

SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS (SAP) (668.34)

One clarification to the NPRM

Rationale for Regulation: The department, concerned that students are receiving federal student aid despite lack of academic progress, has tightened existing regulations.

Key Provisions of the Regulation:

-Institutions must have a reasonable SAP policy, including a schedule to determine incremental student progress or “pace,” and to evaluate student progress at the end of each payment period or the end of an academic year. Because they are more frequent evaluations done at the end of each payment period will allow struggling students at those institutions a warning period regarding their future eligibility for Title IV aid.

- The only change from the NPRM is a clarification that for “programs longer than an academic year in length, satisfactory academic progress is measured at the end of each payment period or at least annually to correspond to the end of a payment period.”

Regulatory Language:

Section 668.34 is revised to read as follows:

Sec. 668.34 Satisfactory academic progress.

(a) Satisfactory academic progress policy. An institution must establish a reasonable satisfactory academic progress policy for determining whether an otherwise eligible student is making satisfactory academic progress in his or her educational program and may receive assistance under the title IV, HEA programs. The Secretary considers the institution's policy to be reasonable if--

(1) The policy is at least as strict as the policy the institution applies to a student who is not receiving assistance under the title IV, HEA programs;

(2) The policy provides for consistent application of standards to all students within categories of students, e.g., full-time, part-time, undergraduate, and graduate students, and educational programs established by the institution;

(3) The policy provides that a student's academic progress is evaluated--

(i) At the end of each payment period if the educational program is either one academic year in length or shorter than an academic year; or

(ii) For all other educational programs, at the end of each payment period or at least annually to correspond with the end of a payment period;

(4)(i) The policy specifies the grade point average (GPA) that a student must achieve at each evaluation, or if a GPA is not an appropriate qualitative measure, a comparable assessment measured against a norm; and

(ii) If a student is enrolled in an educational program of more than two academic years, the policy specifies that at the end of the second academic year, the student must have a GPA of at least a “C” or its equivalent, or have academic standing consistent with the institution's requirements for graduation;

(5)(i) The policy specifies the pace at which a student must progress through his or her

educational program to ensure that the student will complete the program within the maximum timeframe, as defined in paragraph (b) of this section, and provides for measurement of the student's progress at each evaluation; and

(ii) An institution calculates the pace at which the student is progressing by dividing the cumulative number of hours the student has successfully completed by the cumulative number of hours the student has attempted. In making this calculation, the institution is not required to include remedial courses;

(6) The policy describes how a student's GPA and pace of completion are affected by course incompletes, withdrawals, or repetitions, or transfers of credit from other institutions. Credit hours from another institution that are accepted toward the student's educational program must count as both attempted and completed hours;

(7) Except as provided in paragraphs (c) and (d) of this section, the policy provides that, at the time of each evaluation, a student who has not achieved the required GPA, or who is not successfully completing his or her educational program at the required pace, is no longer eligible to receive assistance under the title IV, HEA programs;

(8) If the institution places students on financial aid warning, or on financial aid probation, as defined in paragraph

(b) of this section, the policy describes these statuses and that--

(i) A student on financial aid warning may continue to receive assistance under the title IV, HEA programs for one payment period despite a determination that the student is not making satisfactory academic progress. Financial aid warning status may be assigned without an appeal or other action by the student; and

(ii) A student on financial aid probation may receive title IV, HEA program funds for one payment period. While a student is on financial aid probation, the institution may require the student to fulfill specific terms and conditions such as taking a reduced course load or enrolling in specific courses. At the end of one payment period on financial aid probation, the student must meet the institution's satisfactory academic progress standards or meet the requirements of the academic plan developed by the institution and the student to qualify for further title IV, HEA program funds;

(9) If the institution permits a student to appeal a determination by the institution that he or she is not making satisfactory academic progress, the policy describes--

(i) How the student may reestablish his or her eligibility to receive assistance under the title IV, HEA programs;

(ii) The basis on which a student may file an appeal: The death of a relative, an injury or illness of the student, or other special circumstances; and

(iii) Information the student must submit regarding why the student failed to make satisfactory academic progress, and what has changed in the student's situation that will allow the student to demonstrate satisfactory academic progress at the next evaluation;

(10) If the institution does not permit a student to appeal a determination by the institution that he or she is not making satisfactory academic progress, the policy must describe how the student may reestablish his or her eligibility to receive assistance under the title IV, HEA programs; and

(11) The policy provides for notification to students of the results of an evaluation that impacts the student's eligibility for title IV, HEA program funds.

(b) Definitions. The following definitions apply to the terms used in this section:

Appeal. Appeal means a process by which a student who is not meeting the institution's satisfactory academic progress standards petitions the institution for reconsideration of the student's eligibility for title IV, HEA program assistance.

Financial aid probation. Financial aid probation means a status assigned by an institution to a student who fails to make satisfactory academic progress and who has appealed and has had eligibility for aid reinstated.

Financial aid warning. Financial aid warning means a status assigned to a student who fails to make satisfactory academic progress at an institution that evaluates academic progress at the end of each payment period.

Maximum timeframe. Maximum timeframe means--

(1) For an undergraduate program measured in credit hours, a period that is no longer than 150 percent of the published length of the educational program, as measured in credit hours;

(2) For an undergraduate program measured in clock hours, a period that is no longer than 150 percent of the published length of the educational program, as measured by the cumulative number of clock hours the student is required to complete and expressed in calendar time; and

(3) For a graduate program, a period defined by the institution that is based on the length of the educational program.

(c) Institutions that evaluate satisfactory academic progress at the end of each payment period.

(1) An institution that evaluates satisfactory academic progress at the end of each payment period and determines that a student is not making progress under its policy may nevertheless disburse title IV, HEA program funds to the student under the provisions of paragraph (c)(2), (c)(3), or (c)(4) of this section.

(2) For the payment period following the payment period in which the student did not make satisfactory academic progress, the institution may--

(i) Place the student on financial aid warning, and disburse title IV, HEA program funds to the student; or

(ii) Place a student directly on financial aid probation, following the procedures outlined in paragraph (d)(2) of this section and disburse title IV, HEA program funds to the student.

(3) For the payment period following a payment period during which a student was on financial aid warning, the institution may place the student on financial aid probation, and disburse title IV, HEA program funds to the student if--

(i) The institution evaluates the student's progress and determines that student did not make satisfactory academic progress during the payment period the student was on financial aid warning;

(ii) The student appeals the determination; and

(iii)(A) The institution determines that the student should be able to meet the institution's satisfactory academic progress standards by the end of the subsequent payment period; or

(B) The institution develops an academic plan for the student that, if followed, will ensure that the student is able to meet the institution's satisfactory academic progress standards by a specific point in time.

(4) A student on financial aid probation for a payment period may not receive title IV, HEA program funds for the subsequent payment period unless the student makes satisfactory academic progress or the institution determines that the student met the requirements specified by

the institution in the academic plan for the student.

(d) Institutions that evaluate satisfactory academic progress annually or less frequently than at the end of each payment period.

(1) An institution that evaluates satisfactory academic progress annually or less frequently than at the end of each payment period and determines that a student is not making progress under its policy may nevertheless disburse title IV, HEA program funds to the student under the provisions of paragraph (d)(2) or (d)(3) of this section.

(2) The institution may place the student on financial aid probation and may disburse title IV, HEA program funds to the student for the subsequent payment period if-- (i) The institution evaluates the student and determines that the student is not making satisfactory academic progress;

(ii) The student appeals the determination; and

(iii)(A) The institution determines that the student should be able to be make satisfactory academic progress during the subsequent payment period and meet the institution's satisfactory academic progress standards at the end of that payment period; or

(B) The institution develops an academic plan for the student that, if followed, will ensure that the student is able to meet the institution's satisfactory academic progress standards by a specific point in time.

(3) A student on financial aid probation for a payment period may not receive title IV, HEA program funds for the subsequent payment period unless the student makes satisfactory academic progress or the institution determines that the student met the requirements specified by the institution in the academic plan for the student.