

Complete Policy Title

University Aid and Awards Policy

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Senate

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Responsible Executive

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General Policy Enquiries

[Policy \(University Secretariat\)](#)

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

1. McMaster University supports the financial wellbeing of students in the delivery of aid and award programs. This Policy provides the foundation for equity, consistency, and transparency in the administration of student aid and award programs.

SCOPE

2. This Policy provides the framework through which all University-established aid and award programs must be approved and administered. Established aid and award programs include academic awards, community contribution awards, academic grants, bursaries and work programs.
3. This Policy does not apply to aid and awards established outside the University including, but not limited to, those offered by federal and provincial governments, the Tri-Council Agencies and private organizations. This Policy does not cover departmental financial awards. For further information about the administration of these types of awards please contact the external organization or the administering department.

PURPOSE

4. This Policy defines how aid and award programs are established and administered and describes the responsibilities and accountabilities of the University community in the provision these programs including:
 - a) principles that govern aid and award programs;
 - b) establishing minimum eligibility requirements; and
 - c) establishing and amending fund terms.

PRINCIPLES

5. University aid and award programs encourage and support diversity and inclusivity in the recruitment, retention and recognition of students, including those from equity-seeking groups historically underrepresented.
6. University aid programs assist students who demonstrate the greatest financial need. Need-based aid may be delivered in the form of bursaries and/or work programs.
7. University award programs encourage and recognize the achievement of entering, enrolled, and graduating students. University award programs include:
 - a) academic awards which recognize high levels of scholarship, and in some cases other forms of earned merit, in the form of awards and prizes;
 - b) academic grants which recognize high academic achievement and demonstrated financial need; and

- c) community contribution awards, which recognize non-academic achievement, such as service to the University or community at large.
8. The University administers aid and award programs in accordance with Canadian law, trust law and the [Ontario Human Rights Commission Policy on Scholarships and Awards](#).
 9. Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council, on behalf of the Senate, approve the granting of aid and awards, as recommended by the Registrar, and, in the case of School of Medicine administered aid and awards, the Program Manager of the Undergraduate Medical Program.
 10. To ensure an equitable and transparent allocation of aid and awards, the Registrar:
 - a) maintains, through an annual review process, the current University Calendars as the primary source of aid and award program information;
 - b) updates the *Regulations for Aid and Awards* in the University Calendars to confirm the availability of aid and award programs, to define all aid and award program eligibility criteria, and to identify any restrictions on the number and value of awards that a student may receive;
 - c) restricts the allocation of aid and awards, to remain compliant with external regulating bodies (e.g. Tri-Council Agencies);
 - d) restricts second baccalaureate Undergraduate degree students from receiving any academic award or academic grant, unless the terms of a particular donor award specify eligibility and the student has not received the award previously;
 - e) restricts the allocation of aid and awards according to the fund terms imposed by a donor (e.g. higher academic average requirement);
 - f) may choose not to grant aid or awards in the absence of a suitable candidate;
 - g) may choose to limit the number of recipients selected where funding is limited;
 - h) may choose to limit the number of recipients selected where too few suitable candidates exist;
 - i) may choose to generate applicant pools for awards by application, where complete applications have not been received;
 - j) may revise the terms and stated value and/or suspend the granting of aid and award funds (e.g., donor funds);
 - k) will make aid and award program information widely available to students through the University Calendars, websites and other means, as appropriate;

- I) will comply with other University approved by-laws and policies (e.g., [Senate By-Laws](#); [Operational Policy and Procedures for Trust and Endowed Fund Management](#); [Field Trips, Student Placements and Research Activity Planning and Approval Program](#), etc.).

POLICY AMENDMENTS AND EXCEPTIONS

11. This Policy is reviewed every five years by the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee and Graduate Council. Recommended amendments must be approved by the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee, Undergraduate Council, Graduate Council, and Senate prior to implementation.
12. The University may amend, from time to time, the general requirements to be met by all recipients of University aid and award programs. This may include, but is not limited to, the attainment of some overall level of scholarships, independent of the terms of an individual award. See the [Senate By-Laws](#).
13. The University may amend this Policy, as recommended, from time to time, by the Registrar to the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee, Undergraduate Council, Graduate Council, and Senate.

SECTION II: GLOSSARY

14. For the purpose of interpreting this Policy the following glossary of terms and definitions applies:

Aid Program	An established framework to allocate funding to students on the basis of demonstrated financial need.
Academic Award	An award that recognizes academic excellence and, in some cases, other forms of earned merit. Academic awards are assigned to categories such as <i>Entrance, In-Course, Graduating Student Awards, Travel and Exchange</i> .
Academic Grants	<p>A hybrid of aid <u>and</u> award funding that recognizes academic excellence and, in some cases, other forms of earned merit, and demonstrated financial need.</p> <p>In-course academic grants are awarded based on academic achievement in degree work completed at the University.</p> <p>Entrance academic grants are awarded to students entering Level 1, based on the academic achievement in the studies which qualified them for admission to their program.</p>
Award Program	An established framework to allocate funding to students on the basis of academic excellence or earned merit.
Bursary	Aid funding provided to students in the form of a non-repayable grant. A bursary may include a minimum expectation of academic achievement or other miscellaneous criteria.
Community Contribution Awards	<p>Non-monetary, non-academic awards, that are allocated based on demonstrated qualities of leadership or innovative skills, service to the University or community at large, or outstanding athletic or artistic participation.</p> <p>Recipients of community contribution awards receive letters of recognition.</p>
Department Financial Awards	<p>Funding that supports students in a manner consistent with the goals of the University.</p> <p>Department Financial Awards do not meet all approved regulations through which University-established aid and award programs are administered (e.g. assessment of financial need or merit).</p> <p>Departmental financial awards are administered by designated representatives at the University (e.g. Athletics and Recreation) that have established their own processes for identifying recipients.</p> <p>These types of awards do not have “<i>University</i>” or “<i>McMaster University</i>” in the name of the award and contain words such as “<i>Faculty of xxx Financial Award</i>” or “<i>Department of xxx Financial Award</i>” or “<i>Athletic Financial Award</i>”.</p> <p>Departmental financial awards are not Senate- approved awards and thus are not included on University transcripts, in University Calendars or recognized at University Convocations.</p>

Equity-Seeking Groups	Equity-seeking groups include Indigenous persons, members of racialized communities, women, and persons with disabilities. Indigenous, Black and Latinx students, students with disabilities, and women in STEM fields are most underrepresented in universities as a consequence of individual bias and systemic barriers.
Funds	The financial resources supporting aid and award programs. Funds may be directed from operating, research and/or donor gifts (trust funds) for awards, academic grants, bursaries and work programs.
Fund Terms	The criteria, typically specified by a donor, that a student must meet in order to receive the proceeds of a fund.
Level	Typically used to describe a student's progression through a School of Medicine, Undergraduate or MBA program. Term count is used to describe graduate student progression through a program. Level may be used in establishing fund terms.
Prizes	Academic awards, with a monetary value of \$100 or less, and those with no disbursed monetary value (e.g. books, medals, letters of recognition, etc.).
Registrar	The Office of the Registrar, Aid & Awards in reference to Undergraduate Aid and Award Programs, and the School of Graduate Studies in reference to Graduate Aid and Award Programs.
Student	An individual recorded by the University Registrar as enrolled in an educational course of study recognised by the Senate and for whom the University maintains an education record.
University Calendars	The current versions of the <i>Undergraduate Calendar</i> and <i>Graduate Calendar</i> . See https://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/index.php
Work Programs	<p>An aid program providing employment opportunities to students demonstrating financial need.</p> <p>Part-time opportunities are available during the fall and winter terms, while both part-time and full-time opportunities are available during the summer term.</p> <p>Students earn at least minimum wage. Work programs provide partial reimbursement of an approved student's salary to employers who hired students into approved work program positions.</p>

SECTION III: ELIGIBILITY FOR AID AND AWARD PROGRAMS

15. This Policy identifies the minimum eligibility requirements for student aid and award programs:
- a) to receive the monetary value of aid and awards, [students](#) must be enrolled at the University;
 - b) upon request of the student, and with the express permission of the Registrar, aid and awards may be deferred up to one academic year, unless otherwise specified in the Regulations for Aid and Awards or in the specific fund terms in the University Calendars;
 - c) a student who withdraws, is on approved leave, changes academic load from full to part-time, reduces course load or units, has approved to graduate status or otherwise alters their program of study may be required to forfeit all or part of their funding, per the Regulations for Aid and Award programs in the University Calendars. The decision to rescind or reduce funding will be made by the Registrar and will consider the Regulations for the Aid and Award programs, the specific terms of the aid/award funding, the circumstances leading to the student's decision (e.g. compassionate grounds), the educational costs already incurred and other relevant information;
 - d) if the University concludes, based on reasonable grounds, that an aid or award applicant or recipient has falsified or withheld information as part of an application or misrepresented oneself or achieved academic results through dishonest means (see the [Academic Integrity Policy](#)) the student may have their application removed from consideration and/or be required to forfeit all or part of their funding and/or be restricted from receiving further funding by the Registrar;
 - e) where selection of an aid or award recipient requires judgment, faculty representatives, and/or department representatives, a Faculty Selection Committee and/or a University-wide Selection Committee may be asked to rank and/or recommend eligible students. The Registrar and, in the case of School of Medicine administered funds, the Program Manager of the Undergraduate Medical Program, will review the returned rankings/recommendations and make the final funding decision. Recipient selections will be made in full compliance with the approved terms of reference;
 - f) allocation of aid is completed according to the Regulations for Aid and Awards in the University Calendars and is dependent on demonstrated financial need;
 - g) financial need must be determined on the basis of one or more of the following:
 - (i) Canadian federal and/or provincial government student aid applications (e.g. OSAP);
 - (ii) U.S. Direct Loans Program Applications;
 - (iii) completion of a standard University Need Profile;
 - (iv) student discussions with designated staff on campus (e.g. Student Services Professional, Indigenous Student Counsellor, Case Manager, etc.) who confirm the need for emergency or special consideration funding;
 - h) in determining need, and the allocation of University administered funds, the Registrar must also comply with the policies, procedures and guidelines provided by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities

(MCU) This includes, but is not limited to, the Ministry's Student Access Guarantee, which mandates the institutional aid obligation (payment amount and deadline date) for a student;

- i) allocation of awards is completed according to the Regulations for Aid and Awards in the University Calendars;
- j) all awards must be granted on the basis of one or more of the following:
 - (i) overall academic performance;
 - (ii) academic performance in a particular program, course, project or thesis using one or more of the following criteria including, but not limited to, work completed (e.g. essay, project, thesis, placement, research, research potential, etc.), grades, averages or standing;
 - (iii) achievement in a skill related to academic studies;
 - (iv) non-academic achievement(s) and/or the display of qualities deemed worthy of consideration;
 - (v) demonstrated financial need in the case of academic grants (see g above);
- k) all awards have a minimum academic requirement. The minimums are defined in the Regulations for Aid and Awards in the University Calendars. Donor funds may have additional academic requirements noted in the University Calendars and/or fund documentation.

APPEAL PROCEDURES

16. The University has a responsibility to provide fair and equitable procedures for student appeals relating to aid and award programs. These appeal procedures are outlined in the Regulations for Aid and Awards in the University Calendars.

PRIVACY

17. The University and its employees and agents will protect personal information and handle records in accordance with the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act \(FIPPA\)](#).
18. Applications for aid and awards, supporting documentation (e.g. transcripts, letters of reference, income tax notices of assessment, student loan entitlements, etc.) and responses to applications shall be held by the Registrar and, in the case of School of Medicine administered aid and awards, the Program Manager of the Undergraduate Medical Program.
19. When providing information to donors and others concerning award recipients (including publications such as convocation programs and award booklets), the release of such information shall comply with FIPPA and the University's [Notice of Collection](#) statement.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

20. Mandatory annual reporting to the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee, Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council, include identification of award recipients, aid and award summary information and recognition of selection committee members.

SECTION IV: ESTABLISHING FUNDS TO SUPPORT AID AND AWARD PROGRAMS

21. When establishing funds, to support aid and award programs, the Registrar:
- a) ensures that the fund terms benefit students and are written with a minimum of limiting criteria.
 - b) seeks approval of the fund terms through the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee and Undergraduate Council, or the Graduate Council.
 - c) ensures all necessary approvals are in place prior to publicizing the fund terms, making application forms available, receiving applications, selecting recipients and/or disbursing funds.
 - d) determines the manner in which recipients will be selected, for example, on the basis of calculated financial need or average, or on the basis of an application or nomination, ensuring processes are equitable, consistent and transparent.
 - e) determines whether an application is needed to support the evaluation of non-academic criteria, such as community involvement, recognizing that historically underrepresented students' experiences of bias and barriers affecting numeric grades may be discovered through opportunities to provide narrative contextual information about their lived experiences, leadership and community service involvements, and both academic accomplishments and potential.
 - f) where an application is required, determines the content, deadlines, and supporting documentation requirements to support the evaluation and selection process (e.g. reference letters, curriculum vitae, University transcript, statement of interest, essay, etc.), and provides a rubric with clear and consistent inclusive excellence criteria for assessing the quality and eligibility of candidates
 - g) establishes gender and racially representative University-wide Selection Committees, ensuring a minimum of three members, including at least one faculty member, or at the graduate level a minimum of one Associate Dean or the Dean of Graduate Studies, are involved in the selection processes to rank and/or recommend students for University-wide funding where use of judgment is required. Additionally, the Registrar will provide a list of University-wide Selection Committees and participating members to the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee, Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council on an annual basis.
 - h) oversees the University-wide Selection Committees ensuring the members receive inclusive excellence training to mitigate personal bias and systemic inequities. If the funding is open to students from more than one career (i.e. students enrolled in Graduate, Medicine, Undergraduate degrees), the Registrar ensures that the committee has representation from each area (i.e. Graduate, Medicine and Undergraduate).
 - i) establishes faculty and department contacts where faculty- or department-specific award adjudication is required. Where faculty, school and/or department nomination is required, a defined equitable, consistent and transparent procedure for securing those nominations from their internal departments will exist and meet the approval of the Faculty Award Chair, or the Program Manager of the Undergraduate Medical Program for the School of Medicine, or at the graduate level the Faculty Graduate Associate Dean. Where Faculty-specific Selection Committees are involved in the assessment, ranking and/or selection of recipients, a minimum of three members must serve on the

- selection committee, with the same requirements for diverse representation as in (g) and for training as in (h).
- j) protects the University's academic integrity and autonomy as it relates to funding decisions. In no case shall a donor and/or their representatives select, vote or have a veto over the recipients of funding. The final choice of recipients rests solely in hands of McMaster University.
 - k) requires a minimum donor contribution to support aid and awards (these minimums may be reviewed from time to time by the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee, Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council and adjusted appropriately). With the approval of this Policy:
 - (i) The minimum value to establish an endowed fund that supports University aid and awards is \$25,000. This commitment, at the current expenditure policy rate of 4%, generates \$1000 annually.
 - (ii) The minimum value to establish a fund that is not endowed that will support University aid and awards is \$3000 (a minimum commitment of \$1000 per year for three years).
 - (iii) The minimum value to establish a fund that is not endowed that will support University aid and awards by application is \$9000 (a minimum commitment of \$3000 per year for three years). The minimum value to establish an endowed fund that will support university aid and awards by application is \$75000. This commitment, at the current expenditure rate of 4%, generates \$3000 annually.
 - l) undertakes to abide by the terms attached to trust funds received through bequests and gifts, provided that such terms are consistent with this Policy. See also the [Operational Policy and Procedures for Trust and Endowed Fund Management](#).
 - m) includes only Senate approved awards (i.e. approved through the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee and Undergraduate Council and/or Graduate Council) on University transcripts.
 - n) includes only Senate approved awards in the University Calendars.
 - o) includes only Senate approved graduating student awards in University Convocation publications, and of these, recognizes only the top University and Faculty awards, at University Convocations.
 - p) considers the potential for emerging gift types that do not meet current University-established aid and award program policy. University Advancement may also recommend to the Registrar, the Undergraduate Awards Committee, Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council that new aid and award programs and/or policies, be established to meet the requirements of emerging gift types.

SECTION V: GUIDELINES FOR WRITING FUND TERMS

22. When writing fund terms to support new aid and awards, the following guidelines apply (see Appendix A for further information):
- a) **Name**
The name could be representative of the donor and the aid or award program (e.g. The McMaster Alumni Association Bursary).
 - b) **Descriptive Sentence 1**
The first sentence typically identifies the year in which the award was established, the donor name(s), degree awarded, class year (e.g. Class of '50 (for 1950) and Class of 2020), or anonymous request, and the reason for its establishment.
 - c) **Descriptive Sentence 2**
The second sentence identifies the specific criteria (need-based, academic and/or other form of earned merit) that must be met by the student for whom the funding is intended. Note: the fund terms should be as broad as possible to ensure administrative sustainability and disbursement of funding as intended.
 - d) **Preference Statement**
The third sentence may confirm a donor's preference (if applicable). "Preference will be given to ..." confirms that attempts will be made to identify a student meeting the donor preference after all conditions specified in the descriptive sentences have been met. Preference statements should only be used in funding terms for aid programs. Often preference statements require a student to self-identify (e.g. "Preference to a sole support parent" requires a student to declare "I am a sole support parent"), to be considered for funding. Preference statements are treated as self-declarations and are not necessarily verified by the Registrar. In the case of bursaries, preference statements typically affect the source of a student's bursary funding, not the amount.
Note: Preference statements should be as broad as possible to ensure administrative sustainability and disbursement of funding as intended.
 - e) **Award Value**
An initial award value is typically specified for awards and academic grants. The value may be specified as total dollars and duration. Award values may also be non-monetary, as is the case for prizes (e.g. books, medals, etc.) or community contribution awards (e.g. letters of recognition).
 - f) **Number of Recipients**
Wherever possible, a fixed number of recipients should not be specified, to allow the Registrar to set the number based on available funding.
23. Wherever possible, bursary values should not be specified, to allow the Registrar to set bursary values annually, in accordance with the Regulations for Aid and Award programs.

SECTION VI: AMENDING TERMS OF ESTABLISHED FUNDS

24. The terms of established funds, supporting aid and awards, represent a formal agreement, whether funded through an operating or research account or donor trust fund. When a donor establishes aid or award funding it takes the form of a trust fund administered by McMaster as trustee. Trust funds hold gifts (donations and bequests) that have been *designated* according to terms and conditions agreed upon by a donor and the University. Trust funds may only be altered in accordance with their original purpose, and generally may only be altered if the original purpose is impossible or impracticable to administer. Superficial changes (such as changes to a name or value of an award) are allowed.
25. Where amendment to terms become necessary, due to changes such as cancellations of courses or programs which have been named in the terms, or when there are no longer eligible students, the University may propose to revised terms to carry out the nearest possible original intent of the donor.
26. When aid and awards are no longer available (e.g. operating or research funding no longer exists or a trust fund has been closed) they will be discontinued and removed from publications such as the University Calendars.
27. Changes to aid and award fund names and terms, as well as discontinuation of aid and awards funding must be approved through the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee and Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council.
28. Changes to aid and award values are managed by the Registrar based on available funding and the [Operational Policy and Procedures for Trust and Endowed Fund Management](#) and do not require Undergraduate Council Awards Committee and Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council approval. Changes to aid and award values are reported to the Undergraduate Council Awards Committee, Undergraduate Council and Graduate Council for information.

APPENDIX A: COMMONLY USED PHRASES IN FUND TERMS

“Students enrolled in Level x”

Example: “Students enrolled in Level 1” refers to students who are enrolled in the first year of a program, while “Students enrolled in Level 2 or above” refers to students who are enrolled above Level 1. Note: This phrase should not be used where level is not a factor in determining the aid or award recipient, or where student progression is not dependent on level (e.g. Graduate Studies programs).

“Students graduating”

refers to students who are in their graduating year and will be assessed for an award at the completion of their graduating term. Example - “... to be awarded to students graduating from an Engineering and Management program.”

“Students enrolled in any undergraduate degree program...”

This phrase maximizes the pool of undergraduate students who qualify for the funding.

“Students enrolled in a Sociology program...”

allows students in all B.A., Honours and Combined Honours Sociology programs to be considered. Where any undergraduate degree is not possible, the use of major subject minimizes the risk associated with specific programs no longer being offered.

“Students enrolled in a graduate program in Chemistry...”

allows graduate students enrolled in programs offered by the Department of Chemistry to be considered. This includes both Master’s and Ph.D. students.

“Students enrolled in the English Ph.D. program...”

allows only students enrolled in the specified Ph.D. program to be considered.

“To be awarded to graduate students in the Faculty of Health Sciences. Preference to be given to graduate students pursuing research in preventative medicine...”

allows Master’s and Ph.D. students in the Faculty of Health Sciences, who are pursuing research in preventative medicine, to be considered for the award. If the administrator is unable to first identify an eligible student pursuing research in preventative medicine, the award may then be granted to eligible graduate students enrolled in Master’s or Ph.D. programs in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

“...based on high averages...”

confirms the merit-based award considers one or more available averages, including but not limited to cumulative grade point average (GPA), fall-winter average, final admission average, etc.

“In the judgment of ...”

means that judgment will be used to select students who have fulfilled the minimum aid or award program requirements and other criteria as noted in the fund terms. An application process and/or selection committee may be required.

“Penultimate”

means the second to last level of a program. Example: “To be awarded to students who have completed the penultimate year at the most recent spring review, and who ranks highest in scholarship, leadership and influence.”