



TOPS

- The TOPS program was created by the Louisiana legislature in 1997
- TOPS is funded through the State General Fund and the Millennium Trust Fund
 - TOPS funds must be appropriated each year by the Legislature



Citizenship

- A student must be a U.S. citizen, or a permanent resident who is eligible to apply for citizenship



Residency

- Any student who is a resident of the state and who graduates from a public or approved non-public high school meets the TOPS residency requirements if he or she actually resides or lives in Louisiana for the period of his or her last two full years of high school culminating in graduation as certified by the high school
- Or, a parent or custodian of a dependent student must have been a resident of the state of Louisiana for the 24 months prior to high school graduation



Graduation Year

- For TOPS purposes, the annual academic year for high school begins on September 1 and ends on the following August 31



TOPS Core Curriculum

- All TOPS core curriculum courses must be completed by the date of high school graduation
- Distance learning courses approved by the high school may be used to qualify for TOPS
- College courses taken in the classroom, online, or by correspondence may be used to qualify for TOPS provided that they are determined to be equivalent courses and appear on the student's official high school transcript



Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA)

TOPS Core Curriculum

For Graduates of 2014-2017

- English
 - English I
 - English II
 - English III
 - English IV

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TOPS Core Curriculum

- Math
 - Algebra I or Integrated Mathematics I
 - Or Applied Algebra 1
 - Or Algebra I – Parts 1 & 2 (two units)
 - Or Applied Algebra 1A & 1B (two units)
 - Or Applied Mathematics I & II (two units)
 - Algebra II or Integrated Mathematics II
 - Geometry, Calculus, Advanced Math – Pre-Calculus, Advanced Math – Functions and Statistics, Pre-Calculus, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Mathematics, Algebra III, Applied Mathematics III, Integrated Mathematics III



TOPS Core Curriculum

- Science
 - Biology I or II
 - Chemistry I or II, or Chemistry Com
 - Earth Science, Physical Science, Environmental Science, Biology II, Chemistry II, Physics, Physics II, Physics for Technology I or II, Anatomy and Physiology, or both Agriscience I and II (two units)



TOPS Core Curriculum

- Social Studies
 - United States History
 - ½ Unit Civics and ½ Unit Free Enterprise (1 unit combined), or Civics (1 unit), or AP American Government and Politics: United States
 - World History, Western Civilization, World Geography, European History, AP Human Geography or History of Religion



TOPS Core Curriculum

- Foreign Language
 - Two units in the same language
 - English is not considered a foreign language
 - American Sign Language (2 units)



TOPS Core Curriculum

- Fine Arts Survey
 - **or** one unit of a performance course in music, dance or theater*
 - **or** one unit of studio art*
 - **or** one unit of visual art*
 - **or** both Speech III & IV* (both one unit)
 - **or** one unit of Drafting
 - The one unit may be any combination of half units.

Students no longer have the option to substitute one unit of an elective from among the other TOPS curriculum courses.



TOPS Core Curriculum

- Advanced Placement (AP) course and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses with the same name as a course listed in the TOPS Core Curriculum may be substituted.



TOPS Core Curriculum GPA

- The cumulative grade point average (GPA) for a TOPS award will be calculated using only those grades achieved in the core curriculum courses
 - If a student has completed more than 19 credits for courses that are included in the core curriculum, the GPA will be calculated by using the course in each core curriculum category for which the student received the highest grade



TOPS Core Curriculum GPA

- If a student is substituting two units for a one unit category, the grades from the two units will be averaged together and substituted as one unit
- “P” grades are not included in the TOPS Core GPA calculation
- For high schools using any grading scale other than a 4.00 scale, all grade values must be converted to a 4.00 scale (through the graduating class of 2016 – 2017)
- GPA cannot be rounded up



ACT

- Highest composite score will be considered
 - TOPS does not consider the Essay portion of the ACT in calculating the composite score needed to qualify
- ACT Registration
 - **TOPS Code 1595**



ACT

- ACT Deadlines for 2016 Graduates
 - Without penalty: April 9, 2016
 - Loss of one semester eligibility: June 11, 2016
 - Special tests may be taken prior to July 1
 - A June ACT score **cannot** be used to upgrade an Opportunity award to an Honors or Performance award
 - Students who fail to achieve a qualifying ACT score by July 1 of the graduating year shall not be considered for an award



SAT

- An equivalent SAT score may be substituted for the ACT score (940 minimum score)
 - TOPS does not consider the Essay portion of the SAT in calculating the composite score needed to qualify
- SAT Registration
 - **Scholarship Code 9019**
- SAT Test Deadlines
 - Without Penalty: March 5, 2016
 - Loss of 1 semester eligibility: May 7, 2016 and June 4, 2016



2015 Admission Standards

- **MINIMUM ADMISSION STANDARDS for FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN**
- These are the *minimum* admission standards for regular Freshman admission to a Louisiana, public four-year university for **Fall 2015**.
- **Students should check with the specific institution for additional information about the university's requirements and process for admission.***



2015 Admission Standards

1. **High School Curriculum** = Core 4 Curriculum Courses in the English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Foreign Language, and Arts categories listed in Bulletin 741 as *Core 4*.
2. **Overall HS GPA** = 2.0 (minimum)
3. **Developmental Courses Needed** = None.

Demonstration of College Readiness:

ACT English score = 18 (minimum)

ACT Math Score = 19 (minimum)



Opportunity Award Benefits

- Provides an amount equal to tuition at a Louisiana public institution
 - Or an amount equal to the weighted average public tuition at a LAICU private institution
 - \$2,557 per semester for Academic Year 2015-2016
 - TOPS does not cover academic excellence fees, energy surcharges, technology fees, books, room & board, parking fees, lab fees or any other fee that was not in effect on January 1, 1998
 - A TOPS award may be combined with other forms of financial aid up to the “Cost of Attendance” for the institution



Example of TOPS at LSU

- For the 2015-16 year...
- LSU costs (per year):
 - Tuition and Fees = \$9,660
 - Room and Board = \$10,804
 - » TOTAL Cost = \$20,464
- TOPS Opportunity Award = \$7,111
- Net Cost = \$13,353/year



TOPS Eligible Institutions: Public

- Louisiana State University System
 - Louisiana State University – Alexandria
 - Louisiana State University – Baton Rouge
 - Louisiana State University – Eunice
 - Louisiana State University – Shreveport
 - LSU Health Sciences Center – New Orleans
 - LSU Health Sciences Center – Shreveport
 - University of New Orleans
- Southern University System
 - Southern University – Baton Rouge
 - Southern University – New Orleans
 - Southern University – Shreveport



TOPS Eligible Institutions: Public

- University of Louisiana System
 - Grambling State University
 - Louisiana Tech University
 - McNeese State University
 - Nicholls State University
 - Northwestern State University
 - Southeastern Louisiana University
 - University of Louisiana – Lafayette
 - University of Louisiana – Monroe



TOPS Eligible Institutions: Public

- Louisiana Community and Technical College System
 - Louisiana Technical College – all campuses
 - Baton Rouge Community College
 - Bossier Parish Community College
 - Delgado Community College
 - L.E. Fletcher Technical Community College
 - Louisiana Delta Community College
 - Nunez Community College
 - River Parishes Community College
 - South Louisiana Community College
 - SOWELA Technical Community College



TOPS Eligible Institutions: Private

- Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (LAICU)
 - Centenary College
 - Dillard University
 - Louisiana College
 - Loyola University New Orleans
 - New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
 - Our Lady of Holy Cross College
 - Our Lady of the Lake College
 - St. Joseph Seminary College
 - Tulane University
 - Xavier University



Opportunity Award: Eligibility Requirements

- 2.50 minimum TOPS Core Curriculum GPA
- ACT score equal to the prior year's state average, but never less than 20
 - 20 for 2016 graduates
 - SAT score of 940
- Completion of the TOPS Core Curriculum



Opportunity Award Benefits

- May be used to pursue:
 - Academic undergraduate degree
 - Vocational or technical certificate
 - Non-academic degree
- Students who use their Opportunity Award to pursue a technical program will receive the same benefits and be held to the same retention requirements as a TOPS Tech Award recipient
 - The award may be used at eligible Louisiana cosmetology and proprietary schools



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Opportunity Award Benefits

- May be received for a maximum of eight semesters or 12 quarters
- Not available for summer terms

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Opportunity Award Benefits

- Any recipient who successfully completes a Bachelor's degree in less than 8 semesters or 12 quarters of award benefits, may receive any remaining terms of eligibility for graduate study
 - The amount of the award shall equal the amount of tuition charged for the graduate study, OR the amount charged for undergraduate full-time enrollment at the highest cost public institution (LSU-BR), whichever is less
 - Performance and Honors award recipients will receive their stipends



Performance Award

- Eligibility Requirements
 - 3.00 minimum TOPS Core Curriculum GPA
 - ACT score of 23
 - SAT score of 1060
 - Completion of the TOPS Core Curriculum
 - TOPS general eligibility requirements
- Award Benefits
 - Provides the same benefits as the Opportunity Award, plus
 - \$400 annual stipend



Honors Award

- Eligibility Requirements
 - 3.00 minimum TOPS Core Curriculum GPA
 - ACT score of 27
 - SAT score of 1210
 - Completion of the TOPS Core Curriculum
 - TOPS general eligibility requirements
- Award Benefits
 - Provides the same benefits as the Opportunity Award, plus
 - \$800 annual stipend



TOPS Application

- There are two methods for applying for a TOPS Scholarship
 - FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) – ***www.fafsa.gov***
 - Must be completed if the student is eligible for federal grant aid (Pell Grant)
 - Must be completed if the student is seeking any other form of financial aid
 - The only application needed for TOPS

OR

- TOPS Online Application – ***www.osfa.la.gov***
 - May only be completed by students who can certify that they do not qualify for federal grant aid
 - In the event of a budget shortfall, students completing the TOPS Online Application will be the first to lose their TOPS award
 - Do not complete if you have completed the FAFSA



Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA)

Application Deadlines for 2016 Graduates

Initial Application Receipt Date	Receives TOPS funding for:
Jan. 1, 2016 – July 1, 2017	8 semesters (12 quarters) Beginning Academic Year 2016-2017
July 2, 2017 – Aug. 29, 2017	7 semesters (10 quarters) Beginning Fall 2017
Aug. 30, 2017 – Oct. 29, 2017	6 semesters (9 quarters) Beginning Fall 2017
Initial Applications Received After October 29, 2017	Ineligible for TOPS

Students who attend the 2016-2017 academic year who apply for TOPS between July 2, 2017 and October 29, 2017 must also have met the TOPS retention requirements to be eligible for TOPS funding at the beginning in the Fall 2017 semester

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TOPS Processing Cycle

- Students apply for TOPS
 - FAFSA data is electronically sent to LOSFA by the U.S. Department of Education
 - TOPS Online Applications are entered directly on the LOSFA Website
- LOSFA downloads ACT scores for students who have included the ACT code 1595 on their ACT Registration



TOPS Processing Cycle

- Transcript data is submitted by public school boards and non-public high schools to the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) through the Student Transcript System (STS) after graduation
 - Senior data must be received by LDE by June 15
 - STS calculates the TOPS Core GPA and determines if the TOPS Core Curriculum has been met
- LOSFA downloads transcript data each Wednesday



TOPS Processing Cycle

- Processing cannot begin until we can match your FAFSA data, STS data and ACT data
- LOSFA runs the TOPS Eligibility Program each Thursday night



TOPS Processing Cycle

- TOPS award notifications are e-mailed each Friday
 - Award notifications are e-mailed to the e-mail address the student used on the FAFSA
 - The award letter includes the student's ***Rights and Responsibilities***
 - Students can check their status on the LOSFA website LA Award System (<https://www.osfa.la.gov/AwardSystem/>)
 - Students who have not received notification of their TOPS award eligibility by mid-July should contact LOSFA



Tips To Make Sure Your TOPS Processing Goes Smoothly

- Make sure that you indicate your name the same on all documents (school records, ACT test registrations, FAFSA, college applications, etc.) If your name is John Alan Smith, Jr. don't fill one application out as John A. Smith, Jr.; another as J.A. Smith, Jr., another as J. Alan Smith, etc. A good rule to follow is to use the same spelling and abbreviations as printed on your Social Security Card.



Tips To Make Sure Your TOPS Processing Goes Smoothly

- Make sure to include the ACT TOPS code of 1595 and/or the SAT TOPS code of 9019 on all ACT/SAT test registrations
- Make certain that you list the same date of birth and home street address on all forms, documents, applications, etc.
- Make certain that TOPS has a consent form signed by your parents allowing LOSFA to access your grade information.



Tips To Make Sure Your TOPS Processing Goes Smoothly

- Make sure that you are taking the correct required 19 units that comprise the TOPS Core Curriculum.
- Make sure that you are aware that your TOPS Award is based on your TOPS Core GPA...not your overall cumulative GPA. Also be aware that TOPS does not round GPA's. A 2.49 cannot round to a 2.5.
- Make sure that your FAFSA application is signed by both the student and a parent before submission



Tips To Make Sure Your TOPS Processing Goes Smoothly

- Make certain that the Email contact address you put on your FAFSA is the Email address to which you want your TOPS eligibility or ineligibility notices sent



Tips To Make Sure Your TOPS Processing Goes Smoothly

- Create a Louisiana Award System account after May 1 of your senior year to track initial TOPS eligibility and continuation eligibility throughout your postsecondary education. Be aware that it may not contain any information until after both your FAFSA and your ACT score are received by LOSFA, and that it is unlikely to contain your TOPS Core GPA until after June 15.
- Make certain that your Social Security number is the same on both your high school transcript and the FAFSA. LOSFA will not see your SSN, since it will be encoded on entry into our system, but if they are different the system will not match your application with your transcript data.



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- LSA R.S. 17:39:13 requires the governing authority of each school to provide a form to the parent or legal guardian of each student enrolled in grades eight through twelve which explains that the parent has the right to determine whether their child's Personally Identifiable Information (PII) can be released to LOSFA and to the postsecondary education institution(s) to which their child applies.

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- PII includes the student's full name, social security number, and transcript data. This information will be used by LOSFA to provide a TOPS Tracker to allow students and parents to track a student's progress toward TOPS eligibility and to determine a student's eligibility for a TOPS Award and other student financial aid. This information will also be used by postsecondary institutions to determine whether a student is eligible for admission.

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- A Consent Form for every student is required by the law to ensure that PII is disclosed only for those students whose parent or legal guardian has consented and that the parents who deny consent do so with full knowledge of the effect of denial of consent.
- The form completed at the beginning of this year will be good through the end of high school unless consent is revoked.

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TOPS Processing Cycle

- A Master Roster of TOPS eligible students is available for La. institutions to download from LOSFA each Monday
- Institutions electronically bill LOSFA for the TOPS Awards of eligible students who are enrolled full-time as of the fifteenth class day of the semester or ninth day of the quarter



Award Acceptance

- Must enter an eligible institution as a full-time student by the fall semester following the first anniversary of high school graduation



Award Acceptance

Returning Out-of-State Students

- Any TOPS eligible student who enrolls in an out-of-state institution may return to Louisiana and accept their TOPS award
- All Returning Out-of-State Students must meet the following:
 - Must have met all TOPS continuation requirements that would have applied had the student been enrolled in an eligible in-state institution
 - Must apply for award reinstatement by July 1 following the academic year in which the student returns to Louisiana
 - TOPS eligibility will be reduced by the number of semesters attended out-of-state



Award Acceptance

Military Service

- A TOPS eligible student who joins the Armed Forces on active duty within one year of high school graduation must enter an eligible institution by the semester immediately following the one year anniversary of separation from active duty.
 - Must have received an honorable discharge or a general discharge under honorable conditions
 - Must apply within one year of separation from active duty



TOPS Retention Requirements

- Should apply annually by July 1st by completing the Renewal FAFSA
- Must be continuously enrolled on a full-time basis during the academic year
 - A student is considered full-time for the semester if they are carrying full-time hours as of the 15th class day of the semester or 9th day of the quarter



TOPS Retention Requirements:

Credit Hours

- Must earn 24 credit hours each academic year
 - Failure to earn 24 hours will result in permanent award cancellation
 - Hours earned in advanced placement may not be used
 - Hours earned during any intersession held between the beginning of the fall semester and the beginning of the following fall semester can be used
 - Hours earned in required remedial courses may be used
 - “Earned Hours” are hours successfully completed with a passing grade



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TOPS Retention Requirements: Academic Year (College)

- All intersessions and summer sessions are included. (Applies only to TOPS Opportunity, Performance and Honors Award recipients).



TOPS Retention Requirements:

Credit Hours

- Exceptions to the continuous enrollment or 24 hour requirement may be granted by LOSFA for reasons beyond the student's control
 - Paternity (Maternity)
 - Physical Rehabilitation Program
 - Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program
 - Temporary Disability
 - Permanent Disability
 - Exceptional Educational Opportunity
 - Religious Commitment
 - Death of an Immediate Family Member
 - Military Service
 - Transfer to a Selective Enrollment Program
 - Exceptional Circumstances
 - Must request within 6 months of award cancellation



TOPS Retention Requirements: GPA

- At the end of each academic year, the following cumulative college GPA must be maintained:
 - Opportunity Award
 - 2.30 first academic year
 - 2.50 all subsequent academic years
 - Opportunity award recipients who fail to maintain the retention GPA will be suspended



TOPS Retention Requirements: GPA

- Performance and Honors Awards: 3.00
 - Performance or Honors award recipients who fail to maintain a 3.00 cumulative GPA will revert to the Opportunity award (Students will be funded only if they meet the Opportunity Award retention requirements)
 - Once the recipient reverts to the Opportunity award, the Performance or Honors award may not be reinstated



TOPS Retention Requirements:

Steady Academic Progress

- “Steady Academic Progress” is defined as a 2.00 cumulative GPA
- Steady Academic Progress must be maintained at the end of any semester or quarter
- Failure to maintain Steady Academic Progress will result in award suspension



TOPS Retention Requirements:

Award Reinstatement

- Students whose awards are suspended for GPA or Steady Academic Progress may be reinstated upon attainment of the required GPA
- Period of ineligibility may not persist for more than two years



Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA)

FAFSA

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FAFSA

- **The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the application for both federal and state aid programs.**
 - Be sure to fill out the FAFSA even if you don't think you'll qualify for need based aid.
- **The FAFSA is the only application needed for the TOPS scholarship.**
- **You should never be asked to pay to fill out the FAFSA. It is a FREE application.**



FAFSA

- The only financial aid directly determined from the FAFSA data is eligibility for the federal Pell Grant
- The primary purpose of the FAFSA is to establish the student's Expected Family Contribution (EFC)
 - The EFC is used by the institution, in a process called packaging, to determine your eligibility for need based federal student aid and, in many cases, state and institutional aid.



FAFSA Filing Methods

- FAFSA On the Web: ***www.fafsa.gov***
 - Faster processing
 - “Skip logic” – students are only asked questions which apply to them
 - Immediate EFC estimate
 - Online receipt verification
 - Live online help
- Paper Application
 - Available by calling the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 800-433-3243 or downloading from *www.fafsa.gov*



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FSA ID

- The Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID) replaced the Federal Student Aid PIN as of May 2015. If you already have a PIN, you can link your information to your new FSA ID by entering your PIN while registering for your FSA ID. (This will save you time when registering for your FSA ID.) However, a PIN is not required to create an FSA ID.
- If you are a parent of a ***dependent student***, you will need your own FSA ID if you want to sign your child's FAFSA electronically. If you have more than one child attending college, you can use the same FSA ID to sign all applications. *Please note: Each FSA ID user must have a unique e-mail address.*
- Your FSA ID is used to sign legally binding documents electronically. It has the same legal status as a written signature. **Don't give your FSA ID to anyone—not even to someone helping you fill out the FAFSA.** Sharing your FSA ID could put you at risk of identity theft! The PIN also allows you to make corrections to the FAFSA online.

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FSA ID

- You, and your parent if you're a dependent student, can apply for an FSA ID at any time. If you don't have one by the time you fill out your FAFSA, you will be prompted to apply for one.
- If you think the Social Security Administration (SSA) might have the wrong name or date of birth for you in its records, go to www.ssa.gov now to find out how to correct any errors. Your information must be correct with the SSA before your FAFSA or FSA ID can be processed.
- Your username does not expire, but your FSA ID password will expire every 18 months.

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Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA)

FAFSA: Student Information

- Social Security Number
- State of Legal Residence
- Citizenship status
- Interest in Student Loans and Work-Study programs

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FAFSA: Student Finances

- Records the student's income, assets, and types of federal benefits received

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FAFSA: Student Status

- This section determines your dependency status
- The EFC of a dependent student is based on both your financial information and your parents' financial information



FAFSA: Student Status

- To be considered an independent student, you must be able to answer yes to one of the following questions:
 - Were you born before January 1, 1993?
 - As of today, are you married?
 - At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, will you be working on a masters or doctorate program?
 - Are you currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training?
 - Are you a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces?



FAFSA: Student Status

- Do you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017?
- Do you have dependents (other than your spouse/child) who will live with you and receive more than half of their support from you now and through June 30, 2017?
- At any time since you turned age 13, were both of your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?



FAFSA: Parental Information

- Whose information do you use?
 - Grandparents, foster parents and legal guardians are not considered parents
 - If your parents are divorced or separated, answer the questions about the parent you lived with most during the past 12 months
 - If this parent is remarried as of today, answer the questions about that parent and their spouse
 - If your parent is single or widowed, answer the questions about that parent
 - If your widowed parent is remarried, answer the questions about that parent and their spouse



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FAFSA: Parental Information

- Records parental income, assets, and type of federal benefits received
- Number of household in college
 - Does not include parents
- Parental residency
- Parents' e-mail address

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FAFSA: School Information

- May list up to 10 institutions to receive FAFSA data when filing online
 - Make sure to list a Louisiana school first for TOPS purposes
- Housing plan
- Enrollment status



FAFSA: Signatures

- For a dependent student, both the student and the parent must sign
- FAFSA on the Web may be signed by:
 - Using the FSA ID
 - The parent and student must have separate FSA ID
 - Parents may use the same FSA ID for all of their children
 - Printing the signature page
 - Must mail within 14 days



Student Aid Report (SAR)

- The SAR provides you with:
 - Expected Family Contribution (EFC)
 - Pell Grant Eligibility
 - Listing of Institutions which will receive your data
 - A financial aid history
 - A listing of your responses to the FAFSA
- Corrections may be made:
 - Online at ***www.fafsa.gov***
 - By phone at (800) 433-3243