



**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Memorandum**

To: Financial Aid Officers, Public and Independent Colleges and Universities

From: Dr. Karen Woodfaulk, Director of Student Affairs  
S.C. Commission on Higher Education

Date: May 28, 2020

Re: CHE Guidance for COVID-19 Impacted Situations

The SC Commission on Higher Education (CHE) has received inquiries from students, parents and institutions about campus changes that may have had an impact on academic performance and scholarship eligibility during the 2020 Spring 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 staff reviewed possible areas in the state scholarship regulations that could assist students who have undergone special circumstances related to COVID-19 and addressed those within its authority. In review of the current statute and regulations governing the Palmetto Fellows and LIFE Scholarship programs, CHE staff has identified items that may provide some relief to current scholarship recipients.

**I. Break in Enrollment for eligible State 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 upcoming 2020 Fall term.

**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.**

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, to be eligible for the awards for the 2021-22 academic year.

Students engaging a break in enrollment for 2020 Fall term cannot enroll at any institution of higher education for the 2020 Fall term. **If students intend 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.**

## **II. Pass/Fail Grading Systems and Impact on State Scholarships**

Recently many students have inquired about the impact of grading 2020 Spring 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 2020 Spring term may not impact their GPA for the 2020 Spring term.

Second, the determination by an institution to move to Pass/Fail grading for 2020 Spring term 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 2019 Fall term 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 Summer school as an opportunity to increase their GPA.

Again, CHE staff does not have an opinion on 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 that 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.**

### **III. Allowance for Usage of the July ACT Score for State Scholarship Initial Eligibility**

Both the ACT and College Board offered test administrations in October, November, December, February, and March. While CHE staff does understand that both the College Board and ACT have cancelled their May test administrations and while the College Board also cancelled their June test administration, ACT is still planning to offer both a June and a July test administration, at this point. In response to ACT's decision to offer a July examination, **CHE staff has enacted emergency regulations to allow for students to continue standardized testing through July of the Senior year. Students will now have the opportunity to obtain a qualifying score by the July test administration of the ACT during 2020.**

It is important to note that while CHE will allow the usage of test scores obtained through July 2020 to qualify for state scholarships, the established deadlines for transcripts (June 15<sup>th</sup>) and the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Application Period (June 30<sup>th</sup>) will remain in place.

Finally, CHE staff is anticipating a higher than normal number of scholarship appeals for the 2020 cycle. As you advise students and assist them with navigating the appeal process, we ask that you encourage students to exhaust all institutional methods of appeal and support before steering them to the CHE appeal process.

As we continue reviewing all possible avenues to provide relief, we will ensure that appropriate communication to notify students, families, school counseling staff and other constituencies, continues. A list of all CHE issued guidance and resources regarding COVID-19 can be found on the CHE website at the following link: <https://www.che.sc.gov/HOME/Announcements.aspx>