

## TOPS OPT OUT Questions and Answers

Q1. What does the term Opt Out mean?

A: Due to the TOPS budget shortfall, students may choose not to receive payment of their TOPS awards during the 2016-2017 academic year.

Q2. Do I have to opt out for the whole year, or can I opt out of just one semester/quarter?

A: You do not have to opt out of receiving your TOPS award for the whole year. For example, you can choose to receive payment of your award for the fall semester/quarter, but not for the winter quarter and/or spring semester/quarter or vice versa.

Q3. How do I opt out?

A: In order to “opt out” of receiving your TOPS Award, you must log in to your Louisiana Award System account and select the Opt Out tab. Answer the question that appears, and then select the “Opt Out” button for the semester/term that you wish to opt out. You will be able to opt out for the winter quarter/term and/or the spring semester/quarter/term beginning on November 14, 2016. NOTE: If the semester/term you wish to opt out is in gray, you are not able to opt out for that semester/term because the deadline has passed.

- The applicable opt out deadlines are:
  - Winter Quarter/Term: November 30, 2016
  - Spring Semester: January 13, 2017
  - Spring Quarter/Term: March 8, 2017

Q4. What happens to my award if I opt out?

A. 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. If you do enroll, any grades you earn **will** be included in your TOPS cumulative grade point average.

**NOTE:** If you opt out, you will have five years from the date you first opt out to use all of your TOPS award. For example, if you opt out of receiving your award for the fall semester of 2016, you will have until the spring semester of 2021 to use all of your TOPS Award eligibility.

Q5. What happens if I accept my TOPS Award as opposed to opting out?

A. If you accept your TOPS Award during the 2016-2017 academic year, your award will be paid at a pro-rata amount. If you accept payment of your TOPS award, you will be required to meet all continuing eligibility as set forth in the Rights and Responsibilities document that accompanied your award letter. This means that you must enroll full time each

semester/quarter, that you must remain enrolled (i.e., not resign), and that you must earn 24 hours during the academic year. You must also maintain the required grade point average for your award.

Q6. What if I accept my award for the fall semester/quarter of 2016, but not for the winter quarter of 2016 and/or spring semester/quarter of 2017?

A. If you accept payment of your TOPS in the fall semester/quarter, you must enroll full time and you must remain enrolled throughout the semester.

If you opt out of payment for the winter quarter and/or spring semester/quarter, then you will not have to earn 24 hours for the academic year and you will not have to enroll full time (or at all) for the winter quarter and/or spring semester/quarter. **Note: You must maintain the required grade point average for your award regardless of whether you opt out.**

Q7. What if I accept my award for the fall semester/quarter, but I have to withdraw due to circumstances beyond my control?

A. You must submit a completed Request for Exception form with the required supporting documentation. For example, if you were sick during the semester/quarter and had to resign, you must provide a letter from your doctor to that effect. You can download the Request for Exception form with instructions and a list of the required documentation at [www.osfa.la.gov/sgforms](http://www.osfa.la.gov/sgforms). Email your completed form to [tops.exceptions@la.gov](mailto:tops.exceptions@la.gov).

Q8. I just graduated from high school, and I don't plan to attend school this year. Do I need to do anything?

A. As a 2016 high school graduate, you are not required to enroll as a full time student until the fall semester of 2017. If you do not go to school at all during the upcoming school year, or if you only go part time, you do not have to opt out.

Q9. I just completed my undergraduate degree/my associate's degree and I have TOPS semesters remaining. Can I sit out fall 2016?

A. Yes. As a student who has completed an undergraduate degree or an associate's degree, you are allowed to sit out of school for a year before returning to graduate school or to get a second associate's or a first baccalaureate degree. For example, if you graduate in May 2016, you do not have to enroll in a graduate or a second associate's degree program until the fall semester of 2017. You do not have to opt out unless you want to go to school full time but you do not want your TOPS award to be paid.

Q10. I have enrolled at an out of state school for the fall semester of 2016. I know that when TOPS is fully funded, my total TOPS enrollment will be reduced by one semester for every semester I attend out of state. Does this rule change because of the budget shortfall? Do I still lose a semester even if I opt out?

A. No. If you opt out of payment of your TOPS Award and attend an out of state postsecondary institution, you will not lose a semester of TOPS if you choose to opt out. NOTE: You must opt out prior to the semester you attend out of state. If you wait until you return to Louisiana, you will lose a semester of your total TOPS Award for each semester you attend out of state.

When you return to a Louisiana school, you must still complete the Application to Return from an Out of State College or University and you must provide all transcripts from the out of state school you attended. Any grades you earn while out of state will still be included in your TOPS cumulative grade point average.

Q11. My TOPS Award is suspended because I did not earn the required grade point average. My TOPS Award isn't going to be paid anyway. Do I still have to opt out?

A. You are not required to opt out. However, if you do opt out, you will not have to enroll full time or earn 24 hours during the academic year. Note that the time period during which you must bring your grades up to the GPA required for your award **will not be extended**, even if you choose to opt out.

Q12. Will opt-outs for graduate/professional students function in exactly the same manner as opt-outs for undergraduates?

A. Yes.

Q13. I received my baccalaureate degree in the spring semester of 2015, and I am scheduled to start graduate school in the fall semester of 2016. If I opt out, will my deadline to enroll in graduate school be extended?

A. Yes. Your deadline to enroll in graduate/professional school is the fall semester of 2016, but if you opt out of payment of your TOPS award for the fall semester, you are not required to enroll. Your deadline to enroll in graduate/professional school is extended to the spring semester of 2017. For each semester you opt out, the deadline is extended by one semester. **NOTE:** If there is not a shortfall for an academic year, you must be enrolled in school unless you request and are granted an exception for cause to the requirement to enroll in school or to enroll full time.