

## 5 COMMON FINANCIAL AID MYTHS

**1. The cost of college is so high it's not even an option anymore.**

**FACT:** In 2011-12, over 191,000 needy students received \$2.46 billion in financial assistance.<sup>i</sup> This does not include those students receiving scholarships and loans without need-based aid. Washington was listed as the top state nationally for students receiving undergraduate need-based financial aid during the 2011-12 year.<sup>ii</sup>

**2. The financial aid application form with more than 100 questions is overly complex and families should wait to complete the FAFSA until after their taxes have been filed.**

**FACT:** About 95 percent of students file the online Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov). The simplified “skip logic” allows families to only answer questions that apply to them. Accessible information and assistance is provided by the Department of Education and other agencies. Many Washington partners will engage in FAFSA filing campaigns later this fall along with the Washington Student Achievement Council, who serves as administrator of College Goal Washington.

Although families may retrieve data from the IRS through the FAFSA on the Web, they should file early with estimated tax information and make corrections later—because many funds are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. All students considering college should file the FAFSA, even if they feel their income may be too high to qualify for financial aid.

**3. Most undergraduate students graduate from college saddled with close to \$100,000 in high interest loans.**

**FACT:** Of the 56% of Washington state bachelor's degree recipients who borrowed for college attendance, average student loan debt upon graduation was \$22,244 for the class of 2011.<sup>iii</sup> Federal Direct Stafford and Perkins loans are sound, low-interest sources that should be carefully reviewed by students and families in need of additional assistance after other grants, scholarships, and work-study assistance have been considered.

**4. Students who are not high achieving or top athletes should not spend time searching for scholarships.**

**FACT:** A wide range of scholarships are available to Washington students. Although scholarship application processes are competitive, many are targeted to students based on their interests, desired campus or major, or their background. Students should register on the WashBoard.org to be matched to scholarships in Washington. Of the nearly 500 scholarships listed on the WashBoard in 2011-12, only 1 out of 10 required a GPA higher than 3.0.

**5. Students who work are less likely to get good grades.**

**FACT:** Research has shown students who work less than 20 hours per week will often have higher grade point averages than students who don't work.<sup>iv</sup> Federal and state work study programs provide students with valuable experiences and networking opportunities while providing funds to help cover educational expenses. Students apply for both Washington State Work Study and Federal Work Study by completing the FAFSA. If they are eligible they will be notified on their financial aid award letter.

<sup>i</sup> Washington Student Achievement Council—2011-12 Need-Based Aid Recipient profile reports

<sup>ii</sup> National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs—2011-12 Academic Year report

<sup>iii</sup> Institute for College Access & Success—Student Debt and the Class of 2011, October 2012 report

<sup>iv</sup> Pike, G., Kuh, G., & Massa-McKinley, R. (2008). First-year students' employment, engagement, and Academic achievement: Untangling the relationship between work and grades. *NASPA Journal*, 45(4), 560-582.