

Fayetteville State University Process for Allocating & Reporting the Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding (HEERF) Made Possible by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

Through the CARES Act, Fayetteville State University was awarded approximately \$2.5 million in April 2020 to be distributed directly to currently enrolled students as emergency financial aid grants for student expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to coronavirus. Guidance was given from the U.S. Department of Education that each institution should prioritize students with the greatest demonstrated financial needs. For future reference, post-award clarification was also provided after FSU award disbursements had been completed that awards could be made to students who had graduated as long they were enrolled in Spring semester 2020 and otherwise met federal eligibility criteria.

A team comprised of the Provost, the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management, the Executive Director of the Office of Scholarships & Financial Aid and the Assistant to the Provost reviewed the guidelines provided by the U.S. Department of Education and developed the following processes for allocating HEERF awards (with guidance from the General Counsel's Office):

- 1) In compliance with the guideline that students with the greatest financial need should be prioritized for awards, a list was generated of undergraduate students enrolled in the Spring 2020 semester who received Pell awards, together with enrolled graduate students whose financial needs were comparable to those of Pell-eligible undergraduate students. Pell-eligibility is a widely recognized proxy for significant demonstrated financial need.
- 2) In compliance with the guideline that it would be inappropriate to award funds meant to compensate for campus disruptions to students enrolled exclusively in online degree programs, the list of Pell-eligible priority students was pared down to exclude those taking only online classes in the Spring semester—unless such students were living on campus and had thus been using campus resources.
- 3) A maximum initial award per student was established at up to \$1,000; this would enable each of the approximately 2,150 students who met the priority criteria of Pell-eligibility and demonstrated reliance on campus resources to receive up to the maximum if they had incurred expenses in the Spring semester related to campus disruptions--and still have some level of funding available to help additional students with high priority needs as well.
- 4) The next prioritization tier beyond Pell-eligibility was decided to be those non-Pell students with FAFSA's on file who had unmet financial needs of \$1000 or more.
- 5) A brief application form, email notification, webpage, and flyer were developed which informed students of the CARES/HEERF grant availability, provided basic eligibility criteria, and asked students to indicate the nature of expenses incurred due to COVID-19 related FSU campus disruptions; Eligibility criteria developed by FSU were as follows:
 - a. Be currently enrolled in the Spring semester
 - b. Have previously submitted a FAFSA for the 2019-20 academic year
 - c. Be making Satisfactory Academic Progress toward a degree

- d. Not be enrolled in a completely online degree program, unless living on campus
 - e. Have incurred expenses for new arrangements that had to be made due to the closure of university facilities--such as expenses for food, housing, course materials, computer purchases, internet access, health care, childcare, or transportation.
- 6) While any FSU student could submit an application for CARES Act grant, it was agreed that the most equitable email notifications of grant availability and prioritized application processing would take place in phases
- a. Phase 1 focused on graduating students on the list of prioritized (Pell-eligible, campus connected) students, with award amounts based on student-specific requests, up to \$1,000. (It should be noted that initial guidance from the U.S. Dept of Education indicated that awards to graduating students should be made prior to the date students are awarded their degree, but information received on indicated that institutions could make awards after degree attainment for those students who were enrolled in the Spring Semester)
 - b. Phase 2 expanded the focus to all prioritized (Pell-eligible, campus connected) students, with award amounts standardized at \$1,000 each (or \$500 for those living on campus taking online classes in the Spring 2020 semester)
 - c. Phase 3 expanded consideration to the non-Pell students with unmet FAFSA need of \$1,000 or more.
 - d. Phase 4 implemented batch allocation of remaining CARES Act funds to the students who had not already received federally sourced COVID-19 financial assistance and who otherwise met basic eligibility requirements
 - i. The amount to be distributed to each remaining eligible student was to be determined by dividing the available CARES Act funds remaining after completing prior phase disbursements by the number of students eligible who had not yet received an award
 - ii. To expedite the processing and disbursement process in time of major financial needs, it was recommended that allocation of awards to students in this last phase be done automatically—with students not be required to complete applications or other paperwork
 - e. A target was established to complete all CARES Act disbursements by June 5, 2020, based on guidance from Interim UNC System President Bill Roper. The total funds in the amount of \$2,542,344 have been awarded and disbursed to 2738 students.