

Understanding Your Award Letter - Podcast Transcript

Opening:

Hi, my name is Kyra Mathews, from the Oregon Student Access Commission, also called OSAC for short. Today, I'd like to talk to you about award letters and how to understand them.

Body:

Knowing the ins and outs of your award letter and financial aid package will ultimately help in determining which school is the best financial decision for you. If a school you listed on your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and accepts you for admission, the school's financial aid office will send you a financial aid offer (perhaps electronically) in what is typically called an "award letter." The appearance and contents of your award letter will vary by school. The combination of known federal, state, private, and school aid will be listed on your financial aid award letter.

The cost of attendance is broken down into four sections: Tuition and Fees, Room and Board (Housing costs), Books and Supplies, and Personal Expenses. All of these numbers are estimates except for tuition and fees. This is not a bill from the school, but simply a breakdown of the standard cost of attendance for a student to attend that school.

The cost of tuition is usually accurate for that school, but it can vary depending on a student's academic major (program and class fees), the number of credits taken if different from a standard course load for full-time enrollment, etc.

The room and board cost is usually the estimated price of the school's least expensive standard residence hall and meal plan. This cost may look different if you choose a more expensive residence hall and/or meal plan. I personally live off campus, but my award letter shows the lowest estimated cost for on-campus room and board. If you have a different living situation that costs more than the standard room and board, make sure that you contact your school's financial aid office to discuss with a financial aid professional. Often, the cost of attendance can be adjusted on a case-by-case basis.

Your housing status of on-campus or off-campus should be listed on your award letter. If it is listed incorrectly, contact the financial aid office as soon as possible. If you live on campus, you may have a higher payment to make to your school. If you live off campus, the only cost that you owe to the school is for tuition and fees.

Books and supplies is an estimate of the average student's cost for books and materials needed for class. Again, this is not a billed amount, just an estimate for students. Some classes will have no books, some will have six books. Some will require other materials; it is a cost that varies by term for students.

Personal expenses include an estimate of additional expenses a student might encounter. Things that would be personal expenses are transportation costs, laundry, cell phone, clothes, , computer, entertainment, etc.

If you have been awarded any outside scholarships that are not listed on your award letter, you need to notify your financial aid office of the scholarship name and the award amount.

Your award letter should give you a feel for what is covered by your financial aid and what is left to be covered out of pocket.

Once you view your award letter, you will need to accept or decline some items. Grants and scholarships are usually accepted for you by the financial aid office. If you don't need the loans that are listed, you don't have to accept them. Most loans will continue to be available to you later during the school year, if you decide you need them.

Conclusion: Reviewing your award letter can be tricky, but once you understand the cost estimates, it's a piece of cake. Award letters are not bills; they are simply a breakdown of the estimated costs to attend a specific school. Cost and financial aid offers vary between schools, so it is best to compare award letters to find the best fit for you.

Closing: Thank you for taking the time to learn about this important topic. For more podcast topics, please visit www.OregonStudentAid.gov. From all of us here at the Oregon Student Access Commission, this is Kyra Mathews. We look forward to helping you again soon.