

**LOUISIANA STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE  
COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

***Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS)  
Bulletin***

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| TOPS BULLETIN NUMBER: | T2009-1   |
| DATE ISSUED:          | March 23, 2009  |
| EFFECTIVE DATE:       | As Indicated  |
| DISTRIBUTION:         | College, University and LAICU Chancellors, Financial Aid Offices, Business Offices, Registrars and Auditors; Louisiana Legislators, Officials and the Congressional Delegation; Higher Education Board; Libraries; Commission Members; Technical College Campus Deans and Student Personnel Services Officers |
| TOPICS:               | TOPS Rule Change: Clarification of Program Full time for Completion of Specified Course of Study  |

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The Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission (LASFAC) approved an Emergency Rule and authorized publication of a Notice of Intent to make the rules permanent at its meeting on February 4, 2009, that refines the definition of “full-time” for students who are enrolled in less than twelve hours at a semester school or eight hours at a term school by adding definitions for “Course of Study” and “Clinical Programs.” These revisions are being added to assist postsecondary schools in classifying students as “program full-time” to meet the renewal and payment criteria for TOPS. This action does not change the existing requirements, but clarifies the rules to highlight a “program full time” classification that is already in effect.

The TOPS statute requires students to enroll as a full-time student each semester or term during the academic year. The Scholarship and Grant Program Rules provide that a student must be enrolled in at least twelve hours per semester through the 14<sup>th</sup> class day or in at least eight hours per term through the 9<sup>th</sup> class day to be considered “full-time.” However, LASFAC recognized that under certain circumstances students should be considered full-time even though the student enrolls in fewer than twelve or eight hours. LASFAC provided three such circumstances that will be treated as program full-time:

1. The student requires less than full-time enrollment to complete the undergraduate degree; or
2. The student is enrolled in a degree program that defines full-time as less than 12 hours per semester or eight hours per quarter; or
3. The student requires less than full-time enrollment to complete requirements for a **specified course of study or clinical program**. Emphasis added.

The 3rd circumstance has been underutilized to classify students as full-time for TOPS purposes. In most cases, students have scheduled unneeded hours to ensure that they were enrolled in at least eight or twelve hours. In some cases, students have had their TOPS award cancelled for failure to enroll full time.

LASFAC has revised its rules to provide guidance to the schools to properly determine when affected students can be coded program full time. (EP)

The revision to the rule defines a “**Specified Course of Study**” as a program established by the postsecondary institution leading to an associate’s degree, OR a program with course work specified by a school of study at a postsecondary institution (e.g., business, architecture, mass communications, art and design) required for admission to that school for further studies to earn a baccalaureate degree.

For example, a student will complete the required course work to enter the school of art and design in the spring semester if he/she passes six required hours during preceding fall semester. The college should classify the student as program full time for the fall semester if he/she only enrolls in the six required hours.

The revision to the rule defines “**Clinical Programs**” as student teaching, practicum courses, or clinic based experiences required to earn a baccalaureate degree.

For example:

- At the start of the fall semester, a student has completed all the requirements to enter a college’s nursing program in the following spring semester except for three hours of a required course. The college should classify the student as program full time for fall semester if he/she only enrolls in the required three hour course.
- At the start of the spring semester, a student has completed all the requirements to start student teaching in the following fall semester except for six hours of required courses. The college should classify the student as program full time for the spring semester if he/she only enrolls in the six required hours.

**Caveat:** The 3<sup>rd</sup> circumstance only applies to the semester or term *the requirements are completed* for a “**Specified Course of Study**” or *immediately preceding entry* into a “**Clinical Program.**”

Use of a “program full time” term or semester will reduce the student’s TOPS eligibility by a term or semester.

For additional information, please contact our Customer Service Department at 1-800-259-5626, Ext. 1012 or send an e-mail to [www.custserv@osfa.la.gov](mailto:www.custserv@osfa.la.gov).