

Professional Judgment

Have a special circumstance?

Eligibility for financial aid is determined by the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#), which currently uses financial information from two years prior. Piedmont University Financial Aid Office recognizes that households can experience changes in income or other finances that are not reflected in their information from two years prior. This can affect the ability to pay for education.

When these situations occur, it is possible to re-evaluate a student's aid eligibility based on their current circumstances through the Professional Judgment (PJ) process on a case-by-case basis. All Professional Judgment applications are **required** to have a detailed letter of explanation and supporting documentation. A Professional Judgment cannot be processed for changes until verification is complete. Please check your aid status on your Piedmont Student Self Service Portal.

There must be a **significant change** to the household finances to be considered for a Professional Judgment.

Types of Professional Judgment

1. Change to Expected Family Contribution (EFC)
2. Change to Cost of Attendance (COA)

Change to Expected Family Contribution (EFC)

- Loss or change of employment

Note: A change in student's aid eligibility will likely **not** occur if:

- The person who lost employment has currently been rehired and is earning a similar or higher salary than two years prior
- The loss or change to income was not significant
- Child Support reduction or change
- Divorce/Separation of parents/spouse
- Change of marital status for dependent students
- Death of parent(s) or spouse

- Excessive out of pocket medical and/or dental expenses that exceed 11% of household's Adjusted Gross Income
- One-time taxable income (IRA disbursement, pension distribution, etc.)

A change to the EFC could, but is not guaranteed to, result in a change of eligibility for need based awards.

Non-applicable Circumstances

- Standard living expenses (utilities, car payments, etc.)
- Mortgage payments
- Credit card/other personal debts
- Filing for bankruptcy
- Vacation expenses
- All other discretionary expenses

Change to Cost of Attendance (COA)

Out of pocket costs for the following:

- Costs associated with a student's disability
- Childcare expenses for a dependent child of the student
- One-time purchase of a computer for education expenses
- One-time costs of professional licensure required for student's major

A change to the COA does not necessarily result in a change in financial aid eligibility. An increased COA can provide additional eligibility in a student's educational budget for private aid. In some instances, a student may have increased eligibility for need-based and/or non-need based awards.

The chart below lists the type of supporting documentation **required** for various categories of Professional Judgment. This list is not all inclusive. Additional situations may warrant an appeal or additional documents may be needed. Failure to submit all applicable required documentation **will** result in a delay and possible denial of your Professional Judgment application.

Reason for Professional Judgment Petition	Documents Required
Loss or Change of Employment and/or Income	• Employer separation notice indicating the last date of employment • Copy of the last paycheck • Documentation of the gross income of the person whose employment status changed • Documentation of any type of income being received including workman's compensation, payments from 401(k) or 403(b) plans, the financial contribution made by individuals outside of the household
Change in student marital status	• Student's marriage certificate • Student's and spouse's most recent tax returns • Divorce or separation document
Change in parent marital status	• Parent's marriage certificate • Parent's most recent tax returns • Divorce or separation document
Death of a Parent or Spouse	• Death certificate of the deceased individual • Copy of final paycheck • Documentation of any death benefits received
Disability	• Documentation of disability diagnosis • Documentation of expenses related to the student's disability, i.e. Personal assistance, transportation, equipment, or supplies (These expenses cannot be paid or provided by other agencies to be considered for a Professional Judgment.)
Reduction in Child Support	• Documentation of the total amount of child support expected for each child
Unusual Medical/Dental Expenses	• Documentation of paid out- of- pocket medical expenses • Copy of Schedule A (tax form)
Dependent Care Expenses	• Proof of dependent care expenses paid for the current academic year on letterhead

Computer Purchase	• Proof of cost of computer required for educational purposes or proof of purchase (This is a one-time adjustment.)
Professional Licensure	• Proof of costs associated with professional licensure or proof of payment (This is a one-time adjustment. Preparatory coursework cannot be included.)

Note: An approved Professional Judgment Appeal may not result in a change to the student's financial aid award package.

To Apply for Professional Judgment

The Professional Judgment applications are available by request only. Students may request an application by contacting the Financial Aid Office at finaid@piedmont.edu or 706-776-0114. Be sure to include "Professional Judgment" in the subject line and provide a detailed explanation of your special circumstance. By getting a better understanding of your circumstances, we can assist you with the available options. If a Professional Judgment is warranted, we will provide you with the appropriate form and request documentation.

Once the Professional Judgment appeal form is received along with all required documents, a decision will be made. The student will be notified of the determination along with any changes that are reflected on their financial aid for the year. In some cases, an adjustment to the FAFSA does not increase the student's eligibility for grants or the total amount of the aid offered.