

Debt-Free Community College Program Eligibility

By: Jessica Callahan, Legislative Analyst II
December 10, 2019 | 2019-R-0318

Issue

What eligibility requirements must students meet to receive an award under Connecticut's debt-free community college program? **This report has been updated by OLR Report [2024-R-0138](#).**

Summary

Students must meet various requirements to be eligible to receive an award under the debt-free community college program, and must continue to meet these eligibility requirements to receive these awards in subsequent semesters. These requirements relate to (1) enrollment status, (2) in-state student classification, (3) academic progress during enrollment, and (4) financial need. There are specific provisions on eligibility for students returning to school after an administratively approved medical or personal leave or a military leave.

Within available appropriations, the program must provide awards to eligible students that (1) cover the unpaid portion of tuition and required fees established by the Board of Regents minus the student's financial aid (i.e., scholarships; grants; and federal, state, and institutional aid awarded to the student other than loans) or (2) provide a minimum \$250 grant, whichever is greater. Awards under this program apply to the first 72 credit hours earned by a student in the first 36 months of community college enrollment in a program leading to a degree or certificate.

Program Overview

The debt-free community college program begins in fall 2020, and was established by the General Assembly in the biennial budget act ([PA 19-117, § 362](#)). It is designed to allow certain first-time, full-time Connecticut community college students to pay for college without taking out any private or government loans.

Program Eligibility Requirements

Enrollment Status

To be eligible for the program, a student must have graduated from a public or private Connecticut high school prior to first-time enrollment at a community college in a program leading to a degree or certificate. The student may commence enrollment in fall 2020 or any semester after that and must continue as a full-time student (i.e., one taking at least 12 credit hours in a semester). For a student with a documented learning disability, “full-time enrollment” means the maximum number of credit hours feasible for the student to attempt in a semester as determined by his or her academic advisor.

In-State Student Classification

Only in-state students are eligible for the program. By law, with limited exceptions, eligibility for in-state classification is based on an applicant’s “true, fixed, and permanent home” and the place where he or she intends to remain and return to after leaving ([CGS §§ 10a-28 & 10a-29](#)).

Academic Progress

Students enrolled in the program must make satisfactory academic progress to maintain eligibility. “Satisfactory academic progress” typically refers to academic performance that allows the student to maintain enrollment in his or her degree or certificate program.

Financial Need

Students must also complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and accept all available financial aid that is not in the form of a federal, state, or private loan.

Exceptions for Medical, Personal, or Military Leave

Qualifying students who take an administratively approved medical or personal leave may continue to remain eligible for the award program upon resuming full-time enrollment. The student continues to qualify if (1) he or she continues to meet the above requirements upon reenrollment and (2) the total amount of all approved leaves of absence does not exceed six months.

A qualifying student who is called to active duty as a member of the armed forces during any semester may continue to qualify for the award program upon resuming full-time enrollment if (1) he or she continues to meet the above requirements upon reenrollment and (2) reenrolls no later than four years after the date he or she is released from active duty.

JC:kc