

## **ST. AUGUSTINE COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID VERIFICATION GUIDE 2015**

By law, the Financial Aid Office is required to provide students with information regarding the verification process. This document is for informational purposes and is intended to be used as a resource to guide you through the verification process.

### **What is verification?**

Verification is the process institutions use to review student financial aid files for accuracy. Students are selected for this process by the federal government or by the institution they are planning to attend.

### **Who is selected for verification?**

Last year approximately 24 percent of all financial aid applicants were selected by the federal government for verification. Students are normally selected at random; however, they may be selected if their FAFSA appears to have inconsistent information, numerous corrections have been submitted to FAFSA data; or, if estimated tax information was used to complete the FAFSA.

### **What items are required by law to be verified?**

*All applicants* selected for verification must confirm some or all of the following information:

- Family size (as defined on the FAFSA) of student, parent(s) and siblings or student and spouse (if married)
- Number of family members enrolled at least half time and pursuing a degree/certificate in college
- Food stamps – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – if receipt is reported on FAFSA
- Child support paid – if reported on the FAFSA
- Income earned from work – provide W-2 form(s)

*Tax filers* selected for verification may be required to confirm the following information via the FAFSA IRS Data Retrieval Process or providing an IRS generated tax return transcript:

- Adjusted Gross Income
- U.S. Income Tax Paid
- Untaxed IRA Distributions
- Untaxed Pension Distributions
- IRA Deductions/Payments
- Tax Exempt Interest
- Education Credits

In addition, applicants may be required to provide:

- Documentation of a high school diploma, recognized equivalent or home school credentials
- A copy of valid (e.g., unexpired) government-issued photo identification, such as a driver's license, passport, or military ID
- A signed statement of education purpose for the 2015-16 award year
- Documentation of other untaxed income not reported on your federal tax form
- Clarification of parents' marital status

### **What happens once I submit all verification documents?**

After all requested information is submitted to the Financial Aid Office, the student's file will be reviewed. If we have further questions, the student will be contacted for additional clarification. It is the student's responsibility to respond to these requests for information. Failing to do so will result in an incomplete file, which will delay the completion of your financial aid award and may lessen your aid opportunities, if documents are received after May 21, 2016.

If corrections need to be made to your FAFSA, the Financial Aid Office will make them on your behalf. The Central Processing System (FAFSA processor) will notify you of the changes via the email you provided on the FAFSA or U.S. mail if no email address was indicated.

### **If my file is being verified, when will I receive my official award letter?**

The Financial Aid Office will create "tentative" award letters for 2015 incoming students who have supplied a valid FAFSA even though additional information is required. The award will remain tentative until all required information/documents are received and reviewed and all conflicting data is resolved. An official award letter will be generated and sent via U.S. mail within two weeks of the verification being completed. If any subsequent award changes need to be done. A revised award letter notification will be sent to you via US mail.

### **Verification Tips**

Be sure to:

- Submit verification documents as early as possible but no later than May 21, 2016, to receive full financial aid consideration.
- Provide all necessary signatures on verification worksheet (both student and parent if dependent).
- Keep copies of all documents you submit.
- Include the student's name and St. Augustine College ID number on every form submitted to our office.
- Request your income tax data be imported via the IRS Data Retrieval Process at **fafsa.gov**; thus, eliminating the need for a tax return transcript.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Can I eliminate the need to submit an IRS generated tax return transcript?**

Students and parents or students and spouses who import their income tax return information using the IRS Data Retrieval Process – either when initially completing the FAFSA or through the correction process – will be considered to have verified the FAFSA IRS information for Adjusted Gross Income (AGI), taxes paid, and untaxed income reported on the tax form. This is the fastest, easiest and most secure method to provide your tax data. However, if changes were made to the imported information or if the institution has reason to believe that the information transferred is inaccurate, the applicant must submit an IRS generated tax return transcript.

#### **How do I print a tax return transcript?**

You may print a **tax return transcript** at **irs.gov/Individuals/Get-Transcript** within 45 days of electronically filing your 2014 federal tax return. Or you may order a tax return transcript by calling the IRS at (800) 829-1040. This is a summary of your tax return and is required if you cannot perform the IRS

Data Retrieval process. Federal guidelines no longer permit us to receive a signed copy of your federal tax documents.

### **Why is a signed copy of my federal tax document no longer sufficient for verification?**

Congress now mandates tax return transcripts as the only document that an applicant, parents and/or spouse may provide. This change was enacted to ensure federal funds are distributed to eligible applicants, decrease errors on the FAFSA and reduce fraud.

### **What if I haven't filed a tax return yet?**

If your tax return has not been filed yet but you have been granted a filing extension by the IRS, you must submit:

1. A copy of the IRS Form 4868 (extension notice) or a copy of the IRS's approval of an extension beyond the automatic six-month extension; and,
2. Copy of 2014 W-2 forms from each source of employment; and,
3. A signed statement certifying the amount of the 2014 AGI and U.S. income tax paid.

Once you have electronically filed your federal taxes, wait three weeks, and then return to **fafsa.gov** to have your tax information automatically transferred to the FAFSA by the IRS Data Retrieval Process if required by the Financial Aid Office.

### **I can't locate all my W-2 forms; what can I do?**

Federal law requires the submission of **all** W-2 forms from all employment sources for non-tax filers. The office of Financial aid may request them for tax filers as well. If the employer is still in business, you must contact them and request a duplicate copy of your W-2 form. If you can't obtain a W-2 form due to extenuating circumstances (i.e., natural disaster, business ceases to exist/dissolved, etc.), you must provide a **SIGNED** statement that includes:

1. Amount of income earned from work;
2. The source of that income (employer's name);
3. The employer's phone number;
4. The reason that the W-2 form is not available.

Based on this information provided, the institution may accept the signed statement as proof or require you to obtain the actual W-2 form.

### **What if my parents are divorced but filed a joint tax return?**

If the legal parents, regardless of gender, are **divorced/separated and are still living together both** parents income must be provided; thus, submit the IRS tax return transcript for each parent. You will also need to **submit 2014 W-2 forms for both parents**.

If the legal parents, regardless of gender, are **divorced/separated and are NOT living together**, but filed a joint tax return, you will need to submit the IRS generated joint tax return transcript to the Financial Aid Office. You will also need to **submit the W-2 forms for the parent who the student lived with most during the past 12 months**. Only this parent's income will be considered.

### **What tax information do I submit if my parent is remarried?**

If the parent you live with is remarried and a joint tax return was filed, you may simply transfer the tax data to the FAFSA via the IRS Data Retrieval Process if you have not already done so at **fafsa.gov**. If separate tax forms were filed, federal guidelines require the Financial Aid Office to receive the IRS



generated tax return transcript from **each** individual (parent and stepparent) even if the stepparent doesn't help pay for the student's education.

**What tax information do I submit if my parent is widowed?**

If your parent is widowed and filed a joint tax return with the deceased parent, you need to submit the IRS generated tax return transcript to the Financial Aid Office along with the surviving parent's W-2 forms. If a source of income or loss reported on the current year tax form will not be reoccurring as a result of your parent's death, please indicate so in a **SIGNED** statement. Only the income of the surviving parent will be considered.

**Referral of Fraud Cases**

According to federal regulations, if the Financial Aid Office suspects that a student or parent has misreported information or altered documentation to fraudulently obtain federal funds, we are obligated to report that suspicion and provide evidence to the U.S. Office of Inspector General. If you purposely give false or misleading information, you may be fined up to \$20,000, sent to prison, or both.