

Pledge to Advance Connecticut

PACT

Manual

Connecticut State Colleges & Universities



***Connecticut State
Colleges & Universities***

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I. Program Overview

The purpose of this policy manual is to set forth the BOR's policies related to the implementation of PACT, the Pledge to Advance Connecticut, which is hereby established in accordance with Public Act 19-117, sections 362-364. This document describes the policies and procedures that the community colleges under the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU) system shall use in its administration of PACT (or the Program). This policy manual does not preclude the establishment of administrative procedures necessary to carry out the Program described here.

Pursuant to Public Act 19-117, Section 362, the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) is required to create a debt-free community college program. Under this law, the BOR holds a responsibility to establish a last-dollar scholarship program to make awards to qualifying students each semester, and to adopt the rules, procedures, and forms necessary to implement the Program. Such rules, procedures, and forms were adopted on December 19, 2019 by the BOR

The goals of PACT are to:

1. Mitigate excess debt for students and families;
2. Increase student enrollment within the community college sector;
3. Support student retention efforts across the system; and
4. Support on-time credential completion.

II. Program Benefits to Students

Beginning in Fall 2020, Connecticut's PACT Program allows Connecticut residents who meet certain eligibility criteria to attend any of Connecticut's Community Colleges for up to three years free of mandatory tuition and fees related to an eligible program of study. Awards are only applicable to the fall and winter/spring semesters, and are available regardless of family income level.

A. Awards

PACT awards are made as a last dollar award, after all other sources of federal, state, and institutional financial aid grants are expended. For the purposes of awarding the Program, student loans, work-study programs of any type, and financial assistance dedicated to expenses beyond tuition and fees are not considered to be financial aid.

For students who qualify for PACT, a semester award is equal to the greater of:

1. Any remaining eligible institutional costs after subtracting all awarded financial aid; or
2. \$250

Students who already have their eligible institutional costs covered by an existing financial aid package shall be eligible for a \$250 minimum award each semester. Any excess credit balance on the student's account resulting from a PACT award shall be refunded in accordance with existing BOR policies and procedures.

B. Eligible Institutional Costs

The following institutional costs are eligible to be covered by PACT:

- Tuition
- Extension Fees
- College Service Fees
- Student Activity Fees
- Transportation Fees
- Mandatory Usage Fees, including Clinical Program Fees, Advanced Manufacturing Lab Fees, Supplemental Course Fees, and Material Fees.

Institutional costs not listed above are not eligible to be covered by PACT. Examples of costs not eligible to be covered under the program include, but are not limited to:

- Textbooks and Supplies
- Tier II Educational Extension Fees, including Academic Evaluation Fees, Portfolio Assessment Fees, Proctoring Fees, CT-CCNP Student Assessment Fees, and Nursing Media Fees.
- Tier II Auxiliary Activity Fees, including Late Registration Fees, ID Replacement Fees, Parking Access Card Replacement Fees, Returned Check Fees, Late Payment Fees, Installment Plan Fees, DSST Fees and CLEP Service Fees.

III. Academic Program Requirements

PACT awards may be applied to any degree or certificate program identified by the college as eligible for Title IV funding. Funding may not be applied to non-credit academic programs or programs deemed ineligible for participation in the Title IV programs. Academic program eligibility is defined in accordance with the college's active Program Participation Agreement (PPA) and Eligibility and Certification Approval Report (ECAR) validated by the US Department of Education. In the case of Academic programs that include both credit and non-credit requirements, all required credits and fees shall be eligible for assistance under PACT. Required developmental coursework is also eligible for assistance under PACT.

A PACT award is available to qualifying students for the first 72 credit hours earned from a Connecticut Community College during the first 36 months that the student is enrolled within a Connecticut Community College.

IV. Eligibility Requirements

A. Initial Eligibility

The PACT Program is available to students who meet the following criteria:

1. **In-State Residency.** Connecticut residents per [Connecticut General Statutes §10a-29](#).
2. **High School Graduate.** Students must have graduated from a Connecticut high school (public, nonpublic, or home schooled) or equivalency (including GED, HiSET, and TASC).
3. **Enrollment.** Students must enroll as a full-time student (12 or more credits) for the first time at any of Connecticut's Community Colleges. Students previously enrolled at any college or university prior to Fall 2020 are ineligible for Program participation, except for coursework completed prior to high school graduation or non-credit coursework.
 - a. For the following fall semester, students must be registered as full-time and have completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by July 15 for priority consideration for a PACT award. Fall award eligibility after July 15 will be made on a fund-available basis.
 - b. For the winter/spring enrollment, students must be registered as full-time and have completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by November 15 for priority consideration for a PACT award. Award eligibility after November 15 will be made on a fund-available basis.
 - c. Students must be continually enrolled as a full-time student during succeeding fall and winter/spring semesters to retain eligibility in the Program.
 - d. **PACT enrollment status will be finalized at the census date for the term.** Should a qualifying student who is enrolled at a full-time rate prior to the date for priority consideration but then drop to part-time (fewer than 12 credits) at the time of the semester census, their PACT award and priority consideration status shall be rescinded.
 - e. Winter session enrollment shall be considered part of spring semester enrollment for the purpose of achieving full-time status, and will count toward the 72 earned credit hour timeframe. All summer session enrollment shall be excluded from determining full-time status for award eligibility, but will count toward the 72 earned credit hour aggregate limit on eligibility.
 - f. Developmental coursework shall be applied toward the full-time enrollment requirement.
4. **Eligible Program.** Students must be enrolled in an academic program that meets the requirements in Section III of this policy.
5. **FAFSA.** Students must complete a FAFSA. A completed FAFSA is defined as one that fully determines a student's eligibility for a Federal Pell Grant, including the federal Expected Family Contribution calculation.

B. Returning Qualifying Students

In order to remain eligible in the PACT Program, returning students must continue to meet the following eligibility criteria, including all established priority deadlines for full-time enrollment and filing a FAFSA:

1. **Complete a Renewal FAFSA.** A completed Renewal FAFSA is defined as one that fully determines a student's eligibility for a Federal Pell Grant, including an Official Expected Family Contribution.
2. **Full Time Enrollment.** Students must continue to be enrolled full time (12 or more credits) at a Connecticut Community College.
3. **Continuous Enrollment.** Students must enroll in each fall and spring semester to remain eligible for a Debt Free College award. Students who have demonstrated eligibility and have received a Debt Free College award are eligible to retain their Debt Free College award should the student elect to transfer to another Connecticut Community College.
4. **Satisfactory Academic Progress.** Students must meet the satisfactory academic progress (SAP) policy for determining financial aid eligibility, as approved by the BOR. ([click here for the SAP policy](#))

C. Removal of Students from the Program

Students shall be removed from participation in the Program upon failure to continually meet any of the Program eligibility requirements.

Examples of such instances include, but are not limited to, failing to file a FAFSA, failing to complete FAFSA verification requirements, not meeting the satisfactory academic progress requirements, not enrolling full-time in all fall and spring semesters, or moving out of state.

V. Student Appeals

The PACT Program requires students to maintain continuous full-time enrollment in the fall and spring semesters through the completion of their eligible degree or certificate program. Should an extenuating circumstance occur that prevents an otherwise qualifying student from meeting the continuous full-time enrollment requirement, an appeal process is available for consideration toward regaining Program eligibility.

To ensure the equal treatment of students across all colleges, appeals related to PACT shall be reviewed by an Appeals Committee at the CSCU System Office.

A. Consideration for Appeals

The following extenuating circumstances may be considered by the Appeals Committee. The total amount of time for all approved leaves of absence is capped at six months, except in cases of military deployment.

- Documented medical emergency
- Documented personal emergency
- Documented military deployment (must reenroll within four years of discharge)
- Selective admission programs that require less than full-time enrollment
- Part-time enrollment in final semester of program

B. Appeal Process

All appeals must include an appeal form that is available at each college financial aid office. This form shall include instructions for submitting an appeal, and any relevant information regarding notification to the student of the outcome.

Each appeal must contain supporting documentation to substantiate the appeal. This may include:

- A medical professional's note
- Hospital discharge documentation
- Obituary or death certificate
- Military deployment documentation
- Verification of a program-specific part-time enrollment
- Verification of a student's final semester in their program
- Other documentation on a case-by-case basis

C. Final Appeals

A final appeal of the decision of the Appeals Committee at the CSCU System Office may be made to the CSCU President, or designee. The decision of that official shall be final.

VI. Students with Disabilities

Otherwise qualifying students with documented disabilities that are unable to satisfy the full-time enrollment requirement and are seeking participation in PACT must contact the college's designated disability services coordinator. Based on an individualized assessment and existing disability accommodation policies and procedures, the college's designated disability services coordinator will work with the student and the student's academic advisor to determine the maximum number of credit hours that are feasible for the qualifying student with a disability(ies) to complete in a covered semester. The college's designated disability services

coordinator(s) is responsible for evaluating and documenting the outcome of the requested accommodations for eligibility in the Program. Enrollment deadlines outlined above must be met in order to participate.

VII. Payments and Refunds

Students who are recipients of a PACT award shall have the award disbursed to their account on each semester's financial aid disbursement date following fall and spring census.

Students who have paid for fall and/or spring semester tuition and required fees and then receive a PACT award, including students who receive a minimum award, shall be entitled to a refund of their excess credit balance. Any available credit balance on the student's account resulting from a PACT award shall be refunded in accordance with existing BOR policy.

PACT awards shall only be made if funds are available, and may be pro-rated or reduced if there is insufficient funding to make full awards to all eligible students.

VIII. Treatment of Previous College Credit

All PACT participants must be enrolled full-time to receive Program funding. Credits accepted from previous institutions, such as credits earned in a dual-enrollment program prior to high school graduation or credits earned at another Connecticut community college are not applicable toward each semester's full time enrollment status. All credits earned at any Connecticut Community College while eligible for this program shall count toward the 72 earned credit hour limitation.

IX. Reporting, Program Compliance, and Evaluation

A. Reporting

The CSCU System Office will be responsible for semiannual reporting (March 1 and October 1) on the PACT Program to the General Assembly. The following data will be included:

1. The number of qualifying students enrolled each semester
2. The number of qualifying students receiving minimum awards
3. The number of qualifying students receiving non-minimum awards
4. The average number of credit hours a qualifying student has enrolled

5. The average number of credit hours a qualifying student has completed
6. The average award made to qualifying students eligible for a non-minimum award
7. Completion rates of qualifying students by degree or certificate program
8. Demographic information about qualifying students
9. information about retention and completion by qualifying students

B. Program Compliance

During the reporting process, the System Office will perform quality assurance reviews as a means to determine all Program funds were applied according to Section 362 of PA19-117 and all related policies adopted by the BOR.

Students found to have received a PACT award as a result of an error by CSCU shall have the award rescinded from their account and replaced with institutional funds at no detriment to the student.

C. Evaluation

On an annual basis, the CSCU System Office will review the outcomes of the Program as a means to evaluate its effectiveness.

In addition, within one year of Program operation and periodically thereafter the CSCU system office shall review the utilization of institutional aid with respect to its impact on affordability and access for various groups of students, including low-income students, minority students, and other groups for whom achievement gaps have been identified within the Community College system. That review shall include policy recommendations to the Board of Regents.

Appendix A: Program Calendar

The following Program activities will help to guide CSCU and its institutions in implementing PACT:

May	Outreach activities; Fund appropriation
June	Outreach activities
July 15	Program awarding for priority deadline for fall registration
August	Program awarding for non-priority deadline
September	Award finalization and disbursement
October	Program reporting
November	FAFSA Month preparation
November 15	Program awarding for priority deadline for winter/spring registration
December	FAFSA Month
January	Program awarding for non-priority deadline
February	Award finalization and disbursement
March	Program Reporting
April	Annual program Assessment