



FINANCIAL AID DEPARTMENT

2013-14

Professional Judgment

Request for Change of Income

In cases of extenuating circumstances affecting a student's financial aid eligibility, a student can request special consideration by speaking with a Financial Aid Specialist and submitting the necessary paperwork. Professional judgment is the ability of an institution to make adjustments to a student's specific FAFSA data elements or his/her Cost of Attendance, based on their documentation. Circumstances can include, but are not limited to:

- Loss of employment
- Loss of income due to divorce or separation
- Loss of income due to death of spouse or parent
- Discharge from active military duty
- Loss of untaxed income or benefits
- Loss or hardship due to disability or natural disaster

The need analysis procedures specified in Part F of Title IV of the Higher Education Act will be used in determining need for federal funds. Both current regulations and law recognize, however, that adjustments may be made to data elements in need analysis. Indeed, the Higher Education Act provides that discretionary judgments may be employed. Section 479A(a) states:

Nothing in Title IV shall be interpreted as limiting the authority of the student financial aid administrator, on the basis of adequate documentation, to make necessary adjustments to the cost of attendance and expected family contribution (or both) to allow for treatment of individual students with special circumstances. In addition, nothing in this title shall be interpreted as limiting the authority of the student financial aid administrator to use supplementary information about the financial status or personal circumstance of eligible applicants in selecting recipients and determining the amounts of awards under [the Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, Federal Work-Study, Federal Perkins Loan, Federal Family Educational Loan or the Federal Direct Loan Programs]. Special circumstances may include tuition expenses at an elementary or secondary school, medical or dental expenses not covered by insurance, unusually high child care costs, recent unemployment of a family member or other changes in a family's income, a family's assets, or a student's status.

Adjustments in need analysis may either result in an increase or decrease in the student's need. If the aid administrator is satisfied that the adjustment is based on verifiable information and may be justified as reasonable on grounds of professional judgment, the resulting need figure is valid for all forms of aid, regardless of source.

Professional Judgment allows the student financial aid administrator to make necessary adjustments to the values of specific data elements used in the EFC calculation or adjust the cost of attendance. This included not

only allowing a more liberal financial aid package for some students, but also the ability to restrict aid for students who have additional sources of support not apparent in the analysis.

Because each family's situation is unique, extraordinary circumstances occasionally will arise that require individual attention. In these cases the aid administrator is expected to weigh the family's situation both objectively and subjectively in order to render a professional judgment about the financial support that the family can reasonably provide toward the applicant's post-secondary expenses. Professional judgment represents a key factor in the student financial aid delivery system - the capacity for personal intervention by the aid administrator in cases that merit individual attention.

Effective Spring 2014, Southwestern College's financial aid office will take into consideration approving income changes for students that have by choice left employment for retraining as permitted in Dear Colleague letter GEN 09-04: <http://ifap.ed.gov/dpcletters/GEN0904.html>

Effective Spring 2014, Southwestern College's financial aid office will count unemployment income equal to ZERO as permitted in Dear Colleague letter GEN 09-05: <http://ifap.ed.gov/dpcletters/GEN0905.html>

Effective fall 2013, Southwestern College's Financial aid office will utilize two options of 12 month based income for Professional Judgment's to result in most beneficial circumstance.

January – December (Traditional 12 month year)

July – June (SWC academic year)

Dependency Overrides

Students who wish to request a change in dependency status are required to meet with a Financial Aid Specialist and submit a Change in Dependency Request Form, which must include a personal statement clarifying the rationale for their request and/or a letter from a third-party professional (eg: pastor, counselor, teacher, caseworker, etc.) and any other supporting documentation, such as court orders, police reports, etc. None of the conditions listed below qualify as unusual circumstances meriting a dependency override:

- Parents refuse to contribute to the student's education.
- Parents are unwilling to provide information on the FAFSA or for verification.
- Parents do not claim the student as a dependent for income tax purposes.
- Student demonstrates total self-sufficiency

Decisions to exercise professional judgment or a dependency override will be on a case-by-case basis and decisions regarding requests for adjustment are final and cannot be appealed. Overrides do not carry over from year to year.

Despite the possible expectation of a parent's contribution for an independent student, the aid administrator cannot shift a student from independent to dependent status for federal purposes if the student otherwise meets the requirements of the federal definition of an independent student.