



University of Houston  
**Special Circumstance Appeal Instructions**  
Award Year 2008-2009



• **University of Houston • Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid •**  
**Mailing Address: 31 E Cullen Building • Houston, TX 77204-2010**  
**Physical Address: 120 Welcome Center**

**What is a Special Circumstance Appeal?**

The Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid follows federal, state and institutional regulations in administering financial aid. Your eligibility for financial aid was originally calculated based on the information you provided on the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA). However, we recognize that many families experience changes in income, or have family situations that are not reflected on the FAFSA. Through professional judgment, we have the ability to change a student's financial aid and dependency status based on documented special circumstances.

**How do I appeal?**

If you have unusual or extenuating circumstances that you feel are not addressed by these regulations, you may [contact](#) the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid to schedule an appointment with your financial aid advisor to discuss your situation. Your financial aid advisor will determine whether or not your circumstance warrants an appeal. If so, your advisor will provide a copy of the Special Circumstances Appeal Application and explain the requirements for your individual circumstance.

**What is the process?**

Once your appeal is received, it will be reviewed by the Financial Aid Appeals Committee. Failure to provide the required documentation will result in a request for additional information and possibly the denial of your appeal by the committee. Appeals are processed on a case-by-case basis. The approval of an appeal from a previous institution does not impact the decision of the committee. All information will become a part of your confidential financial aid record, and cannot be returned. You will receive notification from the Financial Aid Appeals Committee in two to four weeks regarding the status of your appeal. *Appeals submitted at the beginning of a semester may require additional time for review and a response.*

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Examples of possible circumstances are provided below; this list is not all inclusive since you may have a situation that is not categorized.

**1. Cost of Attendance Increase**

A cost of attendance for school and personal expenses has been established by our office based upon average yearly costs. We realize that students and their families experience unforeseen circumstances and/or expenses during an academic year. An adjustment may be made to the cost of attendance for expenses that exceed the average by more than a reasonable variance.

- Dependent Care Allowance
- Medical/Dental Expenses
- Computer Purchase

**2. Financial Reconsideration**

In some cases, a loss of income has occurred that can directly affect the outcome of your FAFSA results. An adjustment to reported income may be made for a family who has experienced or is experiencing a loss of income. We are unable to adjust your information if you have already included the loss as itemized deductions on your current tax return.

*NOTE: Loss of income due to a return to school is considered a choice, and does not support a financial reconsideration. The change of income in this circumstance will be reflected on the next year's financial aid application.*

- Extenuating Medical and/or Dental Expenses
- Loss of Employment/Income
- Divorce — Death of Spouse/Parent

### **3. Dependency Status Override**

The federally mandated formula used to determine your financial need is based on the premise that your family has the primary responsibility to pay for your education. When applying for financial aid, the federal government has specific standards to determine whether you are a dependent or independent student. To have independent status, you must meet at least one of the following conditions:

- You were born before January 1, 1985.
- You were a ward of the court until age 18, or both parents are deceased.
- You are a veteran of the United States Armed Forces.
- You are married.
- You have a legal dependent other than a spouse.
- You are enrolled in a graduate or professional program.

If you do not meet any of the conditions for independent status outlined above, you may [contact](#) our office to schedule an appointment with your financial aid advisor to discuss your extenuating circumstances. These are generally severe circumstances within your family that prevent you from obtaining your parent's financial information. **The following are not considered extenuating circumstances for the purpose of achieving independent status for financial aid:**

- You do not live in your parent's home.
- You are self-supporting.
- You are not claimed as a federal income tax exemption on your parents' income tax.
- Your parents cannot afford or refuse to help with college or living expenses.
- Your parents are unwilling to provide their financial information to complete the FAFSA.
- You and your parents had disagreements resulting in a breakdown in your relationship.

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#### **Deadlines for Special Circumstances Appeals to be submitted:**

*(Applicable to Special Conditions 1 and 2 only.)*

**Fall 2008 • October 3, 2008**

**Spring 2009 • March 27, 2009**

**Summer 2008 • June 13, 2008**

State law requires that you be informed of the following: (1) with few exceptions, you are entitled on request to be informed about the information the University collects about you by use of this form; (2) under sections 552.021 and 552.023 of the Government Code, you are entitled to receive and review the information; and (3) under section 559.004 of the Government Code, you are entitled to have the University correct information about you that is incorrect.