

Post-9/11 GI Bill Ready to Go

by Tara Puckey

Sixty-five years after the initial GI Bill gave limitless opportunities to the post-World War II generation, today's veterans are ready for a new education plan to go into effect Aug. 1, 2009.

Chapter 33, also known as the Post 9/11 GI Bill, is aimed at providing benefits for military veterans who have served in recent years, mainly in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Many veterans who served after Sept. 11, 2001, will be eligible for full tuition and fees, a new monthly housing stipend and an annual stipend of up to \$1,000 for books and supplies. Reservists and National Guard members who have been activated for more than 90 days since 9/11 will have access to the same GI Bill benefits. And for the first time, those enrolled in the Post-9/11 GI Bill program will be able to transfer unused educational benefits to spouses or children.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the agency that administers the program, to be eligible for full benefits, a veteran must have served at least three years of active-duty service since Sept. 11, 2001. Veterans serving more than 90 days but less than three years are eligible for a percentage of full benefits based on a sliding scale. Veterans also have up to 15 years to utilize their benefits, as opposed to ten years for previous GI Bill programs.

IUPUI VA Certifying Official Nekoma Burcham recently held an educational session for veterans to explain basic information about the new program. "It is an aggregate time in service," said Burcham, "so if you are a guardsman or reservist who has



U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Lisa Harris, assigned to 407th Air Expeditionary Services Squadron, explains to Senior Airman Eric Owens, assigned to 407th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron, the College Level Examination Program tests available at the education center on Ali Air Base, Iraq. (U.S.A.F. photo by Airman 1st Class Jonathan Snyder)

served multiple tours, you can take those tours and combine them to be eligible for a higher rate."

A confusing change for some veterans and school administrators alike is the change from full-time or part-time benefits to a new rate of pursuit system. "We don't have a full-time or a part-time with this," explained Burcham. "We have a rate of pursuit that dictates how much eligibility you eat up in a semesters time period."

Calculators may be necessary to divide the credit hours a student is taking by the credit hours considered full-time by the school, but VA personnel can assist, said Burcham. "I'm here to give you the tools to help you make an informed decision about how to use your benefits," he said. "I am here to help."

Sgt. Levi Fischer, an Indiana National Guardsman just returning from a tour in Iraq, plans to put the new program to good use. "I'm glad to be back home, of course," he said. "I'm more ready to get started on my education and move on with my life. The new

GI Bill is going to pay more of my tuition and enable me to attend a school that focuses on a degree program that will work for me."

Fischer isn't the only one to be excited about the new plan. Colleges nationwide anticipate increased enrollment from the program and are generally happy with the idea of tuition payments coming directly to them.

However, the schools are still waiting on the VA to finalize some details and implement the program, which has seemed to cause some confusion.

A Huge Impact

VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki said recently that he expects the Post-9/11 GI Bill to have as big an impact as the original GI Bill. That law provided college education or vocational training for millions of returning World War II veterans, loans so they could buy homes or start businesses, and unemployment compensation while they looked for jobs. By the time the original GI Bill ended in July 1956, 7.8 million World War II veterans had