Policy Name: Expected Family Contribution and Dependency Override Professional Judgments and Reviews

Purpose: This document contains the Office of Financial Aid’s current policies and procedures for Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and Dependency Override Professional Judgments and Reviews

Disclaimer: This policy is subject to change, without notice, in order to comply with administrative and regulatory requirements. All policies and procedures below are in accordance with Title 34; Subtitle B; Chapter VI; Part 668 of the Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (eCFR).

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Definitions and Terms:

D.O. – Dependency Override
DOE – Department of Education
EFC – Expected Family Contribution
FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid
OFA – Office of Financial Aid
PJ – Professional Judgment
The OFA may administer a PJ on a case-by-case basis in order to change a student’s dependency status or adjust the data used to calculate his or her EFC. The OFA also reserves the right to request reasonable documentation to verify any FAFSA information related to student eligibility.

**Professional Judgment Committee:**

All PJs are reviewed by a committee of financial aid professionals.

The following PJs and reviews are handled by this committee:

- Dependency Override
- Emancipated Minor
- Homeless /Risk of Being Homeless
- Legal Guardianship
- Orphan / Ward of the Court / Foster Care
- Proof of Legal Dependents
- Adjustment to EFC
- Parent Attending College
- Unsubsidized Direct Loan Request
- Direct PLUS Exceptional Circumstances*

*The Direct PLUS Exceptional Circumstances PJ can only be initiated by the OFA.

**Correspondence:**

Please note that all correspondence from the OFA will be carried out through email. Therefore, the student is responsible for checking his or her Ole Miss email account regularly. If the student does not use their Ole Miss account, it is recommended that he or she forward it to an active email account.
Eligibility for federal student aid is based on the assumption that the student and his or her parents are primarily responsible for the student’s educational costs. If the directions on the student’s FAFSA instruct the student to provide parent information, then by law he or she is considered to be a dependent for federal aid purposes. However, the OFA does have the authority to review individual cases and may be able to students with unusual circumstances who are technically dependent but who do not or cannot have contact with either parent.

Please note that the conditions below, singly or in combination, **DO NOT QUALIFY** as unusual circumstances meriting a dependency override:

- Parents refuse to contribute to the student’s education.
- Parents are unwilling to provide information on the student’s FAFSA (or for verification).
- Parents do not claim student as a dependent for tax-filing purposes.
- Student demonstrates total self-sufficiency.

Some unusual circumstances which qualify as considerations for a dependency override may include, but are not limited to:

- Parental abandonment of the student.
- Abusive family environment which threatens the student’s health or safety.
- Student’s inability to locate parents for a long-term and on-going basis.

**Dependency Override Documentation Submission Requirements**

In order to initiate the D.O. review process, the student must complete the corresponding form and attach supporting documentation from two responsible adults who know and can document the reason(s) for the unusual circumstances that cause estrangement or inability of contact between the student and his or her parent(s). At least one statement should be from a professional individual (e.g., teacher, counselor, medical professional or authority, member of the clergy, prison administrator, government agency, or court).

The D.O. form is available at: [http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_dependencyoverride/](http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_dependencyoverride/)

Requests for a D.O. are considered on a case-by-case basis each academic year and will require, if deemed necessary, the submission of new or updated documentation each year a petition is submitted.
“Emancipation of a minor” is a legal procedure that frees children from the custody and control of their parents or guardians before they reach the age of majority. The age of majority for each state is determined by that individual state.

Because of the effect on dependency status, documentation of a student’s claim that he/she is emancipated must be provided before the OFA can continue processing the application for financial assistance.

Please note that the United States Department of Education does not recognize emancipation of a Mississippi resident as being valid to establish independent student status for Title IV federal financial aid.

**Emancipated Minor Documentation Submission Requirements**

The student can document his or her emancipated minor status by:

- Providing a copy of a court’s decision that as of today the student is an emancipated minor.

  OR

- Providing a copy of a court’s decision that the student was an emancipated minor before he or she reached the age of being an adult (majority) in his/her state.

The student must complete the corresponding PJ form and provide it in addition to the required documentation as listed.

The Emancipated Minor PJ form is available at: [http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_emancipatedminor/](http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_emancipatedminor/)

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**Part 3.6.B.3 Homeless / Risk of Being Homeless Professional Judgment**

Because of the effect on dependency status, documentation of a student’s claim that he/she is “homeless or at risk of being homeless” must be provided before the OFA can continue processing the application for financial assistance.

*Note that the U.S. Department of Education defines a “youth” as a student who is 21 years old or younger; therefore, this process would not apply to dependent students ages 22-23. Instead, individuals 22-23 years of age may wish to submit a Request for Independent Student Status D.O. petition. (Individuals who are at least 24 years of age are already considered independent by virtue of their age.)*
Homeless / Risk of being Homeless Documentation Submission Requirements

The student can provide proof of their status by verifying that:

- Any time on or after July 1 (of the calendar year that precedes the award year in question, e.g. 2013 for award year 2014-15), the student’s high school or school district homeless liaison determined that the student was an unaccompanied youth who was homeless,

  OR

- Any time on or after July 1 (of the calendar year that precedes the award year in question), the director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determined that the student was an unaccompanied youth who was homeless,

  OR

- Any time on or after July 1 (of the calendar year that precedes the award year in question), the director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determined that the student was an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or was self-supporting and at risk of being homeless.

The student must complete the corresponding PJ form and provide it in addition to the required documentation as listed.

The Homeless / Risk of being Homeless PJ form is available at: (http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_homeless/)

Part 3.6.B.4 Legal Guardianship Professional Judgment

“Legal guardianship” is a formal decision by a judge that suspends parents’ custody of their child and gives custody to a non-parent. The kinds of people the courts appoint as guardians vary by state.

Because of the effect on dependency status, documentation of a student’s claim that he/she has a legal guardian must be provided before the OFA can continue processing the application for financial assistance.
Legal Guardianship Documentation Submission Requirements

The student must document their legal guardianship status by:

- Providing a copy of a court’s decision that as of today the student is in legal guardianship,
  OR

- Providing a copy of a court’s decision that the student was in legal guardianship before he or she reached the age of being an adult (majority) in their state.

*Please note that the court must be located in the student’s state of legal residence at the time the court’s decision was issued.*

The student must complete the corresponding PJ form and provide it in addition to the required documentation as listed.

The Legal Guardianship form is available at:  [http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_legalguardianship/](http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_legalguardianship/)

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**Part 3.6.B.5  Orphan / Ward of the Court / Foster Care Professional Judgment**

Because of the effect on dependency status, documentation of a student’s claim that he/she fits any of the three categories below must be provided before the OFA can continue processing the application for financial assistance.

- **Orphan**: A student is considered an orphan if both of his or her biological or adoptive parents are deceased. The student is eligible for a PJ if he/she meets this definition and has no living parent (biological or adoptive) since turning age 13.

- **Ward of the Court**: A student to whom a guardian has been appointed by the court or who has become directly subject to the authority of the court. The student is eligible for this PJ if he/she has been a Ward of the Court any time since turning age 13.

- **Foster Care**: A 24-hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians and for whom the State agency has placement and care responsibility. The student is eligible for this professional judgment if he/she has been in foster care at any time since turning age 13.
Orphan / Ward of the Court / Foster Care Documentation Submission Requirements

The student must complete the corresponding form and provide it in addition to the appropriate documentation as listed in the instructions.

The Orphan / Ward of the Court / Foster Care PJ form is available at: (http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_fostercareorphan/)

Part 3.6.B.6 Proof of Legal Dependents Professional Judgment

Because of the effect on dependency status, documentation of a student’s claim that he/she has legal dependents must be provided before the OFA can continue processing the application for financial assistance.

The OFA defines “legal dependents” for purposes of Title IV federal aid as individuals that the student will support between July 1 and June 30 of the school year in question.

Support is defined as monetary sources of funds used to provide the following:

- Money
- Housing
- Food
- Clothes

Proof of Dependents Documentation Submission Requirements

The student should provide the following documents to substantiate the claim:

1. The student’s most recent Federal Income Tax Returns, W2 forms and applicable tax schedules C or F. (Note - if the student did not file a tax return and he or she received wages during the prior year, the student must still submit W2 forms, or submit his or her most recent pay stub that reflects their year-to-date income).
2. Legal documentation (birth certificates, custody paperwork, etc.) for each dependent person.
3. Rent or lease agreement or copy or proof of mortgage.

The student can include his or her children only if they receive more than half of their support directly from the student and will continue to receive more than half of their support from the student through the end of the school year. The student may include other legal dependents only if they meet ALL of the following criteria:

- They currently live with the student, AND
- They currently receive more than half their support from the student, AND
- They will continue to receive more than half their support from the student the entire school year.
The student must complete the corresponding form and provide it in addition to the required documentation as listed.

The Proof of Legal Dependents PJ form is available at: (http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_dependentsproof/)

**Part 3.6.B.7 Adjustment to EFC Professional Judgment**

A student may complete an Adjustment to EFC PJ request if they, their spouse’s, or their parents’ (for dependent students) financial, marital, or family situation has changed or differs significantly from the information he or she originally provided on their FAFSA for the current academic year (based on the preceding year’s income and assets).

**Adjustment to EFC Documentation Submission Requirements**

Appropriate reasons for an adjustment to a student’s EFC include:

- A change in the family situation has occurred due to the death of a spouse or a parent.
- There are losses of income or benefits.
- A change in marital status has occurred since initial application for financial aid was processed (involving the student himself/herself, OR a dependent students’ parents).
- Extraordinary medical/dental expenses have been paid.
- A significant amount of one-time income was reported on the previous year’s Federal Income Tax that will not be received for the current year.
- There are other unusual or special circumstances that must be considered.

The student must complete the corresponding form and provide it in addition to the required documentation as listed in the form.

The Adjustment to EFC PJ form is available at: (http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_efc/)

**Part 3.6.B.8 Parent Attending College Professional Judgment**

A student may complete a “Parent Attending College” PJ request if they wish to include their parent(s) on the current FAFSA in the number in college. *(Note: if the student’s parent is attending college less than half-time, the student may not include his or her parent as one in college on their FAFSA; there is no need to complete this request.)*
Parent Attending College Documentation Submission Requirements

The student should provide:

- Proof of at least half-time enrollment in degree/certificate program from their parent’s school Registrar for the academic year 2014-15, AND

- An official statement from the parent’s employer indicating the employer is not paying or subsidizing the parent’s classes.

The student must complete the corresponding form and provide it in addition to the required documentation as listed.

The Parent Attending College PJ form is available at:
http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_parentattendcollege/

Part 3.6.B.9 Unsubsidized Direct Loan Request Professional Judgment

Dependent students must typically provide parental data on the FAFSA in order to determine financial aid eligibility. If the student failed to provide this information initially on his or her current FAFSA, corrections can be made at www.FAFSA.gov. The only exception is for students whose parents do not support them and refuse to complete a FAFSA. If this circumstance applies to the student, the student may submit this form.

Federal regulations do allow a dependent student to be awarded a Federal Unsubsidized Direct Loan if the OFA can verify that the parent(s) has ceased financial support and the parent(s) refuses to provide parental information on the student’s FAFSA. However, student information must be submitted on the FAFSA.

If the request is approved by the OFA, the student will be eligible to receive ONLY an Unsubsidized Federal Direct Loan subject to annual borrowing limits based upon grade level. No other federal, state, or university need-based aid will be available, and the student’s parent(s) will not be eligible to apply for a Direct PLUS Loan for the student. An approved student will remain in a dependent status, and will only be eligible to apply for Credit-Based Private Student Loans if additional aid is needed during the academic year.

Unsubsidized Direct Loan Request Documentation Submission Requirements

The student must complete the corresponding PJ form signed by the student. A signed and dated statement from one parent must be attached which specifically states that the parent(s):

- Has stopped providing financial support to the student, including the date when financial support ceased.
• Will not provide financial support in the future (including cash and non-cash support, such as room and board).
• Refuses to complete the parental section of the student’s FAFSA.

The Unsubsidized Direct Loan Request form is available at: (http://finaid.olemiss.edu/pj_umsubloanrequest/)

Part 3.6.B.10 Direct PLUS Loan Exceptional Circumstances

The OFA reserves the authority to award additional Direct Unsubsidized Loan funds to a dependent undergraduate student based on a determination that the student’s parent is unable to borrow a Direct PLUS Loan due to having an adverse credit history or other exceptional circumstances (see DCL GEN-11-07 (http://www.ifap.ed.gov/dpcletters/GEN1107.html)).

The OFA makes this determination on a case-by-case basis, and maintains proper documentation. In addition to circumstances in which a credit check shows that a parent has an adverse credit history, exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to, the following:

• The parent is incarcerated;
• The parent's whereabouts are unknown;
• The parent is not a U.S. citizen or is unable to provide evidence that he or she is in the United States for other than a temporary purpose with the intention of becoming a citizen or permanent resident;
• The student's parent receives only public assistance or disability benefits, and the school has documented that the parent would not be able to repay the PLUS Loan;
• The parent has filed for bankruptcy and has provided documentation from the bankruptcy court stating that as a condition of the bankruptcy filing, the parent may not incur any additional debt; or
• The school has examined the family financial information and documented the parent’s likely inability to repay the PLUS Loan due to an existing debt burden or the parent’s expected income-to-debt ratio.

The following conditions do not constitute exceptional circumstances:

• Parent(s) refusal to borrow a Direct PLUS loan;
• OFA administrator’s belief that a parent should not borrow a Direct PLUS loan (without documentation of exceptional circumstances).