

# FACT SHEET

## Student Financial Assistance Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy (SAP)

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The Department of Education's Satisfactory Academic Progress regulations went into effect on July 1, 2011 (regulations can be found at 34 CFR 668.34). Under the regulations, in order to receive federal financial aid students must meet a certain level of academic achievement and must complete a certain number of credits within a given time frame. The GW Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) reviews satisfactory academic progress at the end of each semester from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective and communicates directly with students.

### 1. Quantitative standards

Students must complete their programs within reasonable time frames based on the average length of the academic program not exceeding 12 semesters for a Bachelor's program, 12 semesters for a Master's program and 9 semesters for a certificate program. OSFA checks whether a student is on a pace that will allow he or she to complete the program within the maximum time frame. The formula OSFA uses to determine this pace is:

$$\text{Pace} = \text{total hours completed} \div \text{total hours attempted}$$

Hours completed are for courses the student completed successfully (received a passing grade). Total hours attempted includes incompletes, missing grades, failing grades, withdrawals (after the drop/add period) and administrative withdrawals. **As you can see, incompletes and missing grades will increase the denominator and thus reduce the calculated pace, causing some students to fail to meet SAP.**

### 2. Qualitative standards

GW continues to require that undergraduates maintain a 2.0 GPA and graduates maintain a 3.0 GPA. Note that if a student is allowed to repeat a course the first grade received remains on the record and is included in the GPA. Students determined not to be meeting this standard are at risk of losing federal financial aid and will likely be contacted by OSFA to that effect.

### 3. Evaluation by OSFA

At the end of each semester, including summer, when approximately 90% of the grades from the university have been reported (this is anecdotal – we have not been provided with a set schedule for SAP review), OSFA evaluates SAP for each federal financial aid recipient and contacts students directly. Initially students are given a warning and have one semester to meet the SAP requirements. If SAP is not met after the warning the student will be ineligible for all federal aid. OSFA will consider putting a student on probation for an additional semester in cases of extenuating circumstances. Students can appeal OSFA's determination.

#### 4. Analysis and CPS Actions

As you can imagine, the regulations and procedures involved in SAP are extensive and complicated. OSFA works with these regulations and is responsible for all evaluation. But since this issue greatly affects CPS students it is our responsibility to minimize its impact by doing the following:

- Instructors must ensure that all grades are submitted in a timely manner\*. Missing grades can trigger the issuance of a warning letter. While the issue can likely be fixed by an appeal to OSFA, having to do so will cause great stress and ill feelings on the part of the student. **University policy states that faculty have five (5) business days to submit grades after the final examination, or after the final class meeting if no exam is given.** CPS is bound by this policy, and students whose grades are not submitted by then are at risk of losing financial aid.

\*Please note that missing grades not only affect SAP, but also the ability of a student to graduate. Students with missing grades cannot be cleared for graduation, and inability to graduate also causes ill will and student dissatisfaction. The clearance process takes place very soon after the end of the semester, so timeliness of grade submission is critical.

- Instructors should only grant Incompletes to students when appropriate and necessary and in compliance with university policy:

The symbol *I* (Incomplete) indicates that a satisfactory explanation has been given the instructor for the student's inability to complete the required course work during the semester of enrollment. **At the option of the instructor, the symbol *I* may be recorded if a student, for reasons beyond the student's control, is unable to complete the work of the course, and if the instructor is informed of, and approves, such reasons before the date when grades must be reported.** This symbol may be used only if the student's prior performance and class attendance in the course have been satisfactory. Any failure to complete the work of a course that is not satisfactorily explained to the instructor before the date when grades must be turned in will be graded *F*, Failure. If acceptable reasons are later presented to the instructor, that instructor may initiate an appropriate grade change, which in all cases will include the symbol *I*. **The course work must be completed within the designated time period agreed upon by the instructor and student, but (except in the School of Business) no more than one calendar year from the end of the semester in which the course was taken.** If work for the course is not completed within the designated time, the grade will be automatically converted to a grade of *IF*, *Incomplete/Failure*, 0 quality points, and the grade-point average and academic standing recalculated.

**Because Incompletes are included in the denominator of the pace equation but not in the numerator, they can have a significant impact on SAP and must be used carefully.** Instructors wishing to grant an "I" must first contact their program director for approval. Upon receipt of approval and terms, OSE will generate an Incomplete contract in the form attached as an addendum to this memo (reviewing the terms for compliance with university policy) and will monitor the signed agreement for progress by keeping in touch with the student.\* OSE will also notify the student if he or she already has "I's" and/or missing grades, increasing the chance that an additional "I" would impact SAP. Students will then be required to negotiate directly with Financial Aid if wishing to be an "exception" to SAP for the given semester.

**\*Faculty may generate incomplete contracts themselves and send a fully signed copy to OSE for its records.**

- OSE will run grade reports on a regularly scheduled basis to determine who is in danger of failing to maintain the required GPA. OSE will place an advising hold on the accounts of such students, requiring them to contact OSE before registering for the following semester.

## INCOMPLETE CONTRACT

The symbol I (Incomplete) may be recorded if in the opinion of the instructor, “the student, for reasons beyond the student’s control, is unable to complete the work of the course, and if the instructor is informed of, and approves, such reasons before the date when grades must be reported.”

This symbol may be used only if the student’s prior performance and class attendance in the course have been satisfactory.

The course work must be completed within the designated time period agreed upon in this contract, but no later than one semester from the end of the semester in which the course was taken.

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Name:

Student ID:

Phone:

Email:

Course Dept. and Number:

Semester and Year of course registration:

Title of Course:

Instructor:

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List the specific course work, projects, assignments or tests needed to complete the course requirements:

Due Date:

I understand that after the due date the symbol “I” may be changed to a grade of “F” and that I am responsible for maintaining contact with the professor until a final grade is submitted.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Director Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_