

**STATE TUITION EXEMPTION PROGRAM (STEP)**

**COMPLIANCE WITH THIS PUBLICATION IS MANDATORY**

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★ This instruction sets forth policies, responsibilities and procedures necessary to implement and administer the State Tuition Exemption Program (STEP). This instruction has been coordinated with the Military Development Department, Directorate of Military Personnel, Louisiana Army National Guard (LANG-DMP-XD). This instruction applies to all Louisiana Air National Guard (LA ANG) members who are eligible to receive State Tuition Exemption. This instruction implements Louisiana Revised Statutes, Title 29, Section 36, Article 1 (L.A.R.S. 29:36.1).

This instruction is affected by the Privacy Act of 1974. Social security number (SSAN) is used to verify the identity of personnel who complete STEP memorandums of agreement in conjunction with obtaining tuition exemption from the State of Louisiana.

**SUMMARY OF REVISION**

Changes were made to this instruction to be more in line with the LA Army National Guard STEP regulation. This (★) indicates revisions from the previous edition.

★ 1. **Provisions.** L.A.R.S. 29:36.1 provides educational benefits to soldiers and airmen in the Louisiana National Guard.

★ 1.1. The exemption may be claimed for (5) academic years (15 semesters/ 20 quarters) of work towards or until receipt of a baccalaureate degree, whichever occurs first.

1.2. Exemption cannot be claimed for courses that cannot be applied toward obtaining a baccalaureate degree.

1.3. Exemption cannot be claimed for courses beyond the baccalaureate level. However, exemption can be claimed for courses as part of a 2, 3 or 4- year degree at professional schools.

1.4. In order to be exempted from tuition payments, claimants must meet the eligibility criteria set forth in paragraph 3 of this instruction.

**2. Responsibilities.**

2.1. The Adjutant General is responsible for overall policies, guidance, administration, implementation and proper utilization of the tuition exemption program.

★ 2.2. The Military Development Department, Directorate of Military Personnel, Louisiana Army National Guard, (office symbol: LANG-DMP-XD), Jackson Barracks, New Orleans, LA 70146-0330, is charged with administering this program.

★ 2.3. The Retention Office Manager, 159<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, is responsible for initiating and maintaining an active publicity program designed to promote the recruiting and retention potential offered by this program.

2.4. LA ANG commanders are responsible for:

2.4.1. Keeping members of their command informed of the program and any changes to it.

2.4.2. Continually monitoring each member's compliance with the military training, participation and performance criteria contained in paragraph 3 of this instruction. Instances where members fail to meet these eligibility criteria should be fully documented in order to substantiate any possible forfeiture or nonapproval of tuition exemption.

★2.4.3. Provide every reasonable opportunity for members to become qualified before the first official class day of the next scheduled academic period when they are disqualified for any of the reasons stated in paragraphs 3.3.

★2.4.4. It is the commander responsibility to notify LANG-DMP-XD (in writing), through this headquarters, of those members who are not in compliance with the military training, participation and performance criteria as soon as violations are discovered. This is extremely important to ensure appropriate action is taken against those members who may be receiving or have been recently approved to receive tuition exemption.

2.5. Unit members are responsible for:

2.5.1. Continuously meeting the eligibility criteria enumerated in paragraph 3 of this instruction.

★2.5.2. Ensuring that LANG-DMP-XD reports their accurate eligibility status to participating institutions before the first official class day of each academic period. This is accomplished by coordinating with their Unit STEP representative and inspecting Unit STEP Eligibility Reports before each academic period (see paragraphs 7.6, 7.7 and 7.8 of this instruction). Members should complete the STEP checklist (attachment 3) to determine whether they are eligible or not eligible.

★2.5.3. Ensuring that LANG-DMP-XD receives the appropriate documentation from their unit for eligibility reinstatement prior to the first official class day of the academic period for which STEP reinstatement will be awarded for the next semester if disqualified for any of the reasons stated in paragraph 3.2.

**3. Eligibility Criteria.** In order to qualify for tuition exemption, members of the LA ANG must meet all eligibility criteria listed below prior to the beginning of each academic period at the participating institution of planned attendance. Once qualified, members must continue to meet these criteria else they will lose their eligibility, be disqualified from the STEP and may forfeit their tuition for that academic period; and in some instances, will be disqualified for subsequent academic periods.

3.1. Members must maintain active membership in a unit of the LA ANG at the beginning of and throughout the entire academic period for which tuition exemption is received.

★3.2. Members must continuously meet the standards of performance, conduct and appearance considered satisfactory by the unit commander. Included within this scope are satisfactory progression in mandatory career development courses and completion of the end of course examination; meet applicable personal weight and physical fitness standards; meet weapons qualification requirements. Failure to meet any of the established standards can reflect in adverse action by the commander and could result in disqualification for subsequent academic periods.

3.3. Members must not be placed on academic probation or academic suspension prior to or while receiving the benefits of tuition exemption. Academic probation or suspension is determined by each respective participating institution.

3.4. Members who enlisted after 14 August 1989 must meet the residency requirements of the participating institution of planned attendance.

★3.5. Members must coordinate with the STEP Coordinator or the Financial Aid Office of the participating institution of planned attendance one month prior to the scheduled registration period to verify eligibility.

3.6. Members must not have already obtained a baccalaureate degree.

★3.7. Members must not have already utilized all eligible tuition exemption from the State of Louisiana for 5 academic years (15 semesters/ 20 quarters).

★3.8. All LA ANG members must complete STEP Memorandum of Agreement, AGO LA Form 621-5A-R, dated May 03 (See attachment 1). Members who have not signed this form cannot be exempted from tuition charges.

3.9. Members must not test positive on drug and alcohol tests or declare themselves as self-referrals.

★3.10. Members must not have acquired their ninth (9) unexcused absence from military duty within a 12-month period. Members are permanently disqualified from STEP participation.

★3.11. Members who use STEP for an academic period are still required to attend Annual Training with the LA ANG during the same fiscal year unless exempted by their unit commander under the provisions of applicable regulations. Failure to meet this criterion will result in disqualification for the upcoming fall academic period.

3.12. LA ANG personnel participating in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program are eligible to participate in the STEP with the exception of those members in the ROTC Advanced Course who are awarded full ROTC scholarships.

#### 4. **Forfeitures.**

4.1. Members must continuously meet all of the eligibility criteria to qualify for tuition exemption. If they fail to do so, exemption will be immediately forfeited.

★4.2. LANG-DMP-XD provides each participating institution a STEP Disqualification Report. This report lists members who forfeit their tuition exemption during an academic period.

★5. **Eligibility Reinstatement.** Members who regain eligibility after being disqualified may be reinstated in the STEP; however, reinstatement will become effective the next semester after reinstatement. Reinstatement may be authorized under the following conditions when members:

★5.1. Are submitted for reinstatement by their commander if they were disqualified due to adverse actions, and have successfully met the standards. Those standards included, career development courses; personal weight and physical fitness standards; weapons qualification requirements.

★5.2. Perform 12 consecutive months of service without acquiring another unexcused absence if disqualified for acquiring between 4 and 9 unexcused absences within a 12-month period. Reinstatement procedures must be IAW with LANG-DMP-XD information paper dated 1 October 2002.

5.3. Are removed from academic probation or suspension if they forfeited tuition exemption as the result of being placed on academic probation or suspension.

6. **Recoupments.** Recoupment of exempted tuition will be recommended to participating institutions for members who are receiving STEP benefits and:

6.1. Are placed on academic probation or suspension.

6.2. Test positive on drug and alcohol tests or declare themselves as self-referrals.

★6.3. Are separated as an active member of the LA ANG before the end of the academic period for which benefits are being used.

★6.4. Become an unsatisfactory participant in the LA ANG by acquiring their ninth unexcused absence.

#### 7. **Step Participation Instructions.**

★7.1. LANG-DMP-XD executes all actions affecting member eligibility status. LANG uses current computer and other electronic methods for administering this program.

★7.2. LANG-DMP-XD is required to verify the eligibility of all Louisiana Air National Guard members before authorizing tuition exemption participation. Verification is required before the beginning of each academic period.

★7.3. Each members verifies the eligibility of members four to five weeks prior to the scheduled registration period of each academic period with LANG-DMP-XD or Retention Office Manager.

★7.4. LANG-DMP-XD produces reports for verification. The first report is the STEP Eligibility Report. This report lists only the members who were provisionally qualified at the time that the initial verification was conducted. This report is forward to each participating institution to use prior to registration when members are contacting the STEP Coordinator or Financial Aid Office to coordinate their tuition exemption for the upcoming academic period.

7.5. Members should complete three checks to ensure that unnecessary delays are not encountered in receiving tuition exemption:

7.5.1. Before the initial verification is performed, review the eligibility criteria above to determine eligibility status - use as a checklist.

7.5.2. Inspect the Unit STEP Eligibility Report when it arrives at the unit. This will provide a good indication of whether accurate information was provided to participating institutions on their STEP Eligibility Report.

★7.5.3. Coordinate with the STEP Coordinator or the Financial Aid Office at the institution of planned attendance four weeks prior to the scheduled registration period of the upcoming academic period. STEP Coordinators verify that members who were reported as provisionally qualified also meet academic and residency requirements at their institution.

★7.6. When questions arise concerning eligibility status, members should always remember to check with the Retention Office Manager for assistance.

★7.7. Members whose expiration term of service date is before the end of the upcoming academic period must extend or reenlist or pay the school for that semester.

★7.8. Members who are ineligible at the time that the initial verification is conducted have until the day before the first official class day of the academic period to qualify their eligibility with LANG-DMP-XD. Members who are still ineligible by the first official class day of the academic period will not be authorized tuition exemption for that academic period.

★7.9. LANG-DMP-XD prepares the STEP Eligibility Supplemental Report and forwards it to each participating institution. This report lists all members who became eligible after the initial verification was performed and before the first official class day.

7.10. Members who become eligible after the initial verification and before the first official class day must be prepared to register under the contingencies that the participating institution imposes.

7.11. Members who will be out of their region during normal registration periods are not excluded from any preregistration requirements.

7.12. Members who are attending Initial Active Duty Training, other military courses or who will be out of their region for any reason during their institution's normal registration period are encouraged to use one of the following to avoid registration problems:

- 7.12.1. Seek your counselor and arrange to preregister before leaving the area.
- 7.12.2. Members can make arrangements for someone to register for them in their absence.
- 7.13. Louisiana Tech University uses the quarter system instead of semesters.
- 7.14. Northwestern State University conducts an A and B term within its Spring and Fall semesters.
- 7.15. Northeastern Louisiana University conducts an A and B term during each Summer semester.
- 7.16. The university may require recoupment of all or part of the tuition from STEP participants who withdraw from school after the latest scheduled drop date for the academic period.

BY ORDER OF THE GOVERNOR

Bennett C. Landreneau  
Major General, LAARNG  
The Adjutant General

OFFICIAL

//Signed//

JOHN B. SOILEAU, JR., Col, LA ANG  
Acting Executive Support Staff Officer

Attachments:

- 1. AGO LA Form 621-5A-R, May 03
- 2. Glossary of Terms
- 3. STEP Checklist

## ★ATTACHMENT 1

**State Tuition Exemption Program (STEP)  
Memorandum of Agreement  
Louisiana Air National Guard**

For use of this form see HQ LA ANGI 36-5. The proponent agency is LANG-DMP-XD.

-----DATA REQUIRED BY THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974-----

AUTHORITY:	LA R.S. 29:36.1
PRINCIPAL PURPOSE:	To explain requirements for STEP and to record your agreement.
ROUTINE USES:	To confirm requirements for STEP.
DISCLOSURE:	Disclosure of your SSAN is voluntary. However, if not provided you will not be eligible for STEP participation.

----- SECTION I ---- ELIGIBILITY -----

1. The enlisting/reenlisting/extending official, unit commander or his or her representative must explain the STEP requirements contained in this memorandum or agreement to each person who completes it. A copy will be given to the member. If the agreement is accomplished in conjunction with enlistment, reenlistment or extension, it will be identified as an **Annex A** to the **DD Form 4, Enlistment/Reenlistment Document-Armed Forces of the United States**, or **NGB Form 66, Extension of Enlistment in the Air National Guard and as a Reserve of the Air Force**, and attached thereto. Otherwise, the agreement will be filed in the member's unit personnel record group.

----- SECTION II ---- ELIGIBILITY -----

1.2. With my enlistment/extension/immediate reenlistment/reenlistment in the Louisiana Air National Guard (LA ANG), I **will not be eligible** for the State Tuition Exemption Program (STEP), if:

1.2.1. I have already obtained a baccalaureate degree.

1.2.2. I have used STEP benefits for 5 academic years (15 semesters/ 20 quarters).

1.2.3. I am placed on academic probation or suspension by the participating state funded public institution of higher learning that I am attending or planning to attend. Academic probation and suspension is defined by the participating state funded public institution of higher learning and the governing board that I am attending or planning to attend.

1.2.4. I become an unsatisfactory participant or perform unsatisfactorily in the LA ANG.

1.2.5. I do not maintain satisfactory performance standards at the academic institution I am attending.

1.2.6. I am separated from the LA ANG.

1.2.7. I do not complete this form.

1.2.8. I test positive on drug and alcohol tests.

1.2.9. I do not meet the residency requirements of the participating institution that I plan to attend if I enlisted after 14 August 1989.

**STATE TUITION EXEMPTION PROGRAM (STEP) AGREEMENT (CONT'D)**

1.2.10. I do not coordinate with the Financial Aid office of the participating institution in the four to six weeks prior to the scheduled registration period.

1.2.11. I do not verify my status for each semester/quarter with LANG-DMP-XD or Retention Office Manager for this program six to eight weeks prior to each semester or quarter starts.

1.2.12. I acquire my ninth unexcused absence from military duty. This will disqualify me permanently from program participation.

1.2.13. I have been recommended for disqualification by unit commander for any adverse actions or adverse actions that require the unit to process the airmen for discharge. I acquire my ninth unexcused absence from military duty. This will disqualify me permanently from program participation.

**----- SECTION III ----- TERMINATION -----**

1.3. My entitlement will be terminated when I fail to continuously meet any of the above eligibility qualification criteria.

1.4. I will be disqualified from program participation until removed from academic probation or suspension by the participating institution that I am attending or planning to attend.

1.5. I must repay all exempted tuition for the current academic semester or quarter if I fail to meet any of the eligibility qualification criteria.

1.6. I received my baccalaureate degree or used five academic years (15 semesters/ 20 quarters).

**----- SECTION IV ----- REINSTATEMENT -----**

1.7. My eligibility may be reinstated if I am disqualified under the following conditions (**not a guaranteed approval**):

1.7.1 I test positive for drug or alcohol abuse and the results of the test are proven to be invalid.

1.7.2. I am submitted for reinstatement by my commander if I was disqualified due to adverse actions, and have successfully met the standards. Those standards included, career development courses; personal weight and physical fitness standards; weapons qualification requirements.

1.7.3. I perform 12 consecutive months of service without acquiring another unexcused absence if I am disqualified for acquiring between 4 and 9 unexcused absences in a 12-month period.

1.8. Once disqualified after the beginning of an academic period (semester/quarter), my reinstatement will not become effective until the beginning of the subsequent academic period (semester/quarter).

**----- SECTION V ----- RECOUPMENTS -----**

1.9. Recoupments of exempted tuition will be executed by the participating institution upon termination or disqualification.

1.10. Recoupments executed for being placed on academic probation or suspension will be for the total amount of exempted tuition for the current academic period.

**STATE TUITION EXEMPTION PROGRAM (STEP) AGREEMENT (CONT'D)**

1.11. Recoupments executed for disqualification or termination for any other cause other than being placed on academic probation or suspension will be for the amount of the current academic period in which I am participating.

**----- SECTION VI ----- STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING -----**

1.12. I understand that it is my responsibility to maintain my eligibility status and stay abreast of all provisions of the program and any changes to it.

1.13. I understand it is my responsibility to verify my status with LANG-DMP-XD or Retention Office Manager for the STEP four to six weeks prior to the semester/quarter starts.

1.14. I understand that tuition exemption is contingent upon verification of my academic and residency statuses by the participating institution of planned attendance.

1.15. I understand that tuition only is being waived with STEP, all fees, housing and books are my responsibility.

1.16. I understand that the above statements are all promises or agreements concerning my enlistment, reenlistment, extension, and/or participation in the STEP benefits. Any other promise, representation, or commitment made to me in connection with STEP is written below in my own handwriting or is waived (If you have none, write "NONE" here \_\_\_\_\_).

**-----SECTION VII ----- AUTHENTICATION -----**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**UNIT AND ADDRESS**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**DATE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**TYPED NAME/GRADE/SSAN OF MEMBER**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**SIGNATURE OF MEMBER**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**TYPED NAME/GRADE OF ENLISTING OFFICER OR UNIT COMMANDER**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**SIGNATURE OF ENLISTING OFFICER OR UNIT COMMANDER**

**ATTACHMENT 2**

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**ACADEMIC PERIOD**

Generic term applied to address the natural subdivision of each participating institution's scheduled academic year. Particularly, this represents the semesters at semester hour schools and the quarters or terms at quarter hour schools.

**ACADEMIC YEAR**

Defined as the academic school year that begins with the Fall academic period and includes each academic period through the subsequent Summer academic period. For tuition exemption accounting purposes, an academic year at a quarter hour institution consists of four academic periods while three academic periods constitutes an academic year at a semester hour institution.

**ASSOCIATE DEGREE**

Degree awarded in a specific curriculum for completion of its prerequisite courses, generally 60 semester or 90 quarter hours, and represents a two-year level of college completion.

**BACCALAUREATE DEGREE**

Degree awarded in a specific curriculum for completion of its prerequisite courses, generally 120 semester hours or 180 quarter hours, and represents a 4-year level of college completion.

**FIRST OFFICIAL CLASS DAY**

The official date that classes begin each academic period as established by each participating institution.

**NON PRIOR SERVICE (NPS) PERSONNEL**

Individuals who have no previous military service or former members of the United States Armed Forces who have 83 days or less of active duty or active duty for training.

**INITIAL ACTIVE DUTY TRAINING**

Active duty for training in Federal status under the provisions of 10 U.S.C. 672 (d) for a minimum period of 84 consecutive days, and any such additional period as may be necessary to complete the training appropriate to the specialty for which NPS personnel are appointed or enlisted.

**PARTICIPATING INSTITUTION**

Each Louisiana state-funded post secondary institution.

**PROVISIONALLY QUALIFIED**

STEP qualification status of members who have met all qualification criteria except academic and residency requirements at the participating institution of planned attendance.

**STEP COORDINATOR**

Individual identified at each participating institution with direct responsibility for routine administration of STEP as it pertains to that institution.

**STEP DISQUALIFICATION REPORT**

Report provided to the STEP Coordinator of each participating institution that lists those members who have been disqualified from STEP.

**STEP ELIGIBILITY REPORT**

Report provided to each participating institution that lists all LA ANG members who are provisionally qualified for tuition exemption for the upcoming academic period upon initial verification.

**STEP ELIGIBILITY SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT**

Report provided to each participating institution that lists all LA ANG members who became provisionally qualified since the publication of the initial STEP Eligibility Report and before the first official class day.

**TUITION EXEMPTION ALLOTMENTS**

Each eligible member of the LA ANG is allotted 5 academic years of tuition exemption benefits. This equates to 15 allotments of tuition exemptions a semester hour schools, 20 at quarter hour schools or any equivalent mixture of both.

**TUITION EXEMPTION INELIGIBLE COURSES**

Courses that do not produce credit hours or cannot be applied toward an associate or baccalaureate degree.

*ATTACHMENT 3*

**STEP CHECKLIST**

THIS CHECKLIST CAN BE USED BY MEMBERS TO PREDETERMINE IF THEY HAVE MET ALL THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF EACH ACADEMIC PERIOD IN QUALIFYING FOR STEP BENEFITS.

YES Do you meet the residency requirement of the school you plan to attend?

NO Will you be on academic probation at the school you plan to attend?

YES Is your Expiration Term of Service date later than the end of the upcoming academic period?

YES Have you completed a STEP Memorandum of Agreement?

NO Have you obtained your baccalaureate degree?

★NO Have you used STEP for 15 academic semesters already?

NO Has your unit commander disqualified you for unsatisfactory participation or performance?

★YES Did you pass your annual physical fitness test? (per the unit requirement)

★YES Do you meet your personal weight standard? (per the unit requirement)

★YES Qualified on individual weapon? (per the unit requirement)

★YES Have you checked with the Retention Office Manager for your current eligibility status?

MEMBERS WHO ANSWER ANY QUESTION DIFFERENTLY FROM THE ANSWER PROVIDED FOR EACH QUESTION ON THIS CHECKLIST MAY HAVE PROBLEMS RECEIVING STEP FOR THE UPCOMING ACADEMIC PERIOD. QUESTIONS CONCERNING COMPLETION OF THIS CHECKLIST SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIT STEP REPRESENTATIVE.