSA website at <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>. They create an account and input the necessary financial information. Students also indicate which universities to send their financial information.

The universities will inform the student about whether they qualify for financial aid. Some students will be eligible for federal and state grants that don't have to be repaid; others will qualify for low-interest loans. And starting in fall 2023, low- and moderate-income students can qualify for the Wisconsin Tuition Promise, which will make college tuition-free at all our UW universities for eligible students!

Because not everyone fills out the FAFSA, over the next several weeks and months, you might see or hear information on several social media platforms encouraging students to fill out the FAFSA. It's my hope, and the hope of my colleagues, that students thinking about applying to UW-Green Bay or any of the universities in the UW System will learn about the FAFSA during this social media campaign and a seed will be planted about attending college.

In addition to social media, there are people at each of our universities who can help you learn more about the FAFSA and how to fill it out. You can find those names and other resources related to the FAFSA at this new website: <https://wisconsin.edu/fafsa/>.

Help is also available through College Goal Wisconsin, a collaboration of Wisconsin universities, colleges, businesses, and others to help students and their parents fill out and finish the FAFSA. College Goal Wisconsin is holding events all across Wisconsin right now, and you can find more information, including a list of in-person and virtual events, here: <https://collegegoalwi.org/>.

Fill out the FAFSA now to find out how much money you can receive for college.

*- Alexander is chancellor, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.*