

PURPOSE: Special and Unusual Circumstances justify why a Financial Aid Administrator is adjusting a student's dependency or financial situation.

REFERENCE TO: Cochise College Financial Aid Standard Operating Procedure

HEA Section 480 (d)(1)(1)

Any student can request the Financial Aid Department to review their Financial Aid application under two unique cases: **Special Circumstance and Unusual Circumstance**. Professional Judgement determines the results in both cases.

Special Circumstances:

A special circumstance is submitted when information on a student's FAFSA form no longer accurately reflect the current financial situation of a student or student's contributor. Contributors are defined as a student's parent(s) and/or spouse.

A student can complete a Special Circumstance Form through their MyCochise Portal. [Special Circumstances Appeal Form for Dependent Student \(online\)](#) [Special Circumstances Appeal Form for Independent Students \(online\)](#) The student is responsible for providing appropriate documentation supporting the special circumstances in a timely manner. If documentation is not submitted in **60 days**, the appeal will be **denied**.

Examples of Special Circumstances below may include but are not limited to:

- Loss of reduction of employment
- Change of marital status due to separation, divorce or death
- Loss of one-time income
- Child or dependent care expenses, medical, dental or elderly dependent care not covered by insurance
- Tuition expenses at a private elementary school
- Any other changes that impact the student's ability to pay for college

Unusual Circumstances:

The Department of Education presumes that a Dependent Student will receive financial support from their parents. This means the student's parents must provide financial information on the FAFSA.

Financial Aid Administrators are given the authority under Section 480(d)(1)(1) of the HEA to change a student's status from dependent to independent in cases of unusual circumstances (Example: parental abandonment, human trafficking, parental incarceration, refugee or asylum status).

A student can complete an Unusual Circumstance Appeal through their online MyCochise portal [Unusual Circumstances Appeal Form \(online\)](#). The student is responsible for providing appropriate documentation regarding their unusual circumstances. Once all the documentation has been submitted by the student a review will be completed by the Financial Aid Department. The student will be notified of the determination of their dependency status as soon as possible, no later than 60 days from the date when all documentation was received or from the date the student enrolled (registered classes). If documentation is not submitted in **60 days**, the appeal will be **denied**.

An Unusual Circumstance Appeal will not be processed for any of the below reasons:

- Parents refuse to contribute to the student's education
- Parents are unwilling to provide information for the FAFSA or verification
- Parents do not claim the student as dependent on their income taxes
- Student demonstrates full self-sufficiency

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth / Risk of Homelessness:

A student is considered homeless if they lack fixed, regular and adequate housing. This includes but not limited to:

- Youth sharing housing with other people temporarily because they have nowhere to go
- Youth living in emergency or transitional shelters
- Youth living in motels, campgrounds, cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations or any public or private place not designated for humans to reside
- Youth living in a school dormitory if they would otherwise be homeless
- Youth who are migrants and who qualify as experiencing homelessness because they are living in circumstances described above

A student who is an accompanied homeless youth or at risk of homelessness can complete an Unusual Circumstance Appeal through their MyCochise portal [Unusual Circumstances Appeal Form \(online\)](#)

Students that are unaccompanied homeless youth or at risk of homelessness review will begin on the date the FAFSA is received OR on the date the student communicated their homelessness status to the Financial Aid Department. The student will be notified of the determination of their dependency status as soon as possible, but no later than 60 days from the timelines noted above. If documentation is not submitted by **60 days**, then the appeal may be **denied**.

In cases where the school has conflicting information concerning a student's eligibility or has any reason to believe the student's FAFSA application information is incorrect, this conflict must be resolved in a timely manner. When conflict data is discovered the student will be notified of the conflict and what documentation is required to resolve the conflict. Any conflict noted on the student's file must be resolved before Financial Aid can determine any sort of Professional Judgement adjustment.

Cochise College will presume any student who received a dependency override in a preceding award year to be independent for each subsequent award year; unless the student informs Cochise College that their circumstances have changed or Cochise College has conflicting information about the student's independence.

DEFINITIONS:

Professional Judgement: The discretion granted to Financial Aid Administrators by law to override dependency status and/or adjustments to analysis.

Special Circumstances: Extenuating circumstances to explain why a student is requesting assistance with the FAFSA application process due to a recent change in a student's current situation. A situation that can support a change in cost of attendance or Student Aid Index (SAI) calculation. (Examples; changes in employment, income, or assets)

Unusual Circumstances: Conditions that support a change in the student's dependency status based on a unique situation. ((Examples; abuse, neglect abandonment, human trafficking)

Independent Student: A student who is at least 24 years old (For the 23/24 school year born before January 01, 2000 for the 24/25 school year born before January 01, 2001), married, have children they support, member of the armed forces, ward of the court, emancipated minor, granted professional judgment or someone who is homeless or at risk of being homeless. If at anytime since the student turned 13 they were orphaned, they were ward of the court, they were in foster care or the student is or was in a legal guardianship with someone other than their parent or stepparent as determined by the state.

Approval: 

Karen Emmer, Financial Aid Director