

FINANCIAL AID INFORMATION FOR THE CLASS OF '14 REPORTING SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

“Special Circumstances” in Financial Aid

- Any circumstance affecting your need for money can be reported to a Financial Aid Office (FAO). Report facts you can't report on the FAFSA (see examples) and significant changes after the FAFSA is filed.
- Examples: Change of income in 2013 or 2014, child support or social security stops at age 18, loss of job, serious illness, disasters, extended family obligations, special medical needs or supplies, unusual expenses, etc. – something that makes your income significantly less than you were allowed to report on the FAFSA.
- Report special circumstances only to the FAO at each college under consideration. Do not report special circumstances to federal or state authorities or the California Student Aid Commission. Do not attach letters or information to your FAFSA. Work separately with each FAO; the offices will make an individual, local decision.
- Financial Aid Offices have the discretion, but not the obligation, to change the evaluation of cost and resources to meet special need. Approaches will differ from college to college. The college decision is final. Colleges generally have appeal processes within the institution, but there are no appeals to federal or state authorities.
- In order to exercise this professional judgment (i.e., change your financial aid based on local discretion), the FAO staff must satisfy 3 federal requirements: decisions must be made on a *case-by-case* basis, with written *justification* and adequate *documentation*.

How to Report Special Circumstances

Unless you are given instructions to the contrary, send a letter to the FAO of every college under consideration that includes:

- A brief explanation of the special situation affecting your ability to pay.
EXAMPLE: “I receive child support payments for my daughter that end when she turns 18. The child support I reported on the FAFSA will not be available.”
- A detailed estimate of the financial effect of the situation, with exact dollars included. The FAO cannot guess or estimate for you. You must make the estimate.
EXAMPLE: “In 2013, I received \$500 per month for a total of \$6000. She turns 18 in April 2014; the check I get in April 2014 will be the last.”
- A specific time frame for your estimate.
EXAMPLE: “From July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015 (the college year) I will receive \$0 in child support.”
- Documentation of the situation.
EXAMPLE: Attach a copy of the court order.

All letters should be signed by both the student and parent(s) and include the student's full legal name and social security number or ID assigned by the college. Contact the Financial Aid Office 2 – 3 weeks after sending your information (if you don't hear from the FAO). Make a personal or phone appointment with a counselor if you have questions.

Follow local instructions – the final authority rests with the college.

Remember you can report special situations AT ANY TIME.

If an emergency arises during the year, contact the Financial Aid Office immediately.

Information on this handout may be superseded by changes in federal or state law; local financial aid offices may have different rules or interpretations. This handout has no legal status; it is offered for informational purposes only.