

# Unveiling the Secrets: Reviewing Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Appeals

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# Agenda

- Introduction
- Florida Bright Futures Renewal Requirements & Petition Eligibility
- Petition Guidelines and Best Practices for Aid Years and Terms
- Common Reasons for Scholarship Appeals
- Components of a Fair Scholarship Appeal Review Process
- Assessing Appeal Documentation
- What is NOT an appeal?
- Providing Constructive Feedback
- Collaboration and Best Practices



# Introduction and Purpose

- Establish the guidelines for petitions based on Florida Bright Futures renewal requirements
- Explore the common reasons why applicants may appeal their scholarship non-renewal decisions
- Learn the essential components of a thorough and fair scholarship appeal review process, including the importance of confidentiality, impartiality, and adherence to established guidelines.
- Discuss best practices for assessing appeal documentation, including academic records, personal statements, and supporting evidence.
- Explore strategies for providing constructive feedback to appeal applicants, fostering transparency and trust in the scholarship review process.
- Collaborate with fellow participants to discuss challenging appeal scenarios, share insights, and exchange best practices.



# Florida Bright Futures Appeal Policy

## Applicants may appeal their scholarship decisions for various reasons

- **Annual renewal requirements were not met due to a verifiable illness or other documented emergency** - As reported by the postsecondary institution, an exception of one academic year to the renewal timeframe may be granted if a course of study is not completed after five academic years.
- **Bright Futures lost at home school, transfer to another school** - The home postsecondary institution will review the student's request and send recommendation of approval/denial to OSFA. Appeal request guidelines may be obtained through the financial aid office of a student's home postsecondary institution.
- **Repayment not satisfied** - A student must reimburse the postsecondary institution for the cost of course(s) dropped or withdrawn after the initial drop/add period. Due to verifiable illness or emergency, a student may make an appeal to the home postsecondary institution for hours dropped or withdrawn after the last day of the drop/add period.

**An institutional academic progress appeal is to be filed within 30 days of the date of the ineligibility notice sent to the student or by the date established by the institution's financial aid office, whichever is later. Ineligibility notices are posted to the student's Financial Aid Recipient History web screen during the summer following spring evaluation.**

Resource: [FLDOE Office of Student Assistance Bright Futures Handbook](#)



## Reasons for Scholarship Appeals for State of Florida Funding: Academic Challenges (Grades and Hours)

- Student did not meet the earned hour and GPA requirement (by program, per OSFA)
  - Unsatisfactory grades in one or more eligible terms, unearned hours or GPA affected
- Review eligible terms based on institution and program
  - Earned hours and GPA reported by OSFA deadlines
  - Summer BF eligibility is GPA only, first year students
  - Student decisions posted in SSFAD portal, student access and FA access
  - Appeals begin afterwards, institutions need access to OSFA decision
- Appeals should be reviewed by aid year and term, note appeal via SSFAD is annual only



# Common Reasons for Scholarship Appeals: G&H Extenuating Circumstances

- Illness – Student or family member
  - Immediate or Extended family – Mother, Father, sibling, grandparent(s), institution needs to establish this guideline
  - Student must explain the relationship to person and how this illness impacted earned hours and GPA
  - **Question?** Do you allow friends or colleague?
- Student personal issues can lead to an appeal, but highly encourage these must be documented
  - **Example:** Fire in an apartment complex, student displaced for 30 days.
- Family emergencies
  - **Example:** Student had to travel during a term for a family emergency, result missed course material – low or unsatisfactory grade



# Common Reasons for Scholarship Appeals: Repayment Obligation Extenuating Circumstances

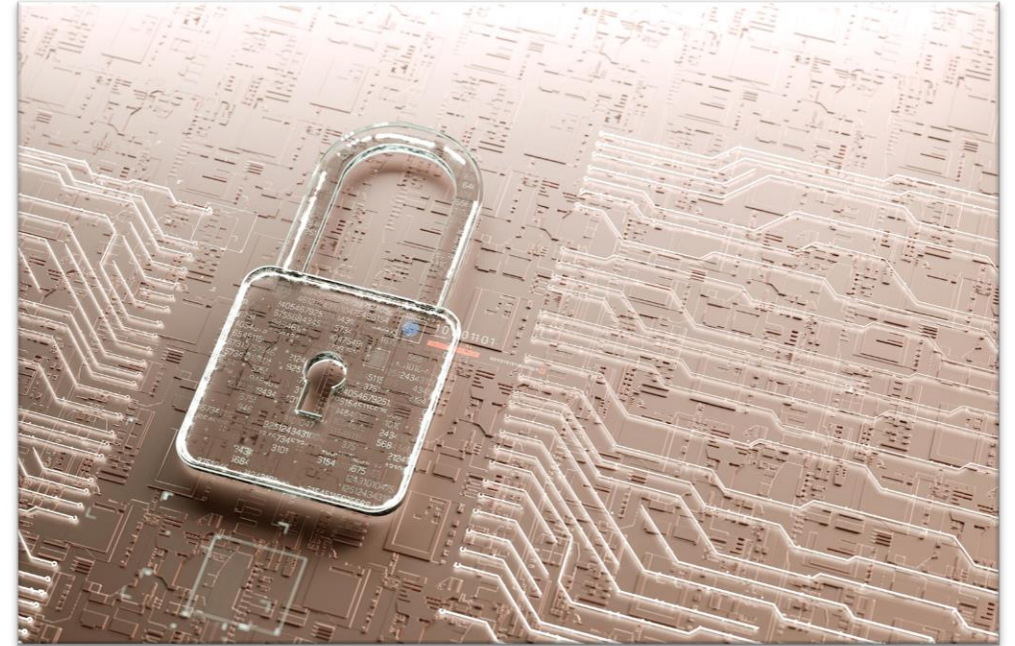
- Financial hardships – repaying for dropped hours could lead to financial setbacks  
**Example:** Student or parent has suddenly lost job
- Institutional drop or academic issue?  
**Example:** Student dropped from course due to lack of enrollment numbers, issue with professor or course offering
- Illness, family emergency, personal issues
  - Establish institution guidelines and best practices, documentation required
  - Consistency is key – Motto: What you do for one, you do for all!





# Components of a Fair Scholarship Appeal Review Process: Confidentiality

- Confidentiality in appeal process is essential!
- Students trust that petitions and reasons are safe guarded
- Responsible to maintain the privacy of students
- Establish petition committee (3-4 office members only)
- Determine review process for petition and documentation
  - Document storage and accessibility
  - Document retention
  - Documents submitted, cannot be returned or copies to Students
- Type of documentation (clear, concise, and official) and limit on documents (<20 pages)



# Components of a Fair Scholarship Appeal Review Process: Impartiality and Biases

- Need for unbiased review panels or committees (3-4 members)
  - Implicit bias - a collection of associations and reactions that emerge automatically upon encountering an individual or group.
- Objective assessment of appeals
  - Personal statement
  - Student academic history for renewal period (G&H)
  - Academic major or academic advisor statements
  - Integrity and trust in the process, consistency
- Process is fair, consistent, and maintains the integrity of the review.



# Components of a Fair Scholarship Appeal Review Process: Guidelines Adherence

- Petition cover letter – consider G&H vs. Repayment
  - ✓ Personal statement, must address terms in question
  - ✓ Clear, concise, and official documentation – letterhead with appropriate dates (within the renewal period) and signatures
  - ✓ Parent statements, consider notarized statements
  - ✓ Death Certificates with a parent statement
  - ✓ No more than 20 pages
- Petition cover letter – Provide option for aid year and term
- Consistent scenarios, established by Institution
- Establish review time, based on volume



# Assessing Appeal Documentation: Personal Statement

- Petition form should provide the academic aid year and term(s) for appeal.
- Applicants can explain their situation and reasons for appealing
- Personal statement:
  - Must explain academic issues that prevented renewal.
  - Student statement must list what has changed or improvements made to meet renewal.
  - Any submitted documentation should support issues presented by student in statement
  - Academic records should match with student statement
- Personal statement is FAO roadmap to review student appeal and provide a decision.





# Assessing Appeal Documentation: Academic Records

- Personal statement > Review student coursework based no statement
- Review academic history available, must include renewal terms
- Review student SFARH record on OSFA's SSFAD – Dropped/withdrawn reporting, repayment reporting, change in PSI.
- How is the student's overall performance?
  - Course performance during the term.
  - Is this an isolated term? Is there a pattern?
- Appeal approval will result in student being able to successfully meet renewal.  
**Example:** Academic probation or GPA < 2.0, possible appointment to speak with student, once appeal approved, the same circumstance cannot be used again.



# Assessing Appeal Documentation: Supporting Documents

- Role of documentation is to strengthening an appeal and support the personal statement.
- Must be concise, relevant, and clearly supports the circumstances.  
**Example:** A doctor's letter (signed, dated, etc.) that explains the issues and the dates of treatment
- Medical Records – must list student or family member information
- Other Relevant Documents
  - Death certificates, in addition to other documentation
  - Parent statements – typed, can be submitted with other documentation
  - Paycheck stubs or letter of job loss
  - Police reports, unredacted copies accepted
  - Institutional documentation – Academic Regulations Committee documentation



## Providing Decision: Timeliness and Transparency

- Effective communication ensures smooth progress.
- Clear feedback helps applicants understand the decision.
- Applicants can improve future petitions if needed with feedback.
- Transparency is crucial during the appeal process.
  - Standards of service printed on form
  - Student ability to track petition status (submitted to reviewed)
  - Decision on appropriate method to provide decision
  - Paper letter, email, or electronic display?
- Provide student with resubmission deadline if needed.





# Providing Decision: Approval message to student

## **Example 1:**

*Your petition was approved. We encourage you to review your scholarship requirements and ensure you meet all scholarship renewal requirements moving forward. Please note that you cannot use this circumstance in future petitions unless you demonstrate new/extenuating circumstances or new development of the condition.*

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## **Example 2:**

*We approved your Bright Futures repayment appeal <aid year and term(s)>. As a result, the eligible hours have been repaid and you can now view the updates in OASIS. It is important to note that this repayment will have an impact on the remaining hours for your Bright Futures scholarship. Therefore, we recommend that you check your remaining Bright Futures hours on the State of Florida Office of Student Financial Assistance portal at <https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org>.*





# Providing Decision: Denial message to student

## **Example 1:**

*Unfortunately, your petition is denied. You did not provide a typed and signed (wet or DocuSign) statement from your medical professional on official letterhead that supports the issues presented in your petition. The medical professional statement must explain how your issue affected your scholarship renewal requirements and provide dates of treatment within the renewal period (e.g., fall 2022 and spring 2023). The documentation provided must be clear and concise. You can resubmit your petition if you have documentation that meets the guidelines for the renewal period. The deadline is July 31.*

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## **Example 2:**

*Unfortunately, your petition is denied. You did not provide a personal statement and documentation of an extenuating issue beyond your control that affected your ability to meet the renewal requirements for your scholarship. Documentation must be clear and brief official documentation (on letterhead with appropriate signature and dates within the 2023-2024 academic year) that supports an issue presented in your petition during the renewal period. You can resubmit your petition if you have documentation that meets the guidelines for the renewal period. Please adhere to any deadlines listed on the petition form.*

# Petition Form Examples – Grade and Hour Petition

- ✓ Student name, university ID, and aid year on top of the form
- ✓ Deadline listed so student can see and instructions about submission
- ✓ Academic year and term (student often write in)
- ✓ Instructions statement, documentation, etc.
- ✓ Standards of Service
- ✓ Student contact information if no longer at institution

**IMPORTANT:** This form must be completed (including any attachments) and submitted to the OFA immediately, but no later than: **April 26, 2024 for 2023-2024 Funding**

Florida statutes provide a petition process if you do not meet the minimum grade point average and/or earned credit hour requirements for your Florida Scholarship Program(s). A petition may be filed if you had a documented medical or other emergency that prohibited you from meeting the renewal requirements. The petition documentation must present a clear connection between extenuating circumstances and your academic performance.

Academic Year:  2020-2021  2021-2022  2022-2023  
 Term(s):  Fall  Spring

**Instructions:**  
 Petitions are reviewed from imaged copies of paperwork you submit. All petitions and documentation are scanned into our imaging system before they are reviewed. Do not submit originals or your only copy of documentation, because the paper is destroyed after it is imaged. Be sure your name and Student Identification Number are at the top of each page you submit.

- Provide a concise, typewritten statement, in your own words, that provides a factual summary of extenuating circumstances for each semester which prevented you from meeting your scholarship requirements (state the semester and year; for example, fall 2021).  
 Be sure you clearly state:
  - What happened during that semester?
  - When did it happen (date specific by month and year)?
  - How did it affect your academic performance that term?
  - If you attended multiple terms with an ongoing or unresolved extenuating circumstance, briefly explain why you continued to enroll without adjusting your course load or sitting out a term.
  - Explain what has now changed, or the steps you have taken, that should now result in you earning all credits attempted for future semesters.
- Attach written/printed documentation for each circumstance and semester. We do not make telephone calls for documentation. Documentation must be legible and attached to the petition.  
 Documentation may include, but is not limited to, one or more of the following:
  - A signed statement on official letterhead from a medical professional stating the circumstances and the dates that you were unable to attend classes.
  - A signed statement on official letterhead from a medical or mental health professional, or a professional counselor indicating the impact of an illness/emergency on your academic performance for a specific time period.
  - A signed statement from a parent or other relative describing a family emergency that required your attention and the dates this occurred. (This must be accompanied by other separate and official documentation.)
  - An official report of an occurrence beyond your control such as a police report, divorce documents, or an insurance damage report.
- Submit all parts of your petition together: petitions that have incomplete or unclear information, or that are missing documentation, will not be approved.

**The Review Process:**  
 Petitions are normally reviewed within 20 working days of the date the petition is imaged and posted as a "satisfied requirement" in OASIS. You can check the status of your petition in OASIS at [www.usf.edu/basis](http://www.usf.edu/basis).

I have read and understand the petition process and the instructions stated above. My attached petition provides all required information. By signing this form, I certify that all the information reported to qualify for federal, state and/or institutional student aid is complete and correct.  
**WARNING:** If you purposely give false or misleading information on this form, you may be fined, sentenced to jail, or both.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

OASIS contact information is up-to-date.  
 No longer a USF Student. - Complete information below:  
 Current Phone Number: ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_



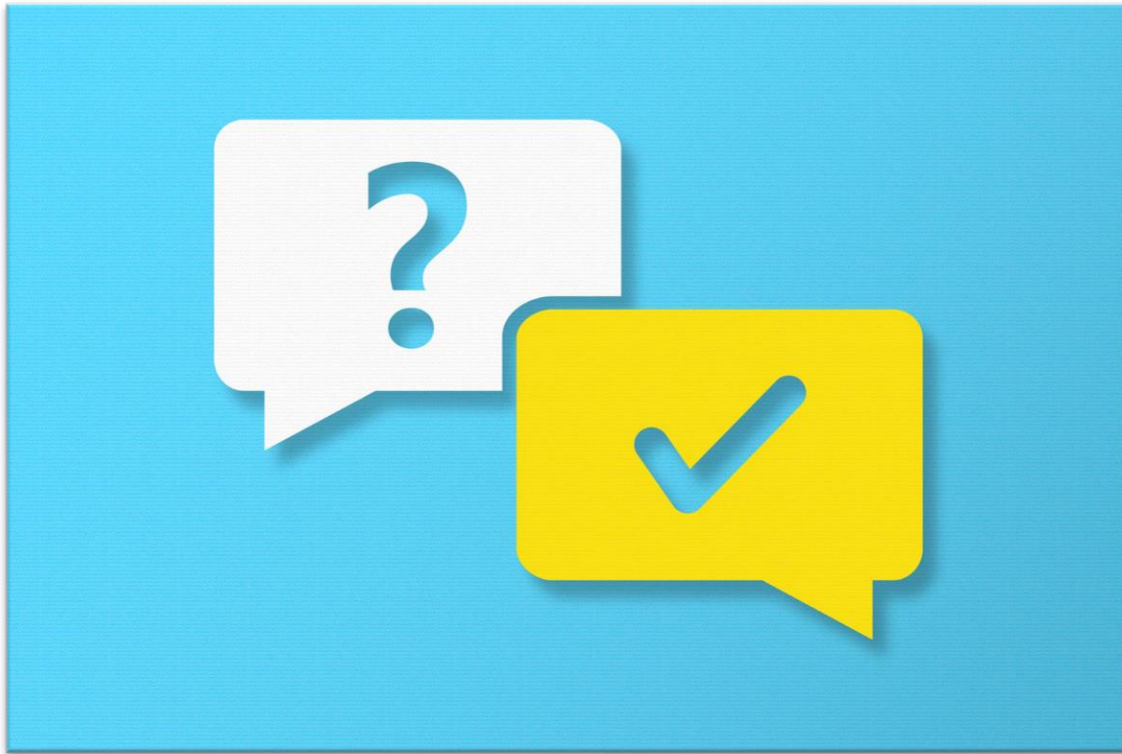


# What is NOT an Appeal?

- X Graduating seniors' requests, enrolled less than (6) hours
- X Grade and hour evaluations ( a C to B grade, GPA increases)
- X Reinstatement/Restoration (OSFA)
- X Extended Hours application or appeals (OSFA)



# Collaboration and Best Practices: Group Discussions



- ❖ Experiences and insights regarding challenging appeal scenarios.
- ❖ Effective strategies for handling
- ❖ Collaboration among scholarship administrators appeals has great value!

**Thank you for attending!**  
**Questions, comments, need to chat? You**  
**can contact me at**  
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