



Verifying Dependency Status SWASFAA 2015

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Automatic Qualifying Questions

- Born before January 1, 1992
- Married
- Working on a graduate degree
- Serving on active duty in the Armed Forces
- Veteran of the Armed Forces
- Children for whom the student provides at least ½ of support
- Dependent other than child for whom the student provides at least ½ of support

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Automatic Qualifying Questions

- Parents deceased after the student turned 13
- Student in foster care since turning 13
- Ward of the Court
- Emancipated minor
- Student has legal guardian
- Homeless or at risk of being homeless

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Documentation

- Do you ask for additional verification for all of the automatic qualifiers?
- If not all, which ones?
- What documentation do you request?
- Do you request documentation every year?

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Veteran's Status

- What documentation do you request if any?
- Do you collect and review the DD214 for a specific discharge status?

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Marital Status

- Do you verify marital status if that is the only criteria that makes the student independent?
- What documentation?

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Supporting a Child/Dependent

- How do you verify that the student provides at least ½ of the support for a child or dependent?
- Do you have a minimum income threshold that causes a review?
- Do you verify where the student lives?

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Foster Care/Ward of the Court/Legal Guardianship

- What documents do you require the student to provide?
- Legal guardianship versus legal custody?
- No legal paperwork but clearly the parent is no longer in the picture – student raised by grandparent/aunt/uncle, etc. How to you verify?

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Unaccompanied Youth/Homeless

- How do you verify?
- Who is considered eligible to provide acceptable documentation?
- <http://www.ifap.ed.gov/dpcletters/attachments/GEN1516Attach.pdf> DCL GEN-15-16

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Emancipated Minor

- Does your state have an official definition of emancipated minor?
- What documentation do you request?

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Other Options

- If you cannot support the answers to any of the qualifying questions you may complete a dependency override if appropriate.

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Authority to Make Professional Judgment Decisions

- Section 479A of the Higher Education Act
- No specific regulations - US DOE is prohibited from making regulations
- Some general guidance and clarification provided in the Student Aid Handbook and in various Dear Colleague Letters such as GEN-11-15

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Dependency Override

- FAO has the authority to override the automatic independent criteria in specific documented situations
- Dependency overrides may be considered for students who are removed from parents' home, experienced abuse, are unable to locate a parent after reasonable attempts

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Dependency Overrides

- FAO must document the situation including support from a third party
- Third parties could include:
 - Counselors or teachers
 - Clergy
 - Government agencies
 - Court documents
 - Medical personnel
- How much documentation is appropriate?

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Dependency Overrides

- You cannot use professional judgment to make an independent student dependent
- You must review the student's request annually and reaffirm that the student's situation has not changed

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Dependency Overrides

- Schools may accept the dependency override that was performed and approved by another school – no additional documentation required (CCRAA)
- The school must collect its own documentation to renew the dependency override for future years

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Dependency Overrides

- Specifically prohibited reasons to grant an override:
 - Parents refuse to contribute
 - Parents are unwilling to provide information
 - Parents do not claim the student as a dependent on the federal income tax return
 - Student has resources to be self-sufficient

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Additional Steps

- Once a dependency override decision has been made, the decision, who made it, and the date should be retained with the other documentation the student provided.
- The student should be notified once the decision has been reached – even if the answer is no.

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THANK YOU!

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