

## Definition of an Independent Student

A student is automatically considered to be an independent student for financial aid purposes (student and spouse's, if applicable, information used) if one or more of the following criteria are met. Students who answer 'no' to **all** of the criteria are considered dependent meaning that student and parent information is used to calculate the Effective Family Contribution (EFC):

- born before January 1, 1992 (for the 2015-16 academic year);
- married as of the date of completing the FAFSA (answer yes if separated but not divorced). "Married" is not defined as living together unless the state recognizes the student's relationship as a same-sex or common-law marriage. (*Note: Illinois does not recognize common-law marriages*);
- at the beginning of the 2015-16 academic year, working on a master's or doctorate program (such as an MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, graduate certificate, etc.);
- currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces or are a National Guard or Reserves enlistee on active duty for other than training purposes; or
- a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Answer "No" (you are not a veteran) if you (1) have never engaged in active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, (2) are currently an ROTC student or a cadet or midshipman at a service academy, or (3) are a National Guard or Reserves enlistee activated only for state or training purposes, or (4) were engaged in active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces but released under dishonorable conditions. Also answer "No" if you are currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and will continue to serve through June 30, 2016.

Answer "Yes" (you are a veteran) if you (1) have engaged in active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard) or are a National Guard or Reserve enlistee who was called to active duty for purposes other than training, or were a cadet or midshipman at one of the service academies, **and** (2) were released under a condition other than dishonorable. Also answer "Yes" if you are not a veteran now but will be one by June 30, 2016.

- has children who receive more than half of their support from the student and will continue to get that support during the 2015-16 academic year;
- has dependents (other than children or a spouse) who will live with the student and who receive more than half of their support from the student and will continue to get that support during the 2015-16 academic year;

- at any time since the student turned age 13, both of the student's parents were deceased, the student was in foster care, or the student was a dependent/ward of the court;
- was or is an emancipated minor as determined by a court in his or her state of legal residence;
- was or is in legal guardianship as determined by a court in his or her state of legal residence;
- was determined to be an unaccompanied youth who was homeless by a high school or school district homeless liaison on or after July 1, 2014;
- was determined to be an unaccompanied youth who was homeless by an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on or after July 1, 2014;
- was determined to be an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or was self-supporting and at risk of being homeless by a director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program on or after July 1, 2014.

The college financial aid administrator may request documentation regarding answers to Dependency questions.

**Note:** *Financial aid administrators have the authority to make exceptions for students who have individual circumstances that make them independent, even though they do not meet the definition of the law. This process, called **professional judgment**, can be used in individual cases to change a dependency status for a student. Professional judgment is based on a case-by-case basis. Federal regulations provide guidelines but each institution determines their own professional judgment policy. Questions concerning dependency status should be directed to the financial aid office at the college/university the student plans to attend.*