

State Services for the Blind College Student Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

State Services for the Blind's (SSB) Workforce Development Unit (WDU) can help you get a job. When a job requires a college degree, SSB may assist with college tuition and related expenses. In order to receive assistance, you must meet certain requirements and follow the responsibilities and expectations outlined in this College Student Handbook. Please read it carefully and ask your counselor any questions you may have.

YOUR COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

GENERAL SKILLS AND ABILITIES

All individuals interested in attending post-secondary education must meet certain requirements. An individual must;

- Have several adaptive ways to read and write. There may be times when your primary method fails (e.g., your laptop stops working in the middle of class). You need to be able to continue with your classes when that happens.
- Have several techniques in place for notetaking during lectures and presentations. Examples include a slate and stylus, digital recorder, electronic note taker, etc.
- Be able to self-advocate when needed. You must be able to explain your accommodation needs to your instructors.
- Have the orientation and mobility skills necessary to independently navigate the campus and travel to classrooms and solve travel problems.
- Be able to access and read printed classroom materials (e.g., an audio version of the textbook) quickly and efficiently.
- Be able to live independently while attending college. This includes handling finances, cleaning, cooking, and maintaining clothing.
- Have strong time management skills for completing college coursework.
- Be able to utilize e-mail and the internet to complete coursework. This includes learning how to use any classroom platforms (e.g., Blackboard).

TECHNOLOGY SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Before you attend college, your SSB counselor will make a referral for an assistive technology assessment. The purpose is for the assistive technology specialist to identify the assistive technology and training that you need (e.g., ZoomText, Magic, JAWS, NVDA, etc.) for post-secondary education.

Assistive technology will be purchased if agreed upon by you and your counselor as necessary to accomplish the employment goal listed on your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). SSB will assist you in coordinating any required training on the technology.

You are responsible for maintaining your technology and having back-up plans for when technology fails. If your technology fails, please notify your SSB counselor.

EXPECTATIONS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

COMPLETE FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)

You must apply for financial aid on an annual basis and submit the award letter to your SSB counselor. The FAFSA form is available [online](#). You can search for “FAFSA application” to find the most current website. Being early and accurate in your application is one of the most important steps in securing aid. If you intend to take summer courses, you will need to complete a separate FAFSA application for summer semester.

If you cannot get financial aid because you owe money to a school or defaulted on student loans, SSB cannot pay for school until you are in good standing with the financial aid office. SSB cannot pay your debt.

If you are not eligible for financial aid for other reasons, talk to your counselor about removing the annual application requirement.

PROVIDE CLIENT FINANCIAL PARTICIPATION (CFP) DOCUMENTATION

You may need to contribute toward the cost of your college education if you are not receiving social security or other public benefits. When required, your

counselor will determine what percentage you will need to contribute, if any, by using tax returns or paystubs for you and any other family members as required by SSB policy. When CFP is in use, it will be re-calculated annually and can be re-calculated sooner if your financial situation changes mid-year.

ENROLL FULL-TIME

You must be enrolled full-time according to your school's definition of full-time status. This usually means 12 credit hours for an undergraduate program and 9 credit hours for a graduate program. Any exception to this must be agreed upon by you and your counselor and re-evaluated at least annually, and in many cases each semester. Your counselor will determine how often to re-evaluate this status. If there is a disagreement between you and your counselor regarding your enrollment status, there may be a reduction in or discontinuation of payment for schooling until it is resolved.

SSB can support summer courses and you should plan to enroll full-time unless you and your counselor have agreed that full-time enrollment is not an option.

MAINTAIN GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA)

An undergraduate must maintain a 2.0 GPA to receive funding from SSB. A graduate student must maintain a 3.0 GPA. If your school's minimum GPA requirement is higher than those outlined above, you must meet the school's standard. If you do not maintain the required GPA, SSB will not pay for school, including support services like housing and transportation, until your overall GPA returns to the required level.

DROPPING OR FAILING CLASSES AND EXAMS

If you must retake a class or exam due to a poor grade or a withdrawal after the add/drop date, it will be your responsibility to pay for retaking the class or exam. If you think you may need to withdraw from a class, contact your counselor immediately to discuss your situation. If multiple classes are offered, SSB will not pay for a different class taken to meet a requirement that was previously attempted and paid for.

COMPLETE CLASSES IN TIMEFRAME SET BY SCHOOL

You are expected to complete your degree in the timeframes set by the school. Most degree programs can be completed within four to five years. If you choose to complete your program at a slower pace than agreed upon with your counselor, additional semesters beyond the expected timeframe will be your responsibility.

Only credit hours that contribute to the degree-required credit hours, including general electives and major-specific, will be supported. For example, if you want to take a karate class but it doesn't count towards a general elective or your major, you will be responsible for the cost of that class.

WORK WITH UNIVERSITY CAREER SERVICES

It is expected that you participate in internships and work experiences that will aid you in obtaining a job after college. The career services office at your school can assist you with cover letters, resumes, networking opportunities with alumni, job fairs, and informational interviews. When you are nearing graduation, you must work with career services to the extent those services are available to you. SSB will provide additional assistance in helping you find a job in your field.

MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH SSB COUNSELOR

You must maintain contact with your SSB counselor. If problems arise that impact your success in school, contact your counselor immediately to discuss. This includes discussing any changes to your major, switching schools, dropping or adding a class, or anything else that impacts your progress and funding. Any changes must be agreed upon by you and your counselor before they are implemented.

SUBMIT INFORMATION REQUIRED BY SSB

You must give your counselor a copy of the following information within the given timeframes:

At least seven days prior to the start of every school year:

- Student Aid Report Summary (SARS). This report is given to you after you submit the FAFSA
- Financial Aid Award Letter (FAAL) from the school's financial aid office.
- Degree Audit Report (DAR), provided prior to first semester of college or when you change your major
- Family Income Information (to determine financial participation when CFP is in use)
- Lease agreement (if applicable)

At least seven calendar days prior to the start of each semester/term:

- Class schedule
- Tuition and fees statement
- Room and board statement (if applicable)
- List of required textbooks and supplies
- Grades from the previous term

If you do not provide the above information at least seven calendar days before the start of the term, you will be responsible for that term's costs. If this information is not available seven calendar days prior to the start date, notify your counselor immediately and work together to come up with a plan for obtaining the required documents as quickly as possible. If you wait until right before, or after, your semester begins to provide your documents or discuss difficulties with your counselor, SSB will not pay for the semester.

WORK WITH THE DISABILITY SERVICES OFFICE

The disability services office arranges accommodations for students who provide appropriate documentation of a disability. You are responsible for the coordination of these services.

To receive services through the disability services office, you generally must:

- Make an appointment with the disability services office.
- Provide disability services with documentation that a disability exists and that requested services are appropriate.

- Be prepared to discuss the accommodations that are necessary and appropriate. The staff will not know that you need support unless you ask. Services are individualized for each student.
- Follow all university/college policies and procedures when requesting services and accommodations.
- Contact instructors for the provision of specific accommodations.
- Keep in contact with the disability services office each semester.

Available accommodations and services may include:

- Assistive technology
- Test accommodations
- Readers/scribes
- Note taking

MAINTAIN ANY CERTIFICATIONS OR LICENSES

SSB does not support ongoing costs associated with maintaining certifications or licenses. You should understand the timelines, costs, and requirements for re-certification and make a plan for those things.

FEE SCHEDULE AND POLICIES FOR POST-SECONDARY COSTS

The fee schedule is adjusted annually and is based on rates set by Minnesota State. All purchases must be included on the IPE and authorized for before they can occur. Do not make any purchases, including required textbooks, until your counselor has notified you that an authorization is in place. If you purchase prior to this notification, SSB will not pay for those items.

SSB will only pay for required classes needed to complete the degree audit.

APPLICATION FEES

SSB will pay for or reimburse 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. Many schools offer free application periods each year, try to take advantage of those offers whenever possible.

TUITION AND FEES

Minnesota State or U of M Tuition and Fees

If you are attending a Minnesota State College or any of the University of Minnesota (U of M) schools for any degree and are not on academic probation, SSB may provide full financial assistance for resident or reciprocity rates after applicable financial aid and financial participation are applied. If you attend one of these schools but are charged an out-of-state rate, the fee schedule for private or out-of-state institutions will apply.

- All types of degrees: the balance up to the entire amount

Note: Schools in the University of Minnesota system offer a tuition waiver for qualified students. These are referred to as the Blind Waiver and the Deaf Waiver. SSB considers these waivers a comparable benefit. Qualifying students must apply for the waivers if they are attending a U of M school.

Private or Out-Of-State Tuition and Fees

If you are attending a private or out-of-state post-secondary institution and are not on academic probation, SSB may pay up to but not exceed Minnesota State's average tuition and fees per credit rate, after applicable financial aid and financial participation is applied. Non-Minnesota residents attending Minnesota public schools will follow the fee schedule unless they receive a reciprocity rate lower than the resident rate. SSB will not pay the higher, out-of-state rate. If SSB's portion based on the fee schedule does not cover all the tuition and fees, the additional expense is your responsibility.

- Associate degree: not to exceed \$220.83/credit
- Bachelor's degree: not to exceed \$318.13/credit
- Graduate degree: not to exceed \$519.38/credit
- Doctoral degree: not to exceed \$916.06/credit

Seminary

Seminary is a graduate level program that prepares students to become priests, ministers, or rabbis. SSB may pay up to but not exceed the average yearly cost of the five schools associated with the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools. Applicable financial aid and financial participation must be applied. SSB's total amount paid for tuition and fees during an academic year must not exceed \$12,210.58.

Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID)
Gallaudet University and NTID are two schools specifically for individuals who use American Sign Language (ASL) to access information. These schools are not subject to the out-of-state fee schedule. SSB may provide full financial assistance, after applicable financial aid and financial participation are applied.

- All types of degrees: the balance up to the entire amount

SUMMER SCHOOL AND INTERSESSION/J-TERM

Summer school and intersession/J-term will be financially supported by SSB if it is justified and approved by the counselor. You must provide documentation that you applied for financial aid for summer school and intercession before SSB will calculate what it will pay. Often, FAFSA for summer term is a separate application. Make sure to apply if you intend to take summer courses.

HOUSING

Post-secondary students may receive housing assistance if housing is not a normal living expense for them. Housing assistance will be provided while you are enrolled, not on academic probation, and participating in your post-secondary program. SSB must be supporting tuition and fees or would be supporting tuition and fees if grants and aid did not cover them, in order to pay for housing.

SSB will not pay relocation costs for students.

Housing assistance is based on the average room and board rate established by Minnesota State.

On-Campus Colleges and Universities

SSB may pay for off-campus housing if housing has not been established as a normal living expense for the individual.

The amount SSB will pay for both room and board (dorm room and meal plan) must not exceed the fee schedule semester and/or summer rate. Any additional expense is your responsibility.

- The amount SSB will pay for both room and board (dorm room and meal plan) must not exceed \$5,570/semester and \$2,680/summer.

Applicable financial aid and financial participation must be applied.

Off-Campus Colleges and Universities

SSB will pay for rent not to exceed \$1,152/month or the monthly amount stated on the lease agreement, whichever is less. Any additional expense is your responsibility.

The amount is prorated by the number of individuals living in the residence or on the lease agreement.

SSB will not pay for utilities and meals for off-campus students.

If there is applicable financial aid remaining after applying it to tuition and fees, the remaining amount must be put toward the cost of off-campus housing. Financial participation must be applied.

SSB may agree to pay summer housing/rent in between Spring and Fall semester if you are enrolled for summer classes or participating in an agreed upon activity such as working at a job, participating in an internship, attending ATB, or volunteering. Appropriate activities require active student engagement or participation as well as prior counselor approval.

TEXTBOOKS AND SUPPLIES

SSB will only pay for textbooks and supplies that are required and only after financial aid and financial participation is applied. SSB must be supporting tuition and fees or would be supporting tuition and fees if grants and aid did not cover them, in order to pay for textbooks and supplies.

MISCELLANEOUS

If you are offered the work-study program, you should take part if appropriate and reasonable. The work-study program gives you the opportunity to build work skills and develop a work history. SSB will not apply work-study earnings to school costs unless the post-secondary program requires the work-study amount be applied to tuition.

You are not required to accept student loans, although you may choose to use them to cover any remaining costs after SSB's contribution. If you intend to accept loans, please connect with your Financial Aid office first to ask how it may impact your SSB funding as accepting loans may cause you to be "over-awarded" for the semester. Always consult with the Financial Aid office prior to making any changes in your enrollment and/or credit load.

Repayable loans, awards, and scholarships based on merit are not considered comparable services and benefits for your SSB program.

Merit awards may be considered when calculating the amount SSB will pay towards your post-secondary education only in the following circumstances:

- If the award was given as a form of tuition reduction and is restricted in use, it can be applied to reduce SSB's contribution if the scholarship would be lost otherwise.
- 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 and will be applied to SSB's contribution.

TRANSPORTATION

SSB must provide the least expensive mode of transportation that serves your rehabilitation needs and accommodates any non-visual disability-related limitations you may have.

SSB must be supporting tuition and fees or would be supporting tuition and fees if grants and aid did not cover them, in order to pay for transportation.

TRAVEL TO OUT OF STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Transportation to and from the state of origin and the school, and/or relocation costs, are your responsibility.

INTERNET

If you are attending a post-secondary institution and not living on-campus, internet may be purchased only for the duration of the training program and only if you are not already paying for internet. The cost SSB pays will be prorated based on the number of roommates on the lease agreement. SSB must be supporting tuition and fees or would be supporting tuition and fees if grants and aid did not cover them, in order to pay for Internet.

PAYMENT FOR POST-SECONDARY 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 cost of enrichment activities related to a post-secondary program. Such activities can be provided only when all of the following criteria are met. The activity:

- is related to your post-secondary program,
- enhances your ability to benefit from a post-secondary program, and
- is a college-imposed requirement not paid for out of tuition or required fees.

Examples of post-secondary enrichment activities include attendance at a workshop, seminar, concert, or theater production required by the instructor. Counselor approval is necessary prior to SSB authorizing and paying for enrichment activities. These activities must be included on the IPE and authorized prior to purchase. Do not pay for an activity until your counselor has notified you the authorization is in place. If purchase is made prior, SSB will not pay for those purchases.

TRAVEL ABROAD

SSB may only contribute to the following travel abroad costs:

- Tuition and fees consistent with the out-of-state fee schedule and only for credit hours that contribute to the degree-required credit hours.
- Housing costs consistent with the housing fee schedule and not to exceed the amount SSB would be paying if you were continuing your studies on campus (example; SSB has been paying \$2,500 per semester for your housing, during study abroad your housing is going to cost \$3,500. SSB will only pay the \$2,500, the remaining \$1,000 is your responsibility.)
- Required textbooks for degree required courses.

All other costs, including transportation, supplies, and incidentals, are your responsibility.