

EXCELSIOR SCHOLARSHIP FACT SHEET



The New York State Excelsior Scholarship is a state funded scholarship program designed to support full-time undergraduate students from working, middle-income households who are on track for on-time degree completion. The Excelsior Scholarship is administered by [Higher Education Services Corporation \(HESC\)](https://www.hesc.ny.gov/) (<https://www.hesc.ny.gov/>).

Eligibility:

To meet the initial eligibility criteria for the Excelsior Scholarship, an applicant must:

- be a NYS resident and have resided in NYS for 12 continuous months prior to the start of the term;
- be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen;
- have either graduated from a U.S. high school, earned a GED, or passed a federally approved “Ability to Benefit” test;
- be enrolled in an undergraduate degree program at SUNY or CUNY;
- not be in default on a state or federal student loan;
- If the student has previously attended college, must be on track to graduate with no breaks in attendance;
- have a family (parents and student) federal adjusted gross income (AGI) of \$125,000 or less based on the prior prior year tax return
 - Example: For the 2023-2024 academic year, an AGI of \$125,000 or less based on the 2021 tax return.

Requirements:

- Execute a HESC issued contract and comply with pre- and post-graduation terms and conditions.
- Enroll for a minimum of 12 credits per semester.
- Complete 30 credits per year (defined as 365 days)
- Remain continuously enrolled and on track for a 4-year graduation when enrolled in a 4-year degree program.
- Complete the FAFSA first each year and then -
 - In the initial application year, also complete the TAP and Excelsior Applications at [hesc.ny.gov](https://www.hesc.ny.gov). The Excelsior application usually opens in May and closes in the August before the academic year you are starting college.
 - In subsequent years, complete the FAFSA and then the [NYS Payment of State Grants, Scholarships and Awards Application](#) (see the Resources section for the written link) on the HESC web site. You do not need to fill out the Excelsior Application again.

Academics:

- Students must enroll for at least 12 credits per semester and complete 30 credits per year. Students are strongly encouraged to register for 15 credits per semester to maximize their ability to retain eligibility for the program and on-time graduation.
- Remedial courses do not count towards enrollment requirements for Excelsior purposes.
- AP/IB and other college credits earned in high school can be “banked” and may be used to meet the annual 30 credit requirement. Confirm with Admission these credits have been transferred to Potsdam.
- Only transfer credits accepted towards the student’s SUNY Potsdam degree will count towards Excelsior requirements.

- Once eligibility is lost due to academic reasons, it cannot be regained without an approved appeal completed through Potsdam
- Students can use credits earned during winter or summer to meet the 30 credits per year requirement depending on the term their contract started. 365 days starts the first day of the semester the student first receives the Excelsior award.
- Students who change their major may continue to receive Excelsior funding provided that the student remains on track for a 4-year graduation.
- Students are strongly encouraged to consult academic and financial aid advisors before withdrawing from classes, changing majors, or enrolling in courses that are not applicable to their degree.
- There is no specific GPA requirement for Excelsior
- Double majors are allowed if graduation is not delayed.
- Repeat coursework can only count towards enrollment requirements if the previously received grade is inadequate for the requirements of the major.

Awards:

- Awards vary and are subject to change.
- The maximum annual Excelsior Scholarship is \$5,500 per year; however, an Excelsior Tuition Credit (ETA) will be awarded to cover any gap between the maximum Excelsior Scholarship and the cost of annual tuition.
- The award cannot be applied to non-tuition costs, such as room and board.
- Excelsior is a “last dollar” award. That means that the value of the award is determined after subtracting other grants and scholarships, such as Pell and TAP, from the tuition cost. If the amount of grants and scholarships exceeds the cost of tuition, the Excelsior award will be zero, but the student is still obligated to meet all the program requirements.
- Excelsior Scholarships cannot be used for summer or winter session tuition costs.
- Awards are post-semester payments. Meaning the award will not be disbursed until after the semester concludes and the student is deemed eligible to certify. It will show as a deferred credit on the bill. At the end of the semester, if the student does not meet the eligibility requirements for the semester and/or year, the amount shown as a deferred credit will become an amount owed.
- Students who fail to complete 30 credits within 365 days will receive the first payment (typically fall), however, they will forfeit the second payment (typically spring), and all future payments. The student will be responsible for paying the tuition retroactively for the forfeited term if the 30 credits have not been completed at the end of the 365 days. In addition, all future payments will be forfeited.
- If the family’s income changes for the prior prior year and their AGI is now over \$125,000, the student will not be awarded Excelsior, but still remains under contract. The student should still follow the eligibility requirements in case the family’s income drops to the threshold or below and the student is eligible to receive the award again.

Exceptions:

- Students designated as ADA are exempt from the standard enrollment requirements, however they are expected to complete all coursework attempted.
- EOP students must complete 24 credits per year and complete their degree within five years.
- Students who do not meet the continuous enrollment and completion of 30 credits per year requirements due to military service, documented medical issues or other significant circumstances, may appeal to Potsdam to retain eligibility.
- During the final semester of enrollment students must enroll for at least 12 credits, but only one course must be applicable toward their degree.
- There are exceptions to the post-graduation residency requirements for military service, graduate school attendance, and Peace Corp enrollment

Contract/Post-Graduation Residency Requirement:

- Upon HESC approving the application, an applicant must execute a Contract agreeing to reside in NYS for the length of time the award is received, and, if employed during such time, be employed in NYS. An applicant who has been determined to be eligible for an award will be instructed as to the execution and submission of the Contract. Failure to sign or submit the Contract to HESC by the given deadline will result in the denial of the award. Failure to meet any requirements will result in the value of the award being converted to a loan.

Miscellaneous:

- Students may take advantage of the “catch up” provision. An applicant who is not on track to complete an associate’s degree in two consecutive years or a bachelor’s degree in four consecutive years (which requires the completion of an average of 30 credits each academic year) can catch up on missing credits to become eligible for an Excelsior Scholarship by taking additional degree applicable courses during their 365 days.
- Students who are applying for the Excelsior Scholarship for the second term of their academic year must have completed 15 credits applicable toward their degree in the first term of their academic year to be eligible for an award. The same increases by 30 for each additional year – 45/75/105.

Questions about Excelsior:

Contact NYS Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) at <http://www.hesc.ny.gov> or 888-697-4372. HESC can also be reached via email at excelsior@hesc.ny.gov.

Resources:

- Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) website: <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/>
- Information about Excelsior: <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/financial-aid/types-of-financial-aid/nys-grants-scholarships-awards/the-excelsior-scholarship.html>
- NY Payment of State Grants, Scholarships, and Award Applications website: <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/apply-for-state-grants-scholarships-and-awards/apply-for-payment-of-tap-state-scholarships-and-awards.html>
- SUNY Potsdam’s Financial Aid website: <https://www.potsdam.edu/admissions/financial-aid>
- Please contact SUNY Potsdam’s One Stop with questions and concerns: <https://www.potsdam.edu/current/one-stop>.