

Federal Student Aid Penalties for Drug Convictions

Upon enrollment, the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) mandates each institution must provide written notice that advises the student that a conviction (while receiving financial aid) of any offense involving the possession or sale of illegal drugs will result in a loss of federal student eligibility.

At the beginning of the fall semester, our office will be sending out annual notices to students' college e-mail accounts.

When completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), question 23 asks if the student has ever been convicted of a drug related offense. Failure to answer the question will automatically disqualify the student from receiving federal aid. Answering the question untruthfully, could result in fines, imprisonment or both.

Convictions count only if they were for an offense that occurred during a period of enrollment for which the student was receiving federal aid. A conviction does not count if it was reversed, removed from the student's record, or if the conviction occurred when the student was a juvenile, before the age of 18 (unless the student was tried as an adult).

According to the law, the following chart indicates the period of ineligibility for federal student aid. (A conviction for sale of drugs includes convictions for conspiring to sell drugs.)

	Possession of Illegal Drugs	Sale of Illegal Drugs
1st offense	1 year from date of conviction	2 years from date of conviction
2nd offense	2 years from date of conviction	Indefinite period
3+ offenses	Indefinite period	

The HEOA established the requirement for schools to provide each student who becomes ineligible for federal financial aid due to a drug conviction, a clear and conspicuous written notice of his/her loss of eligibility, and the methods whereby he/she can become eligible again.

A student regains eligibility the day after the period of ineligibility ends, or when he/she successfully completes a qualified drug rehabilitation program. Further drug convictions will make the student ineligible again.

Standards for a qualified drug rehabilitation program

A qualified drug rehabilitation program must include at least two unannounced drug tests and must satisfy at least one of the following requirements:

- Be qualified to receive funds directly from a federal, state, or local government program.
- Be qualified to receive payment directly or indirectly from a federally or state-licensed insurance company.
- Be administered or recognized by a federal, state, or local government agency or court.
- Be administered or recognized by a federal or state-licensed hospital, health clinic, or medical doctor.

It is the student's responsibility to certify to the Financial Aid Administrator that he/she has successfully completed a qualified rehabilitation program.