

# PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT FOR SPECIAL AND/OR UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Have a special or unusual circumstance? The DIT Financial Aid Office can use professional judgement to help eligible students receive financial aid.

## PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

Professional Judgment refers to the school's authority to adjust, on a case-by-case basis, certain information (data elements) reported on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) so that the Department of Education can recalculate the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC is the number that the school uses to determine if a student is eligible for need based financial aid.

**Please Note:** The school does not have the authority to make direct adjustments to the formula that is used to calculate the EFC, just to certain data elements on the FAFSA which may change the calculated EFC number.

The professional judgment process is an extensive process that requires a thorough review by the DIT Financial Aid Office to determine what, if any changes, to your FAFSA application may be appropriate. It is a time intensive process that includes the following steps:

- If a Professional Judgment request is submitted, the student will be institutionally selected for Verification (if not previously selected). Be aware that during the Verification process, corrections to your FAFSA may be required which can result in a change to a student's aid eligibility.
- The file will then be reviewed to determine if all required documentation has been submitted. If additional documentation is required, the student will be notified by email.
- The DIT Financial Aid Office will determine if a student's Professional Judgment request meets the criteria to make data element changes to their FAFSA.
  - If approved, appropriate changes will be made to the student's FAFSA and submitted to the Department of Education. The Department of Education

will then recalculate the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and the student's eligibility for need based aid. The student will be notified by email.

- If denied, the student will be notified by email.

In many cases, an adjustment does not increase the student's eligibility for Federal grants or the total amount of Federal aid awarded. Be aware that if a student receives a Federal grant(s) and/or a WA State Grant(s), those grant awards may be reduced or lost because they are based on the original EFC and/or the original income(s) that are reported on the FAFSA. The DIT Financial Aid Office will consider all submitted requests for professional judgment. The decision of the DIT Financial Aid Office is final and cannot be appealed to the Department of Education.

Special circumstances are *anything that differentiates the family's finances from those of other families*. Examples of special circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- unusually high childcare or dependent care expenses
- unusually high medical or dental expenses
- parent(s) enrolled in college *at least half-time* in a degree seeking program at an eligible postsecondary institution
- changes in a family's reported income (i.e., due to loss or reduction of employment; or loss of untaxed income or benefits)
- death or disability of a wage earner
- separation/divorce of the student's parents
- receipt of one-time taxable income source

Unusual circumstances are *conditions that justify a financial aid administrator making an adjustment to a student's dependency status based on a unique situation*. Examples of unusual circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- victim of human trafficking
- refugee or asylee status
- parental abandonment (i.e., incarceration)
- student not able to locate and/or has no communication with biological or adoptive parent(s)
- abusive family environment

**Please note:** Use of professional judgment is neither limited to nor required for the situations mentioned above.

Situations that are not considered special or unusual circumstances:

- vacation expenses
- tithing expenses
- standard living expenses (e.g. utilities, cell phone or internet expenses, children's allowances, etc.)
- rent/mortgage payments
- car payments/repairs
- lawn care
- credit card or other personal debt
- all other discretionary expenses
- student doesn't live with parent(s)
- parent(s) does not financially support the student & doesn't claim the student on their tax return
- parent(s) not willing to complete the FAFSA
- parent(s) refusal to contribute to student's cost of education

If you feel you have a special or unusual circumstance that you'd like the DIT Financial Aid Office to consider, please contact the DIT Financial Aid Office for an application and a list of required documents that will need to be submitted for review.