



Transferring to a New School – What You Need to Know

1. Who accredits the college/university?

Accreditors that the Department of Education (ED) recognizes must approve the institution before students can use federal student aid (such as Pell Grants or student loans) or GI Bill benefits at the institution. Accreditation demonstrates that the college or university meets widely accepted basic standards of quality in education and training. It is important to make sure that any school you are considering is accredited by an accrediting agency that is recognized by ED. Some schools advertise that they are accredited but do not indicate the source.

Be aware that there are unrecognized accrediting agencies and that some schools may claim to be accredited by these organizations. The quickest and easiest way to verify whether an accrediting agency is recognized by ED is to search the department's list of recognized accreditors (<http://bit.ly/2FmybiO>). If an accreditor is not on this list, you should avoid it. Students should also pay attention to whether a school is nationally or regionally accredited. This distinction is especially important for credit transferability – credits earned at regionally accredited schools are more widely accepted and transfer more easily.

Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS), which was the accreditor for the failed Corinthian Colleges and ITT Technical Institute, lost federal recognition during the end of the Obama Administration. ACICS argues that it should be able to serve as an accreditor once again, and a hearing will be held in May 2018 to determine whether ACICS should be permitted to grant access to federal aid. If ACICS fails to receive approval, federal student aid and GI Bill benefits cannot be used at ANY school accredited by this agency – students enrolled at those institutions will be forced to transfer. Schools previously accredited by ACICS were given 18 months, which will terminate on June 12, 2018, to find a new accreditation body.

2. What financial aid is available?

If you are planning to use your GI Bill benefits, you must confirm the school is eligible to accept these benefits. It is also helpful to determine whether the school participates in the Yellow Ribbon Program (<http://bit.ly/2DbLIDS>). In addition to federal aid, such as Pell Grants and federal student loans, many institutions have institutional grants and financial aid available.

The Forever GI Bill includes restoration provisions related to closed schools and disapproval of GI Bill benefits, but these provisions are limited in scope. Information about the special application provision and regular restoration of entitlement is available on Department of Veterans Affairs' website (<http://bit.ly/2oVDWKI>).

3. What is the institution's transfer of credit policy?

Each institution has its own policies and procedures related to the acceptance of credit earned at another institution. While some institutions will not accept any transfer credits, others will accept some or all of the credit. Policies may also vary depending on the type of accreditation held by the institution where the credit was earned. For example, some regionally accredited institutions may not accept credit earned at a nationally accredited institution. Talking to a number of schools and learning about their credit transfer policies will help inform your decision when it comes to choosing an institution.



4. Will the institution do a pre-audit of your transcripts prior to enrolling?

If the institution has a policy to award credit from other institutions or for prior military training and/or other prior learning, you can ask if the school will pre-audit your transcripts to help you see how many of your credits are likely to transfer and whether the credits will fulfill degree requirements. Some schools will accept credit, but they may not count it toward degree requirements.

This should be carefully considered in the process of choosing an institution. Remember, it may be more cost-effective to enroll at a school that accepts fewer credits if those credits count toward your degree rather than enroll at a school that accepts more credits but does not apply them toward your specific degree requirements. Ask questions and get clear, definitive answers.

5. What is the institution's residency requirement?

Most institutions have a minimum number of credits that must be completed at the school to earn a degree. When looking for an institution to transfer to, it is important to have a solid understanding of what will be expected from you to complete your degree.

Some online institutions or distance learning institutions also require a specific amount of time for the student to be physically at the institution. These typically add up to a week or two each semester. If you are looking at an online program, this is valuable information to have in order to plan accordingly.

6. What types of support services are available for military-connected students?

Institutions offer a variety of programs and services for their students. Depending on your specific needs and expectations, some of the following questions might be helpful to ask:

- Does the institution have a primary point of contact for military-connected students?
- Is there a veteran student organization, such as SVA, on campus?
- What types of activities are available for military-connected students?
- Who is the person doing the certification of enrollment for GI Bill benefits?
- What types of tutoring are available?
- What are some ways you can get involved on campus?

7. Will I still be able to complete a degree or certificate in my current field of study?

Prior to choosing an institution, it is important to verify that the institution offers a program in your intended field of study.

It is also helpful to identify long-term career goals and what qualifications and levels of education are required to accomplish those goals. If you want to be an auto mechanic for a specific company, it is important to verify what training that company will consider when hiring. Harley Davidson, for example, will only hire those who have been trained through its own corporate training program.

8. What are my options for contacting VA about additional GI Bill questions?

VA's Education Service Call Center (888-442-4551) is an important resource. The Call Center is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Central Time.