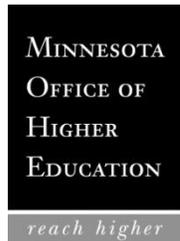


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DATE: October 8, 2013

TO: Minnesota GI Bill Contacts
Minnesota Postsecondary Institutions

Higher Education Veterans Programs
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

FROM: Megan FitzGibbon
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RE: **2013-2014 Minnesota GI Bill Policies and Procedures Update**

On May 23, 2013 Governor Dayton signed into law a new expanded version of the Minnesota GI Bill. Among the new provisions it extended eligibility to Minnesota veterans and eligible Minnesota dependent children and spouses of veterans who have served before September 11, 2001. As many of you may know, the Office of Higher Education administers the Minnesota GI Bill through an interagency agreement with the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA).

In support of the expansion of the program and out of concern for the impact it might have on postsecondary institutions, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) Higher Education Veterans Programs (HEVP) offered to be **solely** responsible for verifying if applicants met the military service requirements beginning in the 2013-2014 award year. I am sure many of you have welcomed the assistance by HEVP Regional Coordinators in reviewing documents and confirming the military service of MN GI Bill applicants and/or the military service of their spouses and parents. To find out which HEVP Regional Coordinators is assigned to which institution, please visit www.mnveteranservice.org/documents/Veterans_Coordinators.html.

To make the transition of this role as smooth as possible, the Office established a separate web access point for MDVA to easily access MN GI Bill application data and submit their determination of each applicant's eligibility based on military service. In addition, the Office made modifications to the online MN GI Bill database used by participating postsecondary institutions to allow for the determination by MDVA to be displayed on the list of applications and on each individual applicant's benefit calculators.

This update is intended to inform all participating postsecondary institutions, as well as others, of the changes that have occurred in MN GI Bill policies and procedures beginning in the 2013-2014 award year due to the expansion of the program and the new partnership with the HEVP Regional Coordinators. Unfortunately, due to timing issues, the MN GI Bill chapter of the 2013-2014 State Financial Aid Manual did not include or specify some of these changes. However, they will all be included in the 2014-2015 State Financial Aid Manual.

An overview of the changes is provided below. The affected section in the MN GI Bill chapter of the State Financial Aid Manual is referenced in parentheses after each item.

Definition of Eligible Veteran (Under ‘Student Eligibility’, ‘Eligible Veteran’)

The updated definition below reflects the expansion of eligibility to include all otherwise eligible students who meet the definition of veteran in state statute regardless of when their military service occurred. **Important note:** Participating postsecondary institutions are no longer responsible for verifying a student is eligible based on military service. However, in order to ensure accurate information is provided to students the following information will be included in the manual.

- For purposes of this program, a veteran is a (See Appendix A for related statutes):
 - service member who was discharged/released under any condition other than dishonorable after serving on active duty for 181 consecutive days; or
 - service member who was discharged/released under any condition other than dishonorable due to a disability incurred while on active duty; or
 - service member who has served on active duty for 90 days or more in a foreign country during a ‘time of hostilities’ in that country; or
 - service member awarded any of the following medals: Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Kosovo Campaign Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, or any other campaign medal authorized for service after September 11, 2001; or
 - service member who received a service related medical discharge during any period of service in a foreign country during a ‘time of hostilities’ in that country.
- A service member who has fulfilled the requirements for being a veteran in this section but is still serving actively in the United States armed forces is also a veteran for the purposes of this program.

Clarification of Eligible Active Service or Active Duty (‘Student Eligibility’)

The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs (MDVA) has clarified the active service or active duty used in determining if a student meets the military service requirements **must** be for purposes **other** than training. Any student who was determined to be eligible by a postsecondary institution prior to the 2013-2014 award year based on active duty that was **not** for purposes other than training will no longer meet the military service requirements to be considered an Eligible Veteran. Affected students will be notified by MDVA and will have an opportunity to provide additional documentation. Students who received disbursements of MN GI Bill prior to the 2013-2014 award year who no longer meet the military service requirements based on this clarification will not be required to repay any previously received disbursements. In addition, the eligibility status based on military service indicated in the MN GI Bill database for students who are no longer eligible for MN GI Bill but received it in the past will be listed as “Disqualified”.

Required Documentation (‘Student Eligibility’)

Participating postsecondary institutions will no longer be required to collect or retain documentation verifying a student’s eligibility based on military service (i.e. copy of student’s DD214 or other discharge paperwork). Beginning in 2013-2014, only the verification provided by MDVA within the MN GI Bill online database will be considered to meet the definition of Required Documentation. However, required documentation collected by the postsecondary institution **must** still be retained for previous award years including the 2012-2013 award year as it may be requested as part of an audit in the future.

Updated Application Process (‘Application Process’)

As a result of the new partnership with MDVA, the MN GI Bill application process described in the MN GI Bill chapter of the State Financial Aid Manual will also be modified as described below:

- Applications can be submitted online via the Agency’s online application.
- Paper Applications:

- Applications can also be submitted in paper form to the institution, OHE, MDVA or the Minnesota National Guard Education Office.
- Although it was possible before the 2013-2014 award year, the 2013-2014 paper application explicitly indicates paper applications can also be submitted to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Higher Education Veterans Program.
- The student certification section also indicates the institution, OHE, MDVA or the Minnesota National Guard Education Office can enter the information from the paper application into the online application on the student's behalf.
- Complete application beginning in the 2013-2014 award year includes:
 - Student application; and
 - Required documentation to verify student eligibility based on military service (provided by MDVA); and
 - FAFSA completion and other documentation related to state financial aid eligibility including but not limited to documentation of Minnesota Resident status and any required documentation related to the federal verification process.
- Required documentation to verify student eligibility based on military service provided to postsecondary institution
 - As is indicated on the student application in the 'certification' section, postsecondary institutions can share information and documentation with the Office as well as MDVA.
 - If a postsecondary institution has or receives documentation which is needed by MDVA to confirm a student's eligibility based on military service, the postsecondary institution must either provide MDVA the documentation or provide MDVA access to review the documentation.
- Incomplete applications:
 - Applications pending the required documentation to verify student eligibility based on military service will be notified within 30 days of the receipt of the application by MDVA that the application is pending and include a list of the required documentation needed in order to determine eligibility based on military service.
 - Applications pending other items such as documentation of Minnesota Resident status and completion of the FAFSA will be notified by the postsecondary institution after MDVA has confirmed the student is eligible based on military service.
- Complete applications:
 - Once an application is complete, the postsecondary institution must notify the student of his or her eligibility or ineligibility within 30 days.
 - Exception: If a complete application is received prior to the beginning of the award year/fiscal year, the institution must notify the student of eligibility or ineligibility within 30 days after the beginning of the award year/fiscal year.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

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Appendix A

M.S. 197.791 MINNESOTA GI BILL PROGRAM. Subdivision 1. Definitions.

(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=197.791>)

(h) "Veteran" has the meaning given in section [197.447](#). Veteran also includes a service member who has received an honorable discharge after leaving each period of federal active duty service and has:

(1) served 90 days or more of federal active duty in a foreign country during a time of hostilities in that country; or

(2) been awarded any of the following medals:

(i) Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal;

(ii) Kosovo Campaign Medal;

(iii) Afghanistan Campaign Medal;

(iv) Iraq Campaign Medal;

(v) Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal; or

(vi) any other campaign medal authorized for service after September 11, 2001; or

(3) received a service-related medical discharge from any period of service in a foreign country during a time of hostilities in that country.

A service member who has fulfilled the requirements for being a veteran under this paragraph but is still serving actively in the United States armed forces is also a veteran for the purposes of this section.

M.S. 197.447 VETERAN. DEFINED.

(<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=197.447>)

The word "veteran" as used in Minnesota Statutes, except in sections [136F.28](#), [196.21](#), and [243.251](#), means a citizen of the United States or a resident alien who has been separated under honorable conditions from any branch of the armed forces of the United States after having served on active duty for 181 consecutive days or by reason of disability incurred while serving on active duty, or who has met the minimum active duty requirement as defined by Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 3.12a, or who has active military service certified under section 401, Public Law 95-202. The active military service must be certified by the United States secretary of defense as active military service and a discharge under honorable conditions must be issued by the secretary.