Veterans Affairs
Benefits Handbook

2020–2021

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Introduction

Descriptions of VA policies and procedures within represent our best understanding of VA policy. Students are encouraged to double check this information, either at the VA Education Benefits Website or with a VA service representative.

In order to receive Veterans Benefits on a continuing basis students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress as defined in the DigiPen Course Catalog. For more information on the Satisfactory Academic Progress policy please view the 20-21 DigiPen Course Catalog.
VA Educational Benefit Programs at DigiPen

Below you will find a description of all the VA Educational Benefit Programs in which DigiPen participates.

Chapter 33: Post-9/11 GI Bill®

TUITION & FEES COVERAGE

Students receive tuition coverage up to a certain percentage of their tuition, determined by the VA. This percentage is also capped by the VA’s Maximum Tuition & Fees Payable to Private Colleges. For the 2020-21 academic year, that maximum is $25,162.14. For example, a student with 80% coverage under chapter 33, the VA will pay 80% of their tuition and fees up to $20,129.71 for the academic year. Since VA benefits are front-loaded (i.e. a majority of benefits are paid at the start of the academic year) this may result in a larger balance due in the spring semester as the cap will have been met.

VA Tuition benefit is not added to a student’s account until funds are received, after the semester has started. Students and families are not expected to pre-pay the anticipated tuition coverage, although students may receive late payment notices. You may e-mail veteranbenefits@digipen.edu if you would like an estimate of your anticipated tuition coverage.

YELLOW RIBBON PROGRAM

The Yellow Ribbon Program supplements the normal tuition coverage under Chapter 33 and is only available for students with 100% coverage who are veterans or dependents of active duty service members. Active duty service members are not eligible for Yellow Ribbon. On top of Chapter 33 tuition coverage, Yellow Ribbon can cover up to another $10,000 per year, which normally covers fall and spring tuition for undergraduate and graduate students. Students may have out of pocket tuition costs if they enroll in the Summer.

The amount of students who can receive Yellow Ribbon annually are limited. DigiPen has a total of 70 undergraduate and 5 graduate spots available. Per VA regulations, spots are awarded to on a first come, first serve basis.

How to apply for Yellow Ribbon: Students who wish to use their Yellow Ribbon benefits at DigiPen must identify themselves to DigiPen’s VA Certifying Official by either calling (425) 629-5002 or emailing veteranbenefits@digipen.edu. Students are then added to the Yellow Ribbon waitlist. From this point, students have 14 business days to submit their Certificate of Eligibility (see instructions below) to the Office of Financial Aid. Failure to submit the Certificate of Eligibility within 14 days will result in the student losing their spot on our waitlist. If a student loses their spot on the waitlist they can reapply for Yellow Ribbon at a later date by repeating this application process.
MONTHLY HOUSING ALLOWANCE

Students receive a Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) from the VA. For the 2020-21 VA Academic Year, MHA is $2,574. The student receives the percentage of that amount for which they qualify (i.e. a student with 80% coverage will receive 80% of MHA). It is also prorated during months where classes are in session for part of the month; students will receive proportionally reduced amounts for August, December, January and, possibly, April or May, depending on the academic calendar. It is also prorated based on enrollment level if less than full time.

Payments are made at the end of the month (i.e. September’s payment is made around September 30) and are made as checks to the student unless the student has set up direct deposit with the VA. Active duty service members and their spouses do not receive the MHA.

Students living in DigiPen housing are required to pay room charges at the regular due date. You will need to prepay the costs or set up payment arrangements with the Accounting Office and use the MHA to reimburse yourself.

BOOK STIPEND

Students receive a book stipend of $1,000, prorated by their percentage of benefit eligibility and paid out per credit based on 24 credits (or about $41.67 per credit for the first 24 credits). For example, a student with 60% coverage will receive $25 per credit for their first 24 credits, up to $600 total.

Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship

The Edith Nourse Rogers Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) Scholarship is available for students who have exhausted or are close to exhausting their Chapter 33 benefits AND are enrolled in an eligible STEM program.

Recipients of the STEM Scholarship will receive up to 9 months of additional benefits (a maximum of $30,000). You may be eligible to apply for the STEM Scholarship if:

- You have exhausted or will exhaust your Chapter 33 benefits within the next 6 months
- You are enrolled in an eligible STEM program (undergraduates only)
- You have completed at least 60 credits towards your degree program

Some things to note about this program:

- Graduate programs are not currently approved for use of the STEM Scholarship.
- The STEM Scholarship shares the same annual caps as Chapter 33. For example, if you use up your annual Chapter 33 benefits in Fall and Spring semester, you will be unable to use the STEM Scholarship during Summer semester.
- The Yellow Ribbon Program cannot be used with the STEM Scholarship.

If you are awarded the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship, you will need to notify the VA Certifying Official of the award and follow the same instructions below in The Certification Process.

For more information, please visit: http://benefits.va.gov/gibill/fgib/steam.asp
Chapter 31: Vocational Rehabilitation

TUITION

Vocational Rehab pays varying amounts of tuition and fees depending on benefit level. The DigiPen will work with the student’s case worker to process payment.

HOUSING PAYMENTS

If you are receiving the Chapter 33 amount instead of the subsistence allowance, please review the subsection on Monthly Housing Allowance of the Chapter 33 with Yellow Ribbon section.

BOOKS & SUPPLIES

Students attending under the Chapter 31 – Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program are allowed to purchase required books and supplies. The VA authorizes all purchases and a course syllabus or documentation from the course instructor/head of the department is normally needed to determine what items are required and when.

Chapter 31 students may acquire a voucher to purchase books and supplies. The VA also has a list of additional authorized supplies considered acceptable for purchase from the bookstore once each term.

Chapter 30, 35, 1606: Montgomery GI Bill®

MONTHLY STIPENDS

Students receive monthly stipends, which are sent directly to the student. The current rates can be found at http://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/resources/benefits_resources/rate_tables.asp. Direct deposit can be set up at https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/manage/contact. We can only certify classes that are required for the student’s degree and that are not repeats of classes taken and passed (or taken and passed with a grade required for progression if higher).
How to Apply for Your VA Educational Benefits

In order to determine your eligibility for VA educational benefit programs, you will need to visit https://www.va.gov/education/how-to-apply/ to begin the application process.

Once your VA education benefits have been verified by the VA, they will provide you with a Certificate of Eligibility which describes which program you’re eligible for as well as how much educational benefits you have. You will need to forward a copy of the Certificate of Eligibility to the School Certifying Official in the Office of Financial Aid.

The Certification Process

Each semester, that a student wishes to use their VA educational benefits, DigiPen is required to report to the VA the student’s degree-related credits, tuition and fees. This is known as certification.

Initial Certification

In order to start the certification process, students will need to provide the School Certifying Official with a copy of their Certificate of Eligibility (obtained from the VA), copy of DD-214 (if veteran student), and complete DigiPen’s VA Benefits Certification Request Form. If students need to complete any other documents or forms for the VA, the School Certifying Official will notify the student of the requirements.

Requesting Certification of Benefits

Shortly after registration is finalized for the upcoming semester, the Office of Financial Aid will send out an email with the VA Benefits Certification Request Form to all students who are eligible for VA educational benefits. Completing this form serves as a student’s request to be certified for the semester. It also confirms that all of the courses they are registered for count towards their degree progression. Students will need to complete the form with their Student Success Advisor. Students will not be certified for the semester until the VA Benefits Certification Request Form is returned and completed with all necessary signatures.

Your initial certification will be based on enrollment as reported on the VA Benefits Certification Request Form as of the date the certifying official processes certifications for that semester. This is so any non-tuition VA payments can be made promptly to the student. After add/drop the final semester registration will be certified to the VA.

If a student does not want to be certified they do not need to fill out the certification request form, however, they will receive reminders to do so until they notify the Office of Financial Aid.
Late Certification

All Chapter 31 or 33 VA students who have submitted a copy of their Certificate of Eligibility to the School Certifying Official by the first day of classes will not receive a late fee, be denied access to classes, libraries, or other institutional facilities, have their account frozen or be required to cover any covered portion of their financial obligation due to delayed disbursement funding from the VA.

The Financial Aid Office has 30 days after the first day of the term to submit all certifications of benefits to the VA. Therefore, we cannot accept any VA Benefits Certification Request Form for the current term beyond the 30-day deadline (see 2020-2021 VA Benefits Calendar for specific date deadlines).
## Important Deadlines

### 2020–2021 VA Benefits Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC YEAR DATES + DEADLINES</th>
<th>2020-2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FAFSA</strong> available for coming aid year. Complete the FAFSA as early in October as possible for maximum consideration.</td>
<td>October 1, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Priority FAFSA receipt deadline.</strong> FAFSA must be received by the Office of Financial Aid for maximum consideration. You may still complete a FAFSA after this date and be considered for aid, however, your aid maybe delayed.</td>
<td>February 1, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority deadline for all students to provide VA Certifying Official with the 20-21 VA Benefits Certification Request Form for <strong>fall semester.</strong></td>
<td>August 15, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall semester <strong>Tuition due.</strong> VA educational benefits will pay directly to a student’s account.</td>
<td>August 21, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall semester starts.</td>
<td>August 31, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall <strong>undergraduate and graduate</strong> census date.</td>
<td>September 14, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final day</strong> to submit initial 20-21 VA Benefits Certification Request Form for fall semester.</td>
<td>September 30, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority deadline for all students to provide VA Certifying Official with the VA Benefits Request for Certification for <strong>spring semester.</strong></td>
<td>December 1, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final grades for fall semester</strong> are certified to VA after fall grades post. Students with punitive grades could owe funds back to the VA.</td>
<td>December 11, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring semester <strong>Tuition due.</strong> VA educational benefits will pay directly to student’s account.</td>
<td>December 15, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC YEAR DATES + DEADLINES</td>
<td>2020-2021</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Day of <strong>Spring Semester</strong></td>
<td>January 4, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring <strong>undergraduate and graduate census</strong> date.</td>
<td>January 18, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final day</strong> to submit initial 20-21 VA Benefits Certification Request for spring semester.</td>
<td>February 3, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Priority filing date</strong> for summer 20-21 semester VA Benefits Certification Request.*</td>
<td>April 1, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final grades for spring semester</strong> are certified to VA after spring grades post. Students with punitive grades could owe funds back to the VA.</td>
<td>April 23, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer 2021 semester</strong> starts.</td>
<td>May 3, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2021 <strong>census day</strong>.</td>
<td>May 17, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final grades</strong> are certified to the VA after final grades post for summer.</td>
<td>July 23, 2021</td>
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*Note about Summer semester: Chapter 33 students who attended full time during Fall and Spring semesters and were certified for both semesters will likely have used up their VA tuition benefits. Students in this situation can be certified to receive summer housing benefits. However, we recommend against this as it counts against your total months of education benefits. Please contact the VA Certifying Official to discuss in more detail the impact requesting summer certification will have on your total benefits.*
VA Benefits & Financial Aid

The Office of Financial Aid recommends that all students file a FAFSA every year, even though it is not required to receive VA benefits. By filing a FAFSA, students may qualify for additional grant money, specifically the Pell Grant, which can be claimed in addition to VA benefits.

In the event that a student no longer qualifies for VA Benefits, having a FAFSA on file helps prevent any delays in federal funding needed to cover tuition and other expenses.

VA Benefits & Academic Progress

Progress Towards Degree

Only courses that satisfy requirements outlined by the DigiPen Course Catalog can be certified for VA Benefit purposes. If a student takes courses that do not fulfill a program requirement, it cannot be certified for VA purposes.

If students are unsure if their course count towards their degree requirements, please check with your Student Success Advisor prior to enrolling. The VA Certifying Official can be contacted with any questions regarding eligibility of VA benefits and enrolled credits.

Repeating Courses

Classes that were successfully completed may not be certified again for VA purposes if they are repeated. However, if a student fails a class, or if a program requires a higher grade than the one achieved in a particular class for successful completion, that class may be repeated and certified to the VA again.

Rounding Out

During a student’s final semester only, a student needing less than a full time course load to graduate may take additional courses to qualify as a full time student in order to maintain full housing benefit. The term that the VA uses for this is “rounding out”.

Federal financial aid and DigiPen institutional aid operate differently. A student considering rounding out who is also using other aid should e-mail veteranbenefits@us.digipen.edu and ask for an overview of their financial aid package.
Changes in Enrollment/Withdrawing from School

Please note that it is the student’s responsibility to report changes in their enrollment to the VA Certifying Official as soon as possible.

ADDING CLASSES

Student wishing to add classes after they already submitted a VA Request for Certification will need to fill out an updated VA Request for Certification with their SSA and submit it to the Office of Financial Aid. Classes can only be added during the regular add/drop period at the beginning of the semester.

DROPPING CLASSES OR WITHDRAWING FROM DIGIPEN

Dropped classes or full withdrawals must be reported to the VA along with what tuition and fees would have been if certified without the dropped class(es) at the beginning of the semester. Students may be responsible for repaying all or part of the difference directly to the VA. The VA determines the amount that must be returned.

If a student withdraws from DigiPen prior to attending any courses in a semester, all funds will be returned to the VA by DigiPen.

NON-PUNITIVE GRADES

When students receive non-punitive grades, i.e. NP or W, those grades must be certified to the VA. The VA considers non-punitive grades to be uncompleted courses, those uncompleted courses will be certified to the VA and it is possible that students could owe funds back to the VA for the credits in which they received non-punitive grades.
DigiPen Resources

Molly Walsh – Certifying Official
Email: veteranbenefits@us.digipen.edu
Phone: (425) 629-5002
Office Location: Redmond Campus, 2nd Floor

Office of Financial Aid
Email: faid@digipen.edu
Phone: (425) 629-5002
Office Location: Redmond Campus, 2nd Floor

Accounting Office
Email: accounting@digipen.edu
Phone: (425) 629-5025
Office Location: Redmond Campus, 2nd Floor