

# Cutting College Costs When No Financial Aid is on The Horizon

## *Squeezing nectar from a financial aid desert*

By Steve Wightman, CFP

When your child or grandchild receives an acceptance letter from the college of their choice, don't accept it! Look in the top right corner. It says "initial", not a final offer! This means that the college door is open to negotiate financial terms with you. They understand that they cannot know your entire situation from financial aid documents. Also, colleges know all too well what kind of endowments they have and how much they are willing to contribute. Parents who refuse to accept the initial letter and instead meet with the financial aid officer often see their child's education expenses cut by as much as 50%. The more expensive colleges offer the steepest reductions because they often have the deepest endowments.

Catch? Your child will have to match a college recruiting need for such things as cultural diversity, a star student academically and or, with extracurricular activities such as in sports or speech competition or, like job hunting, have at least one better offer from another school. Last, families with significant savings accumulated, may use another little-known ploy. Secretly, some colleges reserve some seats to children of wealthier families - hoping to enlist parental support with fund-raising to prop up their endowments. Not accepting the initial acceptance letter and sitting down with the financial aid officer to compare better offers that your child received from competing schools, may be the not only acceptable, but very, very smart. So look again at your child, hold onto your wallet, and schedule an appointment with the school your child most wants to attend. You may find that financial aid can be more than just a mirage.

Published in *Tips From The Top, Targeted Advice From America's Top Money Minds*, Alpha books, 2003

Steven Wightman, CFP is a life advisor specializing in money. He is a member of National Association of Professional Advisors, [www.NAPFA.org](http://www.NAPFA.org) and the Financial Planning Association, [www.fpanet.org](http://www.fpanet.org). He has published articles on the subject of planning for retirement, investments, estates and education. He has been a Certified Financial Planner™ licensee since 1995, practicing fee-only comprehensive planning with Wightman Financial Network, LLC of Lexington, Massachusetts.