



Information BRIEF

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What is a tuition/fee waiver, and how does it benefit the state and SUS?

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A primer on the tuition/fee waiver: what it is, where it comes from, and whom it benefits

What is it?

A “tuition/fee waiver” refers to a program initiated by a state or institution that allows specific individuals to have a “waiving” or a refrain from paying a portion of tuition/fees the students are traditionally charged. The institution is actually owed for the full cost charged, but the tuition/fee waiver is applied by the institution for students meeting specified criteria. As a result, students who have received a waiver have a reduced cost of matriculation. Criteria for tuition/fee waivers may be formalized in statute for state programs or in regulation for system or institutional programs.

Tuition waivers are typically considered a form of financial aid, especially to the student. But there are similarities and differences between waivers and other forms of financial aid. The waiver differs from forms of aid such as scholarships, grants, and loans in that these methods are considered cash subsidies for the student’s expenses. A waiver is instead a reprieve from all or a specific portion of a student’s financial obligations and is treated as “non-revenue” by the institution. Some forms of financial aid are a type of work agreement, such as a fellowship or assistantship, in which a student agrees to work for pay. A student on a fellowship would receive a paycheck, while a student receiving a waiver would receive a reduction in his or her bill for tuition/fees from the university. A key similarity to other forms of financial aid is the non-obligation for repayment. Like the scholarship, fellowship, or grant, a tuition/fee waiver does not have to be repaid by the student.

Where does it come from?

A waiver may be statutory or non-statutory in terms of its origin and purpose. A statutory waiver is one that the State of Florida has deemed is in the best interest of its citizenry and established in formal statute. The statute then defines who is qualified for the waiver and what institutions are included, for example, public four-year institutions or all public institutions within the state. Qualifications in statute identify a particular group that has been determined should be entitled to have a reduction of tuition/fees. Examples of groups of citizens who are eligible for waivers in statute include adoptees from the Florida Department of Children and

A primer on the tuition waiver

Families, dependents and spouses of deceased or disabled veterans, homeless individuals, surviving dependents and spouses of law enforcement, and high school students. These waivers in some cases acknowledge specific circumstances that might prevent these students from attending college, such as homeless students, and other waivers encourage behavior that is in the state's best interest, such as encouraging high school students to enroll in college courses.

A non-statutory waiver is one not in Florida Statute but located within the regulations of an individual institution or system. Waivers in this category are often used to attract students to a particular program or purpose. An example would be a waiver that a university uses to attract students with specific talents, such as fine arts or athletics, because that student brings something desired to the campus. In turn, the university might waive part or all of a student's cost of matriculation.

Who does it benefit?

Waivers can be an important tool for campus recruiting and can help ensure that an institution has musicians, graduate teaching assistants, athletes and other specific students needed for the betterment of the university and its mission. Another group of students often benefiting from waivers is non-resident students. A partial or full waiver of the non-resident fees can be an important recruiting tool to bring qualified non-resident students to an institution. Thus, the tuition waiver might make an institution more competitive with neighboring institutions when recruiting. For example, an institution close to the border of a neighboring state might use a partial waiver to compete for students within a reasonable commuting distance.

Summary

In summary, tuition waivers are a reprieve of part or all of a student's tuition/fee obligation. Tuition waivers are a form of financial aid and have similarities and differences to other financial aid tools. Waivers are not a cash subsidy to pay a student's obligation, like a scholarship, grant, or loan. Fellowships, assistantship, and work-study have a job requirement, where students work to earn pay, but a waiver does not. Like a scholarship or grant, a waiver does not require repayment. A statutory waiver is established in Florida Statute, which defines which students are eligible and which institutions will provide the waiver to qualified individuals. Non-statutory tuition/fee waivers are established in the regulations of a specific institution or multiple institutions. These waivers often encourage the enrollment of specific students or groups of students that will benefit the university, such as musicians or athletes. Or the waivers might be used to recruit non-resident students or graduate students who will fill specific programs. Tuition waivers are a financial aid tool that states and universities can use to attract specific students whose enrollment in higher education will contribute to the best interests of the state, the institution, or both.