

THRIVE

An initiative of The Education Trust in Tennessee

About The Session:

The details of college costs can be overwhelming, and they are further complicated by confusing and complex aid and scholarship applications and programs.

Join Bob Obrohta, Executive Director of the TN College Access and Success Network, as he walks through how to interpret the real costs of college and how to advocate for special circumstances for students.

Key Takeaways:

1. Financial aid award letters are complicated and confusing. The provided excel spreadsheet can help provide clarification.
2. College Navigator provides current, publicly available information on tuition and college costs.
3. Special circumstances can be considered by financial aid offices with proper documentation.

Resources:

- [College Cost Estimator](#)
- [Revision Form](#)
- [Financial Aid App](#)
- [Financial Aid Tips](#)



The Real Cost of College

Bob Obrohta

Tennessee College Access and Success Network

What's Been Done so Far

01

Student has been admitted to colleges

02

FAFSA has been completed

03

Verification Forms for the FAFSA have been submitted to the colleges (if the student was selected for verification)

04

Institutional Scholarship Applications have been completed

Sample Award Letter 1

AWARDS:	FALL 2016	SPRING 2017
2016-2017 Aid Year		
Pell Grant	\$2,908.00	\$2,907.00
Sup. Ed. Op. Grant	\$250.00	\$250.00
Tex Pub Edu Grant (In	\$500.00	\$500.00
Direct Subsidized Loa	\$1,750.00	\$1,750.00
Direct Unsubsidized L	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00
Direct Parent Plus Lo	\$258.00	\$257.00
Texas Grant Initial	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00
Term Total	\$9,166.00	\$9,164.00
Grand Total	\$18,330.00	



Sample Award Letter 2

Summary of Costs and Financial Aid

Total Cost of Attendance	\$48,200.00
Gift Aid Offered	\$5,815.00
Self-help Options excluding Credit Based Loans	\$5,500.00
Credit Based Aid Offered	<u>\$36,885.00</u>
Net Costs After All Aid	\$0.00

Sample Award Letter 3

Gift Aid (Scholarships and Grants).

Award Description	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Total
Pace Incentive Award	11,000.00	11,000.00	\$22,000.00
Pace Grant - New	3,500.00	3,500.00	\$7,000.00
Federal Pell Grant	2,908.00	2,907.00	\$5,815.00
Total Gift Aid	\$17,408.00	\$17,407.00	\$34,815.00

You are eligible for these Other Aid Programs (Loans and Work Study) to assist in covering your Out of Pocket Costs:

Award Description	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Total
Direct Sub Stafford Loan	1,750.00	1,750.00	\$3,500.00
Direct Unsub Stafford Loan	1,000.00	1,000.00	\$2,000.00
Direct PLUS (Parent) Loan	10,675.00	10,675.00	\$21,350.00
Total Loans and Work Assistance	\$13,425.00	\$13,425.00	\$26,850.00

To help you understand how these awards will assist you in paying for your education, please consider the following information. Your Cost of Attendance (COA) consists of the following Direct and Indirect expenses and is based on your status as a Resident student. (Note that costs may be estimated or averaged.)

Direct Expenses (paid directly to Pace):		Indirect Expenses (estimated personal expenses):	
Tuition:	41,120.00	Books and Supplies:	800.00
Fees:	1,902.00	Transportation:	600.00
Room:	12,016.00	Personal Expenses:	1,628.00
Board (Meal Plan):	3,600.00	Living Allowance:	
Total Direct Expenses:	\$58,638.00	Total Indirect Expenses:	\$3,028.00
		Total Cost of Attendance	\$61,666.00

...and that's if you can even find the award and the costs!

Electronic Aid Awards can be buried in a myriad of locations

The electronic aid award is often in a separate location from the costs

The bill from the college is in a separate location from the cost

Aid may not post all at once to the bill

Poor instructions on how to "accept" aid

Poor instructions on how to pay a bill and set up a payment plan.

What do students and families want to know?

Can we afford it?

What is the bill?

How much money do I have to come up with and when do I need to have it by.

Should we take out loans?

If we take out loans, what are we taking out and how much is too much?

College Navigator - <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

The screenshot shows the College Navigator website interface. At the top, the navigation bar includes the IES and NCES logos, the text "National Center for Education Statistics", a search bar, and a "Go" button. Below this, the "COLLEGE Navigator" logo is displayed. The left sidebar contains search filters for "Name of School" (with a text input containing "middle tennessee state university"), "States" (a dropdown menu with "No Preference", "Alabama", and "Alaska" selected), "ZIP Code", "Miles from", "Programs/Majors", "Level of Award" (with checkboxes for Certificate, Bachelor's, Associate's, and Advanced), and "Institution Type" (with checkboxes for Public, Private non-profit, Private for-profit, 4-year, 2-year, and <2-year). A "Show Results" button and links for "Guide Me" and "Clear Search" are also present. The main content area displays details for "Middle Tennessee State University", including its address, general information (phone, website, type), awards offered, campus setting, housing, student population, and student-to-faculty ratio. A "View on Google Maps" link is provided. Below the details is a list of expandable sections: GENERAL INFORMATION, TUITION, FEES, AND ESTIMATED STUDENT EXPENSES, FINANCIAL AID, NET PRICE, ENROLLMENT, ADMISSIONS, RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES, OUTCOME MEASURES, PROGRAMS/MAJORS, SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS, VARSITY ATHLETIC TEAMS, ACCREDITATION, CAMPUS SECURITY AND SAFETY, and COHORT DEFAULT RATES. The footer includes language options (English, Español, About, Search Plug-in) and navigation links (College Navigator Home, College Costs, Prepare, Financial Aid, Careers). The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the system tray with a temperature of 68°F, the date 3/30/2022, and the time 8:57 AM.

Show Results

Guide Me | Clear Search

Beginning students are those who are entering postsecondary education for the first time.

ESTIMATED EXPENSES FOR ACADEMIC YEAR	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	% CHANGE 2020-2021 TO 2021-2022
Tuition and fees					
In-state	\$8,858	\$9,070	\$9,070	\$9,232	1.8%
Out-of-state	\$27,098	\$27,742	\$27,742	\$28,264	1.9%
Books and supplies	\$1,260	\$1,260	\$1,260	\$1,260	0.0%
Living arrangement					
On Campus					
Room and board	\$8,698	\$8,976	\$9,286	\$9,576	3.1%
Other	\$4,148	\$4,212	\$4,398	\$4,486	2.0%
Off Campus					
Room and board	\$8,698	\$8,976	\$9,286	\$9,576	3.1%
Other	\$4,148	\$4,212	\$4,398	\$4,486	2.0%
Off Campus with Family					
Other	\$4,148	\$4,212	\$4,398	\$4,486	2.0%
TOTAL EXPENSES					
In-state					
On Campus	\$22,964	\$23,518	\$24,014	\$24,554	2.2%
Off Campus	\$22,964	\$23,518	\$24,014	\$24,554	2.2%
Off Campus with Family	\$14,266	\$14,542	\$14,728	\$14,978	1.7%
Out-of-state					
On Campus	\$41,204	\$42,190	\$42,686	\$43,586	2.1%
Off Campus	\$41,204	\$42,190	\$42,686	\$43,586	2.1%
Off Campus with Family	\$32,506	\$33,214	\$33,400	\$34,010	1.8%



MULTIYEAR TUITION CALCULATOR

Estimate the total tuition and fee costs over the duration of a typical program.

AVERAGE GRADUATE STUDENT TUITION AND FEES FOR ACADEMIC YEAR

2021-2022

In-state tuition	\$9,396
In-state fees	\$1,432

Net Price

College Navigator - Middle Tennessee State University

nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=middle+tennessee+state+university&s=all&id=220978#netprc

IES NCES National Center for Education Statistics

Search Go

Guide Me | Clear Search

Full-time beginning undergraduate students who paid the in-state or in-district tuition rate and were awarded grant or scholarship aid from federal, state or local governments, or the institution.

	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Average net price	\$12,294	\$11,964	\$12,265

Full-time beginning undergraduate students who paid the in-state or in-district tuition rate and were awarded Title IV aid by income.

AVERAGE NET PRICE BY INCOME	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
\$0 – \$30,000	\$9,136	\$8,919	\$8,763
\$30,001 – \$48,000	\$10,869	\$10,637	\$10,661
\$48,001 – \$75,000	\$15,382	\$14,822	\$14,498
\$75,001 – \$110,000	\$16,927	\$17,177	\$16,941
\$110,001 and more	\$17,208	\$17,446	\$17,222

- Average net price is generated by subtracting the average amount of federal, state/local government, or institutional grant or scholarship aid from the total cost of attendance. Total cost of attendance is the sum of published tuition and required fees (lower of in-district or in-state), books and supplies, and the weighted average for room and board and other expenses.
- Beginning students are those who are entering postsecondary education for the first time.
- Title IV aid to students includes grant aid, work study aid, and loan aid. These include: Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG), National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent Grant (National SMART Grant), Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant, Federal Work-Study, Federal Perkins Loan, Subsidized Direct or FFEL Stafford Loan, and Unsubsidized Direct or FFEL Stafford Loan. For those Title IV recipients, net price is reported by income category and includes students who received federal aid even if none of that aid was provided in the form of grants. While Title IV status defines the cohort of student for which the data are reported, the definition of net price remains the same – total cost of attendance minus grant aid.

NET PRICE CALCULATOR

An institution's net price calculator allows current and prospective students, families, and other consumers to estimate the net price of attending that institution for a particular student.

Visit this institution's net price calculator www.mtsu.edu/financialaid/npcalc/npcalc.htm

- ENROLLMENT
- ADMISSIONS
- RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES
- OUTCOME MEASURES
- PROGRAMS/MAJORS
- SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS
- VARSITY ATHLETIC TEAMS

68°F Sunny 9:04 AM 3/30/2022

Steps to Interpret Aid Awards

1. Separate out the direct costs from the indirect costs.
2. Subtract gift aid from the direct costs.
3. Examine the loans offered and decide how much is necessary to borrow.
4. Determine how much the semester bill will be, and break it down into a payment plan. Decide if this is an affordable amount.

Public 4yr University

Middle Income Student/Good Academics

	Semester	Year
College Costs		
Tuition	\$ 3,573.00	\$ 7,146.00
Fees	\$ 979.00	\$ 1,958.00
Room	\$ 2,856.00	\$ 5,712.00
Board	\$ 2,185.00	\$ 4,370.00
Miscellaneous - Add all (books, trans.,etc)	\$ 2,951.00	\$ 5,902.00
Total Costs	\$ 12,544.00	\$ 25,088.00
Grants and Scholarships		
College Grants/Scholarships	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 5,000.00
Pell	\$ -	\$ -
SEOG	\$ -	\$ -
State Scholarships	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 3,500.00
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Grant Total	\$ 4,250.00	\$ 8,500.00
Loans		
Sub Stafford	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 3,500.00
Unsub Stafford	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 2,000.00
Perkins	\$ -	\$ -
PLUS	\$ -	\$ -
Loan Total	\$ 2,750.00	\$ 5,500.00
Costs		
Bill from the College	\$ 2,593.00	\$ 5,186.00
Miscellaneous Expenses (not included in bill)	\$ 2,951.00	\$ 5,902.00
Total Estimated Costs	\$ 5,544.00	\$ 11,088.00
Cost if you didn't take Loan	\$ 8,294.00	\$ 16,588.00
Work Study		
Work Study can be cash to the student or used to pay the bill. Only include this if you plan to use work study to pay the bill.		\$ -
Cost minus All Aid including Work Study	\$ 5,544.00	\$ 11,088.00
Standard Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem)	\$ 648.25	
Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem) No Loan	\$ 1,335.75	
Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem) Loan and Work Study included	\$ 648.25	

Public 4yr University

"I don't want to take out as much loan."

	Semester	Year
College Costs		
Tuition	\$ 3,573.00	\$ 7,146.00
Fees	\$ 979.00	\$ 1,958.00
Room	\$ 2,856.00	\$ 5,712.00
Board	\$ 2,185.00	\$ 4,370.00
Miscellaneous - Add all (books, trans.,etc)	\$ 2,951.00	\$ 5,902.00
Total Costs	\$ 12,544.00	\$ 25,088.00
Grants and Scholarships		
College Grants/Scholarships	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 5,000.00
Pell	\$ -	\$ -
SEOG	\$ -	\$ -
State Scholarships	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 3,500.00
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Grant Total	\$ 4,250.00	\$ 8,500.00
Loans		
Sub Stafford	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 3,500.00
Unsub Stafford		\$ -
Perkins	\$ -	\$ -
PLUS	\$ -	\$ -
Loan Total	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 3,500.00
Costs		
Bill from the College	\$ 3,593.00	\$ 7,186.00
Miscellaneous Expenses (not included in bill)	\$ 2,951.00	\$ 5,902.00
Total Estimated Costs	\$ 6,544.00	\$ 13,088.00
Cost if you didn't take Loan	\$ 8,294.00	\$ 16,588.00
Work Study		
Work Study can be cash to the student or used to pay the bill. Only include this if you plan to use work study to pay the bill.		\$ -
Cost minus All Aid including Work Study	\$ 6,544.00	\$ 13,088.00
Standard Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem)	\$ 898.25	
Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem) No Loan	\$ 1,335.75	
Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem) Loan and Work Study included	\$ 898.25	

Public 4yr University

Full Pell Grant Student/Good Academics

	Semester	Year
College Costs		
Tuition	\$ 3,573.00	\$ 7,146.00
Fees	\$ 979.00	\$ 1,958.00
Room	\$ 2,856.00	\$ 5,712.00
Board	\$ 2,185.00	\$ 4,370.00
Miscellaneous - Add all (books, trans.,etc)	\$ 2,951.00	\$ 5,902.00
Total Costs	\$ 12,544.00	\$ 25,088.00
Grants and Scholarships		
College Grants/Scholarships	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 5,000.00
Pell	\$ 3,447.00	\$ 6,894.00
SEOG	\$ -	\$ -
State Scholarships	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 3,500.00
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Grant Total	\$ 7,697.00	\$ 15,394.00
Loans		
Sub Stafford	\$ 1,750.00	\$ 3,500.00
Unsub Stafford	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 2,000.00
Perkins	\$ -	\$ -
PLUS	\$ -	\$ -
Loan Total	\$ 2,750.00	\$ 5,500.00
Costs		
Bill from the College	\$ (854.00)	\$ (1,708.00)
Miscellaneous Expenses (not included in bill)	\$ 2,951.00	\$ 5,902.00
Total Estimated Costs	\$ 2,097.00	\$ 4,194.00
Cost if you didn't take Loan	\$ 4,847.00	\$ 9,694.00
Work Study		
Work Study can be cash to the student or used to pay the bill. Only include this if you plan to use work study to pay the bill.		\$ -
Cost minus All Aid including Work Study	\$ 2,097.00	\$ 4,194.00
Standard Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem)	\$ (213.50)	
Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem) No Loan	\$ 474.00	
Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem) Loan and Work Study included	\$ (213.50)	

Community College

Full Pell Grant Student/Good Academics

	Semester	Year
College Costs		
Tuition	\$ 2,186.00	\$ 4,372.00
Fees	\$ -	\$ -
Room	\$ -	\$ -
Board	\$ -	\$ -
Miscellaneous - Add all (books, trans.,etc)	\$ 2,951.00	\$ 5,902.00
Total Costs	\$ 5,137.00	\$ 10,274.00
Grants and Scholarships		
College Grants/Scholarships		\$ -
Pell	\$ 3,447.00	\$ 6,894.00
SEOG	\$ -	\$ -
State Scholarships	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 3,000.00
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Other Grants/Scholarships	\$ -	\$ -
Grant Total	\$ 4,947.00	\$ 9,894.00
Loans		
Sub Stafford	\$ -	\$ -
Unsub Stafford	\$ -	\$ -
Perkins	\$ -	\$ -
PLUS	\$ -	\$ -
Loan Total	\$ -	\$ -
Costs		
Bill from the College	\$ (2,761.00)	\$ (5,522.00)
Miscellaneous Expenses (not included in bill)	\$ 2,951.00	\$ 5,902.00
Total Estimated Costs	\$ 190.00	\$ 380.00
Cost if you didn't take Loan	\$ 190.00	\$ 380.00
Work Study		
Work Study can be cash to the student or used to pay the bill. Only include this if you plan to use work study to pay the bill.		\$ -
Cost minus All Aid including Work Study	\$ 190.00	\$ 380.00
Standard Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem)	\$ (690.25)	
Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem) No Loan	\$ (690.25)	
Payment Plan Estimate 25% (4 payments per sem) Loan and Work Study included	\$ (690.25)	

Is it worth it?



\$12,000 in Student Loans (for every \$10K of loan, assume roughly \$120 a month)



Living at Home (Commuting) vs Living on Campus (Learning Environment)



Food Insecurity vs. Meal Plan (3 hots!)



Working to cover indirect expenses (books etc) vs Working to Pay the Rent

Special Circumstances

- **The FAFSA doesn't reflect your reality**
- **Loss of Employment/Hours cut**
- **Medical Bills (or other extreme spikes in expenses)**
- **Death of a Parent/Guardian**
- **Emergency needs like food, housing, technology, access to Wifi**
- **Reach out to financial aid offices and ask for help.**

Special Circumstances Form

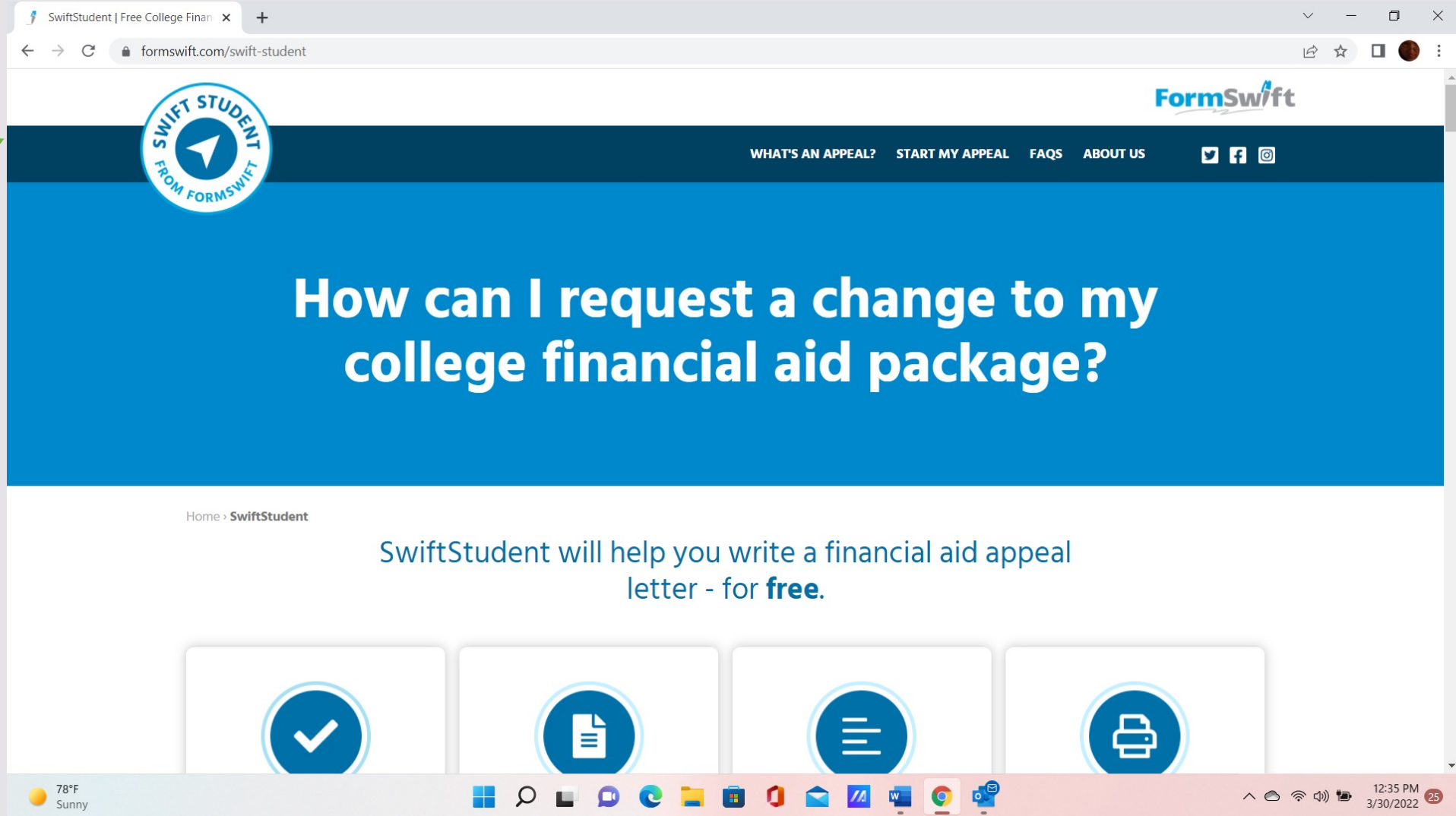
- **Purpose – is to allow financial aid counselors to use “Professional Judgement.”**
- **Provide a more accurate reflection of your family’s financial situation**
- **Allows for adjustments to the FAFSA**
- **Requires additional documentation – previous tax return, W2s, notifications**
- **It might be called something else – (ex. Revision Request Form)**
- **It might not be easily found on the college website.**

What to do

- Remember, you're talking to a person – Professional Judgement!
- Tell your story
 - Write a letter
 - Create a list of monthly income and expenses changes - make it easy to see the difference
 - Collect any and all documentation and dates.
 - Loss of employment letters
 - Pay stubs – ex. if your hours have been cut back
 - Medical expenses not paid by insurance
 - Other major unanticipated expenses

Swift Student (for revisions)

<https://formswift.com/swift-student>



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL formswift.com/swift-student. The page features a dark blue header with the FormSwift logo on the right and a circular logo on the left that says "SWIFT STUDENT FROM FORMSWIFT". Navigation links include "WHAT'S AN APPEAL?", "START MY APPEAL", "FAQS", and "ABOUT US", along with social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The main content area has a large blue banner with the text "How can I request a change to my college financial aid package?". Below this, a breadcrumb trail shows "Home > SwiftStudent". The main heading reads "SwiftStudent will help you write a financial aid appeal letter - for **free**." At the bottom, there are four icons in circular frames: a checkmark, a document, a list, and a printer. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the date as 3/30/2022 and the time as 12:35 PM.

Finaideapp.com (for cost estimations)



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