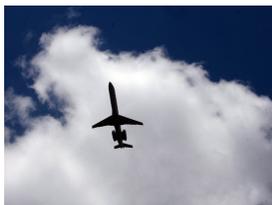


# Report: Louisiana agencies allowed airfares to expire

Alexandria Burris, The (Shreveport, La.) Times 12:50 a.m. EDT September 29, 2014



(Photo: File/The Times)

SHREVEPORT, La. — Employees in at least 112 state agencies wasted more than a half-million dollars purchasing non-refundable airline tickets that were allowed to expire and lose value (<http://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/news/local/2014/09/27/report-state-agencies-allowed-airfares-expire/16292053/>), a recent Office of State Inspector General's report found.

Listed among the state agencies: Louisiana Tech University, Louisiana State University Health Shreveport, Southern University-Shreveport, LSU-Shreveport, Camp Minden and Bossier Parish Community College.

The state-purchased tickets lost value because they were not used within one year of their original travel dates, according to the report. Ten agencies account for the bulk of the unused airfares — accounting for \$330,498 of the \$544,648 in expired tickets purchased between July 1, 2011, and Dec. 31, 2013, the time period examined in the report.



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Travel booking site adds Amtrak alongside airlines

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/flights/2014/04/17/cheapaircom-and-amtrak/7747665/>)

Louisiana Tech and LSU Health Shreveport are listed in the top 10, with expired non-refundable plane tickets valued at \$40,747 and 27,568, respectively.

Sally Croom, spokeswoman for LSUHSC-Shreveport, said the report points out a problem the college is working to minimize.

"Our travel office contacts each traveler to remind them that a ticket is scheduled to expire and we are in frequent contact with our state travel office to monitor ticket sales and outstanding tickets," Croom said.



A Delta 717 aircraft passes over I-20 while landing at Shreveport Regional Airport.(Photo: File/The Times)

She said the school makes monthly contact with travelers and encourages them to apply unused tickets toward another trip, which is the only way to recapture the value of the non-refundable ticket.

Spokesmen at local colleges on the OIG's list say inclement weather, conference cancellations, patient emergencies and unexpected cancellations from prospective employees and student-athlete recruits resulted in the airfare not being used on their original travel dates.

The state requires travelers to buy "best fare" tickets, which are often non-refundable. If a trip is canceled, the additional fees airlines charge to transfer the tickets to another person can be costly or exceed the value of the original ticket, they said.

The Louisiana Administrative Code requires state employees to book commercial airline tickets through Short's Travel Management's Web portal, which the state contracts for employee travel.

Statewide travelers purchased at least 1,190 non-refundable airline tickets with public dollars through the site during the period audited. The agencies ranged from educational institutions to state departments like the Office of Adult and Aging Services and Department of Health and Hospitals.

The 10 agencies with the highest amount of expired tickets and individuals who purchased multiple unused expired tickets account for 75% of all expired airfares noted in the audit, according to the report.

"By minimizing the amount of expired airfare associated with these two categories, the Office of State Travel can nearly eliminate all expired airfare," the report notes. "The Office of State Travel should closely monitor the amounts associated with these two categories to ensure that only a minimal amount of airfare is allowed to expire."

David Guerin, a Louisiana Tech spokesman, said the university concurs with the report's findings. But, he said, expired airfares were 3% of the \$1.3 million the university spent on air travel for faculty, staff, perspective employees students and others during the two-and-a-half-year period audited.

Lisa Cole, the university's assistant vice president of finance and comptroller, said the figure from the state represents the collective value of airfares the university reimbursed and did not reimburse for employees and faculty members — and not how much money the university lost to expired airfares.

Some employees who purchased tickets through the Short's Web portal did not ask for a reimbursement, she said. There is no way to determine how much the university lost by reimbursing airfares that later went unused.

At SUSLA, SUS's Director of University Relations Krystle Beauchamp, said the school is trying to get 10 airline tickets refunded after a student trip was canceled because of bad weather.

The Inspector General's office said SUS employees purchased airfares valued at \$7,286, which later expired and lost value. But Beauchamp disputes the numbers in the report. She says the dollar value in the report represents 47 tickets, most of which have since been used to another trip or will be used.

Seventeen of the 47 tickets are unredeemable and 10 of those are from the student trip, she said.

Brooke Rinaudo, LSUS spokesman, also disputed the report, which said \$5,454.10 in airline fares expired. Rinaudo said the college was able to use most of the after the end of the time period audited, she said. About \$2,230 in unused airfares remain.

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