

## JOBS &amp; EDUCATION



Joint ROTC Color Guard,  
University of Colorado Boulder

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

# Making the Grade

Universities join with military to help veterans maximize GI Bill benefits

By Kit Bernardi

**A** BIG BENEFIT OF serving in the U.S. military is the ability to mature and gain a global perspective. Ironically, this also can present challenges for recently separated veterans transitioning into university campus culture. Although similar in age to their college student peers, veterans often enter school and career training programs with life experiences well beyond their years.

Joseph Garcia, executive director of

education service at the Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA), has prioritized working closely with schools to bridge the gap and “pay back veterans for their service.”

With a military and higher education career background, Garcia aims to strengthen communications with schools and support their veteran and military affairs departments. New initiatives are helping student veterans successfully adjust to campus life and use their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.

“The GI Bill’s macro effect is that

veterans contribute to a more diversified and qualified workforce, become integral members of their local communities, and add to the nation’s overall economic prosperity,” Garcia says.

## CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In November 2022, VBA launched a nationwide collaboration among school certifying officials from traditional higher education institutions of varying sizes, as well as flight and vocational schools. The group supplies feedback on how VBA can provide schools with resources and training.

Garcia says, “When we take care of the schools, they can better help the vets in the process.”

Additionally, Garcia’s education services team regularly conducts road shows and town hall meetings, inviting veterans and schools to share their thoughts on the department’s delivery of benefits and services.

## FAST-TRACKING APPLICATIONS AND FUNDING

Another VBA priority is continually modernizing the department’s platform for rapid response to student veteran applications and faster benefits delivery.

One approach is the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education

(VET TEC) program. Started in 2019 and running through April 2024, the pilot program funds coursework in high-demand technology jobs. Courses last about 95 days, and the average covered cost is approximately \$20,000.

VET TEC offers veterans and service members opportunities to train in data processing, information science, cybersecurity, media applications and computer software and programming at approximately 30 participating companies across the country. So far, VET TEC graduates have been employed by 3,200 companies.

In August, VBA implemented a more efficient method of making funds readily available to new VET TEC applicants. Should a veteran not complete the program that funding becomes “deobligated,” meaning the money is immediately available to a new VET TEC-approved applicant to start training right away. The median salary of a VET TEC graduate is \$64,000, Garcia says.

Initiatives such as VET TEC and the Digital GI Bill are part of what Garcia calls “the arc of change” modernizing the GI Bill of Rights to make it easier for veterans to utilize them. Here are six universities committed to creating a superior environment for student veterans:

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### University of Nevada, Las Vegas Las Vegas

The diversity of people serving in the U.S. military is reflected in the multi-cultural student veteran population at University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).

UNLV is rated a top-tier research university by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education and is part of the Alliance of Hispanic Serving Research Universities. Considered one of the nation's most diverse universities, one-third of the students are the first in their families to attend college, with 6 percent of those being student veterans and dependents.

Army veteran Ross Bryant is director of UNLV's Military & Veterans Services Center, which he helped start in 2012. To date, it has served 8,000 military-affiliated students.

The center's "inclusive, wrap-around services" work together to help student veterans not feel isolated from, but (instead) become active participants in, the college campus community and civilian life," Bryant says.

Full-circle support comes from the PAVE peer mentor team, VetSuccess, and VITAL healthcare, a partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs. In 2023, the university's College of Education launched a three-credit "Academic Basic Training" course for student veterans integrating academic study skills and career counseling with communications coaching and immersive social activities, such as attending concerts and college sporting events.

### University of Georgia Athens, Ga.

In 2023, the University of Georgia was named the nation's most military-friendly Tier-1 research institution by *Victory*, publisher of *G.I. Jobs* and *Military Spouse* magazines, earning top ranking for the third time in six years.

Of the 98 majors offered, student veterans' most popular undergraduate and graduate degrees of choice are business administration, science/math and education.

The Student Veterans Resource Center offers more than 25 programs and services for military-affiliated students, including orientations, scholarships, career coaching, mentorship and corporate partnerships.

The university's Student Veterans of America chapter and the Got Your Six elective course foster community, understanding and integration of veterans into



Operation Battle Born  
60-mile march,  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICES CENTER



University of Georgia student veterans  
placing flags on Veterans Day

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA STUDENT VETERANS ASSOCIATION



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campus culture. The Student Veterans Resource Center and UGA Special Collections Library's Oral History Project are building an audio archive of student veterans' stories about their military service and transition to civilian life.

### University of Colorado Boulder Boulder, Colo.

The University of Colorado Boulder is one of 71 research universities in the U.S. and Canada accredited by the Association of American Universities. This stature — not to mention the beautiful location — attracts a wide spectrum of military veterans.

"Annually, we certify more than \$25 million in veteran education benefits and this academic year gave out \$250,000 in scholarships and student aid," says Stew Elliott, director of veteran and military affairs.

A Navy SEAL veteran and Boulder native, Elliott established the department in 2013 with 500 veterans. This fall, it is supporting 1,400 student veterans and dependents, many pursuing degrees in business, engineering and integrated physiology.

Upperclassmen mentor first-year student veterans. Those completing the program receive a \$1,500 stipend. Nine full-time staff members, 11 work-study student veterans and several tutors work with student veterans in the Veteran and Military Affairs office.

### North Carolina State University Raleigh, N.C.

Established in 2016, North Carolina State's Jeffrey Wright Military and Veteran Services office works with a military-affiliated student population of nearly 2,400. The resource center was recently renovated and expanded.

The school's community outreach initiatives, business partnerships and a robust alumni network provide continued support for student veterans. The UNC System Special Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs services military-affiliated students through 51 specialized programs and events.

"Our staff continues to grow, as do our programs, to meet our military-affiliated students' needs," says director of military and veteran services Nick Drake, whose military career included duty in Operation Iraqi Freedom and more than 20 years in the Army Reserve and North Carolina Army National Guard.



Vice Chancellor D'Andrea Mull welcomes University of Colorado Boulder Veteran and Military Affairs Bridge Program attendees.

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North Carolina State University

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY JEFFREY WRIGHT MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICES

## STUDENT VETERANS BY THE NUMBERS

► The top five states where veterans use GI Bill education benefits in 2023: **Texas, California, Florida, Arizona and Virginia.**

► **Army veterans account for 44 percent** of separated service members using GI Bill education funds. The rates for the other service branches, in order: Navy (19.6 percent); Air Force (17.7 percent); Marines (17 percent); Coast Guard (1.6 percent).

► **Student veterans experience a 72 percent success rate in higher education**, and their grade point averages are generally 0.40 higher than their civilian peers.

SOURCES: Student Veterans of America; Veteran Benefits Administration

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Norfolk State University

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

**University of Idaho**  
*Moscow, Idaho*

The University of Idaho works with the NASA Idaho Space Grant Consortium to offer students space and STEM-related educational opportunities, internships and fellowships. A popular extension program, Harvest Heroes, trains veterans and their families in farming and gardening.

The General Amos Veterans Center has a study lounge and computers. A frequent newsletter keeps student veterans informed of job opportunities, scholarships, academic support programs and social events.

A Veterans Stories blog showcases students' experiences transitioning to civilian life and new careers.

**Norfolk State University**  
*Norfolk, Va.*

Norfolk State University is ranked as a Top 10 small public Military Friendly School by Victory. The 134-acre urban campus has faculty and counselors trained in working with veterans and has experienced military leaders on staff to support military-affiliated students who choose from more than 64 undergraduate majors, minors and graduate programs.

Popular majors are psychology, business, sociology, and biological sciences, and the school offers specialized educational opportunities in such career sectors as cybersecurity, materials science and nanotechnology-based manufacturing and product development.

General Amos  
Veterans Center,  
University of Idaho

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO