New text application answers students' questions on FAFSA

High school seniors who need help completing the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid**(https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa) (FAFSA) form can now get support through **Wyatt** (https://www.getfafsahelp.org/cb/), a free assistance chatbot that replies to students' FAFSA questions via text.

Wyatt was launched through a partnership between the **College Board** (https://www.collegeboard.org/) and **Benefits Data Trust** (https://bdtrust.org/), a national nonprofit that helps connect people to public assistance.

The chatbot, which is available to students until February, answers students' FAFSA questions such as troubleshooting the FSA ID process, understanding whose income to report, what to do if they have a special circumstance, and more.

"Wyatt is a technology that's free for all students and it provides personalized assistance for filling out the FAFSA," said Yulani Smith, product manager at Benefits Data Trust. "It can answer questions via text message and is also very user friendly.

"Once students text with the chat bot, we will also send updates and reminders to make sure they're staying on track," she added. "When we created Wyatt, we wanted it to be accessible for all people, including low-income students and communities. We just really want students to be successful."

Smith said that the sooner students fill out the FAFSA the better because of school deadlines for financial aid.

"Students need to submit the application early because several states and schools have deadlines in early 2021 for aid," Smith said. "Some schools disperse on a first-come, first-served basis, so in order for students to qualify for aid they're eligible for, we want to make sure they're doing it as soon as possible."

Prior to the pandemic, an estimated $3.4 billion in federal student aid was left on the table each year. Due to the economic downtown caused by COVID-19, only 54.6% of the class of 2020 completed the FAFSA.

"FAFSA completions are down quite a bit. Compared to this time last year, they're down 16%," said Neeta Sonalkar, director of access initiatives at the College Board. "While the process for FAFSA itself has not changed, the times have.

"As students are going to virtual or hybrid models, students have less access to their guidance counselors and teachers," she added. "We're very happy that we've developed this tool in Wyatt which will provide assistance during these difficult times."

In addition to utilizing Wyatt for FAFSA support, students who complete the financial aid form can also enter to win $1,000 through the **College Board Opportunity Scholarships (https://opportunity.collegeboard.org/)** program.
The program guides students through six college planning steps including building a college list; practicing for the SAT; improving your SAT score; narrowing down a college list based on academic safety, match and reach schools; completing the FAFSA; and applying to colleges.

Students who complete the list are eligible to earn $40,000. Scholarships will also be awarded through monthly drawings to students who complete each action. The deadline for the program is Feb. 1.

"Half of the scholarship money through the College Board opportunity is reserved for low-income students," Sonalkar said. "Once students complete the FAFSA, they can report their completion on the College Board Scholarships website and they will get entered into a monthly drawing for the $1,000 scholarship.

"Two-hundred students will win a scholarship for the month of November and December and 100 students will win a scholarship in January and February.

"Students who complete all six steps and the Opportunity Scholarships Program will get entered into a drawing to win a $40,000 scholarship for college," she added. "We want to make sure that we're giving scholarships to the students who need it most."

For more information on Wyatt and the College Board Opportunity Scholarships, visit https://www.getfafsahelp.org/cb/