

FAFSA | Dependency Status Update Due to Unusual Circumstances

There are a number of significant updates that are part of the major redesign of the 2024–25 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). One significant change was made to improve the financial aid process for students who need to petition for independent status.

What are “unusual circumstances”?

When completing the FAFSA, student contributors will be asked a series of questions that will determine if they are dependent or independent. If the student is considered a dependent, their parent(s)’s information will be required on the FAFSA. **Unusual circumstances** are situations where the parents are unable to be contacted or contact poses a risk to the dependent student. Some examples of these situations include, but are not limited to:

- Student has been legally granted refugee or asylum status and is separated from their parents, or their parents are displaced in a foreign country;
- Student is in an abusive or threatening environment that jeopardizes the student’s health or safety; or
- Student or parent(s) are incarcerated and/or contact with parents would pose a risk to the student.

Unusual circumstances do not include:

- Parent(s) refuses to contribute to the student’s education.
- Parent(s) will not provide information for the FAFSA or verification.
- Parent(s) does not claim the student as a dependent for income tax purposes.
- Student demonstrates total self-sufficiency.

What can be done if I experience unusual circumstances?

The new FAFSA will allow applicants to indicate that they have an unusual circumstance, which will grant the student provisional independent status and allow them to complete the form without providing parental information. They will receive an estimate of their federal student aid eligibility, but will need to submit an appeal and receive final determination by the institution they attend. The Financial Aid and Scholarships Office must consider all requests to appeal.

If a student’s institution approves their unusual circumstances, their independent status will carry over when they renew their FAFSA form in future years, and they will be considered independent as long as they remain at the same institution and their circumstances remain unchanged.

Why should I submit an appeal?

Submitting an appeal will allow the UC Berkeley Financial Aid and Scholarships Office an opportunity to review your situation to determine if your aid eligibility needs to be recalculated. You will need to provide sufficient documentation for the campus to review. If your appeal is approved, you may qualify for additional need-based financial aid.

Visit the [Financial Aid and Scholarship Office’s website](#) for more information about the [Unusual Circumstances Appeal](#) process.

Due to the volume of appeals and the complexity of the process, it can take several weeks before an appeal decision can be made. Once a decision has been reached, the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office will send you an email with more information. If you need immediate assistance, please contact the [UC Berkeley Basic Needs Center](#).