

RCC students, family members grapple with FAFSA changes

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WHITE CITY, Ore. — This year, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is being known to colleges and students as “a new beast.”

The changes to the federal aid application are a result of the 2020 legislation called the Simplification Act. The legislation was to simplify the application process and make more federal aid available for more people.

"It kind of went through a complete overhaul. Students used to be able to fill out the FAFSA beginning October 1st," said Frankie Everett, the Financial Aid Director at Rogue Community College. "Due to all of the changes that were made, the FAFSA didn't come out until the end of December, so we've lost a little bit of processing time."

The recent changes have only been helpful for half the applicants.

In January, the FAFSA was taken offline due to an error in the Student Aid Index (SAI). this calculation used to be called an expected family contribution and when this year's application was inically opened, those calculations were wrong.

"Some of those Folks that did their FAFSAs early may have a, SAI that is incorrect," said Everett.

Everett has been helping students apply for scholarships and apply for FAFSA when they can.

"RCC is an open enrollment school, so we accept students all the way up until classes begin." Said Everett. "Rogue Community College is a community college, so we don't really have a bunch of deadlines people are missing. It's people that are at four year schools or private schools that are really in a pinch because they have a lot more deadlines to meet and they have to do their acceptance with those colleges."

Jonathon Lyons, the Principal at South Medford High School said the school has been supporting their students emotionally during this waiting game for FAFSA.

"Kids are having to just keep the plates are spinning a little bit longer than they would have normally," Said Lyons. "We're doing a lot more counseling around keeping the faith. It's going to be okay.

It's going to work out. Like, we're going to get you where you want to go."

Lyons said the school is keeping their career center available for students on days off so students can continue to plan for their futures.

"I think it's really put an extra layer of anxiety into the college decision making process and into the choice process," said Lyons. "Normally by now you would know what your financial aid package is and that helps make a more informed decision about what your, your decisions what you're going to do."

Many South Medford students are making multiple plans, one for each school they are considering. until their financial aid comes through, they won't be able to know which school to declare to.

The application process has been easier for about half the students Everett sees. She said that students with two parents and a 'traditional' household, the FAFSA takes 5

minutes. For students with different family dynamics or parents who are from other countries, the application process has been more complicated than before.

Lyons said that as SMHS helps first generation students through the program they have offered help for parents as well as students.

Both educators said that if your students is attending their school to reach out for help. If students or parents need help with FAFSA they can always reach out to their student's current or future school.

Rogue Community College has always offered help nights for their students and community members. Multiple of these FAFSA nights are coming up to give students one-on-one help applying for and navigating their FAFSAs.