

Head of Household

If the IRS income tax return marital status of the student and/or parents is inconsistent with the marital status reported on the FAFSA, that will represent conflicting information that must be resolved before aid can be disbursed.

If the financial aid administrator determines that the marital status reported on the FAFSA is incorrect, the FAFSA will need to be corrected. If the financial aid administrator determines that the marital status reported to the IRS on the US Income Tax Return is incorrect, the student or parent will be required to file an amended income tax return with the IRS. (This may also entail making changes to the FAFSA, since the amended income tax returns may change the AGI and tax liability.) If the student or parent refuses to do this, federal rules prohibit the school from disbursing aid until conflicting information is resolved. Guidance from the US Department of Education has indicated that the school is expected to require the filing of an amended income tax return when there is an apparent error on the income tax return that affects student aid eligibility.

Head of household status is singled out for special mention because many tax preparers incorrectly encourage taxpayers to file with this status. Most married couples who file as head of household do so incorrectly. IRS failure to enforce the correct filing status is irrelevant.

To file as head of household, one must satisfy all of the following requirements:

- Be unmarried or considered unmarried on the last day of the year.
- Have paid more than half the cost of upkeep for a home for the year.
- Have a qualifying person live with you in the home for more than half the year.

A couple is considered unmarried for IRS purposes if they did not live in the same home for the last six months of the year. Temporary absences do not count as living apart, however. If your spouse is a nonresident alien, you may be considered unmarried if you do not elect to treat your spouse as a resident alien. A nonresident alien spouse, however, does not count as a qualifying person. [IRS Publication 17](#) lists other requirements for an individual to be considered unmarried, such as their home being the main home of a child (natural, adopted or stepchild) for more than half the year or a foster child for the entire year. Either member of the couple must also be able to claim an exemption for the child.

Disclaimer: *The information above was retrieved from the Federal Financial Aid website: <http://www.finaid.org/fafsa/headofhousehold.phtml> (Please check for updates.) Piedmont University does not provide tax advice. This material has been prepared for informational purposes only, and is not intended to be considered as tax advice. It is recommended for current IRS tax regulations, to contact a tax professional. Piedmont University employees will abide by all federal and state laws.*