LOUISIANA OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

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TOPS Application Process

Q-1. What is the application for TOPS?

A. To apply for a TOPS scholarship, you must submit one of the following:

1. You must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) unless you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid (Pell Grant). We recommend that all students submit the FAFSA. The most direct way to file the FAFSA is via the Internet at www.fafsa.gov. The paper FAFSA may also be used.

   FAFSA on the Web:
   If you have any problems with filing the FAFSA on the Web at www.fafsa.gov, including problems obtaining or using the **FSA ID** from Federal Student Aid, you should contact the FAFSA hotline at 1800-433-3243 for assistance. Both you and one of your parents must have and use an FSA ID to submit the FAFSA on the Web.

   Be sure that the name that you use on the FAFSA exactly matches your name on file with your high school and the name you use on the ACT. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your FAFSA should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS will be delayed**. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same.**

   Once the application has been submitted, the Web site will prompt you to print and keep a copy of the confirmation page. MAKE SURE YOU COMPLETE THE PROCESS BY SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION AND PRINTING THE CONFIRMATION PAGE. **IF THE CONFIRMATION PAGE DOES NOT APPEAR, THE APPLICATION HAS NOT BEEN SUBMITTED.** SAVE THE PRINTOUT OF THE CONFIRMATION PAGE TO PROVE THE DATE THE APPLICATION WAS SUBMITTED.

   You should receive a **Student Aid Report** (SAR) confirming the receipt of the application within a few days. You should retain a copy of the SAR.

   Paper FAFSA:

   If you submit the FAFSA on the paper form, keep a copy of the FAFSA and send the FAFSA via certified or registered mail and keep the documentation showing the date it was mailed. You should receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) confirming the receipt of the application within a few weeks. Retain a copy of the SAR.

   If you have any concerns about your FAFSA or whether it was received by the federal processor, you may call the FAFSA hotline at 1-800-433-3243 for assistance.

   For a paper FAFSA, call the FAFSA hotline at 1-800-433-3243 or print it from the FAFSA on the Web site.

TOPS On-Line Application:

If you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid, you may submit the TOPS On-Line Application on the LOSFA Web site (**https://www.osfa.la.gov/TOPSonlineapp**). The On-Line Application requires you to certify that you do not qualify for federal grant aid, and to certify your citizenship, residency and criminal conviction status. Once the application has been submitted, PRINT AND SAVE A COPY OF THE CONFIRMATION to prove the date you submitted the application.

The TOPS On-Line application requires that you provide a social security number. Your social security number will be encrypted immediately after you click on submit, and it will not be visible to LOSFA staff. It will only be used by programming to match your application with your student transcript data.

Be sure that the name that you use on the TOPS On-Line Application exactly matches your name on file with your high school and the name you used on the ACT and the name you used when registering for any dual enrollment classes while you were in high school. For example, if your high school records state that your name is John Q. Smith, your ACT and your TOPS On-Line Application should use the name John Q. Smith, not John Smith, not John Quincy Smith, and not Quincy Smith. If your name differs in the slightest way in any of these documents, the determination of your eligibility for TOPS will be delayed. Your date of birth, home address, and email address must also be the same.

NOTE: If you have already submitted a complete FAFSA, you will not be allowed to submit a TOPS On Line Application.

If you experience problems completing your TOPS On Line Application, send an e-mail to LOSFA at **custserv@la.gov**.

Q-2. What is the deadline for applying for TOPS?

A. The deadline for receipt of a TOPS application for the full TOPS award is July 1, or the next business day if July 1 falls on a weekend, following the one year anniversary of high school graduation. If you are a 2022 high school graduate, you must file your application so that it is received by the federal processor by July 1, 2023, to receive TOPS funding. However, no payment of a TOPS award will be made until the initial FAFSA or on-line application has been received and you have been determined eligible for a TOPS award.

The priority deadline for completion of the FAFSA is February 1 of your senior year of high school. Completing the FAFSA by this date will ensure processing for TOPS in a timely manner. It will also ensure that you have time to correct any FAFSA errors and allow you to know early what type of federal student aid you may qualify for.

If you enroll for the first time as a full-time student before you are determined eligible for a TOPS award, you must meet the TOPS Continuing Eligibility Requirements to receive payments of your TOPS award after the first semester, quarter or term of your full-time enrollment at an eligible college or university.

If you are a 2022 high school graduate and your initial application is received from July 2, 2023 through September 1, 2023, you will be eligible to receive seven semesters of TOPS funding

beginning with the 2022-2023 academic year. You must also meet TOPS Continuing Eligibility Requirements if you attend college during the 2022-2023 academic year.

If you are a 2022 high school graduate and your application is received from September 2, 2023 through October 29, 2023, you will be eligible to receive six semesters of TOPS funding beginning with the 2022-2023 academic year. You must also meet TOPS Continuing Eligibility Requirements if you attend college during the 2022-2023 academic year.

If you are a 2022 high school graduate and your application is received after October 29, 2023, you are ineligible for any TOPS award. There are no exceptions, waivers or appeals.

Q-3. Is there a different deadline to file a FAFSA for a high school graduate who first enrolls as a fulltime student in an eligible Louisiana college and then enrolls in an out-of-state college?

A. No. The deadline is the same as for all other students who enroll for the first time as full-time students in eligible Louisiana colleges.

Q-4. Is there a different deadline to file a FAFSA for a high school graduate who first enrolls as a fulltime student in an eligible out-of-state college?

A. Yes. If you otherwise meet the TOPS requirements, including the academic and enrollment requirements for continuation of the award, your FAFSA must be received by July 1 immediately following the academic year you enroll in an eligible Louisiana college. Your application will be accepted if it is received no later than 60 days after the July 1st deadline, but your award will be reduced by one semester. If your application is received more than 61 but no later than 120 days after the July 1st deadline, your award will be reduced by two semesters. (If you attended an out of state college, make sure you review the Q&A on that subject.)

For example, you are a 2022 high school graduate and you enroll for the first time as a full-time student at an accredited out-of-state college for the fall semester of 2022 and then you enroll as a full-time student at an eligible Louisiana college for the spring semester of 2023. Your deadline would be July 1, 2023 for the full award or no later than 120 days after the July 1 deadline for a reduced award.

Q-5. Is there a different deadline to file a FAFSA for a high school graduate who joins the U.S. Armed Forces and enters on active duty within one year of graduation?

A. Yes. If you enter on active duty with the U.S. Armed Forces within one year of graduation and before you enroll as a full-time college student, your FAFSA must be received by the federal processor no later than one year from the date you separated from active duty.

Note that you must enroll as a first-time, full-time student no later than the semester or term immediately following the one year anniversary of your separation from active duty.

The U.S. Armed Forces include the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard.

Q-6. What happens if a military member fails to apply by the deadline?

A. If the federal processor receives your FAFSA or if you complete the On-Line Application after the deadline but within 120 days of the deadline, and you have met all the other TOPS eligibility requirements, you will be eligible for a TOPS Award reduced by one or two semesters of eligibility. If the FAFSA or On-Line Application is late from one to 60 days, your award will be reduced by one semester of eligibility. If the FAFSA or On-Line Application is 61 to 120 days late, your award will be reduced by two semesters of eligibility.

If the FAFSA or On-Line Application is 121 or more days late, you are ineligible for a TOPS award.

Q-7. Is there a certain year FAFSA that I must file? If so, how do I know that I am completing the correct year FAFSA?

A. You should submit a FAFSA for the academic year immediately following your graduation from high school. This will ensure you are considered for a TOPS award even if you do not enroll in a Louisiana college the academic year after you graduate. You should submit the FAFSA even if you intend to enroll at an out-of-state college or sit out a year before enrolling in a Louisiana college. For example: If you are a 2022 graduate, you should submit the FAFSA for the 2022-2023 academic year.

Q-8. Is the FAFSA the only form I need to fill out to apply for TOPS?

A. Yes, in most cases. Some applicants may be required to submit other documentation, such as: high school and college transcripts, residency affidavits and required supporting documentation, the Application to Return from an Out-of-State College for students returning from out-of-state colleges, permanent residency or citizenship documentation, etc. If additional information is required to process your application, LOSFA will ask you for the documentation required. Completing the FAFSA by the priority deadline of February 1 of your high school senior year will ensure timely processing of any additional documentation that may be requested by LOSFA.

All documentation and certifications necessary to establish your initial eligibility and award level, including, but not limited to, high school and/or college transcripts and certifications, copies of student aid reports, applicant confirmation forms, promissory notes, ACT and/or SAT scores, residency affidavits, proof of citizenship or permanent residency status and other documents that may be utilized in determining eligibility, must be received by LOSFA no later than January 15 immediately following the final deadline for receipt of your FAFSA or on-line application. If the required documentation is not received by that deadline, it will not be used to determine your initial eligibility or award level.

Q-9. My parents told me that they cannot complete their taxes by the state deadline for TOPS of July 1 and they are applying by completing the FAFSA. What should I do?

A. The FAFSA for 2022 high school graduates will be available as early as October 1, 2021, and students and their parents will be able to use their 2020 tax returns to complete the form. Because you will be using prior-prior year tax returns, this should not be a problem. However, if your parents are filing their tax returns more than one year late, they should use their best estimate using W-2 forms, year-end accounting reports, or other income reports. See the FAFSA instructions for guidance.

Q-10. Who is eligible to file a TOPS On-Line Application?

A. You can only file the TOPS On-Line Application if you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid because of your family's financial condition. You can determine if you may qualify for federal grant aid by using FinAid's Financial Aid Estimator available on the Internet at www.finaid.org/calculators or the U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA4caster at www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov/.

NOTE: You and your parents should be aware that you will not be considered for any federal financial aid programs, including Pell and other federal grants, student loans, and the federal work study program, or for the Louisiana GO Grant if you do not complete the FAFSA.

Q-11. If I submitted my paper Free Application for Federal Student Aid, sent the information by UPS overnight delivery and have the receipt that it was delivered by July 1, but the federal application receipt date is July 3, what should I do?

A. You should submit to LOSFA a copy of the proof of mailing along with a written explanation of the above circumstances. We encourage you to obtain and retain proof of mailing if the electronic application is not used. The TOPS rules limit proof of mailing to:

1. A certificate of mailing, registered, certified, certified/return receipt requested, priority or overnight mail receipt from the U S. Postal Service, or other authorized mail carriers such as UPS and Federal Express, which is dated prior to the state's final deadline.
2. The Student Aid Report (SAR) or the Institutional Student Information Report (ISIR), produced by the federal processor, shows that the original application was received by the state's final deadline.
3. The federal processor provides verbal or written verification to LOSFA that the original application was received by the state's final deadline.
4. A printed copy of the electronic receipt for a FAFSA filed on the Web shows that the original application was received by the final deadline.
5. A printed copy of the electronic receipt for an On-Line Application shows that the original application was received by the final deadline.
6. LOSFA's On-Line Application submission confirmation code corresponds to a LOSFA database transaction by the final deadline.

No other form of verification, including notarized or certified statements, will be accepted as proof of compliance with the deadline requirement.

Q-12. If I submitted a FAFSA on the Web but the federal processor does not report it to LOSFA or the federal processor has no record of the application, what documentation can I use as proof of compliance?

A. You should keep the following documentation as evidence of having filed the FAFSA electronically:

1. A printed copy of the FAFSA that was transmitted showing a date of entry prior to the state's final deadline; or
2. A printed copy of the confirmation showing the FAFSA was received, having a date of entry prior to the state's final deadline; or
3. Confirmation from the federal processor that the application was received by the state's final deadline.
4. Correspondence from the federal processor confirming that electronic problems/issues prevented processing.

Q-13. Is there a fee charged with or associated with filing the FAFSA?

A. No, federal law prohibits the charging of a fee to file the FAFSA (FREE Application for Federal Student Aid). To avoid fees and possible scams, you should file the FAFSA directly to the federal processor through the Internet at www.fafsa.gov or submit the paper form directly to the federal processor.

If a Web site charges a fee for filing the FAFSA, it is highly unlikely that you will receive any benefit for paying the fee. The Web sites that do charge fees for filing the FAFSA are not associated with the federal government and filing a FAFSA through them may result in delays processing the FAFSA and unnecessary expenses. Some sites simply take your money and your FAFSA is NOT filed.

If you need help filing your FAFSA, LOSFA will be conducting FAFSA completion workshops throughout the state starting in October and continuing throughout the academic year. You are encouraged to file as early as possible to maximize your eligibility for various sources of financial aid and to allow time for processing any corrections that may be necessary. Check our website (www.mylosfa.la.gov) periodically or follow us on Twitter and Facebook to find out when and where.

Check carefully to ensure that you are using the correct Web site before entering your personal and family data.

Q-14. If I discover that I used an incorrect social security number on the FAFSA, what can I do to correct this?

A. If you filed the paper FAFSA form, you must file a new FAFSA with the correct social security number. For assistance, you can contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at (800) 433-3243.

Note: The application receipt date of the FAFSA with the wrong social security number will be used to determine whether the FAFSA was filed before the deadline.

If you filed the FAFSA on the Web, you must correct your social security number with FAFSA on the web. For assistance, you can contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at (800) 433-3243.

Although LOSFA will receive your social security number along with your FAFSA, it will be encrypted upon receipt and no member of LOSFA's staff will be able to view it. Your social security number, along with your name and date of birth, will be used to match all of your records.

Q-15. If I discover that I used an incorrect social security number on the TOPS On-Line Application, what can I do to correct this?

A. You should send an email to LOSFA at custserv@la.gov to have the application with the incorrect SSN deleted, and then you should file a new On-Line Application using the correct SSN. Although LOSFA requires that you input your social security number when completing the TOPS On-Line Application, it will be encrypted as soon as you press "Enter" and no member of LOSFA's staff will be able to view it. Your social security number, along with your name and date of birth, will be used

to match all of your records. Never send your social security number to LOSFA via email, U.S. mail, or any other route.

Q-16. Do I need to reapply for TOPS after each semester or once a year?

A. You should file a FAFSA or a renewal FAFSA **every academic year** unless you can demonstrate that you do not qualify for federal grant aid because of your family's financial condition.

If you do not file a FAFSA or a renewal FAFSA, you will not be eligible for federal grants, work study, the LA GO Grant, or federal student loans.

If you completed the TOPS On-Line Application to be considered for TOPS, you do not need to refile it every year. However, if your family's financial circumstances change while you are in college, you should file a FAFSA to determine whether you will qualify for any federal student aid based upon your new financial circumstances.

A correction can be made to a FAFSA at any time, and corrections do not change the original FAFSA receipt date for purposes of TOPS.

Q-17. What is the deadline to reapply for TOPS?

A. You should file the FAFSA as soon as possible for the upcoming academic year to ensure that you will be considered for all forms of student aid, including federal grants, work study, the LA GO Grant, or federal student loans. The FAFSA for the upcoming academic year is available in October preceding the academic year for which you will be applying for TOPS and other student financial aid. (See www.FAFSA.ed.gov.)

Q-18. What happens if I miss the July 1 renewal deadline?

A. Your TOPS award will be eligible for renewal if you met the continuation requirements.