

Students/parents may appeal to the Office of Student Financial Aid with “special” or “unusual” circumstances that differentiate their situation from information reported on the student’s FAFSA. Students are invited to contact the **Office of Student Financial Aid** (336.770.3297 or finaid@uncsa.edu) to discuss their specific situation. If they wish to appeal, they will be guided to complete appropriate required forms to describe their special or unusual circumstances and submit additional supporting documentation.

The Director of Student Financial Aid will review this information to consider a professional judgment (PJ) decision according to the policy below, based on federal guidelines including the *FAFSA Simplification Act*.

Based on Federal statute, nothing limits the authority of aid administrators, and the aid administrator’s decision is final. Documentation will be maintained in the student’s file for at least three years after the end of their enrollment, along with documentation of the PJ decision.

CATEGORIES OF POTENTIAL CHANGES BASED ON PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENTS

“Special Circumstances”—Adjustments reflecting financial changes affecting the student/parent.

- These adjustments can be made to data elements used in calculating the EFC (Expected Family Contribution) or beginning in 2024-25, the SAI (Student Aid Index).
- Financial adjustments might also be made to the components of the student’s COA (Cost of Attendance Budget for Financial Aid Purposes.)

“Unusual” Circumstances—Adjustments made to the student’s dependency status for financial aid purposes based on a unique situation that differentiates the student from the regulatory bases for dependency determined through standard FAFSA questions.

Special Circumstances to be Considered (Financial):

Adjustments to Components Used to Calculate EFC or SAI

- **Reduced Income:** Adjustments to data elements used to calculate the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) or Student Aid Index (SAI) based on an income or earnings reduction compared to the calendar-year reported on the FAFSA, as a result of circumstances including the

following:

- Change in employment
- Reduction in untaxed income, such as child support
- Divorce/separation of parent or student
- Death of parent or student's spouse
- Permanent and total disability of parent or student's spouse
- Other changes in income

Reduced income must be reported on the specified Income Reduction Worksheet, for the actual prior-calendar year *or* projected current calendar year (with no more than six months of projected income), whichever is more applicable to the prevailing situation. Third-party documentation must be uploaded to support the data provided on the form.

- ***Incurred Expenses:*** Adjustments to data elements used to calculate the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) where certain expenses existed during the calendar year on which the FAFSA is based which are not captured by questions on the FAFSA ,such as:
 - Tuition expenses at an elementary or secondary school
 - Unusual out-of-pocket medical or dental expenses not covered by insurance.

A letter of explanation with itemization of these expenses, accompanied by third-party documentation, will need to be securely uploaded to be considered.

Cost of Attendance Budget Increases

In circumstances in which the student can document that the standard Cost of Attendance Budget does not accurately reflect their necessary expenses, a student may appeal for an increase in their Budget for reasons including the following:

- Documented higher living expenses than represented by the on-campus average or median room and all-access plan meal allowance
- Documented exceptional costs for books, supplies, or miscellaneous personal expenses
- Documented need for a computer or musical instrument
- Need to purchase health insurance through UNCSEA

In cases where a component in the budget is not sufficient, the student must submit a written, signed request detailing their total expenses, along with third-party documentation of costs. In these cases, the entire budget will be reviewed.

For a needed computer, the maximum limit is not to exceed a \$3,000 addition, one time in a student's enrollment. The student must provide a quote for the computer before purchasing, unless the

computer is a documented educational requirement of their area of study (e.g., first-year Film students and D&P Sound students).

For musical instruments, the student must provide a written justification by their major teacher indicating the instrument is needed for success in the student's area of study, and the cost quoted by the student is justified for their instrument type and performance level. An instrument increase can typically occur one time per enrollment but can be spread over two years of budget. Higher-priced instruments (e.g., bassoons, double basses, cellos) cannot exceed a \$10,000 addition for two subsequent years. Lower-priced instruments (clarinets, violins) cannot exceed a \$5,000 addition for two subsequent years or \$10,000 for one year.

UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO BE CONSIDERED (DEPENDENCY):

The 2023-24 FAFSA has 13 questions that determine dependency, based on Congressional law. If a student cannot answer "yes" to any of these questions, the student is considered dependent for financial aid purposes, and parental information is required on the FAFSA.

Within professional judgement, potential adjustments to dependency can be considered based on a student's unique situation. UNCSA considers exceptions to the FAFSA basis for dependency to be in situations where a student's physical or mental wellbeing was or is threatened or jeopardized if the student remains with their parent(s), as well as cases where the parent physically or emotionally abandoned their child. This student must write a letter explaining their circumstances, which must be substantiated by documentation from a third-party, such as a psychiatrist/psychologist, high school guidance counselor, minister/pastor/priest, or medical professional.

A dependency override will remain in effect for the duration of the student's enrollment at UNCSA, unless the student informs about of a change, or Financial Aid has evidence of conflicting information.

Timeline

When all documentation has been submitted, an appeal will be reviewed as soon as possible (but never later than 60 days after the student enrolls.) Typically, global packaging and awarding will be prioritized, with appeals following. After review, students will then be notified about decisions, as well as any adjustments to their financial aid package.