A student must maintain satisfactory progress in the course of study in order to remain eligible for assistance. Schools must have a published policy for monitoring that progress. There are requirements describing how often a school must check satisfactory academic progress (SAP).

In general, for programs longer than two academic years, students must have a “C” average or its equivalent by the end of the second year (regardless of how many credits they have accrued) or have an academic standing consistent with the requirements for graduation. For programs of two years or less, schools must have a qualitative standard at least as stringent as the standard for longer programs.

There is also a quantitative standard. Otherwise, a student could, for example, maintain a high GPA by withdrawing from every course he or she attempts after the first year. This student could have a high GPA but would not be progressing towards graduation. The SAP therefore also includes a quantitative measure to determine the number or percentage of courses, credit hours, or clock hours completed. Schools must explain how they handle course repetitions and how students may appeal determinations that they are not making satisfactory academic progress.

Schools may attempt to manipulate SAP to retain federal student aid dollars.

Footnotes

204 [204] 20 U.S.C. § 1091(a)(2), (c); 34 C.F.R. §§ 668.16(e), 668.32(f), 668.34.

205 [205] 34 C.F.R. § 668.34.

206 [206] 34 C.F.R. § 668.34(a)(5) (requiring that institution’s policy specify the pace at which the student must progress through the academic program), (b) (defining “maximum timeframe”).

207 [207] See § 13.3.2.5 [1], infra.

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Links
[1] https://library.nclc.org/nclc/link/S1.3.03.02.05