



# US Federal Student Aid Policy

## SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

US Federal Law 34 CFR § 668.34 requires the University of Otago (the University) to ensure that all U.S. Federal Student Aid (FSA) students enrolled at the University meet the minimum Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) requirement as part of an academic review at the end of each semester. It applies to all FSA students including graduates, undergraduates, part-time and full-time students.

Students who are taking out FSA for the first-time part way through their course, will also need to demonstrate that they have met the SAP requirements throughout their degree so far.

Students receiving FSA will have their academic progress assessed at the end of each payment period (semester). The assessment will consider the following:

- **QUALITATIVE COMPONENT**

**Academic Standing** - Satisfactory grade point average (GPA)

- **QUANTITATIVE COMPONENTS**

**PACE** – A measure of a student’s progress toward completion of their programme of study; and

**Maximum Timeframe** - Timeframe eligibility for degree completion

For students to remain eligible for FSA, they must meet the minimum requirements for the above-mentioned components, as well as the University of Otago Academic Progress policy and Immigration New Zealand visa legislation.

Any study completed at the University while not receiving FSA will also be included in determining SAP.

### QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

#### **Academic Standing (GPA)**

**First-year undergraduate study** – Students must maintain at least a GPA of 2.0 (C average or above) after the completion of each semester and cumulatively over the period of the student’s first academic year. An academic period is a minimum of one semester or one academic year depending on the student’s programme of study

**Subsequent years of undergraduate study** - Students must maintain at least a GPA of 2.0 (C average or above) after the completion of each semester and cumulatively over the student’s programme of study. An academic period is a minimum of one semester or one academic year depending on the student’s programme of study. Students enrolled in academic programmes, which are longer than two years, must achieve a minimum GPA of at least 2.0 (C average or above) at the end of the second academic year.

**Postgraduate study by coursework** - Students must maintain at least a GPA of 2.0 (C grade or above) after the completion of each semester and cumulatively over the student’s programme of study.

**Postgraduate Research Students** - Masters by Research and PhD students are required to meet milestone reports as set by the Graduate Research School. Supervisors will be required to confirm that a research student is at satisfactory progress at the end of each semester and prior to the next terms disbursement.

## QUANTITATIVE COMPONENTS

### Maximum Timeframe of Completion

For the purposes of FSA, the maximum timeframe in which a student borrower may receive FSA cannot exceed 150% of the minimum length of programme as measured in credit hours for an undergraduate student. For a graduate degree, the maximum timeframe is defined by the University based on the length of the student's programme.

A student is ineligible for FSA when it becomes impossible for the student to complete the programme within the maximum length of programme as measured in credit hours.

Degree	Course Length	Credits/Points for Completion	Maximum Timeframe 150%
Bachelors	3 years	360 credits	540 credits (4.5 years)
For a graduate degree the maximum period varies.			

### Pace of Completion

A minimum percentage of points attempted must be successfully completed cumulatively by the end of each academic year to maintain a satisfactory pace toward degree completion and remain eligible for FSA. Students must successfully complete 66.67% of all points attempted cumulatively during their undergraduate and graduate career, including accepted transfer points.

To determine if you have maintained a satisfactory pace of progression toward your degree, you will need to know how many points you have attempted and completed during your studies. Divide the number of points successfully completed by the number of points attempted to calculate your percentage.

For example:

Earned Points (Credits)	Attempted (Credits)	Points	PACE Calculation	SAP Evaluation
36	54		$36/54 = 66.67\%$	Does met SAP
18	54		$18/54 = 33.33\%$	Does NOT met SAP
40	60		$40/60 = 66.67\%$	Does met SAP

Student is ineligible as soon as it becomes mathematically impossible to graduate within the maximum timeframe allowed.

## OTHER POINTS TO NOTE

Students must also be studying at least half-time in order to be eligible for FSA. Please note this differs to the Immigration New Zealand policy which requires you to be studying full-time, unless in your final semester.

Generally, all periods of a student's enrolment count when assessing progress, even periods when the student did not receive FSA. Some examples of changes to enrolment and how these impact on the measurement of SAP are outlined below.

The policy is at least as strict as the policy the institution applies to a student who is not receiving assistance under the title IV, HEA programs

## TRANSFER OF CREDITS AND REPEAT COURSES

Credits completed and awarded from previous study and that count towards the programme at the University of Otago are included in the SAP assessment of maximum timeframe and pace of completion. The length of time

that the student has credited to the University of Otago will count towards maximum timeframe; and the points credited from the other institution are counted as part of the total allowed points for pace for both completed and attempted.

Courses credited that do not count towards the programme at the University will not be included in the SAP assessment. The credited courses from another institution will not count towards the cumulative GPA component. Students who transfer within the University to a new academic programme and/or major will have the transferred credit count towards the cumulative GPA, timeframe, and pace components. Students will also carry forward any FSA-related warning, probation, or suspension status into the new academic programme.

### **INCOMPLETES AND WITHDRAWALS**

Grade Point Average exclusions e.g. incomplete grades, withdrawals and aegrotat (I, W, WE, AG) are included in the calculation of the maximum timeframe and pace of completion; however, they are not included in the calculation of the cumulative GPA.

Withdrawal from a course or courses can affect a student's eligibility for FSA if it means that they will not complete their programme within the maximum allowed timeframe and pace of completion components. Withdrawal from a course or courses could affect a student's eligibility for FSA if it means that they are not enrolled at least half time for that semester. Students who have received approval by the University to reduce their course load in one or more semesters are still required to meet SAP to remain eligible to receive FSA.

### **REPETITIONS (REPEAT COURSES DUE TO FAILED GRADE)**

Papers previously awarded FSA may be eligible for further aid. To be considered for funding, a student must a) have met SAP; b) the course was completed but a passing grade was not achieved; and c) the course or courses are required for degree completion. A course may only be repeated once for FSA funding purposes. All courses will count towards cumulative GPA, timeframe, and pace components.

### **DEFERRAL**

An approved period of deferral (Masters by Research and PhD students) would not be counted towards the qualitative or quantitative standards but can impact your awarded FSA. Please speak to the Financial Aid Coordinator at the University before making any deferral decisions.

### **NON-CREDIT REMEDIAL COURSES**

These courses are not eligible for FSA and therefore do not count towards SAP eligibility.

### **SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS ASSESSMENT**

At the end of each payment period (semester) and prior to the next disbursement, SAP will be assessed for both the quantitative and qualitative components. The Financial Aid Coordinator at University will complete the following:

- Review the academic record available through eVision to determine the student borrower's semester and cumulative GPA
- Contact postgraduate supervisors, where applicable, for their written comments on their postgraduate research student's progress prior to the next disbursement
- Determine the student borrowers' progress against the maximum timeframe requirements
- Determine the student borrowers' progress against the pace of completion requirements.

Students maintaining the minimum SAP requirements will continue to have access to FSA.

## FSA WARNING

As the University assesses SAP at the end of each payment period, student borrowers who do not meet SAP will be placed on a financial aid warning for the subsequent payment period (semester), during which the student borrower may continue to receive FSA.

Students on FSA warning will be notified by email.

## APPEALS, PROBATION, AND SUSPENSION OF FSA ELIGIBILITY

Student borrowers who fail to make satisfactory progress after the warning period lose their FSA eligibility, unless they successfully appeal.

**Appeal Process** - Students who lose FSA eligibility because they failed to make satisfactory progress after the warning period may appeal based on: injury or illness, the death of a relative, or other special circumstances, such as a natural disaster.

Appeals must be formally requested in writing by the student borrower to the Financial Aid Coordinator at University within 14 working days from the date of being notified of the loss of eligibility. Appeals must contain the following:

- Written statement, explaining why the student failed to make satisfactory academic progress and what has changed in their situation that will allow them to make satisfactory progress at the next evaluation
- Supporting evidence, for example:
  - Copy of death certificate
  - Medical certificate from a registered medical practitioner
  - Student's degree planner
  - Written comments from Faculty Advisor, Associate Dean, and/or postgraduate supervisor.

Appeal documentation must be emailed to [us.financialaid@otago.ac.nz](mailto:us.financialaid@otago.ac.nz) or posted to:

Team Leader, Compliance Services  
International Office  
North End, Ground Floor, Clocktower  
University of Otago  
Dunedin

The appeal will be considered by Team Leader, Compliance Services and Manager, International Student Services. The student shall be notified of the result via email within 14 working days from receipt of the appeal documentation. The appeal decision is final.

Disbursements of funds will not be made while an appeal is being processed.

If the University determines that the student should be able to meet the SAP standards, and the appeal is successful, the student will be placed on probation for the next payment period only.

Students with an unsuccessful appeal will be suspended from receiving further FSA until SAP has been re-established. The onus will be on the student to contact the team at the end of the next payment period (semester) if they want to be considered again for FSA.

### **FSA PROBATION FOLLOWING A SUCCESSFUL APPEAL**

For a student who is on probation for FSA purposes, the Financial Aid Coordinator at the University will review the student's progress at the end of that probation payment period (semester).

A student may be placed on probation for one payment period per appeal. At the end of the probation period, the student must meet SAP or will be suspended from receiving further FSA until eligibility is re-established.

If the University determines, based on the appeal, that the student will require more than one payment period to meet progress standards, the student will be placed on probation and an academic reinstatement plan (for FSA eligibility purposes) will be developed for the student, in collaboration between the student, University of Otago, and the Faculty. The plan developed must ensure that the student is able to meet the University's satisfactory progress standards by a specific time or through to successful degree completion.

The Financial Aid Coordinator will review the student's progress at the end of one payment period, to determine if the student is meeting the requirements of the academic reinstatement plan. If the student is meeting the requirements of the academic reinstatement plan (or the SAP requirements, outside of any individualized academic reinstatement plan), the student is eligible to receive FSA if the student continues to meet those requirements.

### **NOTIFICATION**

If the SAP requirements have not been met, the Financial Aid Coordinator will notify the student borrower by email, sent to the student's preferred email address, within 14 working days of final grades being released, and inform if they have been:

- Placed on Financial Aid Warning, or
- Placed on Financial Aid Probation status, or
- Suspended to receive further FSA.

### **RE-ESTABLISHING FSA ELIGIBILITY**

Student borrowers deemed ineligible for FSA due to failing to meet SAP can re-establish eligibility for FSA.

This will be established by:

- a. Obtaining a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above; and
- b. On track for completion of programme within the maximum timeframe and pace components.

A student who believes they have regained FSA eligibility must submit the following documentation before eligibility can be determined:

- Completed University of Otago Financial Aid Application and the steps within

The Financial Aid Coordinator at the University will assess the application, check the SAP components, and notify students within 14 working days, in writing to the student's preferred email address, of their eligibility status.

### **CONTACT US**

For any enquires about FSA at the University of Otago, please email: [us.financial.aid@otago.ac.nz](mailto:us.financial.aid@otago.ac.nz)