

Unusual Circumstances Policy

Students who do not meet the automatic independent student qualifiers for federal financial assistance, but who are truly self-supporting and independent, will be given the opportunity to prove their status and have their applications reconsidered for unusual circumstances. Students will be considered on a case by case upon notification by the FAFSA and/or the student's request. In subsequent years, students will continue to be self-supporting at MassArt unless the student notifies the Office of Student Financial Assistance of changes in their living situation.

Guiding Principles

- The reasons that a student may request to be self-supporting under unusual circumstances include- an abusive family environment; a victim of domestic violence, no longer residing with parents; abandonment by parents; a student's parent is in jail or cannot be located; or other unusual circumstances.
- A change in status must not be based solely on a student not residing with his/her parent(s). It also cannot be based on a parent's unwillingness to contribute to the cost of the student's education. Financial aid eligibility is based on the family's ability to contribute towards the cost of education, not their willingness to pay.
- Letters from family members, friends or neighbors are not considered acceptable third party documentation.

Process

Any student who requests that he/she be considered to be an independent student must speak to or meet with the Director of Student Financial Assistance (DSFA) or designee for counseling. Options for providing documentation will be discussed in this session. It is the student's responsibility to provide any documentation that the DSFA or designee requires as well as to contact third parties and have documentation sent to the Office of Student Financial Assistance.

Acceptable documentation may include, but is not limited to:

- Notes from interview with the financial assistance administrator
- Signed, dated statement explaining why a student wants to be considered independent. The statement would describe the circumstances that led to the student living independently from the parental household. Provide information about where the student has lived and worked to support her/himself since leaving the parental household.
- If student is tax filer, signed, dated copies of the student's federal income tax returns for the most recent 2 years
- If student is not a tax filer, signed, dated copies of non-tax filing statements for the most recent 2 years

- If parent(s) is/are tax filers, signed, dated copies of the parental federal income tax returns for the most recent 2 years
- If student is a car owner, signed, dated copy of car title and car insurance policy
- Signed, dated proof of health insurance
- Signed, dated copy of house/apartment lease and/or rent receipts for the student's living arrangement
- Signed, dated statement(s) from a disinterested third party or parties, such as the police, high school guidance counselor or school administrator, social worker, minister or other respected community leader who has firsthand, long-term knowledge of the student's circumstances.

Individual determinations of dependency status for federal student aid programs must be made in a manner consistent with institutional policies regarding the awarding of all need-based financial aid, including federal and State aid. Students deemed independent for federal student aid generally must also be independent for State aid.

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