

General Information

The FAFSA’s purpose is to estimate a family’s ability to pay for college by calculating a Student Aid Index (SAI) based on tax information from two years prior. However, the Department of Education realizes that circumstances can change beyond a family’s control, and because of this, that tax year may no longer be an accurate representation of a family’s financial situation. In these situations, the Department of Education, with documentation, allows schools on a case-by-case-basis to review a family’s special circumstances to determine if they warrant an adjustment to certain data elements on the FAFSA. This is what is referred to as a “Professional Judgement (PJ).”

Examples of special circumstances that may qualify for a Professional Judgement include:

- Loss of employment
- Reduction in income or benefits
- Divorce or separation
- Death of a spouse or parent (if dependent)
- Non-recurring income

Examples of Acceptable Documentation

The Department of Education requires that circumstances be documented to support the school’s decision. Please see the chart below for examples:

Circumstance	Documentation
Loss or Change of Employment and/or Income	Statement from previous employer with last date of employment and any benefits paid out Copy of final pay stub with any benefits (vacation, severance, etc.) Proof of unemployment benefits (if applicable) Signed and dated 2024 federal taxes with W-2's 2024 W-2's
Divorce/Separation	Divorce decree Separation agreement (or notarized statement with proof of separate residences such as utility bill, lease, etc.) Signed and dated 2024 federal taxes with W-2's
Death of Spouse or Parent	Death certificate or obituary Copy of final pay stub Documentation of any death benefits received
Non-Recurring Income	Documentation from bank or agency, stating the source of the income 2024 taxes to confirm non-recurrence

Review Process for Professional Judgement

To request a Professional Judgement for special circumstances, please complete and submit the form on the second page with the required documentation for review by the Director of Financial Aid. Once received, an interview will be conducted and documented by the Director of Financial Aid to review the student or parent’s situation. Following the interview, a decision will be made and communicated to the student or parent within 30 calendar days.

To request a Professional Judgement (PJ) for Special Circumstances, please follow the steps outlined in this form.

Step 1: Student Information

Student Name

Student ID

Step 2: Parent Information (If Applicable)

Parent Name

Parent Phone number

Parent Email

Step 3: Detailed Summary of Extenuating Circumstances

Please attach a typed and detailed summary of your extenuating circumstances. Please be as detailed as possible including, as applicable, information such as dates, company names, dollar amounts, etc. so that ACU may understand and establish a timeline of events and the resulting financial hardship.

Please note: All attached statements must be signed and dated by hand. Typed or electronic signatures will not be accepted.

Step 4: Supporting Documentation

The Department of Education requires that all Professional Judgements be supported by documentation. Please attach supporting documentation that corroborates the information detailed in your statement. Any request submitted without documentation will not be reviewed.

Please note: Federal tax returns submitted as documentation must be signed and dated by hand.

Step 5: Certification

By signing this form, I understand that all Professional Judgements will be reviewed and decided based on my statement and corroborating documentation on a case-by-case basis. I understand that the decision made by the Office of Financial Aid is final and cannot be appealed to the Department of Education.

Please note: All forms must be signed and dated by hand. Typed or electronic signatures will not be accepted.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

This section is to be completed by the Office of Financial Aid.

Professional Judgement Review

Date Request Received: _____

Date Interview Completed: _____

Professional Judgement Decision	
Approved <input type="checkbox"/>	Denied <input type="checkbox"/>

Summary of Decision: _____

Director of Financial Aid Signature

Date

Name of Director of Financial Aid