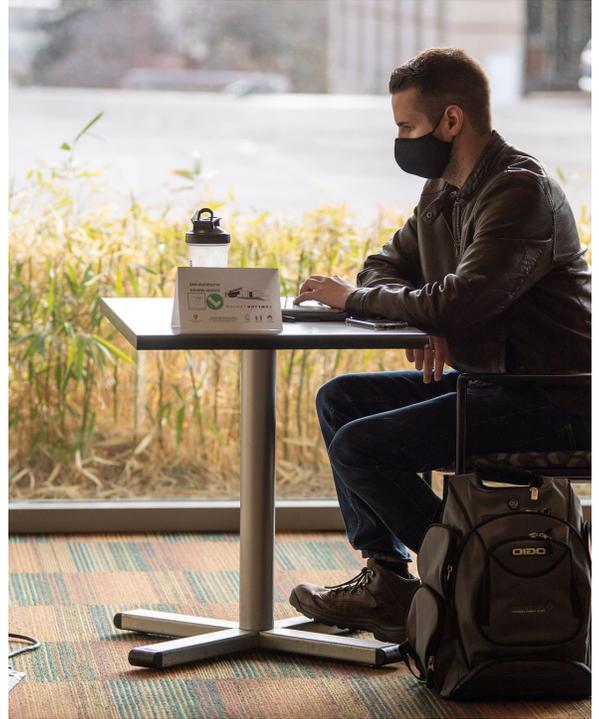


Federally Funded Emergency Grants to Students

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government made a series of investments and incorporated flexibility in federal administrative rules and policy to mitigate the substantial health and financial impacts caused by the virus. This includes impacts to colleges and universities in Washington.

In March 2020, the U.S. Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. This first investment was an historic attempt to stabilize the economy and address the pandemic's health impacts. In December 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSAA) Act to continue the efforts made in the first round of federal dollars, but on a smaller scale. Finally, in March 2021 Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act. It is important to note that while all three federal investments passed Congress, the final investments through the American Rescue Plan Act have yet to be released to colleges and universities by the U.S. Department of Education.



The primary purpose of these investments, together known as the Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF I/II), is to fund grants and provide emergency financial assistance to eligible students who are experiencing hardship due to the coronavirus that could adversely affect their educational success.

Each of the three rounds of federal investments appropriated funds to colleges and universities to provide direct assistance to students. Together, these investments varied in size and scope. The amount each college or university received was primarily based on the number of enrolled students identified as high-need by income as reported to the U.S. Department of Education through PELL reporting calculations¹. While specific award amounts differ between institutions, priority was given to student populations who had the highest financial need as identified through the federal financial aid application process².

- **Student Eligibility.** Washington's public four-year college and universities utilized a variety of approaches to determine student need. In most cases, a completed [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA) was used to determine student eligibility for HEERF student aid. However, graduate and undocumented students often do not complete or are ineligible to complete a FAFSA application; therefore, alternate forms of verification became necessary. For undocumented students in Washington, the [Washington Application For Student Aid](#) (WASFA) was used to establish financial need. In the case of graduate students, online applications for emergency aid were made available on college or university websites.
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- ▶ **Awards to students.** Our institutions used two main methods for awarding HEERF emergency student aid to students. Students were given the option to complete a school-developed application or use an existing school record to automatically award students using established award categories. The most common method used by students across our sector was automatic awards. Students who had more expenses related to COVID-19 then applied for additional funding.
- ▶ **Determining award amounts.** Various factors were used to determine award amounts for HEERF-eligible students. Institutional leadership, financial aid staff, and students were all involved in determining award amounts. Across the sector, institutions determined that rather than all students receiving a very small amount, students with the most financial need would receive a more substantial award. On average, eligible students received a total of between \$500 and \$1,200 from both HEERF I and HEERF II. Maximum awards were given to students beyond the FAFSA need criteria for a financial award. This means that students who were ineligible for a PELL grant award were still eligible to receive a federal emergency grant.

Additional information on how each public four-year college and university awarded CARES dollars to students is available below:

- ▶ [Central Washington University](#)
- ▶ [Eastern Washington University](#)
- ▶ [The Evergreen State College](#)
- ▶ [University of Washington](#)
- ▶ [Washington State University](#)
- ▶ [Western Washington University](#)

Sources:

1. <https://studentaid.gov/complete-aid-process/how-calculated>
 2. <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/electronic-announcements/2020-08-03/fiscal-operations-report-2019-20-and-application-participate-2021-22-fsap-reporting-instructions-and-additional-flexibilities-under-coronavirus-aid-relief-and-economic-security-act-cares-act>
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