



SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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November 4, 1999

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MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. R. Austin Gilbert, Jr., Chairman, and Members,
Commission on Higher Education

From: Ms. Dianne Chinnes, Chairman *DC*
Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

**Consideration of Revisions to
Guidelines for Small Grants Program**

Background

In November 1998, the Commission approved *Guidelines for the Small Grants Program* that had been inactive for several years but was reaffirmed by proviso during the 1998 legislative session.

After a year of administration of the program under the new *Guidelines*, the staff would like to make several changes to the *Guidelines*. These changes have to do primarily with how we define eligible programs and with internal administration (e.g., application deadline; payment by semester rather than on an annual basis; award amount made parallel to the new Life scholarship award amount).

A copy of the *Guidelines* is attached. Proposed additions are shown in italics and proposed strikeovers indicate deletions.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that the Commission approve the revised *Guidelines* for immediate implementation.

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ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES FOR THE SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM

1. ~~Availability of grants is dependent upon the availability of unexpended funds from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Contract Program fund.~~ Up to \$25,000 may be awarded under this program, depending on the availability of funds.
2. ~~Grant applications must be submitted by October 15. funds will be awarded in February, or as soon thereafter as all SREB Contract Program invoices are submitted, and are contingent upon enrollment by the student in both Fall and Spring semesters (or their equivalents).~~
3. An annual grant *in the amount of \$2,000, or whatever the current award is for the LIFE Scholarship, of \$1000* will be awarded to eligible students accepted and enrolled in eligible out-of-state programs on a first-come, first-served basis. Students must apply for the grants annually but may not receive a grant for more than four years for a baccalaureate program, unless the program is a designated five-year program, or for more than the normal completion length of a graduate program as designated by the offering institution.
4. Grant payments shall be made directly to the institution *each semester or quarter* once the eligibility of both the student and the program have been determined and upon receipt of an invoice from the institution. For continuing students, an invoice must be sent to the Commission annually. Under State regulations, payment of the grant is contingent upon receipt of an invoice.
5. Eligible programs are programs that meet the following criteria:
 - a. The program must be designed to culminate in the conferral of a baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degree at a public institution, and the institution must be able to classify the participant as degree-seeking. Degrees or awards at the less-than-associate, associate, and first-professional level, and post-baccalaureate and post-master's awards and certificates are not eligible.
 - b. The program is not available in South Carolina *and conforms to the eligibility criteria described below.* ~~and is also not available to South Carolina residents through the SREB Academic Common Market.~~
 - c. The program's curriculum must be at least 50% different from the curricula of similar programs offered in the state in order to be eligible. Students may be asked to provide appropriate curricular information about the out-

- d. of-state program to assist the Commission in determining program eligibility.
- e. Telecommunicated, correspondence, web-based and other distance-education degree programs originating out-of-state are not eligible.
- f. The program must be one that is approved by the host state's higher education agency. It must also be a published degree program offered by an institutional unit (i.e., a department, school, or college) or an interdisciplinary program with a defined and published curriculum structure. Independent study, *travel study programs*, individualized study majors, and other arranged or negotiated programs of study are ineligible under the premise that such study may be arranged in South Carolina. Independent combinations of available degree programs such as biology and music should not be considered, nor should double major or major/minor combinations that are independently set by students. Coordinated degree programs, such as joint MBA/MPH programs, should have a defined, published structure.
- g. Degree program titles do not necessarily define program content. At least one-half of the courses in the major should consist of courses not available in similar programs in South Carolina. Concentrations, options, tracks, or specializations within more general (and otherwise ineligible) degree programs must be extraordinary, specific, and structured to merit eligibility. They must materially change the nature of the degree such that it is markedly different from degree programs that exist in-state.
- h. The institution must be accredited by the appropriate regional accrediting body (e.g., Southern Association of Colleges and Schools).
- i. Several factors are explicitly excluded from consideration in determining program eligibility. These include:
 - Specific programmatic accreditations or state licensure requirements;
 - Difficulty of access to in-state programs;
 - The lack of availability of a similar in-state degree program with unique student services, student amenities, or other non-academic features; and
 - The geographic location of programs within states.

6. Eligible students are those who meet the following criteria:

- a. The student must first be accepted for admission to the desired degree program by following the normal admission procedure for the institution. The students must be accepted as degree-seeking in the specified major with a regular admission status. Students with a probationary, provisional,

- or non-degree-seeking status at the institution are ineligible. At institutions which do not classify undergraduate students as degree-seeking in a major until a fixed point in their studies (e.g., sophomore or junior year), student eligibility is deferred until that point.
- b. The student must be certified as a resident of South Carolina. Residency certification should be considered valid as long as the student progresses toward the specified degree, remains enrolled at the institution, and does not invalidate his or her state residency as defined by South Carolina's domiciliary statute and relevant regulations.
 - c. The student must remain in good academic standing according to the host institution's requirements in order to remain eligible for the State Grant.
 - d. Assuming other eligibility criteria are maintained, a student retains eligibility to complete a program under these Guidelines even when a similar program may, in the interim, have been established in South Carolina.
7. In order to access the State Grants program, the procedures listed below must be followed by the student:
- a. Request and submit an Application for the Grants Program from the Academic Affairs Division of the Commission on which the program is identified. Staff will verify the programs' eligibility.
 - b. Submit a request to the Academic Affairs Division of the Commission for certification as a South Carolina resident, complete and return the standard certification form, and receive appropriate certification as a South Carolina resident under the residency statute and regulations;
 - c. Submit a letter verifying acceptance as a full-time fully accepted (i.e., non-provisional) degree-seeking student into an eligible **program** (not institution);
 - d. Provide the name, address, and telephone number of an appropriate contact person at the host institution to whom the Commission will send a letter acknowledging award of the grant and requesting an appropriate invoice.
 - e. Continuing students must remain in good academic standing and must ensure that the host institution invoice the Commission *each semester or quarter* ~~annually~~ for the grant amount.
8. Any misrepresentation of any information requested as part of the process of determining initial or continuing eligibility of the student and eligibility of the program on the part of the grant applicant may result in prosecution and recovery of the grant award(s).