March 25, 2013

Dear Colleagues:

In response to the military announcements about the cessation of military Tuition Assistance (TA) funding two weeks ago, the higher education community advocated for the reinstatement of funds to show unwavering support for our servicemembers who have risked much for our country. Concerned citizens from the general public, the military and veteran community, and the higher education sector provided significant feedback to the Military Services and Congress about the suspension of Tuition Assistance (TA) funding for all new course enrollments.

Responding to that strong feedback and concern for servicemembers, Congress reinstated TA with an amendment to the Continuing Resolution that will keep the government operating through September 30, 2013. However, at this time, the Military Services have not issued policies and guidance about the implementation plans for how and when TA funding will be reinstated. While DoD and Homeland Security guidance will be forthcoming in the very near future, the current situation leaves military students uncertain about finding other funding sources with which to pay for college courses for the upcoming semester/term.

To monitor official notices about tuition funding by the respective branches of the Armed Services, we direct you to the following Web sites and/or points of contact:

**Air Force Military TA**
[https://www.my.af.mil/afvec](https://www.my.af.mil/afvec)


**Navy Military TA**  Navy continues to fund Military Tuition Assistance. Updated information will be posted.  [https://www.navycollege.navy.mil/](https://www.navycollege.navy.mil/)

**Marine Corps**  Military TA  Current servicemembers were instructed to communicate with their ESO for additional information.

**Coast Guard**  Tuition Assistance  Current servicemembers were instructed to communicate with their Coast Guard ESO for additional information.

The voluntary education community has begun to see some short-term enrollment initiatives by academic institutions to help military students continue to enroll in college courses and make progress toward graduation without full funding from TA. Some institutions have seized this financial challenge as a time to give back to their military students, focusing on the educational and financial welfare of servicemembers. Other institutions are working closely with the Services’ education centers to identify alternative funding sources for military students. These well-intended efforts to continue supporting military education are laudable and noteworthy.
Nonetheless, it is important, that in their eagerness to help military students, colleges not overstep the bounds of acceptable education recruiting and admission practices as established by the Departments of Education and Defense. Colleges should avoid implementing initiatives that could be seen as aggressive marketing activities or incentives to enroll military students. In developing tenable solutions to the current Tuition Assistance crisis, colleges must not lose sight of the Department of Defense Memorandum of Understanding (DoD MOU), which outlines requirements and acceptable marketing practices for receipt of Tuition Assistance.

Section 3.g of the current DoD MOU at <http://www.dodmou.com/> states that institutions should “adopt an institutional policy banning inducements (including any gratuity, favor, discount, entertainment, hospitality, loan, transportation, lodging, meals, or other item having a monetary value of more than a de minimus amount) to any individual or entity (other than salaries paid to employees or fees paid to contractors in conformity with all applicable laws) for the purpose of securing enrollments of Service members or obtaining access to TA funds as part of efforts to eliminate aggressive marketing aimed at Service members.” Colleges must ensure that actions taken to help military students during this sequestration remain in accord with this provision. For example, institutions that have signed the DoD MOU could find themselves at odds with this requirement if they were to issue tuition grants to new students.


As colleges explore alternate funding options for military students during the absence of military Tuition Assistance funding, reviewing this Department of Education program participation may be instructive to avoid establishing “perceived” incentives to secure new students.

In addition, the SOC Standards of Good Practice <http://www.soc.aascu.org/soconcortium/SOCPrinCriteria.html#AttachA> provide guidance to member institutions about marketing or recruiting strategies that are perceived as incentives to enroll or aggressive marketing. SOC Consortium member institutions should review the Standards and ensure that short-term solutions to minimize the loss of military Tuition Assistance funding do not conflict with these established enrollment and recruitment guidelines.

If your institution is considering implementing a short-term remedy to help servicemembers meet a financial gap caused by the suspension of military Tuition Assistance, please keep the following guidelines in mind:

Offers of scholarships, discounted tuition, and/or free tuition for courses should have no conditions or strings attached to them that could have negative financial impact on the military student (for example, servicemembers must use GI Bill education benefits or pay out of pocket to fund an additional course in order to receive “free” tuition and fees for one course).

Offers of scholarships, discounted tuition and/or free tuition should have no short suspense dates (less than one week) that would pressure a military student to act hastily in order to receive discount.

Offers of scholarships, discounted tuition, and/or free tuition should have established guidelines and deadlines and should be based on published criteria so that all military students impacted by the loss of TA have equal opportunity for consideration (e.g., currently enrolled students with a 2.5 GPA).
Offers of scholarships, discounted tuition, and/or free tuition initiatives are only provided to military students who are currently enrolled at or have been accepted by the institution prior to the loss of TA.

Offers of scholarships, discounted tuition, and/or free tuition initiatives should not be extended to transferring or new applicants as this would be construed as an aggressive recruiting effort to attract new students and offering a student inducement to enroll, an effort that does not comply with Department of Education Title IV regulations.

SOC personnel applaud college efforts during this financial crisis for military students who are engaged in higher education endeavors. We appreciate institutional collaboration with the Services’ education centers to identify alternative funding sources for military students. As always, our primary concern is to ensure that all support activities by institutions have the best interests of our servicemembers at the center of any initiative and do not overstep the bounds of acceptable education recruiting and admission practices of voluntary education.

If you have individual questions or concerns about the military Services’ suspension of Tuition Assistance funding, please do not hesitate to contact me. We will attempt to monitor the ever-changing financial situation created by federal budget cuts and are open to sharing that status with the leadership of our member institutions.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Kathryn M. Snead
President, SOC Consortium