



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Michael V. Drake, MD
President

February 29, 2024

Office of the President
1111 Franklin St.
Oakland, CA 94607

The Honorable Miguel Cardona
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW
Washington, DC

universityofcalifornia.edu

Dear Secretary Cardona:

CAMPUSES

- Berkeley
- Davis
- Irvine
- UCLA
- Merced
- Riverside
- San Diego
- San Francisco
- Santa Barbara
- Santa Cruz

On behalf of the University of California (UC), one of the country’s premier public research university systems, which serves over 83,000 students with Pell grants,¹ approximately 9,500 students with Federal Work Study² (FWS) and nearly 18,000 students with Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) annually, I write to urge the U.S. Department of Education to continue to prioritize all available resources to address the issues related to the 2024-25 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form rollout.

MEDICAL CENTERS

- Davis
- Irvine
- UCLA
- San Diego
- San Francisco

The University is deeply concerned about the impact of ongoing challenges associated with the FAFSA rollout. These challenges are hindering our ability to meet the financial aid needs of our students and to ensure equitable access to higher education. Specifically, the accessibility issues faced by our students with mixed status families in completing the FAFSA requires an expedient resolution. While we appreciate the Department’s efforts to provide a temporary fix, the recent announcement regarding confirmation emails for FAFSA contributors without a Social Security number does not go far enough to ensure that all students with mixed status families can successfully complete and submit the form. This interim solution, beyond being potentially confusing and burdensome for many, will divert resources from the Department’s commitment to a permanent fix promised for early March. The University urges the Department to prioritize the development of a permanent solution to ensure that all students from mixed status families can complete their FAFSA and receive accurate and timely financial aid offers for the fall of 2024.

NATIONAL LABORATORIES

- Lawrence Berkeley
- Lawrence Livermore
- Los Alamos

Furthermore, while we recognize the Department’s efforts towards transparency during the Better FAFSA rollout, concerns remain regarding the lack of clear communication on crucial data delivery timelines. The absence of specific dates and sufficient sample files to institutions has a downstream impact on successive deadlines, including when students can expect to hear back from institutions about their financial

DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

¹ The number of students receiving Pell grants is based on updated November 2023 numbers. UC Information Center, available at: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/financial-support>

² The FWS and SEOG numbers are based on updated November 2023 numbers. UC Information Center, available at: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/financial-support>

aid offers. The University requests the Department provide greater transparency in this process with more precise timelines and additional data our campuses can expect. This will allow institutions to effectively communicate financial aid information, ultimately empowering students to make fully informed decisions about their academic futures.

Another issue raised by our campuses' financial aid experts is the lack of proration on the Student Aid Index (SAI), which is calculated based on a nine-month enrollment timeframe. As you may be aware, changes in legislation now prevent schools from using a prorated SAI for any other periods of enrollment that are lesser or greater than nine months. The unintended consequence would render some students ineligible for aid in the future because their SAI cannot be prorated. For example, a student who is graduating early (i.e., fall semester) could be ineligible for need-based aid even though they would qualify had they enrolled during the full academic year because the entire nine-month SAI would need to be used in full for that term. The University urges the Department to work with Congress in developing a solution that addresses the lack of proration options for institutions.

Finally, as institutions navigate the complexities of financial aid packaging amidst the FAFSA challenges, they simultaneously face the impending implementation of gainful employment regulations on July 1. These regulations introduce new reporting requirements for which institutions have yet to receive procedure or instruction to ensure compliance. Given the compressed timeline and technical challenges associated with the Better FAFSA rollout, the University requests administrative relief on the implementation of the gainful employment regulations by delaying implementation until at a minimum of Jan. 1, 2026. This delay would allow institutions to fully commit and prioritize their personnel and resources to supporting students.

Thank you for your continued support of the University of California. Our financial aid experts stand ready to assist the department in ensuring that the resolutions to these issues keep higher education accessible and affordable to our students in California and across the country. If the University can assist you in any capacity moving forward, please do not hesitate to contact me or Associate Vice President Chris Harrington in our Washington, D.C. office. He can be reached by telephone at (202) 974-6314 or by email at Chris.Harrington@ucdc.edu.

Sincerely,



Michael V. Drake, MD
President

cc: James Kvaal, Undersecretary, U.S. Department of Education
Melanie Muenzer, Chief of Staff, Office of the Under Secretary, U.S.
Department of Education
Lindsey Tepe, Policy Advisor, Office of Postsecondary Education, U.S.
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