



TOPS Pro-Rata Award Amounts for 2016-17 Winter Quarter/Spring Semester



Frequently Asked Questions

- Q. 1 - Why are the amounts being paid to TOPS recipients for Winter Quarter and Spring Semester less than earlier projections?**
- A- TOPS can only pay out the amount appropriated by the Legislature. Additionally, the Legislature voted to “front-load” 2016-17 TOPS award amounts resulting in fall awards being funded at 93.06% of full funding. When subtracted from the total amount appropriated, this resulted in an *estimated* Winter/Spring remaining balance that would cover approximately 48% of the fully funded amount. After processing all fall TOPS award payments and factoring in an *anticipated* \$8+ million shortfall in Tobacco Settlement revenue that was included in the original appropriation, it was determined that the *actual* amount of remaining TOPS appropriation dollars will support spring semester payments of 41.80% of the fully funded award amount.
- Q. 2 - How can I learn how much in dollars and cents TOPS will pay to the school I am attending?**
- A- Click here: http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/TOPS_Payment_Amounts.pdf for a chart breaking down Winter Quarter/Spring Semester TOPS payment amounts by school.
- Q. 3 - In the payment chart, what does the column headed “2016-2017 Max TOPS Payment” mean?**
- A- This column shows amounts equal to what would be paid at each school for the academic year *if* there was no shortfall and we were able to pay the full TOPS award amount for the academic year at that institution. This amount may not equal the full amount of tuition charged at the institution because the Legislature also voted to separate, also referred to as “decouple”, TOPS award amounts from actual tuition amounts.
- Q. 4 - Is it true that some upperclassmen or students in TOPS Honors will not be affected by the TOPS funding cut for the 2017 spring semester?**
- A- No, all TOPS students are affected.
- Q. 5 - Can students opt out of receiving TOPS payments for the Winter Quarter and/or Spring Semester/Quarter due to the budget shortfall and reduced payment amount without any adverse consequences?**
- A- Yes. Act 503 of the 2016 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature allows a student to “opt out” of receiving his/her TOPS Award during a budget shortfall, as is the case with the 2016-17 Academic Year.
- If you choose to opt out, your TOPS award will not be paid for the semester/quarter. You will not be required to earn 24 hours during the academic year and you will not be required to enroll full time. **NOTE:** If you do enroll, any grades you earn *will* be included in your TOPS cumulative grade point average. For additional information on Opting Out, go to <http://www.osfa.la.gov/MainSitePDFs/2016TOPSOptOutQandA.pdf>.

Q. 6 - Why can some institutions fund the shortfall in TOPS funding and is there a pool of funds available at my institution to help with the TOPS shortfall?

A- Higher Education two and four-year institutions had not previously experienced a shortfall in TOPS funding until last fiscal year, and that shortfall was absorbed by the public colleges and universities. Higher Education is again experiencing a shortfall in TOPS funding for this fiscal year. As a result, institutions have become more assertive in requiring students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The completion of a FAFSA form is not currently mandatory, however, if students choose to complete the FAFSA, and are eligible for assistance, institutional funds may be freed up and used for other purposes. This aid model works for institutions that have a larger Pell Grant eligible population and a lower number of TOPS recipients. However, this model does not work well for institutions with a smaller number of Pell Grant eligible students and a larger population of students who receive TOPS. Only when a student completes a FAFSA and is determined to be eligible, does additional Federal funding become available. If the FAFSA is not completed, there is no pool of untapped funds for use by the institution.

Q. 7 - Will TOPS be paid for the summer of 2017?

A- At this time, we do not anticipate that funding will be available to pay summer awards.

Q. 8 - What if I have questions that were not answered here?

A- You may email any additional questions to custserv@la.gov.

TOPS was created by Act 1375 of the 1997 Regular Legislative Session. Since inception, TOPS has assisted over 290,770 students with tuition expenses. In academic year 2015-16, 51,590 students received tuition payments; 13,001 students received TOPS Performance stipend (\$400 annual stipend); and 10,758 students received TOPS Honors stipend (\$800 annual stipend). Data shows 61% of TOPS recipients complete a baccalaureate degree within 150% of time, compared with 33% of non-TOPS students who do so within the same time frame.¹

According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), in Louisiana aid based on criteria other than need was \$1,160 per student in 2013. Louisiana's merit based aid is higher than the SREB average and higher than the national average.²

¹ TOPS Report: Analysis of the TOPS Program from 2006-2014, Louisiana Board of Regents, December 2015.

² Louisiana College Affordability Profile, Southern Regional Education Board, October 2016.