Pennsylvania State Grant PROGRAM HANDBOOK 2018-19 Academic Year and 2019 Summer Term Q & A
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide the financial aid community with responses to questions that were addressed during the 2018-19 State Grant Summer Workshops. Information is being shared for clarification purposes only. This document supplements the 2018-19 Academic Year and 2019 Summer State Grant Program Handbook.

The organization of questions presented in this document follow the order of the Handbook. Sections are noted for cross-referencing purposes.

CHAPTER 1 – SCHOOL AND PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

SECTION B, HEADQUARTERED AND DOMICILED STATUS

Q. How do schools determine what PHEAA has on file for their Headquartered and Domiciled (HQD) status?

A. Schools can find their HQD status information on FG3Y in OC/WebConnect. In the "HQ" field on this display, a code “Y” indicates “yes” meaning the school is HQD while a code “N” means the school has a Non-HQD status. If the field is blank, as is the case with most out-of-state schools, PHEAA will treat the school as having a Non-HQD status. If the status is incorrect or if your school changes ownership, documentation to evaluate the institutional classification must be submitted by your school. Schools who have not submitted any documentation to PHEAA are treated as Non-HQD.

SECTION E, TERM LENGTH

Q. What is the definition of consecutive?

A. The term consecutive is used to describe periods of enrollment for PA State Grant purposes. When used in reference to an academic year, consecutive describes a 12-month calendar period but does not mean that the calendar period must begin in January. When used to reference a week of instructional time, it means 7 days in a row but does not mean that the week must begin on a Sunday. When used to reference combining modules to meet term length definitions, consecutive means “back-to-back” or overlapping periods of instruction.

CHAPTER 2 – STUDENT CERTIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY

SECTION A, ENROLLMENT DEFINITIONS

Q. A student is enrolled for 12 credits in a 17-week semester and 3 credits in a 10-week module. All 15 credits count toward the student’s undergraduate degree. Must the modular credits be counted toward PA State Grant eligibility?

A. The 10-week module is part of the student’s term and must be counted when considering the student’s enrollment status. Therefore, the student in this example must be reported as full-time and must have their term enrollment mode evaluated based upon 15 credits.
SECTION A, ENROLLMENT, INSTRUCTION DELIVERY AND ENROLLMENT MODE REPORTING

Q: If the student makes changes to their schedule, will the enrollment mode need to be updated?
A. Yes. Just like updates from full-time to half-time and vice versa, enrollment mode requires a re-evaluation when classes are dropped or added, as well as when students withdraw to at least half-time.

Q: Can the Partner Interface mass update function be used to update enrollment mode?
A. Yes. Enrollment mode updates can be made in single and mass updates in Partner Interface as well as through the Certification Transmissions process.

Q: Does the PHEAA call center deliver custom messaging to students based on the HQD status of their institution?
A. Yes. Our call center staff delivers messaging to students based upon their specific situation. Therefore, if a student is attending a school that is Non-HQD, then our messaging will reflect that. The only time messaging may become more involved is when the student is considering switching institutions (e.g., HQD to a Non-HQD).

Q: If a student has more remedial credits than required for a term’s remedial exception, must we consider all remedial credits when determining the enrollment mode or just the number of remedial exception credits used?
A. Your school is required to base enrollment mode reporting on the total amount of regular credits in which the student is enrolled for the term plus any remedial credits used for a remedial exception. Extra remedial credits or those not used for an exception should not be considered in enrollment mode reporting.

In the event that your school reported a remedial exception and the student has extra remedial courses, the type of remedial credits (distance education or classroom) which are used for the exception and enrollment mode reporting are chosen by your school.

Example:

Student A is enrolled in 9 regular classroom credits and 3 remedial distance education credits and 3 remedial classroom credits. The student is granted a remedial exception for the term and only needs 12 credits to meet the minimum full-time enrollment requirement. The school may elect to include the classroom remedial credits as the exception credits and report the student’s enrollment mode as “100% classroom”; or, the school may elect to include the distance education remedial credits as the exception credits and report the student’s enrollment mode as “Up to 50% distance education.”

Q: Do updates to a student’s term enrollment mode result in an immediate recalculation of eligibility?
A. In general, yes. Keep in mind, for example, that a student whose record is undergoing an Income Validation review may have a “need bypass” in the record (“pending” status) which prevents recalculation of eligibility until the review is resolved.

Q: Are the award amounts for enrollment modes 3 (“Greater than 50% but less than 100% distance education”) and 4 (“100% distance education”) the same for an individual student?
A. Yes. For the 2018-19 Academic Year, the award amount calculated for each particular student is the same amount whether the student is reported with an enrollment mode 3 or 4.
Q: What award amount can a student who attends a Non-HQD institution and qualifies for an ADA Accommodation expect?

A. Students at Non-HQD institutions who are granted ADA Accommodation exceptions qualify for the amounts consistent with distance education students at HQD institutions.

Q: Is it possible that students with the minimum award will become ineligible due to the change to their enrollment mode?

A. No. The distance education award is calculated in the same manner as the traditional PA State Grant. If the award adjustment factor alone results in the students' awards falling below the minimum award level and thus not being eligible, the students will be permitted to keep the minimum award. For example, if a student's eligibility, when rounded down to the nearest $50 equals $550 and the application of an adjustment factor of either .8772 or .4385 (for 2018-19) results in an amount lower than $500. In both cases, the student is eligible for the minimum $500 award. The most recent version of the PA State Grant Estimator spreadsheet displays both the traditional and distance education results.

Q: Is there any planned communication that will be sent to students to explain why the PA State Grant awards are reduced?

A. All 2018-19 eligibility notice emails, as well as forms that are sent to the student portal inbox, include language that states, “Due to limited resources, students enrolled in more than 50% distance education credits may be eligible for a reduced award.” This language is also given some prominence on the home page of PHEAA.org. The home page alert also directs the students to special FAQs for more detail on this topic.

SECTION A, ENROLLMENT, ENROLLMENT REPORTING

Q: There were several questions regarding unofficial withdrawals that came up during the workshop I attended. Where can I find responses to these questions?

A. Due to the various questions that were posed in the workshops on this subject, the final 2018-19 Academic Year and 2019 Summer State Grant Program Handbook had been revised before publishing in August 2018. Please refer to the online Handbook and replace all pages noted in any printed copy you may have received at the in-person workshop.

Please note that this question is repeated under Chapter 3 since the Handbook addresses unofficial withdrawals with regard to “unofficial withdrawal” in that Chapter as well as Chapter 2.

Q: If a community college student is enrolled in a distance education program and is charged sponsored costs due to this enrollment, what reporting must be done?

A. In this instance, you should first report a “non-sponsoring” program if the student’s residence is located in a non-sponsored district. Next, you must report the appropriate enrollment mode based on the percentage of distance education enrollment. Finally, if the student’s actual charges are then more than 25% lower, you must submit a cost override request.
SECTION A, ENROLLMENT, REMEDIAL/DEVELOPMENTAL COURSE EXCEPTIONS

Q: What do you mean by “remedial exception reporting deadline is the last day of attendance?”

A. Due to questions that arose over the past year regarding the lack of a stated deadline for school reporting of remedial exceptions, a deadline requirement was incorporated. This deadline requires timely reporting so that it is clear for the student and any subsequent transfer school whether or not any additional remedial exceptions can be granted as well as how to properly evaluate Academic Progress. As noted in the August publication of the Handbook, this deadline is intended to allow schools sufficient time to reconcile eligibility. Schools are not permitted to retroactively report a remedial exception for a completed term where the student has failed to earn regular credits that were initially considered in the student’s half- or full-time enrollment status.

SECTION A, ENROLLMENT, ENROLLMENT AT ANOTHER INSTITUTION

Q: If my school has a consortium agreement with a foreign institution, does the foreign institution’s calendar need to meet the term start date and term length eligibility requirements?

A. If a school has a contractual or consortium agreement in place and will be accepting the credits toward the student’s degree, the school should use the “home” academic calendar to verify term start date and term length requirements.

SECTION D, ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Q: How are students informed of the Academic Progress policy?

A. Students are informed of the primary eligibility requirements, including Academic Progress, for the PA State Grant Program in Section II of the State Grant Rights & Responsibilities document. Students are informed not to sign the PA State Grant Form until they have read and agree to the Rights & Responsibilities. On PHEAA.org, a shorter description of all eligibility requirements is listed under the “Prepare” section as well as in the annual Program Manual which is published under “Documents & Forms.” We also have an FAQ regarding this topic. While PHEAA provides guidance on the Academic Progress policy as a whole, institutions are responsible for communicating to students the details of their individual situations.

Q: If a student supplies a somewhat unclear copy of their grades as an unofficial transcript, is that document acceptable?

A. When a document is illegible, a judgement can be made by the school to refuse it as an acceptable form of a transcript. Otherwise, if the school accepts screen captures as a satisfactory, auditable way to document the student’s unofficial academic transcript, then this also satisfies the PA State Grant Program requirement.
Q: Can the school count the remedial credits earned from a term within the review cycle to make up a deficit for another term within the cycle where a remedial exception was granted but the remedial credits were not earned?

Example:

A student has 12 regular and 3 remedial credits in Fall (full-time grant) then takes 6 regular and 6 remedial credits in Spring (full-time grant). He uses a .50 remedial exception counter in the Spring. He does not pass one of the remedial classes from the Spring.

A. Please refer to the above example. Using the steps outlined on pages 2-32 and 2-33 of the Handbook, the answer is “yes” to the first key question in the Handbook, “Did the student have a remedial exception reported during the review cycle?” This student needs a total of 24 semester credits to satisfy the PA State Grant Academic Progress requirement for the academic year in question. The student has earned 24 credits (18 regular and 6 remedial) and this coincides with his 1.0 award counter. The exception he was granted, although for a different term, allows for consideration of 6 remedial credits during the review cycle. This student passes the Academic Progress test. You may find additional examples of remedial credit consideration with regard to Satisfactory Academic Progress beginning on page 2-34 of the Handbook.

SECTION F, PENNSYLVANIA DOMICILE

Q: If our school reports a domicile issue via the Special Request function in Partner Interface, do we need to report this for each year or will domicile reporting carry over from year to year?

A. Your school should only need to report the domicile concern one time unless it appears that additional information has become available that may cause PHEAA to re-evaluate any prior eligibility decisions. When considering a student’s ability to meet the PA domicile requirement, staff takes into consideration all current, active application information as well as prior eligibility.

Q: If a student is ineligible due to the PA domicile requirements, are they ever able to establish residency while they are in college?

A. Yes. The PA domicile requirement requires students to establish 12 months of residency exclusive of enrollment in a postsecondary institution if the student came into or remained in Pennsylvania for the purpose of attending school. When evaluating eligibility, PHEAA considers the student’s stated purpose for moving to Pennsylvania and the documentation submitted to support that purpose. Some students initially move to Pennsylvania for multiple reasons, while others move for the sole purpose of attending college. PHEAA does take into consideration that students generally do not move to Pennsylvania exclusively to attend a community college, for example. When the student is sent a questionnaire, they should provide thorough responses and all requested documentation.

Q: We have distance education students living outside of Pennsylvania. How would they be processed?

A. Students must meet the domicile requirement to receive PA State Grant funds. Students who are not Pennsylvania residents and are attending a Pennsylvania institution online do not meet the domicile requirements and are not eligible. If you discover any discrepancies between your school and PHEAA regarding the student’s state of residency, you must report them to PHEAA.

SECTION H, CHANGES IN EXPECTED FAMILY CONTRIBUTION (EFC) AND FEDERAL PELL ELIGIBILITY

Q: If a student’s Expected Family Contribution [EFC] changes slightly, should the student contact PHEAA?

A. The student should be encouraged to correct any and all application data with PHEAA since it may alter eligibility. There are instances where a slight EFC change can cause a significant difference in eligibility.
SECTION 0, DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL COSTS

Q: Should different charges for distance education courses be reported?

A. As in prior years, different educational costs [which may be due to distance education enrollment] continue to impact student’s final eligibility and must be reported if they are 25% or more lower than the annual costs reported and approved by PHEAA.

Q: Certain fees that we are charging to some students on a term-by-term basis are not permitted to be included in our annual costs reported to PHEAA. Is it appropriate to include these fees [e.g., uniform fee] in an individual student’s Cost Override request?

A. No. We request that schools only include costs and fees that are being assessed to all students and that are noted as allowable in our Institutional Cost Policies and Instructions document. For example, since a uniform fee was not allowed at the school level, you may not include it in an individual student’s Cost Override request. Keep in mind that if the student is already receiving the maximum PA State Grant, this reporting will not change the award amount. Also, you are required to report term charges that are 25% or more lower than the school-level costs.

Q: At what time of the processing year does the Cost Override function become available to schools?

A. Schools aren’t permitted to submit Cost Overrides until conditional PA State Grant Need Analysis is released to the public. This generally occurs in early May but was delayed until June for the 2018-19 Academic Year.

Q: If a student is enrolled in two schools with a consortium agreement, what costs are used to evaluate if a Cost Override is needed?

A. The “home” school must evaluate the actual charges incurred by the student from both schools for each term and add them together. These actual charges must then be compared to the annual costs that were reported and approved by PHEAA for the “home” school to evaluate if they differ by more than 25% and need to be reported.

CHAPTER 3 – PENNSYLVANIA STATE GRANT COSTS AND AWARD ADJUSTMENTS

SECTION C, AWARD ADJUSTMENTS FOR WITHDRAWALS, DROPS, AND ADDS

Q: With regard to partial withdrawals to at least half-time, is the school required to uniformly apply Option 1 or Option 2 across all eligible students or can this be applied on a student-by-student basis?

A. PHEAA does not require that the choice of an option be applied to all students and allows for the option to be selected on a student-by-student basis.

Q: A student enrolls in a term comprised of two modules for 6 credits each and receives all “F” grades. The FAA confirms attendance and activity after the end of the term and finds that the student did not initiate the final module for the term. What action needs to be taken?

A. In this instance, the student does not meet the term length requirement since the student did not enroll in the final module that comprised the term. The student is not eligible, and the school is responsible for marking the student as “not enrolled” and returning the funds to PHEAA.
Q: Can you please provide a few additional examples of when applying the withdrawal procedures is appropriate?

A: A few additional examples are listed in the below table. For the definition of “withdrawal,” please refer to Chapter 3, Section C, paragraph 1 of the Handbook. The definition of “drops” is also included in that same section.

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<thead>
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<th>#</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>PA State Grant Status</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>The student is a “no show” before the start of classes.</td>
<td>The student is ineligible and should be reported as “not enrolled.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The student completed 1 course that meets the term length requirement and received all “F” grades for other courses.</td>
<td>The student is considered to have completed the term since at least one grade was earned and is not an “unofficial withdrawal.” Do not apply the withdrawal procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The student initiated classes and then left without notifying anyone. A last date of attendance is determined to be during the drop/add period, and the school refunds the student according to the school’s policy.</td>
<td>The student is considered to have withdrawn for PA State Grant purposes, and the school should follow the withdrawal procedures and refund PHEAA accordingly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The student initiated classes and then left without notifying anyone. A last date of attendance is determined to be after the drop/add period, and the student does not receive any school refund.</td>
<td>The student is considered to have withdrawn for PA State Grant purposes, and the school should follow the withdrawal procedures and refund PHEAA accordingly. In this case, the student did not receive any refund so there is no refund due to PHEAA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The student did not complete any courses and left without notifying anyone after the first day of classes. A last date of attendance cannot be determined.</td>
<td>The student is ineligible and should be reported as “not enrolled.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: There were several questions regarding unofficial withdrawals that came up during the workshop I attended. Where can I find responses to these questions?

A: Due to the various questions that were posed in the workshops on this subject, the final 2018-19 Academic Year and 2019 Summer State Grant Program Handbook had been revised before publishing in August 2018. Please refer to the online Handbook and replace all pages noted in any printed copy you may have received at the in-person workshop.

Q: Do I need to re-evaluate enrollment mode if we process a withdrawal?

A: Added and dropped credits require enrollment mode re-evaluation. Withdrawals from the full term only require a re-evaluation when the school chooses to report the student as half-time in cases when the student withdraws to at least half-time enrollment.

Q: Do I need to adjust the enrollment mode if our school does not refund the student (e.g., the student is keeping the PA State Grant)?

A: No. Since the award is not adjusted, the enrollment mode must match the enrollment status used to determine eligibility for that award.
CHAPTER 4 – DISBURSEMENTS AND CASH MANAGEMENT

SECTION F, CREDITING

Q: Is a school permitted to credit a term’s payment in intervals? For example, if the student is eligible for $2,000 for the Fall, may we credit $1,000 in October and $1,000 in November?

A. No. A school must credit the entire amount of the PA State Grant award for which the student is eligible at the same time. PA State Grant policies, such as withdrawal, align with a once a term payment to the student. Crediting in another manner may result in a Program Review finding. If your school does not have enough PA State Grant funds to credit 100% of the certified amount to the student for the term, you may request additional funds by following the policy outlined in Chapter 4, Section G, paragraph 6 of the Handbook.

Q: If a student is enrolled in one 3-credit module that spans the full 15-week semester and another 3-credit module that overlaps but begins a few weeks later, can we credit the student during the first module since that first module meets the term length requirement?

A. No. You cannot credit the award until the beginning of the second (final) module after enrollment and eligibility has been verified. While the first module alone spans 15 weeks and satisfies the term length requirement, the student does not meet the minimum credits to qualify for a half-time award until he or she is enrolled in the second module. Please remember that when combining modules, schools may not credit funds to the student’s account until after enrollment certification occurs in the final module that comprises that “term.”

SECTION G, ROSTER CERTIFICATION

Q: Can we get a true print function added to the Roster Certification Page?

A. Incorporating the Roster Certification Page and various school displays (e.g., FG3Y, FG3M, FG4B, FG3S, etc.) is on our list of future enhancements.

Q: What resources are available when the school is having trouble reconciling?

A. There are several resources the school can use to assist in the reconciliation process.

• Partner Interface Dashboard – You can review what PA State Grant records were rescreened over the past 4 weeks. Please note that this does not necessarily mean that eligibility has changed since the last reconciliation roster printed; however, the information is “real-time.”

• Partner Interface Filtering – You can filter any student list by “Eligibility Date.” This can help you to pinpoint PA State Grant records where eligibility had changed within the date ranges you select. For more information on filtering, please refer to the Partner Interface Filtering Tips document found on PHEAA.org/training under “Partner Interface.”

• GPAD reports – You can review the GPAD reports that print in the PageCenter report repository. As noted in Appendix J of the Handbook, these weekly reports list 4 weeks of eligibility changes to student records since initial awarding.
MISCELLANEOUS

ONLINE STUDENT APPLICATIONS AND FORMS (SGF, SUMMER, ENROLLMENT CHANGE)

Q: Is the PA State Grant Summer Application mobile-friendly?
A. Yes. At the end of July 2018, updates were made to our consumer (student) portal that made all information in the portal, including forms to be presented to students in a “mobile-friendly” manner.

Q: If an independent student submits a correction to a FAFSA® and becomes dependent, will this be updated to reflect that the parental signature is now required?
A. Yes. If PHEAA determines that the student is dependent, the parental signature (which is numbered 184 on FG59) will be required, and the record will become or remain incomplete. If the FAFSA correction includes the parental signature, then this will be updated into the PA State Grant parental signature field upon PHEAA’s processing of that correction, and no further signature action should be required.

PARTNER INTERFACE (SCHOOL PORTAL “ALEC”)

Q: Can Non-Sponsoring Program of Study data be added to the Status Listing/Transmission for all terms?
A. We will take this suggestion under consideration for future system enhancements to that process. In the meantime, you can use the filtering function in Partner Interface to narrow down, by term, students who were marked in a Program of Study “P” (Non-Spon Clg Transferrable) and “Q” (Non-Spon 2 Yr Terminal Program). The steps are listed below.

• First, select the desired status (or “All Statuses”) and term.
• Next, highlight the Program of Study code before selecting the “Apply Filters” button. Note: If you want to search for both codes at the same time, simply hold down the shift key to select more than one program code.
• Once you have the list, you can scroll through online or export it to a spreadsheet for further review.

Q: Is enrollment mode information included as a column on the exported data from student lists within Partner Interface?
A. No. At this time, you may filter students by a specific enrollment mode but the enrollment mode information does not appear as column data in the exported spreadsheet. We will take this into consideration for a future enhancement.
REPORTING (PAGECENTER REPOSITORY)

Q: Where can I find resources for PageCenter, PHEAA’s report repository?

A. The following resources are available for PageCenter on PHEAA.org by following this path: “Resources and Training,” “State Grant and Special Programs Resources” and “General SGSP Resources:”

- Download PageCenter Plug-In Instructions
- PageCenter General FAQ
- PageCenter Masking Instructions
- PageCenter Restore Instructions
- PageCenter to Excel Instructions
- PageCenter User Guide
- PageCenter to Word Instructions
- SGSP PageCenter Reports Overview

STUDENT’S ELIGIBILITY STATUS AND NOTIFICATIONS

Q: Can you please clarify the notifications students receive when they become eligible?

A. Upon eligibility determination, students will be sent an email notification to advise that eligibility information is available via the student portal, Account Access. When students log in to Account Access, they can view a summary of their eligibility and also a full PA State Grant Eligibility Notice in their inbox. If we do not have an email address for a student, we will send a letter via U.S. Postal Mail. This letter explains how to log into Account Access to retrieve status information.

Q: I disallowed a dependency override, but the student was approved as independent for PA State Grant purposes. Can I still credit even though the student doesn’t get Federal Aid?

A. As noted in Section B of Appendix J of the 2018-19 Academic Year and 2019 Summer State Grant Program Handbook, PA State Grant determination of a student’s financial independence status may differ from the federal aid determination. For more information, please review paragraph “C - State Agency Criteria” within the “Independent Criteria” section of the latest published PA State Grant Program Policy Manual. The student most likely provided information to PHEAA which supported the State Agency criteria for financial independence. Therefore, you can credit the student’s award even though the student is considered independent for PA State Grant purposes only. However, if you have discrepant information that you do not believe PHEAA was privy to during our review and which you believe may alter the eligibility status of the student, please contact us or forward that information to PHEAA.
Created in 1963 by the Pennsylvania General Assembly, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) has evolved into one of the nation’s leading student aid organizations. Today, PHEAA is a national provider of student financial aid services, serving millions of students and thousands of schools through its loan guaranty, loan servicing, grant administration, outreach, and other student aid programs.

PHEAA’s earnings are used to support its public service mission and to pay its operating costs, including the administration of the PA State Grant and other state-funded student aid programs. PHEAA continues to devote its energy, resources, and imagination to developing innovative ways to ease the financial burden of higher education for students, families, schools, and taxpayers.

PHEAA conducts its student loan servicing activities nationally as FedLoan Servicing and American Education Services (AES). For more information, visit PHEAA.org.

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**PENNSYLVANIA HIGHER EDUCATION ASSISTANCE AGENCY**

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