

Tuition Assistance Top-up

On October 30, 2000, the President signed into law an amendment to the Montgomery GI Bill - Active Duty education program 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. To be eligible for MGIB benefits, the person must be an MGIB - Active Duty participant and must have served at least 2 full years on Active Duty.

The amount of the benefit is limited to the amount that the person would receive for the same course if regular MGIB 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 MGIB benefits will be reduced. The amount of entitlement charged for Top-up payments is determined by dividing the amount of the payment by the claimant's fulltime monthly rate.

The benefit is available for all courses that began on or after October 30, 2000. 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 MGIB 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 change?

A: Before this law, the military services, through their Tuition Assistance program, generally could pay up to 75% of the tuition or expenses charged by the school. Eligible service members had to find additional financing, or pay the remaining expenses from their own pockets. A service member eligible for the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB), a VA education benefit, wasn't allowed to receive both Tuition Assistance and the MGIB for the same course.

Because of the new law, the military services can now pay up to 100% of the tuition and expenses charged by the school up to limits established by DOD. If the tuition and expenses are more than the amount a service department will pay, a service member eligible for MGIB can elect to receive MGIB benefits for all or a part of the remaining expenses. We're calling this add-on payment "Top-up."

Q: What does this provision mean to me?

A: If you're eligible for MGIB, and plan to use Tuition Assistance (TA), and your service will not pay 100% of tuition and fees, you can use MGIB Top-up to pay the balance.

Q: Can VEAP converters and service members eligible for MGIB based on Vietnam Era service receive the Top-up?

A: Yes, anyone who is eligible for MGIB – Active Duty (not MGIB – Selected Reserves) can receive the Top-up benefits.

Q: Is this a good deal for me?

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 MGIB 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: Is there a limit to the amount of Top-up I can use?

A: Yes, Top-up is limited to 36 months of payments. For example, if you are paid Top-up for a 3-month course, you use 3 of the 36 months.

Q: Does this mean if I use 36 months of Top-up, I've used up all my MGIB benefits?

A: Probably not. The 36-month limit for Top-up is based on 1 month used for each month of Top-up paid no matter how much is paid. Your regular MGIB entitlement is based on your full-time monthly rate. For example, if your full-time rate is \$600 and you are paid \$300 Top-up, you only use 1/2 month of your MGIB (\$300 is 1/2 of \$600).

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 in VA and only for training in terms that began on or after October 30, 2000, which is the effective date of the law.

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:

- 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 under the MGIB–Active Duty block.
- 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 for MGIB 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 MGIB. If you're eligible for MGIB, 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.