

Chapter 6 – Education/Training

Service members leaving the military sometimes find a gap between the civilian careers they want and the specific education or training they need to achieve it. The following section will help you identify the resources to assist you in getting the training and education needed to help close that gap.

A. Your Education Benefits: Montgomery GI Bill, VEAP, and More

Several programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide financial assistance to veterans for education programs. This includes enrollment in degree programs, technical and vocational programs, correspondence courses, flight training courses, and on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs. To be eligible programs must be approved, usually by a State-approving agency, for VA purposes, before VA education program benefits are paid.

Two of these programs are the Post-Vietnam-era Veterans' Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) and the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB). Both programs are intended to help you develop skills that will enhance your opportunities for employment. As a rule, the benefits under either of these programs must be used within 10 years of separation from active duty.

Tip: Be sure to fill out and submit VA Form 22-1990, "Application for Education Benefits" (<http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/22-1990.pdf>) as soon as possible, even if you are not ready to begin school. You will reduce the processing time later by doing this now.

Veterans' Education Assistance Program (VEAP) Eligibility

With the exception of some people who signed delayed entry contracts before January 1, 1977, VEAP is for people who first entered active duty during the period January 1, 1977 through June 30, 1985, and who made a contribution to a VEAP account before April 1, 1987. If you participated in VEAP and withdrew your contribution, you may start a new allotment, or make a lump-sum contribution, at any time while you are on active duty.

MGIB Eligibility

MGIB eligibility is straightforward for most veterans, but it can be complex for others. If you have questions about MGIB eligibility, check with your Education Center, or call the VA toll-free education number, 1-888-GI Bill-1 (1-888-442-4551). You may also get information at the VA Education Service website <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>.

With the exception of some officers who received a commission, after December 31, 1976, as a result of graduating from a service academy, or after completing a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) scholarship program, the MGIB is for people who first came on active duty on July 1, 1985, or later, and who did not decline – in writing – to participate in the MGIB program.

To be eligible for the full 36 months of MGIB benefits, veterans must normally meet the character of service, and minimum length of service requirements. Some veterans who are separated from active duty early for the convenience of the government may also receive the full 36 months of MGIB benefits. Depending on the reason for separation, other veterans who are separated from active duty early may be eligible for prorated – reduced - MGIB benefits; one month of benefits for each full month of active duty.

Some veterans who were eligible for the Vietnam Era GI Bill (VRA) have increased MGIB eligibility. They must have had some remaining VRA entitlement on December 31, 1989, when all benefits under the VRA

expired. With some exceptions, they must have served on active duty from July 1, 1985 through June 30, 1988. For these veterans, the 10-year period of time in which they must use MGIB benefits is reduced by any time, from January 1, 1977 through June 30, 1985, that they were not on active duty.

Individuals who are involuntarily separated from the military and who were not originally eligible for the MGIB may have a second opportunity to receive MGIB benefits. This includes officers not normally eligible for the MGIB because they were commissioned after December 31, 1976 as a result of graduating from a service academy or after completing a ROTC scholarship, and people who declined to participate in the MGIB. Contact your Education Center or VA for details.

\$600 Buy-up Program: You can get up to \$150 per month added to your standard MGIB "payment rate." This could increase your total GI Bill benefit by up to \$5,400. To take advantage you must be on active duty and elect to contribute up to \$600 (in \$20 increments) before you leave the service. Each \$300 dollars contributed earns an additional \$75 a month in benefits. You can use form DD Form 2366-1, "Increased Benefit Contribution Program," to process your request through your local payroll or personnel office (<http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/eforms/dd2366-1.pdf>).

For More Information

The VA can provide you with educational counseling after you leave the Service. Contact the VA GI Bill Regional Processing Office by dialing toll-free 1-888-GI Bill-1 (1-888-442-4551) or go to the MGIB website at <http://www.gibill.va.gov>. To contact the VA Regional Office closest to you, go to <http://www1.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp> and click on "Type of Facility." Then, click on your State to locate the Regional Office nearest you. In addition, information on MGIB and other veterans' educational benefit programs is available from your installation's Education Center or from the admissions office and/or veterans' coordinator at most colleges and universities.

Did You Know? You qualify for Federal Financial Student Aid such as Pell Grants and the Stafford Loan Program even if you are still on active duty. Visit <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> to learn how to apply.

B. Additional Educational or Training Options

The transition from military to civilian life is an excellent time to take a serious look at your options for future success. Now is the best time to evaluate your educational options.

Guidance Counseling

Before you leave the military, go to your local Education Center, Navy College Office, or Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center. The counselors can provide assistance in determining the goals that are right for you. If you feel you need additional education or training, the Education Counselor will guide you to the appropriate curriculum and institution, and help you with the paperwork necessary to enroll in an academic or vocational program.

Career Assessment

If you are not sure what you want to do upon leaving the military, then you should talk to a counselor at your local Education Center, Navy College Office, Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center or Transition Office. The counselor can recommend aptitude tests or vocational interest inventories to help clarify your career goals. These tests can help you pinpoint job skills in which you might excel and then relate them to specific occupations and careers in the civilian world.

Your installation's Education Center, Navy College Office, or Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center may offer the Strong Interest Inventory, Self-Directed Search, or Career Assessment Inventory, as well as

computerized counseling systems like Discover. These can help you select jobs and careers that more closely match your personality, background, and career goals.

Academic Planning

Once you have identified your career goal, you may find you need a formal education to achieve it. Your Education Counselor can explore the possibilities with you. Counselors can also advise you on non-traditional educational opportunities that can make it easier for you to get a diploma, vocational certificate or college degree. These non-traditional opportunities include the following:

- **Take “challenge exams,” such as a college-level equivalency exam:** You can convert knowledge learned outside the classroom into credits toward a college program. This can save you time and money.
- **Go to school part time while continuing to hold down a full-time job:** This approach might make adult education more practical.
- **See the veterans’ coordinator at the college, university or vocational school of your choice:** The coordinator can help you understand your VA educational benefits and might lead you to special programs offered to former Service members.
- **Determine if your military learning experiences can translate to course credit:** Check with your service Education Center, Navy College Office or Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center well in advance of your separation date to request copies of your transcripts.
- **Take advantage of distance learning opportunities:** With today’s technological advances, you can enroll in an educational program in which courses are offered by accredited educational institutions in a variety of formats, i.e., CD-ROM, the Internet, satellite TV, cable TV, and video tapes.

Vocational Services

The Education Center, Navy College Office or Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center can tell you about vocational and technical school programs designed to give you the skills needed to work in occupations that do not require a four-year college degree. The counselors at these centers can also show you how to get course credits for non-traditional learning experience (such as military certifications and on-the-job training). The counselors can help you explore these options.

The counselors may also help you find out about certification and licensing requirements – for example, how to get a journeyman card for a particular trade. The counselors can give you information on vocational and apprenticeship programs.

Note: Local trade unions may also offer vocational training in fields that interest you.

Licensing and Certification

Your military occupational specialty may require a license or certification in the civilian workforce. There are several resources available to assist you in finding civilian requirements for licensing and certification:

- <http://www.acinet.org/>: Department of Labor website. Go to “Career Tools” section to look up licenses by state, requirements for the license, and point-of-contact information for the state licensing board.
- http://www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/danteshome.asp: DANTES website has information on certification programs.
- <https://www.cool.army.mil/>: Find civilian credentials related to your military occupational specialty, learn what it takes to obtain the credentials, and see if there are available programs that will help pay credentialing fees.

- <https://www.cool.navy.mil/>: Find civilian credentials related to your Navy rating, learn what it takes to obtain the credentials, and see if there are available programs that will help pay credentialing fees.

C. Testing Available Through Your Education Center

Testing can be an important first step in your career development. Some colleges and universities may require you to provide test results as part of your application. Prior to your departure from military service, you are encouraged to take advantage of the testing services offered by the Education Center, Navy College Office and Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center. These services include the following:

- **Vocational interest inventories:** Most Education Centers, Navy College Offices and Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Centers offer free vocation interest inventories that can help you identify the careers most likely to interest you.
- **Academic entry exams:** Before applying for college or other academic programs, you may want to take a college admission test such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) , ACT, or the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Some schools may require that you do so. Information on these tests is available from your Education Center, Navy College Office or Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center. You must start early. These exams are offered only a few times each year.
- **Credit by examination:** Your Education Center, Navy College Office and Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center offers a variety of “challenge” exams that can lead to college credit. If you score high enough, you may be exempt from taking a certain class or course requirements – resulting in a big savings of time and money as you earn your degree. The College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and the DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSST) are also free to Service members on active duty.

Save Time and Money: You can get up to 30 college credits by taking the five CLEP General Exams. If you are currently serving in the Armed Forces, you can take these exams for free.

- **Certification examinations:** As a Service member working in an important occupational field, you have received extensive training (service schools, correspondence course, OJT) which has proved valuable in developing your professional skills. Your local Education Center, Navy College Office or Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Center can provide you information on certification examinations that “translate” military training into civilian terms. Examinations are available in many skill areas and upon successful completion the documentation you receive is readily understood and received in the professional occupational civilian community.

Contact your installation Education Center, Navy College Office, or Marine Corps LifeLong Learning Office to ensure that they have the capability to offer examinations you need in paper and pencil or Computer-base-testing (CBT) format.

D. DoD Voluntary Education Program Website

For separating service members, the Department of Defense Voluntary Education Program website, <http://www.voled.doded.mil>, offers a wide variety of educational information of interest and use. The website was originally established to provide support for military education center staffs worldwide. As the website developed, it took on the mission of providing direct support to active and reserve components’ Service members and their families. This support includes information on all programs provided by the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support (DANTES) including the Distance Learning Program, Examination Program, Certification Program, Counselor Support Program, Troops to Teachers, and a wide variety of educational catalogs and directories.

Troops to Teachers

More information on the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program can be found in **Chapter 3** of this guide, or by visiting the TTT website at: <http://www.proudtoserveagain.com/>

Links are provided to each of the services' education programs and to a wide variety of education-related resources. There is also a Directory of Education Centers on the website, which contains information on all of the services' education centers worldwide, to include addresses, phone numbers and E-mail addresses.

The primary goal of the website is to provide on-site, or through links, all information for Service members to select, plan and complete their program of study, either while on active duty or upon separation.

E. Service Unique Transcripts

Army: For everything you want to know about the free AARTS transcript (Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript System), go to <http://aarts.army.mil>. This free transcript includes your military training, your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), and college level examination scores with the college credit recommended for those experiences. It is a valuable asset that you should provide to your college or your employer and it is available for Active Army, National Guard and Reserve Soldiers. You can view and print your own transcript at this website.

Save time and Money: Unless you know for sure that you need to take a particular course, wait until the school gets **all** your transcripts before you sign up for classes. Otherwise you may end up taking courses you don't need.

Navy and Marine Corps: Information on how to obtain the Sailor/Marine American Council on Education Registry Transcript (SMART) is available at <http://www.navycollege.navy.mil>. SMART is now available to document the American Council on Education (ACE) recommended college credit for military training and occupational experience. SMART is an academically accepted record that is validated by ACE. The primary purpose of SMART is to assist Service members in obtaining college credit for their military experience. Additional information on SMART can also be obtained from your nearest Navy College Office or Marine Corps Education Center, or contact the Navy College Center.

Air Force: The Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) automatically captures your training, experience and standardized test scores. Transcript information may be viewed at the CCAF website: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/ccaf/>

Coast Guard: The Coast Guard Institute (CGI) requires each Service member to submit documentation of all training (except correspondence course records), along with an enrollment form, to receive a transcript. Transcript information can be found at the Coast Guard Institute Home Page: <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi/forms.html>