

Students and Parents:

Although it can sometimes be difficult for students to distinguish a legitimate organization from a fraudulent organization, there are several phrases that should automatically raise a red flag. If you are asked or told any of these things, you are probably being scammed:

- You are asked to pay a small fee to be eligible for this scholarship. Remember, scholarships are free money. You should never be asked to pay a fee for free money.
- You are asked for your credit card number or bank information to hold a scholarship.
- You are asked for a checking account number to confirm eligibility.
- Told someone can provide a list of exclusive scholarship sources for an advanced fee.
- Told the scholarship or service comes with a money-back guarantee.

Also, if you are told someone who is an OPRFHS District 200 endorses any of these services, do not believe them! District 200 does not endorse private financial aid/scholarship search agencies or websites.

Links for more information:

http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student_guide/2009-2010/english/becareful.htm
<http://www.fsa4counselors.ed.gov/clcf/scams.html>
<http://www.nacacnet.org/LegislativeAction/LegislativeNews/Documents/scholarshipscamsflyer.pdf>
http://www.collegezone.com/2290_3714.htm
<http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2003/05/scholarshipfraud.shtm>

Below is information from the Illinois Student Assistance Commission's COLLEGE ZONE website.

SHOULD I PAY SOMEONE TO HELP ME FIND OR APPLY FOR STUDENT FINANCIAL AID?

The quick answer is: Free help is available, whether you're looking for sources of student aid or completing the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA). If there's a fee involved, be sure you know what you're paying for.

WHERE CAN I GET FREE INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENT AID?

The following sources usually have information about aid from the federal government and your state government; most can tell you about funds from your local community and private sources as well.

- **A college or career school financial aid office.** Talk to the financial aid administrator at the school you plan to attend. Be sure to ask about "institutional aid" - money the school itself awards students. The school's catalog or web site is also a good source of information about aid available at the school.
- **A local or college library.** Relevant materials are usually listed under "student aid" or "financial aid." If you need help, ask the reference librarian.
- **The Internet.** Search using the key words "student aid" or "financial aid." Remember that many scams operate over the Internet, so if an Internet service charges a fee, research it carefully. Better yet, use one of the many free Internet search services or aid information sites.
- **A high school counselor's office.** Many counselors have a large selection of materials, know what recent graduates have received, and can guide you to free online information.

WHAT IF I'M STILL CURIOUS ABOUT SCHOLARSHIP SEARCH SERVICES?

A number of privately operated scholarship search services charge fees that can range from \$50 to well over \$500. It is important to understand what information scholarship search services can provide. Some can be helpful in identifying sources of aid for students who meet certain criteria, such as academic achievement, religious affiliation, ethnic or racial heritage, artistic talents, athletic ability, career plans, or proposed field of study. However, bear in mind that funds from these sources are usually limited and not all applicants will receive awards.

Listed below are some of the services you might reasonably expect from a private scholarship search service.

- Most scholarship search services provide a list of sources of financial assistance you may apply for. After studying the list, you then send a separate application to each source that interests you. The scholarship search service does not apply on your behalf or pay any additional application fees that may be required.
- Many search services offer to refund your fee if you do not receive any award. However, some services require you to provide a rejection letter from every source on the list to claim your refund. You should be aware that many scholarship sources do not routinely send rejection letters. Make sure you get the scholarship search service's refund policy in writing before paying any money.

What Are Some Questionable Tactics I Should Watch Out For?

- **Some services will tell you that millions of dollars in student aid go unclaimed every year.** The large figures you may hear or read about usually represent an estimated national total of employee benefits or member benefits. Usually, such benefits are available only to the employees (and their families) of a specific company, or to the members of a specific union or other organization.

- **Some claim that you can't get the same information anywhere else.** Many services make you pay to get information you could have received for free from a college financial aid office, state education agency, local library, the U.S. Department of Education, or the Internet. Remember that you can find out about student aid without paying a fee to a search service.
- **Others request your credit card or bank account number to hold student financial aid for you.** Search services do not, in most cases, provide any awards directly to applicants, apply on behalf of applicants, or act as a disbursing agent for financial aid providers. You should never give out a credit card or bank account number unless you know the company or organization you are giving it to is legitimate.
- **Others try to get you to send them money by claiming that you are a finalist in a scholarship contest.** Most sources of financial aid have application deadlines and eligibility criteria; they do not, generally, operate like a sweepstakes.
- **Scholarship seminars frequently end with one-on-one meetings in which a salesperson pressures the student to "buy now or lose out on this opportunity."** Legitimate services don't use such pressure tactics. Each year, the U.S. Department of Education receives numerous complaints from students and parents who did not receive the information they expected from a search service. The Department does not evaluate private scholarship search services. If you decide to use one of these services, you should check its reputation by contacting the Better Business Bureau (<http://www.bbb.com/>), a school guidance counselor, or a state attorney general's office. Additionally, investigate the organization yourself before making a commitment:
 - Ask for names of three or four local families who have used its services recently.
 - Ask how many students have used the service and how many of them received scholarships as a result.
 - Find out about the service's refund policy.
 - Get everything in writing.
 - Read all the fine print before signing anything.

The Scholarship Fraud Prevention Act created a fraud-awareness partnership between the U.S. Department of Education and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). For more information about scholarship scams or to report a scam, call the FTC toll free at 877-FTC-HELP (877-382-4357) or go to <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/edcams/scholarship/>

Could you run that by me one more time?

Most of the information private scholarship search services provide can be obtained for free elsewhere. Before you pay any company or organization to find student financial aid for you, make sure you know what you're getting for your money. Searching for student aid on your own can prevent you from wasting your money. You just need to know where to look.

To get information on student aid for college or career school:

800-4-FED-AID (800-433-3243); TTY: 800-730-8913
<http://www.students.gov/>

To get more information about scholarship scams:

877-FTC-HELP (877-382-4357)
<http://www.ftc.gov/scholarshipscams/>

To report a scam:

877-FTC-HELP (877-382-4357)
 or to fill out a [complaint form on line](#)

To check on complaints against a company:

<http://www.bbb.com/>

To fill out the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA):

<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>

To get help completing the FAFSA:

800-4-FED-AID (800-433-3243); TTY: 800-730-8913
www.studentaid.ed.gov/completefafsa

WHAT IF I WANT MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT FEDERAL STUDENT AID?

The major source of student financial aid is the U.S. Department of Education. About 70% of the student aid that is awarded each year comes from the U.S. Department of Education's programs (approximately \$61 billion in 2000-2001). The Department's aid includes grants, loans, and work-study.

Free materials available in the financial aid office at your college or career school or the guidance office at your high school include the FAFSA as well as [The Student Guide](#) and [Funding Your Education](#) (two booklets that provide detailed information about the U.S. Department of Education's programs). You also may request copies of the FAFSA or either of the two booklets by calling the Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC) toll free at the number shown below. The FSAIC's operators can answer your questions about federal student aid and the application process.

Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC):
800-4-FED-AID (800-433-3243)
(TTY 800-730-8913)

Most federal student aid is awarded based on financial need rather than scholastic achievement. For instance, most grants are targeted to low-income students. However, you do not have to show financial need to receive certain federal student loans. You may apply for federal student aid at no cost by filing a paper FAFSA or applying electronically with FAFSA on the Web, the online application for federal student aid. All you need for FAFSA on the Web is a computer that supports a Department-approved browser. FAFSA on the Web is at www.fafsa.ed.gov/.

Who Offers Free Help Completing My FAFSA?

Some private companies charge a fee to help you complete the FAFSA. You can get free help from the FSAIC. You can also get free help from the financial aid administrator at your college, from FAFSA on the Web's online help, or from a U.S. Department of Education online guide called Completing the FAFSA at <http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/completefafsa>. You may visit the Department of Education's federal student aid web site to view Department publications online or to learn more about the Department's programs: <http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/>

What About Aid from Other Government Agencies?

Student aid is also available from other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. For links to such information, visit <http://www.students.gov/>.

WHO CAN GIVE ME DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT STATE STUDENT AID?

Contact your state education agency (usually located in the capital of your state). Call the FSAIC or visit the web site listed below to get the telephone number for your state agency; this site also has links to state agencies' web sites: www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SHEA.htm

WHO ELSE AWARDS AID TO STUDENTS?

Student aid may also be available from foundations, community organizations, and organizations related to your field of interest (for example, the American Medical Association or American Bar Association). Contact the organizations directly for detailed information. Check with your parents' employers to see whether they award scholarships or have tuition payment plans. Although funds from these sources make up a small percentage of the total aid awarded each year, it's worth doing the research - you never know what you might find.

CHECKLIST OF FREE SOURCES OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION

- the financial aid office at your college or career school
- a high school counselor
- the U.S. Department of Education
- other federal agencies (including the military, if appropriate)
- your state education agency
- the reference section of your school or public library
- the Internet
- foundations, religious organizations, community organizations, local businesses, and civic groups
- organizations (including professional associations) related to your field of interest
- ethnicity-based organizations
- your employer or your parents' employers
- free scholarship search services

Check with all of these sources before considering paying for a scholarship search or other financial aid service.

Sincerely,

OPRFHS Student Services