

Guide to VA Benefits for UNCG Academic Advisors

You, as an advisor at UNCG, may be asked to advise students that use Veterans Affairs (VA) Education Benefits, also known as the GI Bill. This is a complex process. Many of the choices students make with their advisors will affect the student's eligibility for these benefits, so it is important that you understand the basic process and common pitfalls as you are advising such a student.

Why This Matters:

The VA Education Benefit population is over 600 students in Academic Year 16-17, and has been rapidly and consistently growing since the ends of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, failure to properly administer these programs can cost UNCG fines, loss of the ability to accept these benefits, potential severe negative reactions among the public, and most importantly the inability to admit, educate and retain these students.

Glossary:

- **Enrollment Certification:** Both a document and the process which generates the document, by which a students' registered courses are reported to be eligible for payment by the VA
- **Degree Program:** Any program at UNCG that will result in a Degree, Graduate or Undergraduate. The combination of Major, Minor, and Concentration determine a Degree Program.
- **VSE:** Veteran's Services Enrollment form, the UNCG form a student uses to request certification for a semester
- **VRC:** Veteran's Resource Center, the office at UNCG designed to aid military-affiliated students, including with the certification process. Ideal first point of contact for military affiliated students.

The Certification Process:

Students that are entitled to and wish to use Education Benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are required to submit the Veteran Services Enrollment (VSE) form online. This must be done once a semester, as soon as possible after completing registration. Once a School Certifying Official has received a VSE from the students, the certification process is begun.

In order for the VA to determine how much to pay to the student or to the school on the student's behalf, an SCO must submit an Enrollment Certification. The Certification provides details regarding the number of certifiable credit hours for which the student is enrolled. These

benefits require that certified courses indicate progress towards the degree. This means that, to be certifiable, any course must

- meet a degree program requirement as outlined in the bulletin or
- be a prerequisite to one of those requirements or
- be needed to fill the minimum 122 credit hours required to complete an undergraduate degree or
- be required for entry into that degree program.

An SCO performs a degree evaluation to determine whether each of a student's registered courses meet the criteria for certification. It is vital that UNCG documents demonstrate the certified courses meet one of these requirements. If we are not able to document certifiability, we will not certify a course. Once those courses are reviewed and documented, the total number of hours that are eligible are reported to the VA.

What are the Consequences of Uncertified Courses?:

While students will generally wish to have as many courses certified as possible, they are certainly allowed to attend uncertified courses if they wish. Often, students are not be aware that they are liable for Tuition costs for those courses despite use of VA Education Benefits.

If a student wishes to attend uncertifiable courses, (in order to complete a non-Degree Program, for example), this is best done as a Full Time student. Once the student has been certified for a Full Time courseload, additional courses (generally) do not generate additional benefits, but nor do they (generally) generate additional Tuition charges at UNCG. This means that if a student wishes to attend courses that are uncertifiable, the best strategy is often to enroll as a full time student with certifiable courses, then enroll additionally in the uncertifiable courses on top.

Common issues:

- Students not filling out a VSE. This must be done each semester (including Summer) that a student wishes to utilize benefits. If the student does not request certification, no benefits can be paid for any course work that semester.
- Students adjusting their schedules after they are certified. If a student replaces a certified course with an uncertifiable one, or reduces the certifiable courses below full time, the benefits they are eligible for will likely be reduced. This is regardless of the Add/Drop date, the Withdraw Without Academic Penalty date, or any other period of enrollment change.
- A student is certified for courses that do not meet for the standard 15 week semester (Part of Term 1). While UNCG apportions tuition on a credit hour per semester basis, VA Education Benefits are paid based on actual dates of attendance. This means that if a

student is actually attending a part time load during part of the semester and a full time load during the rest of the semester, benefits will only pay on this pattern.

- Courses enrolled in intending to meet the minimum 122 hours requirement. If the student has outstanding course requirements that are projected to meet this criteria, elective credits **cannot** be certified.
- Course intended to substitute for degree requirements. To be certified as such, the department will need to submit a Curriculum Modification form (CMF) in accordance with UNCG course substitution policy before the semester begins.
- Because graduate programs often have variable program requirements or program requirements that require approval of an advisor, a completed and signed Graduate Plan of Study is required before certification of Graduate Students.
- Students will sometimes be advised to take an experimental or alternate course. If courses are not listed as filling a requirement as laid out in the UNCG Undergraduate or Graduate Bulletin for that student's catalogue year, that course is not certifiable without a documented course substitution.
- Students register in accordance with requirements for a major/minor that they are not yet listed as seeking. A student must complete any major/minor change to be certified
- Students in majors that do **not** specify a degree outcome **cannot** be certified for courses that contribute to that program only
 - "Undecided" majors can only be certified for GEC courses, and only within the freshman and sophomore years
 - Department-wide pre-program majors (ex. "Pre-Health Studies and/or Sciences") cannot be certified towards
 - Pre-professional majors that do not themselves result in a degree (ex: "Pre-Medical") cannot be certified towards
 - Honors programs - while we encourage such achievements by students, courses that are required for Honors work alone and do not meet any requirement in the student's Degree Program are not certifiable.
 - Visiting/Visions students are not enrolled in Degree Programs, and therefore cannot be certified for those courses (there are exceptions for students currently seeking a degree at another institution)

If You Need Additional Help:

_____Because the population has grown so rapidly and the process is complex, UNCG has established resources on campus to aid both students and faculty in this process.

- The Veterans Resource Center: The Veteran's Resource Center (VRC) is a centralized office to support and advocate for veterans, active-duty service members, dependents, and any other military affiliated students, staff and

faculty. Many of the staff use VA Education Benefits themselves, and they can be considered the first point of contact for questions about certification.

- Location: 150 Spring Garden Apartments (Walk-Ins Welcome)
 - Phone: 336-334-5632
 - Email: veterans@uncg.edu
 - <https://veterans.uncg.edu/>
- School Certifying Officials: School Certifying Officials (SCO), located in the University Registrar's Office, execute the certification process, and are available for specific questions regarding issues with certification.
 - Neil Goodman
 - Location: 180 Mossman Building
 - Phone: 336-334-5697
 - Email: ntgoodma@uncg.edu
 - Milvia Sadler
 - Location: 180 Mossman Building
 - Phone: 336-3344-5490
 - Email: mlsadler@uncg.edu