

Washington & Jefferson College – Office of Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy

Policy Update Spring 2021

Section 3509 of the CARES Act allows institutions to exclude from the quantitative component (pace measurement) of satisfactory academic progress (SAP) attempted credits a student was unable to complete as a result of the COVID-19 national emergency. This exclusion only applies to periods of enrollment in which the National emergency Declaration is in effect, beginning March 20, 2020.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic the Quantitative Standards will be excluded if the student indicates that failure to complete required credits was the result of a COVID-19 related circumstance. Circumstances can include but are not limited to:

- *Illness of the student or family member;*
- *Need to become a caregiver or first responder;*
- *Economic hardship;*
- *Added work hours;*
- *Inability to continue with classes via distance education; and*
- *Inability to access internet due to closed facilities*

Students not meeting SAP will be notified they can appeal due to impacts related to COVID19 when they receive their initial SAP status notification email. Those who fail to meet SAP as a result of COVID-19, will only be required to submit a Satisfactory Academic Progress Appeal Form. They will not be required to submit other supporting documentation or an Academic Improvement Plan. These updates to the SAP policy are designed to make the appeal process less stringent for those whose academic progress was affected as a result of COVID-19.

Students are expected to maintain a certain level of academic progress that will enable them to successfully complete the requirements for graduation over a four-year period. To ensure that students are making adequate progress, the Committee on Academic Status meets after each term and notifies students who are not meeting academic standards. Students may be warned, placed on probation, continued on probation, or dismissed from the College. For more specific information regarding this academic review, refer to the Academic Regulations section of the College Catalog.

In addition to the review of academic standing completed by the Committee on Academic Status, the Office of Financial Aid is required to monitor academic progress in regard to financial aid eligibility. The Federal Higher Education Amendments mandate that institutions of higher education establish and enforce standards of Satisfactory Academic Progress. This helps to ensure that students are moving toward successfully completing the program of study for which they are receiving financial aid in a timely manner. Washington & Jefferson College applies these standards to all institutionally awarded funds (including tuition remission and tuition exchange) and all Federal Title IV programs (including all grants and loans). Students receiving

grant funds from the state are subject to the standards set by the state agency governing the funds. Some lenders require satisfactory academic progress for private loans as well.

The following requirements are established to define satisfactory academic progress as it relates to the renewal of financial assistance. Failure to meet minimum requirements will result in the loss of financial aid eligibility for the upcoming academic year.

Policy Requirements

Financial aid academic progress evaluations will occur annually after the end of the academic year (normally after the spring term). Freshman students who begin in January will be evaluated after the end of each fall semester.

Two criteria are involved in evaluating academic progress in regard to financial aid eligibility: Quantitative standards and Qualitative standards. Quantitative standards are the pace at which the student is progressing through their academic program and the qualitative standards are the GPA requirements needed at each evaluation.

Quantitative Standards

Students must maintain a pace of progression by completing a minimum of 67% of all attempted credits in order to complete a degree within the maximum time frame allowed for receipt of financial aid.

To meet the minimum course completion requirement, a student must receive a passing letter grade and earn credit in the course. PED credits do not count toward course completion since they are handled separately from the other courses required for graduation.

Full time students may receive federal financial aid for no more than a 6-year period (12 semesters). Periods of enrollment without financial aid assistance are included in this calculation. Periods of non-enrollment (for students whose education is interrupted) will not be counted.

Even though students show minimal academic progress to maintain financial aid eligibility, specific aid program requirements may limit the amount and/or number of awards they may receive prior to earning their degree. For example, W&J will award a maximum of 8 semesters of College funded aid to full-time students, although some federal programs may allow additional semesters of eligibility.

Grade Point Average

Students must achieve the following minimum cumulative GPA by the end of each academic year to maintain satisfactory academic progress:

First Year: 1.17
Second Year: 1.74
Third Year: 1.94
Fourth Year: 2.00

Fifth Year: 2.00
Sixth Year: 2.00

Years reflected above are measured in time and not grade level.

Other Considerations

Transfer Students

For transfer students, courses accepted for credit at W&J from the institution previously attended will be used to evaluate quantitative standards. Only grades earned at W&J will be used to calculate the cumulative GPA. The academic progress review for transfer students who enter at the beginning of the academic year or mid-year will occur at the end of the spring semester.

Readmission

Students who are re-admitted to W&J after a period of non-enrollment will be evaluated using the regular standards regarding pace of progression and cumulative GPA, taking into consideration all coursework from past and present. In regard to the 6-year maximum time frame, periods of non-enrollment are not considered.

Part-time Enrollment

For part-time students, the normal time frame for completion of a course of study will vary. Progress evaluation for part-time students will be determined by the pace of progression. The same cumulative GPA requirements apply as described under Policy Requirements.

Repeated Courses

For those students who repeat a course, both attempts will count toward pace of progression. Only the most recent grade will be used to determine the cumulative GPA.

Course Audits

Audited courses do not count toward pace of progression and also are not used in the determination of the cumulative GPA.

Incomplete Grades

Courses at an incomplete status will not be counted as completed until a passing letter grade is received. They also will not be included in the cumulative GPA calculation until a letter grade is assigned. According to the College Registrar, incomplete grades must be completed in the first four weeks of the succeeding session in which the student is enrolled, or the grade of "I" is converted into an "F." The student is responsible for informing the Office of Financial Aid of a grade change and asking for an immediate re-evaluation of progress through an appeal.

Withdrawn Courses

Courses at a withdrawn status are counted as attempted credits in the pace calculation but not as completed credits and are factored in to the maximum time frame of 6 years. (For example, one semester of courses at a "W" status counts as a semester toward the 12 semester maximum.) These courses do not affect calculation of the cumulative GPA.

Transfer Credit

Courses accepted for credit taken at another institution will be counted toward the pace of progression, but will not be used in the calculation of the cumulative GPA.

Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory

For courses taken Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, the course will count as attempted credits but only a Satisfactory grade will count toward completed credits. Neither an “S” grade nor a “U” grade affects the cumulative GPA.

Appeal Process

The Office of Financial Aid will notify students who are not maintaining satisfactory academic progress that they have lost financial aid eligibility for the upcoming academic year. Students may appeal for reinstatement of aid by taking the following steps:

- 1) Submit a Satisfactory Academic Progress Appeal Form.
- 2) Include with this appeal form a typed explanation citing specific circumstances that prevented maintenance of satisfactory academic progress (trouble with coursework, illness, death in the family, etc.) and should include the specific steps taken to ensure progress in the future.
- 3) Enclose any supporting documentation to substantiate your appeal (for example, submit a medical statement if illness is the basis of the appeal). All information will be strictly confidential.
- 4) Submit an Academic Improvement Plan formulated with the Director of Academic Advising (Office of Academic Affairs) to ensure satisfactory progress in the future.

Appeals must be received within 30 days of notification of loss of financial aid eligibility. The Financial Aid Appeal Committee will evaluate appeals and may request additional documentation when deemed necessary. Students will be notified of the Committee’s decision in writing. If the appeal is approved, the student is placed on Financial Aid Probation for one semester and financial aid eligibility is reinstated for this time period. Academic progress will be evaluated at the end of the probationary period (one semester) based on the standards specified in the Academic Improvement Plan. If satisfactory progress was made and the Academic Improvement Plan requirements were met for that semester, the student is removed from Financial Aid Probation. If progress was not made, the student will lose their financial aid eligibility until the SAP requirements have been met.

In regard to the Academic Improvement Plan, please note the following:

- Summer school coursework not taken at W&J cannot be calculated in the student’s GPA but can count toward pace of progression.
- Incomplete grades must be changed to a passing grade in the time frame designated by the Registrar in order to count toward pace of progression.
- Transfer credits will not be considered toward pace of progression until they are officially reflected on the W&J transcript.