



LAWRENCEVILLE | ALPHARETTA-NORTH FULTON

# Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy

## Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) Standards

Federal regulation stipulates that schools must monitor and ensure students maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) requirements to receive financial aid. The minimum SAP standards are:

**Maximum Time Frame:** Students must complete their programs within 150% of the credit hour length of their primary program;

**Completion Ratio:** Students must complete at least 2/3 cumulative attempted credit hours; and

**Cumulative Grade Point (CGPA):** Students must maintain a 2.0 minimum cumulative GPA.

Students who fail to maintain the minimum Cumulative Completion Rate and Cumulative Grade Point Average are eligible to receive financial aid for one additional semester and are placed in the Financial Aid Warning status. This provides one semester to achieve the minimum requirements needed to regain eligibility. If students fail to meet the minimum SAP standards by the end of their Warning semester, they will be placed on Financial Aid Suspension and are no longer eligible for financial aid.

Student who exceeding their 150% of the credit hours for their program will not get a Warning. A Warning semester is not permitted per federal regulation for this requirement. Preliminary emails will be sent for max-hours students as a courtesy to allow them some additional time if student decided to appeal before the next semester begins.

Eligibility for continued financial aid will only be re-established as follows: a) the student subsequently meets the Satisfactory Academic Progress standards; or b) the student successfully appeals and is placed on Academic Plan status.

## SAP Calculation

Students' SAP progress will be reviewed at the end of each semester of attendance and will be calculated after official grades have been posted.

**Completion Ratio:** The Financial Aid Office abides by the institutional policy for calculating passed and attempted hours. The attempted credit hours amount includes withdrawals, learning support, credits in which financial aid is not used, transfer and

repeated courses. To calculate completion ratio, the number of passed credit hours is divided by the cumulative attempted credit hours.

***Incomplete Grade Policy Update March 2020 (CARES ACT):***

Incomplete Grades will no longer be calculated in the attempted credit hours. This will create a temporary SAP status until the student finishes the courses and official grades are posted in Banner. Once the official grades are posted, the SAP calculation will be done again.

**WARNING STATUS:** If a student was in warning status before the Incomplete grades were given one of two scenarios will occur once the final grades are posted:

- If the student passes the courses, no further action is required on the student part and they will stay in good standing.
- If the student does not pass the courses and the Completion Rate and/or GPA is below the federal minimums, then aid will be suspended and the student may owe a balance.

***Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA):*** The Financial Aid Office abides by the institutional policy for calculating CGPA. Learning support classes and withdrawals are not included in CGPA unless the student received a Withdrawal Failing (WF) grade. If a student retakes a class in order to raise a grade or to receive credit for the courses, all grades are used to compute their CGPA.

***Maximum Time Frame:*** Students who are mathematically unable to complete their program of study within the 150% maximum time frame will be placed on Financial Aid Suspension. A Warning semester is not permitted per federal regulation for this requirement. Every course taken and transferred into GTC is counted within the maximum time frame calculation. As an example, a student who has a program which requires 70 credits hours to graduate will be eligible to earn up to 105 credits (150%) without exceeding their maximum time frame

***Transferred Credit, Earned Credits:*** Credit hours earned by testing or other non-standard means are counted in the SAP calculations as both hours attempted and earned. This includes hours earned from Credit by Exam (*i.e. CLEP Exam.*)

The SAP calculation is based on the program pursued at the time of evaluation. Situations may arise in which changes in program status may alter Satisfactory Academic Progress. Students who are suspended may self-identify in order to request that their SAP standing be re-evaluated as a result of a different degree program.



### **COVID-19 Exemptions for Spring 2020:**

Section 3509 of the CARES Act allows institutions to exclude from the quantitative component (pace measurement) of satisfactory academic progress (SAP) attempted credits a student was unable to complete as a result of the COVID-19 national emergency. The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) recognizes that the change to fully online instruction may have impeded some students' ability to complete course requirements. Therefore, Gwinnett Technical College, in accordance with the TCSG procedure, will implement a special grade for affected students enrolled in Spring 2020 classes. Once the term is complete, students who withdrew from coursework as a result of the circumstances surrounding the disruption of instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis will receive a grade of "Z". The "Z" grade will not be calculated in a student's GPA or Completion Rate and will provide for a "no-penalty withdrawal" for students.

## **Appeal Process**

**Completion Rate and Cumulative GPA Appeals:** Students placed on Suspension may appeal their Financial Aid status by submitting an electronically signed SAP Appeal Form through Dynamic Forms. The appeal must include a detailed letter explaining extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control and how the extenuating circumstances have changed to ensuring future academic success. Students must also include documentation to support the extenuating circumstances that occurred during the time frames specified within the letter. All appeals that are approved for CGPA and/or completion rate deficits will require an Education Plan. Approval notifications will provide details regarding the submission of an Education Plan.

An extenuating circumstance can be defined as:

- Medical Emergencies or health issues
- Death of a student's immediate family member
- Unexpected military service; or
- Other Extenuating Circumstances.

Acceptable documentation that can be submitted should include (but is not limited to):

- Hospitalization or medical records
- Death certificates, obituaries, or funeral programs
- Official military activation orders
- Other documents verifying the extenuating circumstance.



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**Maximum Time Frame Appeal (updated starting Fall 2021):** Students who are ineligible due to maximum hours should submit an electronically signed SAP Maximum Time Frame appeal through Dynamic Forms. The student must include a copy of their Degree Works in the appeal. The appeal must include a detailed letter explaining extenuating circumstances and how their circumstances have changed to ensuring future academic success, along with documents to support the circumstances that occurred during the time frames specified within the letter. All appeals that are approved for maximum time frame will require an Education Plan. Approval notifications will provide details regarding the submission of an Education Plan.

- **Maximum Time Frame Only:** These are students on SAP due to exceeding the maximum time frame while still maintaining the minimum Cumulative Completion Rate and Cumulative Grade Point Average.
- **Trifectas and Doubles:** If a student has reached their maximum time frame and the GPA and/or Completion Rate is below the requirement for receiving financial aid, the student will do a maximum time frame appeal and address the other areas as appropriate.

**Additional Information:** Students returning from Academic Dismissal will not automatically regain financial aid. They must follow the appeal process applicable to their situation. Students are responsible for the quality and content of their appeals. Published on the Gwinnett Technical Website are SAP Appeal tips for students to utilize in preparing their appeal. Students should abide by published appeal deadlines each semester.

Once an appeal is submitted to the Financial Aid Office it will be reviewed by the Satisfactory Academic Progress Appeals Committee. This committee consists of faculty and staff from the Gwinnett Technical College community. Committee members will review the appeal based upon the SAP appeal criteria. Decisions are based upon determination of the committee majority.

If a student is currently enrolled, on suspension or maximum hours, and misses the semester deadline to appeal, they lose the chance to receive aid for that semester.

**IMPORTANT:** Students are only permitted one appeal per aid year. Should the student violate their SAP Academic Plan due to a subsequent extenuating circumstance, the second appeal must be approved by Financial Aid Leadership. The student should submit another full appeal for review. Second appeals will only be approved in extreme circumstances.

## Appeal Determination

**Approved Appeals (Updated Fall 2021):** Students who have been granted appeal approval will be notified via student email. Students with approved appeals must complete an Education Plan through Dynamic Forms. The Education Plan will show what courses the student needs to



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complete the program of study. Students can only register for courses listed on the Education Plan. Student may register for courses out of sequence.

Students cannot change programs or add a second program while on a SAP Academic Plan. If they do so, they must go through the appeal process for the new program. If the student was granted an appeal approval and had already been admitted to two programs of study (Admissions must have record of this), both programs may/should be added to the Education Plan. There is only one exemption to this rule:

**Umbrella Rule Exemption:** The Financial Aid Office has opted to allow one exception to this requirement for any student who is changing their major to a higher credential within their same area of study. As an example; a student wants to move from Business Technology Diploma to Business Technology Degree. Students will be required to self-identify and must make this request after their change of major has been updated in Banner so the SAP Specialist is made aware of the need to update their SAP status, which is a manual process. This exemption can also be used for students changing the concentration in the same program of study. This exemption is only for current students.

The Financial Aid Office will review SAP Academic Plans each term after drop/add for Maximum Time Frame students. If a student registers for a course outside the Education Plan, the course is not eligible for Financial Aid. The SAP Specialist will contact the Registrar's Office and have the class "K.O." which is the Banner code to keep aid from paying for the course. If registered courses differ from the plan, the student will be responsible for the balance due.

Once a student regains eligibility by meeting minimum SAP standards they will be placed back into good standing. This determination will only occur at the conclusion of each semester after all official grades have been posted.

If a student does not attend GTC within 3 semesters of their SAP appeal approval, they will be required to submit a new appeal and follow current SAP policies and procedures.

If the student on an Education Plan due to **Cumulative Completion Rate and/or GPA**, the student must successfully pass all courses. Student cannot receive a **D, F, W, or WF** in any of the courses on the Plan (This does not apply to **Maximum Time Frame Only** students unless they fail to meet Cumulative Completion Rate and/or GPA).

Dual Enrollment Students are held to the GPA and Completion Rate requirements. The advisor will check the box indicating the Education Plan is for a Dual Enrollment student. Classes are not to be listed on the Plan and the End Term date will be two years from when the Education Plan was approved.



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If the student is on an Education Plan due to **Maximum Time Frame Only**, student must maintain Cumulative GPA and Cumulative Completion Rate at or above the minimum requirement in order to continue with the Plan.

The Education Plan is no longer valid after the **End Term Date** and aid will be suspended. The End Term Date is two terms after the last term listed on the Education Plan. If the End Term Date needs to be changed, the student must get a new Education Plan from the advisor. Students failing to comply with the terms and conditions of the Education Plan will result in termination of financial aid for subsequent semesters. There are two student friendly exemptions:

1. **Max Twice Exemption:** A student was on an Education Plan for Maximum Time Frame only and uses the Umbrella Rule to move to a higher credential which returns the student to good standing. If the student approaches the maximum time frame for the higher credential and the original Education Plan has not expired the student is eligible to do an updated Education Plan rather than a new appeal. Students will be required to self-identify and must see an Enrollment Advisor who will inform the SAP Specialist of the need to update their SAP status and process the new Education Plan, which is a manual process. This exemption is only for current students.
2. **APLAN 2 to Max Exemption:** If a current student is on an Education Plan for GPA and/or completion rate and is now reaching the maximum time frame for that program, the student will be eligible to do an updated Education Plan.

## Re-admit Students

Students who are in suspension and leave the college for more than 2 semesters are considered re-admit students. The SAP status the student left with is the status the student will have when they return. There is only one exemption to this rule: HS21/HLC Exemption. If a student was formally in the Healthcare Certificate Program that was phased out in 2017, they may qualify for this exemption. There are three criteria the student must meet in order to qualify for this exemption:

- Suspended for Maximum Time Frame only
- GPA is 2.0 or better and Completion Rate is 67% or better
- Admitted into the new Interdisciplinary Studies Program Associate Degree

The advisor will need to inform the SAP specialist that a student is a candidate for the exemption. The specialist will check to see if the student meets the criteria and update Banner accordingly.



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Re-admit students who left on an Education Plan:

- **Not Expired:** If the re-admit student returns to Gwinnett Tech in the same program, then the Education Plan is valid. If the student re-admits into a different program, then the student will need to do a new appeal. Enrollment Advisers are tasked with checking the SAP Status of re-admit students and informing the student if their Education Plan is still valid or if they need to do a new appeal. If the Enrollment Adviser is unsure, they will need to confer with the SAP Specialist.
- **Expired Education Plan:** The Re-admit Rule states that the SAP status a student leaves on is the status they have when they return to Gwinnett Tech. The plan will be valid for the return semester and Banner will term it when the SAP process are performed at the end of term. If the student re-admits into a different program, then the student will need to do a new appeal. Enrollment Advisers are tasked with checking the SAP Status of re-admit students and informing the student if their Education Plan is still valid or if they need to do a new appeal. If the Enrollment Adviser is unsure, they will need to confer with the SAP Specialist.

**Denied Appeals:** Determination of a denied appeal is final. Students are permitted one appeal per aid year. It is important that students understand the process and submit all required documentation with their initial appeal. Denied appeals resulting from incomplete or insufficient supporting documentation will not be reconsidered. You may discuss your denial with our office; however, a denied decision will not be overturned due to any additional information provided during this meeting.

## SAP Notifications

All SAP correspondence will be sent to students GTC email. Please note: Financial Aid Warning does not require action by the student; this designation is intended to inform students in advance that they will lose eligibility in the subsequent semester if they do not meet the minimum requirements at the conclusion of the next semester.

**\*\*\*Emergency Preparedness Plan\*\*\*** *In the event of a State or National emergency situation, all the policies and procedures in this document are subject to change according to the U.S. Education Department's and/or Technical College System of Georgia's guidelines. Updates to any policies and procedures during emergency situations will be documented and communicated to staff and students accordingly.*