

Summary of Enhancements to the 2014-2015 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) General Change “who is a parent”

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has long been constructed to collect information about both of a student’s parents *only* if the parents are married and has used the gender-specific terms “mother/stepmother,” and “father/stepfather.” As a result, the FAFSA has excluded income and other information from one of the student’s legal parents if the parents are unmarried but are living together and is therefore inconsistent with the statutory expected family contribution (EFC) calculation provisions that do not reference the parents’ marital status or gender.

To address this inconsistency, the Department is making a change to the collection of parental information on the FAFSA. Beginning with the 2014-2015 FAFSA, the response “Unmarried and both parents living together” will be added to the existing responses for the parents’ marital status question. When this new response is chosen, the FAFSA will collect information from both of the dependent student’s legal (biological or adoptive) parents if they live together to calculate the student’s EFC regardless of the marital status or gender of the parents. This change makes the application and the EFC calculation consistent with the statute (HEA section 475) which uses the terms “parent” and “parents’,” rather than “mother,” “father,” or “spouse.” In some instances, the FAFSA will now use the gender neutral term “Parent” in lieu of the gender specific terms. However, it will also continue to use terms such as “father,” “mother,” “stepfather” and “stepmother” where appropriate.

Dependent students whose legal parents are unmarried and not living together would continue to provide the parental information on the parent that the student resided with the greater portion of the 12 months preceding the date of completing and submitting the FAFSA.

The change will also provide a more equitable assessment of the financial resources available to the student, regardless of the student’s parents’ marital status or the gender of the student’s parents, and therefore makes the application and process more inclusive to recognize the diversity of American families.

2015-2016 Draft FAFSA directions:

Notes for Step Four, questions 59–94 (pages 6 and 7)

Review all instructions below to determine who is considered a parent on this form:

If your parent was never married and does not live with your other legal parent, or if your parent is widowed or not remarried, answer the questions about that parent.

If your legal parents (biological and/or adoptive) are not married to each other and **live together**, select “Unmarried and both parents living together” and provide information about both of them regardless of their gender. Do not include any person who is not married to your parent and who is not a legal or biological parent. Contact 1-800-433-3243 for assistance in completing questions 80-94.

If your parents are married, select “Married or remarried.” Consistent with the Supreme Court decision holding Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional, same-sex couples must report their marital status as married if they were legally married in a state or other jurisdiction (foreign country) that permits same-sex marriage, without regard to where the couple resides. If your legal parents are divorced but living together, select “Unmarried and both parents living together.” If your legal parents are separated but living together, select “Married or remarried,” not “Divorced or separated.”

If your parents are divorced or separated, answer the questions about the parent you lived with more during the past 12 months. (If you did not live with one parent more than the other, give answers about the parent who provided more financial support during the past 12 months or during the most recent year that you actually received support from a parent.) If this parent is remarried as of today, answer the questions about that parent and your stepparent.

If your widowed parent is remarried as of today, answer the questions about that parent and your stepparent.