All About the FAFSA

What exactly is the FAFSA and how do you know if you are filling out correctly?

FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid and needs to be submitted each year. The information on your FAFSA will help to determine how much financial aid you are entitled to for the following school year—i.e., the FAFSA you fill out this semester is for the 2015-2016 school year.

Students can submit the FAFSA as early as January 1. You can find the application online at fafsa.gov. As long as you have your supplies ready it should take you less than an hour to complete. There is a list of supplies on Page 3 and a to-do list on Page 4 to help!

Given how important and complex the form is, the process can feel intimidating, but it is manageable. There are many resources, including the workshops noted on Page 3, and people at IC willing and waiting to help you.

The Illinois College priority deadline is January 31. Make sure you have your FAFSA in by this date! The workshops will be held before this deadline and it would be smart to start working on your FAFSA well before then, then you can show up to the workshop with a list of final questions. You do not want to be rushing around last minute to get it done.

So be sure to utilize these free resources! We hope to see you at January’s FAFSA Workshop! (Details on Page 3)

MONTHLY QUOTE:
“No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world.”
~ Robin Williams
“Dream Too Big”  
By Ryan Flynn 

“Your life is bigger than your best dream for it.” This quote by activist Jason Russell is the most important thing I took back from Invisible Children’s Fourth Estate Leadership Summit, which I attended summer 2013. Don’t be afraid to dream, but never limit yourself to just those dreams. This is what I have learned over this past year. I am a history major and an archives worker. I’ve always surrounded myself with history books and have continually set myself up to become a researcher or something of the like. 

However, since last spring, I have expanded my skills set, taken on a variety of new projects, and have even added a minor and changed my career focus. I have done all of this by simply striving beyond what my dreams were and saying yes to the opportunities that have come my way.

We all have the ability to do this, but many of us believe we are not capable of it or believe that we shouldn’t, because we will be setting ourselves up for failure. Honestly though, is a project worth doing if there is no chance for failure? Here are my five tips for doing the best job you can do, and getting all that you want out of each and every opportunity that comes your way:

Number one, pay attention when an opportunity presents itself. You would be surprised just how often opportunities are missed, simply because a person is not paying attention. The quickest way to miss an opportunity is by not volunteering when there is an option to. Most of my best projects started by volunteering somewhere. Chances are if you volunteer and you work hard, it will turn into something magnificent.

Number two, think outside the box. Every time you start a job, assume that the person doing it before you was not creative enough with it; that they did not stretch the project or job to the best it could be. Sometimes you will be wrong, but that’s okay. Other times, you will innovate and show off your creativity, which again can turn into something magnificent!

Number three, don’t be afraid to jump. You don’t know all the details? That is okay. If you are drawn to something that speaks to your soul, to who you are as a person, don’t worry about the details. They will fill themselves in over time. Just jump!

Number four, make it personal. The best stories and the best accomplishments come when a person has made their project personal. If you do not make it personal, if you are not passionate about what you are doing, then there is nothing to say you will not quit tomorrow. 

Number five, and maybe the most important: dream big, in fact dream too big! The bigger you dream, the higher you will reach. Even if you do not reach exactly where you set your sight on, by reaching that much higher, you will still land higher and closer to your goal than you normally would have. The only person who can limit the reaches of your innovation and imagination is you.

I like telling stories and dreaming too big. I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I did not dream too big. Anybody can do anything they want, as long as they set their mind to it...and as long as it isn't dependent on things out of their control, like money. So pay attention, be creative, think outside the box, don’t be afraid to jump, make it personal, and dream too big. Make your dreams a reality, but don’t stop there.
Guest Column: Becky Birdsell, Associate Financial Aid Director

Financial Aid is a topic that concerns most students and their parents. We understand that the financial aid process can be confusing and at times complex. When you have questions about financial aid, you will find the answers in the Office of Financial Aid. Our staff wants to assist you and your family in any way possible. We want to make the process of applying for and receiving financial aid as simple and as seamless as possible.

Be sure to attend our FAFSA Completion Workshop on Wednesday, January 21 at 4:00 pm or Thursday, January 22 at 8:00 pm, in Baxter 100. We will help you complete and submit your 2015-16 FAFSA online. Can’t attend the workshop? Schedule a personal appointment to come to our office and we will help you complete the FAFSA.

Contact our office if you have any financial aid questions or need help completing your FAFSA. You can reach us by phone: 217.245.3035, email: finaid@ic.edu or in person: Tanner Hall, 2nd floor.

Upcoming FAFSA Workshops

On Wednesday, January 21 at 4:00, and Thursday, January 22 at 8:00 pm, in Baxter 100, Financial Aid’s Becky Birdsell and Rebecca Johnson, will present a FAFSA Workshop for TRiO students!

Everyone who attends will have their own computer to work on as the facilitators walk students through the FAFSA process step by step! This is an invaluable workshop you do not want to miss!

Please bring any and all questions to this workshop, as Becky and Rebecca will do their best to answer them all. If the workshop runs over time, you can always email them with specific questions and they will be happy to answer them for you.

There are several items you will need to bring with you to the workshop in order to complete your financial aid application.

You are strongly encouraged to bring the following information to the workshop:

1) Your FAFSA PIN number
2) Your parent(s) FAFSA PIN number
3) Your 2014 income information
4) Your parent(s) 2014 income information
5) Your asset information
6) Your parent(s) asset information
7) Your Social Security number
**Financial Aid To-Do List**

1. After January 1, you and your parents prepare income tax returns for the previous year.
2. Complete and electronically submit the FAFSA after January 1st but before Illinois College’s priority deadline of January 31. The Financial Aid Office is happy to help you submit your FAFSA. Call (217.245.3035) to set up an appointment.
3. Review your processed FAFSA for errors. If it needs to be corrected contact the Financial Aid Office at 217.245.3035.
4. You may be required to provide the Financial Aid Office with additional information (verification worksheet, IRS Tax Transcript) – submit requested documents in a timely manner.
5. Review your Financial Aid Award Letter when you receive it and share/show it to your parents.
6. Complete the Acceptance Form, included with your award letter, and return it to the Financial Aid Office in a timely manner.
7. If you will be borrowing student loans, follow the procedures outlined by the Financial Aid Office on your award letter or on our website, www.ic.edu/finanaidlinks.

**February Social Committee Events**

The TRiO Social Committee will be hosting two events in February. The first is our second Open Mic Night of the year on February 6 (times to be announced). If you would like to sign up to present at this event, please email Joyce Mann (joyce.mann@mail.ic.edu). Come out and support your friends and classmates, too!

TRiO will also be creating and distributing Valentine’s Day cards and candy to the senior residents of Jacksonville’s retirement homes on February 13. If you would like to participate, please bring cards, candy or monetary donations for materials to Joyce’s office, 3rd floor Schewe Library, room 305.