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Journalism Capstone

May 9, 2017

Life During and After Serving

America is a land of the free and the home of the brave. I grew up knowing that all my life. I know how important the military is to our country because I grew up in a military home. I traveled around the country when I was young and wasn’t in a permanent home till I was eight. The one thing my parents told me is I could choose whatever I wanted to do. So of course, I chose college thinking this was my best option for the long run.

The military, consisting of the Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, and Air Force, are also known as the Armed Forces. There are 1,301,300 active duty service members. There are about 800,000 Veterans and Active Duty service members are in college. The most popular undergraduate degrees by veterans are in business, social sciences, homeland security, law enforcement and firefighting, and computer and information services. After 20 years in the Navy, my dad went to college for computers and later taught it for active duty members.

With the help of government money for college is it easier for them to merge back into civilian life with good jobs. The financial aid that military veterans and active duty members get are the G.I. Bill and the Tutition Assistance. The G.I. Bill is basically recipients who became eligible for greatly expanded benefits, or the full cost of any public college in their state.

Every college in the country has military veterans looking for a place in civilian life again. There are several education benefits provided to student veterans, based on military service, and to dependents of certain veterans. The Federal Government provides a federal GI Bill. Depending on your status, they are:

Post 9/11 GI Bill which pays anywhere from 40%-100% of your tuition, the same percentage for a monthly housing stipend, and the same percentage to a yearly book allowance. The percentage is based on the qualifying active duty service after September 11, 2001. Post 9/11 also allows active duty or recently retired service members to transfer their Post 9/11 benefit to their dependents to use.

Montgomery GI Bill is still available for those veterans who served 2 or more years of active duty; generally this will be used by those students who do not qualify for Post 9/11 or wish to use it instead. This pays the students a monthly housing stipend. Montgomery GI Bill is also available for those students who are in the Reserves or National Guard. They also receive a monthly housing stipend, although it is not as large as that for those students who served on active duty.

Vocational Rehabilitation GI Bill for those student veterans who generally were discharged due to injury suffered in their military service. This also pays their tuition, a monthly living stipend and a small book and supply allowance.

If the veteran does not want to go to college his/her family can use it. Dependents educational allowance provides a monthly stipend to dependents (child/spouse) of a 100% disabled or deceased, as a result of military service, veteran.

The WI GI Bill is a tuition waiver program for both veterans who entered service from Wisconsin or for non-Wisconsin veterans who have lived here for five consecutive years. This program waives the tuition up to 128 credits at any UW school or WI Technical College for any degree program. Additionally, if the Wisconsin veterans has a 30% or greater disability rating, the dependents of the Wisconsin veteran can also use the WI GI Bill to have their tuition waived up to 128 credits. Students using this program must maintain a 2.0 cumulative GPA.

“UW-Whitewater has 192 veterans and dependents using the WI GI Bill, about 5 active duty personnel using Tuition Assistance while on active duty and about 80 students using the National Guard Reimbursement Grant,” said Janice Nordin, head of Veterans Affairs at UW-Whitewater.

While interviewing people around Whitewater and other UW schools, I learned some interesting information on why military veterans go to college. Some people were not willing to be on record or have their picture taken, which is understandable. Two veterans and 3 active duty were willing to give me their reasons of going to college and some only wanted to have their pictures taken.

They have received extensive training in the military and it is usually not related to civilian employment. Some veterans hope college will ease their discomfort because some come back from overseas with PTSD. With the help of government money for college is it easier for them to merge back into civilian life with good jobs. I also learned that most veterans at UW-Whitewater are actually studying in the Communication field and not the typical fields you would think for military veterans.

This is all true for this man right here, Matthew Thompson. He is currently a 4th year at UW-Parkside and is currently studying Communication and Psychology. Mr. Thompson was in the Navy for eight years and when he retired for medical reasons he had trouble at first deciding what to do.

“I had no choice but to leave the military because of having some medical issues. It’s not the type of medical issue that is physical, it is mental. I have Bipolar Disorder and that prohibited me from staying with the Navy”, says Thompson.

He told me the story of how his mental illness gets in the way of his everyday life. He knew he had to do something with his life but having a mental illness it is hard to get a job. When looking at his options, he saw colleges are willing to help out our military veterans no matter what illness they have, mental or physical.

“Once I saw that college could help me with my future, I took it. I thought Communication and Psychology because I wanted to help people that have mental illnesses like the people that helped me”, says Thompson.

With our veterans on campus, make sure you are welcoming to them. They deserve a lot of respect for what they have done for this country. Also don’t forget to thank them for their service. Sometimes they don’t hear it often, so when they hear it they appreciate it.

<http://www.nea.org/home/53407.htm>

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/veterans-and-college.aspx>