

## Episode 34 – Graduate School for Military Veterans

Welcome to Grad-post! I'm your host, Brian S. Mitchell and we're here to talk about life before, during, and after graduate school, and whether an advanced degree is right for you. I'll draw upon my experiences as a graduate dean and research mentor, as well as my network of students, colleagues, and experts to bring you the most complete information on graduate education that I can.

I had a brief but spectacular exchange on Bluesky last week with a military analyst regarding the similarities between academia and the military. That's too lengthy of a topic to go into here, but one of the relevant touchpoints for this podcast was the opportunities for veterans to obtain advanced degrees. There might be more than just a few of you vets out there who recently found yourself without a government job, so let's explore some options that involve continuing or resuming your education. As almost always, let's start with some numbers.

Go back just a few months to late 2024. [Laugh] – oh, that's funny! According to the [Partnership for Public Service](#), about 30% of federal employees were veterans, compared to just 5% in the civilian workforce. Way back then, the federal workforce was only 2 million persons, accounting for only 0.6% of the entire population and roughly 2% of the entire workforce, so, some 600,000 veterans were working in the federal workforce. I haven't looked at my watch this morning so I don't know how many of those veterans have been fired as of today, but let's go with a conservative estimate of [10% of the federal workforce taking the so-called “deferred resignation” program](#) or roughly 60,000 veterans leaving the federal workforce. Some will immediately find other employment because of their prodigious talents and experience, but some will be searching for a pathway to a more productive and rewarding career in the private sector where their skills and efforts will be appreciated and rewarded. For some, that pathway may include obtaining an advanced degree. Why more schooling? Well, [veterans with more than a bachelor's degree earned over \\$129,000](#) on average in 2017 compared to a little over \$84,000 for veterans with a bachelor's degree. That reflects the economic benefits of obtaining an advanced degree I discussed in [Episode 4](#) and [Episode 11](#).

The percentage of veterans currently in graduate schools is a little harder to pin down. According to one [U.S. Department of Education 2020 publication from the now-defunct](#) Institute for Education Sciences, about 5% of graduate students or 181,800 were veterans in 2015-16. The percentage is even higher if you include active duty and reserves personnel. Of those graduate students who are veterans, roughly 36% received veterans education benefits, excluding housing. That means nearly 2/3 of veterans in graduate school did not receive veteran's education benefits. The majority of veteran graduate students attended on-campus programs, but a significant number – 45% - were in online programs. Some veterans were simply taking graduate-level courses in non-degree programs.

The reasons that a high percentage of veterans in graduate school are not receiving veteran's education benefits are not immediately clear. There are other forms of financial aid that they receive and in some cases they may not be eligible. But it's clear that there are dollars left on the table for veterans who want to continue on or return for advanced degrees. Let's explore some of those opportunities.

The biggest and most popular education program available to military veterans and their families is the so-called “GI Bill.” While the [original GI bill](#) passed in 1944 has long since expired, the [Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act](#) replaced it in 2008 with the “[Forever GI Bill](#)” signed into law by President Trump in 2017 that expanded and clarified some of the provisions in the 2008 bill. Without going into the myriad opportunities called “chapters” these bills provide, you should know that many of the educational benefits apply to post-baccalaureate study. Covered expenses include tuition and fees, books and supplies, housing, licensing and certification fees, national tests and prep courses, relocation expenses if you are coming from a rural area, and even tutorial assistance. There are of course rules and limitations on amounts,

so check out the VA website for current information at [va.gov/education](https://va.gov/education). There are tons of other online resources for vets and their educational benefits, but use some caution. Wherever there is money involved, there will be predatory services looking to charge you money or take your personal information with little in return. Always start with the official government or university provided information.

Many higher education institutions cater to veterans, and it probably wouldn't surprise you who they are and where they are located. Without endorsing one particular institution or program over another, I want to highlight a recent example I ran across while editing a volume on master's education for the Council of Graduate Schools. The University of North Georgia is one of six senior military institutions in the United States. It has a [designated veteran's resource office](#) which is a member of the [Student Veterans of America](#) (SVA) organization and provides a network of military veterans and businesses to address state and regional workforce needs. SVA is also a great resource for those veterans planning careers in higher education and beyond. But veterans programs are not just limited to military colleges. [Columbia University](#), [Northeastern University](#), and the [University of Southern California](#) are further examples of graduate schools with dedicated information and programs for veterans.

I also like to highlight personal stories to make these opportunities seem more real. The Council of Graduate Schools has some really interesting student vignettes that I invite you to investigate, including one on [Tyler Mobra](#) who obtained his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa after tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. James "Jayme" Hentig retired from the military in 2012 after suffering a traumatic brain injury while on deployment in Afghanistan. He returned to school to complete his bachelor's degree in neuroscience and eventually his PhD from the University of Notre Dame. He also has master's degrees in business and public health, and is now a clinical research scientist at Immunovant. Check out his [videos on YouTube](#)!

I hope this quick spotlight on using your GI Bill for getting an advanced degree has stimulated your interest. All of the links provided on my podcasts – and there are a lot of them today – are available in the transcripts at [grad-post.com](https://grad-post.com). I thank all our veterans for your service regardless of your career paths after the military, and all our listeners today for joining me. Regardless of your veteran status, if you should choose to pursue an advanced degree, every degree will count.

#### Links

<https://ourpublicservice.org/fed-figures/a-profile-of-the-2023-federal-workforce/#:~:text=Veteran%20Status,new%20federal%20hires%20were%20veterans.>  
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020488rev.pdf>  
<https://www.nu.edu/blog/military-and-veteran-higher-education-statistics/>  
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<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020488rev.pdf>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G.I.\\_Bill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G.I._Bill)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-9/11\\_Veterans\\_Educational\\_Assistance\\_Act\\_of\\_2008](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-9/11_Veterans_Educational_Assistance_Act_of_2008)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forever\\_GI\\_Bill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forever_GI_Bill)  
<https://cgsnet.org/news/gradimpact/gradimpact-gallery/gradimpact-for-country-and-family>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owySRiDRpt0>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxyTGBmKIWE>  
<https://ung.edu/student-orientation-success/veterans-military/index.php>  
<https://studentveterans.org/>  
[https://www.gs.columbia.edu/sam-military-veteran?source=GOGL&utm\\_source=google.com&utm\\_medium=paid\\_search&utm\\_campaign=General\\_Studies&utm\\_content=paid\\_search&utm\\_term=390901422&ss=paid&gad\\_source=1](https://www.gs.columbia.edu/sam-military-veteran?source=GOGL&utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=paid_search&utm_campaign=General_Studies&utm_content=paid_search&utm_term=390901422&ss=paid&gad_source=1)  
<https://graduate.northeastern.edu/knowledge-hub/military-education-benefits-for-grad-students/>  
<https://online.usc.edu/news/gi-bill-explained-finance-online-graduate-degree/>