



USI STUDENT

VETERAN

FEBRUARY 2025

NEWSLETTER

EDITION #2025-5

STAY INFORMED - USI SVA ON FACEBOOK



Are you following us on FaceBook? Scan the QRC to learn about updates and events we have with our student veterans!

COMPLETE YOUR SBRF TODAY!

Remember to submit your Semester Benefit Request Form EACH semester you want to file a claim for educational benefits. You can do so online at usi.edu/veterans.

NEXT SVA MEETING: FEBRUARY 2 / 3:30 PM STUDENT VETERAN LOUNGE (ED0114)

Meetings for the Student Veteran Association are held the first Friday of each month. Veterans, current serving and dependents of veterans are all welcome!



Members of Rolling Thunder, Indiana Chapter 6, Honor Flight of Southern Indiana, USI SVA, community veterans and basketball teams help hold the American Flag during the 2025 Hoops for Troops - Military Appreciation Basketball game. Picture by Mick Hetman, Hetman Design LLC, Jan 18, 2025

ANNUAL 'HOOPS FOR TROOPS' BASKETBALL GAME BRINGS IN RECORD NUMBER VETERANS

On January 18, 2025, the USI Student Veteran Association hosted the 12th annual "Hoops for Troops - Military Appreciation Basketball Game".

The Screaming Eagles bested the Western Illinois University Leathernecks in the Liberty Arena in both the men and women's games.

The veteran community came out in a 'show of force' with over 120 ticket redemptions before the start of the women's game and approximately 220 tickets total for the event. This year's attendance overall capped at over 2,400 fans as opposed to 1,700 the year before.

The student fan base received free commemorative shirt that was sponsored by INVets which is a non-profit organization that aids in transitioning to civilian life, focusing on job placement and finding the right community for veterans and their families to ensure their success and happiness.

We look forward to capitalizing on this momentum for next year's event.

VA BENEFIT MONTHLY REQUIREMENTS

If you use VA Educational Benefits under Chapters 33 (Post 9/11), 30 (Active Duty), 1606 (Reserve Component), or the Norse STEM Scholarship, there are monthly requirements that you MUST do to avoid stipend delays.

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ARE ARMY CADETS READY TO TAKE ON THE WORLD?

The U.S. Army is failing its youngest and most promising scholars by forcing them to choose between academic excellence or a solid foundation in the service. Commissioning programs, who compete for prestigious scholarships do not receive the necessary development they require as lieutenants due to their involvement in these exceptional programs.

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USI STUDENT VETERANS ASSOCIATION

SCREAMING EAGLES LAND IN COLORADO SPRINGS FOR NATCON



In the earliest hours of 2025 when many people were just returning home from the night's activities, four officers from the USI Student Veteran's Association boarded a plane bound for Colorado Springs, CO where SVA Chapters from across the United States and territories gathered to share ideas, best practices, and network with veteran and military-affiliated students, their families, supporters, and allies, as well as corporate, government, and nonprofit partners.

Mackenzie Gamage, Matthew Leonberger, Andrew Rhoades, and Greg Weldon (pictured L-R) represented the USI Chapter in over 100 breakout sessions and listened to keynote speakers who shared their best practices in local and national chapters to enhance the experience of all student veterans.

While there, they were able to connect with Jared Lyon, National President & CEO of Student Veterans of America (SVA).

Though delayed by countless of flight delays, cancelations and lines, the SVA made it home through the usage of a rental car arranged at the Chicago airport.

Though tired from the road, the motivation of bringing back valuable lessons to our chapter kept their spirits up, even when facing the loss of power at home. For more information, please visit the Student Veteran Lounge in ED 0114.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT - REFLECTING ON THE PATH FORWARD



THE FALL SEMESTER offers a fresh start and a time of growth in knowledge and relationships. It is the start of an incredibly special time on campus.

My initial arrival to the USI campus in the fall of 1986 as a student was wrapped in anticipation and some anxiousness. As a first-generation student with parents who farmed and earned high school-level educations, I had to navigate through the higher education process on my own. I knew I found a home at USI and was ready, but had to determine the best path to achieve my goals.

Three years later, my transition to a new USI employee rekindled the same feelings I experienced as a new student: anticipation mixed with anxiousness. Work was not new to me, I worked 32 hours a week throughout my college career at Sureway Foods, a grocery store in Henderson, Kentucky. However, when stepping into my first professional role at USI, I felt something shift inside me. My connection to USI, and sense of responsibility for the students who would follow the path I once did, deepened.

During my 35 years at USI, in each of the roles I've fulfilled, including the most recent, Vice President for Finance and Administration, making a positive difference has always been my focus, something I've embraced from our early campus leaders. Like them, I start with what is right, put students first, take the blame, share the glory and use humor as a tool to relieve stress in myself and others. These were all bits of wisdom imparted to me by our founding president, vice presidents and treasurers: Dr. David Rice, Byron Wright, Richard Schmidt, Michael Whipple '75 and Dr. Linda Bennett, our third President, as well as too many more to name here. While I walked among these and other giants daily, they always made me feel essential. This gift of their leadership may have been their greatest lesson.

In the leadership role of President, I will remain true to the values essential to USI's historic fabric. I am excited to create the same student success I enjoyed as a student—whose expectations were surpassed—for those joining us now and in the future. Tradition has always been important to me and has only been further instilled in me here. At the University of Southern Indiana, our world is tradition-driven but forward-looking.

Have a great fall, visit us frequently, talk about USI often and trust we are working to advance your institution, your home, that has made a difference in so many lives.

Steven J. Bridges '89 M'95 Interim President

USI STUDENT VETERANS ASSOCIATION

REMINDER: VA BENEFITS HAVE MONTHLY REQUIREMENTS

Student Veterans that use benefits under Chapter 33 (Post 9/11), 30 (Active Duty), 1606 (Selected Reserve - including National Guard) and the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship must certify their enrollment EACH month to receive stipends. The following information is broken down by benefit so you know how to certify your enrollment.

PLEASE NOTE: If you changed your schedule and we already corrected your enrollment, please indicate that your enrollment HAS NOT CHANGED when you contact the VA. Unless you have withdrawn completely, small changes can delay your stipend as they then contact us to make sure you are still enrolled.

CHAPTER 33 - Post 9/11

- By text - The VA will send you a text when you start your program. They will ask if you want to verify your enrollment by text. If you respond "yes," they will send you a text every month asking you to verify your enrollment.
- By email - If you choose not to get text messages or you don't use texting, the VA will email you instead to verify your enrollment each month to the email address they have in their records for you.
- Online - You can verify your enrollment through Ask VA. In your message, be sure to include the dates of your enrollment in school or training.
- By phone - Call 888-442-4551 (TTY: 711) Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET.

CHAPTER 30 AND 1606

- By WAVE - You'll need to use the Web Automated Verification of Enrollment (WAVE) website to verify your enrollment for Montgomery GI Bill benefits. To do this, follow this web page:
 - gibill.va.gov/wave/index.do
- By phone - Call 888-442-4551 (TTY: 711) Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET.

EDITH NOURSE ROGERS STEM SCHOLARSHIP

You'll need to verify your enrollment each month for the Edith Nourse Rogers Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) Scholarship in one of these two ways:

- By text - The VA send you a text asking if you want to get messages through our STEMText service. If you choose to get texts, they will send you a message each month by text asking you to verify your enrollment.
- By email - Email the VA each month with the dates of your enrollment in school or training. To do this, send a message to: STEM.VBABUF@VA.gov.

STUDENT

**VETERAN
ASSOCIATION
VETERAN**

MEETINGS:

**FIRST THURSDAY OF EVERY MONTH
1:30 PM (1330)
VETERANS LOUNGE - ED0114**

PARENTING TIME CENTER PRESENTS

Valentine's family
FUN DAY

AT WALTHER'S GOLF & FUN
2301 N 1ST AVE, EVANSVILLE

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15
11:00AM - 3:00PM**

Bring the whole family for a day filled with laughter, excitement, and unforgettable memories

Event Highlights
TICKETS: \$10 EACH
UNLIMITED MINI GOLF
2 SLICES OF PIZZA
1 DRINK
*SCAN QR CODE TO PURCHASE TICKET

Join Us for a Spectacular Family Fun Day!

FOR MORE INFORMATION: VISIT PARENTINGTIMECENTER.ORG

SOLDIER-SCHOLARS REQUIRE MORE UNIT TIME TO SHINE

-CPT MATTHEW WALTERS, AUSA, JANUARY 2025

The U.S. Army is failing its youngest and most promising scholars by forcing them to choose between academic excellence or a solid foundation in the service. Senior cadets from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, and ROTC, who compete for prestigious scholarships such as Rhodes, Marshall, Fulbright and others, do not receive the necessary development they require as lieutenants due to their involvement in these exceptional programs.

These cadets, selected for their scholarships during their senior year at their commissioning source, are commissioned as second lieutenants into active duty before completing their scholarships abroad. In each case, these young scholars will delay their Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC) start dates by 14 to 26 months following their commission in order to complete their scholarships.

Many scholars spend less than a year with their first unit before beginning the Captains Career Course. The current onboarding system represents a significant missed opportunity to harness the potential of the Army's youngest scholars and retain their unique experiences in the force.

Experience Undervalued

Their scholarship experiences could greatly benefit the Army, but often are undervalued or irrelevant to the assignments new second lieutenants are given. The current system puts scholars on the back foot from Day 1 despite their outstanding academic backgrounds.

Regardless of the type of scholarship, cadets generally follow a rigorous and demanding timeline. Cadets will self-identify their interest in competing for a scholarship sometime between the spring and fall semesters of their junior and senior years. From there, they rely on their mentorship circles to guide them through multiple, rigorous rounds of interviews and applications required to reach a scholarship decision board.

Cadets can receive notification of their selection for these prestigious opportunities anytime in the spring semester of their senior year up to late April as scholarship selection boards run through their lists of primary and alternate selectees. Within weeks, these cadets will be commissioned as second lieutenants, marking the start of their active-duty service.

Time Crunch

Once commissioned, the 48-month clock starts winding down for these officers to become captains. Post-

commissioning, these scholars must wait two to four months to complete stateside prerequisites, arrange travel and prepare for the fall semester. After arriving, scholars spend considerable time, ranging from 14 to 24 months, executing their scholarships, with an additional one to two months for their return trip.

Only after a maximum of 28 months as a commissioned officer will these officers begin BOLC. BOLC itself is often over nine months long, when considering follow-on schools. Scholars who wish to attend U.S. Army Ranger School further increase their time in the training pipeline. Thus, scholars arrive at their first units with almost 36 months of active service under their belts, but without a day in the operational force or as a platoon leader.

By contrast, their peers who haven't participated in a scholarship program likely will have led one or two platoons and will have moved on to specialty staff positions or taken over as their company's executive officer. Over half a scholar's time as a lieutenant will have been spent either on their scholarship or at BOLC, significantly reducing their time with their first unit and hindering their development as officers.

If scholars are lucky, they will spend their 12 remaining months as lieutenants leading a platoon within their respective branches. If they are unlucky, they will sit on staff and wait to attend the Captains Career Course. Since lieutenants are not guaranteed to lead platoons, many of these officers invariably will be pushed to the career course without ever having led soldiers in any capacity.

Missing Hard Lessons

This arrangement is detrimental to both the Army and these scholars, and leads to professional drawbacks. The Army disincentivizes the scholar from attending follow-on schools after BOLC; the scholar is likely to receive only one Officer Evaluation Report as a lieutenant and is highly unlikely to serve as an executive officer or in another similar position. Scholars will receive the bare minimum in practical Army education, which hurts their ability to learn hard lessons early in their careers.

While they may be branch-qualified, scholars may only shoot one gunnery, experience one platoon live-fire or experience only one company commander's leadership

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SOLDIER-SCHOLARS REQUIRE MORE UNIT TIME TO SHINE

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style before moving on. The Army's brightest young scholars might not experience a combat training center, hold key additional duties that they will need to effectively manage later in their careers, or experience a deployment until they sit in key leadership positions.

While missing these developmental opportunities does not necessarily preclude a scholar from a successful career, it does not allow them to set a good base for themselves. With the 2019 adoption of the Army Interactive Marketplace, an online talent-management platform, scholars now must compete in a highly competitive environment with just one Officer Evaluation Report representing a year of platoon leader time in the best of scenarios.

This does not mean they cannot find positions in units where their unique skill sets would provide the most value, but it limits their ability to do so. Many commanders are likely to be unfamiliar with the scholarships these young officers received, and the strength of their practical resume may not carry them through a hiring interview.

Possible Solutions

The Army can solve this problem in one of two ways: bar any cadet from competing for nationally competitive scholarships, or delay commissioning cadets selected for a scholarship.

Barring cadets from competing for scholarships would be a mistake, with effects that may not be realized for decades. The service academies are leaders in producing world-class scholars, and their yearly records of producing multiple scholars in each scholarship track show this. For each scholar the Army produces, the service gains additional trust and credibility with the American people. This also lends to the prestige of Army academic institutions and grants the Army future officers who have deep ties in academia and foreign nations.

Scholars return with an incredibly unique experience that undoubtedly will benefit them as they mature in their Army careers. Many will have unique connections to industry, performed research at the highest levels in militarily relevant subjects or spent years in foreign countries mastering the local language.

This experience may not be immediately beneficial while these scholars are still junior officers. However, the benefits of allowing them to be both a great officer and a great scholar will be visible when they broaden as senior captains and majors.

Delay Commissioning

Delaying a scholar's commissioning would work in their favor in several ways. The first and most obvious is the amount of time they would get to spend as lieutenants doing the job they spent four years at their commissioning source preparing for—leading a platoon.

Scholars also would receive more time to attend follow-on schools after BOLC, attend training with their first battalion and experience all the Army needs them to experience as junior officers.

If the Army does not require scholars to commission immediately upon graduation, it may allow scholars to apply for scholarships that grant skills instead of degrees. For example, West Point cadets cannot apply for Fulbright Program scholarships as English teaching assistants because that path does not grant a master's degree. However, the English teaching assistants track grants an unparalleled ability to learn a host nation's language.

Delaying commissioning also would more adequately allow the Army to utilize the skills scholars bring to the table. Instead of throwing scholars into the force without thought, their career managers could send them to brigades regionally aligned to the areas in which they spent the past few years studying. For example, a scholar who studied in India might find a good home in the 11th Airborne Division, which performs yearly exercises with the Indian Army. One from an opportunity in Eastern Europe may find a good place in the 3rd Infantry Division or another European-aligned division.

The Army is failing its youngest and most promising scholars during their first four years on active duty. Outstanding cadets who go out of their way to compete for unique opportunities find themselves behind the curve as they enter active service. Because the Army insists on commissioning scholarship recipients, its brightest scholars are denied chances at platoon leadership, additional Army schooling and other vital developmental milestones that will serve them well as captains, majors and colonels.

The Army also is denied a chance to take and use the unique skills these new officers bring to the force. The Army should do everything in its power to accommodate these officers, but instead, they are set up for failure.

PERSONALIZED CAREER PLANNING AND GUIDANCE: FREE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER COUNSELING

Any student who is eligible for GI Bill benefits is also eligible for Personalized Career Planning and Guidance, a free benefit that provides:

- Career counseling to help students decide which civilian or military jobs they want.
- Educational counseling to help them find a training program or field of study.
- Academic and adjustment counseling to help students address issues or barriers that get in the way of their success.
- Resume support and goal planning.

Students can use this benefit more than once. Please share this information with students and any relevant academic advising offices as you see fit. If students need more information about [Personalized Career Planning and Guidance](#), or want to apply, you can share our [webpage on the benefit](#).

SHOULD YOU REPORT VA DISABILITY AS INCOME FOR TAXES? DO NOT INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS -LAPRESSE, MARCA, JANUARY 2025

When it comes to [VA disability benefits](#), the good news is clear: you don't need to report them as taxable income. These benefits are specifically designed to support veterans who have served their country and sustained service-connected disabilities, and the government ensures they remain tax-free.

According to the IRS, VA disability benefits include compensation and pension payments to veterans or their families, grants for homes specially adapted for wheelchair living, and financial aid for specially equipped vehicles for those who have lost their sight or use of limbs. Additionally, benefits provided under a dependent-care assistance program fall under the tax-free umbrella. So, if you're wondering whether to include these in your gross income on your tax return, the answer is a solid no.

This tax-exempt status extends beyond monthly payments. For instance, if the VA increases your disability rating, the retroactive payment you receive for the adjustment is also non-taxable. Veterans granted Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) or those affected by the Combat-Injured Veterans Tax Fairness Act of 2016 are eligible for tax refunds if their severance payments were previously taxed incorrectly. The Department of Defense has even issued notifications to affected veterans to ensure they claim their rightful refunds.

Are VA disability benefits taxable?

It's also worth noting that disability benefits don't reduce your eligibility for certain tax credits. For example, you might still qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) or the Child Tax Credit, even though your disability compensation isn't counted as part of your income.

For veterans who rely on these benefits, the tax exemption can provide significant financial relief. As always, if you have questions about how your specific circumstances align with tax rules, consulting a tax professional can give you clarity and confidence when filing.

Lastly, while VA disability benefits are non-taxable, it's essential to distinguish them from other types of income veterans might receive, such as military retirement pay, which is fully taxable. Ensuring you understand the difference can save you from costly errors at tax time.

Remember, your service and sacrifices have earned you these benefits. The tax exemption is just one way the nation shows its gratitude. As the IRS states, "Don't include these benefits as income-they're tax-free!"