

Communicating with the Financial Aid Office

How can you help us help you?

Northland is currently staffed with one financial aid administrator and one financial aid office assistant. Because two staff members are responsible for 100 percent of all grants, scholarships, loans, etc., for the current seven hundred students, it gets busy. The preferred method of communication is e-mail. This allows us to gather the necessary information and get back to you with complete information instead of what is at our fingertips. It also allows us to communicate 24 hours a day. Often times we need to research something or ask another department for information. Phone calls are the next preferred method. Our desire and intent is to return your call the same day if we receive your call by 2:00 p.m. Calls after 2:00 p.m. will be returned the following day. During our busy periods (July–September and April–May), please allow us 24 hours to return your call. It is always helpful if you can give us a best time for the return call. Including your time zone is critical! Yes, I have called Guam at 2:00 a.m. their time! The parent was very patient and understanding, but it was a mistake we do not want to repeat.

What communication do we need from you?

The most critical information is on the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and the resulting Student Aid Report (SAR). The comment section on your SAR will give you information that we still need from you for the resolution of conflicting issues, awards you may be eligible to receive, or general FAFSA comments. If any of these are not easily understood, please contact us. We receive an identical report (ISIR—Institution Student Information Record) which will provide the same comments.

The e-mail address on the FAFSA will be our primary point of communication in the beginning. Please tell us if you prefer mail or phone calls. The e-mail is our first option so information can be processed quickly. Please be wary of sending your social security number (SSN) via e-mail. It would be best to call with that information. E-mailing forms with SSNs should be password protected. Then you may follow with a separate e-mail with the password, or call the password in to the office. Faxing is another alternative to deliver documents to our office. You can fax any financial-aid related information to 715-324-4211.

In addition to the FAFSA information, there may be other school-related forms that we require (scholarship applications, loan applications, etc.). We will communicate the need for you to complete these forms when we begin to process your file. If possible, we will send the blank forms to you electronically; however, all the forms are available on the Financial Aid website (ni.edu/financialaid).

Questions—there will be numerous questions. Please ask them all! If we do not have the answers, we will help you find them. Keep asking! No one wants a financial surprise when heading off to college. We want you to be an informed consumer in all aspects of financial aid during your college experience.

What communication will we provide for you?

Most of the information that is sent to you during the process is in the form of requests. These requests might include questions about conflicting information, additional information you need to include in your aid package, and questions about your work plans. Prompt attention to these matters is beneficial for all. A delay of thirty days means no progress is being made on your file. This could mean a missed opportunity for aid dollars. Responding within a few days is valuable to all.

While we strive to make the information as user friendly as possible, there will be questions. Please be sure you understand exactly what it all means. Assumptions lead to miscommunication and lost dollars. If something is not included that you feel should be taken into consideration, please contact us. This is not with the intent of negotiating a deal. This is with the intent of finding all of the dollars you are eligible to receive that we have available.

Providing the most accurate, easily understood information is the best way to appeal any decision by the Financial Aid Office. If you feel we have underestimated your aid package, please contact us in writing to provide us with the relevant information we need to amend your package. All documentation along these lines must be done in writing for auditing purposes. Again, this is not for the purposes of negotiating a deal. Please be assured that we will provide all financial aid possible and are not able to “negotiate” beyond what we have available or beyond that for which you qualify.

What is the end result?

Your goal is a Financial Aid Award Letter that meets your needs to attend Northland. There may be additional steps that you will be required to meet after the award letter is issued (i.e., accepting the aid, applying for a loan, work study earnings). Please take the time to understand your responsibilities in order to receive the aid that has been awarded to you.

Our goal in the Financial Aid Office is to give you the greatest potential possible for attending Northland in spite of financial hardships—and to make that process as smooth as possible. Understanding and obtaining financial aid can be a daunting task. We are here to help!