



IRAQ *and* AFGHANISTAN VETERANS *of* AMERICA

Intel for Next Semester

A GI Bill Syllabus

Whether you are a new student fresh to the Post 9/11 GI Bill or a seasoned 2nd semester veteran, here is some actionable intel on how to make your next term go smoothly. This GI Bill “syllabus” will answer these four questions:

- How long will I have to wait for my GI Bill check this term?
- What benefits will I receive now that it is 2010?
- When will the VA starting asking for the emergency \$3,000 checks back? Will there be a second round of emergency checks?
- What’s being done to improve the new GI Bill?

How long will I have to wait for my GI Bill check this term?

Last year’s delays were long and inexcusable and left many veterans scrambling to pay their rent and buy their books. This term the [VA has promised](#) that they will pay all GI Bill claims received by January 19th by February 1st. By all accounts this is a pretty bold claim and while we sincerely hope that they are able to achieve this goal, we suggest you prepare for the worst just in case.

The four things you need to know to prepare:

1. In order to meet the VA’s January 19th deadline, you must have submitted your completed VA paperwork and your school must have already verified your enrollment to the VA. Here is an easy to use [checklist](#) to help you accomplish both of these tasks. If you have already received a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE) from the VA last term you will not need to reapply.
2. Last fall the VA took on average 47 days to cut a veteran’s check and sadly we even heard reports of veterans waiting the entire term for their GI Bill benefits to arrive. While the VA has devoted a great deal of resources to make sure this term is different, you should be prepared to survive for a month or two without your GI Bill benefits. In order to do this we strongly suggest applying for federal financial aid, which historically has a quick turnaround and can help you weather the first month or two. You may also find out that you qualify for additional aid, like Pell Grants, on top of your GI Bill benefits. This is essential free money for you. Work with your school ahead of time to find out their policy on deferring tuition/fee charges. Although very few schools force veterans to pay out of pocket, some schools do.

3. This is incredibly important to understand, living allowance checks are paid at the end of each month and are usually prorated for months at the beginning and end of each term. This is because you are only enrolled in school for a partial month (e.g., school starts mid-January). Speaking of living allowances, we have been asked a lot of questions about what happened to GI Bill “[interval pay](#)”, which allows a veteran to get paid a living allowance over the winter break. We just received confirmation from the VA that they do offer interval pay for the Post 9/11 GI Bill. If you were expecting this payment you should contact the VA immediately see about your options.

4. Monitoring your GI Bill claim this term will become even harder now that the VA has closed their GI Bill call center on Thursdays and Fridays. If you want to check on the status of your claim you can call the GI Bill hotline at (888) GIBILL1 (keep in mind the hotline usually has long wait times) or send them an email at <http://www.gibill.va.gov/contact/contact.htm> . If you have already tried those avenues and the February 1st deadline has passed, you should contact your local [Senator or Congressman](#). Congressional inquiries about your claim will usually move your claim to the top of the pile.

What benefits will I receive now that it is 2010?

Although the new living allowance rates for 2010 were published by the Department of Defense earlier this month and went into effect for the military on January 1st. Most living allowance rates rose about 2.5% nationally, while some BAH rates went up \$262/month (Long Island University) and others went down \$201/month (San Francisco State).

The VA is unsure whether they can modify their GI Bill payment system in time to handle the new rates and therefore are having “internal discussions” on when the new living allowance rates will come into effect. We are working closely with the VA on this issue and will keep you updated. In the meantime we have updated our [benefits calculator](#) to include a number of new changes to your benefits and have upgraded our zip code finder to now include benefit rates for Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam.

When will the VA starting asking for the emergency \$3,000 checks back? Will there be a second round of emergency checks?

Sadly, we don’t have a definitive answer to either of these questions.

We have received assurances from Keith Wilson, the head of VA Education Services, stating that the VA will give veterans “ample” notice before they start trying recoup the emergency checks. We will announce the VA’s policy on this as soon as they figure it out themselves.

As for another round of emergency checks, the VA stated during a House Veterans Affairs Committee Roundtable last month that if the delays continue they would consider a second round of emergency checks. However, they believe (and we hope they are right) that they will deliver checks on time this term. If you have not already received a \$3,000 emergency check [you can still apply](#).

What's being done to improve the new GI Bill?

Last month the House Veterans Affairs Committee held an [education roundtable](#) to discuss ways to improve the new Post 9/11 GI Bill. [The Military Coalition \(TMC\)](#), a consortium of nationally prominent military and veterans associations (including IAVA), proposed several critical upgrades to the new GI Bill. These upgrades will streamline VA processing times by pruning bureaucratic steps and provide all veterans a generous and equitable benefit. These recommendations include:

- **Yellow Ribbon Reforms:** Fully covering tuition and fees at any public undergraduate school, while setting a national baseline for the Yellow Ribbon program for private and graduate schools.
- **Title 32 AGR Service:** Authorizing Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits for Title 32 Active Guard Reserve (AGRs). *H.R. 3554 / S. 1668, the National Education Equality Act (84 House cosponsors & 11 Senate cosponsors).*
- **Vocational Programs:** Granting Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to veterans who enroll in vocational programs, apprenticeships and On The Job training (OJT). *H.R. 4320, the Post-9/11 GI Education Fairness Act.*
- **Distance Learning:** Providing a living allowance for full-time distance learners based on the zip code in which the veteran lives. *H.R. 3467, the Veterans Education Enhancement Act (12 cosponsors).*

Thanks to the advocacy of IAVA, TMC and other veterans groups, Congress has introduced nearly 30 pieces of legislation to upgrade GI Bill benefits. Here are few other examples of IAVA endorsed GI Bill upgrades:

- **Transferability for Retirees:** *H.R. 3577*, the EARNED Act, will allow all retirees after 9/11/01 to transfer their unused benefits (14 cosponsors).
- **Transferability for Medical Discharges:** *H.R. 4064* will allow servicemembers medically discharged after 9/11/01 to transfer their unused benefits.
- **\$600 Buy-up, Licensing Tests, Students Loans, General Discharges, etc.:** H.R. 1336, the Veterans Education Improvement Act, is a sweeping bill that will give veterans additional benefits for participating in the \$600 buy-up, will expand benefits for licensing tests, allow GI Bill benefits to pay back student loans, and expand the criteria of eligibility to include general discharges.

IAVA is fighting to see comprehensive GI Bill upgrades legislation introduced in the next two or three months that will combine as many of these changes as possible.