A. Purpose

1. Gaston College maintains its Manual of Veterans’ Affairs which includes those policies and procedures surrounding the "Certification of Students under Veterans' Laws" at Gaston College. The State Approving Agency (SAA) for Veterans Education identifies the education institutions which may participate in the state-wide Veterans Education Program, their specific education programs acceptable for veterans' enrollment, and the delivery methods appropriate for pay purposes.

2. The documents used to determine veteran students' eligibility for financial assistance are found in current regulations published in the Federal Register Supplemental Materials by Book, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Certification of Students Under Veterans' Laws, North Carolina Association of Coordinators of Veterans’ Affairs (NCACVA) Veterans Counselor Handbook, other regulations that impact veterans’ aid, and Gaston College policies and procedures.

B. Institutional Policy Development Responsibility

The Director of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs is responsible for establishing institutional policy development surrounding the delivery of veterans’ financial assistance. Policy development adheres to federal and state laws and regulations as well as the mission of the College. Financial Aid policy is reported to and approved by the Vice President for Student Services and Enrollment Management when appropriate.

C. Institutional Principles of Financial Aid

1. Based on the principles of access and choice, with an understanding that aid resources at the college are limited, the following principles have been adopted by the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs.

2. The primary purpose of the financial aid program is to provide assistance to students, who without such aid, would be unable to attend Gaston College.

3. Financial assistance consists of grants, scholarships, work study programs and veterans’ benefits which may be offered to students singularly or in various combinations.
4. The family of a student is expected to make a maximum effort to assist the student with college expenses. Financial assistance from the College is viewed only as a supplement to the student and the family contribution.

5. Students must maintain satisfactory academic progress.

6. The total amount of need-based financial assistance offered a student by the College shall not exceed the student's demonstrated eligibility. Non need-based aid shall not exceed the cost of attendance.

7. In determining the amount of other resources available to the student, the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans' Affairs shall take into account the financial support which can be reasonably expected from income, assets, and other resources available to the student. The Federal Methodology (FM) analysis established by Congress shall be the mechanism used to determine the student’s and family's contribution.

8. Self-help may be awarded to students if requested by completing a work study application.

9. The College will strive, through cooperation with schools and other colleges, its publications, and other communications, to encourage college attendance by all able students.

10. In determining a student's financial aid award, outside resources (including scholarships, grants, and loans) will be taken into consideration to ensure equitable distribution of funds.

11. International students are eligible only for scholarships.

12. Selection of students to receive financial aid will be made without regard to age, sex, race, color, religion, national origin, disability, or marital status. All financial aid recipients are informed of the conditions under which aid is granted at the time the offer is made.

13. The Office of Financial Aid and Veterans' Affairs shall refrain from and discourage others from making any public announcement of the amount or type of financial aid awarded to a student in order to protect the confidentiality of the economic circumstances of the student and his/her family. Information shall be released only by written consent of the student and his/her family.
D. Policies

The following operating policies are designed to assure that the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs is effective in carrying out its responsibilities:

1. All students must apply for financial assistance by submitting appropriate application forms to the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs.

2. All funds available to the College for financial assistance shall be administered through the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs. The selection of students to receive certain designated scholarships shall be submitted by the responsible committee and/or department to the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs for processing. When funds or awards for students are received from outside sources by other offices (such as the Business Office), that office will be required to notify the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs.

3. All work study (WS) student employment shall be administered through the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs. It shall be the responsibility of the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs to cooperate with the employing offices in matching the capabilities of the individual student to the requirements of the job. All departments wishing to employ work study students may do so with the approval from their vice president. Wage schedules corresponding to student positions are recommended by the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs. However, the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs has the final authority for establishing wage amounts.

4. Students are given a choice about which financial aid programs they apply for; therefore, students are considered for work study or veterans’ benefits only if they complete the appropriate application and/or forms.

5. The Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs shall maintain adequate records to ensure proper administration of aid funds. This includes making sure that aid given is not in excess of need and/or the cost of attendance and that aggregate awards do not exceed total expenditures of funds under each program. Records on work study students must be adequate to assure the student is earning up to, but not in excess of, the amount authorized in his/her student aid package.

6. Priority consideration for aid is given to students whose files are complete by April 30 of each year.
7. All undergraduate students applying for aid are required to apply annually for federal assistance. (If the student is a resident of the state of North Carolina, he/she is automatically considered for NC state grants with the submission of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid [FAFSA]).

E. Financial Aid Committee

The Financial Aid Committee is a policy-level committee established to:

1. Recommend College policy on matters relating to scholarships, grants, loans, and student employment.

2. Determine program objectives consistent with the College’s strategic plan.

3. Facilitate the distribution of financial aid information.

4. Monitor the effectiveness of financial aid activities.

5. The composition of the Committee includes campus officials from administrative, academic, and student areas including representatives from the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs, Business Office, Office of Enrollment Management and Admissions, Office of Student Registration and Records, Counseling, Student Government Association, Office of Development and Gaston College Foundation, and other areas of the College as appropriate.

6. A College scholarship committee selects the recipients of endowed and miscellaneous scholarships.

F. Distribution of Forms

1. FAFSA worksheets and general Gaston College financial aid forms are available in the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs on the Dallas, Lincoln, and East Campuses. These forms are also online on the Gaston College web site.

2. Veteran forms are distributed from the Veterans’ Affairs and Financial Aid Specialist’s office.
G. Confidentiality of Records

All records and conversations between an aid applicant, his/her family, and the staff of the Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs are confidential and entitled to the protection ordinarily given a counseling relationship. Gaston College assures the confidentiality of student educational records in accordance with North Carolina State University rules, state, and federal laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, as amended. As a rule, all currently enrolled and former students have the right to review their records to determine their content and accuracy. Parents of dependent students (as defined by the Internal Revenue Code) who give evidence of this status have the same rights. For the cost of photocopying, students may generally have copies of any documents in their file, except for other institutions' transcripts. A student who wishes to obtain access to his/her financial aid record must schedule an appointment with a specialist.

H. Public Information

1. Unless the student has requested in writing that public information be withheld from normal disclosure, the following information may be released by any member of the College in response to inquiries from the public regarding individual students, whether the request is made in person, by telephone, or in writing.

2. A student's consent is not required for disclosure of portions of the educational record defined by the institution as directory information.

I. Non-Public Information

1. A student’s consent is required for the disclosure or publication of any information which is (a) personally identifiable and (b) a part of the educational record. However, certain exceptions to that generality, both in types of information which can be disclosed and in access to that information, are allowed within the regulations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

2. A student must submit a written release of information for any additional information to be released to any other person or agency. The student’s release must contain:
   a. date of request
   b. student's social security number
   c. student's signature
(1) specific contact name or agency
(2) summary of information which may be released

J. Active Records

The Office of Financial Aid and Veterans’ Affairs maintains a master record for each student receiving financial assistance and/or veterans’ benefits. All financial aid folders are retained for five years after submission of the Fiscal Operations Application to Participate (FISAP) report. Any records involved in any claim or expenditure which has been questioned by federal audit are retained until the question is resolved.