



# Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy

The purpose of this policy is to evaluate students at the end of each term to ensure students are satisfactorily progressing towards degree completion. This policy applies to undergraduate, graduate and certificate eligible students.

Federal Regulation 34 CFR 668.34 requires Montana State University (MSU), as an institution receiving federal student aid funds under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to establish a policy for determining whether an eligible student is making satisfactory academic progress (SAP) in his or her education program to receive federal student aid.

The Office of Financial Aid (OFAS) monitors the academic progress of all students. Financial aid satisfactory academic progress (SAP) includes both qualitative standards and quantitative standards. This policy governs a student's eligibility to receive federal student aid funds and any other student aid sources that base eligibility on federal or institutional financial aid SAP standards. This policy can be separate from MSU's criteria that determines renewability on some institutional scholarships or waivers. This policy is at least as strict as the University's academic standards.

All students must meet the qualitative and quantitative standards for financial aid SAP, regardless of enrollment status. The SAP policy is consistent among all students in application and is applied to all students whether they are receiving financial aid.

## a. Scope

Satisfactory academic progress is measured during all periods of enrollment at MSU, including periods in which the student is not receiving financial aid or periods where a student is in a non-degree enrollment status. MSU will run the SAP review process at the end of each term using grades posted at the time of the run. Federal student aid programs subject to this policy include the following programs:

- Federal Pell Grant
- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)
- Iraq/Afghanistan Service Grant
- Direct Subsidized Loan
- Direct Unsubsidized Loan
- Direct PLUS Loan
- Direct Graduate PLUS Loan
- Federal Perkins Loan
- Federal Work-Study (FWS)

Non-federal student aid programs may base a student's eligibility on whether the student is meeting an institution's federal SAP standards. A state agency awarding state aid may establish its own academic standards.

## b. Definitions

**Appeal:** A process by which a student who is not meeting one or more financial aid satisfactory academic progress standards requests that the Office of Student Aid reconsider his or her eligibility to receive financial aid subject to this policy. The appeal must explain the student's situation and explain changes that will be made in order for SAP to be met.

**Financial Aid Probation (SATISA):** A status assigned to a student who failed to make financial aid satisfactory academic progress, has successfully appealed, and has had his or her eligibility for student aid, as identified in this policy, reinstated.

**Financial Aid Progress (SATIS):** A status assigned to a student who is meeting all satisfactory academic progress standards as detailed in this policy.

**Financial Aid Suspension (INEL\*\*):** A status assigned to a student who is not meeting one or more standards for financial aid satisfactory academic progress.

**Maximum Timeframe:** A period of time that is 150% of the published length of the academic program in which the student, for financial aid purposes, is expected to complete his or her academic program as specified in this policy.

**Pace of Completion:** The ratio, expressed as a percentage, of successfully completed (earned) credits divided by attempted credits. For most academic programs at MSU, the minimum completion rate to continue receiving financial aid is at least 67%. Percentages are rounded under traditional rules.

**Payment Period:** The academic period of enrollment established by an institution for which financial aid is disbursed. A payment period is usually, but not always, the same as a term.

**Denial:** The status of an appeal that has been reviewed and determined to not contain the minimum reasons or support for continuation of aid.

**Maximum Timeframe:** One of two qualitative standards. Maximum timeframe evaluates time to degree. Almost all degree pursuits will use a 150% of degree requirements as the maximum timeframe.

**Pace:** One of two qualitative standards. Pace evaluates progress towards a degree that would ensure degree completion prior to the maximum timeframe.

**Completed credit hours:** Any hours a student has completed with a passing grade including transfer hours.

**Attempted credit hours:** Any credit hours completed (passing and failing), incomplete grades or in progress grades, withdrawn coursework, hours dropped after the first day of the semester, transfer hours, repeat coursework and revision of records. Repeat coursework will count for each attempt made towards the course and each grade reported until the student completes a request for grade replacements with the Registrar office. Once the grade has been replaced, each attempt will be included, but only the replaced grade will be considered with SAP.

**Grade Point Average (GPA):** The qualitative component of the SAP standards that a student must have at each evaluation point. An escalating GPA may be required in the probationary or contract terms to ensure a student will be able to reach or maintain SAP standards and progress towards degree completion. Remedial coursework is included toward GPA standards. GPA is based on credits taken only at MSU.

**Completed program:** If a student completes the academic requirements for a program, but does not have a degree, they are ineligible for any additional federal financial aid funds.

**Warning:** Warning is a status assigned to a student who has failed to meet minimum academic standards after a previous evaluation of good standing. This student has one additional semester to re-establish minimum standards of eligibility. Deficiencies must be resolved in the next enrolled term.

### c. Satisfactory Academic Progress Standards

#### Qualitative Standard - Grade-Point Average

Undergraduate students enrolled in a program that is longer than two academic years, will have their grade point average (GPA) aligned with MSU's scholastic standards for their first two years (< 60 credits) and must at the end of their second year (60 < credits) have and maintain a grade-point average (GPA) of at least a 2.0. Graduate and Certificate students must maintain a grade point required by the Graduate School or program for continued enrollment.

A student who has been suspended from MSU scholastically or with just cause will immediately become ineligible.

## Quantitative Standards

- **Maximum Timeframe Standard**
  - Students must complete their program within a maximum timeframe based on units attempted for their primary academic program. Credits are the unit of measure used for most academic programs at MSU. Students can pursue additional academic objectives (e.g., majors, minors) and continue to receive financial aid as long as they do so within the maximum timeframe allowed for the primary academic program. All attempted credits (as defined below) by the student count for SAP purposes.
  - Once the maximum timeframe is reached, or when OFAS determines that it is not mathematically possible for the student to complete the academic program within the maximum timeframe, the student is considered ineligible for financial aid and will be assigned the status of financial aid ineligible.
  - The maximum timeframe is calculated by multiplying the minimum units required for the academic program by 150% to determine the maximum number of units.
    - $\text{Maximum Timeframe} = \text{Minimum units required for academic program} \times 150\%$
    - For example, a student pursuing a bachelor's degree that requires 120 credits has a maximum timeframe of 180 credits.
  - Attempted credits are counted for all payment periods (e.g., terms) and include transfer credits, credits for courses taken during a semester from which a student has withdrawn, credits for which the student did not receive financial aid, as well as those usually waived under academic amnesty (academic renewal).
- **Pace of Completion Standard**
  - Unless otherwise specified by academic program requirements, students must maintain a pace of completion of at least 67%. This pace of completion should ensure that students will complete their academic programs within the maximum timeframe described above. Percentages are rounded, and students who fail to meet the pace of completion risk losing eligibility for student financial aid.
    - $\text{Pace of Completion} = (\text{Cumulative hours successfully completed} \div \text{Cumulative hours attempted}) \times 100$ . The information below details when a credit is counted as successfully completed (i.e., credit earned) or as attempted (i.e., credit attempted).

## Incompletes, Withdrawals, Repetitions (Course Repeats), Transfer Credits, and Grade Changes

- **Incomplete Grades**
  - Credits for a course in which a student was enrolled but received an Incomplete (I) or Missing Grade (NR) count as attempted, but do not count as earned. The student's grade-point average for that semester will be calculated without these credits.
  - When a valid incomplete grade is finalized, it is factored into the student's SAP status at the next evaluation unless brought to the attention of OFAS.
  - However, if the I or NR grade was invalid (i.e., assigned in error as documented in writing by the instructor or Registrar's Office), the SAP status may be immediately reevaluated by OFAS.
- **Withdrawals**
  - Credits for courses taken during a semester from which a student has withdrawn count as attempted, but do not count as earned. The student's GPA is not affected by credits from which a student has withdrawn.
- **Repetitions (Course Repeats)**
  - The credits of a repeated course count as credits attempted. For impact or repeated courses on GPA. Please consult with the MSU catalog: <http://catalog.montana.edu/curriculum-enrollment-graduation/>.
- **Transfer Credits**
  - Transfer credits earned at another school and accepted by MSU count as both attempted and earned. The student's GPA is not affected by credits that have been transferred to MSU from another institution. Transfer credits accepted by MSU are factored into the student's SAP status at the next evaluation.

- Grade Changes
  - When a grade is changed, a student's SAP status can be immediately reevaluated. The student or Records Office must contact OFAS after the grade change is posted to his or her academic record to request that the SAP status be reevaluated.
- Credit Earned Defined
  - In general, credits earned have one of the below attributes:
    - Undergraduate Student: Grade of D or better; Satisfactory/Pass grades
    - Graduate Student: Grade of C or better; Satisfactory/Pass grades
  - Transfer credits earned at another school.
  - Credits earned through examination (e.g., AP).
  - Credits earned for remedial courses.
  - Credits for ESL courses.
  - Previous coursework of students granted academic amnesty (academic renewal).
  - Completion of research credits.
- Credit Attempted Defined
  - Attempted
    - Every credit earned.
    - Every credit in which the student enrolled but did not earn credit.
      - e.g. for undergraduates this would include F, I, and NR grades.
      - Includes courses that were withdrawn from or dropped after the 15<sup>th</sup> class day.
  - Not Attempted
    - Credits withdrawn from due to military obligations.
    - Graduate credits below the 500 level.
      - Documented preparatory coursework can be an exception.
    - Courses dropped prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> class day.
    - Audited courses.
  - If a credit does not count as attempted, it does not count as earned.

#### d. **Monitoring for Financial Aid SAP**

All students are monitored at the end of every enrolled payment period. Students who meet all financial aid SAP standards are eligible to receive or continue to receive financial aid. Students who are not meeting financial aid SAP standards, or for whom it is not mathematically possible to meet the standards within the maximum timeframe, will receive notification from OFAS via their MSU email accounts of the impact on their aid eligibility.

A student not meeting SAP will be given one term of financial aid warning. A student is eligible for aid while on warning. A new status will be evaluated per the policy at the next evaluation and the student will either have regained status or be identified as being ineligible for aid from the end of the warning term moving forward. A student is notified of the warning status via the identified email in MSU's system.

#### Multiple Degrees and Changes in Major

Both students who are attempting to complete more than one major/minor and those who have changed majors will not be given an increased timeframe. The student will not be treated differently than any other student (almost exclusively undergraduate). Coursework is only excluded for changes of career (e.g. undergraduate to graduate).

The student will need to submit an appeal and the circumstances will be evaluated for exceptions and continuation of aid. Students who have completed requirements for a degree but not matriculated will require a consultation with the Registrar's Office. If by choice, OFAS can then consider approval of only Direct Loans moving forward.

#### e. **Restoring Financial Aid Eligibility**

##### Restoring aid without an appeal

Students who fail to meet the qualitative standards or the quantitative pace of completion standard can restore financial aid eligibility by enrolling for one or more payment periods (e.g., terms) at their own expense until they

achieve the minimum financial aid SAP standards required by this policy. Students who exceed the maximum timeframe standard cannot restore eligibility without appealing to the Office of Student Aid for reinstatement consideration.

#### Restoring aid with an appeal

Students assigned the status of financial aid suspension may appeal to the Office of Student Aid for reinstatement of their aid. SAP appeal forms are available from the OFAS website.

A student may file an appeal for each period of enrollment where standards are not met with the Office of Student Aid explaining the reason the minimum standards were not achieved. Examples of this include: death of a relative, student injury, family illness, student illness, or other special circumstances. In addition to the explanation of why the minimum standards were not met, the appeal needs to describe what has changed in the student's situation that will allow the student to demonstrate financial aid SAP in the future. A successful appeal should be complete and supply all appropriate supporting documentation and signatures.

OFAS will notify the student through the student's MSU email account or letter of the results of the SAP appeal. If an appeal is denied, the student is ineligible for financial aid subject to this policy. If an appeal is approved, it will fall into two possible conditions. The first condition is probation. Probation is a status assigned when it is determined that minimum standards can be achieved at the end of the subsequent term of enrollment. At the end of the probationary period, the student will either be back in good standing or be ineligible per policy. The second condition occurs when it is determined that the minimum standards will take more than one successful term to achieve. In this situation, the student may be asked to submit a plan of study and/or be offered the option of signing an OFAS Plan (contract) which outlines conditions over multiple terms that need to be met. These conditions will represent growth needed to reach minimum standards moving forward. Students are responsible for understanding and following the conditions set forth in the academic plan. A student successfully achieving the minimum financial aid standards prior to completion of the plan will be placed on good standing and the plan will be void and the student subject again to policy review.

Students whose appeals are denied can restore financial aid eligibility by enrolling for one or more payment periods (e.g., terms) at their own expense until they achieve the minimum financial aid SAP standards required by this policy.