Paying for Graduate School
First Steps

WiseBorrower® Education Series
Relax. We’ve helped many students in your shoes.

Our goal at Access Group is to make your life as a prospective law, medical, graduate or professional student easier both from a financial perspective and from one of convenience. If you’re concerned about how you’re going to pay for school, we want you to know that financial aid is available up to the full cost of attendance.

Just follow the simple steps in this checklist and you’ll be way ahead of the game in terms of getting the money you need and in preparing for what’s next. Go through this list and do your best to accomplish everything.

✓ First, determine how much you and your family are willing to contribute to your education.
Education is a big investment and how you pay for it will impact your financial future and your lifestyle after graduation. Of course, the more you can contribute, the less you have to borrow. What’s important about that is the less you borrow, the less you have to pay back.

We suggest you discuss this with your family and know where you stand 12 months prior to the start of school.

✓ Go ahead and contact your school to find out how much it will cost.
Talk to the schools you’re interested in and find out the expected FULL cost of attendance. Your school may call this a budget – it includes more than just tuition and fees. It also includes things like living expenses, transportation and personal expenses. Ask how much books and supplies will cost, and an estimate of what it costs to live in that area, so that you have a realistic idea of how much money you’ll need. Don’t forget – ask whether living expenses set by the school assumes having a roommate.

We recommend you gather this information 12 months prior to the start of school.

✓ Next, learn about the financial aid process at each school.
Schools do things differently. We recommend you ask about:

- The types of financial aid offered.
- The required application procedures, instructions and forms.
- How and where to obtain the application forms.
- The application deadlines.

It’s a good idea to mark your calendar with application deadlines. School funds are limited. If you miss a deadline you could be missing out on “free” money like scholarships and grants.

We think you should complete this 12 months prior to the start of school.

✓ Complete your income tax return as soon as you can after January 1.
Okay, not a lot of fun, but information will be needed from your federal income tax return in order to complete your FAFSA. (More about FAFSA in a second.) Schools may ask to see your return, so save a copy.

We recommend you complete your tax return as soon as you can after January 1.

✓ Submit your FAFSA. Apply at fafsa.gov.
Filling out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is the first step to receiving federal financial aid. Mark “yes” to the question asking if you’ll be a graduate or professional student so you’ll be considered financially independent by the federal government.

This one’s important. We recommend you submit the FAFSA 6-9 months prior to the start of school, but be sure to refer to your schools’ deadlines.
✔ Pay down (or off!) your debt before you start school.
Credit cards can be dangerous. And, schools can’t give extra financial aid to help pay off credit cards or other debt while you’re in school. If you have debt that can’t be paid off before school starts, talk to the admissions/financial aid office to discuss options. While you’re at it, avoid taking on any new debt now, such as more credit cards or car loans.

✔ Get into saving. And save as much as possible before school starts.
Open a savings account! The more you save, the less you’ll have to borrow (and repay). You’ll also need money to cover expenses before school starts that won’t be covered by financial aid, such as:
- Application fee for the admission tests (e.g., the LSAT, MCAT and DAT)
- Admissions application fees
- Relocation expenses – transportation, moving van, etc.
- Security deposits: apartment, utilities, etc.

✔ Check your credit report at annualcreditreport.com.
If you don’t already check your credit report regularly, check it out to be sure it’s accurate. It’s easy to do at annualcreditreport.com. Did you know that the Federal Direct Graduate PLUS Loans (which can help cover some expenses that might not be covered by the Federal Direct Unsubsidized loan) requires that you do not have adverse credit? That means your credit report will be checked when you apply. So it’s important that you know what the Department of Education is seeing.
- Go to annualcreditreport.com at least 6 months before you plan to apply for a student loan.
  You can get free copies of your credit report from the three major consumer reporting agencies every 12 months.
- If errors exist, contact the agency reporting the error immediately. It can take several months to correct errors.
- Take care of any delinquencies (late payments) on your account(s) ASAP
  PAY ALL OF YOUR BILLS ON TIME!

If you think that you have credit problems, talk to the financial aid staff before applying for credit-based loans. They may have suggestions on how you can resolve any problems and review what alternatives might be available. And for more information about credit reports, check out the “Credit & Loans” section at ftc.gov. Also, check out AccessGroup.Org and myFICO.com.

✔ Set up a record-keeping system.
This can actually be fun. No kidding. Keeping good financial records and having a safe, secure record-keeping system will help you successfully manage your finances while you’re in school and long after graduation. How you do it is up to you – design a system that fits your own needs and personal style. It’s a great feeling to be able to find something quickly without having to dig through piles of paper or e-mails. Whatever system you choose, remember the three S’s:
- Simple – Make your system easy to use. If it’s too complicated or takes too much time to manage you won’t use it.
- Sustainable – Make it a system you’ll maintain over the long term.
- Secure – Make it safe from loss or damage due to fire or theft. Consider investing in a small, fireproof box to store your important documents.
My Personal Action Plan

We know you have a lot on your plate and don’t want to add to your to-do list. But the more buttoned-up your financial planning is, the better you’re going to feel. You’ll be more relaxed for studying, exam-taking, and other fun things like that! To help you keep track, here’s an action plan. Good luck!

☐ Figure out how much I can pay without borrowing anything.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Get clear on how much my education is going to cost.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Contact the schools and find out what’s what.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Complete my federal tax return (what fun) as soon as possible after January 1.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Submit my Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Submit any required school applications for financial aid.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Apply for scholarships and grants.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Apply for federal student loans.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Establish and stick to a monthly spending plan.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Pay down (or off!) my debt before I start school.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Save as much money as possible before school starts.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Check my credit report at annualcreditreport.com.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______

☐ Set up my record-keeping system.
   My deadline ______ I completed this on ______
✓ Check for — and submit — any other applications.
We know the paperwork can be a little overwhelming. But it’s important. Some schools may require other financial aid applications for their school-based grant and/or scholarship programs, like the Need Access® application, or some other financial aid forms. Contact the schools you’re considering to obtain any other required application materials and instructions.

   We suggest you get in touch with the schools 12 months prior to the start of the semester.

✓ Don’t forget to apply for scholarships. It’s FREE MONEY!
A number of private groups offer scholarships and grants to graduate and professional students who have “demonstrated financial need” or meet other criteria. Check with the financial aid staff at the schools you’re interested in attending. And with all of that spare time you have (that’s a joke), remember to search for scholarships and grant opportunities. We recommend checking out FastWeb.com and Scholarships.com.

   It’s a good idea to apply for scholarships as soon as you can, and definitely before the scholarships’ deadlines.

✓ Apply for federal student loans, as needed. (Get these first!)
Gather personal information and records: driver’s license, Social Security Number, and two references.

   Federal Direct Loans
   • Borrow up to $20,500 annually (or $47,167 for medical, dental, and some health programs).
   • Fixed interest rate 6.8%; low fees (with no payments while in school).
   • 10 – 25 years to repay (depending on total loan debt and payment plan).
   • No credit check required.

   Federal Direct Graduate PLUS Loan
   Get a Grad PLUS loan if you need more than the annual Direct Unsubsidized loan limits.
   • Borrow up to the cost of attendance less other aid (according to your school).
   • Fixed interest rate 7.9%; low fees (with no payments while in school).
   • 10 – 25 years to repay (depending on total loan debt and payment plan).
   • Credit check is required.

If you’re not eligible for federal loans, private loans may be available – check with your school first. Remember, borrow as little as possible!

   We recommend applying for federal student loans 3-6 months prior to school starting. And, remember, borrow only what you need.

A few ways to be Smart in general.
Good money management is habit forming. If you start doing the right things now, you’ll see rewards and you’ll want to keep up the good work. Check out the following list. Doing some not-so-difficult things will help you be more organized and financially savvy.

✓ Establish and stick to a monthly spending plan.
Set your priorities and start making conscious decisions about how you spend money. Look for budget planning worksheets or calculators online. They’re actually kind of fun to use. Be sure to track your spending and adjust your plan, as needed.
WiseBorrower® Education Series

About Access Group

For more than 25 years, Access Group, a non-profit organization, has successfully guided thousands of students, like you, through the financial aid process. We are proud to continue our tradition of financial literacy. Today, we are excited about and thoroughly committed to our mission of providing financial support and solutions to help aspiring professionals achieve success.
### Need Access vs. All New for the 2012 - 2013 Academic Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need Access</th>
<th>Independent Student</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FM Access</td>
<td>Need Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tbody>
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### Need Analysis Comparison

**Assets**
- Business (small family-owned)
- Business
- Retirement Accounts
- Other Real Estate/Investments
- Home Equity
- Cash

**Liabilities**
- Income Protection Allowance
- Student Living Expenses
- Tuition Paid
- Medical/General Expenses
- FICA
- State and Other Taxes

**Allowances**
- Professional Year
- Bus Year
- Income
- Regular Income
- Simple Income
- Auto Zero

**Notes**
- FM Access
- Need Access
- Notes

**Requirements**

1. **Income**
   - **FM Income**
     - Yes
     - No

2. **Family Size**
   - Yes
   - No

3. **Residency**
   - Yes
   - No

4. **School Option**
   - Yes
   - No

5. **Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)**
   - Yes
   - No

6. **Allowance Based on Table 6**
   - Yes
   - No

7. **Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)**
   - Yes
   - No

8. **Exclusions**
   - Yes
   - No

9. **FM Projection**
   - Yes
   - No

10. **Est and Other**
    - Yes
    - No

11. **FM Access**
    - Yes
    - No

12. **Notes**
    - Yes
    - No

13. **FM Access**
    - Yes
    - No

14. **Notes**
    - Yes
    - No

**Minimum Contribution**
- Yes
- No

**Fram Equiry (family resides on farm)**
- Yes
- No

**Other Real Estate/Investments**
- Yes
- No

**Home Equity**
- Yes
- No

**Cash**
- Yes
- No

**Income Protection Allowance**
- Yes
- No

**Student Living Expenses**
- Yes
- No

**Tuition Paid**
- Yes
- No

**Medical/General Expenses**
- Yes
- No

**Tuition**
- Yes
- No

**FICA**
- Yes
- No

**State and Other Taxes**
- Yes
- No