

COMPARING FINANCIAL AID AWARDS

After college and universities receive the SAR, a financial aid award will be mailed to the family. Comparing the awards is very important to determine what the "bottom line" will be at each institution. Follow these general tips to compare your award letters:

É Look for the "bottom line" - your "net cost" to attend each institution. Don't be dazzled by the amount of money a particular college offers - focus on how the awards affect the costs you have to pay. A \$5,000 award may cover your need completely at one school, while a \$10,000 award at another could leave you short.

É Look at the combination of awards in each financial aid package. Your aid offer will probably include a mix of several types and sources of aid - "gift aid" (grants and scholarships that do not have to be repaid) and "self help" (jobs a school offers you so you can earn part of your award and/or loans that must be repaid).

É Finally, look for special conditions or requirements stated in the financial aid package. For example, many institutions require scholarship recipients to maintain a certain grade-point average before their award is renewed. Other institutions may require continued enrollment in an academic program.

É Once you choose a school and have been awarded financial aid, follow the instructions in your award letter. You may be asked to provide more information or select a lender for a student or parent loan. Complete any forms that come with the award letter, sign the letter, and return it by the due date. Be sure to notify other schools that accepted you that you will not attend, so any funds you may have been awarded can be given to students who will attend.

É Don't forget that, in the end, the best college for your student is the one that fits the best. We caution you not to make cost the only factor that drives your child's college decision. Just because a particular college will cost you the least doesn't necessarily mean that it is the best school for your child.