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STAFF RECOMMENDATION FOR EXPANSION OF TUITION GRANT ELIGIBILITY

Acceptable Appeal Situations:

The Commission currently allows and accepts appeals for consideration for the following circumstances:

1. Failure to meet Satisfactory Progress Requirements
2. "Dependent" student's marriage after filing the FAFSA
3. Spring-Only Grant Requests for unusual circumstances
4. Late Applications
5. Properly documented situations as approved by the appropriate college office that qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
6. Residency Determination

While the overall goal is to have students obtain a degree within a 4-year timespan, a handful of students annually need just one additional semester or year to complete their degree program. Despite full-time enrollment being 12 credit-hours, there is no bachelor's degree program that can be completed with only 96 credit-hours. The Commission's appeals committee would like the opportunity to allow students to appeal for a maximum of two additional semesters (not to exceed a total of 10 semesters of eligibility) on a case-by-case basis, for those students who can demonstrate successful completion of a degree within that additional timeframe. Commission Staff estimate less than 50 students annually would appeal and, if able to accept appeals for this reason, would require an academic action plan outlining the ability to earn a degree within the additional requested time. By allowing appeals for this reason, students close to the finish line would not be forced to either walk away from their progress or rely on additional student loans to earn their degree.

The staff recommends that the Commission consider the following change to the Tuition Grants Program Appeals Policy:

Effective with the 2022-2023 Academic Year, the South Carolina Tuition Grants Appeals Committee can begin accepting appeals for students needing one or two additional semesters beyond the 8-semester limit to complete their degree program, to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

A vote by the South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission is required to change the currently approved Acceptable Appeal Situations.

Calculation of Maximum Grants for Non-Traditional Programs

When the Commission voted to create a Non-Traditional Calendar Program policy, allowing participating colleges and universities to request approval for students enrolled in such programs to be eligible to

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receive South Carolina Tuition Grants, any Non-Traditional Program which had differing Tuition and Fees charges compared to that institution's Traditional "Day" program, had a Maximum Tuition Grants Amount pro-rated based on the percentage difference from the Traditional Program. The Commission members of that time worried students may choose to attend a college's Non-Traditional Program, as the value of the Tuition Grant may extend further compared to the tuition and fees of the Traditional Program. At a time when the Non-Traditional Programs comprised solely of evening classes or classes taken at satellite campuses around the State, this was an important factor for those Commission Members.

With most of the currently approved Non-Traditional Programs being offered as "online degree programs," it appears to Commission Staff that students are enrolling in programs with the structure that works best for the student, whether that be a Traditional "Day" Program or a Non-Traditional/Online Program. With each college and university having differing Tuition and Fees amounts compared to others, students will still choose the institution of higher learning that best fits their needs. To expand this access to higher education, Commission Staff would like to propose that the Maximum Grant for all Programs at all participating colleges and universities be set at the Commission-approved Maximum Grant, without proration for Non-Traditional Programs. If approved, this change would result in an additional \$2.4 million in Tuition Grants funds being paid to eligible students. This increase is well within the Commission's current budget for at least the next several award cycles.

The staff recommends that the Commission consider the following change to the determination of the Maximum Grant amount for approved Non-Traditional Calendar Programs:

Effective with the 2022-2023 Academic Year, the Maximum Grant amount of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program shall be the Commission approved Maximum Grant at all participating colleges and universities, regardless of Traditional or Non-Traditional Program designation.

A vote by the South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission is required to change the current method used to determine Maximum Grants for Non-Traditional Calendar Programs.