

Counseling Guidance for Use of FTA and MGIB (Ch 1606/1607)

21 January 2015

Department of Defense (DoD) policy does restrict the concurrent use of TA with certain veteran's education benefits. Specifically, TA is not allowed in conjunction with other educational benefits programs authorized under title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.), to include the Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve program (Chapter 1606) or the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (Chapter 1607) for the same course. To clarify, this policy provision impacts Service members utilizing DoD educational benefits programs authorized under title 10, U.S.C., not the GI Bill programs authorized under Title 38, U.S.C., to include the Montgomery GI Bill - Active Duty program (Chapter 30) or the Post-9/11 GI Bill program (Chapter 33).

Background:

On May 15, 2014, DoD published in the Federal Register a change to DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1322.25, "Voluntary Education Programs," increasing protections to service members and their families through an enhanced memorandum of understanding (MOU) with educational institutions. The initiative, which implements the President's Executive Order (EO 13607) establishing Principles of Excellence (POE) for institutions of higher learning, is designed to address reports of misleading or predatory behavior toward our service members and their families pursuing higher education through improved oversight of Federal military and veterans educational benefits programs, including benefits programs provided by the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the TA program. Since issuing the instruction in May 2014, DoD has been actively engaged with VA to align new provisions in DoDI 1322.25 with the VA's benefits administration processes. Although the new DoD guidance was published in May 2014, the VA issued its advisory in late November 2014 and the passage of time may have contributed to confusion among stakeholder groups or individuals and potentially raised the concern that the changes were "new," and unrelated to the revisions of DoDI 1322.25.

With the new guidance, it was the Department's intention to revise policy so as to improve oversight, evaluation, and enforcement efforts strengthening the integrity of the TA program. One area of particular concern included benefits duplication. Cognizant of the potential for overlap between the myriad of educational benefits programs available to our service members and their families, DoD conducted a comprehensive review of available programs and implemented policy with a goal to minimize any potential duplication, especially among educational benefits programs authorized under title 10, U.S.C. For example, DoD policy prevents a Service member attending an educational institution where TA covers the total cost of attendance from collecting additional title 10, U.S.C, education benefits intended to offset the cost of attendance when no other costs are present.

It's vitally important to reiterate that military TA benefits remain unchanged; there has been no reduction. In addition, the policy does not deny Service member access to their earned veteran's education benefits. The TA amount authorized per Service member to pay tuition for college courses (part of an evaluated education program) is uniform across the Services at up to \$250.00 per semester-hour of credit with a maximum of \$4500.00 for each fiscal year (per DoD Policy). The aforementioned policy change primarily impacts the Army as they are the only Service that extends TA to its Reserve Component. Service members eligible for multiple educational benefits programs authorized under title 10, U.S.C. (i.e., TA and Chapter 1606/1607) must select which title 10 program they plan to use for each course. For example, a full-time military student may be enrolled in four courses during a term, choosing to use TA benefits for one course and apply Chapter 1606/1607 for the other three courses.

In general, the individual Services are charged with administering TA programs for their Service members and providing education counseling services. Therefore, we recommend that impacted Service members work directly with the Army to address specific concerns related to accessing military education benefits or discuss potential sources of aid to finance their continued education.

We appreciate your continued interest in the policies and processes serving the off-duty educational needs of our military members. The Department remains proactively engaged in significant efforts to ensure that our voluntary education programs, especially TA, offer the best possible protections for our Service members.

The above document was developed by the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense