

SIPA
POLICY ON SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS
FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FSA) RECIPIENTS

6/11/13

1. SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

CFR SOURCE:

Compilation of Federal Regulations (CFR):

34 CFR 668.34 – Student Assistance General Provisions

34 CFR 668.16(e) – Administrative Capability

34 CFR 668.32(f) – Student Eligibility - General

As per regulations cited above, SIPA maintains standards for satisfactory academic progress for federal aid recipients to assure that only students meeting those standards receive federal aid. SIPA's SAP standards include assessment of both qualitative and quantitative measures. Monitoring satisfactory academic progress is a shared responsibility of the Offices of Financial Aid and Student Affairs.

SIPA's SAP standards for federal aid are the same as those used for academic progress required for continuation in the degree programs, and are described and communicated on the SIPA website with the following text:

Academic Progress: Students must maintain a 3.0 minimum cumulative grade point average for all courses applicable to the MIA or MPA degree. A student whose performance does not meet these standards may not be permitted to continue to enroll in the degree program and appropriate action will be taken by the School. If at the end of a semester a graduate student fails to meet the GPA requirement, or accumulates 2 or more INC (Incomplete) grades, or in other ways fails to meet the standards for progress, the student will receive a written warning concerning the lack of academic progress. The student must remedy the problem within one semester. Failure to re-establish satisfactory academic standing may result in dismissal from SIPA, subject to review by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. A student who is dismissed must wait a minimum of one calendar year from the date of dismissal before applying for readmission to the graduate program.

Satisfactory academic progress for a full-time student is defined as a minimum GPA of 3.00 and completing a minimum of 9* credits per term toward the degree. Full-time students who do not earn this minimum number of credits will have a Dean's Hold placed on their registration.

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A Dean's Hold prevents a student from registering for classes and from receiving the degree. Students with two or more IN or UW or one or more grades of F will have their registration placed on Dean's Hold. In serious cases of unsatisfactory performance, a Dean's Hold may lead to dismissal from the School upon recommendation by the Committee of Deans. Students who are placed on Dean's Hold must be granted permission to register by the Associate Dean.

Effective Fall 2011: Students are required to complete all of the MIA or MPA degree requirements within five years of the first semester of matriculation at SIPA. The total number of attempted credits toward the degree should not exceed 90 credits.

Advanced Standing/Transfer credits do not impact the cumulative GPA, but count as both attempted and completed credits.

*Note – students enrolled in the part-time Executive MPA Program (EMPA) are required to complete an average of 6 credits per term instead of the 9 required for full-time students.

1.1 “AT LEAST AS STRICT...”

SIPA's academic progress requirements are identical for all students, regardless of financial aid application or eligibility status.

The Office of Student Affairs reviews progress for all students once per academic year at the conclusion of the spring semester (students in some small programs that begin in the summer are reviewed at the end of the fall, their second semester) and does not differentiate between aid applicants/recipients and non-applicants/recipients. All students found not to be meeting SIPA's SAP standards are reported to the Financial Aid Office, who then identifies those who have applied for aid or who have applied for it in the past.

1.2 CONSISTENT APPLICATION

SIPA only offers graduate programs, and holds students in all programs to the same qualitative standards for academic progress. The only differentiation in quantitative standards for students enrolled in the Executive Masters in Public Administration (EMPA) program; as that is predominantly a part-time program,

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students may maintain a lower number of credits completed per semester than required of full-time students and still be considered to be making SAP.

All students, regardless of program, are reviewed simultaneously by the same measures except as indicated above for those in the EMPA program.

1.3 REGULAR EVALUATIONS

The evaluation by the Offices of Student Affairs and Financial Aid to determine Financial Aid eligibility by SAP standards will be performed annually as described in Section 1.1 above.

If at the end of a semester a graduate student fails to meet the GPA requirement, or accumulates 2 or more INC grades, or in other ways fails to meet the standards for progress, the student will receive a written warning concerning the lack of academic progress. The student must remedy the problem within one semester. Failure to re-establish satisfactory academic standing may result in dismissal from SIPA, subject to review by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. A student who is dismissed must wait a minimum of one calendar year from the date of dismissal before applying for readmission to the graduate program.

1.4 GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA)

SIPA mandates a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale for the school's qualitative measure of SAP.

The Office of Student Affairs will notify the Financial Aid Office annually of any continuing students with a grade point average of less than 3.0. The Financial Aid Office will mark that student's record as not meeting SAP standards and notify them of the implications to their application for financial aid.

Students must maintain a 3.0 minimum cumulative grade point average for all courses applicable to the MIA or MPA degree. A student whose performance does not meet these standards may not be permitted to continue to enroll in the degree program and appropriate action will be taken by the School.

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1.5 MAXIMUM TIME FRAME AND PACE OF COMPLETION

Students are required to complete all of the MIA or MPA degree requirements within five years of the first semester of matriculation at SIPA, and by attempting no more than 167% of the total number of credits required to complete the SIPA portion of any degree, including dual degrees.

Students are expected to complete 60% of registered applicable courses per term.

1.6 EFFECT/TREATMENT OF “ATYPICAL” COURSES/SITUATIONS

See details in following sections.

1.6.1 EFFECT OF INCOMPLETES

Two or more grades of Incomplete (INC) will automatically trigger academic action and the student will be considered not to be making SAP.

INC grades are not calculated in the cumulative GPA. However, the credits for courses with INC grades count toward the maximum number of attempted credits toward the degree.

Depending on whether a passing or failing grade is awarded when a resolution of the INC grade is granted, SAP will be re-evaluated.

1.6.2 EFFECT OF WITHDRAWALS

Students who withdraw from a course receive either a W (withdrawal) or UW (unofficial withdrawal) grade.

Two or more UW grades will automatically trigger academic action and the student will be considered not to be making SAP. UW grades are not calculated in the cumulative GPA. The credits for courses with UW grades count toward the maximum number of attempted credits toward the degree.

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W grades are not calculated in the cumulative GPA. The credits for courses with W grades count toward the maximum number of attempted credits toward the degree.

1.6.3 EFFECT OF COURSE REPETITIONS

If a student repeats a course, only the first grade counts toward the GPA, so typically students are only advised to repeat a course if they fail it the first time so that they can fulfill the requirement; SIPA does not allow a student to repeat a course simply to improve their grade. Repeated grades count toward the maximum number of attempted credits toward the degree.

1.6.4 EFFECT OF DUAL DEGREES

Depending on the specific dual-degree program, students' maximum time frame for completing the degree may vary. The cumulative GPA for dual degrees will be based on semester(s) they are in residence at SIPA.

A dual-degree student has a maximum of 30 additional credits (above the minimum required) to compete the SIPA portion of the dual-degree program.

1.6.5 EFFECT OF ADVANCED STANDING

Advanced Standing does not impact the cumulative GPA, but count as both attempted and completed credits.

1.6.6 EFFECT OF TRANSFERS OF CREDIT FROM OTHER SCHOOLS OR INSTITUTIONS

Transfer credits do not impact the cumulative GPA, but count as both attempted and completed credits.

Please note that not all SIPA programs accept transfer credits.

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The 2-year MIA/MPA programs allow up to 12 points (1 residency unit) of transfer credit (referred to as Advanced Standing).

The Executive MPA also allows up to 6 transfer credits.

PEPM Students who have previously completed a graduate degree in economics or a related discipline may apply to transfer up to nine credits from their previous graduate degree toward the PEPM MPA degree.

The MPA in Environmental Science and Policy and MPA in Development Practice do not accept transfer credits.

Courses transferred must be applicable to the degree and have received an earned grade of B or better, and they are not factored into the SIPA GPA.

1.6.7 EFFECT OF CHANGES OF PROGRAM OF STUDY

Only students making SAP would be allowed to change their program. Students who change programs are held to the same standards for quantitative and qualitative measures and maximum time frame as students who originally matriculated in the program.

1.7 STATUS DEFINITIONS

SIPA does not use the Financial Aid Warning status, as SAP is not checked every semester unless a student is on Financial Aid Probation. SIPA does not offer any programs of one academic year or less in duration.

Financial Aid Probation: If at the end of the academic year, during SIPA's annual evaluation process, a student receiving federal aid is found to not be meeting SAP requirements, that student will be notified in writing and placed on Financial Aid Probation. Financial Aid Probation is a status defined by federal regulations as being ineligible for federal financial aid.

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If students on Financial Aid Probation appeal successfully, this status does then trigger off a SAP review at the conclusion of the subsequent semester.

Students may appeal Financial Aid Probation by following the steps described in Section 1.9, Appeals, below. A successful appeal combined with an academic plan may restore federal aid eligibility.

The following text is included in the letter to students who may be placed on Financial Aid Probation:

Federal regulations mandate that all students receiving any form of financial assistance from the federal government must be making satisfactory progress towards a degree in accordance with the school's standards. According to our records, your current aggregate academic performance is not meeting these standards; please see http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources_services/student_affairs/academic_policies/grading_system.html for details on SIPA's academic policies. Academic progress is determined at SIPA using both quantitative and qualitative measures; students must earn an aggregate grade point average of at least 3.0 and complete a minimum of 9 credits per semester (*note: this figure is 6 credits per semester for students in the part-time EMPA program*).

This status precludes your eligibility for federal student aid, including Direct Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, Graduate PLUS Loans and Work Study. It does not disqualify you from consideration from various private loans available to otherwise eligible students, such as those detailed at http://www.columbia.edu/cu/sfs/docs/Grad_Fin_Aid/Private_Loans/index.html. But at this time, we are unable to consider you for loans or Work Study from the federal government.

You may appeal this decision by working with an academic advisor in the Office of Student Affairs to implement an academic plan for remediation that will be submitted to the Director of Financial Aid for approval. If your appeal is approved, you will be determined to be

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eligible for federal aid on a probationary basis. Your progress will be monitored at the end of the [upcoming] semester, and in order to continue receiving that aid for the spring 2014 semester, you must be meeting those standards. If at that time you are not meeting SIPA's standards, your federal aid for the spring semester will be cancelled.

We hope that this will not be an obstacle to your goals and that by this time next year you will have joined the ranks of SIPA alumni. If you have any questions about your financial aid eligibility, please contact us at 212-854-6216 or sipa_finaid@columbia.edu. Have a good summer, and we hope to see you in the fall.

1.8 PROVISION FOR A FINANCIAL AID WARNING STATUS

SIPA evaluates SAP on an annual basis and per federal regulations therefore does not use the Financial Aid Warning status.

1.9 APPEALS

If a student is not meeting SIPA's SAP standards and is determined to be ineligible for federal aid as a result of that status, they do have the opportunity to appeal the decision to the Offices of Financial Aid and Student Affairs.

Appeals must be submitted to the Director of Financial Aid, who will work with the appropriate Dean in the Office of Student Affairs to evaluate the merits of the student's appeal. If the Dean has met with the student and is confident that the mutually agreed upon academic plan is sufficient to put the student on track to graduate within 167% or less of the prescribed 4-semester timeframe, the appeal is likely to be approved. The Director of Financial Aid will be notified, and the student's financial aid records will be updated accordingly.

Aid received following a successful appeal will be awarded on a probationary basis only, for the duration of one semester. After that semester, the student's academic record will be reviewed for compliance with the academic plan submitted during the appeal process. If the student is then found to be satisfying the criteria established in the academic plan, their federal aid will continue for the following semester without interruption. If after receiving

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federal aid on a probationary basis for one semester the student is found not to be meeting the standards set in their academic plan, federal aid for the following semester is cancelled.

The following language regarding appeals is found in the original communication sent to students informing them that they are not making SAP:

You may appeal this decision by working with an academic advisor in the Office of Student Affairs to implement an academic plan for remediation that will be submitted to the Director of Financial Aid for approval. If your appeal is approved, you will be determined to be eligible for federal aid on a probationary basis. Your progress will be monitored at the end of the fall 2013 semester, and in order to continue receiving that aid for the spring 2014 semester, you must be meeting those standards. If at that time you are not meeting SIPA's standards, your federal aid for the spring semester will be cancelled.

1.9.1 ACADEMIC PLANS

An academic plan is completed by the student and is submitted to the academic advisor in OSA who will then notify the Director of Financial Aid if it is approved. This is required for all students who appeal the SAP decision.

Students with a successful appeal must meet the terms set forth in their academic plan in order to maintain federal aid eligibility.

1.10 RESTORING ELIGIBILITY

As explained in section 1.9, students not meeting SAP standards have the right to appeal, and the process is explained to them in the original notification they receive instructing them that they are not making SAP. A student who is ineligible for federal funds (either an appeal is unsuccessful or the student does not appeal) may restore eligibility if they are still enrolled for the following academic year.

The appeal procedure is explained in section 1.9. If a student not making SAP either does not appeal, or if they appeal unsuccessfully and return for the subsequent year to enroll and apply for financial aid, their academic progress

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will be reviewed after the following spring semester as per normal procedures. It should be noted that most SIPA programs are less than 3 years in length, so following a year of ineligibility, most students will have had an opportunity to complete their program, so the 167% of program length policy must be examined as well for any such students.

1.11 NOTIFICATIONS

Students who are not meeting SIPA SAP standards must be notified of this status, how it impacts financial aid eligibility, their right to appeal, instructions on the appeal procedure, and how the results of the appeal procedure may impact their eligibility.

The Financial Aid Office will notify all students found by the Office of Student Affairs not to be meeting SIPA SAP standards. This notification will be sent via email to the student's UNI email account, which is consistent with SIPA policy that all official notifications from the school are sent to the UNI email address. To avoid confusion about types of aid for which a student does not qualify, this notification is not sent to international students.

The text of this notification is as follows:

Federal regulations mandate that all students receiving any form of financial assistance from the federal government must be making satisfactory progress towards a degree in accordance with the school's standards. According to our records, your current aggregate academic performance is not meeting these standards; please see http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources_services/student_affairs/academic_policies/grading_system.html for details on SIPA's academic policies. Academic progress is determined at SIPA using both quantitative and qualitative measures; students must earn an aggregate grade point average of at least 3.0 and complete a minimum of 9 credits per semester (*note: this figure is 6 credits per semester for students in the part-time EMPA program*).

This status precludes your eligibility for federal student aid, including Direct Stafford Loans, Perkins Loans, Graduate PLUS Loans and Work Study. It does not disqualify you from consideration from various

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private loans available to otherwise eligible students, such as those detailed at

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/sfs/docs/Grad_Fin_Aid/Private_Loans/index.html. But at this time, we are unable to consider you for loans or Work Study from the federal government.

You may appeal this decision by working with an academic advisor in the Office of Student Affairs to implement an academic plan for remediation that will be submitted to the Director of Financial Aid for approval. If your appeal is approved, you will be determined to be eligible for federal aid on a probationary basis. Your progress will be monitored at the end of the [subsequent] semester, and in order to continue receiving that aid for the [following spring] semester, you must be meeting those standards. If at that time you are not meeting SIPA's standards, your federal aid for the spring semester will be cancelled.

We hope that this will not be an obstacle to your goals and that by this time next year you will have joined the ranks of SIPA alumni. If you have any questions about your financial aid eligibility, please contact us at 212-854-6216 or sipa_finaid@columbia.edu. Have a good summer, and we hope to see you in the fall.