

The Essentials for College Success

The Veteran's Guide

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Each year hundreds of thousands of service members leave the military for civilian life. As part of this transition, many enroll in a postsecondary education program. The transition from a highly structured military environment to a college or university can be overwhelming for veterans, who may confront a variety of barriers in their quest to earn a degree. Aside from having a break in their education, many veterans feel unprepared as students and find it challenging to relate to their peers, faculty, and staff, and to navigate the numerous assistive resources on campus and within their communities. The transition from the military to college is a big step that requires a well-developed and comprehensive plan.

Your success as a college student depends on overcoming academic, financial, and personal challenges. For instance, many first-year student veterans have not yet mastered the writing, presentation, and study skills they need to succeed. Outside of the classroom, they need to familiarize themselves with available campus and community resources, learn how to cope with stress in a healthy manner, juggle employment and family commitments, and figure out how to balance their academic and personal life. And, finally, they have to figure out how to maximize their educational benefits and not get mired in student loan or credit card debt.

The following 10 steps provide details on what you should consider when pursuing a college degree:

1 Where do I start?

You already know how to make decisions based on a combination of options. For instance, you had five military services to choose from and something about your particular branch spoke to you. After meeting with a recruiter, getting a free t-shirt and deciding to enlist, you went to MEPS, took the ASVAB and had to make another choice – this time, it was centered on your MOS. There were likely a combination of factors that prompted you to enlist and to hone in on the job that you performed. Similarly, choosing a college requires a good bit of reflection in order to clarify and ultimately determine what you're looking for in a school.

To get started, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I need a degree to do what I want to do beyond the military?
- Is the type of degree I get important? (certificate, AA, BA/BS)
- What about the reputation of the institution?
- Are there professionals or people in my field of interest that I can talk to for advice?
- Can my hobbies and interests translate into an academic major or career?
- Is the location of the school important to me?
- What is a realistic starting salary for the majors I'm interested in?

2 Identify schools that are right for you

When you talk about going to college you will get a wealth of opinions from friends, family members and colleagues. Although well intentioned, this decision must be made based on your own individual needs and interests. To support this process make a list of subjective and objective items:

- Size (less than 10,000 students; more than 20,000)
- Location (close to home, the ocean, a major city)
- Type (Public, Private, Ivy League, Public Ivy, Online)
- Reputation (highly selective, selective, less selective)
- Cost (GI Bill will cover entirely, loans, grants, Yellow Ribbon)
- Types of academic programs available
- Long-term Goal (Will a degree in _____ prepare me well for medical school?)
- Internship, career placement, and study abroad opportunities
- Other (close to a VA clinic, disability services)

3 Be cautious

Use discretion when researching schools. Beware of schools that are exclusively online and for-profit, programs that grant a vast amount of “life experience” credit or that emphasize getting

finished quickly, and schools that use questionable marketing and recruitment tactics for veterans. Be sure to verify that your colleges of interest are accredited and that the Department of Veterans Affairs will pay for it.

4 Make a list

Identify at least 9 schools of interest. Break these 9 schools into three categories:

- 1) Likely = a high likelihood of being accepted
- 2) Possible = a possible / favorable chance
- 3) Reach = challenging, but I'm going for it!

Go to each school's website and look around. What is required for admissions? Is there an applicant profile? Is there specific information for military applicants? Pay attention to SAT / ACT scores, Grade Point Average, Essays and Letters of Recommendation.

5 Reach out to the Veterans Office and ask questions

Most colleges have a designated Veterans Office who can walk you through the application process and explain what a competitive candidate looks like. The Veterans Office can also provide information concerning specific campus and community resources ranging from disability and career services to housing and child care. Other helpful questions to pose to this office include:

- Can I get college credit for military training?
- Do I apply as a first year or transfer student?
- As a veteran, do I need to meet the same requirements as regular first year or transfer students?

- What information do I need to provide to apply?
- What if I can't afford the application fee?
- What if I need to brush up on basic academic skills?
- What should I do if I need help with the application process?

6 Apply

Whether you are a first time college student or a transfer student, you must fill out an application. Most colleges require you to apply online and several waive the application fee for veterans. Go to the school's website to determine the admission requirements and deadlines. Provide official transcripts and test scores along with a copy of your DD-214 and request an official Joint Services Transcript <https://jst.doded.mil/official.html> for credits you might have earned while in the service.

Many colleges require an essay as part of the admissions process. This is a great opportunity to discuss your military background. Be sure to include your branch of service, MOS, and noteworthy accomplishments such as deployments, NCO and supervisory skills, awards, and unique experiences. Also, it is helpful to include in your essay an explanation of how a degree from your school of interest will assist with fulfilling your larger personal and career goals.

7 Figure out money matters

All student veterans should apply for financial aid by filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) www.fafsa.gov. This aid can be for grants, loans and/or work-study. Because many veterans are eligible for several types of federal and state aid, determine the best benefit to use by contacting the Veterans Certifying Official at your school and by looking at the Department of Veterans Affairs GI Bill Comparison Tool <http://department-of-veterans-affairs.github.io/gi-bill-comparison-tool>

8 Connect with other veterans on campus and get involved

Veterans have a tendency to isolate on campus and often find that they don't relate easily to their younger civilian peers. To maximize your college experience, consider joining a student organization or club. Many colleges have a chapter of Student Veterans of America <http://www.studentveterans.org> and a Veterans Lounge. These are excellent options to meet other veterans, to do peer-to-peer networking, to learn about assistive resources, and to simply hang out with people who have been there and done that.

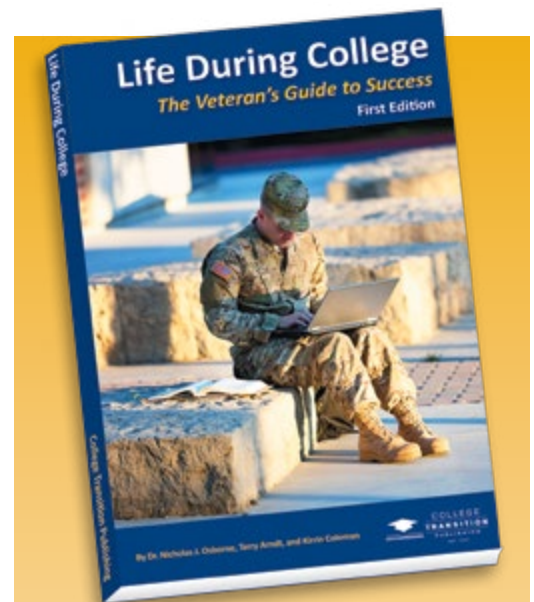
9 Understand cultural differences

Veterans arrive at college after having spent a good portion of time living and working within a unique environment. In addition to a military alphabet and collection of traditions, there is a distinct culture within the military, which can be characterized as highly structured with its own customs and policies. Some veterans speak of the military as a "different world" when compared to civilian society. While on campus, veterans are likely to experience these differences in culture.

- Veterans are often older and more likely to be first-generation learners
- Veterans are more likely to have at least one dependent, such as a spouse or child, while going to school
- Veterans are more likely to commute to campus and to be less involved in campus activities
- Veterans often work while attending school
- Veterans are more likely to have a documented disability
- Veterans often report feeling rusty or underprepared when going back to school

10 Seek out resources on college success

Several resources have been produced to assist students with the transition into and during college – specifically veterans. For example, **Life During College, *The Veteran's Guide to Success***, available from **College Transition Publishing**. Not only does this publication provide important tools on achieving academic success, but it also provides great information on achieving financial and career success as a college student. Seek out this publication, and others, to ensure you maximize the benefits a college education can provide.



For more information, resources and tools on assisting veterans achieve academic, financial and career success, visit:

www.CollegeTransitionPublishing.com



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