Policy Name: FAFSA Processing

Purpose: This document contains the Office of Financial Aid's current policies and procedures for loading Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) data submitted by students.

Disclaimer: This policy is subject to change, without notice, in order to comply with administrative and regulatory requirements. All policies and procedures below are in accordance with the Federal Student Aid Handbook.

Policy Contents:

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Definitions and Terms:

CPS – Central Processing System
DOB – Date of Birth
EFC – Expected Family Contribution
FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid
FSEOG – Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant
ISIR – Institutional Student Information Record (processed FAFSA)
NSLDS – National Student Loan Data System
OFA – Office of Financial Aid
ProSAM – OFA database system
SSN – Social Security Number
TEACH – Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education
Each year, students apply for Federal Title IV aid (Pell Grant, Iraq & Afghanistan Service Grant, FSEOG, TEACH, Work-Study, Direct Loans, Perkins Loan, and PLUS loans), as well as need-based state and institutional aid, using the FAFSA. This application is available to both undergraduate and graduate/professional students at www.fafsa.gov. It must be submitted annually to the U.S. Department of Education’s CPS (the application opens October 1 for the subsequent award year).

Students choose which institutions of higher learning can access their processed FAFSA data by providing the appropriate school codes when they apply. UM receives applications electronically and stores the information in its financial aid database, ProSAM (a Sigma Systems product). Each record contains the student’s responses to all FAFSA items, as well as key processing results and the student’s financial aid history (as maintained by NSLDS).

The OFA works to detect and resolve issues that prevent FAFSAs from loading by instructing students to correct erroneous FAFSA information, or by making revisions administratively to a student’s FAFSA when appropriate.

The financial aid database contains admitted students only. Therefore, the OFA can only load FAFSAs for students with an established ProSAM record. If a student is not fully admitted, but submitted a FAFSA with the UM school code, then that student’s FAFSA record will be held electronically in a suspense (pending) file until the student is admitted – at which point the FAFSA can be manually and/or automatically loaded to ProSAM.

In the financial aid database, the award “year” is set up so that it can identify each student as undergraduate (e.g., 2018, representing 2017-18) or graduate/professional (2018GR) based on his/her UM admission status. Since FAFSAs are year-specific, ProSAM will attempt to match the FAFSA information with the student’s admission status before loading (to ensure that the data is not inconsistent).

For processing purposes, the OFA database system assigns students on an annual basis to a single, mutually-exclusive “track” (or category). The default track is “No FAFSA Submitted”. Following FAFSA loads, the track will change to one of the types below:

- Valid ISIR – Not Selected for Verification
- Correction Returning from CPS
- Dependent Selected for Verification
- Error – Student Not Assigned a Track in Batch
- Independent Selected for Verification
- Institutionally Selected for Verification (dependent or independent)
- Invalid – ISIR and Admission Program Type Mismatch
In general, these distinctions are based on whether the FAFSA has been selected for verification or not, or is rejected. In addition, there are several error tracks that must be monitored. One track, “Student has ISIR/Waived Verification”, can only be set manually by an OFA staff member upon the request of a student who does not plan to complete the process and wants to opt out of any automatic reminders. (These students will not qualify for federal or need-based aid.) For more information about verification, refer to policy “3.5 Verification”.

Data from a student’s FAFSA is accessible throughout the ProSAM system, and a printable version of the compiled FAFSA is available for use by the OFA or student as needed.

The OFA works to detect and resolve issues when a FAFSA was completed by a student but either UM cannot access it, or there is a processing problem. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following conditions:

- **No UM School Code on the FAFSA** – If the student neglected to include the UM school code, the OFA cannot access it. Since the student must authorize this access, the OFA would request that the student make changes to the FAFSA to include the school code.

- **Rejected – No EFC Calculated** – Parent information is missing on the FAFSA (for dependent students), or FAFSA was not signed. The OFA would instruct the student to correct FAFSA to include parent information and/or signatures. Or, when parent information is missing, the OFA may determine, through communication with the student, if the student is eligible for consideration for a dependency status change through professional judgment (i.e., Dependency Override).

- **Track for Correction Records** – A mismatch exists between the DOB that was entered on the student’s FAFSA as compared to the DOB that appears in UM’s student record. The OFA would instruct the student to correct the FAFSA if the DOB is correct in ProSAM but incorrect on the FAFSA, OR to provide a copy of the student’s driver’s license (or other documentation verifying the student’s DOB) to UM’s Admissions Office if the DOB is correct on the FAFSA but incorrect in the UM student record.

If there are other discrepancies between certain information on the student’s FAFSA and the corresponding data in UM’s student record (i.e., name, year, SSN), the student’s FAFSA is relegated to a holding file for partial matches (the “Preprocessor”) in ProSAM.
The OFA reviews these on a case-by-case basis to determine the reason for the mismatch, and with proper information/documentation, may manually load the FAFSA from the Preprocessor. The list below provides a general overview of procedures the OFA follows to resolve suspended ISIRs in the Preprocessor:

- **Name Mismatch** – If the student’s DOB and SSN match, the OFA must verify the student’s correct last name. If the student’s last name is correct on the FAFSA but incorrect in student records, the OFA would instruct the student to correct their last name in UM’s records (which may require additional documentation submitted to Admissions or the Registrar). If the student’s last name is incorrect on the FAFSA, the OFA would instruct the student to correct the FAFSA. Certain conditions regarding name mismatches (like the inclusion or exclusion of special characters like apostrophes or hyphens) may be resolved by simply loading the FAFSA manually from the Preprocessor, provided the OFA can verify the student’s identity.

- **Year Mismatch** – If the student’s name, DOB, and SSN match, the OFA must determine the accuracy of the student’s reported degree level (undergraduate versus graduate/professional). If the OFA can verify the accuracy of the degree level in university records, the OFA may make the FAFSA corrections (i.e., change information from undergraduate to graduate), or instruct the student to correct the FAFSA (if correcting information from graduate to undergraduate, which may then necessitate that the student answer other dependency status questions, and include parent information on the FAFSA). The OFA never manually loads ISIRs with a year mismatch.

- **SSN Mismatch** – If the student’s last name and DOB match, the OFA would instruct the student to provide a copy of the Social Security Card with SSN to the Admissions Office to correct information in university records. Or, the OFA would instruct the student to re-submit a FAFSA with a correct SSN if the SSN is incorrect on the FAFSA. The OFA never manually loads ISIRs with a SSN mismatch.

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**Part 12.3 Subsequent ISIR Loads**

When changes are made to a processed FAFSA (by the student, the school, or CPS), CPS creates another “transaction” (or version) of the application. The original transaction for that award year is numbered “01”, and subsequent versions are “02” and beyond. Although the ProSAM system stores all FAFSA data, only one transaction is active for display and processing at a time (unless the student has both an undergraduate and a graduate/professional record open in a given year).

The OFA loads all subsequent ISIRs (provided the ISIR includes the UM school code) whether FAFSA corrections were made by the applicant (student/parent), the OFA, another institution, or the federal processor (CPS). The financial aid system will then flag student records as “previously awarded” or “already verified” if these processes occurred prior to the new FAFSA being received. The OFA must regularly review and resolve these statuses.
to ensure that financial aid packages are accurate, and make adjustments to awards as necessary. These reviews also assist in resolving conflicting information when comparing FAFSAs (see policy “13.0 Conflicting Information”).

If a subsequent FAFSA is selected for verification by the federal processor, AND a student has been awarded federal or need-based aid on a previous ISIR that was NOT selected for verification, the OFA requires the student to complete verification in order to retain any federal or need-based aid. If changes in an applicant’s FAFSA causes verification selection (and/or a change in the student’s eligibility for federal or need-based aid), and the student does not complete verification, paybacks on aid already awarded would result.