
Your Cost to Attend College

Now I am striving harder to get in, knowing that the only thing holding me back is my performance. I can no longer have the excuse of lacking funds because this project showed me that it is not usually the case. - Mark Z.

So far, we've seen the lifetime benefits of a college degree and looked into the key elements to consider when choosing a college. We know the massive amounts of life-changing financial aid available, and we're aware of what other students pay, on average, to attend different colleges. And now it's your turn. It's time you get the most realistic estimate of *your* net price to attend college.

How can you do this? By answering a few questions online on a college's **net price calculator**. Depending on your family's financial situation, you may find be surprised to see you're likely to get a BIG financial aid award. For example, the UC System's "Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan" covers *all tuition and fees* if your family makes less than \$80,000 per year.¹ Net price calculators are free, and you can calculate as many different financial scenarios as you want, though

1. The Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan is available for California residents or undocumented students with AB 540 status. <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/paying-for-uc/glossary/blue-and-gold/>

you should be as accurate as possible. Keep in mind: these calculators don't account for other scholarships you may receive, so lace up and find more ways to lower your final cost even further.

JORDAN AND THE UC NPC

Jordan was thinking about attending UC Irvine and decided to check out their net price calculator to figure out what it might cost him to attend. Jordan entered his parents' income – about



\$60,000 per year – and noted that they had assets – a car – worth about \$10,000. Jordan would be expected to pay for some of his college costs if his own income was more than \$6,310 last year. But, he made about \$5,700 working at a movie theater, so he's all good.

Jordan has two siblings, including one who will also be in college at the same time as him. He also wants to live on campus, since living on campus is awesome. Before using a net price calculator, Jordan never thought he could afford college. But now, for the first time, he realized college was a possibility. Check out Jordan's results:

UCI Net Price Calculator – Dependent²

| Estimated Total Cost of Attendance | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Line 1 | Tuition and Fees | \$14,576.97 |
| Line 2 | Room and Board | + \$12,638.00 |
| Line 3 | Books and Supplies | + \$1,732.00 |
| Line 4 | Other Expenses | + \$2,630.00 |
| Line 5 | Total Cost of Attendance | \$31,576.97 |

2. Most students graduating from high school will apply for financial aid as dependents. If you are curious if you might qualify as an independent, look here: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/filling-out/dependency>

The College Project

| Estimated Financial Aid | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Line 6 | Grants | \$19,574 – \$20,574 |
| Line 7 | Self Help | \$9,200 – \$10,200 |
| Line 8 | Family Help | \$1,302 – \$2,302 |
| Line 9 | Estimated Net Price | \$11,002 – \$12,002 |

| Expected Family Contribution | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Line 10 | Student Contribution | \$0 |
| Line 11 | Parent Contribution | \$1,802 |
| Line 12 | Expected Family Contribution | \$1,802 |

Line 5 describes the *gross price* of attending UCI.

Line 6 describes the discount Jordan could get from *need-based aid*: about \$20,000 off the total gross price.

Line 7 describes the amount Jordan is expected to contribute to his education with additional scholarships, student loans, or earnings from work–study.

Line 8 describes the amount that Jordan’s family is expected to contribute (with their money or additional loans).

Line 9 is the total amount Jordan and his family will have to pay; this is the sum of lines 7 and 8.³

If Jordan had significant assets of his own, the amount he would be expected to contribute would be on **line 10**.

Line 12 is Jordan’s *Expected Family Contribution* (EFC)⁴ for one entire school year at UCI, found by taking his Estimated Net Price (line 9) and subtracting Self Help (line 7).

After accounting for financial aid provided by UCI, the University expects Jordan and his family to come up with

3. Even though it's listed as "Self Help" and "Family Help," it doesn't matter if this money comes from Jordan, his family, or a combination of both.

4. More about the EFC in Chapter 7.

between \$11,002-\$12,002 out of \$31,576! That’s a discount of about \$20,000 from the sticker price! In the end, Jordan could likely cover this \$11,000 cost with other scholarships, work-study, savings, and if necessary, loans.

JESSICA AND THE CAL STATE NPC



After graduating from high school, Jessica wanted to continue living with her mom so that she could help out with her younger siblings. Her family had \$35,000 in income, and she had no older siblings in college. Given her situation, she got this result from the Net Price Calculator for Cal State Long Beach:

The following cost is based on your indication that you would be living at home with parents while attending CSU Long Beach.

CSU Long Beach – at home with parents

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Estimated Cost of Attendance (COA) for the 9-month academic year | \$15,960 |
| a. Estimated tuition and fees | \$6,452 |
| b. Estimated books and supplies | \$1,860 |
| c. Estimated room and board | \$4,770 |
| d. Estimated other expenses (personal, transportation, etc.) | \$2,878 |
| Estimated total grant aid | \$12,858 |
| Estimated net price (COA minus grant aid) | \$3,102 |

| Total estimated financial assistance | |
|---|---------|
| Estimated Federal Pell Grant Eligibility | \$5,730 |
| Estimated Cal Grant Eligibility | \$1,656 |
| Estimated State University Grant Eligibility | \$5,472 |
| Estimated Eligibility for Need-Based Student Loan | \$3,102 |

Based on her family income, Jessica’s “Estimated net price” to attend CSULB is only \$3,102. Awesome! She can cover that amount with a loan (shown on the last line of the calculator results) or, even better, with a job or additional scholarships.

Remember, these are estimates — if you don’t apply for the aid, you’re not going to get it. You need to complete the applications before the deadlines, and possibly do some additional work on your end. You might have to write an essay, get a job on campus, or keep a minimum GPA (usually 3.0, sometimes 3.5). Also, this financial aid is an estimate for one year in school. You have to reapply for *most* need-based aid each year. So, if your family situation changes while you’re in college, your financial aid situation is also likely to change, for better or worse.

I wish net price calculators were available to me when I was applying to college back in 2002. If I had known the generous amount of financial aid USC was about to offer me, I would have been way less stressed!

ME AND THE PRIVATE UNIVERSITY NPC

With three siblings (one who was also in college) and a single mom who earned around \$60,000 per year, this is what my NPC would look like if I applied to USC in 2017:

*Estimated Gift Aid** \$57,434 – \$58,836

* Estimated Gift Aid is the amount you may be eligible to receive

TYLER HENSLEY

in federal, state and need-based university grants and does not include athletic or other scholarships. Based on the information you entered, we estimated your median Gift Aid to be: \$58,143.

Estimated Cost of Attendance

(Based on 2016-17 costs)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Direct Costs | |
| Tuition and Fees | \$52,217 |
| Indirect Costs | |
| Room and Board | \$14,348 |
| Books and Supplies | \$1,200 |
| Other Expenses | \$1,946 |
| ESTIMATED COST OF ATTENDANCE | \$69,711 |

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Grants & Scholarships reduce your costs | |
| Estimated Total Cost of Attendance | \$69,711 |
| Estimated Gift Aid* | - \$58,143 |
| Estimated Net Price | \$11,568 |

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Estimated Other Aid | |
| Federal Work-Study | \$2,500 |
| Federal Direct Student Loan | \$5,500 |
| Estimated Total Other Aid and Resources | \$8,000 |

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Adjusted Costs | |
| Estimated Net Price | \$11,568 |
| Estimated Total Other Aid and Resources | -\$8,000 |
| Estimated Remaining Costs | \$3,568 |

* Remember, if your family's income is less than the amount I entered above, you will likely receive an even larger discount.

In the end, I would end up with a net price of \$11,568 to attend USC. I'd receive a \$58,143 discount, 83% off of the gross price of \$69,711. Also, USC estimated that work-study — an extra \$2,500 in my pocket — and a federal loan would bring my remaining costs down to \$3,568. There's no doubt that some combination of scholarships, savings, a summer job, and additional loans would make this final price affordable. And in real life, that's exactly what happened. Incredibly, many students can attend a private school like USC for a price that's lower than many state colleges when you include room and board...

Attention to Detail

It's important to remember that net price calculators are found *directly* on each university's website. They *do not* ask for your name, social security number, FSA ID,⁵ or address. However, they *do* ask for your family's annual income, and some will require additional information about taxes and assets. Nobody checks this information for accuracy (again, they don't ask for your name), so it's up to you to input correct numbers. Obviously, the more accurate the information you provide, the more accurate the price estimate. This may be a good time to have an honest discussion with your parents regarding your family's financial situation, so you can get a realistic look at your college costs.

CHAPTER RECAP

1. Net price calculators are eye-opening. **USE THEM.** They're free to use as many times as you want, and they provide you with a more accurate description of what it costs to attend different colleges.

5. Details about the FSA ID in Chapter 7.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

1. If cost wasn't an issue, would you prefer to go to a two-year or four-year college? Why?

DO NOW

5.a. Using Google is the easiest way to find net price calculators. Here's an example of what to type into Google: "UCLA net price calculator." Make sure you go to the ".edu" website that's associated with the school you're interested in. Write your net price (the amount you'll be expected to pay after financial aid is applied) for each of your focus schools in the table below. Since this information is personal, you should not be required to share it with anyone else.

| School Name | My Net Price |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |

*If your parents are divorced, separated, or remarried, please go to this link for guidance on whose information you'll use to estimate your financial aid: <http://studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/filling-out/parent-info>.

**If your parents are unavailable or don't want to input their information for this exercise, please use the median information for your community, which can be found at <http://www.city-data.com/>. Then estimate your tax information using this site: <http://www.bankrate.com/calculators/tax-planning/quick-tax-rate-calculator.aspx>. When applying for financial aid in real-life, which we discuss in Chapter 7, you *will* need your parents to input their personal financial information.