

NJ GEAR UP Scholarship Administration Policy Dec 2009

Related to Service Delivery from Campus Programs to Students

Eligibility and administrative guidelines governing the scholarship as it relates to processing by the Commission on Higher Education and HESAA have been established and remain in effect. These documents and other related scholarship information can be found at www.nj.gov/highereducation/gearup/scholarship.htm.

Student Eligibility

As defined in the NJ GEAR UP State Project successful proposal for funding (2005-2011), students are eligible for the NJ GEAR UP scholarship if they:

- Participate in the program in seventh grade
- Complete the program (see definition in next section)
- Graduate from high school
- Enroll in an associate or bachelor's degree program at a NJ college or university
- Participate in the program **every year** beginning in seventh grade*

*Provision added October 2009. Applies to students who entered the program in 2009 as sixth or seventh graders and all subsequent classes (2010 and 2011).

Definition of Student Completion of NJ GEAR UP

A student has completed the NJ GEAR UP program when he or she has participated in a substantive manner during the academic year and/or summer components of the program beginning in seventh grade and continuing each year until high school graduation. The official record of a student's completion will be maintained in the database in the form of active student records for each year, beginning in seventh grade and supplemented by documentation in the student files. Determination of whether a student has completed the program will be made in the senior year by CHE, based on the database record, using the database submitted for the Annual Performance Report.

Definition of Substantive/Active Student Participation in the Program

A student's active or substantive participation in the NJ GEAR UP program must be defined by the local campus program. Each campus program must maintain a definition of substantive participation at that site for the academic year and the summer components in its policies and procedures manual and other relevant program documents. There must also be documentation in the students' files that supports the decision to make these students active in the database.

Although there is no statewide definition of "active" or "substantive" participation at this time, programs should consider the high dollar value of the scholarship and the need for fairness when developing their definitions. They should consider students with hardship and those who have faithfully maintained annual participation in the program as well as the standard of participation in comparison to other NJ GEAR UP programs.

Program Responsibility

As with all other student services described in the NJ GEAR UP State Project proposal, contracted campus programs (CHAMP/GEAR UP at Rowan University, College Bound SMT/GEAR UP at Passaic County Community College, SMILE/GEAR UP at Mercer County Community College, College Bound/GEAR UP at New Jersey City University, and Consortium for Pre-College Education in Greater Newark at NJIT) must assist students in qualifying for the scholarship by:

- Informing the Commission that the list of scholarship-eligible students in the database is accurate in a timely manner (by APR deadline each year) and submitting appeals for students who may have stopped out (two weeks prior to the APR deadline each year)
- Maintaining accurate annual student files which contain documentation of a student's participation in the program (updated Personal Education Plan, report card or transcript, course schedule, sign-in sheets, test scores, career inventory, and/or other information that provides a record of substantive program participation)
- Discussing the scholarship with GEAR UP students each year as part of the Personal Education Plan
- Providing information about college financial aid to juniors, seniors and their parents, including the student's responsibilities regarding the GEAR UP scholarship
- Actively assisting seniors in the process of making a college-going decision, including taking the SAT or ACT, writing the college application essay, choosing a college, applying for admission and financial aid, and completing the scholarship form by the deadline
- Having the program director review the list of eligible students and make a final determination based on satisfactory participation
- Ensuring that ineligible students understand that they will not receive the award.

NOTE: **Guidance counselors** or other third parties are NOT to be a point of contact regarding the GEAR UP scholarship for any reason. They are not to disseminate or collect forms or provide letters making any promises about the scholarship. The only information they are to provide about this topic is contact info for the GEAR UP program and Commission staff.

Appeal of Student Eligibility by Program Directors

If a student has "stopped out" (missed up to two years of active student participation in the program) and the program wishes to appeal his or her eligibility for the scholarship, they may do so utilizing the **Stop Out Appeal** process. The appeal is to be submitted to CHE by the program director; students may not appeal for themselves. Appeals must be made at least two weeks prior to the Annual Performance Report deadline each year. The requirement that a student must have participated in the seventh grade will not be waived.

Directors may appeal by sending an explanation of why the student stopped out and for how long. If the director feels that the student has had adequate participation, they may recommend that the student's eligibility be reinstated.

Student Responsibility

As defined on the NJ GEAR UP website and in practice, students must, for each year for which they are applying for the scholarship:

- Keep their address current with GEAR UP program staff
- Complete the scholarship form by the stated deadline. Students are ultimately responsible for returning a **correct and complete** form. If the GEAR UP staff chooses to send forms on behalf of students, they must check the scholarship eligible list prior to sending
- Students must indicate the New Jersey college that they will attend. This is the only way to know where to send the scholarship funds. Forms received without an eligible college listed will be discarded
- Complete the FAFSA
- Submit high school transcript (recent high school graduates) or current college transcript (continuing students)
- Meet all other scholarship and institutional requirements
- Respond promptly to the financial aid office at their colleges to sign their check

Once they enter college, students should communicate directly with their financial aid office and CHE staff with issues or questions. In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), once students

reach the age of 18, GEAR UP staff and guidance counselors – and in most cases, parents – should not act or speak on their behalf.

Commission Staff Procedures

Once the director has confirmed the list of seniors, the Commission staff sends a mailing to the students' addresses on file in the database. Directors may also download forms and distribute forms to eligible students only.

As forms are returned to CHE, student info is entered into a database with the updated address, college, amount, and semester. The final list is sent to NJ BEST for check processing. Checks are made out to both the student and the college. Each semester the amount will be ½ of the maximum Pell Grant amount unless otherwise stated.

In the case of an issue with the scholarship, students must go to their financial aid office first. Commission staff will intervene on a student's behalf if necessary.

Financial Aid Rep Responsibilities

Outlined in the NJ GEAR UP Scholarship Guide

Process

- (ongoing) Programs input accurate records of annual student participation
- By December 30, 2009 – CHE creates new scholarship forms.
- By January 1, 2010 – if not done already, programs review their internal definitions of substantive/active student participation and update all relevant documents with that information
- By February 1, 2010 – CHE makes new scholarship-eligible DB query and report available
- By February 1, 2010 – Programs begin utilizing the **Scholarship Eligibility and Responsibility Form** in PEP or other sessions so that students, especially seniors, sign off confirming that they understand the scholarship eligibility rules
- By February 1 each year – programs run the scholarship-eligible list in the database, beginning the process of checking their records to see if the list accurately reflects those students who should receive the scholarship
- Two weeks prior to the APR Deadline – submit appeals for student who are not eligible to an absence of up to two years. There will be no appeal for students who did not participate in 7th grade.
- By APR deadline each year – program verifies via report questions and the database submission that the scholarship eligible list is accurate and that appeals have been made on behalf of students, if appropriate. Programs should send all outstanding the **Seniors' Scholarship Eligibility and Responsibility Form** with the APR.
- April 30 each year – CHE sends letter informing all 7th graders of new rules
- By April 30 each year – CHE sends official mailing of scholarship eligibility
- By June 1 of each year – students submit the scholarship form. Only students who have signed the **Seniors' Scholarship Eligibility and Responsibility Form** will receive the scholarship. CHE sends the list of fall semester applicants to NJ BEST, where checks are processed and sent directly to the institutions. Students who miss this deadline will be added to the spring semester list.
- By August 31 each year – students in grades 7-11 have received and signed **Scholarship Eligibility and Responsibility Form**
- December of each year – CHE sends the list of spring semester applicants to NJ BEST, where checks are processed and sent directly to the institutions.