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Independent student status is defined by federal law.

Independent Student Definitions

The law defines an independent student as a student who:

1. Is at least 24 years old by December 31 of the award year,
2. Is a veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States, or is engaged in active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training,
3. Is a graduate student,
4. Is married, at the time the FAFSA is signed,
5. Since turning age 13 became an orphan, was in foster care, or was a dependent or ward of the court,
6. Is currently or was an emancipated minor or in legal guardianship,
7. Is verified as an unaccompanied youth who is homeless, or at risk of being homeless,
8. Has legal dependents other than spouse (provides more than half of the dependent's support),
9. Has a documented decision by the financial aid administrator that other unusual circumstances warrant the treatment of the student as independent.

Note: The definition makes no reference to the student being or not being claimed for tax purposes by the parents or about any level of student earnings.

Use of Professional Judgment

Federal regulations permit the College at Oneonta to exercise professional judgment in determining if unusual circumstances can be documented to make the student independent for federal student financial aid purposes. This determination is made on a case by case basis.

Student Procedure

If the student is dependent by definition but believes circumstances are present to establish him/her as "independent", the student can request a review of his/her unusual circumstances by the Financial Aid Office at the College at Oneonta. Students who

are unable to provide parental data on the FAFSA may submit the application by indicating that they believe they have special circumstances.

The following steps are required:

- A. Student must provide, in writing, a full explanation of his/her unusual circumstances with specifics.
- B. Student must secure written documentation from at least two appropriate persons, agencies, etc., confirming the specifics as identified by the student in A. It must be in writing and signed and dated by the appropriate party. One supporting letter should be from a disinterested third party.
- C. Student is responsible for providing **full written documentation** as stated in A. and B. to the Financial Aid Office at the College at Oneonta. The documentation should show that personal choice was not a consideration.

What Does Not Constitute Unusual Circumstances

The College at Oneonta maintains that certain circumstances cannot be considered unusual. For example, a parent refusing to provide data, a student who does not want to ask parents for information, a student who is and has been "on their own" for several years, a student who does not communicate with parents. A student who has been independent in past years would not be considered independent unless he/she met one of the conditions of the current independent student definition.

Review of Unusual Circumstances

On a case by case basis, personnel in the Financial Aid Office will exercise professional judgment in determining if unusual circumstances exist and if adequate documentation has been provided. The student will be notified of the decision in writing. Other colleges may not accept the College at Oneonta's determination of independent status. Likewise, if another college has granted you independent status, the College at Oneonta reserves the right to require the above documentation for our review and determination.

Note: Financial Aid Awards are contingent upon the College receiving adequate federal funds to support these programs. In the event of any changes, you will be notified. State and Federal budget discussions may lead to changes in funding levels, cost increases, or regulatory changes.

The State University of New York College at Oneonta completely subscribes to all Federal and State Civil Rights Laws prohibiting discrimination at institutions of higher education. The State University of New York College at Oneonta aspires to provide an environment of inclusion for all its employees and students. It is the policy of our College to provide equal employment and educational opportunities for all qualified people. The College shall not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment or admission to the College because of race, color, gender, religion, age, pregnancy, national origin (including ancestry), disability, being a disabled veteran or veteran of the Vietnam era, sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity, marital status, or any other protected category.