



To: Senior Public Institutions
County Colleges
Public Mission Independent Institutions
Proprietary Institutions Licensed by OSHE to Offer Academic Degrees

From: Office of the Secretary of Higher Education
Higher Education Student Assistance Authority

Date: October 18, 2023

Subject: College Cost Transparency Initiative

A national consortium of institutions of higher education (IHEs) recently announced the [College Cost Transparency Initiative](#) (CCT), through which IHEs across the country may voluntarily commit to abide by CCT’s principles and standards for financial aid offers.). While the initiative is well intentioned, CCT’s principles and standards are not fully compliant with New Jersey’s laws. In particular, the CCT website approves of illustrative financial aid offers which present the net price in an imprecise manner and display a total financial aid package summing up grants, loans, and work-study earnings. Under New Jersey state law, financial aid offers may not present student loans and work-study wages as a form of “aid.”

Pursuant to P.L. 2022, c.127, public, independent, and proprietary institutions licensed to offer academic degrees are required to ensure that financial aid award letters provided by institutions are consistent with financial aid shopping sheets. Financial aid award letters sent to students must follow the guidance below:

- (1) be presented in a manner, and in such language, that is substantially similar to that which is used in, and uses terms as defined in, the financial aid shopping sheet provided to students pursuant to section 2 of [P.L. 2019, c.201](#) (C.18A:3B-6b), which also established the State’s model Financial Aid Shopping Sheet templates which can be found [here](#) (for two-year colleges) and [here](#) (for four-year colleges);
- (2) clearly display the estimated net cost to attend the institution;
- (3) clearly differentiate a student's eligibility for loans from a student's eligibility for other forms of financial aid, including grants and scholarships; and
- (4) include a clear statement that the acceptance or declination of one or more loan offers shall not impact a student's eligibility for any other grants or scholarships detailed in the student's financial aid award letter.

Please take note that New Jersey IHEs must remain compliant with all New Jersey and federal laws and regulations regarding the communication of financial aid offers and consumer information disclosures. CCT [principles and standards](#) acknowledge that IHEs must comply with consumer protection laws in their local jurisdiction, and in the case of New Jersey, the State's financial aid offer transparency laws supersede those of the CCT.

If you have any questions, please refer to the attached guidance memos issued jointly by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) and the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education to IHEs on September 14, 2022 and February 8, 2023, as well as Memorandum 05:23 issued by HESAA to IHE financial aid officers on March 8, 2023, or contact HESAA at jschmid@hesaa.org for a review of your financial aid offer templates and shopping sheets.



State of New Jersey

P.O. Box 545
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0545

PHILIP D. MURPHY
GOVERNOR

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
LT. GOVERNOR

MEMORANDUM

To: New Jersey public and independent institutions of higher education
Proprietary institutions licensed by OSHE to offer academic degrees

From: Brian K. Bridges, Ph.D, Secretary of Higher Education
David J. Socolow, Executive Director, Higher Education Student Assistance Authority

Date: September 14, 2022

Re: Academic Year 2023-2024 guidance on complying with state law requiring institutions to provide Financial Aid Shopping Sheets to undergraduate students

New Jersey Public Law 2021, c. 211, enacted on September 16, 2021, requires postsecondary institutions covered by this law¹ to provide a financial aid “shopping sheet” to **every** student, including prospective and currently enrolled students, as part of the institution’s financial aid offer to that student using only one of the following two options:

Option A: the model Shopping Sheet prescribed by the N.J. Secretary of Higher Education;
or

Option B: the most current financial aid shopping sheet developed by the U.S. Department of Education or the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Details and templates for both Option A and Option B are provided on page two of this memo.

To avoid confusion, institutions should not send students an additional document that is substantially similar to the shopping sheet. Pursuant to P.L. 2019, c. 201, section 2(a), “the purpose of the shopping sheet is to provide prospective students and their families with clear information on the costs, loan options, and estimated debt that the student will incur in attending the institution, and to allow students and families to easily evaluate and compare financial aid packages from different institutions.” To comply with this legislative intent, institutions covered by this law should not supplement the shopping sheet (either Option A or Option B) with a separate, competing document that presents similar information (e.g, total costs, financial aid grants and scholarships, net costs, options for financing these costs, and institutional data on graduation rates, repayment

¹ Postsecondary institutions covered by New Jersey Public Law 2019, c. 201 are: all New Jersey public and independent institutions of higher education and all proprietary institutions licensed by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) to offer academic degrees.

rates, and student debt statistics) in a tabulation, worksheet, or another form similar to that of the required shopping sheet.

Institutions may choose to provide information to complement the shopping sheet and help students understand their financial aid offer package, such as next steps, financial aid policies, award acceptance deadlines, terms and conditions, verification procedures and billing information. For example, institutions may provide students a video explaining the financial aid package.

Option A: For Academic Year 2023-2024, the approved New Jersey Financial Aid Shopping Sheet is on HESAA's Publications page (www.hesaa.org/Pages/HESAAPublications.aspx), or at these direct links to templates for Associate Degree-granting institutions ([NJ Financial Aid Shopping Sheet AY23-24 template – Associate's Degree](#)) and Bachelor's Degree-granting institutions ([NJ Financial Aid Shopping Sheet AY23-24 template – Bachelor's Degree](#)). The New Jersey Financial Aid Shopping Sheet differs from the federal format described below as Option B, in that the New Jersey template provides more contextual information for students to understand their financial aid offers. New Jersey's Shopping Sheet also was designed to incorporate feedback from those working directly with students and the New Jersey financial aid community about how information should be presented in a way that most aligns with student needs.

New Jersey's Financial Aid Shopping Sheet templates are formatted as fillable PDF documents to enable institutions to supply each student's individual information and to insert institution-specific information at the top, bottom, and right side of the shopping sheet. When filling in the institution-specific metrics on the right side of the document, institutions should use data from the following official sources: [IPEDS](#) for Graduation Rates within 150% of normal time to degree; [NSLDS](#) for statistics on Median Borrowing and Repayment Rates; and the U.S. Department of Education's [Official Cohort Default Rate website](#) for Three-Year Cohort Default Rates.

If you wish to customize the header of the New Jersey Financial Aid Shopping Sheet with your institution's logo and color scheme, please contact Jules Cornelious at jcornelious@hesaa.org for assistance.

Option B: For Academic Year 2023-2024, the most recently published "College Financing Plan" from the U.S. Department of Education is available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/guid/aid-offer/index.html>.

Please contact Jean Hathaway at jhathaway@hesaa.org with any questions.



State of New Jersey

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MEMORANDUM

To: New Jersey public and independent institutions of higher education
Proprietary institutions licensed by OSHE to offer academic degrees

From: Dr. Brian K. Bridges, Secretary of Higher Education
David J. Socolow, Executive Director, Higher Education Student Assistance Authority

Date: February 8, 2023

Re: Financial Aid Award Letter Guidance, Academic Year 2023-2024

New Jersey Public Law 2022, c.127, enacted on December 12, 2022, requires public, independent, and proprietary institutions licensed to offer academic degrees to ensure that financial aid award letters provided by institutions are consistent with financial aid shopping sheets. Financial aid award letters sent to students in Academic Year 2023-2024 must follow the guidance below:

- (1) be presented in a manner, and in such language, that is substantially similar to that which is used in, and uses terms as defined in, the financial aid shopping sheet provided to students pursuant to section 2 of [P.L.2019, c.201](#) (C.18A:3B-6b), which also established the State's model Financial Aid Shopping Sheet templates which can be found [here](#) (for two-year colleges) and [here](#) (for four-year institutions);
- (2) clearly display the estimated net cost to attend the institution;
- (3) clearly differentiate a student's eligibility for loans from a student's eligibility for other forms of financial aid, including grants and scholarships; and
- (4) include a clear statement that the acceptance or declination of one or more loan offers shall not impact a student's eligibility for any other grants or scholarships detailed in the student's financial aid award letter.

Financial aid award letters sent before this time should be updated to meet the statutory requirements as soon as possible.

If an institution fails to meet the requirements of this law, they will risk their eligibility to receive State-funded financial aid. Prior to revoking eligibility for student assistance, the Secretary of Higher Education will provide an opportunity for institutions to come into compliance with the requirements. Future HESAA management reviews will include verification of institutions' compliance with P.L. 2022, c.127.

To ensure your institution's initial compliance with the law, please send all updated formats for financial aid award letters to HESAA at: jhathaway@hesaa.org prior to disseminating to students and prospective students. **All updated financial aid award letter formats must be sent to HESAA no later than June 1, 2023.**



PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
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DAVID J. SOCOLOW
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM 05:23

March 8, 2023

TO: Financial Aid Directors

FROM: Jean M. Hathaway
Director, Grants & Scholarships

Jill Schmid
Director, Audits & Quality Assurance

SUBJECT: N.J.A.C 9A:9-2.5 Institutional Notifications

Dear Colleagues,

On February 8, 2023, a joint memo was issued by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) and the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA), regarding the requirements of New Jersey Public Law 2022, c.127.

We would like to take this time to remind you of N.J.A.C. 9A:9-2.5, regarding the institution's notifications to students. This regulation requires an institution's written notification to a student regarding State financial aid to contain a clause indicating the State is not responsible for funding the award in the event of fraudulent, inaccurate, or misleading information. This requirement can also be found in the Grants & Scholarships Policy and Procedures manual, Chapter 9, page 7, "Institutional Notifications to Students".

New Jersey Public Law 2022, c.127 (award letter requirements) and New Jersey Public Law 2021, c.211 (shopping sheet requirements) do not eliminate the N.J.A.C. 9A:9-2.5 notification requirement. Since P.L. 2022, c.127 states that financial aid award letters must be consistent with financial aid shopping sheets, both the award letter and the shopping sheet must contain the clause outlined above for students who are state aid recipients.

Institutions should ensure both their award letters and shopping sheets are updated with this clause by September 1, 2023. During audit reviews, institutions will be required to supply award letters and shopping sheets to ensure compliance with this law.

If you should have any questions regarding this information, please contact either Jean Hathaway (jhathaway@hesaa.org) or Jill Schmid (jschmid@hesaa.org).