TUITION ASSISTANCE TOP-UP

On October 30, 2000, the President signed into law an amendment to the GI Bill that permits VA to pay a Tuition Assistance Top-up benefit. The amount of the benefit can be equal to the difference between the total cost of a college course and the amount of Tuition Assistance that is paid by the military for the course.

To be eligible for the Top-up benefit, the person must be approved for federal Tuition Assistance by a military department and be eligible for MGIB Active Duty benefits or the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

The amount of the benefit is limited to the amount that the person would receive for the same course if regular GI Bill benefits were being paid. In no case can the amount paid by the military combined with the amount paid by VA be more than the total cost of the course.

If a person receives the Top-up benefit, his or her regular GI Bill benefits will be reduced.

A copy of the Tuition Assistance Authorization form for the course that has been signed by an authorized military official will be required. People who have not requested GI Bill benefits before should submit a VA Form 22-1990 to establish eligibility.

The application and other evidence should be sent to one of VA’s four education processing offices in Atlanta, Buffalo, Muskogee (OK), or St. Louis. See HERE for addresses of the processing offices. The application form is available HERE. Claims should specify that Tuition Assistance Top-up is being claimed.

The Top-up program is not available at this time to persons who are eligible for the MGIB Selected Reserve program.

Q: WHAT DOES THIS PROVISION MEAN TO ME?

A: If you’re eligible for MGIB or the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and plan to use Tuition Assistance (TA), and your service will not pay 100% of tuition and fees, you can use your GI Bill Top-up to pay the balance.
Q: IS THIS A GOOD DEAL FOR ME?

A: Using Top-up is a good deal if you plan to use TA to complete a degree program while on active duty, and don’t plan to continue your education after service. Top-up can also be helpful for just taking a few courses with TA while on active duty. Then you can save most of your GI Bill to use after service to complete your education program.

You need to consider carefully your own situations, and check with your education officer or counselor before applying for Top-up. For example, if you plan to take expensive courses using Top-up, you need to consider whether you’ll take additional training after you’re discharged from active duty. If so, you need to understand the effect of using the Top-up. You can then calculate whether your remaining benefits will cover the additional training you might need.

Q: HOW ARE MY GI BILL BENEFITS CHARGED IF I USE THEM FOR TOP-UP?

A: Your GI Bill entitlement is charged differently depending on which GI Bill program you are using:

- If you are utilizing the Montgomery GI Bill your entitlement is charged based on the dollar amount of benefits VA pays you. You will be charged one month of entitlement for each payment you receive that is equal to the full time monthly rate for the GI Bill. View the current payment rates.

- If you are utilizing the Post-9/11 GI Bill your entitlement is charged based on the training time you are enrolled in. If you are going to classes at the half-time training level you will be charged for a half month of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for each month you are enrolled and receiving GI Bill benefits no matter how much money you are reimbursed.

Q: CAN THE TOP-UP APPLY RETROACTIVELY, TO TRAINING ALREADY RECEIVED?

A: Yes, the Top-up can apply retroactively, but you must be eligible for the Montgomery GI Bill, and we can only go back one year from the date your claim was/is received by the VA.

Q: WILL DOD PAY 100% TUITION ASSISTANCE?

A: DOD will encourage services to pay 100% TA if their budgets permit, but this could vary from service to service. Of course, if DOD does pay 100%, you won’t need to use MGIB Top-up.

Q: WHAT SHOULD I DO TO APPLY FOR TOP-UP?

A: If you want to use Top-up, go ahead and file the claim following the instructions below.

If you haven’t previously filed a claim for MGIB, you should do the following:

Contact us: www.benefits.va.gov/gibill  888-GIBILL-1
• Request TA from your branch of service. See your education services officer or education counselor.

• Complete an application for VA education benefits, VA Form 22-1990. You can apply online HERE.

• Indicate "Top-up" on the VA application in item 1A.

• Send your TA approval form, along with the application for VA education benefits, to the VA Regional Processing Office that handles your claim. The address is on the form.

• If you’ve previously filed a claim for MGIB and weren’t denied benefits, simply submit your signed TA approval form to the VA Regional Processing Office that handles your claim. See HERE for the address.

Important: These claims are handled differently from claims without TA. For Top-up claims, you won’t need to check in with the school official who certifies VA benefits. We won’t need an enrollment certification on VA Form 22-1999. You won’t need to check for approval of the program for VA benefits; approval isn’t an issue. That’s because Top-up is payable for any course for which TA is payable under DOD criteria.

VA determines your eligibility for the GI Bill. If you’re eligible for GI Bill benefits, the TA approval form establishes your eligibility for Top-up. No certifications from the school are needed.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE SIGNATURES ON THE TA APPROVAL FORM?
A: The TA approval form must be signed by the approving DOD officials. Some branches of service require the commanding officer’s signature; some require the education service officer’s signature.

For More Information, Call Toll-Free 888-GIBILL-1 or Visit Our Web Site at http://benefits.va.gov/gibill