

# Financial Aid Graduation Requirement

## Counselor Communication Guide

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*This publication was produced in collaboration with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. For feedback or questions, please contact [info@texasoncourse.org](mailto:info@texasoncourse.org).*

*Last updated March 2024*

## Introduction

Don't have time to create your own email or social media campaign? Let Texas OnCourse do the work for you! Each month just post, share, or email the financial aid content included in this guide to help keep your students and families on track!

**Pro-Tip:** Does your student-management system allow you to save and schedule future messages? Consider setting up your annual campaign at the start of the year, and never miss an opportunity to share important reminders or deadlines!

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## Sample Implementation Timeline

Helping all your seniors to meet the Financial Aid Application Graduation Requirement may feel like a daunting task. And you may not even know where to begin. Consider this sample implementation timeline to help you plan your year and take it one step at a time.

**August and September** Just like teachers use the start of the new school year to establish expectations and set goals, counselors and advisors can help families feel more successful by using the first month of school to begin providing information about what to expect and how to meet this graduation requirement. During this time, counselors should:

- Share information about what the new Financial Aid Application Graduation Requirement is and how students can meet it.
- Encourage families to research which financial aid application is right for them.
- Provide instructions for students and families to create an FSA ID or consider hosting an FSA ID Tutorial Session to assist families with this process.
- Set completion goals and continue monitoring them throughout the year to help you stay on track! Get students involved by posting percentages or make it a competition. Will your principal do something crazy (like sleep on the roof of the school) if you meet 100%? You never know until you ask!

**October** Ready? Set. Go! The official financial aid application season opens October 1! Continue the great momentum that you created at the start of the year and encourage students and families to submit applications early!

- Work with teachers to include financial aid application lessons into their classroom instruction.
- Host financial aid application completion events on your campus.
- Work with your community partners to advertise financial aid completion events at local colleges or community centers.
- Set aside time when you can assist students and answer questions related to financial aid application submissions.
- Get familiar with the ApplyTexas Counselor Suite and determine how you will track completion rates for your campus. Can you reach 25% complete by the end of the month?
- Update your student information system to reflect completed PEIMS coding standards for all students that have completed applications or submitted opt-out forms.

**November and December** The holidays can be a busy time of year and it is easy to lose momentum, but don't stop now!

- Continue to track student completion rates by using the ApplyTexas Counselor Suite.
- Follow up with students that have started but not submitted their financial aid applications.
- Consider hosting additional financial aid application completion programs.
- Identify students that have a special circumstance that makes completing the application difficult and connect them with additional resources to get help.

- Create a list of students that may need to complete an opt-out form instead of submitting a financial aid application. You may include students with disabilities whose transition goals may include transitioning to the workforce, independent or supported living situations and/or community participation. You may ask that students and families complete the opt-out form during their annual ARD meeting. You could also include students that have provided verification of their enlistment into the military.

## **January**

The priority deadline for Texans to submit financial aid applications is January 15! Use this month to encourage students to submit their applications and follow-up with any verification requests that they may have submitted.

- Follow up with students that have started but not submitted their financial aid applications.
- Connect students with internal or external partners to support completing applications.
- Continue to track student completion rates by using the ApplyTexas Counselor Suite. Set a goal to reach 50% complete by the end of the month.
- Update your student information system to reflect completed PEIMS coding standards for all students that have completed applications or submitted opt-out forms.

## **February, March, and April**

Spring semester always seems to fly by. Don't lose sight of those students who may be late to the financial aid party.

- Identify students that have not started a financial aid application and discuss their post-secondary plans. Consider connecting them with external partners to support completing applications or discuss what opting out would mean for them.
- Support students that have been selected for verification to ensure that their financial aid applications are processed successfully.
- Follow up with special education case managers to determine which students may still need to complete an opt-out form and continue to share information with ARD committee members.
- Meet with your local military recruiters to obtain lists of students that have completed the enlistment process. If these students have not completed a financial aid application, meet with them to discuss their options to meet the graduation requirement.
- Continue to track student completion rates by using the ApplyTexas Counselor Suite. The school year is almost over! Can you get to 75% complete?

## **May and June**

It's time to wrap up another school year and get those last few students across the finish line!

- Identify students that have not started or have an incomplete financial aid application and discuss their post-secondary plans. Support them in completing applications or provide an opt-out form.
- Update your student information system to reflect completed PEIMS coding standards for all students that have completed applications or submitted opt-out forms.
- Finish the year strong with 100% completion rate!

## August- What is the financial aid application requirement?

**Parent Email** Have a senior? In Texas, all students must submit a financial aid application to graduate. Every year, billions of financial aid dollars go unclaimed. Texas students miss out on roughly \$300 million in free money each year by simply not enrolling in college. Texas' new graduation requirement gives students an extra push to get these funds and pursue education or training after high school.

Families play an important role in the financial aid process. Not only do students benefit from motivation at home, but many students will need to report parental information on their application.

While applying for financial aid can seem confusing, we are here to help you through the process. Check your email regularly for updates from the counseling department, and use these resources to help you get ready for the next steps:

PDF: [Debunking Financial Aid Myths](#)

Webpage: [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#)

**Student Email** Attention seniors! In Texas, all students must submit a financial aid application to graduate. Every year, billions of financial aid dollars go unclaimed. Don't leave money on the table! Texas' new graduation requirement gives you an extra push to get these funds and pursue education or training after high school.

While applying for financial aid can seem confusing, we are here to help you through the process. Check your email regularly for updates from the counseling department, and use these resources to help you get ready for the next steps:

PDF: [Debunking Financial Aid Myths](#)

Webpage: [My Texas Future](#)

**Tweet** Seniors! Don't miss out on FREE money for college. Complete your financial aid application and discover how much aid you qualify for. Ask a counselor for more information and guidance.

**Facebook and Instagram** Seniors! To graduate, you must complete a financial aid application. FREE money for college is waiting for you to claim it. Come talk to a counselor for guidance and information to take home.

## September: Get ready to complete your financial aid application!

**Parent Email** The first step to helping your student meet the financial aid application graduation requirement is figuring out which application to complete. Students in Texas will submit **one** of the following applications to apply for financial aid.

- **The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**
  - Application for federal, state, and institutional aid
  - Only available to US citizens, permanent residents, and [certain eligible noncitizens](#)\*
- **The Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA)**
  - Application for state and institutional aid
  - Only available to [Texas residents](#) who are not eligible to apply for federal student aid through the FAFSA

For more information about which application is right for your child and additional resources in English and Spanish, download the [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#) or contact your child's counselor.

**Student Email** The first step to meeting your financial aid application graduation requirement is figuring out which application to complete. Students in Texas must submit **one** of the following applications to apply for financial aid.

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  - Application for state and institutional aid
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For more information about which application is right for you and additional resources visit [My Texas Future](#) or see your counselor for more information.

**Tweet** Unsure which financial aid application you're eligible for? which application you're eligible for and get ready to apply and receive FREE money for college. Visit [TexasOnCourse.org](#) for more helpful resources.

**Facebook and Instagram** Financial aid is for everyone! Check out which application you're eligible for and get ready to apply and receive FREE money for college. Visit [TexasOnCourse.org](#) for more helpful resources.

## October: Ready? Set. Go! Financial aid applications are open!

**Parent Email** Financial aid applications are available to complete now! Whether your student is eligible to fill out the [FAFSA](#) or the [TASFA](#), you want to be sure that they have everything they need to get started.

Use this helpful Financial Aid Checklist [in English](#) or [in Spanish](#) for a list of materials you and your child need to complete their application. You can also visit the [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#) for additional resources, helpful videos and more!

See your child's counselor if you have questions, concerns, or need additional help.

**Student Email** Financial aid applications are available for you to complete now! Whether you are eligible to fill out the [FAFSA](#) or the [TASFA](#), you want to be sure that you have everything you need to get started.

Use this helpful Financial Aid Checklist [in English](#) or [in Spanish](#) for a list of materials needed to complete your application. You can also visit [My Texas Future](#) for additional resources.

See your counselor if you have questions, concerns, or need additional help.

**Tweet** Applications are officially open! Whether FAFSA or TASFA is right for you, make sure you have everything you need to get started.

**Facebook and Instagram** Applications are officially open! Whether FAFSA or TASFA is right for you, make sure you have everything you need to get started. Need some help? View and download the Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families. Visit [TexasOnCourse.org](#) for resources.

## November: Keep track of important financial aid dates and deadlines

### Parent Email

Your child's senior year is full of milestones, important events, and deadlines, and it may feel overwhelming at times. Helping your child complete their financial aid application is one of those important tasks you don't want to miss. Financial aid is often awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so encourage your student to apply as early as possible. Mark your calendar or set a reminder to keep track of the following financial aid deadlines:

- **State priority deadline:** In Texas, the state priority deadline is January 15. More financial aid is available to students who apply by this deadline.
- **College deadline:** Each college sets its own financial aid deadline. Encourage your student to double check each college's deadline. In some cases, it may fall earlier than the state priority deadline.
- **Federal deadline:** The federal filing deadline is June 30 of the financial aid award year. Encourage your student to apply by the earliest priority deadline set by the state or college. The longer students wait to apply, the less likely that financial aid will be available.

Need help getting started? Download the [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#) for additional resources, helpful videos, and more! You can also visit [Tomorrow Ready Texas](#) to create a personalized college and career action plan to help your student prepare for success after high school. See your child's counselor if you have questions, concerns, or need additional help.

### Student Email

Senior year is full of milestones, important events, and deadlines, and it may feel overwhelming at times. Financial aid is often awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so apply early! Completing your financial aid application is one of those important tasks you don't want to miss.

Mark your calendar or set a reminder to keep track of the following financial aid deadlines:

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- **Federal deadline:** The federal filing deadline is June 30 of the financial aid award year. Apply by the earliest priority deadline set by the state or college. The longer you wait to apply, the less likely that financial aid will be available.

Need help getting started? Visit the [My Texas Future](#) for additional resources, helpful tips and more! Or see your counselor if you have questions, concerns, or need additional help.

### Tweet

Mark your calendar to keep track of important financial aid deadlines. Financial aid is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so be sure to submit your application sooner rather than later!

**Facebook and Instagram** Mark your calendar to keep track of important financial aid deadlines. Financial aid is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so be sure to submit your application sooner rather than later! For additional resources and helpful videos, check out the Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families or My Texas Future.

## December: Having trouble with your financial aid application? Know where you can go to get help.

**Parent Email** There are many circumstances that can impact your child's ability to complete a financial aid application. Maybe your living situation or finances are complicated. Maybe all the new [financial aid lingo](#) feels like a foreign language. Or maybe you just don't even know how to get started.

You're not alone! There are people and resources available to help you. You just need to know who to ask. Schedule a time to meet with your child's counselor or send an email asking for help. Download the [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#) to find helpful resources and links.

Students can even get **free** virtual advising support via text message 24/7! [ADVi](#) – short for advisor – provides on-demand support to Texas students to help ensure that they receive the information they need to access higher education. When students sign up to receive messages from ADVi, they get:

- Weekly reminders about upcoming deadlines and nudges to complete key college access milestones
- The ability to ask questions about college 24/7 via text message,
- Backup support from our virtual advisors if a student has needs or questions beyond what ADVi can provide,
- Information and tips to help with their college applications, planning, and financial aid, and
- Resources to help navigate the transition to college.

**Student Email** Sometimes life is hard and that may make completing a financial aid application feel impossible. Maybe your living situation or finances are complicated. Maybe all the new [financial aid lingo](#) feels like a foreign language. Or maybe you just don't even know how to get started.

You're not alone! There are people and resources available to help you. You just need to know who to ask. Schedule a time to meet with your counselor or send an email asking for help. Visit [My Texas Future](#) to find helpful resources and links.

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- Backup support from our virtual advisors if you have needs or questions beyond what ADVi can provide,
- Information and tips to help with college applications, planning, and financial aid, and
- Resources to help navigate the transition to college.

You may opt-in to receive ADVi messages when creating your profile on ApplyTexas. On the last page, make sure you select **Yes** when asked “Do you consent and agree that ApplyTexas and its partners (the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and AdmitHub) may communicate with you by email or text message (including SMS and MMS messages)?”

See your counselor if you have questions, concerns, or need additional help.

**Tweet** Don't let free college money slip from under you. Talk to your counselor about financial aid or chat with @askADVi for free, 24/7 virtual advising support.

**Facebook and Instagram** Don't let free college money slip from under you. Talk to your counselor about financial aid or chat with @askADVi for free, 24/7 virtual advising support.

## January: Make sure your financial aid application is complete! Follow up with important next steps.

**Parent Email** Submitting a financial aid application is only the first step to helping your child find money for college or training after high school. Remember to follow up after your child submits their FAFSA or TASFA application to support them in what comes next.

- **Make sure their application was correctly submitted and received by the college.** FAFSA students can check their Federal Student Aid account by logging in with the FSA ID and password they created when they submitted the application. TASFA students will need to contact colleges directly.
- **FAFSA only: review the FAFSA Submission Summary.** This document will let students know if any corrections need to be made on their application. Encourage your child to look over the section “Next Steps.” Read [What is the FAFSA Submission Summary?](#) from the Federal Student Aid website for more information.
- **Consider if your situation has changed.** Your child’s financial aid award is based on prior prior year income. That means students applying to receive financial aid to attend college in the 2024–2025 school year will provide income information from 2022 tax returns. A lot can change in two years! People can move or lose jobs. New circumstances may arise that affect your income or ability to pay for tuition. If you feel like your child’s financial aid application does not reflect your current situation, your child can appeal their award offers after their application has been processed by their schools. Students should contact the school they plan to attend to confirm their appeal process. Likely the school will request an appeal letter, and students can use [this template from SwiftStudent](#) to help you get started.

Still need help? Download the [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#) for more helpful resources and links. Contact your child’s counselor if you have additional questions or concerns.

**Student Email** Submitting a financial aid application is only the first step to finding money for college or training after high school. Remember to follow up after you submit your FAFSA or TASFA application to find out what comes next.

- **Make sure your application was correctly submitted and received by the college.** If you submitted the FAFSA, check your [Federal Student Aid account](#) by logging in with the FSA ID and password you created when you submitted the application. If you submitted the TASFA, you will need to contact colleges directly.
- **FAFSA only: review the FAFSA Submission Summary.** This document will let you know if any corrections need to be made on your application. Look over the section “Next Steps.” Read [What is the FAFSA Submission Summary?](#) from the Federal Student Aid website for more information.
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Still need help? Visit [My Texas Future](#) for more helpful resources and links. Contact your school counselor if you have additional questions or concerns.

**Tweet** Submitting a financial aid application is the first step in securing money for college! Remember to check for corrections and submission confirmation by logging into your FSA account or contact your schools for TASFA status.

**Facebook and Instagram** Submitting a financial aid application is the first step in securing money for college! Remember to check for corrections and submission confirmation by logging into your FSA account or contact your schools for TASFA status. If you're having trouble, don't hesitate to ask your counselor.

## February: What is verification?

**Parent Email** Was your child selected for verification? FAFSA students might see a note on their FAFSA Submission Summary saying they've been selected for verification, or their school might contact them via the communication portal or email to let them know they've been selected. TASFA students may receive an email or see additional documentation needed in their college portals.

[Verification](#) is the process schools use to confirm that the data reported on the FAFSA is accurate. Being selected for verification doesn't mean your child has done anything wrong. Some people are selected randomly, and some schools verify all student financial aid forms.

It's important to note that if your child has been selected for verification, they cannot receive aid until they follow the instructions provided by their school and provide the documentation requested by their deadline.

To learn more about the verification process and how your child should respond to their school's request for documents, download [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#). You can also contact your child's school counselor with questions and concerns.

**Student Email** Were you selected for verification? FAFSA students might see a note on their FAFSA Submission Summary saying they've been selected for verification, or their school might contact them via the communication portal or email to let them know they've been selected. TASFA students may receive an email or see additional documentation needed in their college portals.

[Verification](#) is the process schools use to confirm that the data reported on the FAFSA is accurate but being selected doesn't mean you have done anything wrong. Some people are selected randomly, and some schools verify all student financial aid forms.

It's important to note that if you have been selected for verification, you cannot receive aid until you follow the instructions provided by your school and provide the documentation requested by their deadline.

To learn more about the verification process and how you should respond your school's request for documents, visit [My Texas Future](#) . You can also contact your school counselor with questions and concerns.

**Tweet** Financial aid application verifications are common and most times, students are selected at random. For info and help on the process, visit [My Texas Future](#).

**Facebook and Instagram** Don't freak out if you receive a financial aid verification message. Verification checks are common and students are selected at random. You won't be able to accept aid until the process is complete. For additional guidance, visit [My Texas Future](#).

## March: Late to the financial aid party? Financial aid applications are still open!

**Parent Email** Your child's senior year may feel like a blur! How did your baby grow up so quickly? Sometimes you may feel like you are struggling to keep up, missing important deadlines, and running out of time. Don't worry! If your child hasn't started yet, **now** is the time to plan and help them submit their financial aid application.

The federal filing deadline for the [FAFSA](#) is **June 30**, but the sooner your child applies the more likely that financial aid will be available. Aid is often awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so encourage them to apply as early as possible.

Is your child completing the TASFA application online? Students should check with their college or university to find out institution deadlines for submitting an application.

Counselors are available to answer any questions you may have, and you can download [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#) for access to additional resources.

**Student Email** Senior year may feel like a blur! Sometimes you may feel like you are struggling to keep up, missing important deadlines, and it's too late to get started. Don't worry! If you haven't started yet, **now** is the time to plan and submit your financial aid application.

The federal filing deadline for the [FAFSA](#) is **June 30**, but the sooner you apply the more likely that financial aid will be available. Aid is often awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so apply as early as possible.

Completing the TASFA application online? Check with your college or university to find out their deadline for submitting an application.

Counselors are available to answer any questions you may have, and you can visit [My Texas Future](#) for access to additional resources.

**Tweet** Seniors, you still have time to apply for financial aid! Get started on your financial aid application today. Make an appointment to talk with a counselor and visit [My Texas Future](#).

**Facebook and Instagram** Seniors, there's no time to waste! You can still apply for financial aid. Make an appointment to discuss your future with a counselor and visit [My Texas Future](#) to get started.

## April: Financial aid offers: What they mean and what you need to do next

**Parent Email** Once your child is admitted to a college or university and their financial aid application has been processed, they should begin receiving award letters. These letters list the types and amounts of financial aid offered to your student. Colleges may send these notices via email, or your student may need to log in to their student portal to see their offer.

Students should only accept aid to the school they plan to attend. They can choose to select some, all, or none of the financial aid offered to them. Have your child review this [list of questions](#) to better analyze their financial aid offers. In general, encourage your child to accept **gift aid**, such as scholarships and grants, before accepting loans.

If accepting **loans**, make sure you and your child understand each loan's terms and interest rates. Students should also pay attention to whether the aid they're receiving is renewable in future years. For more information, read Federal Student Aid's [Accepting Financial Aid page](#). You can also use uAspire's [College Cost Calculator](#) to help analyze and compare financial aid offers.

Still need help? Download the [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#) for more helpful resources and links. Contact your child's counselor if you have additional questions or concerns.

**Student Email** It's admission season! Once you're admitted to a college or university and your financial aid application has been processed, you should begin receiving award letters with a list of the types and amounts of financial aid offered to you. These notices may be sent via email, or you may log in to your student portal to see your offers.

You should only accept aid to the school you plan to attend, and you can choose to select some, all, or none of the financial aid offered to you. Review this [list of questions](#) to better analyze your financial aid offers. In general, you should accept **gift aid**, such as scholarships and grants, before accepting loans.

If accepting **loans**, make sure you understand each loan's terms and interest rates. Pay attention to whether the aid you're receiving is renewable in future years. For more information, read Federal Student Aid's [Accepting Financial Aid page](#). You can also use uAspire's [College Cost Calculator](#) to analyze and compare financial aid offers.

Still need help? Visit [My Texas Future](#) for more helpful resources and links. Contact your school counselor if you have additional questions or concerns.

**Tweet** Financial aid offers are rolling in! Learn more about different types of aid at <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types> and only accept aid to the school you're planning to attend.

**Facebook and Instagram** Financial aid offers are rolling in! Learn more about different types of aid at <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types> and only accept aid to the school you're planning to attend. Your counselor is here to assist you in answering questions or concerns.

## May: Show me the money! When will you receive your financial aid?

**Parent Email** Your child has marked everything off their financial aid to-do list and the only thing left to do is see the award money roll in. So, when can they expect to see financial aid funds pay out?

Gift aid, like scholarships and grants, will be applied directly to your child's tuition and fees balance once they have registered for classes. After they have accepted these types of aid, no additional steps are required.

Other types of aid, such as [federal loans](#), require students to complete additional steps like completing [entrance counseling](#) and signing a [master promissory note](#). Be sure your child follows the instructions provided by their school to ensure that these steps are completed before the deadline.

Students who accept work-study will need to apply for work-study jobs at their college. Typically, these jobs will be posted at the beginning of each semester. Students can only receive work-study funds they have been awarded if they obtain an approved on-campus job.

Read Federal Student Aid's [Receiving Financial Aid page](#) to learn more about how and when your child can expect to receive their student aid payments. Students can also reach out to the school's financial aid office if they have questions or need assistance. For more information and helpful resources, download the [Texas OnCourse Financial Aid Requirement Toolkit for Families](#).

**Student Email** You marked everything off your financial aid to-do list and the only thing left to do is see the award money roll in. So, when can you expect to see financial aid funds pay out?

Gift aid, like scholarships and grants, will be applied directly to your tuition and fees balance once you have registered for classes. After you have accepted these types of aid, no additional steps are required.

Other types of aid, such as [federal loans](#), require you to complete additional steps like completing [entrance counseling](#) and signing a [master promissory note](#). Be sure that you follow the instructions provided by your school to ensure that these steps are completed before the deadline.

Have you accepted a federal work-study award? Clean up your resume! You will need to apply for work-study jobs at your college. Typically, these jobs will be posted at the beginning of each semester. You can only receive work-study funds if you obtain an approved on-campus job.

Read Federal Student Aid's [Receiving Financial Aid page](#) to learn more about how and when you can expect to receive your student aid payments. You can also reach out to the school's financial aid office if you have questions or need assistance. For more information and helpful resources, visit [My Texas Future](#).

**Tweet** You've selected your school and accepted aid. Now what? Read more on receiving financial aid and what it looks like depending on the type you accepted:  
<https://studentaid.gov/complete-aid-process/receive-aid>

**Facebook and Instagram** You've selected your school and accepted aid. Now what? Read more on receiving financial aid and what it looks like depending on the type you accepted:  
<https://studentaid.gov/complete-aid-process/receive-aid> Don't forget the counseling department is here to help you and answer any questions you may have!

## Social Media Samples and Template

### August Sample:

# Seniors! What is the financial aid application requirement?

To graduate, you must complete a financial aid application. FREE money for college is waiting for you to claim it. Talk to a school counselor for guidance and information to take home. Visit [TexasOnCourse.org](https://www.texasonlinecourse.org) for helpful resources.



**TEXASONCOURSE**

### September Sample:

# Seniors! Get ready to complete your financial aid application!

Financial aid is for everyone! Check out which application you're eligible for and get ready to apply and receive Free money for college. Visit [TexasOnCourse.org](https://www.texasonlinecourse.org) for helpful resources.



**TEXASONCOURSE**

To create additional social media posts, use the [Texas OnCourse Canva template](#).