

## Satisfactory Academic Progress and Financial Aid – Questions and Answers

See also [www.finaid.msu.edu/sap.asp](http://www.finaid.msu.edu/sap.asp)

### General Questions

Q. What are the circumstances that may be considered for an extension on appeal?

A. Students will be considered for an extension due to severe illness of the student or a family member or death of a family member during the semester in which he/she failed to meet the monitoring criteria. Students must document this with third-party statements, medical records, etc., which should be supplied to the academic official and kept on file in the student's academic folder. The academic advisor must then indicate on the appeal form that he or she has received documentation of the circumstances.

Q. What happens to my financial aid for the semester after I am placed on Warning or Probation?

A. Students in a Warning or Probation status will have a future-dated Financial Aid Denial entered on their record for the semester after the Warning or Probation. Because of the MSU billing and payment system, your financial aid will be applied to the student account as a pending aid credit. This credit acts as any other form of payment on your account and will allow you to become registered but will not produce a refund. If the student successfully appeals for an additional semester of financial aid, the pending aid will become actual payments. If the student does not successfully appeal, then the pending aid will be cancelled and the student will become responsible for paying all university charges. It is important to note that there are timing issues that may allow a student to receive a payment of financial aid instead of pending aid. If this occurs, the aid payment may be allowed until an appeal decision has been rendered. If, in that case, the appeal is denied, the financial aid will be cancelled and the student will be billed for that cancelled aid.

Q. What aid programs are affected if I am denied aid?

A. Financial Aid Denial will keep a student from receiving any federal aid programs, such as Pell Grant, SEOG, TEACH, Federal Work Study, Direct Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, Parent PLUS Loans, and Graduate PLUS Loans. In addition, students are ineligible for all MSU need-based grant funds, as well as any MSU or private funds that require Satisfactory Academic Progress as a condition of the award. Other student awards will be reviewed if a student is in Financial Aid Denial to determine whether the student may continue to receive the award.

### Notifications

Q. Who is notified when a student fails financial aid satisfactory academic progress monitoring?

A. A student who fails the monitoring will always be notified by a secure email from the Office of Financial Aid. The email will instruct the student to use their MSU Network ID and Password to

access a secure MSU email website to read the details of the message. The dean and academic advising director in the student's college, in addition to the Dean of Undergraduate Education (for undergraduates) and the Dean of The Graduate School (for graduate and graduate-professional students), will be able to access a secure website where they can view detailed information for their students.

All residential college (James Madison College, Lyman Briggs College, Residential College in the Arts and Humanities) students will be reported to their college.

Agricultural Technology students will be reported to the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

All other freshmen and sophomores will be reported to the University Undergraduate Division.

All other upper division students, including all graduate students, will be reported to their college.

### ***Appeal Process***

Q. What happens after an appeal is submitted?

A. Students are required to submit an online appeal, then to meet with their academic advisor. If the academic official supports the appeal, he/she will complete the advisor portion. The appeal then must be approved by the Associate Dean before being forwarded to the Office of Financial Aid.

The appeal is then reviewed by OFA staff to determine if it can be approved on its merits or if it must be forwarded for further review. This review may be conducted by the SAP Coordinator if it is the student's first appeal. If the student is appealing for the second time (or more), or if the situation is marginal, the SAP Coordinator will submit the appeal to the OFA SAP committee. Appeals may be approved at this stage, but if denied within OFA, they will be forwarded to the University Financial Aid Appeal Committee for a final decision.

Q. What is the University Financial Aid Appeal Committee?

A. The UFAAC is established to review the more complex financial aid eligibility appeals in a collaborative setting that includes both academic and administrative perspectives. Five people form the committee base which includes faculty and representatives from support units other than the Office of Financial Aid. The decisions of this committee are final.

Q. How long does it take to process an appeal once it is submitted to OFA?

A. It is reasonable to expect that approval will occur within one week of submission for an appeal that OFA can approve on its own. An appeal that must be reviewed by the UFAAC may take up to 3

weeks for review. Students are advised to make plans accordingly.

Q. How can employees in a support unit (like the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities, Counseling Center, Learning Resource Center, etc.) who have worked with a student who is filing a financial aid appeal participate in the process?

A. Any person who has direct knowledge of circumstances that negatively affected a student's academic performance can submit a letter of support for purposes of the financial aid appeal. It is recommended that the student obtain this letter and share it with the academic official who is providing a statement or academic plan rather than submitting it to the Office of Financial Aid as part of their appeal.

Q. Are there any other situations in which a financial aid appeal is required?

A. There are other circumstances under which a student might be permitted to file an appeal of the denial of financial aid. Many of these circumstances result from a deterioration of financial circumstances after a financial aid application (FAFSA) has been submitted. OFA can provide information to students and parents about how to prepare such an appeal.

Q. Are there any financial aid denial situations which cannot be appealed?

A. The federal government prohibits paying financial aid to students who have completed their degree requirements but have not asked to have the degree conferred. This is true even if the student does not have the minimum GPA required for degree conferral. Such a student can continue taking classes but without federal financial aid. OFA will work with the student to determine if there are other sources of aid that might replace all or some portion of the lost federal aid, but finding such funds is not assured. Also, students who are ineligible for financial aid due to general federal regulations cannot appeal this denial. This includes students who are not enrolled in a degree granting program, not a US Citizen or eligible noncitizen, and students in default on federal debts. These situations are fully detailed on the federal student aid website [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov).

Q. Can a student make a personal appeal to the UFAAC?

A. There are no provisions for the student to appear in person to the Committee. All appeals are made through documents and information submitted for review. Students are expected to meet with an academic official in the preparation of the appeal materials, however.

Q. Will second or third appeals be regarded differently than first appeals?

A. Yes. A subsequent appeal after one has been granted will be held to stricter scrutiny. The first appeal outlines a plan by which the student may regain SAP during the term(s) for which the aid is requested. If the student fails to meet the terms of that plan, careful consideration will be given to subsequent appeals to determine if circumstances have indeed changed to allow the student to be

successful now.

### ***Appeal Form Questions***

Q. What is an academic plan?

A. An academic plan is an academic official's recommended courses for a student to take for the future semester(s). Usually, a grade point average is specified for each semester in order to demonstrate the student's progress toward graduation. Specific courses might be mandated or a set of courses might be suggested from which a student must choose a specific number. Similarly, minimum grades for specific courses might be mandated. An academic plan also can include recommendations for repeating courses.

Q. Who can create and authorize an academic plan?

A. An academic plan is a contract between the student and a curriculum agent of the university. Colleges differ in who is allowed to authorize an academic plan. It may be your academic advisor or a college administrator. Your academic advisor will know who can create and authorize a plan for you.

Q. When am I required to file an academic plan?

A. An academic plan can be submitted for any appeal of denial of financial aid and is an obviously helpful planning tool for a student. A plan must be submitted when you are appealing the 180 credit limit on receiving aid for a first undergraduate degree. An academic plan also is required when your GPA falls below the required university minimum, unless you meet one of the conditions cited previously here. (It was your first aid Denial and you took too few credits to raise your GPA. You took only courses graded on a Pass/No Pass basis.) Please note that an academic official has the authority to require an academic plan for any reason and OFA must support that decision.

Q. What is the difference between an academic plan and a statement of support from an academic official?

A. A statement of support from an academic official simply adds additional credibility to a student's explanation of circumstances and does not include any required courses or minimum grades. An academic plan specifically lays out a set of courses and grades that will move a student to good standing and/or graduation. A statement of support from an academic official is required but does not take the place of an academic plan for those circumstances in which one is mandated.

Q. Who has access to the documentation submitted for a financial aid appeal?

A. All documentation submitted to the Office of Financial Aid will become part of the student's electronic financial aid file. It will be accessible to all financial aid staff and all academic officials who are in positions that require them to prepare materials for the financial aid appeal process and make related academic decisions. The material also must be provided to auditor or program reviewer if requested.

Q. How does a student protect sensitive health issue documentation that is needed for a financial aid appeal but should not be generally available to others?

A. Any medical and mental health documents that contain information the student wishes to be considered in a financial aid appeal but which the student does not wish to submit directly to the Office of Financial Aid should be submitted to the student's academic official. That person will provide a summary statement that will substitute for the detailed information for the financial aid appeal and will keep the original documents or sufficient information from those documents to support the summary statement.

### ***Withdrawals / Retroactive Schedule Changes***

Q. What if a student has a course or courses dropped retroactive to a prior term?

A. Such situations will be handled on a case-by-case basis. The Office of Financial Aid will be as generous as regulations permit in retaining aid until the student is able to file an appeal if that is necessary.

Q. What happens if a student withdraws during a semester during which they are on Financial Aid Warning or Probation?

A. A student on Financial Aid Warning or Probation who withdraws with grades reported will be monitored for financial aid eligibility for that semester according to the grades received. A student on Financial Aid Warning who withdraws with no grades reported will be placed on Financial Aid Denial in their next enrolled semester. A student who is on Financial Aid Probation and withdraws with no grades reported will be Denied further financial aid and will be required to submit a new or revised appeal if they wish to be considered for aid in the next enrolled semester.

### ***GPA Questions***

Q. If a student is in warning for GPA problems and has one term left before completing academic requirements for their degree, what happens if the student is only taking pass/fail or no-grade courses in that term? It clearly isn't possible to improve the GPA in that semester.

A. The student would be denied financial aid at the end of that semester and would have to appeal. The academic advisor could support an extension of financial aid for another semester or more under these circumstances, provided that the student still has required coursework that is graded and that makes it possible for the student to reach the required GPA in a reasonable amount of time.

Q. How are academic programs that are graded as pass/no pass monitored, such as allopathic and osteopathic medicine?

A. Students in the College of Osteopathic Medicine and College of Human Medicine must pass at least 80% of their courses, or meet the established standard of the college. The OFA works closely with the medical schools to determine which students must be placed on Financial Aid Warning and Denial.

Q. How is GPA monitored for a dual degree program, one of which carries numeric grading and one of which does not?

A. GPA monitoring will follow the grading rules of the primary degree or academic level.

Q. What if a student needs to repeat a particular course to improve GPA but the course is offered only once a year or once every two years?

A. The student will still need to appeal. We would expect this circumstance would be cited by the academic official as a reason that the student needs more time to rehabilitate the GPA.

Q. How is summer semester treated for a student who takes only 1 or 2 courses?

A. Generally, summer is treated as any other term in which a student enrolls. A student enrolled less than full time who is on Financial Aid Warning would still need to file an appeal in the subsequent semester if they are not back in good academic standing. However, if a student takes fewer credits in a semester than is mathematically required to improve the GPA to good standing, they will likely be granted an additional semester of Probation. We would expect this circumstance to be cited by the academic official as a reason that the student needs more time to rehabilitate the GPA.

Q. How do carrier courses for Study Abroad affect GPA monitoring?

A. Carrier courses are used as placeholders in the MSU system to substitute for courses a student is taking at another institution while studying abroad. Since carrier courses do not convert to MSU courses or affect the GPA, the student cannot improve the GPA during that semester and may need to appeal for additional time to improve the GPA. The academic official can support the appeal by noting that the student completed the coursework satisfactorily if that is the case.

Q. How is a student who receives a grade marker (an Incomplete, for example) treated for GPA monitoring?

A. GPA is tested as of the day after grades are posted. The GPA at the test date will reflect only the coursework graded on that date and will be used to determine the student financial aid status. The student may appeal the Denial of aid if a course graded after the test date brings the GPA to at least the minimum. An appeal under such circumstances would be approved.

Q. What is the impact if a student on Financial Aid Warning repeats a course to more quickly improve their GPA?

A. As long as the student's academic advisor approves repeating a course, it will be treated as any other enrolled course for financial aid purposes. Regulations limit the number of times a student may receive aid to repeat a course that has been previously passed.

Q. How are remedial courses evaluated for GPA monitoring?

A. Remedial coursework is not treated differently than any other course for the purposes of GPA calculation and SAP monitoring.

### ***Time to Degree Questions***

Q. How is program length monitored for dual degree programs?

A. Because dual degree programs are highly variable in length, the maximum number of eligible credits for financial aid is 180, but academic officials will note the required additional time for a specific student and this extension generally will be approved.

### ***Completion Rate Question***

Q. At what point in the semester does a dropped course count for purposes of measuring completion rate?

A. Students may drop or add courses during the "drop and add" period, also known as the refund period, with no consequences. But if a class is dropped after the census date ("quarter of term") of that particular class, the drop is counted for completion rate purposes. This type of drop is also known as a "charged drop" or forfeiture, because the tuition cost is not refunded to the student.

Depending upon the start and end dates and the length of the class, it may have a non-standard census date. Students and academic advisors should use care when considering dropping a non-standard course.

If a drop is backdated to allow a tuition refund, it is considered that the student was not in the class on the census date, and therefore the drop is not counted for completion rate purposes. (There

may be other effects, such as a recalculation of aid based upon the new credit level, but it does not affect the assessment of a student's completion rate during the semester.)

Q. How is a student who receives a grade marker (an Incomplete, for example) treated for completion monitoring?

A. GPA is tested as of the day after grades are posted. The GPA at the test date will reflect only the coursework graded on that date and will be used to determine the student financial aid status. The student may appeal the Denial of aid if a course graded after the test date brings the GPA to at least the minimum. An appeal under such circumstances would be approved.

Q. How are repeated and remedial courses treated for completion monitoring?

A. All repeated and remedial courses are treated in the same way as other coursework for completion monitoring.

### ***Degree Completion Question***

Q. How does a Degree Completion notification differ from an SAP hold?

A. Students in a Degree Completion status are those working on the first baccalaureate degree only. These students lose Federal Pell Grant and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) funds, since the federal rules permit students to receive this aid only for the first degree. Students may continue to receive other federal and MSU aid funds.

Degree completion is monitored by the Registrar's Degree Audit system, and notifies OFA when the student has enrolled in the final required course(s) in the specified term. Even if the student chooses not to apply for graduation, he or she is eligible to graduate and will be denied further Pell or SEOG. Students may not appeal this decision.