

College Admissions Tips for Military Veterans

By [TANYA ABRAMS](#) *The New York Times* Monday, October 8, 2012



If you've served in the military but have dreams of one day earning your college degree, we've gathered some admissions intel that may prove helpful to you.

As part of our [continuing coverage](#) of the annual meeting of the [National Association for College Admission Counseling](#) this week in Denver, we sat in on a session called, "Recruiting and Serving Veteran Populations Using Chapter 33 Military Benefits."

Although the session was primarily for college representatives and guidance counselors, we found some take-aways for college-bound veterans, too.

Here are some college admissions tips for military veterans.

Apply for Your Benefits

Military veterans who qualify for the [Post-9/11 G.I. Bill](#) (also known as Chapter 33 benefits) may have the full cost of their tuition and fees paid directly to their public, in-state college or university. They may also receive a monthly housing allowance and stipends for books and school supplies.

Veterans who are interested in attending a private or out-of-state public school might consider the [Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program](#).

There are [other programs to help veterans finance their education](#), too, all listed on the Web site of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The department offers an online "[Road Map](#)" to help veterans find the benefits plan that best fits their circumstances.

"They are fully funded and supported for all four years," George Walls, the director of undergraduate recruiting and admissions at [Capitol College](#), told a crowd of admission officers and college counselors. "Funding for college is often one of the biggest challenges in the recruitment and enrollment management process, so having someone who's going to be fully funded allows us to focus on things like fit, and services, and making sure that they're successful."

Of course, all of these benefits are null if veterans don't apply. Michael Perry, a fellow audience member and the director of undergraduate admission at [Florida Institute of Technology](#), told me after the panel that the sooner the veterans finish this basic step, the better.

"You'd be surprised how daunting of a task that is for some young soldiers. Nobody's taking them to the V.A. Web site and saying, 'Here's the application for your V.A. benefits. You are now eligible for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill,'" said Mr. Perry, who is also a battalion commander.

"It does seem basic, but it takes time. It takes the V.A. anywhere from two to six months to process these benefits because they're backlogged. So apply early. Get that stuff going."

Begin Your College Search Early

Veterans will have to undergo the same college admissions process as high school seniors: finding the right college fit, visiting campuses, submitting test scores and transcripts, writing essays, and, of course, navigating their unique financial aid process.

Soon-to-be veterans should start their college search as soon as they get back from deployment, Mr. Perry said.

Look for Schools With Veteran Support

Find colleges and universities with veterans centers and counseling services. Mark Sifford, a co-panelist with Mr. Walls and the project director of the concurrent admissions program for [Servicemembers Opportunities Colleges](#), encouraged college representatives to make these resources available for veterans so that they can connect with other veterans and transition to civilian life.

But beware the unscrupulous for-profit colleges and universities that claim to be "military friendly," accept your military benefits as payment, and have a low graduation rate, or leave too many veterans in debt, Mr. Walls said.

One way to find genuinely "military-centric" or "military-inclusive" schools — as Mr. Sifford prefers to call them — is to search for Yellow Ribbon colleges and universities. The [V.A. Web site has an interactive map](#) that allows veterans to search for institutions that participate in the Yellow Ribbon program.

Ask Around

Talk to other veterans who attended a college or university that interests you. They'll be able to give you an uncensored account of their experience from the perspective of a fellow veteran.

Check Out the Dorms

"Veterans don't want to live in dorms," Mr. Sifford told college admissions officers. "The 18-year-old thing happened while they were in the barracks, by and large. They're coming back to

you as 25- and 26-year-olds, they're there because they want to go back to school, they don't want to live around a bunch of 18-year-olds and explain to them what it's like."

Of course, as one attendee pointed out, living on campus may actually be an appealing part of the college experience. It's best to find out what residential options are available — graduate housing, traditional dorms, or apartments for families — and see if any of those options fit your needs.

Get Credit for Your Military Experience

Veterans may face academic and financial challenges during the admission process, Mr. Walls said, some of which may have led to their decision to join the military in the first place. But when they return home and want to go to college, they're bringing with them the same grades and test scores that they earned in high school years ago.

What isn't always accounted for — but should be — is a veteran's military experience, Mr. Walls said. Sometimes it's a matter of having a box to check on the college application.

To get credit for your military experience, veterans should complete the [DD-214 form](#), a military service record that outlines the experiences and accomplishments of your military career.

Those experiences could earn you college credit. The [American Council on Education](#) offers transcripts of the experience and training that personnel receive. Those transcripts, the A.C.E. reports, are recognized by more than 2,300 colleges and universities.

Student applicants could also use their essay and resumes as opportunities to highlight what they've learned from the military, especially if their college applications and test scores aren't strong indicators of their abilities, the panelists said. Veterans often have undergone rigorous training and gained strong leadership skills, but admission officers may not realize those attributes in the application, Mr. Walls said.

Seek Support

There are many ways to get support through the college admission process, but veterans need to seek out these resources. Panelists recommend that you talk to an education services officer (your E.S.O.) early about your higher education goals. Visit the military education center. Explore the V.A. Web site.

When you are talking to college admissions officers, get the facts. Panelists suggest that veterans ask prospective colleges the same basic questions during their search: Are you military friendly? Do you accept military benefits? Are you a Yellow Ribbon school?

If the attendance at this session is any indication, there are many colleges and universities that eagerly await you.