

WE Need You

The success of VA educational programs depends largely on you, as a certifying official. Your work on behalf of your institution in assisting VA students is critical in the processing and payment of veterans educational benefits. We could not do our job without you.



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Education Liaison Representatives

We now have two ELR's for Ohio to answer emails and phone calls. In the future, please use the email address:

OH.ELR.VBASTL@va.gov

One of us will be glad to answer your questions!



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Dual Certification

- Schools are obligated to submit student's enrollment "without delay"

In the SCO handbook (page 44) this is expressed as, "Schools are requested to submit certifications as early as possible in order to ensure that students receive their benefit payments in a timely manner, but must be submitted 30 days of the beginning of the term."

- An effective way to minimize student debts and adjustments is for schools to submit an enrollment certification with \$0.00, and then amend the tuition and fees after the end of the drop-add period. This practice is often called "Dual Certification."
- However, before an adjustment or termination of the enrollment is made, an "amended" certification must be submitted with the tuition and fees that are charged at the beginning of the term.
- Reductions must show what the tuition and fees are for the reduced hours for the beginning of the term.



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ANNUAL REPORTING FEES (ARF)

- The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, Public Law 115-48 (Section 304) provided the following changes, effective August 1, 2018, to Reporting Fees:
- Schools will receive \$15.00 per eligible student (Calendar year 2018 ARF will be paid in 2019).
- Eliminates the separate higher fee payment for institutions that offer advanced payment.
- If a school receives a Reporting Fee for 100 or more eligible students, then the Reporting Fee paid to the school cannot be used for, or merged with, the school's general fund.



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ANNUAL REPORTING FEES (ARF)

Compliance Procedures:

o Education Compliance Survey Specialists (ECSSs), Education Liaison Representatives (ELRs), and State Approving Agencies (SAAs) should continue to review how the Reporting Fee paid to the school are utilized during Compliance Survey visits.

- The surveyor will interview the primary School Certifying Official (SCO) and confirm how the school utilizes the Reporting Fee and document findings in the narrative report.
- Schools should document how they use the Reporting Fee (a formal ledger, receipts to/from a SCO training Conferences, Workshops, invoices for equipment for the school's Veteran Center, formal documentation the school uses the Reporting). The surveyor should review these documents and ensure the school has not spent the Reporting Fee on unapproved expenses.



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WORK STUDY

- Work-Study students must only be assigned tasks that require 100% performance of VA-related activities.
- Work-Study students are assigned to a specific work site per the application and Job Description and cannot perform work at any other location. Assigning Work-Study students to other locations is cause for withdrawal of the work site.



Work study

- At least some full-time center employees had been falsifying certifications to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs by overstating the amount of time actually worked by VA work-study students. The money being paid to the students for the work-study, which involved duties including helping other veteran students, was coming from the VA.
- According to a statement from the college, The President learned about the allegations on May 31 and reported them to state and federal officials the same morning. Later that afternoon, the statement says, the college had enough evidence to justify firing several employees, one who had been a full-time center staff member since July 1, 2016.



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CHAPTER 35/DEA

The new law decreases the amount of entitlement that new eligible individuals will receive under the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) program from 45 months to 36 months. This change applies to individuals who first enroll in programs of education on or after August 1, 2018. Individuals who first enrolled in a program of education prior to August 1, 2018, would still qualify for a maximum of 45 months of entitlement.



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Public Law 114-315 Section 404: Academic Progress and Outcome Measures

- Background: Department of Veterans Administration, Department of Education , and Department of Defense have collaborated for the last 3 years to develop and publish outcome measures. However, VA did not have the statutory authority to require schools to report this information. Mostly recently with the passage of the Blumenthal-Miller Act (Public Law 114-315), VA is authorized to make it a condition of approval for schools to submit information regarding academic progress for GI Bill students.
- Academic Progress includes:
 - Retention Rate
 - Persistence Rate
 - Transfer Rate
 - **Graduation Rate - Institute of Higher Learning (IHL) Schools**
 - **Certificate Completion - Non College Degree (NCD) Schools**

What does this mean?

It is mandatory by the law for educational institutions to report academic progress to VA

If educational institutions now fail to report student academic progress they risk losing VA approval for training.

Leveraging this data provides VA the ability to assist Veterans, Servicemembers and eligible dependents in making more informed educational decisions.



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ACADEMIC PROGRESS

As a condition of approval, schools are now required to report on outcome measures (graduation and completion dates), effective January 1, 2018.

- ***How far back should schools go to report graduation/completion data for Post-9/11 GI Bill?***
- ***January 1, 2018.***



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School Certifying Official (SCO)

Training Requirements

- Section 305 of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, also referred to as the “Forever GI Bill,” authorizes VA to establish training requirements for SCOs at “covered institutions”.
- Training requirements will be developed in consultation with the State approving agencies (SAAs).
- VA may disapprove any course of education offered by the institution if training requirements are not met.
- A "covered educational institution" would refer to an educational institution that has enrolled 20 or more individuals using VA educational assistance.
- This section will be effective on August 1, 2018



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Implementation Plan

- VA and SAAs are currently engaged in recurring conference calls to define specific training requirements.
- Training requirements must be met on an annual basis.
- VA will identify covered institutions and designated SCOs at those institutions.
- VA Form 8794, Designation of School Certifying Official(s), must be accurately maintained to ensure only SCOs performing certification duties are listed.



Implementation Plan

- Training will be deployed in phases, with specific requirements for new SCOs.
- First phase will be for new SCOs designated on or after August 1, 2018.
- New SCO training will be completed online and will include a basic overview of VA education benefits and SCO responsibilities.



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Implementation Plan

- Training requirements for all SCOs may be met by completing online micro-learning training modules, verified registration and attendance at SCO conferences, or a combination thereof.
- Subsequent phases will include diagnostic testing for experienced SCOs, the results of which may be used to satisfy annual training requirements.
- SCOs may be given specific training requirements based on the results of site visits conducted at an institution or after 100% audits.



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Current projects under way

- “85/15” Reporting Waiver Request
- Certifying Officials email addresses
- OJT/Apprenticeships VAONCE
- Training – new ELR and ECSS
- EForce – Ohio is on the test project
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“85/15” Reporting Waiver Request

The 85:15 percent ratio applied to all VA-eligible students under all education chapters, not just Chapter 33. The percentage of VA and Educational Institution supported students must be computed for each program separately. The results of the computation must be submitted no later than 30 days after the beginning of each term (quarter or semester, excluding summer sessions, or module). If your calendar is based on a school year instead of terms, these reports are required every 12 weeks. Sufficient records (by student, program, term) must be kept by the Educational Institution to allow the computation to be verified. Branches with separate administrative capability must compute and report the 85:15 percent ratio separately from the main campus. Compliance with the 85:15 ratio will be reviewed during compliance surveys.



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35 Percent Waivers

When 35 percent or less of a school's total enrollment receive VA benefits, the school and each branch with separate administrative capability may certify to that effect and receive a *waiver of periodic reporting* of the percentage of VA students enrolled in each program. The school must count all students receiving VA benefits on the VA side of the ratio. The certification is required only once. The waiver will remain in effect unless the school's *percentage of VA students rises above 35 percent*. If that occurs, the school must compute the 85-15 percent ratio for all courses and submit the results to the Education Liaison Representative.



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Calendar Week

- Currently it is understood that the term “Calendar Week “is defined as Sunday to Saturday, therefore schools that have classes starting on different weeks must report the appropriate start date for those specific classes.
- Effective any (Standard) term, quarter, or semester with a start date after the date of notification. The term “calendar week” will be understood to mean “seven calendar days.”
- If a student enrolls in a course and the actual first day that the student attends class is no later than the seventh calendar day of the term, then the beginning date of the certification will be the first day of the term, quarter, or semester in which the student is enrolled.
- If a student enrolls in a course and the actual first day that the student attends class is after the seventh calendar day of the term, then the beginning date of the award will be the actual date of the first class scheduled for that particular course.



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What to do if a student repeats a course

- Classes that are successfully completed may not be certified for again for VA purposes if they are repeated. However, if a student fails a class, or if a program requires a higher grade than the one achieved in a particular class for successful completion, that course class may be repeated and certified to VA again.
- Example 1, if a Nursing program requires a “B” or better in Biology, then that class may be repeated if a “B” or better was not earned. That requirement must be in the school catalog.
- **If a course is required for graduation, a student may repeat the course and be certified for it until it is successfully completed. No further information needs to be provided to VA regarding those courses.**



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What to do with a walk away

- Schools with an established attendance policy must monitor compliance with that policy, enforce the policy, and report terminations due to violations of the policy to VA. However, absences that do not violate the established attendance policy don't need to be reported. Schools that don't have an established attendance policy are not required to report changes in attendance.



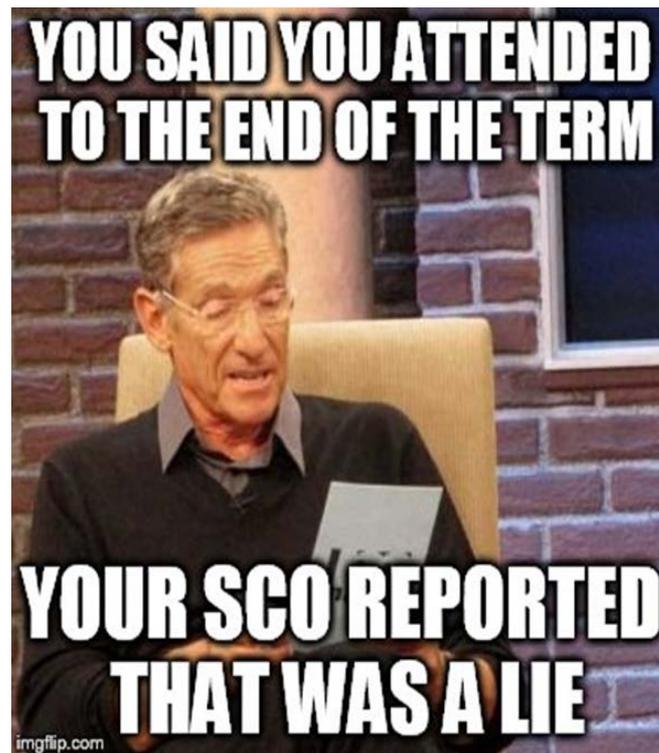
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What to do with a walk away

The last date of attendance during a period of enrollment does not need to be reported if a student *completes the enrollment period* with a punitive grade *and does not violate the school's standards of conduct, progress, or attendance during that term.*



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Earned 'F' Grades: To report, or not to report?

Question: If a student completes a period of enrollment with a failing punitive grade (i.e. an F) assigned, does the school need to report the last date of attendance during that enrollment period?

Answer: No. The last date of attendance during a period of enrollment does not need to be reported if a student completes the enrollment period with a punitive grade and does not violate the school's standards of conduct, progress, or attendance during that term.

Question: Are schools required to report any changes in attendance, or only those that violate the schools attendance policy?

Answer: Schools with an established attendance policy must monitor compliance with that policy, enforce the policy, and report terminations due to violations of the policy to VA without delay. However, absences that do not violate the established attendance policy don't need to be reported. Schools that don't have an established attendance policy are not required to report changes in attendance.

Earned 'F' Grades: To report, or not to report?

- **Question:** But the SCO Handbook states, “If a student completes the term with all “F” and/or non-punitive grades, then determine and report the actual last date of attendance for each course and, if required, terminate the student for unsatisfactory progress.” (page 73) Doesn’t this say I have to report a last day of attendance if they earn ALL “F” grades?
- **Answer:** Yes, IF you have an enforceable attendance policy. If you do not have an attendance policy, you will likely have to report them as unsatisfactory, earned on the last day of the course.
- **Question:** Has this always been the rule?
- **Answer:** No. The VA released an advisory November 15, 2013 to help clarify VA’s interpretation of 38 CFR 21.4203 and 38 CFR 21.4253.

Advisory: Questions and Answers on School Reporting Requirements for Changes in Attendance.

November 15, 2013

I. **Background:** VA’s regulations covering school reporting requirements are contained in section 21.4203 of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations. Subsection (d), in particular, states that “When a veteran or eligible person interrupts or terminates his or her training for any reason, including unsatisfactory conduct or progress, or when he or she changes the number of hours of credit or attendance, this fact must be reported to VA by the school in a form specified by the Secretary [emphasis added].” However, section 21.4253 of the same part only requires accredited schools to maintain attendance records if the school has an established attendance policy.

II. **Issue:** Regional Processing Office (RPO) personnel that conduct compliance surveys are unclear as to whether the regulations require all schools to report all changes in attendance, or only schools that have an attendance policy. The RPOs have asked a number of questions regarding attendance reporting requirements. The questions and answers are shown below.

III. **Questions & Answers**

Note: The questions and answers below deal with requirements for schools to report any/all changes in attendance. Reporting requirements for non-attendance due to an interruption (e.g. a leave of absence), changes in enrollment (e.g. voluntary or involuntary reductions or terminations), violations of established policies for attendance or conduct, or for corrections to information previously certified in error are separate issues and remain unchanged.

Question 1: Do the regulations require all schools, including those that are accredited and don’t have an attendance policy, to report changes in attendance?

Answer 1: No. Only schools that have an attendance policy are required to report pertinent changes in attendance.

Question 2: Are schools required to report any changes in attendance, or only those that violate the schools attendance policy?

Answer 2: Schools with an established attendance policy must monitor compliance with that policy, enforce the policy, and report terminations due to violations of the policy to VA without delay. However, absences that do not violate the established attendance policy don’t need to be reported. Schools that don’t have an established attendance policy are not required to report changes in attendance.



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AUTHORITY

- Schools and training establishments must make records of progress and training, tuition and charges, and other records available upon request by a duly authorized representative of the Government. (38 U.S.C. 3690(c))
- Examination of records: In administering benefits payable under 38 U.S.C. **Chapter 31**, THIS WILL INCLUDE GRADES.



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DD214

- Most veteran's records are stored at the National Archives and Records Administration's National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records (NPRC-MPR OR NPRC), **St. Louis, Missouri.**
- However, if you were separated from the service after 1995, your military branch may have your records.
- Regardless of what anyone tells you, your records **ARE NOT** available online.



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WEAMS REPORT – VA Form 22-1998

- VA BENEFICIARIES ARE ENROLLED IN AND PURSUING THE APPROVED PROGRAM AS CERTIFIED.
- WHAT TO DO WHEN THE SCO RECEIVES THE WEAMS REPORT?
- Please look the document over and let the ELR/SAA know if there are corrections that need to be made.



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WEAMS REPORT – VA Form 22-1998

- IF THE DEGREE, COURSE OR PROGRAM IS NOT IN WEAMS, THE VETERANS CLAIMS EXAMINER WILL CONTACT THE SCHOOL OFFICAL AND THE ELR FOR FOLLOW-UP. IN SOME CASES THE VCE MAY DENY THE CLAIM AND SEND A LETTER TO THE VETERAN/BENEFICIARY OF THE DENIAL.



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EFORCE



Putting Veterans First

SalVA



U.S. Department
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forward



JUNE 2018

Marie George, VA Salesforce Team



Veterans Benefits Administration

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QUESTIONS

