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**SimpleTuition Newsletter:
Financial Aid Professional Edition
May 9, 2011**

Use of Professional Judgment

Today an increasing number of students and families need special circumstance considerations. Parents have lost jobs, faced salary cuts, had changes in marital status, and many more issues. How do you, as an advisor, deal with the rising demands for special attention from students and their families?

The Department of Education gives financial aid officers flexibility when dealing with special circumstances through professional judgment (PJ), as long as each case is considered an exception and not the norm. Documentation is always key, but it's equally important to understand your office's process for reviewing such cases. Every school should ensure that their professional judgment policies identify:

- who has the authority to use PJ
- what are the appropriate circumstances
- when requests can be submitted
- what are the acceptable forms of documentation

It is essential to have open dialogues with families either through written correspondence, phone calls or in-person visits when granting revised financial aid packages. Even if you review families' special circumstances, it may not necessarily affect the students' eligibility for certain types of financial aid. You have a tough job, and it seems to be getting harder each year. With this in mind, having an opportunity to assist individual students and parents through difficult times is valuable for us all.

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