Bobcat Money Matters

Financial Wellness Center

Your Money Matters

Today You Will Learn

- Understand your financial aid
- Stay eligible for aid
- Manage your money
- Borrow responsibly
- Know when and where to ask for help

Know Your Financial Aid

Free Money

Grants & Scholarships

Money you typically do not have to repay

Self-Help

Work-Study

Money you earn through an eligible job—it is **not automatically applied to your bill**

Student Loans

Money you borrow and must repay, generally with interest

Cost of Attendance ≠ Your Bill

These are NOT the same thing!

Cost of Attendance (COA)
An estimated annual budget that may include:

- Tuition & fees
- Housing & food
- Books & supplies
- Transportation
- Personal expenses

Your Student Account
Shows the actual charges you owe UC Merced

Financial Aid is a Partnership

We have a role—and so do you.

Our job:
Determine your eligibility
Process your financial aid
Communicate important information
Help you understand your options

Your job:
Check your UC Merced email
Review your student portal
Complete requirements promptly
Meet important deadlines
Ask questions when you don't understand something

Best habit: Don't ignore a financial aid message because you don't understand it. **Ask us!**

Your Enrollment Matters

Thinking about changing your classes?

Adding, dropping, withdrawing from, or not attending courses **may affect your financial aid.**

Before making a major enrollment change:

STOP → ASK → THEN ACT

Contact Financial Aid first.
A five-minute conversation now may prevent a much bigger financial problem later.

Keep Your Aid

Receiving financial aid comes with academic responsibilities.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) looks at things like:

GPA — Are you maintaining the required academic performance?

Pace — Are you successfully completing enough of the units you attempt?

Timeframe — Are you progressing toward your degree within the allowed timeframe?

Important: Dropped, withdrawn, failed, incomplete, and repeated courses can matter.

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Your Refund Isn't a Bonus Check

You received a $2,400 financial aid refund.

But…

That money may need to help cover:

- Housing
- Food
- Books & supplies
- Transportation
- Personal expenses

$2,400 ÷ 4 months = $600/month

Could you make it last all semester?

Takeaway: Your refund is part of your educational budget—not necessarily extra spending money.

Build a College Budget

You don't have to stop spending money on things you enjoy.

You just need to know **what you can afford.**

1. Start with your available money
Financial aid refund + wages + other resources

2. Subtract your MUST-PAYS
Housing + food + transportation + books + bills

3. Plan for everything else
Eating out + shopping + entertainment + subscriptions

Budgeting = giving your money a plan.

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Borrow With Your Future Self in Mind

Before accepting a student loan, ask yourself:

Do I need to borrow the full amount offered?

Remember:
Amount offered ≠ Amount you have to accept

Before borrowing, know:

- How much you're borrowing
- Whether interest accrues while you're in school
- Your total borrowing over time
- That loans must eventually be repaid

Borrow what you need—not automatically what you're offered.

Credit Cards Aren't Free Money

Your **credit limit** is not your spending budget.

Know these four terms:

APR → Cost of borrowing
Statement Balance → Amount owed for that billing cycle
Minimum Payment → Smallest required payment—not necessarily what you *should* pay
Credit Limit → Maximum the lender allows you to borrow

Best practice: If possible, only charge what you can afford to pay off.

Protect Your Money & Identity

Watch for financial scams.

Be cautious if someone:

- Asks for your password or FSA ID
- Guarantees you a scholarship
- Charges you to "unlock" financial aid
- Pressures you to act immediately
- Requests banking or personal information unexpectedly

When in doubt: Don't click. Don't pay. Verify first.

When Life Changes, Talk to Us

Things happen.

A family may experience:

- Loss or reduction of income
- Job loss
- Unexpected financial hardship
- Changes in family circumstances
- Other significant financial changes

Don't assume nothing can be done.

Ask early. There may be options.

Contact the **Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships** to discuss your circumstances.

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Before You Leave Today…

Remember these 5 things:

CHECK your UC Merced email and portal
KNOW what type of aid you're receiving
ASK before making major enrollment changes
BORROW only what you need
CONTACT US before a small problem becomes a big one

You don't have to be a financial aid expert.

You just need to know when to ask for help.

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