



PA State Grant and Special Programs
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Memo

To: Participating Schools
From: Elizabeth K. McCloud 
Vice President,
PA State Grant and Special Programs
Date: June 2020
Subject: PA State Grant Program – Fall 2020 Term Updates

The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) is aware that many postsecondary institutions are planning adjustments to the Fall 2020 term as a result of COVID-19. While accommodations were provided to institutions during the Winter, Spring and Summer 2020 terms, it is important to keep in mind that the structure of the PA State Grant Program is grounded in statute and regulations which continue to govern the program as schools look ahead to the 2020-21 Academic Year.

In an effort to assist schools in making decisions without unintended impacts on program or student eligibility, this memo provides reminders and guidance regarding the PA State Grant Program and corresponding statutory, regulatory, and policy requirements at the institutional, program, and student eligibility levels.

1. Term Start Dates

As outlined in Chapter 1, Section D of the *2020-21 Pennsylvania State Grant Program Handbook*, term start dates for semester/trimester schools must fall between July 16 and November 15 and term start dates for quarter schools must fall between August 2 and November 1. Additional information on term start dates as they relate to disbursements and applying payment for a PA State Grant is available in Chapter 4.

Disbursement of Fall 2020 PA State Grant Program funds is based on the term start date provided to PHEAA as part of the 2020-21 Costs on the Web (COTW) cost collection process. **Schools must update PHEAA as instructed below if instituting a calendar change, such as an earlier or later start date.**

Schools with an earlier term start date have the option of asking PHEAA to disburse funds based on the school's revised fall start date. However, with a potential increase in fluctuation of enrollments due to COVID-19, each school needs to decide if this is something the school would want since an over-disbursement could negatively impact the adjustment percentage applied to the school in the future. As noted in Chapter 4, Section C of the *Handbook*, the adjustment percentage is based on a historical average of the percent of funds used for the past 3 years. If a school changes its Fall 2020 term calendar to allow for an earlier start date but chooses to keep the original disbursement date on file with PHEAA, the school can then use the preceding weeks as an opportunity to make enrollment changes prior to disbursement in order to achieve a cleaner roster.

If your 2020-21 Academic Year start date has been postponed since submission of 2020-21 costs, or if it has been moved up and you wish to update for disbursement purposes, please log into the school portal to make corrections to your Educational Cost Form by July 15, 2020. Select "Modify the information on the completed form" and select "Term Start Dates" from the column on the left. Enter your revised dates and continue to the verification page to submit. PHEAA staff will monitor these submissions and manually update, if appropriate. If changes to any other items are included in this submission, please send PHEAA those additional changes via email to sghelp@pheaa.org after your submission. PHEAA will review the additional information and notify the school of accepted changes.

2. Minimum Term Length

Chapter 1, Section E of the *2020-21 Pennsylvania State Grant Program Handbook* provides the following guidance on minimum term length, as defined in regulations:

TERM	22 PA. CODE § 121.1 DEFINITION	STANDARD RANGE
Semester	A period of approximately 17 weeks normally comprising one-half of the academic year	Minimum of 15 weeks Maximum of 18 weeks
Quarter	A period of approximately 11 weeks normally comprising one-third of the academic year	Minimum of 10 weeks Maximum of 12 weeks
Trimester	A period of approximately 15 weeks normally comprising one-half of the academic year	Treated as a semester

A term is a period of instructional time that begins on the first day of classes and ends on the last day of final examinations. If there are no final examinations, the term ends on the last day of scheduled classes. Weeks are measured beginning with the first class day of the term, and a week of instructional time is any period of 7 consecutive days in which at least 1 day of regularly scheduled instruction, examination, or (after the last day of classes) at least 1 scheduled day of study for examinations occurs. Instructional time does not include periods of orientation, counseling, homework, vacation, or other activity not related to class preparation or examination. Therefore, the weeks of instructional time may be less than the number of calendar weeks that elapse between the first day of classes and the last day of classes or examinations.

Additional information on term length, as it relates to disbursements and applying payment for a PA State Grant, is available in Chapter 4.

Please note that a winter intersession is not part of a term for purposes of term length.

3. Modules

If your school is considering a move to modular enrollment for the first time, **please be aware that PA State Grant Program requirements surrounding modules differ from federal guidance.** Chapter 1, Section E of the *2020-21 Pennsylvania State Grant Program Handbook* provides instruction on the combining of modules to meet minimum term length requirements and includes an example of an ineligible combination of modular enrollment.

In particular, please note that when combining modules for PA State Grant Program purposes, as noted in Chapter 4, Section D, **schools may not credit funds to the student's account until after enrollment certification occurs in the final module that comprises that "term."**

4. Educational Costs

PHEAA understands that institutions may have initially planned cost increases for the 2020-21 Academic Year and then subsequently decided to hold costs steady or implement a smaller increase than was originally indicated to PHEAA as part of the 2020-21 COTW cost collection process.

If your 2020-21 Academic Year tuition and/or fee costs have changed since submission of 2020-21 costs, please notify PHEAA by July 15 via email to sghelp@pheaa.org and then submit the changes via COTW for PHEAA review. Please note that PHEAA-approved costs may differ from costs submitted by the institution and should be reviewed using FG4B in OC/Webconnect within the school portal prior to contacting us about any changes. PHEAA will evaluate the impact of your cost changes on student eligibility and will make a determination if it is necessary to rescreen student records. Reductions to room and board do not require any adjustment in costs.

Changes to student costs submitted after July 15 may not be accepted, and reporting Cost Overrides may be required for impacted students. Please refer to Chapter 2, Section O for more information on Different Educational Costs.

5. Academic Progress

Please review Chapter 2, Section D, paragraph 8 of the *2020-21 Pennsylvania State Grant Program Handbook* for information regarding the exception or appeals process for students who received incomplete grades for the Winter, Spring, or Summer 2020 terms or otherwise did not achieve satisfactory Academic Progress as a result of COVID-19.

Students may request an exception when there is failure to complete the required number of credits to satisfy the Academic Progress test. The student must report the medical condition, family illness, or other extenuating circumstance that contributed to the failure. The Academic Progress Exception Form and instructions are available on [PHEAA.org/forms](https://www.pheaa.org/forms). Electronic signature instructions can be found at <https://www.pheaa.org/documents/sgsp/ph/pdf-signature.pdf>.

6. Distance Education

In order for PHEAA's Board of Directors to be able to continue making future decisions regarding award amounts, all schools will continue to report student enrollment mode. Enrollment mode must match the student's final enrollment used for eligibility determination, including ALL credits or clock hours which count toward establishing a student's enrollment status. Please review Chapter 2, Section B of the *2020-21 Pennsylvania State Grant Program Handbook* for additional information on the enrollment mode reporting requirements.

For the Fall 2020 term, please remember that otherwise-eligible students enrolled more than 50 percent online will be considered eligible for PA State Grant awards as long as the students are attending an eligible, participating school that is headquartered and domiciled in Pennsylvania. The awards for these students will be at the same level, regardless of a student's percent of online enrollment.

Students enrolled in an institution that is not headquartered and domiciled in Pennsylvania, must be enrolled in a program of study that is structured to allow them to complete at least 50% of their credit or clock hours in the classroom. Additionally, students must be enrolled at least 50% in classroom or, if they have a medical disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), must provide ADA-supporting materials from their medical healthcare provider and the [ADA Accommodation Request Form](#).

Please note, this memo references guidance contained in the *2020-21 PA State Grant Handbook*, which is being shared with this guidance, and should be applied in conjunction with current program policy. If you have questions which have not been addressed by this guidance, please send them to sghelp@pheaa.org.

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