



FINANCIAL AID ELIGIBILITY FOR REMEDIAL AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSES

This month's Melissa Talks will cover a topic involving federal student aid. We are going to talk about federal student aid (Title IV funds) eligibility for ESL (English as a second language) and remedial coursework. This topic is an important one because Federal regulations require an eligible student be enrolled in an eligible certificate or degree program. Let's tackle the first part of that sentence. The student must be eligible to receive federal student aid. To be eligible, the student must be qualified to study at the postsecondary level. A student qualifies if they:

- have a high school diploma (this can be from a foreign school if it is equivalent to a U.S. high school diploma);
- have the recognized equivalent of a high school diploma, such as a general educational development (GED) certificate or other state sanctioned test or diploma-equivalency certificate;
- have completed homeschooling at the secondary level as defined by state law;
- have completed secondary school education in a homeschool setting which qualifies for an exemption from compulsory attendance requirements under state law, if state law does not require a homeschooled student to receive a credential for their education; or
- have completed one of the ability-to-benefit (ATB) alternatives and is either currently enrolled in an eligible career pathway program or first enrolled in an eligible postsecondary program prior to July 1, 2012.

See, HEA Sec. 484(d), 34 CFR 668.32(e).

A student may self-certify their eligibility on the FAFSA—specifically that that they have received a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate or that she has completed secondary school through homeschooling as defined by state law. In this case, the school is not required to submit a copy of said documentation (except under certain circumstances, such as certain verification groups selected by the U.S. Department of Education). If, however, the school requires a copy of the high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate for admission, then you must confirm the admissions record with what the student reported on the FAFSA to ensure there is no conflicting information.

In addition to being enrolled in a Title IV eligible program, federal student aid can be disbursed only for coursework required for the admitted program of study being pursued by the eligible student. Even with this in mind, many incoming (and returning) college students are underprepared for the rigor of college-level study. These students are often referred to remedial or developmental education courses.

What is considered remedial coursework?

Remedial coursework (See 34 CFR 668.20) prepares a student for study at the postsecondary level. Remedial coursework is NOT preparatory or prerequisite coursework, which prepares a student for a given program or must be completed before a student can be accepted into a given program of study.

Is remedial coursework eligible for Title IV aid?

A student enrolled solely in a remedial program is not considered to be in an eligible program. If acceptance into an eligible program is contingent on completing remedial work, a student cannot be considered enrolled in that program until they complete the remedial work. However, if the student is admitted into an eligible program and takes remedial coursework within that program, they can be considered a regular student, even if he is taking all remedial courses before taking any regular courses and in this case is eligible for up to one academic year's worth of remedial courses in their enrollment status for Title IV aid. One academic year's worth of remedial courses is categorized as:

1. 30 semester or trimester hours,
2. 45 quarter hours, or
3. 900 clock hours.

If the remedial classes are non-credit or reduced-credit, you must determine the conversion to how many credit hours they are worth to count toward the student's enrollment status and remedial coursework cap.

More requirements regarding remedial courses

1. A remedial course cannot be below the educational level needed for a student to successfully pursue their program after one year in that course.
2. Remedial courses must be at least at the high school level, as determined by the institution of higher education (MCCCD), its state legal authority, its accrediting agency, or state agency recognized for approving public postsecondary vocational education.

If MCCCD or its state legal authority, accrediting agency, or state agency recognized for approving postsecondary vocational education determines that a remedial class is below the secondary level, the school must abide by that determination, and the class cannot be included for aid purposes. Additionally, Title IV funds cannot be used for any remedial course that uses direct assessment of student learning instead of credit or clock hours.

A student cannot use non-credit remedial hours towards a student's enrollment status if that non-credit remedial course is part of a program that leads to a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. Also, a student is never permitted to receive funds for training or for coursework prior to the completion of high school, even if the high school equivalency training is offered at postsecondary schools or is required for the postsecondary program.

What are preparatory or prerequisite courses?

Preparatory and prerequisite coursework prepares a student to be eligible for admission as a regular student into an educational program. In other words, a preparatory course is any prerequisite that must be completed for a specific academic program before being admitted into that academic program at the postsecondary level. A student must not yet be admitted as a regular student when those preparatory courses are taken for the purposes of Title IV aid. After the student has been admitted as a regular student by the school, the student cannot receive Title IV aid for any preparatory coursework. After admission, prerequisite courses that do not count toward degree completion and are not remedial courses cannot be paid with Title IV aid.

A student may apply for a Federal Direct Loan for preparatory coursework that the college has documented as necessary for them to enroll in an eligible program. Courses must be part of an eligible program otherwise offered by the college. If enrolled at least half-time in these prerequisite courses, a student may be eligible for loans for one consecutive 12-month period beginning on the first day of the loan period. A student cannot use Federal Direct Loan money if the purpose of taking preparatory courses is to raise their GPA in order to be admitted.

Are English as a Second Language (ESL) courses considered remedial?

Similar to other remedial coursework, a student may receive Title IV funds for English as a second language (ESL) courses that are part of a larger eligible program. There are differences though: ESL courses don't count against the one-year limitation on

remedial coursework, and they need not be at the secondary school level. ESL courses taken when a student is enrolled in an ESL program are not eligible for financial aid. ESL courses are non-academic courses, which are not counted toward the completion of a student's degree. ESL courses are used in preparing a student for being able to pursue their courses to obtain their degree; these non-credit courses do not go toward the student's federal student aid. Federal aid is provided for courses that are required for the degree the student is pursuing.

If taken as part of an approved academic program and have credit equivalencies, students taking ESL courses are eligible for financial aid and aid will be awarded to cover tuition costs for these courses. In order to be aid eligible, an ESL program must meet the general requirements for eligible programs (e.g., it must lead to a degree or other credential), and a school must request an eligibility determination for it from the department.

The program may admit only students who need instruction in English to be able to use the knowledge, training, or skills they already have. The school must document its determination that the ESL instruction is necessary for each student enrolled. Awarding Pell Grants over a series of semesters for such work can exhaust eligibility for Pell Grants before the student completes their program. In other words, students enrolled in a program that consists solely of English as a second language (ESL) instruction are only eligible for Pell Grants.

See, CFR Title 34; 668.20; 668.8(j); and 668.32

If you have any questions, please contact Melissa Flores at Melissa.Flores@domail.maricopa.edu.



Melissa Flores

MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Sr. Associate General Counsel | Office of the General Counsel

2411 West 14th Street, Tempe, AZ 85281

Melissa.Flores@domail.maricopa.edu

<https://www.maricopa.edu/>

O: [480-731-8418](tel:480-731-8418) | M: [801-557-1657](tel:801-557-1657)