

Briefing Paper: Demographics of Military-Connected Students & Student Veterans

Terms and Definitions - Who is a veteran?

A *veteran* as outlined in Title 38 U.S.C. § 101, and for determining eligibility to benefits offered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), is defined as, “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.”¹ This excludes ROTC cadets who are civilians enrolled in a college ROTC program and agree to a service obligation upon graduation.

For the purposes of recruiting and enrolling veterans into college, they may be defined as anyone who served in the Armed Forces regardless of discharge status. The preferred definition is usually campus specific. “*Service member*” is used for anyone currently serving in the Armed Forces from enlisted personnel to flag officers. This excludes United States Service Academy cadets who are civilians enrolled in a service branch academy program (e.g. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard) and are commissioned as officers upon graduation.

A *family member* or dependent may be a spouse or child of a service member or veteran.

The terms *military-connected* or *military-affiliated* student may be applied to include veterans, service members, and/or family members enrolled in a post-secondary program. *Student veteran* may be used when speaking about veterans who are enrolled in a post-secondary program.

Demographics of Military-Connected Students

Estimated Total Number of Veterans Enrolled in Postsecondary Education

Academic year	Undergraduate Student Veterans	Graduate Student Veterans	Total Enrolled Veterans
2007-08	690,000	106,900	796,900
2011-12	855,900	109,700	965,600
2015-16	948,800	189,000	1,137,800

Note: rounded to nearest 100

Source: NCES, NPSAS, Trendstats (2008, 2012, 2016)

¹ Source: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/38/101>

Total Population of Students Who Receive VA Education Benefits (CY 2019²): 963,275 Students

Note: This includes veterans, service members, and dependents receiving VA education benefit programs including the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Montgomery GI Bill.

Top 5 States by Students Receiving GI Bill Benefits:

1. Texas: 95,608
2. California: 98,990
3. Florida: 67,283
4. Arizona: 52,977
5. Virginia: 51,819

Top 20 Institutions by GI Bill Students

Federal GI Bill funding is included and identified by the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs' GI Bill Comparison Tool. Graduation rate is included and identified by the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard; "NA" means no graduation rate was reported for that institution. College Scorecard does not delineate between residential and online campuses so some, e.g. Liberty University and Southern New Hampshire University include the graduation rate as reported without the distinction..

Institution	GI Bill Students	Federal GI Bill Funding	Graduation Rate ³
AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM	17,635	\$57,814,446	24%
UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX-ONLINE CAMPUS	14,716	\$85,757,482	N/A
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND GLOBAL CAMPUS	13,988	\$56,416,708	25%
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY	10,465	\$40,865,900	44%
SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE UNIVERSITY ONLINE	9,221	\$33,123,761	68%
ASHFORD UNIVERSITY	6,975	\$26,725,042	28%
WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY	6,502	\$16,824,608	42%
GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY	6,424	\$29,392,712	32%
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY-TEMPE	6,230	\$52,300,300	66%
CENTRAL TEXAS COLLEGE - MAIN CAMPUS (Two-Year IHL)	4,977	\$ 4,533,871	12%
COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY	4,747	\$11,368,793	51%

² Source: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2018-education.pdf>

³ Current rate displayed by school on the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard; "Graduation Rate" is the percentage of students who graduated within 8 years of entering a school for the first time.

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY SAN DIEGO	4,276	\$29,706,956	39%
COLORADO TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY-ONLINE	4,008	\$31,932,718	29%
PURDUE UNIVERSITY GLOBAL	3,935	\$ 9,843,579	N/A
FULL SAIL UNIVERSITY	3,654	\$49,969,646	54%
TIDEWATER COMMUNITY COLLEGE-VIRGINIA BEACH (Two-Year IHL)	3,637	\$ 9,014,936	22%
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY	3,209	\$16,273,727	57%
EXCELSIOR COLLEGE	3,021	\$14,942,697	48%
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO	2,987	\$13,763,562	44%
CAPELLA UNIVERSITY	2,877	\$16,041,875	12%

Characteristics of GI Bill Recipients and Beneficiary Type in Fiscal Year 2018

Veterans and Servicemembers receiving GI Bill benefits: **584,858**

Transfer of Eligibility - Spouses using transferred entitlement: **29,745**

Transfer of Eligibility⁴ - Child(ren) using transferred entitlement: **89,857**

Fry Scholarship⁵ - Spouses using eligibility: **876**

Fry Scholarship - Children using eligibility: **2,733**

Gender Breakdown of Post-9/11 GI Bill Beneficiaries in Fiscal Year 2018

Female: **202,396**

Male: **505,431**

Undisclosed: **242**

Distinctive Characteristics of Student Veterans

Student Veterans of America's National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST)⁶ was a comprehensive study to measure demographics and the academic outcomes of veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill published in 2016.

- The top three most popular majors were business, STEM, and health-related fields. Veterans using the post-9/11 GI Bill had a 54% completion rate and 72% success rate⁷.
- Approximately 38% of degree earners using the Post-9/11 GI Bill were between the ages of 25 - 29.

⁴ The transferability option under the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows Servicemembers to transfer all or some unused benefits to their spouse or dependent children. The request to transfer unused GI Bill benefits to eligible dependents must be completed while serving as an active member of the Armed Forces.

⁵ The Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship (Fry Scholarship) provides Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to the children and surviving spouses of Servicemembers who died in the line of duty while on active duty after September 10, 2001.

⁶ https://nvest.studentveterans.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/NVEST_Factsheets.pdf

⁷ NVEST defines success rate as those who earned a credential before separation, those who earned a credential after separation, and those who are still enrolled as of the time of the analysis.

According to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families⁸, student veterans are more likely to be older, married, have children, a VA-rated disability, work full or part time and be a first generation student.

According to Veterans Education Success⁹, veterans using the GI Bill were slightly less likely to take out student loans in 2015-16 than nonbeneficiaries. Even though 47% of undergraduate student veterans were not using GI Bill benefits in 2015-16, the proportion of nonbeneficiaries who took out any student loans—federal or nonfederal—was only 7 percentage points higher (31%) than that of veterans using benefits (24%). A robust proportion of veteran beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries had no student loan debt, 76% and 69%, respectively.

Veterans using and not using the GI Bill borrowed about the same amount. For the 24% of student veteran beneficiaries who did borrow, the average annual loan amount was about \$7,930, compared to \$8,170 for the 31% of veteran borrowers not using benefits in 2015-16.

Data Limitations to Consider

- There is no national dataset that captures veterans in higher education (though some claim to be authoritative), but rather a constellation of datasets including:
 - National Student Clearinghouse: Student Tracker
 - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: GI Bill Comparison Tool
 - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Annual Benefits Report, Education
 - U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study
 - U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Data System
- We can't always distinguish veterans from active or dependents at individual colleges and universities.
- Not all veterans self-identify at college and universities nor do all colleges and universities ask them to identify.
- It's often not possible to distinguish between undergraduate and graduate student veterans.

Further Reading

1. Cate, C.A., Lyon, J.S., Schmeling, J., & Bogue, B.Y. (2017), [*National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A Report on the Academic Success of Student Veterans Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill*](#), Student Veterans of America, Washington, D.C.
2. Ochinko, W., Payea, K. (2019), [*Annual and Cumulative Student Loan Debt Among Veterans Using and Not Using GI Bill Benefits*](#), Factsheet #3, Veterans Education Success.
3. [*VBA Annual Benefits Report Fiscal Year 2018*](#) (2019), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.
4. [*Student Veterans: A Valuable Asset to Higher Education*](#) (2017), Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University, Student Veterans of America, Washington, D.C.
5. [*GI Bill Comparison Tool*](#) (2019), www.va.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

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⁸ Source: <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/student-veterans-a-valuable-asset-to-higher-education/>

⁹ Source: <https://vetsedsuccess.org/annual-and-cumulative-student-loan-debt-among-veterans-using-and-not-using-gi-bill-benefits/>