

Getting Credit for Your Military Service



Today's service members have endless choices when it comes

to pursuing higher education. Some institutions advertise granting credits for military service, but how do you know what will transfer?

AmeriForce Publishing spoke with Dr. Randy Plunkett, National Manager of Government Education at Capella University, and retired Air Force Reserve Recruiter (AGR), about this issue facing service members worldwide.

If a service member is thinking of going back to school, and is unsure what, if any, of his or her military service can count for college credit, what are the first steps he or she should take to find out?

I think he or she should go to the American Council on Education (ACE) website and download the publication: A Transfer Guide: Understanding Your Military Credit Recommendations. This was written specifically for military and veterans so they can understand all about transfer credits and their AART, SMART, Coast Guard Institute or CCAF transcript. Talk with the admissions office at your institution of choice and see if they can do an unofficial evaluation of your transcripts to see what they will take. This is also a great resource for registrars at institutions of higher learning as well.

Is there a central governing body (such as ACE) that determines a uniform standard of how many credits for each type of military experience? Or do individual schools make their own

determinations? If it is up to the individual school, how does that work?

ACE credits are based on the evaluations of every military training (formal and on the job) experience available. However, ACE from its inception has maintained that the credits that result from their evaluations are 'recommended' credits. It is definitely up to the institution to weigh the acceptance of ACE credits. The issue I find is that most institutions are not aware of the process employed by ACE to arrive at these recommended credits. They hire academic experts, PhDs who are leaders in their field of study, or disciplines. These folks do extensive evaluations and onsite observations, akin to an accreditation review. The process is very thorough. Sadly, the majority of institutions of higher education are not well versed on this process. They see an AART or SMART transcript and assume the military has its own internal system try to come up with college credit, so these transcripts are either ignored all together, or the courses are only used to fill electives. The other glaring fact is: the very institutions that reject these transcripts may be the homes of the faculty members who wrote the recommendations.

What are the most common college-credit-worthy military experiences? What types of college credit do these experiences most often count towards? Are there certain military experiences that translate better into college credits (in other words, for those still serving, are there things they can do to improve their number of eligible college credits)?

Every formal training school in the military is evaluated for credit, with few exceptions. The Air Force has the Community College of the Air Force, which is a regionally accredited, degree granting, community college. That means every course taught in the Air Force that is job-related or managerial or supervisory in nature has college credit attached to it. Again, CCAF credits are accepted by the majority of colleges, but not all.

The key ingredient missing for most veterans and service members is the requirements of the degree program they elect to pursue. For example, I was a supply technician, but my chosen field of undergraduate studies was religion. Therefore, not much of my CCAF credits applied to the program of study I was pursuing. The biggest complaint of military members is they have 'all this college credit.' The challenge for military members and veterans is to understand that the degree requirements set for programs may have very few electives, and unless they are pursuing degrees directly related to their military experience, the chances of transferring in a large amount of credits from their military transcripts is rare.

Dr. Randy Plunkett is the National Manager of Government Education at Capella University. Throughout his 20-plus years in the Air Force, Dr. Plunkett used tuition assistance, the GI Bill and scholarships in his quest to obtain college and graduate degrees. Prior to retiring from the Air Force in 2004 as a Senior Master Sergeant (E-8), he earned a Doctorate of Education in Educational Innovation and Leadership from Wilmington University in Newark, Del. Dr. Plunkett's research interest is military voluntary education.

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What advice would you give a service member who is thinking of going back to school?



Dr. Randy Plunkett

1 Understand that your individual goals are most important! This means the institution your parents, or our siblings, or your military buddies attended or are attending, may not be right for your life preparations. That leads us to ...

2 Know what you want to do with your degree first. Start with the end in mind. If that is not possible, enroll as an undeclared major, or choose to attend a community college and work on your general education requirements (math, English, speech, sciences) first. Those courses are universal and part of nearly every degree program. Talk with people, take personality tests and career exploration tests and get advice. When you find a career field or vocation that interests you, talk with those who are involved in those professions. It is okay if you don't know what you want to do after military service or after college, but be proactive in learning about you and what interests you! Also, take advantage of your institutions' career services office. These folks exist to help you!

3 Find an institution that will maximize your credit. Again, this varies by individuals. My friend who is a Marine decided to attend Dartmouth, so he did not care if they took any of his transfer credits. I don't blame him! He was accepted at a very prestigious institution, and his educational experience will be invaluable. That may not be the path you choose. So, if one can shorten their educa-

tional ride by transferring credits to their chosen institution and program, then why not? My advice to military and veteran student here is simple: Do your homework and check into a variety of schools that house programs that interest you and don't be afraid to ask about what they may or may not accept ahead of applying.

4 Remember, the choices of others should not be ridiculed, and that goes for their institution of choice. I get tired of hearing people say that one institution is better than another, or "all for profit schools are bad", or "liberal arts degrees will not get a graduate a job." Many military members and veterans choose totally online programs. That does not make the program any less rigorous or a lower quality program. Too often, our own prejudices based on experience or narrow perspectives can influence people in the wrong way. People are individuals, regardless of their experiences, and they will make their own choices based on what they desire! I feel it the duty of everyone involved in higher education to help military, veterans and their families to get as much information as possible about their educational choices, even if they elect to attend institutions elsewhere. A great way to give back to those who are or have sacrificed so much is to be a resource of information and a source of inspiration!

To read the entire transfer guide or to download it as a pdf from ACE, visit www.acenet.edu/Content/Navigation_Menu/ProgramsServices/Military_Programs/Transfer_Guide.htm ●