



## **Augusta University's Office of Military and Veterans Services** *Improving Transitions from Military Service to Program Completion*

Helping military and veteran students to persist and graduate is all about partnerships at Augusta University.

While branches of the Armed Forces have been encouraging service members to complete programs of study for many years, and have tied degree completion to promotional opportunities/salary increases, STEM certifications and degrees have become vitally important in mastering the technological skills in many military occupation specializations. Augusta University provides excellent educational degrees and certifications in a variety of STEM disciplines, and the Office of Military & Veterans Services (MVS) at AU can facilitate the use of Department of Defense and Veterans Administration educational benefits.

While most service members or veterans receive educational benefits, there are many benefit variations. The most frequently encountered benefits are VA Educational Benefits, Tuition Assistance (TA), and Health Professions Scholarship Programs. More than 500 students currently utilize VA benefits which are divided into several chapters. Students may be eligible to utilize one or more chapters; however, once a chapter is selected, the decision may be irrevocable. For this reason, it's very important that students receive correct information about the duration and type of support they are entitled to receive by chapter. Children and spouses of veterans who are deceased or 100% disabled as a result of a service-related incident are eligible to receive Chapter 35 benefits. Some active duty service members transfer their G. I. Bill to spouses and/or children and MVS assists approximately 165 dependents using their VA benefits. The Office of Military & Veterans Services employs a VA School Certifying Official who is a VA benefits expert to assist students and certify students' VA benefits.

Tuition Assistance is available to active duty, reservists, and National Guard service members under certain circumstances. Recently, the Department of Defense restricted use of this benefit to 16 semester hours per calendar year. Some service members are no longer eligible to participate in the program until they complete their first year of service, achieve a promotional status, or complete various training requirements. AU active duty service members rely on the counseling services of the MVS Tuition Assistance Coordinator.

The VA School Certifying Official also manages the Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP) for each branch of the service. In 2014, Augusta University graduated one medical doctor, seven dentists, and several graduate students from allied health professions programs such as nursing and physical therapy. Approximately 50 students participate in HPSP each year. AU degree programs in Clinical Laboratory Science and Nuclear Medicine accept transfer credit for veterans who have completed training and can provide documentation that they are certified as laboratory or nuclear medical technicians at a military medical installation. Other types of military training in the Signal and Cyber Corps may also be accepted as transfer credit in IT and other computer science degree programs. In 2016, Augusta University held the grand opening of the Cyber Institute which was awarded a Certificate of Academic Excellence in Cyber Education by the Department of Defense. The Institute and its multi-disciplinary faculty offer the highest instruction and support for students completing IT degrees and Cyber Defender Certifications.

In addition to benefit certification and assistance, The Office of Military & Veterans Services provides a Military Resource Center (MRC) for military affiliated students. The MRC includes a large lounge with a television, refrigerator, microwave, coffee pot, group study room, computer lab and library which includes testing manuals, text books and leisure reading materials. Approximately 300 students use this facility each month. The MVS employs a cadre of VA Work-Study students. They assist with administrative duties, Vet 2 VET mentoring, tutoring, and manage a Veterans Bi-monthly Library Discussion Group.

The Office of Military & Veterans Services collaborates with these on-campus partners to provide student services:

- The Department of Military Science
- The Counseling Center
- The Career Center
- Student Health Services
- The Athletic Department
- The Office of Government Relations
- Disability Services
- The Study Abroad Office
- The Reese Library
- The Bursar's Office
- First Year Experience
- AU colleges and academic departments.

Current initiatives include providing Green Zone Training Program for faculty and staff on the AU campuses; building an endowed scholarship for military and veteran students, and participating in the NCAA Division II/ Military Partnership Pilot Program with AU Athletics and Ft. Gordon. MVS staff members continuously research best practices and implement those that seem a fit for our veterans as funding or resources become available.

Off campus partnerships include:

- The Augusta Warrior Project
- Greater Augusta Employment Council
- The Veterans Transition Center
- The Vet Center, Education Services Division and other offices at Ft. Gordon, VFW of Harlem, Georgia, and The Association of the United States Army.

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