

Dependency Override: Who qualifies?

Many students assume that because they are not living with their parents, are responsible for their own expenses, and are not claimed on their parents' income tax returns then they should qualify for financial aid programs as an independent student. However, Congress' definition of independence is not that simple. The Federal Government has established the guidelines below that determine which students are considered independent for financial aid purposes and which are not. This document explains these guidelines and will help you determine if you will be considered independent when applying for federal financial aid.

Independent Student Definition:

To be considered an independent student in the academic year of 2008-2009, you must meet at least **ONE** of the following **EIGHT** conditions:

1. You were born before January 1985, or
2. You will or are working on a Master's or
3. You are married, or
4. You have children who receive more than half of their support from you, or
5. You have legal dependents (other than your child(ren) or spouse who live with you and for whom you provide more than half of their support, or
6. Both of your parents are deceased or you are or were until age 18 a ward/dependent of the court, or
7. You are currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training, or
8. You are a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces (members of the National Guard or Reserves are not considered a veteran unless they served active duty for purposes other than training).

Proof of Eligibility:

Even if you meet one of these eight conditions, you may be asked to provide supporting documentation such as your birth certificate, or a copy of your armed forces discharge (DD214).

Inability to Document Independent Status:

If you apply for financial aid as an independent student but do not meet all of the federal guidelines, you will be considered a dependent applicant and be required to correct the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You will be required to provide your parents' information in order to determine your eligibility for financial aid as a dependent student. Correcting your dependency status may result in a change in your award notice.

Appeal of Dependency Status:

Lake Region State College Financial Aid Office is required to follow federal government guidelines in determining a student's dependency status. The Financial Aid Office acknowledges, however, that parental estrangement is a reality for some students. If you have experienced abandonment, abuse, or neglect, you may petition for independent status. You will be asked to explain your extenuating circumstances in writing and provide evidence for your claim. Our office will review your dependency status and determine whether you can be considered independent based on a professional judgment exception.

The following situations are not valid in themselves to claim independency:

- ❖ You do not reside with your parents.
- ❖ Your parents refuse to pay your college education.
- ❖ Your parents are not financially able to pay for your education.
- ❖ You were married after you applied for financial aid.
- ❖ You do not want your parents' assistance and have decided to pay for your own college education

Please note: Appealing for independent status is a procedure that takes time and may delay the timely packaging of your financial aid; it is a process that should be considered only in cases of extenuating circumstances.

If you would like your dependency status to be reviewed, you must submit a Letter of Dependency Appeal to LRSC financial aid office, which explains the reason(s) why you should be considered independent. Include in the letter the location of both parents and the last time you had contacted with each parent. You must include a third-party letter (e.g., a statement with letterhead from a social worker, counselor, principal, doctor, lawyer, or clergy) to support the reason(s) listed in your letter and a copy of your 2007 tax return. All information regarding your letter, Third-party letter and supporting documentations such as your income information etc. will remain confidential. Once the necessary information has been received, your appeal will be reviewed and you will be notified.

If you have any questions regarding your status, please schedule an appointment with a financial aid advisor or contact the Office of Financial Aid at:

katie.nettell@LRSC.nodak.edu

Phone: (701)662-1516 or 1-800-443-1313, ext. 516

Fax: (701)662-1581