

**BLUEFIELD COLLEGE
HANDBOOK FOR VETERANS**

GENERAL INFORMATION

VA Phone Numbers:

Education Information:	1-888-442-4551
General VA Information:	1-800-827-1000

BC Veteran's Coordinator:

Catherine L. Matherly
Email: cmatherly@bluefield.edu
Phone: 276-326-4348

BLUEFIELD COLLEGE VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE

The Veterans Affairs Office is located on the main campus of Bluefield College. For information, please come by the office during regular business hours or call Catherine L. Matherly at (276)326-4348.

The role of the Bluefield College Veterans Affairs Office is to assist the student in pursuing the student's educational, professional, or vocational objective. The VA Coordinator is available to answer questions about Veteran educational benefits, to certify enrollments for the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and monitor student degree plans and academic progress.

Although BC works to ensure DVA regulations are satisfied, the College has no authority to make judgments regarding benefit status. Only the Department of Veteran Affairs may determine the eligibility of individuals for veteran educational benefits and approve or disapprove payment of benefits.

The National Toll-Free number for the Department of Veterans Affairs for education benefits is **1-888-442-4551**. All other VA questions should be directed to **1-800-827-1000**. They may be reached M-F, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM.

The BC Veteran Affairs Office highly recommends that veterans take all original DD Form 214's to a County Courthouse to be placed on record. This enables the veteran to obtain a certified copy at any time in the future, should the original become damaged or lost. The student's DD Form 214 is a valuable document and may be needed in future years. Guard it carefully.

APPLYING FOR EDUCATION BENEFITS

First-time applicants can complete the online application at www.gibill.va.gov or print and complete the application from the Education Forms link at the same website. Printed applications should be mailed directly to the Department of Veteran Affairs Eastern Regional Processing Office, P.O. Box 4616 Buffalo, NY 14240-4616

The following documents may also be submitted to the VA Eastern Regional Office to expedite processing:

- Veterans must submit copies of all DD Form 214's.
- Students in Active Reserves should obtain DD Form 2384 (Notice of Basic Eligibility) from their Reserve Unit.
- Veterans with benefits remaining under the old GI Bill (Chapter 34) must bring original documents proving status of dependents (birth certificates, marriage license, adoption papers, etc.)
- Dependents and spouses of 100% disabled or deceased veterans may need to submit copies of birth certificates or marriage licenses.
- Dependents and spouses of active duty personnel who are using benefits under Transfer of Eligibility (available under Post 9/11 GI Bill only) must submit the documentation provided by the Department of Defense that authorizes the transfer.

Application for benefits is generally completed one time only unless the student is applying under a different chapter than one they have previously applied for. If the student has previously received educational benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs at another school, the student must complete VA Form 22-1995 or 22-5495, Change of Place of Training, at the new school if they are remaining under the same chapter of education benefits.

If the student has even **one** day of active duty service during the term the student will be attending BC, the student must apply as active duty and have the form completed by an Armed Forces Education Services Officer.

Once the DVA Regional Office has processed the application for benefits, the veteran student will receive a Certificate of Eligibility from them. A copy of this form should be submitted to the Bluefield College Veterans Office, along with a copy of the veteran's DD214.

Note: First time applications may take up to 60 days to process **after** they reach the appropriate DVA Office.

ATTENDING BLUEFIELD COLLEGE

All prospective VA students to Bluefield College must complete an Application for Admission and submit copies of all college transcripts. Those who have not previously attended any colleges must submit a copy of their high school transcript or GED scores, whichever is applicable.

Students are also required to attend New Student Group Advising through the Student Services Office. Students should also check with them to see if any entrance testing is required. The Student Services Department will inform the student regarding advising and scheduling.

Complete the VA Data Sheet and submit it to the BC Veterans Office.

CERTIFICATION OF ENROLLMENT

The certifying official at the BC VA Office is a College employee who has been trained by the Department of Veterans Affairs to process documents relating to VA educational benefits. As the certifying official, this person certifies to the DVA:

- The student is enrolled in an eligible program at BC
- The classes in which the student is enrolled are required for the program the student is pursuing.

DVA educational benefits apply to courses that are required and are completed. Continuing Education course are not eligible for certification.

Veteran students must submit a copy of the **Statement of Student Account** or the **Estimate of Student Account** to the BC VA office each semester in order to be certified for that semester. The certification of enrollment will be processed in the order in which the statement/estimate is received by our office. The copy may be submitted in person, mailed in, emailed or faxed in.

The VA Office at Bluefield College makes every effort to submit the certification of enrollment to the Department of Veteran Affairs in a timely manner. The vast majority of certifications are submitted within 30 days of the start of each semester. However, the certification may be submitted to the VA up to one year from the term start date.

The Department of Veteran Affairs will generally process an award within 30 days of receipt of the certification. If a student is in their initial enrollment period, this process could take up to 60 days while the VA is establishing their education file.

In order to receive payment each month, Chapter 30 students are required to verify enrollment either by phone or online.

The student is responsible for ensuring the courses they enroll in are required in their respective program.

DEGREE PLAN

All students wishing to obtain VA education benefits must enroll in a program that has been approved by the State Approving Agency (SAA). The degree plan is kept in the student's file in the BC VA Office. Courses not required in the plan cannot be certified for payment. Substitutions require departmental approval. Prerequisites may be certified only if taken before the required course. Remedial courses can be certified only if test results indicate developmental work is needed.

EVALUATED CREDIT/PREVIOUS TRAINING

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) requires credit for previous training to be applied to the student's educational program.

DVA regulations will not allow benefits for repeating of a course that the student has previously completed with a satisfactory grade. **It is the student's responsibility to determine if they are repeating a course.**

The College will evaluate the military transcript (AARTS or SMART) received for each student. If no transcript is received, four semester hours of physical education credit will be granted based on DD Form 214 information. (Note: This credit will not be allowed if the student is majoring in physical education.) Credit is not posted until the student has completed 6 hours at the college.

Air Force veterans need to submit a CCAF transcript. Since CCAF is an accredited college, the registrar's office will evaluate that document.

CHANGE OF PROGRAM

The student who wishes to change the program they are pursuing must notify the BC VA Office. Acknowledgement of the program change will be confirmed to the VA along with certification of enrollment.

Career counseling is available through the Department of Veterans Affairs and through Bluefield College through the Student Services Division.

MONTHLY VERIFICATION

Veteran students (not spouses or dependants) under Chapter 30 are required to verify their enrollment each month on the last day of the month. Students may either call their verification in at 1-877-823-2378 or verify online at www.gibill.va.gov/wave. Since the VA needs 30 days for processing **after** they receive certification from the school, students may not be able to verify on the last day of the first month of enrollment. Students should keep trying to verify each day until the award has been processed. The BC Veteran Affairs office should not be called UNLESS 30 days from the term start date have passed and there is still nothing to verify.

SATISFACTORY PROGRESS

The student must meet the satisfactory criteria given in the BC Catalog (or its addenda for specific programs) to be eligible to receive VA educational benefits. Students on academic suspension must be reported to the Department of Veterans Affairs for unsatisfactory progress.

Once reported for unsatisfactory progress, benefits cannot be resumed unless the Department of Veterans Affairs finds that the cause of unsatisfactory progress has been removed and the program is suitable to the student's aptitudes, interests and abilities.

REPEAT COURSE WORK

The Department of Veterans Affairs will not allow payment for course work for which a student has already received credit (a grade of D or better). **It is the student's responsibility to ensure they do not repeat a course which they have previously completed and passed.**

DROPS, ADDS, AND WITHDRAWALS

It is the student's responsibility to report the BC Veterans Affairs Office when the student drops or adds a class or withdraws from a term.

Unreported drops or withdrawals may burden the student with an overpayment liability. Any course load reduction must be reported by the student and by the BC VA Office to the DVA. If the student has mitigating circumstances for dropping a class and the VA approves, the student may be paid up to the last

day of attendance. If not, the student will not be paid for the dropped course, retroactive to enrollment date.

OVERPAYMENTS

To avoid overpayments of educational benefits the student should:

- Report changes in enrollment promptly
- Understand the consequences of dropping a class or withdrawing from a term
- Report changes of dependency, if applicable
- Attend classes regularly

An instructor may drop the student for non-attendance and the student would then have to repay benefits for that course from the beginning of the term. If an overpayment is created, the VA is required to take prompt and aggressive action to recover the overpayment. The VA may take any of the following actions:

- Add interest and collection fees to the student's debt
- Withhold future benefits to apply to the student's debt
- Refer the student's debt to a private collection agency
- Offset the debt from the student's federal income tax refund
- Offset the debt from the student's salary if the student is a federal employee
- File a lawsuit in federal court to collect the debt
- Withhold approval of a VA home loan guarantee pending payment of the student's debt

Mitigating Circumstances: If the student changes enrollment after the regular add/drop period and wishes to receive educational benefits up to the drop date, the VA will want a statement explaining the events surrounding the change. The law states that no payments will be made for a course from which the student withdraw, or for which the student receives a non-punitive grade, unless there are "mitigating circumstances". The VA defines mitigating circumstances as "the unanticipated and unavoidable events that interfere with a student's pursuit of a course." Examples the VA may accept are:

- Prolonged illness or serious injury.
- Severe illness or death in the student's immediate family.
- Unscheduled changes in the student's employment that are beyond the student's control.
- Unanticipated difficulties with child care arrangements made for the purpose of allowing the student to go to school.
- Recall to active duty or deployment.

The student will normally be expected to submit evidence to support the statement that the event was not anticipated and was beyond the student's control; for example, a letter from the student's employer in the case of employment change. Examples of events that the VA will not accept include:

- Withdrawal to avoid a failing grade
- Dislike of the student's instructor
- Too many courses attempted

Dropping a course without mitigating circumstances means the student is not entitled to benefits for that course from the beginning of the term. If payment has already been processed for the course, the student has been overpaid and must repay that portion to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Effective June 1, 1989, the DVA will consider "mitigating circumstances" exist in the "First Instance" of withdrawal for courses totaling not more than 6 semester hours. "First Instance" means first instance occurring after 6-1-89. The "First Instance" consideration applies to all benefit types except Section 901. This "6-hour exclusion" is a one-time consideration.

OTHER INFORMATION

VA Educational benefits are non-taxable.

Additional aid may be available. For information regarding additional financial assistance for which the student may be eligible, contact the Financial Aid Office at BC.

It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with the information in the College Catalog and Student Handbook. Both of these items can be accessed online from the Bluefield College home page at: www.bluefield.edu.

REMEMBER:

It is the responsibility of the student to ensure they only take classes required for their degree, they do not repeat any courses for which they have already received credit, they notify the VA Coordinator any time they have a change in enrollment hours, and they provide a copy of their Statement of Account to the VA Coordinator for each term they wish to be certified.

Documents to submit to BC Veterans Affairs Office:

- Copy of Certificate of Eligibility from VA (if applicable) or copy of Application For Education Benefits
- Copy of DD214

WELCOME TO BLUEFIELD COLLEGE!

