

Meeting of the
OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
December 5, 2013

AGENDA ITEM #xx:

Policy

SUBJECT: Academic Scholars Program Proposed Rule Revisions.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the State Regents approve and adopt the proposed permanent rule revisions for the Academic Scholars Program.

BACKGROUND:

The Academic Scholars Program was established in 1988 by the Oklahoma Legislature and provides scholarships to academically outstanding students who attend an Oklahoma college or university. The program is intended to keep Oklahoma's best high school students in Oklahoma for college and to attract quality nonresident students to Oklahoma institutions. Both Oklahoma residents and nonresident students can qualify for the program by achieving designation as a National Merit Scholar, National Merit Finalist or United States Presidential Scholar. Oklahoma residents may also qualify by scoring at or above the 99.5 percentile on the ACT or SAT. In 1999, legislation authorized a category called "Institutional Nominees" which allowed public colleges and universities to submit a limited number of scholarship nominees based upon minimum criteria established by the State Regents and the institution.

The program provides participants funding to use toward tuition, fees, room and board, and required textbooks or materials for up to four (4) years of undergraduate and graduate study, at accredited institutions of higher education in Oklahoma. The annual award amounts for all National Merit & ACT/SAT qualifiers are \$5,500 for students attending a research university, \$4,000 for students attending a regional university, and \$3,500 for students attending a community college. The annual award amounts for Institutional Nominees were \$2,800 for students attending a research university, \$2,000 for students attending a regional university, and \$1,800 for students attending a community college. In addition to the cash award paid by the program, public institutions provide tuition waiver scholarships. In 2012-2103, about 2,300 students participated in the program receiving total awards of approximately \$10 million.

POLICY ISSUES:

The Academic Scholars Program plays an important role in attracting high-achieving students to Oklahoma's colleges and universities. These students help enhance the academic quality of the state's institutions.

ANALYSIS:

The proposed rule changes address the following issues:

Summer Awards: The proposed revisions clarify that students may receive a full-semester award during the summer if the student enrolls full-time in at least 12 semester credit hours. The summer award will count toward the student's overall scholarship limit of eight full-time semester awards, so no additional

fiscal impact to the program is expected. The proposed change will accommodate those students capable of completing their undergraduate degree in less than four calendar years. The proposed change also recognizes alternate semester structures such as the trimester system at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO) which provides three equal trimesters each academic year allowing students to earn 36 credit hours or more per year.

Clarification of Institution Tuition Waiver Award: State system colleges and universities are required to provide program participants a tuition waiver award in addition to the cash award paid by the program. The proposed revision clarifies that the combined amount of the program award and the institution tuition waiver may not exceed the average costs of tuition and fees, room and board, and required textbooks or materials.

The proposed rule revisions were posted at the State Regents meeting on September 5, 2013.

Title 610 - State Regents for Higher Education

Chapter 25 - Student Financial Aid and Scholarships

Subchapter 1 - Academic Scholars Program

Section 610:25-1-1 Purpose [no change]

Section 610:25-1-2 Definitions [previously revoked]

Section 610:25-1-3 General principles for operation of program [no change]

Section 610:25-1-4 Eligibility Requirements and Term of Scholarship Award [no change]

Section 610:25-1-5. Criteria for Annual Renewal

(a) Participants awarded a scholarship under the Academic Scholars Program shall maintain a 3.25 cumulative or retention grade-point average. The cumulative grade point average will include all courses attempted in high school for college credit. For the purpose of this policy, a fiscal year begins in the fall semester and continues through the summer term. The cumulative grade-point average will be determined between the summer and fall term.

(b) Participants awarded a scholarship under the Academic Scholars Program must enroll full-time each semester (as defined by the State Regents) for continuation in the program. In this context, "full-time" means a minimum of 12 hours per semester. A total of 24 hours must be earned for the program year to retain eligibility for the next program year. Students who, due to extraordinary circumstances during the semester, drop below the minimum of 12 hours of initial enrollment, must earn 24 credit hours for the program year to retain eligibility for the next program year. Students will ~~not~~ be eligible for summer support if they have ~~not~~ earned 24 semester credit hours in the preceding two regular semesters. ~~Students who receive support for the summer semester must earn six hours of credit in order to be eligible for support in the fall semester. Students who receive part-time awards for summer must enroll in at least 6 credit hours and must complete a total of at least 30 credit hours during the full academic year (fall, spring, summer). Students who receive full-time awards for summer must enroll in at least 12 credit hours and must complete a total of at least 36 credit hours during the full academic year (fall, spring, summer). Hours~~ Part-time awards, for enrollment of 6 to 11 credit hours, made for the summer term will count as one-half of a semester used in the program and will be in the amount of one-half of a semester award. Full time awards, for enrollment of 12 or more credit hours, made for the summer term will count as a full semester used in the program and will be in the amount of one semester award.

(c) In order to receive a payment for enrollment in a summer term, the student must submit the summer term application to the State Regents' office by the specified deadline.

(d) Credit by examination, the practice of granting students credit for passing tests based on the subject matter of college courses in which they have not enrolled, audited courses and correspondence courses will not be considered toward meeting the full-time enrollment requirement or the requirement to earn 24 hours for the program year.

(e) A student beginning in the program for the first time in the summer must have achieved a 3.25 cumulative grade-point average at the end of the one year and the summer. The student is not required to meet the 3.25 grade-point average at the end of the first summer.

Section 610:25-1-6 Reinstatement; leave of absence [no change]

Section 610:25-1-7. Fiscal aspects of program

- (a) Award limits. Academic Scholarship awards to qualified nonresident students attending Oklahoma institutions shall not exceed 25 percent of the greater of the number of awards of the preceding year or the amount of the previous year's funding for certified awards for the program.
- (b) Additional aid. Students receiving this scholarship may also receive additional state-supported financial aid, but not in excess of the student's cost of attendance as determined by the institution consistent with regulations for federal financial aid. Likewise, a student may enhance the Academic Scholars award by accepting grants and scholarships from private sources.
- (c) Funding priorities. The Oklahoma State Regents will, as soon as fiscally feasible, set aside in the Oklahoma State Regents' Academic Trust funds for the full scholarship commitment. Funding priority will be given first to prior years' recipients, and secondly, to any students applying for the scholarship for the first-time. For first-time students, priority will be given to Individual Applicant Qualified Students, Presidential Scholars, National Merit Scholars, and National Merit Finalists, and secondly, to Institutional Nominees.
- (d) Amount of Scholarship. The program shall provide participants a scholarship in an amount not to exceed the average costs of tuition and other fees, room and board, and required textbooks or materials for undergraduate and graduate study for students attending regionally accredited public institutions of higher education in Oklahoma.
- (1) The institution shall provide the student a tuition waiver that, when combined with the scholarship award, will ~~meet~~ not exceed the costs described in paragraph (d) above.
 - (2) Students who do not meet the continuing eligibility requirements for the scholarship may be eligible for the tuition waiver if they meet the standard tuition waiver criteria determined by the institution.
 - (3) Transfer students are eligible for the same level of tuition waiver as all other Academic Scholars.
 - (4) Institutions may elect to award nonresident students a resident and/or nonresident tuition waiver.
- (e) Payment of funds. Funds made available to students as part of the Oklahoma State Regents Academic Scholars Program shall be paid directly to the institution in which the student is enrolled, in trust for the student, and on the student's behalf and shall contain appropriate restrictions and conditions that such monies are expended only for the purposes authorized by the State Statute authorizing this program.
- (f) Private institutions. For students attending private Oklahoma institutions, the award amount will be the same as the student attending a similar type of public institution as defined by the State Regents.

Section 610:25-1-8 Requirements for graduate and professional study [no change]