

Professional Judgment/Dependency Override

The Higher Education Act of 1992 allows Financial Aid Administrators to make professional judgment decisions for special or unusual family or student circumstances. Professional Judgment occurs on a case-by-case basis, and is initiated by the student/family requesting the adjustment. It is the Financial Aid Office's responsibility to collect any supporting documentation required to make a determination on the student's circumstance. The process begins with verifying the FAFSA data as submitted to ensure the original EFC is correct based on tax data. Income, taxes, number in the household, etc may be changed which may cause the EFC to change. Anything can be changed directly except EFC. The Financial Aid Administrator is responsible for documenting any changes and the reasoning behind said changes. If the administrator chooses to use the financial aid year instead of the tax year, it should be documented.

Circumstances

Student circumstances, which may warrant a professional judgment decision, are circumstances that occur by no fault of the student or their family. Such circumstances include, but are not limited to:

1. Parent, student or spouse's loss of full-time employment.
2. Loss of unemployment compensation, social security benefits, or other sources of income.
3. The death of a parent or spouse.
4. The separation or divorce of parents.
5. Parental Abandonment.

Documentation

Financial Aid Administrators are required to document professional judgment decisions. This documentation must be maintained in the student's file. Students requesting a professional judgment decision must first complete the verification process and submit a written request explaining their circumstance. Because each situation is unique, additional documentation may be requested from the student after the initial review of the request. It is left to the discretion of the Financial Aid Administrator to select what is appropriate documentation.

1. Documentation should substantiate the student's situation.
2. Typically, documentation supporting a student's claims should be from a disinterested third party.
3. If collecting documentation about a student's life situation, documentation from more than one person should be collected.

Notification to Students

Students are notified of the results of professional judgment/dependency override by receipt of an award letter and an email from a Financial Aid Administrator. In addition, students will receive an updated Student Aid Report reflecting any changes made as a result of the professional judgment/dependency override process.