Professional Judgment & Dependency Overrides Policy

The Higher Education Act of 1992 allows financial aid administrators to make professional judgment decisions for special or unusual family or student circumstances. These circumstances must be documented. Circumstances requiring professional judgment decisions must be analyzed on a case---by---case basis.

Pitt Community College FAO may treat a student with special circumstances differently than the strict application of the methodology would otherwise permit. Adjustments can either increase or decrease a student's EFC or cost of attendance. In the case of an adjustment to a student's EFC or cost of attendance, specified adjustments may be made to data elements. The reason for the adjustment must relate to that student's special circumstances and must be documented in the student's file.

Areas of Administration
Professional judgment decisions may be made to adjust eligibility for all institutional, Title IV, and campus---based aid. Documentation supporting special circumstances must be maintained in student's record.

Staff Authority
The Student Financial Services Office has the authority to adjust a student's eligibility using professional judgment. When the counselor is made aware of unusual circumstances, they may offer the professional judgment form for the student to complete to return with all documentation. Once all documentation is received, the counselor would submit the request to the FA Director or Asst. FA Director. Professional Judgement Decisions are final.

Circumstances for Which PJ Adjustments are NOT Allowed
The Department of Education expects that financial aid administrators will exert this authority on a case by case basis only after receiving sufficient documentation from a student to justify an exception to normal federal financial aid program guidelines. Professional judgment cannot be exercised for the following:
- to circumvent the law or regulations
- to waive general student federal aid eligibility requirements
- to change a student's status from independent to dependent
- to directly adjust the federally expected family contribution for a family who indicates that it is "too high".

Adjustments cannot be made for items such as:
- Vacation expenses
- Donations
- Standard living expenses such as utilities, credit card payment, children's allowance, etc
- Standard home maintenance
- Private school tuition

Conditions that do NOT qualify as "unusual circumstances:
- Parents refusal to contribute or complete the FAFSA
- Parents do not claim students as a dependent
- Student demonstrates self sufficiency

Circumstances Under which PJ ADJUSTMENTS ARE ALLOWED
A financial aid administrator can exercise discretion in certain areas when a student's family has special or unusual circumstances that are not adequately addressed by need analysis, regulations, or legislation. ED does not regulate PJ. The HEA explicitly authorizes the financial aid administrator to exercise PJ in the following areas:
Dependency status (dependent to independent only) in extreme circumstances as noted
Certain data elements used to calculate the expected family contribution (EFC)
One---Time Taxable Income
Unsubsidized Stafford Loan eligibility for dependent students whose parents have ceased supporting the student financially, will not support the student in the future, and refuse to complete the FAFSA.

Documentation
Aid Administrators are required to document professional judgment decisions. This documentation must be maintained in the student's file. Because professional judgment situations are unique, specific required documentation is not listed for each case. It is left to the discretion of the FA Director or Asst. FA Director to select what is appropriate documentation.

Documentation should substantiate the student's situation. Typically, documentation should be from a professional outside the family and not a family member.
If collecting documentation about a student's life situation, documentation from more than one person should be collected.