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The local campus is responsible for reviewing the economic eligibility of all entering Special Programs (SEEK/CD/) students. A first-time freshman can be permitted to register as a Special Programs student prior to the documentation of their economic eligibility, but cannot receive Special Programs funds until program eligibility is confirmed. Although special circumstances may warrant more time, economic eligibility should be confirmed prior to the entry semester’s census date. Special Program economic eligibility review applies only to first-time, incoming freshman. Once admitted to a SEEK/CD/ program, students may continue to receive Special Programs supportive services in subsequent years as needed, regardless of changes in the family’s income. However, to receive and to continue to receive special program funding, students must demonstrate need by filing FAFSA and NYS TAP applications appropriate to the academic year for which funding is desired. Where required by the US Department of Education, students must complete the verification process described in SAM chapter 4. Information about Special Programs fund management in CUNYfirst is not contained in this chapter but is available separately.
Economic Eligibility Criteria for Entering Freshmen

For purposes of determining a student’s economic eligibility for Special Programs, a student’s dependency status must first be determined in accordance with the federal definition.

A student is considered economically disadvantaged if he or she is a member of a household whose total annual income falls within the limits indicated on the economic guidelines chart below. A dependent student’s household consists of the student and everyone that is dependent upon the income that supports that student. All economic eligibility criteria apply to the base year (the calendar year prior to the student’s first academic year in college). For 2018-19, it is the 2017 calendar year. Income levels is based on the 2017 poverty guidelines and is 185% of poverty level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons in the 2017 household</th>
<th>2017’s Total Upper Income limit</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$22,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$30,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$37,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$45,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$53,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>$60,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>$60,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For 8 or more persons</td>
<td>Add $7,733 for each additional person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reference to the household income chart need not be made if the student falls into one of the following categories and documentation is available:

- The student’s household is the recipient of:
  - Family Assistance Program Aid or;
  - Safety Net Assistance through the NYS Office of Temporary & Disability Assistance, or a county department of social services; or
  - Family day-care payments through the NYS Office of Children & Family Services or a county department of social services; or
- The student is living with foster parents who do not provide support for college, and no monies are provided from the natural parents; or
- The student is a ward of the state or a county.

Total Annual Income

Total annual income refers to all taxable and nontaxable monies that are received by the household. Such monies may be derived from various sources: wages, salary, tips, dividends, interest, Social Security disability, annuities, pensions, veteran’s benefits, and unemployment benefits. When determining income from a federal tax return, total annual income refers specifically the IRS 1040 tax return line titled “Total Income.” All untaxed income declared on a
tax return must be added to the tax return’s “Total Income.”

**For Special Programs eligibility purposes the following shall not constitute income:**
- Monies received specifically for educational purposes from sources such as veteran’s education benefits, and education grants from the Office of Vocational Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID);
- Social services or public assistance payments received through the Family Assistance Program, or Safety Net;
- Assistance Program and Family Day-Care Payments;
- Federal Earned Income Credit (EIC).

The applicant’s income is taken into account only when he/she meets the federal definition of independence.

**Fifteen Percent Variation**

A maximum of 15 percent of the students admitted to Special Programs may come from a household whose income exceeds the Economic Guidelines Chart. Such decisions are made on a case by case basis in response to unusual and extenuating circumstances. The determination of such special circumstances are the purview of the financial aid office. Documentation of these circumstances must be kept on file by the school at which such students are enrolled. In all cases, this documentation must include a statement from a disinterested, reliable third party, such as a member of the clergy, a legal representative or a social worker, who has direct knowledge of the student’s situation. Students accepted into Special Programs under the 15 percent rule must be so designated at the determination of initial eligibility.

**Categories into which these variations may fall are limited to the following:**
- Serious mismanagement of the household income with little of the funds accruing to the interest of the student. Serious mismanagement might be defined as use of a controlled substance by head of household, bankruptcy, or a history of gambling. For this category, the statement from the disinterested third party and financial aid counselor notes would be acceptable documentation.
- A one-time fluctuation in household income where there is a history of low income. Satisfactory evidence that a household’s yearly income, immediately prior to the base year, fell within the limits of the applicable household income scale shall be sufficient to establish the existence of a one-time fluctuation in household income. Documentation of both the base year’s and the year prior to the base year’s income are collected.
- Households with substantial long term, non-reimbursed medical obligations (such as maintenance of physically or mentally handicapped children). This may be documented by the appropriate medical bills or a statement from the facility if the family member is institutionalized.
- Families which must maintain two households, one for the wage earner and one for dependents, in order to maintain employment. Documentation required would be leases, utility bills for both residences and a statement from the employer attesting to the job location.
Families where the EFC as computed from base year financial data by a United States Education Department approved need analysis system indicates no parental contribution (from a dependent’s household or zero EFC from an independent student’s household).

If a college wishes to use the 15 percent rule to enroll a student in a Special Program, they should collect the required documentation, complete a 15 Percent Variation Request form [see p. 10-6 for sample] and submit it to the Director of CUNY’s Office of Special Programs.

**Economic Eligibility Documentation for Entering Freshmen**

For Special Program eligibility, only the 2016 income of the dependent student’s parents or the 2016 income of the independent student/spouse need be documented. The following shall comprise acceptable documentation for determining Special Program economic eligibility:

**All Income, Earned Dividends, Interest, Pensions & Annuities**
A signed copy of the appropriate year’s Federal income tax return (IRS Form 1040, 1040A, or 1040EZ) and where appropriate, W2 forms. When the original tax returns are unavailable, applicants may request a copy of the tax return or a transcript from the IRS: [http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Get-Transcript](http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Get-Transcript)

**Pension/Annuity/Unemployment Benefits**
A letter from the applicable agency showing the base year’s total disbursement/benefits (if not already reported on IRS Forms 1040, 1040A, 1040EZ or 1099).

**Social Security, Supplemental Security Income or Veterans Administration Non-Educational Benefits**
A letter from the applicable agency showing the appropriate year’s total award for each member of the household (including Medicare premiums) or IRS Form 1099 for each member of the household.

**Social Services Payments**
Verification from a branch of the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Office of Children and Family Services Assistance, or a county department of social services showing the appropriate year’s benefits received and the names of recipients.

**Child Support and/or Alimony**
A court order, affidavit or amounts reported on student’s Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

**Zero Household Contribution**
The student’s need analysis output document, either the SAR or ISIR.

**Additional Members in Household**
For persons not listed as an exemption on an IRS document or not referred to as part of the household on a Public Assistance document, the following may be appropriate birth certificates,
marriage certificates, third-party verification, or similar documentation (e.g., Medicaid cards or Immigration documents) may be accepted.

**No Income**
If an independent student or parent declares no base year income, that/those person(s) must submit an IRS “Verification of Nonfiling Letter.” A “Verification of Non-filing Letter” can be obtained from the IRS “Get Transcript Online” tool at [www.irs.gov/Individuals/Get-Transcript](http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/Get-Transcript) or by submitting, to the IRS, the IRS Form 4506-T and checking box 7. **Note**: base year Verification of Non-filing Letters are not available until June 15 of the following year.

**Eligibility for Receiving Special Programs Financial Assistance**
To receive Special Programs financial Assistance, a student must do the following each academic year:

- File a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and a NYS TAP application by the deadline established by the student’s financial aid office.
- Be enrolled full-time.

**Note**: Special Programs students must begin attendance in each of the courses used to determine enrollment status each semester. If a student receives a WN grade in a course, that course must be excluded from the calculation of enrollment status.

If, after receiving a disbursement of Special Programs funds, a student is found to have not established a fulltime enrollment, that semester’s special program funding must be returned.

**Exceptions to fulltime enrollment/attendance requirement**
The Special Programs director may give written approval:

- For a student to carry only those courses needed for graduation in the student’s last semester of enrollment, even if it is less than full-time.
- For a student to carry less than a full-time load due to extenuating circumstances that are documented in the Special Programs office.
- Allowing a student to drop from full-time to 9 credit/contact hours provided the Special Programs counselor has deemed the action advisable and proper authorization is maintained in the Special Programs office under the student file.

Students are not required to enroll fulltime in order to receive summer immersion program funding or to receive summer Special Program funding.

Part-time status is granted for only one semester but can be extended through a waiver. Thus, students who are enrolled part-time for two or more semesters must receive a waiver if they are to maintain their SEEK/CD eligibility and remain in the Program. Part time waiver extensions cannot be granted at the college level but must be approved by the Office of Special Programs.

The majority of part-time Special Program students fall into the following five categories:

- Certified differently-abled students whose mandated accommodation(s) include a reduced course load;
- Graduating seniors requiring fewer than 12 credits to complete their degrees;
- Students on probation who are required to attend part-time;
- Students who have not met the basic skills requirements and are consequently required to take a reduced course load; and
Students pursuing a major that has restrictions on the course load.

Note: that the part-time waiver policy and procedure applies to students who enroll part-time at the beginning of the semester; it does not apply to students who enroll full-time and later drop classes thereby becoming part-time. As a means of facilitating part-time waiver requests, the Office of Special Programs has developed a Student Part-Time Enrollment Report. The Student Part-Time Enrollment Report must be submitted to OSP each semester. After reviewing the Report, OSP will approve the waivers and return them to the respective campuses for appropriate action and for inclusion in the students’ files.

For students seeking a waiver for a second (or more) part-time semester for reasons other than the five listed above, Directors must complete and submit the following Request for Additional Part-Time Semester Enrollment for SEEK/CD Student form (See Page 10-12).

Books, Fee/Stipend Payment System

To be eligible for summer stipends, books, and fees, a student must file a FAFSA and a NYS TAP application by the deadline date established by the University/College. For 2018-2019, the maximum amount awarded for books and supplies is based on available funding and may be less than the amount built into the student budget in Chapter 6 graduating. Book funds and student fee credits should be disbursed as early in a semester as is possible. Back payments will be allowed throughout the term. However, for the summer session, only back payments for books and fees will be permitted. All books, fees, and stipend disbursements must be processed and accounted for through SFA or CUNYfirst.

Period of Student Funding Eligibility

- A SEEK student is allowed ten (10) semesters of eligibility and CD students are allowed six (6) semesters, or the equivalent, of opportunity program eligibility. In addition, all special program students are allowed one Immersion and two regular summer semesters.
- Five-year baccalaureate programs: a student is allowed twelve (12) semesters, or equivalent, of opportunity program eligibility if enrolled in a registered five-year baccalaureate program.
- When a Special Programs student graduates upon the completion of the 11th semester for SEEK or the 7th semester for CD, that student would be eligible for an additional semester of Special Programs financial aid support.
- When a Special Programs student has not been a STAP recipient but will be graduating upon the completion of the 11th semester (for SEEK) or the 7th semester (for CD), that student would be eligible for an additional semester of Special Programs financial aid support (SEEK the 11th semester – CD the 7th semester). See TAP/STAP eligibility below.
- Requests for exemptions for individuals who do not fall into the first 3 categories should be submitted to the University Office of Special Programs for consideration. Special Program directors are required to maintain records for all exemptions given to students.
The maximum length of leave of absence granted to CD/SEEK students shall not exceed three (3) consecutive semesters. Where special circumstances warrant, requests for exceptions along with appropriate justification shall be transmitted by the College Special Programs Director to the University Office of Special Programs for appropriate approval.

**Calculation of Semester of Eligibility**

A student will use one semester of Special Programs eligibility every time he or she registers as a full-time student. To calculate the number of semesters used by students who were required to register part-time (e.g. those on academic probation or for whom part-time status was approved for exceptional reasons), add up the total number of credits or equated credits taken while enrolled on a part-time basis and divide it by fifteen.

**Eligibility for Non-Citizens**

There are no citizenship requirements for Special Programs eligibility. However, all Special Program students must be New York State residents. Students in diplomatic or student visa categories (J-1, F-1) are not eligible for Special Programs. Undocumented students are not eligible for Special Programs, federal or NYS financial aid funding but may receive other services associated with the program.

**Continued Eligibility**

Special Programs students are not required to submit financial aid applications for continued Special Programs eligibility. However, a student must file a FAFSA each year that Special Program funding is desired.

**Transfer Students**

All students transferring between CUNY Special Programs or from HEOP/EOP programs into CUNY Special Programs must submit a completed Special Programs transfer request to the college of their attendance (see page 10-10). The local Financial Aid Office has the responsibility for reviewing the completed transfer form and to determine eligibility for CUNY Special Programs.

**Pre-Freshman Summer Experience**

Students provisionally admitted as incoming freshmen into a SEEK, CD Program who fail one or more of the CUNY reading, writing, and/or mathematics skills assessment tests are required to attend a pre-freshmen summer session. Students who are required to, but do not, attend the summer session are not eligible for SEEK/CD admission in the fall semester.

**Loan Defaults**

Students in active default of Title IV funds or who have other delinquent Federal Student Aid accounts are not eligible to transfer within Special Programs until all delinquent accounts are cleared.