

FAFSA weighs cutting aid application length

Study recommends fewer questions

BY ASHLEE EDWARDS
STAFF WRITER

Getting financial aid could soon be only 27 questions away, now that the U.S. Secretary of Education has recommended shortening the hefty federal aid application.

Secretary Margaret Spellings recently proposed changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, which will cut the form from more than 120 questions to only 27.

That announcement comes after a team of higher education experts, the Rethinking Student Aid study group, released results from a two-year study that ultimately recommended an overhaul of the FAFSA. Spellings said the changes she proposed would make the process clearer for students.

"This new form, coupled with other financial aid reforms, will provide real-time information on how much aid you can expect to receive," Spellings stated in a press release issued Wednesday.

"This will put you in the driver's seat, with more time to investigate your options."

The FAFSA currently entails questions about the student's personal

information, sources of income, and family circumstances. More than \$80 billion in aid is distributed annually based on those answers.

Tabatha Turner, senior associate director in the UNC Office of Scholarships and Student Aid, said some students struggle with the form.

"The FAFSA has good directions, but they're long, and you have to read the notes that go along with each question to complete it accurately," Turner said. "People get overwhelmed when they look at it."

Many income-based questions require that students and parents fill out the form together, Turner said. There also many opportunities for mistakes when reporting things such as investments and untaxed income, she said.

Sophomore Diana Iglesias said some sections were harder than others.

"The taxed income parts are hardest, because they're the most complicated."

Shirley Ort, director of scholarships and student aid, was a part of the study group that made the recommendation.

"The goal of the committee was

"People get overwhelmed when they look at (FAFSA)."

TABATHA TURNER, SENIOR ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR IN UNC OFFICE OF SCHOLARSHIPS AND STUDENT AID

... to see if there was a way they could all be rethought, restructured, and simplified to better serve families and students," Ort said.

The committee recommended simplifying the process by collecting data directly from income tax records. Students would be able to release tax information directly to the education department.

"The Department of the Treasury and the IRS guard this data very carefully, as they should; it would involve the IRS perhaps changing the rules and the design," Ort said.

But senior Jennifer Tait said she worries that shortening the FAFSA may leave out important details.

"I think more people will be interested in applying if it's shorter, but I don't think 27 questions are enough to provide all your information."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

National and World News

FROM THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Debate scheduled for Tuesday night

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (MCT)— John McCain and Barack Obama are preparing for their second debate Tuesday night as they head into the final month of the campaign.

The economy is likely to dominate the questions posed to the two men. The 90-minute debate at Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., will feature questions from a live audience moderated by NBC's Tom Brokaw. It will be televised nationally starting at 9 p.m.

Candidates keep up economic talk

WASHINGTON, D.C. (MCT)— As stock markets around the world tumbled Monday, Republican presidential candidate John McCain urged lower taxes and tough curbs on government spending, and Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama pushed his plan for a quick stimulus package.

Analysts scoff at McCain's claim that he can balance the budget by 2013 while pushing big tax cuts and spending more on the military.

Dow falls but recoups some losses, U.S. slump affects global economy

NEW YORK (MCT)— The Dow Jones industrial average fell as much as 800 points to trade below the 10,000 mark Monday as nervousness over the credit crisis spread after the U.S. government's \$700 billion bailout and interventions in Europe seemed only to add to investor anxiety.

But hopes of a coordinated intervention to stop the bleeding in global markets helped the Dow recoup half of its losses.

"Right now, it's about stabilizing the financial system and then see how much collateral damage has

been done to the economy," said Owen Fitzpatrick, head of U.S. equity at Deutsche Bank.

"The clear message is that the global economy is slowing rapidly, and the magnitude of the slowdown is starting to be realized by the market."

The pan-European Stoxx 600 index slid 7.6 percent Monday, the biggest one-day fall on record. European governments didn't reach a common deal on bailouts over the weekend. Instead each country is handling the fallout on its own.

Pakistan's leaders face more attacks

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (MCT)— Violence from Islamic extremists against politicians in Pakistan intensified Monday with a suicide bombing at the home of an opposition lawmaker that left 18 dead.

Pakistan is struggling to cope with an Islamist insurgency and with an economic crisis that has pushed the country to the brink of bankruptcy.

Within the last week, two political leaders from Awami National Party, which leads the regional government in the insurgency-plagued North-West Frontier Province, were targeted.

Supreme Court opened Monday

WASHINGTON, D.C. (MCT)— The Supreme Court opened Monday, letting stand without comment a lower court decision's ordering Arizona to issue "choose life" license plates to those who want them.

Justices then weighed whether state laws can be used to challenge deceptive cigarette advertising.

The smokers contend Marlboro Lights advertising tricked consumers into thinking "low tar and nicotine" cigarettes are less harmful than conventional cigarettes.

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