Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy for students in receipt of US Federal Student Aid (Title IV), for academic year 2019/20

Introduction
The following policy sets out the requirements for satisfactory academic progression. The requirements for progression and final award are stated in terms of credit requirements, consistent with the UK Higher Education sectors’ normal procedures. The requirements at Sussex meet fully the Quality Assurance Agency’s Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and related guidance published by the QAA on the application of credit to learning.

See:
https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks

The principles and standards below are based on the University’s normal assessment regulations for each stage of study. Students in receipt of Federal Student Aid are subject to the University’s examination and assessment regulations and to federal regulations regarding satisfactory academic progress and the provision and withdrawal of financial aid (https://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1819FSAHbkVol1Ch1.pdf (Pages 14-19))

Core standards for Satisfactory Performance extracted from the principles set out in the University’s Examination and Assessment Regulations Handbook and Handbook and Regulations for Doctoral Researchers available at:
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/documents
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/rsao/regulations/

Qualitative Standard (grade-based)

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Courses:
The principles governing the University of Sussex examination and assessment regulations are as follows:

Principle 1: The adoption of UK sector norms as specified in the QAA HE national framework for higher education qualifications, including the requirement that students achieve the credit requirement as set out in the University’s Academic Framework.

Principle 2: The requirement of 120 credits for progression on undergraduate awards, subject to specific rules on compensation and trailing of credit. Progression does not normally apply to postgraduate awards which are considered as one stage (with the exception of taught postgraduate awards which are part of a designed professional doctorate course of study).

Principle 3: The University of Sussex Academic Framework sets out the volume and level of credit required to achieve each specific award of the University. This includes the principle that Progression and Award Boards (PABs) are permitted to condone failed module(s) up to a maximum of 30 credits at the final award stage based on the academic judgement of the Progression and Award Board that the learning outcomes for the award have been met.
Principle 4: A 0-100 marking scale for all taught courses with pass thresholds at 40% on modules at levels 3-6 and 50% on modules at level 7 and standard thresholds across the institution for classification purposes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Principle 5: The application of rules on compensation, trailed credit and condoned credit apply only to students who achieve a stage mean of 40% for undergraduate courses stages 1 to 3 and 50% for postgraduate taught courses, and stage 4 of an integrated masters degree, for progression and/or award. This principle assures the standard for all University of Sussex awards.

Principle 6: Module resits are permitted for all stages at undergraduate level, including for honours where course conditions allow. Resit at postgraduate level for taught modules are also permitted where course conditions allow. Where credit has been awarded by a PAB no student shall be permitted to resit to improve the mark.

Principle 7: Where a student has failed a module or been granted credit via condoned credit or automatic compensation (35-39% on a module at level 3 to 6 and 45-49% on a module at level 7 respectively) and takes a resit opportunity then the uncapped resit mark will normally be used for progression purposes but the capped resit mark will be used for transfer and award classification. The mark achieved at the resit will stand, where it has been taken, even where it is lower than at the original attempt. Where the resit has not been taken the original mark will stand.

Principle 8: A failing student in stage 1 only is entitled to an offer of a repeat year providing that they agree to abide by the additional conditions set down in the University Repeat Year Learning Agreement.

Principle 9: A repeat year for a Foundation Year course, Stage 2 and beyond for undergraduate courses, and masters awards is permitted at the discretion of the Progression and Award Board. Such students will be subject to an individual Repeat Year Learning Agreement.

Principle 10: Individual exceptional circumstances is the University's description of conditions which are sudden and unforeseen and temporarily prevent a student from undertaking assessment, or significantly impact on student performance in assessment in general, including late submission: as such the measure of severity is not about impact on the student but the impact on the assessment at the level of the module.

Principle 11: All students are given a fair and equal opportunity to demonstrate academic achievement. A student with accepted exceptional circumstances will have this drawn to the attention of the PAB. The extent of the impact on the overall module assessment mark will be determined by the Progression and Award Board (PAB) based on academic judgement informed by the student's overall performance. If the PAB considers the impact to be significant on the overall module assessment then the PAB may offer a sit as for the first time for all or part of the module assessment. Where the ‘sit’ is taken the original mark shall be expunged from the student record. Where a lower mark is obtained at this new sit this mark shall be recorded. If the offered ‘sit’ is not taken the original mark shall remain on the student record. This principle applies in order to ensure equality of opportunity for all students. There shall be no setting aside of marks or reclassification of an award in any circumstances.

Principle 12: Ongoing or longer term conditions or circumstances are not in themselves individual exceptional circumstances as they are not sudden, unforeseen and temporary. Students will be referred to the Student Support Unit (SSU) for consideration of any reasonable adjustments which can be made. Ongoing or longer term conditions may give rise to valid exceptional circumstances impacting on assessment only if they are first confirmed/diagnosed or become suddenly, unexpectedly and markedly worse at a particular assessment point. In all such cases the exceptional circumstances process may be followed. Claims for circumstances not impacting on an ongoing or
longer term condition may also be made via the exceptional circumstances process, but no claim of exceptional circumstances can be made citing lack of fitness to study. All claims must be specifically linked to a module assessment and must be sudden, unforeseen and temporarily impact on assessment.

Postgraduate Research Courses:
Postgraduate research courses are assessed by thesis and viva examination, at the conclusion of the period of study (normally 4 years). The progress of every student is monitored on a continuing basis, with an annual review required in order to progress from one year to the next. The annual review is subject to detailed quality assurance procedures via School Research Degree Committees and the Doctoral Studies Committee.

Quantitative Standard (time-based)
This is the maximum amount of time students are permitted to complete their course and remain eligible for financial aid under the Federal Direct Loan Program.

If a student takes temporary withdrawal / intermission from their course, they will be classed as withdrawn for funding purposes. The amount of Title IV funding that they have earned will be calculated in accordance with the US Department of Education’s Return of Title IV Funds (R2T4) regulations and any excess funds received by the student (or the University) will be returned. Once the student returns to their course they will be able to reapply for funding for the remainder of their course, providing they are able to complete their course within the maximum timeframe permitted to receive financial aid.

If a student transfers from another institution, credits and time taken to achieve them will only be counted if the credits count towards the student's current course.

If a student transfers internally between courses, credits and time taken to achieve them will only be counted if the credits count towards the new course. The new course must be eligible for financial aid, for the student to continue to receive financial aid.

Undergraduate Courses:
Under the University’s Examination and Assessment Regulations Handbook the maximum period of registration for an undergraduate student is normally the minimum period plus 3 years. The maximum period of registration is not extended for any time spent on temporary withdrawal.

To remain eligible for financial aid, an undergraduate student is required to complete their course within 150% of the published length of the course; measured by the cumulative number of credit hours they are required to complete and expressed in calendar time.

Students will become ineligible for financial aid as soon as it becomes clear that they will exceed the maximum timeframe to complete their course and not at the point when they actually reach the maximum timeframe.

- An undergraduate student studying a three year course can therefore only repeat one and a half stages (years) of study to complete their course within the maximum timeframe permitted to receive financial aid.
- An undergraduate student studying a four year course can therefore only repeat two stages (years) of study to complete their course within the maximum timeframe permitted to receive financial aid.

The pace of completion for undergraduate students is governed by Principle 2 of the University of Sussex examination and assessment regulations.
Postgraduate Taught Courses:
Under the University’s Examination and Assessment Regulations Handbook the maximum period of registration for a postgraduate taught student is normally the minimum period plus 1 year. The maximum period of registration is not extended for any time spent on temporary withdrawal.

To remain eligible for financial aid, a postgraduate taught student is required to complete their course within 200% of the published length of the course; measured by the cumulative number of credit hours they are required to complete and expressed in calendar time. Students must also be enrolled at least half-time to receive financial aid.

- A postgraduate taught student studying a one year course can therefore repeat one stage (year) of study to complete their course within the maximum timeframe permitted to receive financial aid, provided that they continue to be enrolled full-time.
- A postgraduate taught student on continuation status repeating an assessment(s) will not be eligible to receive financial aid, as they will drop to below half-time status at the University.

Course Convenors assess the pace of completion for postgraduate taught students at the end of each payment period and the Progression and Award Boards (PABs) assess annually.

Postgraduate Research Courses:
Under the University’s Handbook and Regulations for Doctoral Researchers the maximum period of registration for a full-time Master of Philosophy student is three years and the maximum period of registration for a full-time Doctor of Philosophy student is four years. In exceptional circumstances a research student may request an extension to their period of registration past their maximum period of registration. A research student may apply for an extension of two, three or four quarters or up to a maximum of one year. Each quarter (three months) must begin on the first of a month. The request should be made to the Director of Doctoral Studies in the student’s school.

- A postgraduate research student will be eligible to receive financial aid for an extension period of up to a maximum of one year whilst they are enrolled full-time or half-time (pre-submission status).
- Once they submit their thesis, they will drop to below half-time status at the University until their viva and will not be eligible for financial aid.

Under the University’s Handbook and Regulations for Doctoral Researchers a research student who has not met the standard required for their award at their first attempt will be required by the Examination Board to revise and resubmit their thesis or portfolio for re-examination within one year. The Research Student Administration Office will write to the student to inform them of the recommended revisions and of the date by which their thesis or portfolio must be resubmitted.

- Revise and Resubmit students will be eligible to receive financial aid up until the deadline for the resubmission of their thesis or portfolio, whilst they are enrolled half-time.

The pace of completion for postgraduate research students is assessed at annual reviews.

Satisfactory Academic Progress Evaluation
The student’s Academic Advisor / Course Convenor / Supervisor as appropriate is contacted to check that satisfactory academic progress has been made before each loan disbursement, at the end of each payment period. Both the qualitative (grade-based) and quantitative (time-based) standards are reviewed.
Financial Aid Warning
If a student fails to meet the satisfactory progress standards, they will receive written notification from the Financial Aid Office and be put on financial aid warning for one payment period. The student will continue to receive their loan during this period provided they remain enrolled at least half-time at the University. If the student does not meet the satisfactory academic standards by the end of the warning period they will lose their financial aid eligibility, unless they successfully appeal and are placed on probation.

Appeals and Financial Aid Probation
Students may appeal the suspension of financial aid on the basis of injury or illness, the death of a relative or other extenuating, unforeseen circumstances. The appeal must explain why they failed to make satisfactory academic progress and what has changed in their situation that will allow them to make satisfactory progress at the next evaluation.

To appeal the loss of financial aid eligibility, a student must, within 15 working days of notification, submit to the Financial Aid Office a signed and dated letter of appeal. Documentation verifying the situation will be required. The Financial Aid Office will pass the appeal to the student's Director of Student Experience who will consider the appeal. The outcome of the appeal will be conveyed in writing to the student by the Financial Aid Office within 15 working days of the student making the appeal. All decisions made are final.

Appeals should be sent to:

Financial Aid Office
Student Life Centre, Bramber House
Level 1, North Side
University of Sussex
Falmer, East Sussex
BN1 9QU

If it is determined, based on the appeal, that the student should be able to meet the satisfactory academic progress standards by the end of the subsequent payment period, the student will be placed on financial aid probation for one payment period. The student will continue to receive their loan during this period provided they remain enrolled at least half-time at the University. Progress will be reviewed at the end of the payment period. If the student does not meet the satisfactory academic standards by the end of the payment period, they will lose their financial aid eligibility unless they are successful in a further appeal and an academic plan (learning agreement) is created.

If it is determined, based on the first appeal, that the student will require more than one payment period to meet progress standards, the student will be placed on probation and an academic plan (learning agreement) created for the student. Progress will be reviewed at the end of one payment period to determine if the student is meeting the requirements of the academic plan (learning agreement). If the student is meeting the requirements of the academic plan (learning agreement), the student will continue to receive their loan as long as they continue to meet the requirements.

A student who has had their financial aid suspended but continues on their course, under their own means, and subsequently meets satisfactory academic progress standards will be entitled to regain a probationary status and apply for, or receive financial aid.