

# Policies for the Office of Student Financial Aid

## Subject

State Grants (G)

*Office of Student Financial Aid/Scholarships*

April 2024

Page 1 of 8

The purpose of this policy is to insure the External funded awards are processed and distributed with the necessary controls. This policy has the further purpose of formalizing those procedures used by the University in coordinating with outside agencies, disbursement to student accounts and reconciliation's of accounts. This program shall be administered through the Office of Student Financial Aid with the concurrence of the respective external organization and NSU Business Affairs Office. The Director of Student Financial Aid shall be responsible for the development and implementation of procedures to assure compliance with this policy.

### I. AWARD CATEGORIES

1. Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS)
2. Rockefeller Wildlife Scholarships
3. START (Student Tuition Assistance and Revenue Trust Program)
4. Go Grant

State Grants will be applied to student's accounts upon verification of eligibility. NSU will bill each category according to category rules.

The following are recognized grants from the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA).

#### 1. Louisiana Taylor Opportunity Programs (TOPS)

The TOPS Program was enacted in the Regular Session of 1997 to create a comprehensive program of student awards to promote academic persistence and to reward academic merit. TOPS replaces the Tuition Assistance Plan (TAP) and the Louisiana Honors Scholarship Program, formerly the state's primary student aid programs and creates an additional award, for students enlisted in National Guard, a National Guard Stipend. Along with TOPS those students who have demonstrated exceptional Academic merit may qualify for an Honors Stipend or a Performance Stipend.

Legislative Authority: R.S. 17:3021 – 3036  
R.S. 17:3042.1  
R.S. 17:3048.1

Students are determined eligible for the Taylor Opportunity Program for students, hereinafter referred to as TOPS, by the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission (LOSFA). Upon eligibility determination, it is the post secondary institution's responsibility to administer the TOPS program to all qualified applicants. This policy has the purpose of formalizing procedures and institution controls in coordinating and administering the TOPS award.

**Policies for the  
Office of  
Student  
Financial Aid**

**Subject**

**State Grants (G)**

*Office of Student Financial Aid/Scholarships*

April 2024

Page 2 of 8

**Certification of Student Data**

Information Systems receives LOSFA'S Master Roster listing all students who qualify for TOPS. Using the Master Roster, eligible students are verified by LOSFA status codes to determine eligibility and award level. Awards are offered to qualified students enrolled at NSU.

A TOPS reconciliation report is run to verify the accuracy of the award offer to the students account; students are also verified for full-time enrollment status.

**Program Billing**

Each term institutions shall bill LOSFA for students who are recipients

1. Institutions may only bill for students who have been certified by LOSFA as eligible for a TOPS award; and
2. Institutions will bill LOSFA based on their certification that the recipient of a TOPS Award is enrolled full time, as of the fourteenth class day, and for any qualifying summer sessions as of the last day to drop and receive a full refund for the full summer session. Institutions shall not bill for the students who are enrolled less than full time on the fourteenth class day, and for qualifying summer sessions as of the last day to drop and receive a full refund for the summer session, unless the student qualifies for payment for less than full-time enrollment.
3. Students failing to meet the full-time enrollment requirement are responsible for reimbursing the institution for any awards received.
4. Certify that the institution will reimburse LOSFA for any award funds incorrectly disbursed to ineligible students; and
5. Upon the school's certification that a recipient of a TOPS Award is enrolled full time, institutions shall bill for and LOSFA will reimburse the institution for each such recipient as follows:
  - a. Public two and four-year colleges and universities may bill for an amount up to the maximum tuition for that institution;
  - b. For recipients of the Performance, Honors and National Guard awards, institutions may bill LOSFA for the stipend that accompanies these awards.

A bill of all TOPS awards is prepared and forwarded to LOSFA using the LOSFA Portal.

**Policies for the  
Office of  
Student  
Financial Aid**

**Subject**

**State Grants (G)**

*Office of Student Financial Aid/Scholarships*

April 2024

Page 3 of 8

**C. Reconciliation of Funds**

Upon EFT deposit or receipt of the check, the dollar amount is compared to the payment roster received through the LOSFA portal to ensure that all approved payments have been accounted for.

**D. Reporting of Academic Data**

At the conclusion of each semester, and for the purpose of determining an applicant's eligibility for a program award, an institution will report the following student data: the institution will complete and return to LOSFA, a College Academic Grade Report including, but not limited to the following data elements:

1. Semester hours attempted; and
2. Semester hours earned; and
3. Semester quality points earned
4. Academic standing, and if applicable, date of placement on academic probation; and
5. upon graduation, degree, date and type of degree as determined by LOSFA

**E. Records Retention**

Records pertaining to the students listed on the billing certification form will be subject to audit as required by state statute. Such records will be maintained for a minimum of three years and be available upon request to LOSFA and the Louisiana legislative auditor.

Appeal process for TOPS is handled through LOSFA

# Policies for the Office of Student Financial Aid

## Subject

State Grants (G)

*Office of Student Financial Aid/Scholarships*

April 2024

Page 4 of 8

### Procedures for Simultaneous Enrollment in Two or More Schools

It is necessary for the student to gain access to the courses required for completion of the degree in the chosen discipline and where the total number of hours earned at all institutions during the academic year is the equivalent of carrying a full-time academic workload as determined by the institution which will award the degree.

Student attending two or more Louisiana public two or four-year colleges or universities shall receive a total amount not to exceed the amount that would be paid at the school with the highest tuition among those at which the student is simultaneously enrolled.

### Procedures for Dual Billing

- a. Student enrolled full time and billed at the maximum rate at one institution are not eligible for TOPS funding at another institution for the same term.
- b. Students whose enrollment at multiple institutions is necessitated by the program of study pursued and whose enrollment at any one institution is not considered full-time, may be considered eligible for TOPS funding if the combined number of enrolled hours from the multiple schools are equivalent to full-time enrollment as determined by the home institution. These students will be termed "dual enrolled students".
- c. The Student is responsible for securing verification of necessity for dual enrollment from the appropriate university official and providing this verification to the financial aid officer at the home (degree granting) and guest institution(s). Verification provided to the guest institution should include where they are to forward enrollment verification. School may develop forms to gather this information.
- d. The TOPS Counselor at the student's home institution (degree granting) is designated as the billing coordinator for that student.
- e. The TOPS Counselor for the guest institution is responsible for forwarding enrollment verification after the 14<sup>th</sup> class day to the home institution for the tuition charged at the guest institution.
- f. The billing coordinator collects verification of the 14<sup>th</sup> class day enrollment from the guest institution(s) and confirms the following:
  - a. Total number of hours enrolled at both (all) institutions totals 12 or more semester hours and 8 or more at quarter schools.
  - b. The total funding requested does not exceed the highest TOPS tuition of the institutions involved.
- g. Each school bills LOSFA separately based on maximum amount for the home institution.
- h. Upon processing of the payment request, LOSFA will forward by EFT or checks and Tuition Payment Rosters directly to all institutions.
- i. Each institution is responsible for retaining documentation necessary to support billing.

# Policies for the Office of Student Financial Aid

## Subject

State Grants (G)

*Office of Student Financial Aid/Scholarships*

April 2024

Page 5 of 8

## 2. Rockefeller Wildlife Scholarships

The Rockefeller State Wildlife Scholarship is a competitive scholarship that awards \$2,000 annually for an undergraduate student and \$3,000 annually to a graduate student pursuing a degree in forestry, wildlife or marine science at a Louisiana Public College or University. The cumulative maximum award is \$12,000 for up to 3 years of undergraduate study and 2 years of graduate study. Eligibility is determined by LOSFA.

### How to Apply

1. Complete the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) no later than July 1<sup>st</sup>.
2. Complete the [Rockefeller State Wildlife Scholarship Application](#) so that it is received by LOSFA no later than July 1 immediately before the academic year you wish to be considered. If your application is not received by the July 1 deadline, but is received by December 1, you may be eligible for the next spring semester if funds are available.

### Eligibility Requirements

1. Be a U.S. citizen or national or eligible non-citizen and be registered with Selective Service if required.
2. Be a Louisiana resident for at least one year prior to July 1st of the scholarship award year.
3. Complete and submit such documentary evidence as required by the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance.
4. Be enrolled as a full-time undergraduate or graduate student in a Louisiana Public College or University majoring in forestry, wildlife or marine science with the intent of obtaining a degree in that field. Undergraduate students must have earned at least 60 hours of college credit and have at least a 2.50 cumulative college GPA.
5. As a graduate student have at least a 3.00 cumulative college GPA on all credits earned in graduate school.

### Maintaining Eligibility

1. Have received the scholarship for not more than 5 academic years (3 undergraduate and 2 graduate).
2. By the end of the academic year (spring term), have earned at least 24 hours of earned credits during the fall, winter and spring terms at a school defining 12 semester or 8 quarter hours as the minimum for full-time undergraduate status, or earn at least 18 hours total credit during the fall, winter and spring terms at a school defining 9 semester hours as a minimum for full-time graduate status; and
3. Achieve a cumulative GPA of at least 2.50 as an undergraduate student at the end of each academic year or achieve a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.00 as a graduate student at the end of each academic year; and
4. Maintain continuous enrollment as a full-time student unless granted an exception by LOSFA
5. Continue to pursue a course of study leading to an undergraduate or graduate degree in [wildlife, forestry or marine science](#).

### Disbursement

Funds are disbursed to student accounts after payment has been provided by LOSFA.

**Policies for the  
Office of  
Student  
Financial Aid**

**Subject**

**State Grants (G)**

*Office of Student Financial Aid/Scholarships*

April 2024

Page 6 of 8

**3. START (Student Tuition Assistance and Revenue Trust Program)**

Start is an innovative college saving plan designed to help families contend with the future high cost of their children's post-secondary education. The program is administered by the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance under the direction of the Louisiana Tuition Trust Authority, or LATTA. The LATTA is a public body composed of representatives from the state's higher education governing board.

A notification form stating the amount that has been authorized to be disbursed for each student is received by EFT or Check and applied to the students account for the designated semester.

# Policies for the Office of Student Financial Aid

## Subject

State Grants (G)

*Office of Student Financial Aid/Scholarships*

April 2024

Page 7 of 8

### **4. GO GRANT**

GO Grant is a State program administered by the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) in accordance with the approved program and a memorandum of understanding by and between the Louisiana Board of Regents and the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission. The Louisiana GO Grant assists those students who can demonstrate financial need to pay for the cost of postsecondary education. The GO Grant is used to pay a portion of the cost of attendance at an eligible Louisiana postsecondary institution.

#### **Eligibility Requirements-**

1. Be a Louisiana Resident
2. Be a Federal Pell Grant recipient for the same award year
3. Enrolled in an eligible program leading to an undergraduate degree
4. Maintain satisfactory academic progress

#### **Awarding of GO Grant-**

1. Students must have a completed the Title IV aid application process as defined in the application section of this manual,
2. Verification must be completed if selected,
3. Student must be a Pell Grant recipient
4. Student must be a Louisiana resident
5. Student must be enrolled on at least half-time basis (6 hours or more)
6. Need must be determined using the following formula

Cost of Attendance  
Less Student Aid Index  
Less Federal/State/Institutional grant or scholarship aid

(Priority is given to those who are over 25 years or older and transfer students who self-identify as prior recipients at other institution(s), dependent upon funding availability.

7. GO Grant can be awarded through packaging process and/or on a case-by-case basis by running a report to identify qualifying students,
8. Go Grant can be renewed for subsequent years to a maximum lifetime award that correlates to that of the Federal Pell Grant.
9. Beginning with the 2324 award year GO Grant award amounts are a maximum of \$2,400/year for fulltime or \$1,200 per semester; \$1,200/year for half time or \$600 per semester, which is less than the authorized maximum amount established by LOSFA's framework to allow more students to receive Go Grant funds.
10. RPEDISB is the program used to feed Go Grant to the student accounts

#### **Shortfalls in funding-**

1. During any year a shortfall in funding exists, NSU will award students on a 1<sup>st</sup> come 1<sup>st</sup> serve basis. NSU will continue to award up to the allocation provided by LOSFA

#### **Billing of GO Grant-**

1. The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) will be billed for all students awarded GO Grant beginning after the 14th day of enrollment but prior to the LOSFA billing deadline.

# Policies for the Office of Student Financial Aid

## Subject

State Grants (G)

*Office of Student Financial Aid/Scholarships*

April 2024

Page 8 of 8

### Over Award Policy

- The Louisiana Go Grant is packaged on a need basis and sometimes the student is inadvertently awarded over need allowed due to the addition of need based aid later on in the year. In order to find these inadvertent over awards, all GO Grant recipients are double-checked to determine if they still meet the eligibility requirements for the grant prior to billing.
- In the event the student's total aid exceeds his financial need or the cost of attendance, any federal loan included in the total aid package shall be reduced, then institutional and other aid in accordance with institutional practice, then the Louisiana GO Grant, then a TOPS award, if applicable, shall be reduced by the amount of any remaining over award.
- If the receipt of additional gift aid occurs during the fall semester the GO Grant award for the spring semester will be reduced. If the receipt of additional gift aid occurs during the spring semester, no reduction is required per LOSFA guidelines. The reason for the excess award will be noted on the student file. If an over award occurs during the fall semester and the GO Grant has already been billed, a refund will be processed to LOSFA to return any funds that the student was ineligible to receive.
- Go Grant eligibility is based on enrollment levels as of the 14th class day. If the student was eligible for the award on the 14th class day, no refund is due to LOSFA. Pell adjustments after the 14th class day will not impact the level of GO Grant funding. If a student withdraws from the University prior to the 14th class day and the Financial Aid office does not become aware of the withdrawal until after it has already billed for the student, then a refund will be due to LOSFA since the student did not meet the enrollment criteria to receive the grant.
- Go Grant eligibility is contingent on the student receiving a Pell Grant. If a student loses their Pell Grant eligibility for a specific semester, then they will also lose their GO Grant eligibility. For instance, if a student Never Attends all of their coursework for a given semester, then they are no longer considered Pell eligible for that semester, and therefore, is ineligible for the Go Grant. In these such cases the GO Grant will be refunded to LOSFA.

Go Grant Point of Contact:

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