

# **COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**

## **POLICY ON SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

### **FOR LOANS AND FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FSA) RECIPIENTS**

#### **SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

Columbia Law School's policies on satisfactory academic progress outlined in this document pertain to students receiving loans and federal financial aid.

#### **CONSISTENT APPLICATION**

To maintain satisfactory academic progress (SAP) at Columbia Law School, a student must be making measureable academic progress toward completion of the Columbia Law School Juris Doctor (JD), Master of Laws (LLM), or Executive LLM degree. Federal regulations require evaluation of both quantitative and qualitative academic progress for students who are receiving funds under the Federal Student Aid programs through the Columbia Law School Office of Financial Aid that are classified under Title IV aid:

- **Federal Unsubsidized Loans**
- **Federal Graduate PLUS Loans**
- **Federal Work-Study**

Satisfactory academic progress (SAP) standards are the same for all categories of students within each Law program (JD, LLM, or Executive LLM), including those students registered with the Office of Disability Services. SAP assessment does not differ if a student is full time or part time, nor whether a student is receiving Federal aid (e.g., students who are funding their Law studies through personal/family resources; international students, those who are not US citizens or permanent residents, and are not eligible for Federal aid, etc.).

All periods of enrollment will be included in the measurement of SAP. Semesters in which the student enrolls but is not receiving Federal financial aid are included in the measurement.

Any student who does not meet satisfactory academic progress will receive an email notification stating that they have lost financial aid eligibility. Students not meeting satisfactory academic progress may appeal the loss of their financial aid eligibility by submitting an appeal to the Office of Financial Aid.

Visiting students may be eligible for Federal financial aid through their home institution, and should consult with their home institution's financial aid office about their eligibility and SAP. Since they are not matriculated in a Columbia Law School degree program, their satisfactory academic progress will be determined by their home institution.

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**REGULAR EVALUATIONS**

Students in the three-year JD program will be assessed for SAP at the end of each academic year (i.e., in June/July after each of their first and second years in the program).

Students in the one-year LLM program will be assessed after their first semester in the program – in January after the completion of the Fall semester.

Students in the Executive LLM program will be assessed in May after completion of the Spring semester required courses.

Students enrolling at Columbia Law School for the first time are considered initially to be meeting SAP. This includes transfers into the second year of the JD program. As stated above, the measurement of SAP will be made at the conclusion of the first academic year at the Law School for JD students, at the end of the first semester for LLM students, and in May for Executive LLM students. For transfers into the JD program, the credits accepted in transfer toward the Columbia JD will be included in the SAP assessment.

Students who have been academically suspended or excluded from Columbia Law School and who are re-admitted are not eligible for Federal financial aid unless they meet the SAP standards. Students who are re-admitted may follow the appeal policy if consideration for Federal financial aid is sought.

**GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA)**

**JD Students:** To maintain satisfactory academic progress, a JD student must maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 by the end of the academic year in which the SAP assessment will be made. The GPA will be reviewed annually, after the posting of the spring semester grades and the overall GPA must be equal to or greater than 2.0.

**LLM Students:** To maintain satisfactory academic progress, an LLM student must maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.67 or have a preponderance of B grades by the end of the semester in which the SAP assessment will be made. The GPA will be reviewed after the posting of the fall semester grades in January, and the overall GPA must be equal to or greater than 2.67, or the student must have a preponderance of grades that are B or higher, and may not fail more than one course or seminar.

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**Executive LLM Students:** To maintain satisfactory academic progress, an Executive LLM student must maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.67 or have a preponderance of B or higher grades by the end of the semester in which the SAP assessment will be made. The GPA will be reviewed after the posting of the Spring semester grades in May, and the overall GPA must be equal to or greater than 2.67, or the student must have a preponderance of grades that are B or higher, and may not fail more than one course or seminar.

**Procedures:** To successfully complete points, you must receive grades of letter grades (A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, or C) or CR (and HP, P, LP for courses graded with such grades). Non-passing grade designations include F (failure) and W (withdrawal). A grade of W (withdrawal) will not count toward graduation credit or the student's GPA. A grade of IN (incomplete) does not count toward the GPA unless replaced by a passing grade.

**JSD Students:** There is no GPA calculation for students in the JSD program (Doctor of Juridical Science). Program requirements are outlined at: <https://www.law.columbia.edu/academics/jsd-program-and-curriculum>. Since JSD students are graded only on the Credit/Fail basis, a GPA calculation does not apply. The student's faculty advisor will confirm progress toward completion of the degree each academic year.

**MAXIMUM TIME FRAME AND PACE OF COMPLETION**

**Maximum Time Frame (JD Candidates):** In accordance with American Bar Association regulations, JD students must complete their degree in a maximum time frame of no more 84 months, from time of enrollment to graduation, including any semesters at institutions at which students were previously matriculated, study abroad programs, and semesters on leave from the Law School.

**Maximum Time Frame (LLM Candidates):** LLM candidates must complete their degree requirements within two semesters. Upon petition, LLM students may be granted permission to complete their degree requirements within three semesters.

**Maximum Time Frame (Executive LLM Candidates):** Executive LLM candidates are expected to complete their degree coursework during the February – October program period. In certain rare instances, with prior approval from the Program Director, a student may be able to complete the Residency portion of the program in two consecutive summers rather than one.

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**Pace of Completion (JD Candidates):** To progress to the second year of the JD program, students must have completed all requirements save one associated with the first year of studies (87% of registered points). To progress to the 5th (third year), students must have completed all the requirements save one associated with the first four semesters (67% of registered points).

**Pace of Completion (LLM Candidates):** To progress to the second semester of the two-semester LLM program, students must have completed all requirements save one associated with the first semester of studies, or at least 67 percent of all points attempted. No LLM candidacy will be extended or renewed beyond the second award date subsequent to the termination of the candidate's period of residence, i.e., February for candidates going out of residence in May.

**Pace of Completion (Executive LLM Candidates):** To attend the Residency portion of the program (Summer semester), students must successfully complete the required courses in the Spring semester.

**Procedures:** The grades of letter grades (A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, or C) or CR (and HP, P, LP for courses graded with such grades) count toward the pace of completion calculation. The grades of IN (incomplete), W (withdrawal), and non-passing grade designation of F (failure) also count toward the pace of completion calculation.

**Maximum Time Frame (JSD Candidates):** JSD candidates must complete their degree requirements within six (6) academic years. Upon petition, JSD students may be granted permission for a short extension of time to defend their dissertation.

**EFFECT/TREATMENT OF “ATYPICAL” COURSES/SITUATIONS**

**Effect of Incomplete**

The satisfactory academic progress of JD students will be assessed annually after the Spring semester. The satisfactory academic progress of students in the one-year LLM program will be assessed at the end of the Fall semester, in January once grades have been submitted. The satisfactory academic progress of Executive LLM students will be assessed after the posting of the grades for the first semester courses in the Executive LLM program in May.

If a student receives an incomplete, this course will count as attempted points in the pace of completion assessment of satisfactory academic progress. Since incompletes are temporary grades, they have no impact on the GPA of the student. Once final grades are awarded for an incomplete, students will be re-

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assessed for satisfactory academic progress. Incompletes will count toward the pace of completion calculation.

#### **Effect of Withdrawals**

Withdrawal after the designated Law School deadline will affect satisfactory academic progress. Non-passing grade designations include W (withdrawal). A grade of W (withdrawal) will not count toward graduation credit or the student's GPA. Withdrawals will count toward the pace of completion calculation.

#### **Effect of Course Repetitions**

If a course can be taken for points multiple times according to its course description, then the points of the course will count as accepted points in the pace of completion assessment and the grades will be factored into the GPA calculation in any assessment for satisfactory academic progress.

If a student passes a previously failed course, then the course will count toward attempted points in the pace of completion assessment and both grades will be factored into the GPA calculation in any assessment for satisfactory academic progress.

If a student retakes a class that they previously passed, then the course will not count toward completed points, but will be counted towards attempted points. The course grade will not be calculated into of the GPA in any assessment for satisfactory academic progress. An exception will be made when the repeated class is necessary for the student's major or concentration. In these cases, the points will count towards that students' full time status for the semester.

#### **Effect of Dual Degrees**

A JD student in a dual (or joint) degree program must complete all requirements for both degrees (JD and other) before they can be conferred the JD degree. Depending on the dual (joint) degree program, a JD student will earn the JD upon completion of either three (3) or four (years) of study.

There are no dual (or joint) degree programs for LLM Program or the Executive LLM Program.

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### **Effect of Advanced Standing (Transfer Students)**

Students who transfer into the JD program are allowed a maximum of 32 points of advanced standing towards the degree. All of these points will be counted as attempted and completed points towards the degree.

The Law School does not accept transfer credits for the LLM Program or the Executive LLM program.

### **Effect of Transfers of Credit from Other Schools or Institutions**

Students who transfer into the JD program are allowed a maximum of 32 points of advanced standing towards the degree. All of these points will be counted as completed points towards the degree. To be eligible for the Columbia Law School JD degree, transfer students are required to spend at least four (4) semesters in residence at the Law School.

The Law School does not accept transfer credits for the LLM Program or the Executive LLM program.

### **Emergency Declarations and University-wide Changes**

In the event of a national or state-wide emergency, and/or where a pass/fail or credit/fail grading system is implemented University-wide:

Any courses graded as credit/fail will be counted in the total number of attempted hours.

When a course is successfully completed and given a grade of "CR", the credits are added to the total number of attempted and earned credits hours; but, the "CR" grade is not included in the GPA calculation.

When a course is not successfully completed and the student is given a grade of "F", it will be treated as a standard grade of "F" and this will negatively impact the progression and GPA of the student.

Any student who fails a SAP assessment as a result of a qualifying emergency will be allowed to submit an appeal, as described in this SAP policy.

Any and all treatment of Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) updates and changes will abide by existing statutory regulation on SAP, any temporary

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statutory relief provided by Congress, and any temporary guidance provided by the Department of Education (ED).

### **STATUS DEFINITIONS**

#### **Financial Aid Probation:**

For JD candidates, academic progress will be evaluated annually after Spring semester grades are available, and each semester for any student on Financial Aid probation and who is required to follow an Academic Plan.

Academic progress is evaluated in January for LLM candidates, once Fall semester grades are available, and each semester for any student on Financial Aid probation and who is required to follow an Academic Plan.

Academic progress of Executive LLM students will be assessed after the posting of the grades for the Spring semester in the Executive LLM program in May.

Any student who does not meet satisfactory academic progress will receive an email notification from the Office of Financial Aid stating that they have lost financial aid eligibility.

Financial aid probation is the status of a student who has failed to meet SAP guidelines and who has successfully appealed the loss of federal financial aid eligibility. Students will be monitored while on probation and have one semester (or as specified by the Academic Plan):

- to meet the satisfactory academic progress requirements and be removed from financial aid probation; or
- to meet the Academic Plan requirements and possibly remain on financial aid probation in order to remain eligible for financial aid in the subsequent semester.

Students continue to receive aid while on financial aid probation.

**Academic Suspensions:** A student who has been suspended for academic reasons and falls below satisfactory academic progress guidelines may appeal the loss of federal financial aid eligibility upon re-enrolling.

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### **APPEALS**

A student may appeal loss of financial aid eligibility. Federal regulations mandate that in order to receive financial aid, students must be making satisfactory academic progress ("SAP") towards their degree. As such, the Office of Financial Aid is not permitted to disburse financial aid to students who are not making satisfactory academic progress.

Federal regulations do not mandate institutions to offer an appeal process, however the law school has established a Title IV SAP appeal process. Students who have unforeseen extenuating circumstances that prevented them from making SAP may submit an appeal in writing to the Office of Financial Aid.

**Appeals Process:** Students not meeting satisfactory academic progress may appeal the loss of their financial aid eligibility by submitting an appeal to the Office of Financial Aid. The committee will meet shortly thereafter and notify students of a decision prior to the start of the subsequent semester. To appeal, students must submit a letter explaining their circumstances, document the circumstances cited, and develop an Academic Plan to reinstate satisfactory academic progress in consultation with an academic adviser.

A student may initiate the SAP appeal process by preparing and submitting a written Title IV Satisfactory Academic Progress appeal with all substantiating documentation. The appeal must include (1) a detailed explanation regarding: (a) why the student failed to make SAP (examples of appeal-worthy circumstances are: serious physical or mental illness of the student, serious physical or mental illness of a student's immediate family member, death of a student's immediate family member and other extenuating circumstances) and (b) what has changed that will allow the student to make SAP at the next evaluation, and (2) a SAP academic plan that outlines the specific plan/corrective action to improve academic progress.

### **Academic Plans**

A SAP Financial Aid Academic Plan outlines a specific plan and/or corrective action to improve academic progress. A student should meet with one of the Academic Counselors in the Office of Student Services in order to prepare an appropriate SAP academic plan prior to submitting the appeal. A determination will be jointly made by the Office of Financial Aid and the Office of Student Services at the Law School of whether the student's appeal will be approved or denied. All appeal decisions are final. If the appeal is granted, students will be



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required to follow the SAP Financial Aid Academic Plan in order to receive federal, state and institutional financial assistance.

Students must be enrolled in the course work listed on their SAP Academic Plan, meet minimum completion rates, and be making progress each semester toward all SAP requirements by the Academic Plan projected end date and/or graduation date to retain Title IV eligibility. Failure to meet the terms of the Academic Plan will jeopardize eligibility for federal, state and institutional financial assistance.

### **RESTORING ELIGIBILITY**

A student can regain financial aid eligibility by becoming compliant with satisfactory academic progress requirements.

### **NOTIFICATIONS**

The Law School's Office of Financial Aid will notify students in writing by email when aid eligibility is affected by SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS evaluation.

Students whose appeal has been approved will be notified in written form by email that they are on financial aid probation. They will be given one semester (Spring or Fall) to become compliant either by satisfying SAP requirements or by meeting the terms of the academic plan. Financial aid will be suspended if satisfactory academic progress is not met after the next academic semester the student is registered.

Language is incorporated into communications to students affected by the Law School's Mandatory Academic Support Policy about the potential effect on satisfactory academic progress standing and federal financial aid eligibility.

The Law School's Office of Financial Aid will send written communication by email independently to students who are placed on or removed from financial aid probation.