

Get the Most from Your Education Benefits

CENTS | June 2025 | 1 Hour

Agenda



- Welcome & Goals
- Define Your Mission
- Map your VA benefits
 - GI Bill Comparison Activity
- Calculate the total cost
- Fill the gap wisely
- Vet the school
 - College Navigator Activity
- Wrap-Up & Resources

Welcome to CENTS

- Seattle-based nonprofit founded in 1995
- Co-founded by a federal bankruptcy judge and financial professionals
- Provides free, independent financial education and legal resources
- Serves seniors, students, cancer patients, justice-involved individuals — and now veterans
- Focused on practical tools, not financial products
- This program is supported by the American College of Bankruptcy Foundation.



Class Goals

- Understand every major VA education benefit
- Learn safe “stacking” / sequencing rules
- Practice two comparison tools live
- Finish with a personal action checklist

Step 1: Define Your Mission

- Degree? Trade? License?
- Rank these:
 - Cost
 - Speed
 - Flexibility
 - Support
- What educational goals do you have?

Step 2: Map Your VA Benefits

- Post-9/11 GI Bill
- Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB)
- Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E)

Post-9/11 GI Bill Highlights

- Up to **36 months** of benefits
- Up to 100% tuition
- Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) = E-5 w/ dep. Basic Allowance for Housing (by ZIP)
- \$1,000 books + \$500 rural move
- At 100% tier, the VA usually covers the full cost of any public undergraduate institution
 - A UW undergrad billed \$12,242 tuition sees \$0 on their statement after certified enrollment

Post-9/11 GI Bill Service Tiers

Active-Duty Service	Coverage %	Example: \$10k Semester Tuition
36 mo./Purple Heart Recipient	100%	Full tuition, full Housing (MHA)
30 to 35 mo.	90%	\$9k tuition, 90% MHA
24 to 29 mo.	80%	\$8k tuition, 80% MHA
18 to 23 mo.	70%	\$7k tuition, 70% MHA
6 to 17 mo.	60%	\$6k tuition, 60% MHA
90 to 179 days	50%	\$5k tuition, 50% MHA

Monthly Housing Allowance

- Paid at E-5 with dependents
Basic Allowance for Housing
- Examples:
 - Seattle ZIP 98195: \$3,027/mo.
 - Pullman ZIP 99164:
\$1,218/mo.
- Online-only students get half
national avg. (\$1,118/mo.)



Yellow Ribbon Programs

- Pays tuition above GI Bill cap
- School and VA split the gap 50 / 50
- Only for 100 percent tier students
- Not available while on active duty



Montgomery GI Bill Highlights

- MGIB = cash stipend (not tuition-paid)
- \$2,438 mo. (≥ 3 yrs service, full-time)
- 10-yr use-by date
- Switching to Post-9/11 refunds \$1,200 buy-in

VR&E Highlights



- Service-connected disability rating 10 percent +
- Entitlement determined by Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
- Up to 48 months training and support
- Pays full tuition, fees, books, equipment

VR&E Subsistence Allowance Options

- Standard VR&E rate: \$821–1,093/mo. (2025)
- Optional Post-9/11 housing rate if GI Bill eligible (uses GI Bill concurrently)
- A veteran with long academic goals can use VR&E for four years of undergrad and the GI Bill for three years of graduate study



Step 3: Calculate Total Cost

Cost category	Estimated annual cost*
Tuition & mandatory fees	\$11 200
Housing	\$27 243
Food (\approx \$500 mo. \times 12)	\$6 000
Books & supplies	\$1 200
Transportation & misc.	\$2 500
TOTAL	\$48 943

Step 4: Fill the Gap Wisely

Cost category	Estimated annual cost*	Post-9/11 GI Bill (100 % tier)	Student gap / other aid
Tuition & mandatory fees	\$11 200	\$11 200	\$0
Housing	\$27 243	\$27 243 housing allowance	\$0
Food (≈ \$500 mo. × 12)	\$6 000	Not covered	\$6 000
Books & supplies	\$1 200	\$1 000 book stipend	\$200
Transportation & misc.	\$2 500	Not covered	\$2 500
TOTAL	\$48 943	\$39 443	≈ \$9 500

FAFSA and State Aid (WAFSA for WA)

- Opens Oct 1; use prior year tax data
- VA education payments excluded from income
- Enables Pell Grant, state-base grants, and work-study
 - Full sticker vs. Net price



Stacking Benefits

1. School applies tuition-only waivers first
2. GI Bill pays remaining net tuition
3. Grants / scholarships cover any gap or fees
4. Refunds can pay housing or books

Entitlements, Grants, & Waivers	Tuition (\$8,000) & Fees (\$1,000) What's left?
Campus Veterans Waiver (\$1,000)	\$7,000 tuition \$1,000 fees
Post-9/11 GI Bill (80% or \$5,600)	\$1,400 tuition \$1,000 fees
Washington College Grant (\$2,400)	\$0 tuition \$0 fees

**\$9,000
Cost**



**\$0
Cost**

GI Bill Comparison Tool Activity



Tuition and fee coverage displayed



Yellow Ribbon participation flag



Housing allowance by ZIP



Veteran complaint warnings

va.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool

Institution comparison:

View school information side by side to compare schools

Highlight differences

School	School
GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY	SEATTLE UNIVERSITY
Remove	Remove

Cautionary information

Caution flags	Cautionary information	Cautionary information
	<p>⚠ This school has 1 cautionary warning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lawsuit Filed by Federal Trade Commission	<p>This school doesn't have any caution flags</p>
Student complaints	22	1

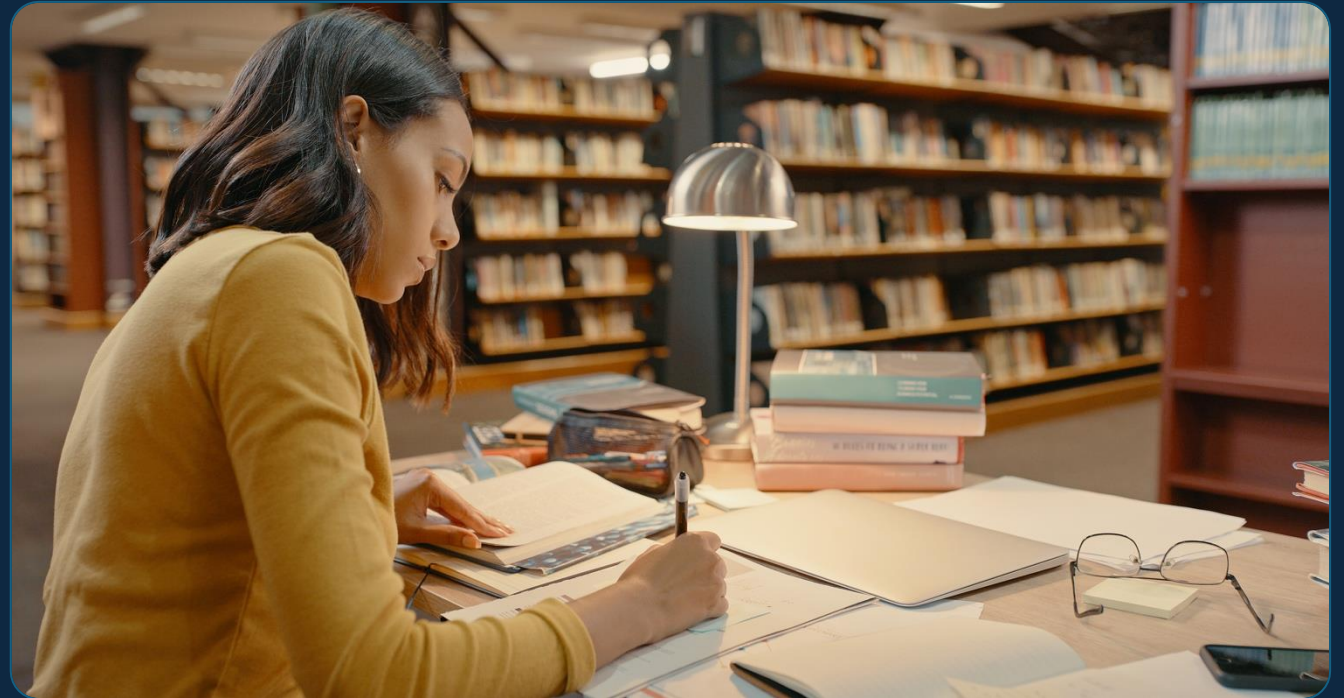
Tips to Retain GI Bill Benefits



- Start at community college with lower tuition if your GI Bill doesn't cover full costs
 - Many states have direct transfer agreements (including WA)
- Use remaining entitlement for bachelor's
- Example: complete 90 quarter credits at Pierce College using 18 months of GI Bill, then transfer to UW Tacoma with 18 months left for the final two years.

Scholarships and Work-Study

- Army Emergency Relief and AMVETS awards
- Tillman Scholars – leadership focus
- VA Work-Study pays state minimum wage
- Earnings do not reduce GI Bill payments and do not have to be paid back
- Many programs have grade requirements, so note any GPA stipulations for renewal
- Remember to file the FAFSA



Sample 6-year Plan

Years 1-4:

- VR&E pays bachelor's degree, standard subsistence



Years 5-6:

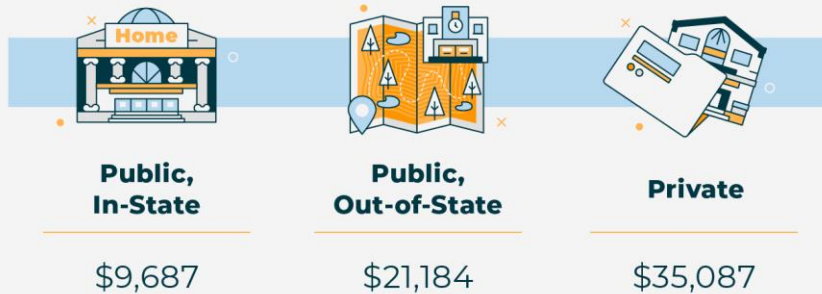
- Post-9/11 GI Bill funds MBA, full housing stipend

Total entitlement used:
48 VR&E + 24 GI Bill = 72 months

Step 5: Vet the School

Types of Colleges and Universities

Average College Sticker Price in the United States



Source: U.S. News and World Report

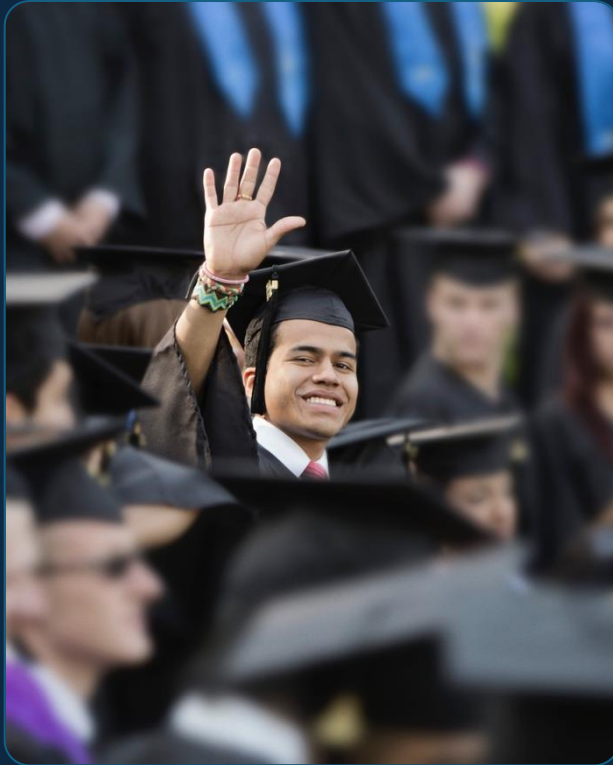
- State / public institutions – government funded, lowest published tuition for residents
- Private, nonprofit institutions – tuition-driven, mission-based, tuition often higher than publics
- For-profit institutions – run as businesses to return profit to owners or shareholders
- Always check cost, outcomes, and veteran support regardless of sector

Accreditation Basics

- Accreditation = independent quality check on curriculum, faculty, and student support
- Regional accreditors cover most public and private nonprofit universities (e.g., NWCCU in Washington)
- National or programmatic accreditors review specific trades or programs
- GI Bill pays only if the school or program is accredited and VA-approved



What Is a Graduation Rate?



- Measures the percent of first-time, full-time students who complete a degree within 150 percent of normal time
- Public four-year U.S. average \approx 64 percent; private nonprofit \approx 68 percent
- For-profit four-year average \approx 25 percent – wide variation by campus
- Use it to gauge academic support and likelihood of finishing on time

Cohort Default Rate (CDR)

- Percent of borrowers who default on federal student loans within three years of entering repayment
- Public four-year CDR: about 5 percent
- Private nonprofit four-year CDR: about 4 percent
- For-profit four-year CDR: about 12 percent – highest among sectors



For-Profit Risk

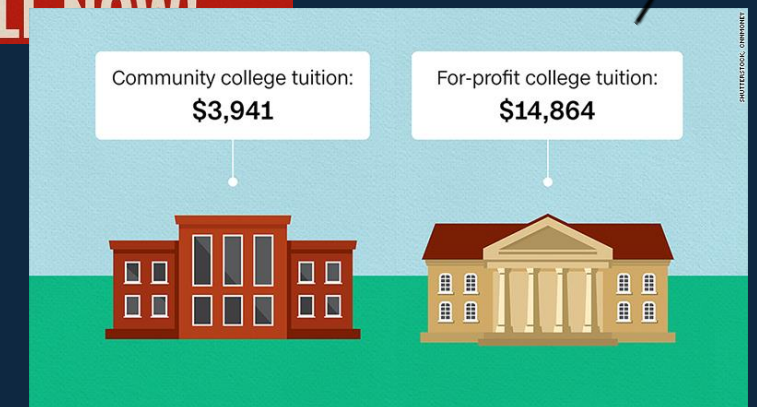
- For-profit colleges show the highest average loan default rates nationwide
- Marketing often targets veterans with aggressive recruiting tactics
- Verify accreditation, CDR, and graduation rate before signing an enrollment agreement
- Compare costs with public or nonprofit options using the GI Bill Comparison Tool

Examples of For-Profit Schools:



Red Flags – Predatory School Warning Signs

- Pushy telemarketing or social-media ads
- Promises of “free” computers, tablets, or gift cards
- Tuition cost far above similar programs
- Accreditor on probation or none for program
- Not all for-profit schools are “Red Flags,” but you should be cautious when considering them



College Navigator Activity

nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator

1

Choose a school you are considering

2

Find accreditation and graduation rate

3

Record cost of attendance

4

Find cohort default rate (%)

5

Create a checklist of next steps

Step 6: Build Your Plan

- Define your mission
- Map your VA benefits
- Calculate the total cost
- Fill the gap wisely
- Vet the school

Discussion

- What topics matter most to you right now?
- Feedback on presentation and future classes

Q&A

- Open discussion and questions
- Preview upcoming classes
- Resources
 - GI Bill Comparison Tool – va.gov/education
 - College Navigator – nces.ed.gov
 - Washington College Grant Estimator – wsac.wa.gov
 - Veterans Education Call Center – 888-GI-BILL-1
- Thank you for participating!