

Mandatory Fees (Chapter 33)

Reference pages 65-66, School Certifying official Handbook, Version 4.1, dated February 9, 2015.

Fees are mandatory charges (other than tuition, room and board) applied by the school for the pursuit of an approved program of education. Fees must be applied to *every* student in the approved program to be submitted to VA for the student receiving veterans education benefits. Fees include, but are not limited to, student activity fees, information technology (IT) fees, freshman fees, graduation fees, and lab fees. Health premium fees may be included and submitted to VA if the student elects to take advantage of the health insurance. If the student has his/her own health insurance and elects not to take advantage of the health premium offered by the school is it not assessed and not submitted to VA.

Fees do not include study abroad course(s) unless the course(s) is a mandatory requirement for completion of the approved program of education.

Fees are defined in the school's catalog or supplement and listed on the school's (student's) billing statement or invoice

Examples of fees that are not allowed include, but are not limited to:

- Penalty fees (i.e., late registration, late course changes, repeated course, returned check fees)
- Add/drop fees
- Parking fees that are not required of *every* student
- Fees for any food or lodging expenses, meal ticket fees
- Overload fees for course loads that require special permission
- Transportation/transit system fees that are not required of *every* student
- Application for admission fees

Book and Supply Stipend (Chapter 33)

Reference pages 31-32, School Certifying official Handbook, Version 4.1, dated February 9, 2015.

Mandatory fees indicated above are certified to VA regardless of the Book and Supply Stipend. The Book and Supply Stipend is paid to the student based on the number of credits or clock hours the student is taking in any specific enrollment period until the Book and Supply cap is reached. SCO's do not determine the Book and Supply Stipend. That is done by VA. If a fee is charged to the veteran and every other student in the program, then that fee is certified to VA. Remember, the Book and Supply Stipend is not just for books, it can be used by the veteran to purchase supplies as well. The school does not have to maintain a record of what the veteran student purchases with the Book and Supply Stipend.

Tuition and Fees (Chapters 30, 35, 1606 & 1607)

Reference pages 66-67, School Certifying official Handbook, Version 4.1, dated February 9, 2015.

Flat Tuition Charges for Chapter 33

Some schools charge a flat rate tuition for specific enrollment periods. If a Chapter 33 student is being certified for an enrollment period where a flat rate tuition applies, see pages 67-70, School Certifying Official Handbook, Version 4.1, dated February 9, 2015 for information on the correct certification procedures for flat rate tuition.

Prior Credit (All Chapters)

The following is a reprint of the guidance received from VA concerning prior credit. This guidance was originally published in Certifying Official Newsletter # 82.

Prior credit is addressed in 38 CFR 4253(d)(3) or 38 CFR 4254(c)(4) for prior credit depending on accreditation status]. If a school requires a student who has previously attended school to submit transcripts for related training in order to be formally admitted into a program, that's fine; but it's their requirement and not ours. We require that schools assess prior training (to include transcript review when applicable), grant credit for prior training as appropriate, and have the a written record of the assessment. We don't dictate what prior training will or will not be accepted. That's up to the school, and we require that they follow their policy regarding acceptance of transfer credit. Also, we don't mandate students to provide transcripts to a school as a requirement to pay benefits. The prior credit assessment must occur for all students in receipt of VA Education benefits, not only those who self-report prior training. We routinely review for assessment of P/Cs as part of each compliance survey. It is considered a 'best practice' that SCOs request evidence of prior credit twice, but for VA purposes, the assessment must occur by the end of the second term. If a student will not provide transcripts (usually due to poor grades or outstanding debt that prevents issuance of the transcripts) and the school doesn't mandate that they be supplied as a requirement for formal admission or certification, the school must continue to certify the student. The SCO should document copies of e-mails, correspondence, or other evidence or notations showing that the information was requested but not supplied. In this case, the prior credit granted will be "0" and that's fine. It should also be noted that there is no 2-semester requirement for assessing credit for prior training. If

transcripts are received at a later date, the prior credit assessment must be updated to reflect the new information. If at that time, it is determined that the student has repeated a course(s) at the current school for which credit was since granted, the SCO must report a reduction or withdrawal effective the first day of the term for any affected courses. There is commonly confusion between the prior credit review and the two term payment limit for non-matriculated students. There is a payment limit for matriculation status, however SCOs should continue to certify those students with the added remark that the student remains non-matriculated. This allows for VA to make the formal denial of benefits along with the associated appellate rights to the affected veteran student.

Reporting Graduation

Reference, page 80, School Certifying Official Handbook, Version 4.1, dated February 9, 2015.

Schools are required to report graduation or program completion information to VA.

The easiest way to do this is to go to the enrollment certifications for the student and choose the very last enrollment certification, the period in which the student completed the degree or program, and terminate that very last enrollment certification using "Graduation" as the reason for termination of degree programs or "End of Term or Course" as the reason for termination of non-degree programs. The LDA/Eff Date will be pre-populated with the last date (End Date) of the enrollment period. Make sure the LDA/Eff Date is the end date of the enrollment period. Do NOT report the actual date of graduation. Use the End Date of the enrollment period. By using the End Date of the enrollment period the student will receive the proper benefit payment.

Report graduation only when the student is using veterans education benefits during the enrollment period when they are completing a degree or completing a program. If the student has "run out" of benefits and is paying for the last enrollment period "out-of-pocket" there is no requirement to report graduation. (This is a change from previous guidance.)

Federal Regulations

Need to refer to a Federal Regulation? Use the following link to the Code of Federal Regulations:

<http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&rgn=div5&view=text&node=38:2.0.1.1.6&idno=38>

Section 702, Public Law 113-146 (Choice Act)

Legislation has been proposed in Pennsylvania that, when passed, will meet the VA verification requirements for public schools for Chapter 30 and 33 students. It is anticipated that this legislation will reach the Pennsylvania Senate during the month of May 2015. Until the legislation is passed and VA verifies Pennsylvania public schools are in compliance with the Choice Act, the provisions of the following VA Central Office letter apply:

“Dear School Certifying Official:

In August 2014, President Obama signed the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (“Choice Act”) into law. Section 702 of the Choice Act requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to disapprove programs of education under the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty (MGIB – AD) at public institutions of higher learning if the school charges qualifying Veterans and dependents tuition and fees in excess of the rate for resident students for terms beginning after July 1, 2015. It is important for schools to understand that VA must disapprove programs of education for **everyone** training under the **Post-9/11 GI Bill and MGIB – AD**, if resident charges are not offered to all “covered individuals.” Almost all States and territories have informed VA that their public institutions of higher learning intend to comply with the requirements of section 702, and none have informed VA that they do not intend to comply. To date, VA has confirmed only **one** state to be fully in compliance, Texas; therefore, the guidance in this advisory does not apply to schools in Texas.

In order to ensure that your programs remain approved for Post-9/11 GI Bill and MGIB – AD benefits, and to allow time for states to affect legislative/policy changes, it is imperative that public institutions of higher learning, *other than those in Texas*, adhere to the following procedures when certifying enrollment in terms beginning after July 1, 2015.

- Post 9/11 GI Bill: Insert a zero dollar figure “\$0” for tuition and fee charges in VA-ONCE when submitting enrollments prior to the beginning of the term. You may submit the actual charges on an amended enrollment certification **only after VA has verified** that your school’s tuition and fee policies are compliant with section 702 **or** if a waiver is granted.
- MGIB – AD: Tuition and fees are only submitted if a Veteran is enrolled at less than one-half time. You should **not** submit enrollment certifications for MGIB – AD Veterans attending at less than one-half time **until VA has verified** that your school’s tuition and fee policies are compliant with section 702 or if a waiver is granted. MGIB – AD students attending at half-time or greater, as well as students on active duty, should be certified normally.

Your adherence to these procedures is vitally important in ensuring that our Nation’s Veterans and their qualifying dependents continue to be eligible to receive their hard earned VA education benefits. The submission of tuition and fee charges in excess of the resident rate for a covered individual could lead to the immediate disapproval of the affected program of education for **all** Post-9/11 GI Bill and MGIB – AD beneficiaries. Information on additional schools and states found to be in compliance with the requirements of section 702 will be posted to the GI Bill website (www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/), and information will

also be disseminated to impacted schools through the Education Liaison Representative and State Approving Agency of Jurisdiction.

Thank you for your time, assistance, and continued support of America's Veterans and their dependents.

/s/

Robert M. Worley II
Director, Education Service”

Public institutions with questions about Section 702 or waiver procedures can submit them to VA at Section 702.VBAVACO@va.gov.

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This newsletter is being e-mailed to Certifying Officials at each school. Please share this newsletter with all other Certifying Officials, the Bursar's or Comptroller's Office, Financial Aid Office and other interested individuals at your school. It is extremely important that the information in this newsletter receives the widest dissemination in order that veterans receive the GI Bill and other educational benefits to which they are entitled.