

Student Financial Aid

The Office of Student Financial Aid supports the University goal of providing postsecondary education opportunities by assisting qualified Athens State University students in the pursuit of their educational goals with funds from grants, scholarships, loans, and work-study programs from federal, state, and private sources. The Office is committed to:

- Ensuring compliance with federal, state and institutional regulations and policy requirements governing student financial aid services;
- Maintaining funding sources by ensuring program integrity through ongoing staff training and continuing education, external audits, and self-evaluations;
- Maximizing funds available for Athens State University students to meet their costs of attendance, supplementing the efforts of students and parents in meeting educational goals; and
- Providing quality financial assistance services effectively and efficiently.

For questions regarding financial aid, contact the Office of Student Financial Aid: (mail) Athens State University Office of Student Financial Aid, 300 North Beaty Street, Athens, AL 35611; (phone) 256-233-8122; (email) finaid@athens.edu . Students may also visit the Financial Aid webpage at <http://www.athens.edu/financial-aid> . The Student Financial Aid Office is located on the upper-level of the Sandridge Student Center.

Financial Aid for Degree-Seeking Graduate Students

The only financial aid funds available to degree-seeking graduate students are Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loans (also known as Direct Stafford Loans) and Federal Graduate Direct PLUS Loans.

Federal Student Direct Unsubsidized Loans

Federal Student Direct Unsubsidized Loans are available to both undergraduate and graduate degree-seeking students; there is no requirement to demonstrate financial need. The Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan Program allows degree-seeking graduate students to receive loans with the following benefits:

- Loans have a low fixed-interest rate.
- No repayment is required while the student is enrolled.
- Loan acceptance is not based on the student's credit history.
- Students may borrow up to \$20,500 per year (as of this catalog's publication).

Students who are required to take undergraduate prerequisites prior to full admission to a graduate program will be eligible for loans as long as they have not reached their aggregate undergraduate loan limit. As of this catalog's publication, students are eligible to borrow up to \$12,500 per year in undergraduate loan funds.

Eligibility Requirements for Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loans

- Student must be a U. S. citizen or eligible non-citizen.
- Student must be registered with Selective Service (if required).
- Student must be accepted for admission to a graduate program as a degree-seeking student.
- Student must be enrolled as a degree-seeking graduate student in at least six (6) semester hours.
- Student must maintain satisfactory academic progress (see below).
- Student must not be in default on a federal student loan or owe a repayment of Title IV federal aid funds.
- Student must not be receiving aid at more than one school during the same enrollment period.

Federal Graduate Direct PLUS Loans

Federal Graduate Direct PLUS Loans are available to graduate and professional students. A student must exhaust all Direct Unsubsidized Loan eligibility for the year before applying (\$20,500 per year as of this catalog's publication). Eligibility depends on the cost of attendance minus all resources including any unsubsidized loans. Students are not eligible if they have adverse credit without a credit worthy co-signer. Interest accumulates while attending school, but loan payments are deferred while enrolled at least halftime.

A new Master Promissory Note and entrance counseling will have to be completed for first time Grad PLUS borrowers. **Direct PLUS loans are not available to students taking undergraduate prerequisites to be admitted into a graduate program.**

Basic Steps for Applying for Aid

Students must apply for aid each academic year. Additional details can be found on the Student Financial Aid webpage [Aid Process – Start to Finish](#).

Apply for a U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID)

Apply for an FSA ID at <http://www.fafsa.gov>. Click the "FSA ID" link to create an FSA ID; you will be asked to create a username and password and enter your email address. You will receive a secure code by email at the address you entered asking you to confirm your email address with the code. The FSA ID will be your electronic signature for the FAFSA, renewal FAFSA, and Master Promissory Note for loans. Parents of dependent students must also have their own FSA ID to sign the FAFSA electronically.

Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Students can apply for Federal Aid at www.fafsa.ed.gov. This application is required to determine a student's eligibility for federal grant and loan programs. The results of this application are mailed to each student and electronically transmitted to each institution listed on the student's application. **Athens State University's School Code is 001008.**

Apply for a Direct Student Loan

Students requesting loan funding for the first time must fulfill the one time online requirements of Entrance Counseling and completion of a Master Promissory Note at www.studentloans.gov. The Master Promissory note requires a Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID) number to complete. The Financial Aid Office receives direct electronic confirmation of the completion of these requirements.

Federal Requirements on Satisfactory Academic Progress for Graduate Students Receiving Aid

All degree-seeking graduate students must comply with the minimum requirements for Satisfactory Academic Progress for students receiving financial aid. The minimum requirements for Satisfactory Academic Progress are:

- The student must maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.00 based on graduate coursework.
- The student must successfully complete 67% of all coursework attempted. All grades of "W", "I", and "F" count as unsuccessful completions.

- The student must complete the requirements for the graduate degree within 150% of the usual time frame for degree completion. Athens State generally requires completion of 30 semester hours to earn a graduate degree. Therefore, financial aid will be available for no more than 45 semester hours of graduate level credit.

All accepted transfer work will be included in calculations of the number of hours eligible for financial aid. Noncredit remedial courses are not included in the calculations. Repeated courses and courses for which the student has been granted academic bankruptcy or course forgiveness are included in the calculation of both attempted and earned hours. Students changing majors will not have additional time allowed for goal accomplishment. For financial aid purposes, graduate students are considered to be in satisfactory progress status the first term of enrollment (see below).

Compliance with standards of academic progress is checked at the end of each term. Students not in compliance will be in the financial aid “WARNING” status for one semester. If at the end of the WARNING semester the student fails to regain compliance with SAP, the student will be in SUSPENDED status (ineligible for aid). Students are notified via their student email account of suspension and steps for appeal and/or reinstatement of aid.

Suspension of Financial Aid – Process for Student Appeal/Reinstatement

Please note: The process detailed below is for appeals related to the suspension and reinstatement of financial aid. Students who have also been suspended from the University for poor academic performance must file a **separate** appeal concerning the University suspension. Additional information on this process can be found in the [Standards of Academic Performance](#) policy.

Students on SUSPENDED status may submit an appeal for aid reinstatement due to extenuating circumstances. Student appeals must include a completed Federal Aid Suspension Appeal Form and supporting documentation, including:

- A typed explanation of:
 - Unusual or mitigating circumstances that you believe prevented or hindered you in making satisfactory academic progress;

AND

 - What has changed and/or corrective actions and steps being taken to prevent future problems.
- Supporting documentation relevant to the circumstances and your request for reinstatement of aid (e.g., doctor’s statements, hospital discharge records, death certificate, etc.).
- A complete updated plan of study provided by your academic advisor.
- **RECOMMENDED:** At least one letter of support from someone (**not a family member**) who can attest to the extenuating circumstances (e.g., medical doctor, clergy, professional, etc.).

The appeal documentation must be provided to the Office of Student Financial Aid **no later than 30 days prior to the tuition payment deadline for the upcoming semester**. Failure to provide all documentation within the prescribed dates will result in a delayed determination.

Once the Office of Student Financial Aid has made a decision on the student’s appeal, the student will be notified of the decision via the student’s Athens State email account. If the student’s appeal is approved, the status will be changed to PROBATION, which may require that the student agree to certain conditions. Generally, PROBATION continues until the student has regained SAP, provided the student has no grades of “W”, “I”, or “F” while on PROBATION status. Failure to follow all conditions related to the PROBATION status will result in financial aid being terminated.

The student may appeal the decision of the Office of Student Financial Aid with an additional typed letter to the Financial Aid Committee. The Committee will review the appeal and notify of their decision via the student’s Athens

State email account. The committee reviews appeals once per semester/term, near the beginning of the term. Decisions of the committee are final.

If the student's appeal is denied or the student elects not to appeal, the student generally must self-pay to complete the hours necessary and achieve the grades required to return to compliance with SAP. Financial aid status will return to **GOOD STANDING** when the Office of Student Financial Aid makes a determination that the student meets all the terms of SAP. Additional details can be found on the Student Financial Aid webpage [Satisfactory Academic Progress](#).

Federal Regulations on Return of Funds for Students Receiving Title IV Aid (Financial Aid)

The federal regulations in effect at the time of publication of this catalog are given below. Regulations are subject to change; for additional details, see the [Financial Aid Regulations](#) on the University website.

Title IV funds are awarded to students under the assumption that the student will attend school for the entire period for which the assistance is awarded. When a student fails to complete the term, the student may no longer be eligible for the full amount of Title IV funds he or she was scheduled to receive, and the institution and/or the student may be required to return funds according to federal regulations. The Title IV programs included in these regulations are Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), TEACH Grants, and Federal Direct Loans. Federal Work-Study funds are not included.

Federal refund regulations require Athens State University to determine the amount of aid "earned" by each student receiving Title IV funds who withdraws from all classes prior to the 60% point in the term. A student completing 60% of the term is considered to have "earned" 100% of the Title IV funds the student was scheduled to receive during the period.

Any student earning a passing grade in at least one course for the term are not subject to the federal Return to Title IV Funds regulations. **Students are strongly encouraged to consult the Office of Student Financial Aid prior to withdrawing or dropping out of the term.**

Calculations are based on the student's official withdrawal date. For unofficial withdrawals, calculations are based on the last date of an academically related activity that the student participated in, the mid-point of the term, or the date the school determines the student ceased attendance due to illness, accident, grievous personal loss or other circumstances beyond the student's control. Unofficial withdrawal dates are determined by the faculty, identifying the last date of activity for courses where a student earned an 'F', 'I', or 'W'.

The withdrawal date must be determined within 30 days of the end of the term, academic year or student's program, whichever is earlier.

The institution must return the amount of Title IV funds for which it is responsible no later than 45 days after the date of the determination of the date of the student's withdrawal. Athens State University offers all degree programs in a credit hour, term based format. As a credit hour, term based degree program, the following formula is used to compute aid to be returned:

- $(\text{Days Enrolled} / \text{Days in Term}) \times \text{Title IV Aid Awarded and Disbursed} = \text{Aid Earned}$
- (Any break of five days or more is not counted in the days in the term)
- $\text{Aid Disbursed} - \text{Aid Earned} = \text{Aid to be Returned}$

If a student earned less aid than was disbursed, the institution would be required to return a portion of the funds and the student would be required to return a portion of the funds. **When Title IV funds are returned, the student borrower will owe a debit balance to the institution.**

If a student earned more aid than was disbursed, the institution will owe the student a post-withdrawal disbursement, to be paid within 120 days of the student's withdrawal.

Responsibilities of Students Receiving Financial Aid

A student receiving financial aid has the responsibility to:

- Review and consider all information about a school's program BEFORE enrolling.
- Pay special attention to the application for student financial aid, complete it accurately, and submit it on time to the appropriate person, office or agency. Errors can delay or prevent receiving aid.
- Know all the deadlines for applying or reapplying for aid and meet them.
- Provide all documentation, corrections, and/or new information requested by either the Student Financial Aid Office or the agency to which the application was submitted.
- Notify the University of any information that has changed since an application was submitted for financial aid.
- Read, understand, and keep copies of all forms requiring signature(s).
- Repay any student loans. When a student signs a promissory note, the student is agreeing to repay the loan.
- Complete an entrance and exit interview for the University if the student has a Federal Direct Student Loan.
- Notify the University of any change in name, address, or attendance status. **If a student has a loan, the lender must also be notified of any changes.**
- Satisfactorily perform the work agreed upon, if the student is employed in a federal work-study job.
- Understand the University's refund policy as specified in this catalog.

Rights of Students Receiving Financial Aid

A student has the right to ask the University:

- For the names of the University's accrediting and licensing organizations.
- For a copy of the documents describing the institution's accreditation or licensing.
- About the University's programs, instructional, laboratory, and other physical facilities, and about the faculty.
- About the cost of attending, and about the University's policy on refunds to students who drop out.
- About the types of financial assistance that are available, including information on all federal, state, local, private and institutional financial aid programs.
- About financial aid personnel, where their offices are located, and how to contact them for information.
- About the procedures and deadlines for submitting applications for each available financial aid program.
- How the University determines financial need, including cost of education and resources available.
- How much of one's need, as determined by the University, had been met.
- How and when financial aid is received.
- To explain each type and amount of assistance in the financial aid package.
- About the interest rate on any student loan, the total amount to be repaid, the length of time for repayment and when repayment must start, and what cancellation or deferment provisions apply.
- If offered a federal work-study job— about the kind of job, the hours to be worked, the duties of the job, the rate of pay, and how and when wages are paid.
- To reconsider an aid package, if a student believes a mistake has been made, or if enrollment or financial circumstances have changed.
- About the requirements for satisfactory academic progress, and the consequences of unsatisfactory progress.
- About the special facilities and services that are available to persons with disabilities.