**POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**Starting fall semester 2016, the following Post-Secondary Policy is in place for students attending any post-secondary training.**

**GENERAL POLICY**

The following policies and fee schedules apply to all students attending a post-secondary training program and who require financial support from State Services for the Blind (SSB).

**APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL AID**

Students must apply for financial aid every year. If a student cannot get financial aid because they owe money to a school or defaulted on student loads, then SSB cannot pay for school until the student is in good standing with the financial aid office.

**STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

* Provide the rehabilitation counselor with a copy of the Student Aid Report Summary (SARS) each year. The SARS is the report that the individual receives after successfully completing the FAFSA each year.
* Provide the rehabilitation counselor with a copy of the Financial Aid Award Letter (FAAL) from their school’s financial aid office each year.
* Provide the rehabilitation counselor with the following items prior to the start of each term:
	+ a copy of their class schedule,
	+ tuition and fees statement,
	+ list of required textbooks and supplies, and
	+ grades from the previous term.

If the student does not provide the above items prior to the start of each term, the student will be responsible for that term’s costs.

* Maintain contact with their rehabilitation counselor and promptly notify their rehabilitation counselor of any changes in major, schools, dropping a class, or any other changes that might impact their progress and funding. These changes must be agreed upon by the rehabilitation counselor and student.

**STATUS AND PROGRESS INFORMATION**

* Students must be enrolled full-time according to their schools definition of full-time status. This means 12 credit hours for an undergraduate program and 9 credit hours for graduate programs. Less than full-time enrollment must be justified and approved by the counselor.
* An undergraduate must maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) to receive funding from SSB. A graduate student must maintain a 3.0 GPA.
* Students are expected to complete their degree in the timeframes set by the school.
* Summer school and intercession/J-term will be financially supported by SSB if it is justified and approved by the counselor. Students must provide documentation that they applied for financial aid for summer school and intercession before SSB will calculate what it will pay.
* SSB will pay for a class one time. If the student must retake a class due to a failing grade, SSB will not pay for that class again.
* Credit hours that do not contribute to the degree-required credit hours (general electives and major-specific) will not be supported.

**FEE SCHEDULES FOR POST-SECONDARY COSTS**

Application Fees

SSB will pay for up to three college application fees, not to exceed $20 per application. SSB will pay for up to three housing application fees, not to exceed $25 per application.

Tuition and Fees

*MNSCU or U of M Tuition and Fees*

If the student is attending a Minnesota State College or University (MNSCU) or the University of Minnesota (U of M) for any degree, SSB may provide the following financial assistance:

* Financial aid and financial participation must be applied first.
* All types of degrees: the balance up to the entire amount.

*Private or Out-of-State Tuition and Fees*

If the student is attending a private or out-of-state post-secondary institution, SSB’s fee schedule is based on MNSCU’s average tuition and fees per credit rate:

* Financial aid and financial participation must be applied first
* Associate’s Degree: not to exceed $180.52/credit
* Bachelor’s Degree: not to exceed $260.07/credit
* Graduate Degree: not to exceed $410.22/credit
* Doctoral Degree: not to exceed $723.53/credit

*Seminary*

Seminary is a graduate level program that prepares students to be priests, ministers, or rabbis. Based on the average yearly cost of the five schools associated with the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools, SSB’s total amount paid for tuition and fees during an academic year must not exceed $12,210.58.

Housing

Post-secondary students may receive housing assistance if housing is not a normal living expense for the individual. Housing assistance will be provided while the student is enrolled, not on academic probation, and participating in their post-secondary program.

Housing assistance has the following fee schedule based on the average room and board rate established by MNSCU:

*All Colleges and Universities- On-Campus*

* The amount SSB will pay for both room and board (dorm room and meal plan) must not exceed $3,880.50/semester and $1,940.25/summer.
* Financial aid and financial participation must be applied first.

*All Colleges and Universities- Off-Campus*

* The amount SSB will pay for rent only must not exceed $808/month or the monthly amount stated on the lease agreement, whichever is less.
* SSB will not pay for utilities and meals for off-campus students.
* SSB may pay for off-campus housing if housing has not been established as a normal living expense for the individual.
* If there is applicable financial aid remaining after applying it to tuition and fees, the remaining amount must be put towards the cost of off-campus housing.
* Financial participation must be applied.

Textbooks and Supplies

SSB will only pay for textbooks and supplies that are required and only after financial aid and financial participation is applied.

Miscellaneous

* Students who are offered the work study program are expected to take part in the program if appropriate and reasonable. The program gives the student the opportunity to build work skills and develop a work history.
* Merit awards may be considered when calculating the amount SSB will pay towards a student’s post-secondary education only in the following circumstances:
* If the award was given as a form of tuition reduction, it can be applied to the total amount billed for the semester along with the Pell grant, before SSB funds are applied to the remaining balance;
* If the award was offered as an incentive to attend a specific university and is therefore not applicable to other universities, then it is tuition reduction rather than a merit based scholarship.

**Out-Of-State Colleges and Universities**

A student may choose to attend an out-of-state college or university. In those instances, the following conditions apply:

* The fee schedule listed above must be used.
* Transportation to and from the state of origin and the school is the responsibility of the student.
* Relocation costs are the responsibility of the student.

**Payment for Training-Related Enrichment Activities**

An enrichment activity is an activity that is not necessarily a required service but instead is one that would be beneficial to the individual.

Maintenance may be paid to cover the costs of enrichment activities related to a training program. Such activities can be provided only when all of the following criteria are met. The activity:

* is related to the individual’s training program,
* enhances the consumer’s ability to benefit from a training program, and
* is a college-imposed requirement not paid for out of tuition or required fees.

Examples of enrichment activities include attendance at a workshop, seminar, concert, or theater production required by the instructor. Travel abroad would not be included even though it might be enriching to the student unless the school requires such a program of all students and provides no alternatives.

**Any exceptions to the above policy must be approved by the Deputy Director of Program Services or their designee.**

***Current Rule Language***

*Vocational training services. SSB may provide tuition, supplies, maintenance, and transportation to an eligible individual for training at an institution of higher learning only if there is evidence that the eligible individual is capable of completing the required coursework or degree program. Tuition, supplies, maintenance, and transportation paid by SSB for training at a private or non-Minnesota institution of higher learning must not exceed those amounts charged by Minnesota public colleges, universities, or technical and community colleges offering the same program nearest the eligible individual's residence unless the necessary training is not available to the eligible individual at a public Minnesota institution.*

The proposed changes in policy do not go against the rule language. The rule states that the amount SSB pays for school must not be more than the amount charged by a Minnesota public institution with one exception. The exception is that SSB can pay more than an in-state public school charges if the training isn’t available at a Minnesota public institution. While the rule allows SSB to make that exception, it does not require it.