

Financial Aid Office: *Responsibilities and Red Flags*

The purpose of a school's financial office is to assist students and their families in navigating the financial aid process. Financial aid offices have several **responsibilities**; this is what you can expect of a school's financial aid office:

- ✓ **Direct and honest answers**—even if you do not like them—about financial aid eligibility, awards, etc.
- ✓ **Support for the right to appeal a financial aid decision and facilitate the process**; it may not be approved, but you can appeal or ask for a professional judgment review.
- ✓ Assistance for students and families to **secure the financial aid necessary** to attend a given institution.
- ✓ **Education for** students and families about different types and sources of financial aid, the application process, requirements to renew your aid, and deadlines.
- ✓ **Guidance for** students in completing entrance and exit counseling for federal student loans.
- ✓ **Referral to** outside funding or scholarship opportunities. (**NOTE:** Many schools will refer to private lenders; be wary and/or avoid using private loans to fill the gap!)
- ✓ **Accurate and concrete** answers regarding the cost of attendance—which includes tuition and fees, books, and living expenses. This information should also be readily available on the school's website.

There are other things which you may encounter in dealing with a financial aid office which should serve as warning signs. Here are some **red flags**:

- ✓ Coercion or pressure to sign financial aid paperwork, particularly loan forms, on the spot or immediately. *You always have the right to take a step back and think about it before you borrow. You should always seek help from an adult to walk you through the paperwork.*
- ✓ Efforts to discourage the student from bringing a parent/guardian/adult to a campus visit or financial aid meeting. *It is your choice and right to bring someone with you; do not let the school tell you otherwise.*
- ✓ It is rare, but a school may ask you to “stretch” the truth to qualify for aid, which helps their bottom line. *Always, always, always be honest on financial aid forms. Never misrepresent yourself or lie—you may lose out on aid in the future, forever!*
- ✓ Questionable or uncertain answers regarding the cost of attendance; outright hesitation to answer the question is even more concerning. Furthermore, you should be cautious if this information is not readily available online. *Most colleges are expensive; however, a school should be honest, upfront, and consistent regarding the cost of attendance.*

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