



Online Free Seat Program Implementation & Guidance Document for State University System Institutions

August 4, 2021

Background

Pursuant to CS/HB 1261, the 2021 Legislature created the Free Seat Program “to encourage veterans, active duty members of the United State Armed Forces, active drilling members of the Florida National Guard, and nontraditional students to enroll in an online baccalaureate degree program at a state university.”

Student eligibility

1. A student whose tuition and fees are waived and tuition discounted under this program must:
 - a. Be a resident for tuition purposes under s. 1009.21, F.S.;
 - b. Not have previously earned a bachelor’s degree;
 - c. Be enrolled in an online baccalaureate degree program as defined in the “Online Baccalaureate Program” section below;
 - d. Meet one of the following eligibility requirements:
 - i. Is a veteran as defined in s. 1.01(14), F.S.;
 - ii. Is an active duty member of the United States Armed Forces;
 - iii. Is an active drilling member of the Florida National Guard whose eligibility is validated by the service member’s unit Commander and/or the Commander’s designated representative serving as the Unit Point of Contact;
 - iv. Is a nontraditional student, defined for the purposes of this program as a student who has earned a Florida standard high school diploma, a high school diploma comparable to a Florida standard high school diploma, or its equivalent, or completed a home education program, and has been out of high school or home education program for at least 5 years. A nontraditional student must not have been enrolled in a postsecondary institution in the last 5 years.
2. Students who wish to be considered for the Online Free Seat program must submit an application and be approved by their institution to participate in the program.
3. To remain eligible for the Online Free Seat Program, a student who has been approved for participation must enroll at least part-time in the program during each academic year. Taking at least one credit hour during the academic year would qualify for part-time enrollment.

4. Active drilling members of the Florida National Guard must have active drilling status verified on a form developed by the Board of Governors and provided by the university to obtain a signature from the member's Unit Commander and/or designated representative serving as the Unit Point of Contact (electronic signatures may be used, if needed). Such verification must be conducted each term in which the student is participating in the Online Free Seat Program.

Online Baccalaureate Program

1. For purposes of this program, online baccalaureate programs are those programs/majors included in the Board of Governors Online Program Inventory (<https://prod.flbog.net:4445/pls/apex/f?p=136:13>).
2. The Free Seat Program applies to online baccalaureate programs/majors funded by E&G and those that are self-supporting; both types of programs are identified as online programs and are included in the Board of Governors Online Program Inventory.
3. All courses that are waived or discounted must be a part of the online baccalaureate degree program in which the student is enrolled.

Implementation

Institutions shall implement the Online Free Seat Program according to the following guidance.

1. Waivers
 - a. The tuition and fees for one online course will be waived in the first term in which a student participates in the Free Seat Program.
 - b. Waivers will be granted on a first-come, first-served basis up to the maximum allocation of students for each institution.
 - c. Universities will determine for each student the online course whose tuition and fees will be waived; the student must be provided the opportunity to have the waiver applied instead to a course with more credit hours taken that term.
 - d. This waiver will not be used/granted if other waivers, 3rd party contracts, and/or scholarships that are expressly restricted to and applied/credited toward a student's tuition and fees have already been applied.
 - e. Existing policies and procedures governing the application and disbursement of established waivers and financial aid will apply.
 - f. For purposes of this program, fees shall be those associated fees specified in Board Regulation 7.001 Tuition and Associated Fees and the distance learning fee defined in Board Regulation 7.003 Fees, Fines and Penalties.
 - i. The waiver applies to tuition and the following fees specified as Associated Fees in Board Regulation 7.001(5):
 - (a) Student Financial Aid Fee;
 - (b) Capital Improvement Fee;
 - (c) Health Fee;

- (d) Athletic Fee;
 - (e) Activity and Service Fee
 - (f) Non-Resident Student Financial Aid Fee, if applicable;
 - (g) Technology Fee;
 - (h) Other fees approved by the Board of Governors pursuant to Regulation 7.003(24); and
 - (i) Tuition Differential.
- ii. The waiver applies to the fees in Board Regulation 7.003(24):
 - (a) Green Fee – This fee may be assessed to establish or improve the use of renewable energy technologies or energy efficiencies that lower the university’s greenhouse emissions.
 - 1. University of South Florida: up to \$1.00 per credit hour
 - 2. New College of Florida: up to \$1.00 per credit hour
 - 3. University of West Florida: up to \$1.00 per credit hour
 - (b) Test Preparation Fee – at cost. This fee may be assessed to increase accessibility to test preparation courses in programs where students are expected to obtain specific preparation for a practice-based examination.
 - 1. Florida International University
 - 2. Florida A&M University – (bar test preparation)
 - (c) Student Life and Services Fee – This fee may be assessed to expand student participation in transformational learning opportunities that build new and enhances ongoing activities which connect students to the institution.
 - 1. University of North Florida: not to exceed 5 percent of tuition.
 - iii. The waiver applies to the distance learning fee defined in Board Regulation 7.003 Fees, Fines and Penalties:
 - (a) Distance Learning Fee - Universities may assess a distance learning fee to any student enrolled in a course listed in the distance learning catalog. The average distance learning fee amount assessed by a state university may not exceed \$30 per credit hour.
- g. The initial allocation of waivers for 2021-22 will be based on the distribution of military credit hours for institutions with at least one online program. The second allocation of waivers will be based on a subsequent DRS request issued to determine the number of applications received for participation in the Free Seats Program and the number of waivers granted. Seventy percent (70%) of the waivers will be allocated initially, with the remaining 30% being allocated based on the results of the DRS request. The methodology will be reviewed and modified, if needed, for 2022-23.

Table 1: ONLINE FREE SEAT WAIVER INITIAL ALLOCATION (70%) METHOD

BASED ON MILITARY UNDERGRADS ONLINE CREDITS (FALL 2020)

INST	# ONLINE BACHELOR'S PROGRAMS	MILITARY UNDERGRADS ONLINE CREDITS	# CREDITS FROM ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS	% CREDITS FROM ELIGIBLE INSTITUTIONS	# ONLINE FREE SEAT WAIVERS
FAMU	0	57	.	.	.
FAU	12	3,746	3,746	11.80%	82
FGCU	3	772	772	2.43%	17
FIU	44	4,202	4,202	13.24%	92
FPU	0	10	.	.	.
FSU	7	1,443	1,443	4.55%	31
NCF	0	17	.	.	.
UCF	32	4,616	4,616	14.54%	101
UF	22	1,473	1,473	4.64%	32
UNF	3	3,030	3,030	9.55%	66
USF	11	7,515	7,515	23.68%	165
UWF	14	4,945	4,945	15.58%	109
SUS	148	31,826	31,742	100%	695

Source: BOG-ODA, extracted 2021-06-09.

Note: Military includes Active Duty, National Guard or Veteran.

The number of Online Bachelor's programs includes fully online and primarily online.

Online credits includes All and Partial Distance Learning courses - not FLEX courses.

The SUDS database does not identify whether students are in an online program.

2. Tuition Discounts

- a. For all other courses in the program, a state university may not charge an eligible student more than 75% of the tuition rate as specified in s. 1009.24(4) and 75% of the tuition differential pursuant to s. 1009.24(16), if the student remains enrolled at least part-time in the program during each academic year.
- b. A student who qualifies for the tuition discount is eligible to receive the discount for up to 110 percent of the number of required credit hours of the degree program for which the student is enrolled.
- c. Fees will not be discounted.

3. Credits Earned from Accelerated Mechanisms and Transfer Credits

- a. Accelerated credits and transfer credits count towards the 110 percent limitation specified in the statute.
- b. Courses may be discounted if students need to take them to upgrade their basic knowledge after being absent in the classroom for several years. For example, if students majoring in a field that has changed a lot since they first took a course in it, the "re-take" course should be eligible for the applicable waiver or discount.

4. Withdrawals/failing grades/changing majors
 - a. Existing policies and procedures governing the application and disbursement of established waivers and financial aid will apply.