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.” 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Undergraduate Student Veterans</th>
<th>Graduate Student Veterans</th>
<th>Total Enrolled Veterans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>690,000</td>
<td>106,900</td>
<td>796,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>855,900</td>
<td>109,700</td>
<td>965,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>948,800</td>
<td>189,000</td>
<td>1,137,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: rounded to nearest 100


1 Source: https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/38/101
Total Population of Students Who Receive VA Education Benefits (CY 2019): 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..

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>GI Bill Students</th>
<th>Federal GI Bill Funding</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM</td>
<td>17,635</td>
<td>$57,814,446</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX-ONLINE CAMPUS</td>
<td>14,716</td>
<td>$85,757,482</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND GLOBAL CAMPUS</td>
<td>13,988</td>
<td>$56,416,708</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBERTY UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>10,465</td>
<td>$40,865,900</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE UNIVERSITY ONLINE</td>
<td>9,221</td>
<td>$33,123,761</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASHFORD UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>6,975</td>
<td>$26,725,042</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WESTERN GOVERNORS UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>6,502</td>
<td>$16,824,608</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>6,424</td>
<td>$29,392,712</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY-TEMPE</td>
<td>6,230</td>
<td>$52,309,300</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTRAL TEXAS COLLEGE - MAIN CAMPUS (Two-Year IHL)</td>
<td>4,977</td>
<td>$4,533,771</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>4,747</td>
<td>$11,368,793</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
### 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.

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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.


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 Families, 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 Success, 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**


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