



HOPE: Opportunity for Georgia's Students

What is the HOPE Scholarship?

Created in 1993, Georgia's [HOPE Scholarship](#) is a lottery-funded, merit-based scholarship intended for Georgia students "who have demonstrated academic achievement throughout high school and/or while in college" (a 3.0 Grade Point Average). At public postsecondary institutions in Georgia, HOPE currently pays all of a student's tuition, HOPE-approved mandatory fees (fee payments are capped at the rates charged in January, 2004) and a book allowance of \$150 per semester. Students at private institutions are also eligible to receive a "private HOPE scholarship" currently in the amount of \$3,000 per year.

HOPE and Student Learning Support

Though HOPE is a merit-based scholarship for students who have "demonstrated academic achievement", some students who earn HOPE scholarships still require Learning Support (LS) for extra academic help once they enter University System of Georgia (USG) institutions. According to the University System, three groups of students may be enrolled in LS programs:

- Students who do not meet USG minimum requirements for placement testing (i.e. 430 SAT-Verbal, 400 SAT-Math, and college preparatory curriculum English and Math);
- Students who are above the USG minimum requirements but are required by the individual college or university to take LS courses or other courses;
- Students who volunteer to take LS courses to prepare for regular college courses.

The table to the right shows the number of First-Time Freshmen (FTF) with HOPE in Fall 2005 (the most recent data year available), and the percentage of those students who were required to enroll in Learning Support programs because they did not meet USG or institution-specific minimum requirements, by [institution type](#). An additional 261 students across the USG voluntarily enrolled themselves in Learning Support Programs.

Sector	Number of FTF with HOPE	Percent of FTF With HOPE Requiring Learning Support
Research Univ.	7,208	0.1
Regional Univ.	3,671	0.4
State Univ.	8,639	7.4
State Colleges	3,167	37.1
2-Year Coll.	2,792	40.1
System Totals	25,477	11.6

HOPE Scholarship Criteria Changes

All of the 25,477 students included in the table above were deemed HOPE-eligible. These students earned B averages from their high schools but were not prepared for college-level academic work according to the university system. Has there been a "mismatch" between the definition of a "HOPE Scholar" and the reality of what is required for college-level work? The state education agencies, concerned about a possible mismatch, have sought to address it through a more rigorous high school curriculum, a new graduation rule and through the implementation of legislative changes to the HOPE Scholarship itself.

	Previous Method	2007 Method*
High School Reports to Georgia Student Finance Commission	Student GPAs Only	Complete Transcript with Course History
HOPE Grade Eligibility Determined by Nominal Standard for Eligibility	Local High School	Georgia Student Finance Commission
College Preparatory	3.0 on a 4.0 scale/80 on numerical scale	3.0 on a true 4.0 scale—no numerical standard
Other Diploma Types	3.2 on a 4.0 scale/85 on numerical scale	3.2 on a true 4.0 scale—no numerical standard
Academic Credits Counted		
English	4 Highest Graded Credits	All Credits Attempted
Mathematics	4 Highest Graded Credits	All Credits Attempted
Science	3 Highest Graded Credits	All Credits Attempted
Social Studies	3 Highest Graded Credits	All Credits Attempted
Foreign Language (College Prep Only)	2 Highest Graded Credits	All Credits Attempted
Courses Weighted in GPA Calculation	Any May be Weighted (Local Discretion)	Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Only
Weighting Done By	Local High School or System	Georgia Student Finance Commission
Value of Weights	Locally Determined	Uniform Across the State

*Applies to all Georgia High School Graduates who begin their college careers on or after May 1, 2007, regardless of previous eligibility determinations. Those enrolled and attending an eligible college prior to May 1, 2007 are subject to the previous high school eligibility standard. The statute governing this process, §20-2-157 O.C.G.A., may be viewed at http://www.legis.state.ga.us/cgi-bin/gl_codes_detail.pl?code=20-2-157

In Fall 2003, the bipartisan [HOPE Scholarship Joint Study Commission](#) issued a report and made recommendations in order to "improve the HOPE scholarship program for the future," and to assure "the continuing and future availability of sufficient funds for HOPE scholarships." In 2004, the state began advertising a new calculation method for the HOPE scholarship based on these recommendations, which took effect for the high school graduating class of 2007 to address issues of consistency and fairness across the state and the possibility of such a mismatch. This chart shows the current and previous calculation and eligibility methods.

Has HOPE Eligibility Declined?

The number and percentage of HOPE-eligible public high school graduates had been relatively stable until this year.

According to the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), reasons for a decline in the

number of HOPE-eligible students include a) removal of local school system weights for courses; b) a switch to a “true” 4.0 grading scale; and c) large numbers of “D” grades in core courses that had not previously been calculated in students’ GPAs.

Course Weights

The new method of HOPE eligibility calculation weights only Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses—two programs with [national recognition](#) for having higher academic standards. In their 2007 transcript study, the GSFC found that while some of Georgia’s 180 school systems previously did not weight AP or IB courses, only 28 systematically weighted “honors” courses, 11 systematically weighted other types of courses such as pre-IB, gifted, etc., and 31 weighted some individual courses.

Grading Scales

Under the pre-2007 system, students had to earn an 80 average in core courses to qualify for HOPE, but not all school systems’ grading scales were created equal. For the 2006-07 school year, 277 public high schools in Georgia used a standard 100-point grading scale; however, many schools used a different scale:

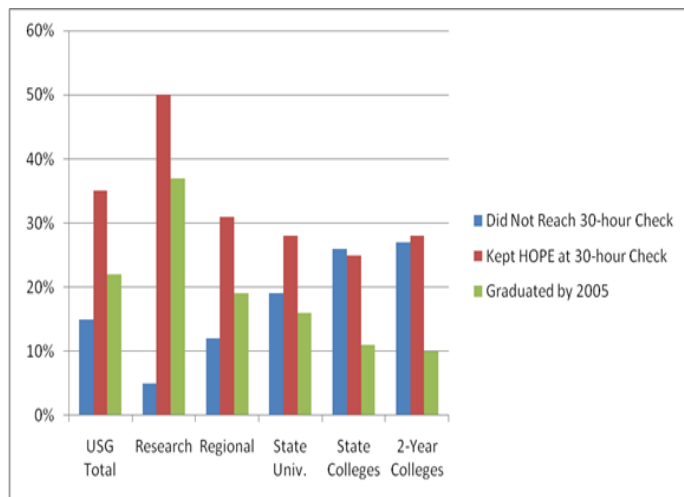
Low Grades

Under the old HOPE calculation method, only the highest 16 units were counted in the GPA: 4 English, 4 Math, 3 Science, 3 social studies, and 2 foreign language. Also,

if a course were taken more than once, only the highest grade would count. Now all grades count. According to [GSFC](#), “Omitting failed grades from the computation of grade point averages contributed to inflation of reported grade point averages for HOPE qualifying purposes. Consequently, freshmen applicants to college with grade point averages below 2.0 by Board of Regents grade point average calculation standards were qualifying for the HOPE scholarship despite the nominal ‘B’ average requirement.”

Have HOPE scholars retained their scholarships?

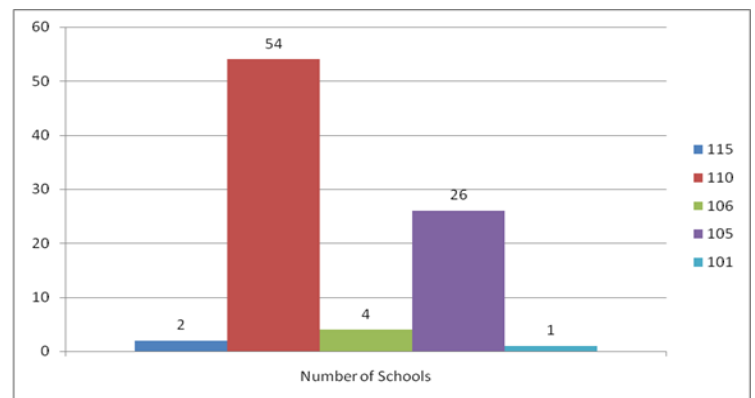
How have HOPE scholars fared in keeping their scholarships throughout their college careers, and how might that change in the future? Once enrolled in college, students’ GPAs are checked when they reach 30, 60, and 90 credit hours to determine ongoing HOPE eligibility:



HOPE Scholarship Retention for FTF Entering USG in Fall, 1999

Graduation Year	Number of Public HS Graduates Eligible for HOPE	Percent of Public HS Graduates Eligible for HOPE
2003-04	42,233	62.0
2004-05	43,080	61.1
2005-06	45,731	61.7
2006-07	29,617	38.1

Grading Scales Used by Georgia’s Public High Schools



Conclusion

Even at Georgia’s research universities, only 50 percent of Fall 1999 first-time freshmen still had their HOPE scholarships at the first checkpoint. The 2003 HOPE Scholarship Joint Study Commission also addressed HOPE eligibility and retention by recommending that the state “preserve the merit-based focus of the HOPE Scholarship program” and that it was necessary to be more vigilant in “ensuring compliance with the 3.0 requirement [once students are in college].” The new calculation method ostensibly addresses the merit-based aspect of the program, and GSFC has instituted additional GPA checkpoints at the end of each college spring semester to prevent students from taking lighter courseloads (and thereby prolonging the time before they earn enough credit hours to have their HOPE eligibility checked). This spring will be our first opportunity to see how well students who earned HOPE under the new calculation method succeed at their first checkpoint.