

## New Resources For Veterans Ease Transition To Higher Education

If you've served Uncle Sam in the armed forces, and you're looking to boost your chances of civilian career success with a college degree, Long Island's colleges and universities want you!

The Island's public and private colleges and universities are making a big effort to attract veterans. They're improving services for veterans, hiring new administrators who are either veterans themselves or have extensive experience assisting students with military backgrounds, and opening new resource centers – all with the goal of easing your transition to student life.

If you decide to go back to college, government financial aid and scholarships are available to cover your tuition and housing costs and even pay for your textbooks.

### Expanded Resources

Last year, Suffolk County Community College hired Shannon O'Neill, an administrator with over 10 years of experience working with military veterans, as the first college director of veterans affairs.

"Suffolk County has the largest concentration of veterans in any county in New York State, and Suffolk County Community College serves 700 veterans, active duty service members and their families, annually," O'Neill says. About 138,000 veterans live on Long Island, including 79,000 in Suffolk and 59,000 in Nassau County, according to the most recent U.S. Census.

In April, new Veterans Resource Centers opened on all three of Suffolk County

Community College's campuses in Brentwood, Selden and Riverhead, funded by a \$183,000 private foundation grant. Veterans can speak with resource center advisors about their benefits and connect with community organizations such as the Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency.

### Enrollment Increases

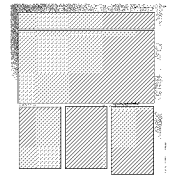
St. Joseph's College in Patchogue enrolled 97 new student veterans this year, the largest increase in years, says Erin D'Eletto, director of the Office of Military and Veteran Services. D'Eletto, who previously worked as a senior congressional aide to U.S. Rep. Timothy Bishop (D-Southampton), says that, currently, 202 undergraduate and 36 graduate students at St. Joseph's are veterans.

*Continued on next page*

"We don't wait for the veterans to come to us," says D'Eletto, who also was hired last year. She works with the campus veterans resource center to help students keep their focus on career and educational goals.

"Although it is a transition and a significant one at that, I believe veterans are succeeding because of their discipline and focus, which is required for academic success," D'Eletto says.

At Molloy College in Rockville Centre, veterans representatives in the Bursar's Office, Admissions and Financial Aid answer questions such as how much credit you'll receive for military training or college attendance prior to enlistment.



"We help veterans out, step-by-step, with the whole process of applying for their benefits. We walk them through the registration and admissions process from start to finish," says Kimberly Vereline, assistant director of admissions at Molloy, where 39 veterans are currently enrolled.

The Farmingdale State College, SUNY, Office for Veteran's Services also helps applicants navigate the admissions, registration and financial aid process, says Eric Farina, director of veteran's affairs. Currently, 175 veterans are pursuing degrees at Farmingdale State, says Farina, a member of the New York Army National Guard, who served in the U.S. Army in Germany from 1988-90 and in the Army National Guard in Afghanistan in 2008.

"What my office provides is a safe space for vets to reintegrate to the civilian life as well as the hyper-challenging experience of a vet attending college," Farina says. "We provide a sense of community and belonging at a time in their lives when they are disconnecting with their military families and searching for new meaning after years of serving others in a higher purpose."

## Post 9/11 GI Bill

The Post-9/11 GI Bill, which has helped 773,000 veterans and their family members pay for college, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, continues to be a major motivating factor for college-bound veterans, college officials say.

"The Post 9/11 GI bill is the most generous GI bill seen to date," says SCCC's O'Neill. O'Neill says that under the bill, full tuition is paid for eligible service members, as well as a \$1,000 book stipend and a housing allowance of approximately \$3,100 a month while they are registered as full-time students.

"We're seeing higher numbers of veterans going back to school because of the housing allowance, which sustains them financially," says D'Eletto of St. Joseph's College.

A component of the Post 9/11 GI Bill assists student veterans who want to attend a private college or university. The Yellow Ribbon program allows approved institutions of higher learning and the Veterans Administration to partially or fully fund tuition and fee expenses that exceed Post 9/11 GI Bill thresholds.

## Scholarships Close the Gap

Not all veterans are eligible for the full amount, however.

"Some people have not been in (the service) long enough, or they have not deployed to get the full 100 percent GI Bill. They might only get 30 percent and need a little extra to cover tuition or fees," says Lynn W. Rolf III, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) director of national programs.

For those veterans the VFW offers the Help A Hero Program, which awards individual scholarships of \$5,000 per semester, which can be reapplied for annually. The VFW has given out almost 600 Help A Hero scholarships totaling a little over \$25-million, Rolf says.

The Student Veterans of America, another national organization with campus chapters across the United States, also lends financial assistance. About \$1 million in total academic scholarships has been awarded to student veterans since 2011.

*Continued*

## Veterans Tuition Awards

Managed by the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation, Veterans Tuition Awards are for full-time study and part-time study. They are available for eligible veterans matriculated at an undergraduate or graduate degree-granting institution, according to the state division of veterans' affairs.

To be eligible, students need to be New York State residents discharged under honorable conditions from the U.S. Armed forces.

For more information on Veterans Tuition Awards, including eligibility, amounts and how to apply, visit [hesc.ny.gov](http://hesc.ny.gov). To learn more about the benefits and services available to veterans, service members and their families, call the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs Help Line at 1-888-838-7697.

## Choosing a Health Career

If you decide to study health care, Northwell Health's Military and Veteran Liaison Services assists veterans in translating military experience into marketable skills, says program director Juan Serrano.

Anthony Silvera, a 30-year U.S. Air Force veteran who retired with the rank of major, was hired last year as a veterans specialist. Silvera helps veterans navigate the



application process and craft a resume. A Barracks to Business workshop also assists in the process, including tips on interview preparation and dressing for success.

