

Student Financial Assistance  
Amendments to  
Policy and Procedures Manual



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Income Security Programs

Effective October 2010

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# **Student Financial Assistance**

Policy Proposal(s) for Deputy Minister Approval

October 2010

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## **Unique Travel**

### **Issue:**

Over the years, SFA has paid for travel benefits for Basic Grant recipients to further destinations if the student provided proof that their chosen program of studies was unique and not offered at a postsecondary educational institution closer to the Northwest Territories. Should unique travel be a benefit SFA offers?

### **Current Practice:**

The travel benefit given as part of the basic grant, awarded when a student's program is unique to their institution. In this situation, the SFA Program may pay for the student to travel from their home community in the NWT to their institution. To access this benefit, the student must submit a letter from the institution clearly stating that the program is unique, what makes it unique and is not offered at an institution closer to the Northwest Territories. Once the letter is received, the SCO is required to verify and research the information confirming the program is unique and not offered anywhere closer and then it is forwarded to the Director for final approval.

### **Jurisdictional Research:**

Besides the NWT, only Nunavut and Quebec consider travel benefits to the nearest institution offering the student's chosen program of studies. Yukon has a flat rate for travel benefits depending if the student is travelling within the territory or outside. Yukon students are eligible for one travel benefit for their entire study period during the academic year. Students will receive the current government rate per kilometre from their home community to the community their studies are being offered, or to Whitehorse if they will be studying outside of the territory. Those in Old Crow will receive \$1,000 for an airfare to Whitehorse, and if applicable, a government rate per kilometre to the community their studies are being offered. If the Old Crow students will be attending studies in Dawson City, they will receive a \$600 airfare allowance only. In addition to the above amounts, eligible students may receive an airfare allowance of \$1,800 to attend studies outside of Yukon.

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## **Options:**

1. Keep unique travel as it is. The program of studies must be unique, not the setting, view, location, language, instructor, etc.
2. Students could apply for and be assessed for a Repayable Loan for travel expenses further than Edmonton, AB.
3. Unique travel should be limited to Canada only.
4. Eliminate unique travel benefits all together and give everyone studying outside the NWT travel benefits as far as Edmonton only. (May need to consider grandfathering.)

## **Pros:**

- Basic Grant students would receive travel benefits to attend the program of their choice, regardless of the location.
- No changes to legislation, regardless of option chosen.

## **Cons:**

- The total expenditures of unique travel amounted to just under \$25,000 in 2007/08.
- Additional work is required of the Student Case Officer to research the program and what makes it unique, in addition to requiring final approval from the Director.
- There would be greater out of pocket expenses to the student to cover the remaining cost of the travel to the closest institution that offers their program of study.

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## **Discussion Points:**

- None – all discussion points were options, pros, or cons.

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### **Recommendation:**

Since no recommendation was proposed or considered, it makes sense to leave the policy as it is currently administered. The current practice uses the following definition for a unique program:

*A unique program is a highly unusual or rare program academically, but not just because of a few differences. The few differences cannot be a geographical setting, an Ivey League, a smaller class size, etc.; it must be because there is something in that program that makes it significantly academically unique compared to the closest institution to the NWT offering the same program.*

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APPROVE OPTION # 1 <sup>(one)</sup> :

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy Minister

2010-11-16  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**VARIED:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy Minister

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**COMMENTS:**

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## Transcripts

### **Issue:**

Some students' funding is being held up for those that apply for continued SFA beginning immediately after the previous academic year (ie. academic year ends August 29 and new academic year begins September 1) until their official transcript has been submitted and reviewed. Although the student will receive the retroactive payment for the semester, it can be late in the first month of their studies before they receive any assistance, causing late fees and/or other serious repercussions.

### **Current Practice:**

Currently, students must submit an official copy of their transcript at the end of each academic year prior to receiving any further assistance. This requirement is feasible for students who are on a typical academic year of 8 months, or 10 months for some programs at Aurora College. However, those students that attend a full academic year over a 12 month period do not have access to an official copy for approximately 2 – 4 weeks after completing their final exams.

### **Jurisdictional Research:**

N/A

### **Options:**

1. Keep the current practice as is. An official copy of a student's transcript must be submitted prior to releasing any further funding.
2. Allow this small group of students submit an unofficial transcript/statement of grades that have been approved by a school official in order to release their first SFA payment for that academic year. These students would still be required to submit the official copy of their transcript as soon as it becomes available in order to receive funding for the remainder of the semester.

### **Pros:**

- There would be no administrative impact by changing the current policy to allow these particular students to be paid upon review of an unofficial transcript/statement of grades that has been approved by a school official.
- It would be highly unlikely that an unofficial transcript would be inaccurate.

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- Students wouldn't be put in financial duress because of late tuition, fees, rent, etc. as a result of SFA holding up their first payment of the semester.

### **Cons:**

- There is a small chance that the unofficial transcript/statement of grades was inaccurate and the student didn't successfully complete the previous academic year. This would require a recovery of the first month payment.

### **Recommendation:**

All six members agreed upon Option #2 - To see this group of students that attend full-time studies year round the ability to submit an unofficial transcript/statement of grades that have been approved by a school official in order to release their first SFA payment for that academic year. These students would still be required to submit the official copy of their transcript as soon as it becomes available in order to receive the remainder of their SFA funding for the semester.


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APPROVE OPTION # 2 (two):

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy Minister

2010-11-16  
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Date

**VARIED:**

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Deputy Minister

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**COMMENTS:**

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