



UTAH SYSTEM OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

TAB C

April 15, 2022

FAFSA Completion Efforts

Overview

Below is a summary of significant Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion efforts by the Commissioner's office in 2021-22. These were done in partnership with the Utah College Advising Corps (UCAC), Utah College Application Week (UCAW), and the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), along with college access programs, high school counselors, and other financial aid professionals across the state.

Integration of UHEAA's Outreach Efforts

In June 2021, Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority's (UHEAA) two outreach officers were reallocated to the Commissioner's office. All of UHEAA's former FAFSA programs have been merged with the Commissioner's office access programs and initiatives, in addition to a substantial number of new efforts this year.

FAFSA Nights

This year, 139 FAFSA Nights were hosted throughout the state, representing an increase of 37 events over last year; more than 1,400 students attended a FAFSA Night. To assist students, 168 volunteers from 21 financial aid offices and college access programs, provided over 564 hours of volunteer services in the fall of 2021.

UCAW and FAFSA Nights Collaboration

FAFSA Nights work in tandem with Utah College Application Week (UCAW), a program run by the Commissioner's office that supports high schools in providing their students an opportunity to apply to college during the school day. This year, 118 high schools hosted a joint FAFSA Night/UCAW event, which helps to solidify the relationship between applying to college and paying for college. In addition, in October 2021, Governor Spencer J. Cox declared October as [Utah College Application and Financial Aid Awareness Month](#), the first time financial aid was specifically called out in such a declaration.

Utah College Advising Corps (UCAC)

UCAC advisers attend a FAFSA Boot Camp, [a mid-year training](#) with detailed FAFSA case studies, and monthly webinars from the Commissioner's office. UCAC Advisers also support high school counselors in hosting UCAW and FAFSA Night events at their high school and have access to their school's FAFSA Data

Site (described below). To support UCAC regional coordinators in answering complex FAFSA questions, the Commissioner's office set up a Slack channel where they can quickly ask the USHE FAFSA State Coordinator questions.

Trainings

FAFSA Boot Camps

[FAFSA boot camps](#) are an annual three-hour FAFSA training for high school counselors, UCAC regional coordinators and advisers, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teachers, Latinos in Action (LIA) teachers, financial literacy teachers, GEAR UP advisers, TRIO advisers, scholarship advisers, and FAFSA Night volunteers. These trainings include updates of the FAFSA, common topics and sections of the FAFSA, answering questions, and practice using the FAFSA with pre-created case studies. This year the Commissioner's office hosted more than 16 boot camps for 314 college access professionals.

FAFSA Deep Dive Trainings

During the 2021-22 school year, the Commissioner's office initiated a new training series for UCAC regional coordinators and GEAR UP advisers across the state that provided a deeper look into the FAFSA. These [four one-hour trainings](#) covered the following topics:

1. Before the FAFSA
2. Inside the FAFSA
3. Assisting Dreamers, Refugees, and Asylum Grantees
4. After the FAFSA

Financial Aid Webinars

[Five financial aid webinars](#) were given throughout the school year for college access professionals across the state. These 30-minute webinars provided professional development contact hours for counselors and covered topics such as:

- More than Pell: Five Reasons Why the FAFSA is Important for Students from All Income Levels (with a guest speaker from Weber State University Financial Aid)
- FAFSA Guidance: Students with Divorced, Remarried, Separated, Widowed Parents (with a guest speaker from Davis Technical College)
- Advising for Out of State College (with guest speakers from Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE)/Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), West High Counseling, and UCAC)
- The Financial Aid Deferment Process (with a guest speaker from Snow College)
- Coming soon this April: Navigating Financial Aid Award Letters (presentation from the Commissioner's Office FAFSA Help Team)

FAFSA Data Sites

USHE FAFSA Data Site

The [FAFSA Data Site](#) provides high school counselors secure access to view near-real-time data showing

which of their students have completed the FAFSA. This tool helps counselors strategically plan and assist students in their FAFSA completion.

USBE FAFSA Equity Dashboards

USHE and the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) have joined together to provide FAFSA equity dashboards that high school and district professionals can use to see real-time FAFSA filing percentages for their individual schools, disaggregated by five demographic categories: Race/ethnicity, Socioeconomic disadvantage, gender (male/female), English Language learner, and special education (IEP/504). This will help high school professionals find ways to strategically assist specific populations in their schools and close equity gaps in services. The dashboard will be launched in fall 2022.

Spring FAFSA Push

FAFSA Scholarships and FAFSA Cup

This year, the Commissioner's office will award twelve \$500 scholarships to students who attended a FAFSA event, completed their FAFSA, and completed the [FAFSA survey](#). These scholarships have proved to be helpful incentives for students to participate in FAFSA Nights. In addition, the high school that has shown the most significant increase in FAFSA completion is awarded the FAFSA Cup, which comes with a \$1,000 grant for the high school counseling team. These competitors provide information on what they do to promote, host, meet with, and follow up with students and families to complete the FAFSA.

FAFSA Best Practices Document

Informed by prior efforts from FAFSA Cup winners, the Commissioner's office has put together the [USHE FAFSA Nights and FAFSA Completion Best Practices](#). The best practices document has been shared with high school professionals throughout the state to support increased FAFSA completion in their schools.

FAFSA Walkthrough Videos

One of the most-used resources provided by the Commissioner's office is a full-length FAFSA walkthrough video in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#). This video provides a full narration of how to complete the FAFSA, from FSA ID completion to FAFSA submission. While this video is well-known across the country and is used by college access programs nationally, a focus has been placed this year on increasing Utah's viewership of the video. Utah is now among the top four states with the most views.

Questions?

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Commissioner's Recommendation

This is a discussion item only; no action is required.