Dependency Status Override Procedure

The basic premise of federal financial aid is that student and parent(s) have the primary obligation to finance postsecondary education to the extent they are able. Student Financial Services at CHC supports this premise and the current federal dependency definition. It is our policy to override the federal determination of dependence with extreme caution and only when it is clearly demonstrated and supported with third-party documents, which an otherwise dependent student’s parent(s) is no longer available to participate with the student in applying for federal assistance.

When a student completes the FAFSA they are asked questions to determine if they must include their parent’s income information or not. Sometimes students who must include their parent’s income information are unable to do so. Student Financial Services at CHC under very specific reasons may override this requirement and make a dependent student an independent and not require the parent’s information.

When you complete the FAFSA you are asked questions to determine if you are a dependent or independent. If you can answer yes to any of the below questions you are considered an independent. Documentation for most is required.

For the 2014-2015 academic year, you are automatically independent for federal student aid if you meet one of the following criteria:

1. You were born before January 1, 1991;
2. You were married on or before the date you completed the FAFSA;
3. You will be working on a master’s or doctorate program (such as an MA, MBA, MD, JD, or Ph.D., etc.) at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year;
4. You are currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training;
5. You are a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces;
6. You have or will have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015;
7. You have dependents (other than your children and spouse) who live with you and who will receive more than half of their support from you, between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015;
8. At any time since you turned 13, both your parents were deceased, you were in foster care or were a dependent/ward of the court;
9. You are/were an emancipated minor as determined by a court in your legal state of residence;
10. You are/were in legal guardianship as determined by a court in your legal state of residence;
11. On or after July 1, 2013, your high school or school district homeless liaison determined that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless;
12. On or after July 1, 2013, the director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determined
that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless;

13. On or after July 1, 2013, the director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determined that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless.

- Unaccompanied youth who was homeless is defined as:
  1. 21 years of age or younger or still enrolled in high school as of the day you sign the FAFSA application,
  2. not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, or
  3. lacking fixed, regular and adequate housing

If you cannot answer yes to the above or do not have the proper paperwork to verify then you are considered a dependent student and must provide your parents income information.

**USE OF PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT:** The Higher Education Act allows a financial aid counselor to exercise professional judgment to give an otherwise dependent student independent status if unusual circumstances can be documented. This determination is made on a case-by-case basis, and must be supported by documentation provided by the student.

**WHAT DOES NOT CONSTITUTE UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES:** Chestnut Hill College maintains that certain circumstances cannot be considered unusual. None of the conditions listed below, singly or in combination, qualify as unusual circumstances meriting a dependency override:

1. Parents refusing to contribute to the student’s education;
2. Parents are unwilling to provide information on the FAFSA or for verification;
3. Parents do no claim the student as a dependent for income tax purposes;
4. Student demonstrates total self-sufficiency.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Your living situation (whether or not you live with your parents or they claim you on their tax return) does not affect your dependency status. If you do not satisfy at least one of the Federal criteria for independent status listed above, you are a dependent student for the purposes of Federal student aid.

*Unusual circumstances may include:*

- Abandonment by parents.
- An abusive family environment that threatens the student’s health or safety.
- The student being unable to locate his or her parents.

**STUDENT PROCEDURES:** If you are a dependent student by the federal definition, but you believe that unusual circumstances are present that establish you as “independent”, you can request a review of your situation by Student Financial Services. The following procedure is required:

- You must complete the Dependency Status Appeal Form.
Explain in detail why you should be considered an independent student.

Provide documentation such as legal documents if applicable.

You must provide written documentation from two disinterested professional, third party and/or agency confirming the specifics as described by you in (A). This documentation must be in writing, on the appropriate letterhead, and must be signed (see below for instructions).

Submit a signed copy of your 2013 federal tax return transcript and all related W2 forms. If you did not work you must provide a written explanation of how you were supported during the calendar year of 2013.

A completed Verification Worksheet (which can be obtained at http://www.chc.edu/Undergraduate/Financial_Aid/Verification_Forms/ or at the Student Financial Services office located in St. Joseph’s Hall)

Student Financial Services will determine if unusual circumstances exist based on the documentation submitted. The student will be notified in writing of the decision.

Instructions for Third Party Documentation

The information stated in the Dependency Status Appeal Form must be verified by a disinterested, professional third party who is aware of the student’s home situation and can verify from first-hand knowledge the information the student has provided. Examples of such a person include, but are not limited to: employer, clergy, social worker, attorney, court official, teacher, counselor, psychiatrist, psychologist, medical professional, law enforcement agent, etc.

Third party documentation must be a SEPARATE statement on official letterhead. Please include any information of which you have first-hand knowledge and that you feel best describes the student’s situation. The following is a list of information to include in the letter:

- How long you have known the student.
- Your relationship to the student.
- The last time the student lived with and/or received financial support from his/her parents.
- State your direct knowledge of when the student last had contact of any type with his/her parents. Please include information regarding both parents.
- Any knowledge of his/her current relationship with his/her parents.
- The steps that the student has taken to establish independence from his/her parents.
- Please include your professional title, name and type of business, business address, telephone number, and where to contact you should any additional information be required.

The Dependency Status appeal form along with letters and any documentation should be provided to Student Financial Services for review. Students will receive a letter in the mail or email to their CHC account notifying if their appeal is accepted or denied.