

Tips For College Veterans

These tips are courtesy of the National Association of Veterans' Programs Administrators (NAVPA). These are their ten best suggestions for returning veterans thinking about going to college as reported to US News and World Report.

1. **Start by applying.** Whether you are a first time college student or a transfer student, you must fill out an application. Go to the school's website to find the requirements and deadlines. Provide transcripts and test scores as needed and your DD-214 for credits you might have earned while in the service. Take a tour of the campus—either on the web or in person. If you don't know where you want to go, try the school finder at www.military.com or the “education” tab on www.GIJobs.com to get started.
2. **Meet the School Certifying Official.** Find the Veterans Office on campus and introduce yourself. You will be asked to provide various documents and complete different forms so your enrollment can be certified to the VA.
3. **Get your GI Bill benefits.** There are many different programs and a wide variety of education benefits offered by the VA. The Post 9/11 GI Bill (including Transfer of Benefits), Montgomery GI Bill, the Yellow Ribbon Program, and Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, to name a few. Additionally, individual states offer varying opportunities to National Guardsmen (some of the benefits come with different levels of eligibility). Whether you are a reservist, in the National Guard, or on active duty, you should check the VA website or discuss your benefits with the school's certifying official. You can find a wealth of information -- as well as the application for benefits -- at the GI Bill website.
4. **Apply for financial aid.** All students can apply for financial aid by filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by going to <http://www.fafsa.gov/>. This aid can be for grants, loans and/or work-study.
5. **Apply for scholarships.** There are many types of scholarships available based on merit, academics, or athletics, as well as private and general scholarships by area of interest. Some schools offer scholarships specifically for veterans. You just have to look. Check the school's website and always remember: do not pay for any scholarship application.
6. **Find a place to live.** The key to being placed in housing is making sure you indicate you are a veteran on all forms. By doing so, you may be able to select a roommate from the beginning. Otherwise you might be assigned to a room with traditional students (just out of high school), which can be awkward with your recent military experience. Many colleges have housing set aside for veterans; make use of it.
7. **Get an advisor.** Every student is assigned to an advisor. Some schools have advisors specifically for veterans; smaller schools may not, but curriculum is standard for majors at each school. Interaction with the advisor will assist you in developing a suitable educational plan, making your course selections, and determining your major. This person will get to know you and empower you in decision-making skills in education, career, and life choices.
8. **Take the CLEP.** The College Level Examination Program is a series of exams you can take to test your college-level knowledge on what you have learned through on-the-job training, professional development, etc. There is a wide range of exams both general and subjective, worth up to six credits each. The cost of a CLEP exam is fractional compared to the cost of tuition and fees. It could assist in skipping general introductory courses, general education classes or could even demonstrate your ability in a foreign language.
9. **Connect with other veterans on campus.** Veterans Centers are popping up on many campuses. They are the place to meet other veterans, to do peer-to-peer networking, to connect student veterans with resources, and to help you to get involved—or simply hang out. If there is no center on campus, start one. Student Veterans of America can assist you in forming a chapter at your school.
10. **Get career training and develop skills.** Career services and job placement are available for you while getting your education. Résumé writing and mock interviews are offered. You can be placed in an internship or co-op program related to your career goal and earn college credits as well as a stipend or small paycheck.