Policy # 43106

SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY & VERIFICATION POLICY

Effective Date: **March 11, 2025**   **Revised Date:**
Responsible office: **Office of Financial Aid**
Division: Academic Affairs & Enrollment Management

I.   PURPOSE/OBJECTIVE

To ensure that scholarships awarded to students align with university eligibility criteria, including standardized test requirements, and to prevent financial, legal, and reputational risks associated with awarding scholarships in error at Grambling State University.

II.   APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all institutional scholarships awarded to undergraduate and graduate students at Grambling State University. This policy shall not conflict with the role of the Scholarship Committee and/or Policy **#43104 - Scholarship Policy; #43104.5 - Procedures for Awarding Academic Scholarships; #43105 - Scholarship Appeals Policy.**

Grambling State University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctorate degrees. GSU also may offer credentials such as certificates and diplomas at approved degree levels. Questions about the accreditation of GSU may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website (www.sacscoc.org).

III.   STATEMENT OF POLICY

A.   Eligibility Verification Prior to Awarding

1. All scholarship applicants must have verified eligibility criteria (e.g., ACT/SAT, GPA, academic standing).

2. The Office of Financial Aid must perform a secondary review before disbursing funds.

B.   Automated & Manual Review Process

1. Automated screening will flag students missing required criteria.

2. A designated financial aid officer must manually confirm eligibility before awards are finalized.

C. **Corrective Measures for Errors**

1. If a scholarship is awarded in error, the university will:

2. Notify the student immediately with options in accordance with Section VI of either:

   a. to appeal; or

   b. transition to alternative funding.

3. Offer a grace period (e.g., one semester) for impacted students to maintain the award during the semester the error is identified. Impacted students shall secure alternative aid going forward.

4. Work with financial aid advisor to determine case-by-case solutions if errors result in financial hardship to compile a recommendation for review by the Scholarship Compliance Team.

D. **Appeals Process**

1. Students may appeal a rescinded scholarship within 10 business days of notification.

2. Appeals will be reviewed by a Scholarship Appeals Committee including representatives from Financial Aid, Student Affairs, and Academic Affairs.

IV. **SCHOLARSHIP COMPLIANCE TEAM**

A standing scholarship compliance team is created with representatives from financial aid, student affairs, enrollment management, department of finance, internal audit, university compliance and any other department at the discretion of the university president or his duly authorized designee. The Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management shall oversee the Scholarship Compliance Team and coordinate a regular review schedule. The duties of the Scholarship Compliance Team shall include but are not limited to the following:

A. **Identifying and Investigating Errors**

1. Error Detection: Review the scholarship award process to identify any discrepancies in eligibility or errors in awarding, such as incorrect data entry, mismatched student qualifications, or failure to follow the scholarship criteria.

2. Error Documentation: Thoroughly document each identified error, including the date, nature of the error, and the affected scholarship(s), ensuring that there is clear evidence of what went wrong.

B. **Communication and Transparency**

1. Student Notification: Develop a clear and respectful communication strategy to inform students about the scholarship error in coordination with university communications. This includes the reasons for the error, its impact on their scholarship, and the steps taken to correct it.

2. Internal Communication: Ensure the academic affairs, financial aid, university advancement, enrollment management and other relevant departments (e.g., Department of Finance, Registrar) are informed of the error and corrective actions. Collaboration is key to avoid further complications.

C. Corrective Actions Implementation

1. Award Adjustments: Revise scholarship amounts, reallocate funds, or cancel the scholarship if necessary, in accordance with the guidelines.

2. Refunds or Reimbursements: If students were over-awarded, facilitate the refund or reimbursement process in an organized and timely manner, ensuring compliance with institutional policies.

3. Reapply for Eligibility: In cases where students do not meet the scholarship criteria due to the error, ensure that they are notified of the process to reapply or remedy the situation, if applicable.

D. Compliance with Policies

1. Review of University Guidelines: Ensure corrective actions align with both University policies and external regulations, such as federal and state financial aid laws, and scholarship terms.

2. Audit Trail Creation: Maintain detailed records of all actions taken to correct the errors, including communications with students and financial transactions, ensuring proper audit trails for compliance purposes in anticipation for review by the Legislative Auditor, Office of Inspector General, Department of Education or any other external agency as deemed applicable.

E. Reporting and Documentation

1. Reporting Errors: Prepare periodic reports for the university president, executive cabinet or the University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors, highlighting the identified errors, corrective measures taken, and the impact on students and university finances.

2. Internal Documentation: Create or update internal documentation and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to prevent future errors, based on the findings from the incident.

F. Training and Education

1. Staff Training: Train scholarship administrators and other involved staff to ensure they understand scholarship awarding criteria, error detection methods, and the corrective action process to prevent future mistakes.

2. Student Education: Provide guidance to students on how to track and verify their scholarship status, and how to address any discrepancies they may notice.

G. Preventive Measures

1. Process Improvement: Continuously review and improve the scholarship awarding process to prevent errors from recurring. Implement technological solutions or checklists that minimize human error and ensure more accurate data entry.

2. Quality Control: Set up a periodic quality control system to audit scholarship awards before they are finalized, ensuring compliance with eligibility criteria and accuracy.

H. Monitoring and Follow-up

1. Post-Correction Monitoring: Track the effectiveness of the corrective actions, and follow up with affected students to ensure satisfaction and resolution.

2. Ongoing Compliance Checks: Implement regular checks to ensure that no further errors arise and that compliance standards are consistently met moving forward.

I. Customer Service and Support

1. Student Advocacy: Act as a liaison for affected students to ensure their concerns are heard and resolved in a fair and timely manner. This includes providing guidance or mediation if students feel that the corrective actions are unjust.

2. Counseling: In case of significant impacts on the students (such as loss of financial aid), provide counseling services or direct them to alternative financial assistance programs.

V. TRAINING & COMPLIANCE MONITORING

A. The university will train scholarship administrators on verification protocols.

B. Annual compliance audits will ensure adherence to eligibility criteria as determined by the internal auditor.

VI. ENFORCEMENT

Failure to adhere to this policy may result in:

A. Corrective actions for staff errors, including retraining or disciplinary measures including and up to termination.

B. Scholarship adjustments for students found to be ineligible.

VII. STUDENT COMMUNICATION PLAN: SCHOLARSHIP AWARD ERROR NOTIFICATION

Scholarship Award Error Notifications must include the following information as a template:

Subject: Urgent Update on Your Scholarship Award

Dear [Student Name],

We recently conducted a review of scholarship eligibility requirements and identified an error in your scholarship award. Unfortunately, it appears that you do not meet the eligibility criteria due to [missing ACT/SAT scores or other reason].

What This Means for You:

1. Your current scholarship [Name of Scholarship] may be adjusted or revoked based on eligibility requirements.

2. We understand this may impact your financial planning, and we are committed to helping you explore alternative funding options.

Your Next Steps:

• Appeal Process: If you believe you meet the eligibility requirements or have extenuating circumstances, you may submit an appeal by [Deadline].

• Alternative Financial Aid Assistance: Our Financial Aid Office can assist you in identifying other scholarship or grant opportunities that you may qualify for.

• Extended Deadline for Payment: If your tuition balance is impacted, we will offer a [Grace Period] to help you secure additional funding.

We deeply regret this error and are here to support you through the process. Please contact our Financial Aid Office at [Email/Phone] or schedule an appointment via [Scheduling Link].

Sincerely,
Your Name]
Title]
University Financial Aid Office]

VIII. REVISION/REVISED HISTORY