



Lamar University Verification Policy 2017-2018 Financial Aid Office

New FAFSA verification, updating, and corrections requirements for all students receiving federal and state financial aid

Overview

To apply for federal financial aid, a student submits a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to the Central Processing System (CPS). Because students sometimes make errors on their application, there is a process for verifying applications and making corrections. The regulations in Subpart E (sections 51 to 61 of Part 668 of the Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations) govern the verification by institutions of information submitted by applicants for student financial assistance under the subsidized student financial assistance programs.

In accordance with the provisions of Subpart E, the University has established and uses written policies and procedures for verifying an applicant's FAFSA information. These policies and procedures include—

- (1) The time period within which an applicant must provide any documentation requested by the University;
- (2) The consequences of an applicant's failure to provide the requested documentation within the specified time period;
- (3) The method by which the University notifies an applicant of the results of its verification if, as a result of verification, the applicant's EFC changes and results in a change in the amount of the applicant's assistance under the Title IV, HEA programs;
- (4) The procedures the University will follow itself or the procedures the University will require an applicant to follow to correct FAFSA information determined to be in error; and
- (5) The procedures the University will follow for making referrals to the Office of Inspector General.

► ***Institutional Responsibility:*** The University must require an applicant whose FAFSA information is selected for verification to submit supporting documentation to verify specified data elements of his/her FAFSA, unless the applicant qualifies for a federal exclusion. (See Exclusions from Verification.)



► **Applicant Responsibility:** If the University requests documents or information from an applicant under this Subpart E, the applicant must provide the specified documents or information.

Selection of Applicants

► **Standard Selection:** As stated previously, to apply for federal financial aid a student submits a FAFSA to the Central Processing System (CPS). The CPS selects which applications are selected for verification. Data-based statistical analysis is used to select for verification those applicants with the highest probability of error on their FAFSA submissions. The CPS sets a *Verification Flag* on the student's processed FAFSA report to indicate that the student's record has been selected for verification. The processed FAFSA is also known as the Student Aid Report (SAR).

► **Customized Selection:** The U.S. Department of Education's long-range goal for verification is a customized selection approach based on the data provided by each applicant on the FAFSA. When fully implemented, this process will identify, for a selected applicant, only the FAFSA information that requires verification based upon that applicant's data. Transition to a customized verification process is expected to continue over multiple award years. Moving toward this customized approach in the 2017-2018 award year, the CPS will also use a *Verification Tracking Flag* to place an applicant selected for verification into one of three Verification Tracking Groups. (See Information to be Verified.)

► **Update or Correction Selection:** An aid applicant should be aware that an update or correction to his/her FAFSA may trigger the CPS to select the application or additional data elements for verification. In this case, the University must require the applicant to submit any additional documentation needed to complete the verification process.

► **Institutional Selection:** The University has the authority and responsibility to select an application for verification if there is reason to believe that an applicant's FAFSA information is inaccurate and/or contains conflicting information. The student will then be required to submit documentation to clarify the accuracy of the FAFSA data and/or to resolve the conflicting information and/or to verify specific data elements deemed necessary.

Exclusions from Verification: Federal regulations stipulate that the University need not verify an applicant's FAFSA information if:

- a) the applicant dies;
- b) the applicant does not receive assistance under the title IV, HEA programs for reasons other than failure to verify FAFSA information;
- c) the applicant is eligible to receive only unsubsidized student financial assistance; or
- d) the applicant who transfers to the institution, had previously completed verification at the institution from which he or she transferred, and applies for assistance based on the same FAFSA information used at the previous institution, if the current institution obtains a letter from the previous institution—

- (1) stating that it has verified the applicant's information; and
- (2) providing the transaction number of the applicable valid ISIR.



Further, unless the University has reason to believe that the information reported by a dependent student is incorrect, it need not verify the applicant's parents' FAFSA information if:

- a) the parents are residing in a country other than the United States and cannot be contacted by normal means of communication;
- b) the parents cannot be located because their contact information is unknown and cannot be obtained by the applicant; or
- c) both of the applicant's parents are mentally incapacitated.
- d) both parents or the custodial parent has died

Lastly, unless the institution has reason to believe that the information reported by an independent student is incorrect, it need not verify the applicant's spouse's information if:

- a) the spouse is deceased;
- b) the spouse is mentally incapacitated;
- c) the spouse is residing in a country other than the United States and cannot be contacted by normal means of communication; or
- d) the spouse cannot be located because his or her contact information is unknown and cannot be obtained by the applicant.

► **Lamar University policy regarding federal exclusions:** Verification requirements will be waived for the federal exclusions listed above provided the University receives supporting documentation pertaining to the applicable exclusion by our published verification deadlines.

Notification

A student whose FAFSA information is selected for verification will be notified of his/her selected status as follows:

- a) the CPS will notify the student on his/her Student Aid Report (SAR). Next to the EFC will be an asterisk referring to a comment in the student section of the SAR that tells the applicant that he/she will be asked by the University to provide documentation for verification; and
- b) Lamar will send an email notification to students regarding any outstanding requirements and these requirements are outlined in the student's Self-Service Banner Account. Additionally, first-time freshman students are sent a Missing Information Letter in the mail.

University email notifications sent to a student whose FAFSA information is selected for verification will include:

- a) a link to the student's Self-Service Banner login screen: https://ssbprod.lamar.edu:9000/btdb/twbkwbis.P_WWWLogin. This site allows the student to view all documentation needed to satisfy the verification requirements and complete any additional financial aid requirements; and
- b) the student's responsibilities with respect to completing all requirements for financial aid, including the consequences of failing to complete any required action or delaying their



completion of any requirements.

Information to be Verified

For each award year, the Secretary of Education publishes in the **Federal Register** a notice announcing the FAFSA information that an institution and an applicant may be required to verify. The notice also specifies what documentation is acceptable for verifying FAFSA information. The **Federal Register** lists these items for the 2017-18 award year.

The individual verification items that an applicant must verify are based upon the *Verification Tracking Group* to which the applicant is assigned as listed in the chart below:

Verification Tracking Flag	Verification Tracking Group Name	FAFSA Information Required to be Verified
V1	Standard Verification Group (Tax Filers)	<input type="checkbox"/> Adjusted Gross Income <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Income Tax Paid <input type="checkbox"/> Untaxed Portions of IRA Distributions <input type="checkbox"/> Untaxed Portion of Pensions <input type="checkbox"/> IRA Deductions & Payments <input type="checkbox"/> Tax Exempt Interest Income <input type="checkbox"/> Education Credits <input type="checkbox"/> Number of Household Members <input type="checkbox"/> Number in College
V1	Standard Verification Group (Non-Tax Filers)	<input type="checkbox"/> Income Earned from Work <input type="checkbox"/> Number of Household Members <input type="checkbox"/> Number in College
V4	Custom Verification Group	<input type="checkbox"/> High School Completion Status <input type="checkbox"/> Identity/Statement of Education Purpose
V5	Aggregate Verification Group	<input type="checkbox"/> All items in V1 and V4

NOTE: Federal regulations stipulate that an institution may require an applicant to verify any FAFSA information that it specifies. Therefore, as necessary, the University may require a student to verify any FAFSA information and to provide any reasonable documentation.

Acceptable Documentation

The documentation required for verification varies according to the specific FAFSA information being verified. A student selected for verification will need to submit the following acceptable documentation to the University to complete the verification process. If a student is unable to submit any of the required documents, he/she should contact the Financial Aid Office to discuss possible alternative acceptable documentation. **For 2017-2018, each Tracking Group has its own assigned Lamar University Verification Worksheet.**



SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID LAMAR UNIVERSITY

<i>FAFSA Information</i>	<i>Acceptable Documentation</i>
Household Size*	Assigned Lamar University Verification Worksheet (2017-18)
Number in College	Assigned Lamar University Verification Worksheet (2017-18)
AGI & U.S. Tax Paid	IRS DRT*** or 2015 IRS Tax Return Transcript****
Untaxed Income (Tax Return Data)	IRS DRT*** or 2015 IRS Tax Return Transcript****
Untaxed Income** (FAFSA Questions 45 & 94)	Assigned Lamar University Verification Worksheet (2017-18); 2015 IRS Wage and Income Transcripts and/or W2 Forms; LU Minimum Household Resources Form Other Documentation as Requested by the Financial Aid Office
Non-Filer Work Income	2015 IRS W-2 Forms, Assigned LU Verification Worksheet, Verification completed before April 24, 2017 required a “Verification of Non-filing Letter” from the IRS dated on or after October 1, 2016; When a W-2 cannot be provided DOE rules allow the student/parent/spouse to provide a signed statement indicating the amount earned, the source, and why a W-2 form cannot be provided.
High School Completion	High School Diploma or transcript; GED certificate or transcript; homeschooled credential or transcript; academic transcript showing two-year program completion; other documentation allowed by DOE.
Identity/Statement of Education Purpose	Original government-issued photo identification (ID) such as a passport or a driver’s license and <u>original</u> 2017-18 Identity and Statement of Educational Purpose done in person or with a Notary of the Public.
Other Information	Other documentation as specified by the CPS or the University

***Household Size:** For 2017-2018, the number of household members includes anyone who is receiving more than half of their support from the student, spouse, or the parent listed on the FAFSA from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018. At times additional information may be requested to confirm the household size.

****Untaxed Income (FAFSA Questions 45 & 94):** If the University determines that the amounts provided and verified from Question 45, Question 94, and from other income information (e.g. adjusted gross income, income earned from work) do not appear to provide sufficient financial support for the number of household family members reported, the applicant and, if appropriate, the applicant’s parents or spouse must explain how the family was financially supported during the 2015 calendar year.

*****IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT):**
The IRS DRT is the fastest, easiest, and most secure method of meeting verification requirements. To verify tax data, the U.S. Department of Education and the University encourage students and parents to



SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID LAMAR UNIVERSITY

use the IRS DRT to import data from their tax return directly to the FAFSA, either at the initial FAFSA filing or through the FAFSA correction process. For the retrieved data to be acceptable documentation of tax data, it is necessary that neither the student nor the parents change the data after it is transferred from the IRS.

► For assistance with the IRS DRT process, a student may view a tutorial at:
<http://financialaid.lamar.edu/how-to-apply/index.html>.

Under the following conditions the IRS DRT is NOT available (all apply to both students and parents):

- a) the person did not indicate on the FAFSA that the tax return has been completed;
- b) the applicant or applicant's parents had a change in marital status after the end of the 2015 IRS tax year on December 31, 2015;
- c) the first three digits of the SSN are 666;
- d) the person has been a victim of identity theft (See Victim of Identity Theft below.);
- e) the tax return was amended (See Filing an Amended Return below.);
- f) the person filed a tax filing extension with the IRS (See Tax Filing Extensions below.);
- g) the person filed a Puerto Rican or foreign tax return (See Foreign Tax Filers below.);
- h) the person is married and filed the tax return either as head of household or married filing separately;
- i) in all instances, when the dependent student's legal parents are unmarried and living together;
- j) neither married parent entered a valid SSN on the FAFSA;
- k) a non-married parent or both married parents entered all zeroes for the SSN on FAFSA; or the person filed the tax return as married and has now separated, divorced, married someone else, or been widowed.

Please Note: *As of March 10, 2017, the Data Retrieval Tool (DRT) will be unavailable until further notice. Students, spouses, and/or parents who did not successfully use the DRT prior to this outage must obtain an IRS Tax Return Transcript.*

******IRS Tax Return Transcript:** If a student or parent has filed taxes and cannot/will not use the IRS DRT, they must provide the *IRS Tax Return Transcript* obtained from the IRS that lists tax account information of the tax filer for tax year 2015. In some cases our office will also request W-2 Forms.

► Requesting a Tax Return Transcript and a Wage and Income Transcript: A student or parent may request an IRS Tax Return Transcript and the Wage and Income Transcript from the IRS, free of charge, in one of the following ways:

- a) online by downloading an immediate PDF at <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Get-Transcript>;
- b) by mail after submitting an online request at <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Get-Transcript>, or by calling the IRS at 1-800-908-9946;
- c) by visiting an IRS office in person

► Victims of Identity Theft: Victims of identity theft who cannot get a return transcript or use the DRT must submit a Tax Return DataBase View (TRDBV) transcript as well as a statement they have signed and dated indicating that they were victims of tax-related identity theft and that the IRS has been made



SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID LAMAR UNIVERSITY

aware of it. They do this by calling the IRS's Identity Protection Specialized Unit (IPSU) at 800-908-4490. After the IPSU authenticates the tax filer's identity, he/she can ask the IRS to mail him/her the TRDBV transcript, which is an alternate paper transcript that will look different than a regular transcript but that is official and can be used for verification. If our office has reason to doubt the TRDBV transcript's authenticity, we will request that the student obtains a TRDBV transcript that has an IRS signature or stamp or other official validation. Students who cannot obtain a TRDBV transcript may instead submit another official IRS transcript or equivalent IRS document if it includes all of the income and tax information required to be verified and then confirm with our office that this documentation is acceptable.

► **Filing an Amended Return:** A student or parent who files an amended return cannot use the IRS DRT process. Instead he/she may submit to the Financial Aid Office:

- IRS Tax Return Transcript, or any IRS tax transcript that includes all of the income and tax information required to be verified, *and*
- a signed copy of the amended 2015 tax return (1040X) that was filed and stamped by the IRS or done with a tax preparer and has the tax preparer's PTIN on the form. In the event the 1040X was not done by a preparer or stamped by the IRS then the student/parent will need to wait for the 1040X to be processed and then request and submit an IRS Tax Account Transcript to our office showing the amendment was filed.
- Other documents, such as W-2s, may be required upon request.

► **Tax Filing Extensions:** Families who file an extension with the IRS must provide the Extension Request Form 4868 and provide all 2015 W-2 Forms and provide a pending 2015 Tax Return Form or a signed statement of their anticipated AGI and Income Tax Paid for 2015. The student will be awarded with this information but **NO** funds will disburse to the student until the taxes have been filed and an IRS Tax Return Transcript has been provided to our office.

► **Foreign Tax Filers:** A student or parent who filed an income tax return other than an IRS form, such as a foreign or Puerto Rican tax form, must use the income and tax information (converted to U.S. dollars) from the lines of that form that correspond most closely to the income information reported on a U.S. income tax return to complete the FAFSA. Foreign tax filers cannot use the IRS DRT and, therefore, must submit signed copies of their 2015 foreign tax returns translated into English with U.S. dollar equivalencies to the Financial Aid Office.

► **Non-filers:** A student or parent who is not required to file a U.S tax return is required to submit the Lamar University Verification Worksheet for 2017-2018, copies of all 2015 IRS Wage & Income Transcripts and/or W-2 Forms to verify income earned from work, and A "Verification of Non-Filing Letter" from the IRS. If an individual who is required to submit an IRS Wage & Income Transcript and/or W-2 Form is unable to obtain one in a timely manner, the University may permit that individual to provide a signed statement that includes:



- a) the amount of income earned from work;
- b) the source of that income; and
- c) the reason that the IRS Form W-2 Form is not available in a timely manner.

Please Note: Students completing verification after April 24, 2017 will no longer be required to provide a “Verification of Non-Filing Letter” from the IRS that show they, their spouse, or their parents did not file a tax return. Instead, individuals will self-certify on the assigned verification worksheet that they did not and are not required to file a 2015 income tax return. Additional documentation may be requested if the University has reason to believe this information is inaccurate. These changes come from updated guidance from the Department of Education.

Deadlines and Failure to Submit Documentation

Lamar University strongly recommends that all applicants for financial aid complete the 2017-2018 FAFSA and all associated requirements (including Verification) prior to March 31st (the deadline for some state aid programs is March 15th). This is the priority deadline for the University for possible additional financial aid funding. If the student misses this deadline they are encouraged to complete the FAFSA as soon as possible.

A student whose FAFSA information has been selected for verification must submit all documentation required for verification to the Office of Student Financial Aid. Please allow three weeks for the verification process to be completed, once all items have been submitted. The process might take longer if the University receives incomplete documents or require additional information.

For Title IV Aid programs, excluding the Federal Pell Grant program: A student must complete the verification process no later than two weeks before the last day of the student’s enrollment.

A Pell eligible student selected for verification must complete the process for the 2017-2018 aid year by September 22, 2018 or 120 days after the last day of the student’s enrollment, whichever is earlier.

If the student does not provide the verification documentation by the deadline or the University does not receive a valid processed FAFSA by the deadline:

- the aid could be canceled for the award year (or term if the student is enrolling in one term only)
- Students will not receive a financial aid award or any disbursement until verification is complete.
- Students may lose out on the State of Texas programs (i.e. Texas Grant)

If the student provides the documentation after the deadline, Lamar University will reevaluate the students’ eligibility for aid on a case by case basis.



Updating FAFSA Information

► *Generally, a student cannot update FAFSA information that was correct as of the date the application was signed because the FAFSA is considered to be a “snapshot” of the family’s financial situation as of that date.* For example, if a student’s family sold some stock after signing the FAFSA and spent the proceeds on an automobile or home improvement, the student cannot update the FAFSA to reflect a change in assets. After the FAFSA is signed, only certain items can be updated under the conditions listed below.

- (1) **Dependency Status Change:** If a student’s dependency status changes at any time during the award year, the student must update FAFSA information, except when the update is due to a change in the student’s marital status.
- (2) **Verification of Household Size or Number in College:** An applicant whose FAFSA information is selected for verification of household size or number in college must update those items to be correct as of the date of verification, except when the update is due to a change in the student’s marital status.
- (3) **Marital Status Change:** The University may require a student to update FAFSA information under paragraph (1) or (2) of this section for a change in the student’s marital status if the University determines that the update is necessary to address an inequity or to reflect more accurately the student’s ability to pay.

Correcting Errors on FAFSA Information

► *Although a student cannot update FAFSA information that was filed correctly, except under limited conditions as listed-above, errors made on the original FAFSA must be corrected.*

As stated previously, to apply for federal aid a student submits a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to the Central Processing System (CPS). Generally, the FAFSA is submitted through the online process and the student receives from the CPS an electronic summary of his/her processed FAFSA known as the Student Aid Report (SAR).

Upon receipt of the SAR, the student should review all information listed on the SAR and submit for processing any errors reported on the original FAFSA to the CPS. In addition, customized Lamar University Verification Worksheets will be listed in the Self-Service Banner for students selected for federal verification. The student and parent(s) should complete the documentation as soon as possible and return it to the Financial Aid Office. Please note the deadlines listed above.

An electronic summary of a student’s original FAFSA and any corrected FAFSA information will be sent from the CPS to the University. Once received, all FAFSA data, Lamar University Verification Worksheets, and any supplemental verification documents will then be reviewed by the Financial



SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID LAMAR UNIVERSITY

Aid Office to verify the accuracy of the student's FAFSA information and to calculate his/her eligibility for need-based financial aid.

► *If a student's FAFSA information changes as a result of the University's verification process, the Office of Student Financial Assistance will:*

- a) submit for processing changes to the FAFSA information determined to be in error*;*
- b) recalculate the student's Federal Pell Grant on the basis of the recalculated EFC;*
- c) adjust the student's financial aid package on the basis of the recalculated EFC; and*
- d) notify the student via Self-Service Banner of any change to his/her financial aid package.*

**Note: Although the University will be able to submit most changes to FAFSA information, on occasion it may be necessary for the student to submit changes directly to the CPS. These events include a correction to the student's biographical information, marital status, or dependency status or a correction to a parent's biographical information or marital status. In such cases, the University will notify the student by phone, mail, or email as to which data items must be corrected by the student and submitted for processing to the CPS. Additionally, some corrections, such as incorrect tax return filing statuses, will need to be addressed by the student and/or parent before we will be able to continue processing the student's application.*

Any corrections or updates must be submitted by midnight Central Time, September 15, 2018.

Applicant Verification With No Corrections Necessary

In many situations, applicants who have been selected for verification do not have any errors on their application and therefore no information reported on their FAFSA needs updating. Applicants and their parents are encouraged to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool because of its accuracy and ease of use. However, to ensure to the furthest extent that a financial aid representative does not overlook an error in an applicant's verification information, the Office of Student Financial Assistance has a process set up so that after a verification is deemed to need no corrections, the verifications will be later reviewed by someone other than the original processor to ensure that no errors were overlooked. If an error is found, the original processor will then contact the applicant to arrange for the error to be corrected and/or for the applicant to submit the necessary documentation. Additionally, the Assistant Director of Student Financial Assistance will be notified of the corrections being made to the applicant's FAFSA.

Professional Judgments

Professional judgment is the discretionary action available to a financial aid administrator to address unusual circumstances that affect a student's ability to pay education expenses. Financial aid administrators may make adjustments on a case-by-case basis, and documentation must be collected.



Professional judgments may be reviewed by the Assistant Director, Associate Director, or the Director of Student Financial Assistance. There is a required form that each student requesting a professional judgment must complete along with viable documentation. The form must be requested by the parent/student and they are asked what the special condition is. The form must be completely filled out by the student and/or parent. If not, the student will not be notified what is needed. The process takes up to six weeks depending on the student's/parents' situation and the documents needed to complete the professional judgment. The school is required to perform verification on selected applicants before completing the professional judgment request from the student.

Referral of Fraud Cases

The Lamar University Office of Student Financial Assistance will report any suspected fraud or falsified information (on the part of the student, the parent, and preparer of financial aid applications or related parties) to the U. S. Department of Education and all other related parties for immediate action. Examples of such information include false claims of independent student status, false claims of citizenship, use of false identities, forgery of signatures or certificates, and false statements of income. This information will be forwarded to authorized agencies in addition to the U.S Department of Education for investigation such as the Office of Inspector General at 1-800-MIS-USED (1-800-647-8733) or by email at oig.hotline@ed.gov; web: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oig/hotline.html>. Anyone who suspects fraud or abuse may make a confidential report contacting the Office of Inspector General. Noncompliance issues follow the University administrative chain of command. Should an issue remain unresolved, complainants can call the State Hotline at 1-800-TXAUDIT. Complainants can also report suspected instances of noncompliance to the Department of Education, Office of the Ombudsmen, or report the complaint to www.ethicspoint.com

Definitions of Common Terms

► **Central Processing System (CPS):** The primary business function of the CPS is student application processing and eligibility determination for federal student financial assistance for postsecondary education.

► **Federal Expected Family Contribution (FM EFC):** A measure of how much the student and his/her family can be expected to contribute to the cost of the student's education for the award year based on the federal need analysis formula. Note: The University determines a student's eligibility for need-based federal aid based on a student's FM EFC.

► **Institutional Expected Family Contribution (IM EFC):** A measure of how much the student and his/her family can be expected to contribute to the cost of the student's education for the award year based on the institutional need analysis formula. Note: The University determines a student's eligibility



SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID

LAMAR UNIVERSITY

for need-based institutional aid based on a student's IM EFC.

► ***Institutional Student Information Record (ISIR):*** One of two output documents created by the CPS after processing a student's FAFSA. The ISIR is made available electronically to the institutions listed on the student's FAFSA and his/her state agency.

► ***Federal subsidized student financial assistance programs:*** Title IV, HEA programs for which eligibility is determined on the basis of an applicant's FAFSA EFC. These programs include the Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), Federal Work-Study (FWS), Federal Perkins Loan, and Direct Subsidized Loan programs.

► ***Federal unsubsidized student financial assistance programs:*** Title IV, HEA programs for which eligibility is not based on an applicant's FAFSA EFC. For students attending Lamar University, these programs include the Direct Unsubsidized Loan and Direct PLUS Loan programs.

► ***Student Aid Report (SAR):*** One of two output documents created by the CPS after processing a student's FAFSA. The SAR is made available electronically to the student.