Education Service
School Certifying Official Webinar | April 26, 2013

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Agenda

• Today we will discuss Public Law 112-249, better known as “The Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012”: its basic points and its major effects on schools and Veterans.

• We will discuss the Yellow Ribbon Program: its basic points and timeline as well as changes effective this year.

• We will also discuss VA’s Work Study program and expiring provisions.

• We will then answer questions you submitted prior to this webinar. You may submit questions during this webinar which will be answered at a later date.
Housekeeping

• Participants may submit questions and feedback during the webinar. We want this to be beneficial for you.

• Answers to questions will be provided when a copy of the webinar is uploaded to [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov).

• To find the webinars on the website visit [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov) > click on “School Resources” > then select “Education Benefit Presentations” from the Certification and Training box.

• A copy of January’s webinar and Q&A are also available online.

• For any specific or situational questions you may have, please be sure to contact your ELR or call the SCO Hotline.
On behalf of the Under Secretary for Benefits Ms. Allison Hickey, the Deputy Under Secretary for the Office of Economic Opportunity Mr. Curtis Coy, I welcome you to our continuing series of webinars.

We are here to discuss ways in which we can both serve Veteran students better and make the job easier for all of us involved.
Public Law 112-249 contains several provisions that affect SCOs, here is a listing of the major provisions:

• VA will publish feedback on IHLs regarding the quality of instruction, recruiting practices, and post-graduation employment placement.

• VA will develop methods to provide Veterans and Servicemembers with information regarding postsecondary education and training opportunities.

• VA will provide an online tool that allows Veterans or Servicemembers to assess whether they are ready to engage in postsecondary education and allow them to search for a suitable institution.
Public Law 112-249 (continued)

VA will develop a centralized mechanism for tracking and publishing positive and negative feedback from students and SAAs regarding the quality of instruction, recruiting practices, and post-graduation employment placement

- Feedback will be accepted from students and SAAs.
- IHLs will be able to verify feedback and address issues before the feedback is published.
- Only feedback deemed relevant by the VA will be published (e.g. “my payment is late” doesn’t qualify as relevant feedback).
- We are partnering with DoJ to submit cases for review and possible investigation.
- We anticipate accepting complaints on our website and hotline by early summer 2013.
- A more robust feedback system, capable of accepting positive and negative feedback is being developed.
VA will develop methods to provide Veterans and Servicemembers with information regarding postsecondary education and training opportunities, this information will include:

• An explanation of the different types of accreditation, the institution’s accreditation status and the accrediting agency contact information.

• In the interim we embedded College Navigator into gibill.va.gov so you can use ED’s tool to compare institutions inside the GI Bill domain.
• We’re building a Comparison Tool with a GI Bill estimator that will let Veterans see how much they could potentially receive by what Institution they attend.

• We anticipate having information about the institution including:
  - Public, private nonprofit, or proprietary for-profit status
  - Relevant SAA contact information
  - Whether the institution participates in any programs under Title IV
  - Estimated Tuition and Fees
  - Median amount of debt from Federal loans
  - Cohort default rate
  - Total enrollment, graduation rate, and retention rate
  - Whether the institution provides students with technical, academic, and other support
  - Credit transfer policies
Public Law 112-249 (continued)

VA will provide an online tool that allows Veterans or Servicemembers to assess whether they are ready to engage in postsecondary education.

- We conducted a market survey to search for the best available tool.

- Based on the market survey results, VA determined that CareerScope is the likely preferred commercially available off-the-shelf online tool that provides an assessment of academic readiness and vocational aptitude.

- For the purpose of vocational and educational planning, CareerScope is an evaluation tool already used by VR&E’s Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to help determine the academic readiness and other educational/vocational services needed for a Veteran, Servicemember, or dependent.

- This assessment tool is also widely used by career and guidance counselors in IHLs for the purposes of educational planning. This commercially available online product allows the Veteran, Servicemember, and/or dependent to easily access and self-administer the online tool.

- VA anticipates offering a pilot CareerScope tool to future students by late summer 2013.
Yellow Ribbon Program

• Created through passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008

• Only available for IHLs in the U.S. or branches of an Institution outside of the U.S.

• If the costs exceed the in-state tuition and fees for a public school (or the national annual maximum rate for private school) the school may elect to voluntarily participate in the program

• The institution can make contributions for up to 50% of the costs exceeding the in-state tuition and fees or national maximum and VA will match these contributions

• Only available to individuals entitled to the 100% educational assistance benefit rate; meaning it’s...
  • Only available to Veterans and their transferees, (child transferees of Servicemembers may be eligible if the Servicemember is qualified at the 100% rate)

• Active Duty members and their spouses with transferred entitlement are not eligible
Yellow Ribbon Program (continued)

- VA will issue any Yellow Ribbon Program payments directly to the school along with the normal tuition and fee payments

- Entitlement charge is not affected by Yellow Ribbon Program participation

- More information can be found on the School Resources page on the GI Bill website

- Preparing for academic year 2013-14 with “open season” for the Yellow Ribbon Program now through May 15, 2013

- All agreements are now “open ended” meaning if there are no changes from your participation last year, no further information is necessary

- A list of schools participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program for the 2013 – 2014 academic year will be posted to the website on June 15, 2013
Work Study

• On March 25th we asked RPOs to hold requests for extending work study contracts beyond June 30, 2013 for the following activities:
  ▪ Outreach services to Servicemembers and Veterans furnished under the supervision of a State approving agency employee
  ▪ Hospital and domiciliary care and medical treatment to veterans in a State home when VA pays an allowance to the State for such care
  ▪ Any activity relating to the administration of a national cemetery or a State Veterans’ cemetery

• These provisions will expire on June 30, 2013.

• There is pending legislation to extend these work study activities.

• However, unless new legislation is signed into law, VA has no authority to pay work-study benefits for these activities beyond June 30, 2013.

• “VA-related” positions can include helping at Veteran offices at IHLs. It’s critical the work performed relate back to VA benefits.
More information

• Tuition Assistance Reinstated

• We acknowledge your questions on resuming debt collection from tuition, fee, and Yellow Ribbon payments however we cannot address these until a revised policy has been developed, approved and distributed to IHLs first

• New DoD transferability policy
Questions

Q: Will the response time on Right Now Web improve? Or is Right Now Web being phased out?

A: Response time is a function of incoming inquiries and the number of customer service representatives available. VBA is currently reviewing the possibility of implementing a new integrated customer relationship management solution, but RNW will continue to be used for inquiries.

Q: Can I submit documents to the VA via Right Now Web?

A: Right Now Web was not intended to accept documents that should be submitted via other means such as VA-ONCE.

Q: Is the deadline for the VRAP program April 2014 whether the veteran has used all their 12 months or not?

A: All VRAP payments will terminate on March 31, 2014 regardless of program completion.
Questions (continued)

Q: We have a Truck Driving program that lasts 8 weeks and several VRAP students have gotten COEs for Truck Driving. Will they be able to change to another program to finish out their 12 months of eligibility?

A: If they complete a program of education under VRAP they are eligible to enroll in another program in the same high demand occupation.

Q: Can the VA just send the tuition & fee payment to the Veteran instead of the school, this would make things a lot easier in the case of training time changes?

A: No, the Post-9/11 GI Bill specifies that tuition & fee payments are to be sent directly to the school on the student’s behalf.

Q: When will SCO’s have view access to eBenefits? If not anytime soon, can we at least have eligibility/award visible in VA ONCE for all benefits?

A: We would like to see both of these happen however funding has been allocated for delivery of our new automated processing system in lieu of these changes.
Questions (continued)

Q: When will VA put in writing that the reporting fee is “required” instead of “highly recommend” that these funds be utilized for the SCO to participate in state, regional and national trainings/conferences?

A: The law reads: “Any reporting fee paid an educational institution or joint apprenticeship training committee after the date of the enactment of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2011 shall be utilized by such institution or committee solely for the making of certifications required under this chapter or chapter 31, 34, or 35 of this title or for otherwise supporting programs for veterans.”

We recommend you confer with your ELR and use your best professional judgment to decide how to allocate funding fees in accordance with the law.

Q: Will VA ONCE ever have the capability to interface with the school programs such as SCT’s Banner Production?

A: No.
**Q:** Under YR program, why does the student get any tuition and fees (t/f) payments? This happens when we pay out the entire T/F national cap and then student makes adjustments to a prior session in that academic year and charges the student a T/F Debt (say $1,500), so then when VA processes another session in that same academic year, the computer system knows that we already paid the maximum T/F payment and so they pay the student the up to the debt amount that the student had ($1,500). Then the school has to get the $1,500 from the student to help cover T/F. The computer system needs to be changed. T/F doesn’t belong to the student.

**A:** The tuition and fees do belong to the student. They are paid to the school on the student’s behalf, but ultimately are the student’s benefits.
Other Requests:

• “I would really like to have some training on processing 1606 and 1607 certifications.”
  – The SCO Handbook and online training available on the GI Bill website has information on 1606 and 1607.

• “Suggesting a change to the drop processing procedure. Change the drop processing from 30 days to 45 days or only count the duty days that certifying officials work at their school to get the 30 days for drops.”

• “I feel that a directory of whom to call in case of specific needs should be put together and circulated to us, so that we can better serve the needs of our veterans, who at most times become quite dissatisfied if they can't get an answer quickly.”
  – Your ELR is your point of contact and is able to answer questions.

• (I have) a hard time contacting my ELR via phone or email.
  – We highly recommend you use the SCO hotline for technical questions and claim related questions.

• “It would be extremely helpful for the VA to insist that the processing agents make it a habit to read the messages we provide in the "remarks" section so that certifications are processed correctly.”
1) **Question:** Can we use VA Work Study funds for a veteran to go onto military bases to promote our IHL?

   **Answer:** No, Work Study may only be used for VA-related activities.

2) **Question:** You stated that work-study contracts for some activities are scheduled to expire on June 30, 2013. To clarify is that only for those Work Study participants who are not in outreach, hospitals and national cemeteries? May those working at IHLs with SCOs be extended beyond June 30, 2013?

   **Answer:** That is correct.

3) **Question:** Good morning - we noticed in the 2013-14 Yellow Ribbon agreement that there is a new question 14 - asking if we as an institution intend to comply with the Principles of Excellence (POE). If we chose to sign an open-ended agreement last year and did not intend to make any changes this year, does this tacitly imply that we will be complying with the POE?

   **Answer:** No it does not. For more information about the POE program you can contact us at principles.excellence@va.gov.
4) **Question:** Will the Yellow Ribbon Program be available to Fry Scholarship recipients in the future?

   **Answer:** We don’t anticipate that happening and there is no pending legislation to do such. This can only happen is there is a statutory change.

5) **Question:** We are having a lot of difficulty reaching our ELR and when calling the hotline we get different answers depending on who you speak with and when. What should we do to ensure we are getting the correct information out to our students?

   **Answer:** You can try sending your question through Right Now Web if you are having issues the SCO hotline. Right Now Web has a priority queue for school certifying officials which will ensure speedy service. Be sure to use the [SCO Handbook](#) to become a subject matter expert on the GI Bill.

   We will definitely look into the inconsistency of answers as an issue that can be addressed by better training. We will also review the guidelines about what student information can be discussed with SCOs and consider modifying them.
Questions Received During Webinar

6) **Question:** Can you name a good professional resource that will help us get information from other SCOs?

**Answer:** The National Association of Veterans Program Administrators (NAVPA) and the Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists (WAVES) come to mind as great resources, there are also several regional and state information resources available. Contact your ELR or see the “Conferences & Events” page for more information.

7) **Question:** How are payments issued when a student is taking classes at two schools? For example: taking one class at a school as a guest student, and taking another class at another school which is the school granting the degree.

**Answer:** Each school will have to send a separate enrollment certification, one as the primary school and one as secondary school.

8) **Question:** Can Chapter 1607 be used with TA?

**Answer:** Yes, Federal Tuition Assistance and REAP benefits can be paid simultaneously if the student is enrolled at one-half time or above.
Questions Received During Webinar

9) **Question**: It would be awesome if schools could get the ability to certify top-up that way you guys wouldn't have to deal with the burden of that paper-intensive process

   **Answer**: Schools should submit an Enrollment Certification for active duty students who are receiving Federal Tuition Assistance and wish to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill for the out-of-pocket charges. The amount of the Federal Tuition Assistance should be factored into the net charges submitted to VA. Active duty students using TA and Montgomery GI Bill benefits must continue to send the paper Tuition Assistance authorization forms to VA. This is detailed in the [SCO Handbook](#) (pages 81-83).

10) **Question**: We have been told by ELR's that we are to submit information about students on probation via Right Now Web (RNW), is that still correct or are we prohibited from submitting these documents via RNW?

    **Answer**: That direction is still correct; however you should refrain from submitting other documentation, specifically enrollment certifications via RNW. If the student requests submission of their documents such as DD214s, you should direct them to submit the documents themselves via RNW. Please continue to submit probation info via Right Now Web.
Questions Received During Webinar

11) Question: Will there be any VA standard remarks for processing "walkaway F grades" and non-punitive F grades (when the school has a policy that repeat F grades don't impact GPA)? I was informed in a compliance audit that I need to report these and I consistently get calls from the RPO regarding what they are etc.

   Answer: VA-Once has standard remarks for punitive and non-punitive grades. Without having more detail, a “walkaway F grade” sounds like a punitive grade and should be reported as such. For non-punitive grades (that don’t affect the GPA) no VA payment is due.

12) Question: Why will VA-Once not allow for multiple terms to be entered? The old link is not working.

   Answer: We are aware of some issues using VA-Once with the Internet Explorer 10 browser. People have reported that problems were resolved by using a different browser or older version of Internet Explorer. We are working to resolve these problems and recommend using an alternative browser and apologize for the inconvenience.
Questions Received During Webinar

13) **Question:** There is a rumor that VRAP will be extended, could you expand on that possibility?

   **Answer:** As you know, an act of Congress is necessary to extend VRAP. There are currently a few proposals to extend VRAP. They vary based on the length of the time extension and whether or not they increase participation. It’s too early in the process to discuss likelihood of passage or specific provisions.

14) **Question:** If a VRAP student begins training in June 2013, his payments will stop on March 31, 2014? Are the VRAP veterans aware of this information? I hope so.....

   **Answer:** Yes, VA has notified VRAP beneficiaries in their award letter and by email. We routinely promote the fact that the program will end March 31, 2014.

15) **Question:** Are the VRAP veterans made award of this so they know their pay will STOP?

   **Answer:** Yes. This is included in both the certificate of eligibility and award letter for VRAP.
16) Question: When will VA put in writing that the reporting fee is “required” instead of “highly recommend” that these funds be utilized for the SCO to participate in state, regional and national trainings/conferences?

The issue is that the "powers to be" at the institution is not using the fees for these reason. It goes into a "general" fund and we never see it, the schools want us to put some teeth into the regulation.

Answer: The law states: “Any reporting fee paid an educational institution or joint apprenticeship training committee after the date of the enactment of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2011 shall be utilized by such institution or committee solely for the making of certifications required under this chapter or chapter 31, 34, or 35 of this title or for otherwise supporting programs for veterans.”

We don’t want to arbitrarily limit schools to a specific list of things toward which the funds can be used. However, the items on the list of “highly recommended” uses are in line with the law. If you are unsure whether some other use of the reporting fees is permissible, contact your ELR.
17) Question: Why does the student get any tuition and fees (T&F) payments? This happens when we pay out the entire T&F national cap and then student makes adjustments to a prior session in that academic year and charges the student a T&F Debt (say $1,500), so then when VA processes another session in that same academic year, the computer system knows that we already paid the maximum T/F payment and so they pay the student the up to the debt amount that the student had ($1,500). Then the school has to get the $1,500 from the student to help cover T/F. The computer system needs to be changed. T/F doesn’t belong to the student.

Answer: We don’t pay T&F benefits to the student, we restore benefits and apply them toward a student’s T&F debt. This occurs when:

1. We have paid the maximum amount to the school for the academic year, and
2. The student makes an adjustment leading to a student debt, and
3. The student then enrolls (or increases enrollment) during the same academic year leading to a restoration of benefits.

Since we have already paid the annual maximum amount of tuition and fees to the school, we cannot pay any more because of a student debt; that would be illegal. Consequently, any award amounts generated a later enrollment (or increase in enrollment) for the same academic year is applied toward the previously established student debt.
Questions Received During Webinar

18) **Question:** How does the Treasury Offset Program (TOP) work for school debts?

**Answer:** Once debts are referred to TOP, VA is no longer collecting the debt and control of the collection is managed by the Department of Treasury. The TOP process will capture funds payable to the school issued by other government entities. When an offset occurs Treasury will also assess a $17.00 administrative fee. Once funds are captured, they are forwarded to VA’s Debt Management Center (DMC) who is responsible for applying the funds to the school debt. Additional information on TOP, and contact information, can be found at the following website [http://fms.treas.gov/debt/top.html](http://fms.treas.gov/debt/top.html)

*NOTE:* The process of referring a debt to TOP takes at least 120 days. During this timeframe the school will receive one letter from the RPO of jurisdiction and three letters from DMC.

19) **Question:** How can a school dispute a debt?

**Answer:** The best way to submit a dispute is to email the Debt Management Center (DMC) at dmcedu.vbaspl@va.gov. Schools may also call DMC’s toll free number and speak to a customer service representative or mail a written dispute to DMC. DMC’s contact information can be found online at: [http://www.va.gov/debtman/](http://www.va.gov/debtman/).

DMC will automatically suspend collection of a school debt if a dispute is received prior to referral to TOP. The school will be notified of VA’s decision regarding the dispute, and DMC will continue the collection action if appropriate.
Questions Received During Webinar

20) Question: I am having issues with the TOP program. We had funds withheld from our university in error on the VA's part. The debts were actually paid but the monies were still withheld. The monies have since been sent back to our university but no one can tell us what fund it needs to be applied to now. I have contacted Treasury, Debt Management, and VA and I keep getting passed around in a circle. Please help me!!

Answer: If you want to find out the specific payment from which the offset was deducted, contact the Treasury Offset Program Call Center using the contact information at http://fms.treas.gov/debt/top.html. It is strongly suggested that schools wait until they receive the first notification of indebtedness and then return the funds directly to DMC. By doing so, mishaps like this will be avoided.
Best Practices

1. Be proactive. Keep your students informed.

2. As a SCO, you must have a working relationship with your Bursar’s Office (business office). Keep your Bursar’s Office informed of any and all VA changes that will impact payments to the school.

3. Work with your VA ELR, ECSS and the State Approving Agency. They are a great resource!!!

4. For new SCOs, don’t be afraid to work with your VA ELR and senior SCOs. Networking with other schools will prove to be beneficial. A new SCO also needs to keep in mind that not everyone will be a good SCO. If you are unable to handle the stress of the workload as well as people in your face and possibly yelling at you, you may want to rethink about being an SCO.

5. Work with your Registrar (records office) to automate notifications of withdraws and changes in VA recipients enrollment status. With the increase of students participating in the different VA education benefit programs, automating your school’s processes will be a blessing.
Best Practices (continued)

6. Don’t ignore your Payment Legends or Debt Management Letters. Don’t assume payments from the VA are always correct. If they do not match what the school has reported to VA, don’t hesitate to question VA.

7. Don’t believe everything you hear from the student(s). Ask them to get VA’s response in writing, using RNW tool.

8. Remember that VA does not recognize hybrid or blended courses; they know in-residence or independent study. The SCO must calculate the percent (%) of in-seat time to know whether the hybrid/blended class qualifies for in-residence reporting.

9. If you can, conduct a self-audit. Don’t wait until the Compliance Survey for you to start reviewing your files.
Closing Remarks

• Thank you for attending this webinar, we plan to hold webinars on a quarterly basis.

• A synopsis of this webinar will be available on the School Resources page of our website.

• There is a new “News for School Officials” webpage with information specifically for SCOs, it can easily be accessed by clicking on the “MORE” link within any of the boxes on the School Resources page.