

How to Use the Military Tuition Assistance Program

If you've thought about going to college, but didn't know if you could afford it, then the Military Tuition Assistance program may be just the benefit you need. The program is available to active duty, National Guard and Reserve Component service members. While the decision to pursue a degree may be a difficult one personally, TA can lessen your financial concerns considerably, since it now pays up to 100 percent of tuition expenses for semester hours costing \$250 or less.

Courses and degree programs may be academic or technical and can be taken from two- or four-year institutions on-installation, off-installation or by distance learning. An accrediting body recognized by the Department of Education must accredit the institution. Your service branch pays your tuition directly to the school. Service members need to first check with an education counselor for the specifics involving TA by visiting their local installation education office or by going online to a virtual education center. Tuition assistance may be used for the following programs:

- Vocational/technical programs
- Undergraduate programs
- Graduate programs
- Independent study
- Distance-learning programs

Eligibility

All four service branches and the U.S. Coast Guard offer financial assistance for voluntary, off-duty education programs in support of service members' personal and professional goals. The program is open to officers, warrant officers and enlisted active duty service personnel. In addition, members of the National Guard and Reserve Components may be eligible for TA based on their service eligibility. To be eligible for TA, an enlisted service member must have enough

time remaining in service to complete the course for which he or she has applied. After the completion of a course, an officer using TA must fulfill a service obligation that runs parallel with - not in addition to - any existing service obligation.

Coverage amounts and monetary limits

The Tuition Assistance Program will fund up to 100 percent of your college tuition and certain fees with the following limits:

- Not to exceed \$250 per semester credit hour or \$166 per quarter credit hour
- Not to exceed \$4,500 per fiscal year, October 1 through September 30

Tuition assistance versus the Department of Veterans Affairs education benefits

While the TA program is offered by the services, the Department of Veterans Affairs administers a variety of [education benefit programs](#). Some of the VA programs, such as the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008, also known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill®, can work well with the TA program, as it can supplement fees not covered by TA. In addition, the Post-9/11 GI Bill® funds are available to you for up to 15 years after you leave the military. The TA program is a benefit that is available only while you're in the service.

Tuition assistance benefits and restrictions

Tuition assistance will cover the following expenses:

- Tuition
- Course-specific fees such as laboratory fee or online course fee

NOTE: All fees must directly relate to the specific course enrollment of the service member.

Tuition assistance will not cover the following expenses:

- Books and course materials
- Flight training fees

- Taking the same course twice
- Continuing education units, or CEUs

Keep in mind that TA will **not** fund your college courses, and you will have to reimburse any funds already paid if any of the following situations occur:

- Leaving the service before the course ends
- Quitting the course for reasons other than personal illness, military transfer or mission requirements
- Failing the course

Application process

Each military branch has its own TA application form and procedures. To find out how to get started, visit your local installation education center, go online to a virtual education center or click on the following links for each service branch:

- [Army](#)
- [Marine Corps](#)
- [Navy](#)
- [Air Force](#)

Prior to your course enrollment, you may be required to develop an education plan or complete TA orientation. Be sure to keep the following important information in mind when you apply:

- Military tuition assistance may only be used to pursue degree programs at colleges and universities in the United States that are regionally or nationally accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S Department of Education. A quick way to check the accreditation of a school is by visiting the [Department of Education](#).
- Your service's education center must approve your military tuition assistance before you enroll in a course.

Top-up program

The [Top-up program](#) allows funds from the Montgomery GI Bill® - Active Duty or the Post-9/11 GI Bill - to be used for tuition and fees for high-cost courses that are not fully covered by TA funds.

- **Eligibility.** To use Top-up, your service branch must approve you for TA. You also must be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill® or the Montgomery GI Bill® - Active Duty.
- **Application.** First apply for TA in accordance with procedures of your service branch. After you have applied for TA, you will need to complete VA Form 22-1990 to apply for Department of Veterans Affairs education benefits. The [form](#) is available online from the VA. Make sure you specify "Top-up" on the application and mail it one of the education processing offices listed on the form.

Other supplemental funding possibilities

Aside from using the MGIB-AD or Post-9/11 GI Bill for items such as tuition and fees not covered by TA, there are other funding opportunities available to service members including the following:

- **Federal and state financial aid.** The federal government provides \$150 billion per year in grants, work-study programs and federal loans to college students. The aid comes in several forms, including need-based programs such as Pell grants, subsidized Stafford Loans, Supplemental Educational Opportunity grants and federal work/study programs. You can also get low-interest loans through the federal government. Visit [Federal Student Aid](#) to find out more or complete an online application for FAFSA at no cost to you