

Guidance for Current State Scholarship Recipients and Frequently Asked Questions

The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) recognizes that these are unprecedented times for our state scholarship recipients, families, and public and independent higher education institutions. During the 2020 Spring semester, and possibly future semesters, state scholarship recipients will be placed in academic settings that they may not be familiar with, including distance education. Our highest priority is to ensure that every student attending SC public and independent colleges and universities has the opportunity to succeed. CHE will continue to look for ways to help to address the financial burdens that are confronting students and families this year. We are working as much as we can to assist students within our limited authorities as a state agency.

CHE has received inquiries from students, parents and institutions about campus changes that may have had an impact on academic performance during the 2020 Spring term. College and university faculty have been very sensitive to instructional adjustments on their campuses as well as the need for students to meet scholarship renewal requirements by the end of Summer term. It is important to share that the eligibility requirements for the Palmetto Fellows and LIFE Scholarships are statutorily mandated and therefore not within CHE's authority to revise at this time. CHE reviewed possible areas in the state scholarship regulations that could assist students who have undergone special circumstances related to COVID-19 and addressed within its authority. In review of the current statute and regulations governing the Palmetto Fellows and LIFE Scholarship programs, CHE staff has identified an immediate way to provide some relief to current scholarship recipients

The Palmetto Fellows and LIFE Scholarship regulations presently require continuous enrollment once the student begins attendance. However, there may be cases where, due to financial, medical or other COVID-19 related circumstances, students may need to enroll in the 2021 Spring term rather than enroll this fall. **Eligible students who decide to enroll in the 2021 Spring term instead of the 2020 Fall term due to COVID-19 related circumstances are temporarily granted a waiver of this continuous enrollment requirement.**

Allowance for a Break in Enrollment for the 2020 Fall Term (Students must return 2021 Spring Term)

CHE has enacted emergency regulations to allow for students to utilize a break in enrollment for the 2020 Fall term only. Students must meet the continued eligibility requirements for the Palmetto Fellows or LIFE Scholarship in order to utilize a break in enrollment for 2020 Fall term **and receive the second term of the award upon re-enrolling for the 2021 Spring term.**

A summary of the emergency option is as follows:

- Students who were eligible for the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship entering the 2020 Fall term can utilize a break in enrollment for the 2020 Fall only. **Students must re-enroll for the 2021 Spring term.** Eligible students can continue to receive the scholarship for their remaining eligible terms **upon re-enrolling for 2021 Spring term.**
- Students who were eligible for the LIFE Scholarship entering the 2020 Fall term can utilize a break in enrollment for the 2020 Fall term only. **Students must re-enroll for the 2021 Spring term.** Students will be eligible for their remaining terms of eligibility **upon re-enrolling for 2021 Spring term.**
- Students who were ineligible for the Palmetto Fellows or LIFE Scholarship entering the 2020 Fall term can still utilize a break in enrollment. However, students will not be eligible for the award upon re-enrollment for 2021 Spring term.
- All students, regardless of their eligibility or the decision to use the break in enrollment option, will still be responsible for meeting all scholarship eligibility requirements, including the established annual credit hour requirements (minimum 30 institutional cumulative credit hours for the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship for continued eligibility and an average of 30 credit hours for the LIFE Scholarship), **by the end of 2021 Summer term(s)**, to be eligible for the awards for the 2021-22 academic year.

Students engaging a break in enrollment for Fall 2020 term cannot enroll at any institution of higher education for the 2020 Fall term. If student intends to take a break in enrollment for the 2020 Fall term, they are advised to notify the financial aid office at their home institution of their intentions.

CHE staff will continue to explore all possibilities that exist within current statute and regulations that may provide current scholarship recipients a fair and equitable way to maintain their state scholarship eligibility for the next academic year.

Frequently Asked Questions for State Scholarship Recipients

What happens if a student's cumulative GPA falls below a 3.0 or they do not earn 30 credit hours by the end of the academic year?

Students have the opportunity to increase their GPA by the end of the academic year (Summer 2020 term). LIFE Scholarship recipients may attend any eligible institution to attempt to increase their LIFE GPA and credit hours.

Palmetto Fellows Scholarship recipients must attend their home institution if they intend to increase their GPA during in the summer. However, Palmetto Fellows Scholarship recipients may attend another eligible institution if they wish to increase their credit hours, provided that their home institution will accept the credit hours for graduation purposes.

For students who fail to maintain the 3.0 cumulative GPA and 30 credit hours earned requirements, they should work directly with their home institution for additional support. CHE has an official appeal process in place. However, **students should exhaust all appeal options (academic and financial) at their home institution prior to submitting an appeal to CHE.** Applications for appeal may be obtained from the Commission on Higher Education's web site at:

<https://www.che.sc.gov/Students,FamiliesMilitary/StudentAppeals.aspx>. CHE's appeal process is currently open and will close at 5:00pm on September 4th, 2020.

I am struggling with online coursework this semester and do not feel it is the best modality for my learning style. If my institution announces that the 2020 Fall semester will continue to be all online classes due to the COVID-19 outbreak and I choose to take the Fall semester off will I lose my Palmetto Fellows or LIFE Scholarship?

CHE has enacted emergency regulations that allow students who are meeting the continued eligibility criteria to be able to utilize a break in enrollment for the Fall 2020 term and not forfeit their Palmetto Fellows Scholarship or a term of eligibility for their LIFE Scholarship.

Can I use my LIFE or Palmetto Fellows Scholarship over the 2020 Summer term?

As stated in the scholarship guidelines governing year-round scholarships, students may use their LIFE or Palmetto Fellows Scholarship for a Summer term within an academic year, provided they have met the requirements for the following year by the end of the Spring term. Based on this guideline, students who have earned at least a 3.0 LIFE GPA (for LIFE) or 3.0 cumulative institutional GPA (for Palmetto Fellows) and who have earned at least 30 credit hours by the end of Spring 2020, may use their LIFE or Palmetto Fellows Scholarship over the Summer 2020 term.

What can I do if I am unable to meet the renewal eligibility criteria by the end of 2020 Summer term?

CHE staff encourages students to work with their institution first. Institutions have stated they will investigate various ways to support students through this difficult time. After working through their institutional processes for support, if the student has not met the academic criteria by the end of the 2020 summer term(s) due to what they believe is an extenuating circumstance, the student can file an appeal with CHE. The appeal process is currently open, and will close on 5:00pm on September 4th, 2020. Applications for appeal may be obtained from the Commission on Higher Education's web site at:

<https://www.che.sc.gov/Students,FamiliesMilitary/StudentAppeals.aspx>.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my college adopted an optional pass/fail system for all 2020 Spring classes. If I were to take a "pass" for one of my classes, will the credits for that class be awarded towards the 30 required credits for continued eligibility?

Recently many students have inquired about the impact of grading Spring 2020 coursework on a Pass/Fail system, and what that would do to current Palmetto Fellows, LIFE or SC HOPE recipients with regards to continued eligibility. Each institution chooses how to implement a Pass/Fail system. The S.C. Commission on Higher Education does not have an opinion on Pass/Fail grades. However, the decision of the student in choosing a Pass/Fail option would have an impact on the GPA for scholarship eligibility.

First, the GPA for continued eligibility is based on the academic policies of the institution, and the GPA calculation for the scholarship is determined by the grading system used at the institution where the coursework is taken. If the institution determines that the only Pass/Fail grades will be used in determining a student's performance in a course, and those Pass/Fail designations do not carry a grade with quality points, then the grade(s) cannot be used in the GPA calculation for the scholarships. Therefore, moving to the Pass/Fail option for Spring 2020 may not impact their GPA for 2020 Spring term.

Second, the determination by an institution to move to Pass/Fail grading for Spring 2020 would impact students who entered the term with below a 3.0 GPA by possibly placing them in a situation where summer school is necessary. As stated above, assuming that Pass/Fail coursework is not included in the GPA calculation for scholarship eligibility, then students would not increase or decrease their GPA based on 2020 Spring term performance. This will allow some students the opportunity to essentially be eligible for the 2020-21 academic year based on Fall 2019 academic performance, but it may also cause students to fall out of eligibility for the 2020-21 academic year based on their 2019 Fall term academic performance. In these cases, the student may use the 2020 Summer term(s) as an opportunity to increase their GPA.

Again, CHE staff cannot offer guidance to students regarding the grading scale of an institution. In determining the impact of grades due to campus adjustments, each institution has the responsibility to establish the grading scale they determine best suits the needs of their students and faculty. **It is important that students contact their academic advisor and the financial aid office at their institution for more information about the impact of their grading scales on academic performance and, in turn, state scholarships.**

This link on our CHE website will provide further information about state scholarships and eligibility requirements:

<https://www.che.sc.gov/Students,FamiliesMilitary/PayingForCollege/FinancialAssistanceAvailable/ScholarshipGrantGuidelines,RegsLegislation.aspx>