Using the GI Bill? Do & Don’t tips when working with advising and Veterans services

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Do:
Contact Veterans Services early and often about career plans and schedule changes. Why? We want to make sure that you are getting the most out of your benefits every semester. This means working with your Academic Advisor and Faculty Advisor to ensure that you are only taking classes that go towards your degree, that you are looking ahead to when classes in your degree program are offered, and strategically mapping the fastest route to graduation.

Request to have your Joint Services Transcript reviewed. Most often you will have earned general elective credit that may or may not be useful to you, but sometimes you may also have earned credit that can be used towards your degree. Take advantage of every credit that can be applied towards your degree; progress is time and money saved. Work with your advisors to decide which credits to use.

Take advantage of prior learning credit whenever possible. Many of you are coming to college with years of experience, some of which can be translated into college credit through a portfolio. Ashley Collins in the PLA, (Prior Learning Assessment), office is a great resource and always happy to meet with students. Ashley can be reached at ashley.c.collins@maine.edu.

Keep track of your benefits. Time moves quickly in college and it is up to you to know what you have for remaining eligibility. You can either log on to the eBenefits website, www.eBenefits.va.gov and check your status page, or call 1-800-827-1000, or you can request that Veterans Services check on your behalf. Whatever you choose, make sure that you know what you have left so that when you are meeting with your advisor you both know what timeframe you are dealing with.
Are you a veteran using Post 9/11? Have a service connected disability rating? You may be eligible for an additional 12 months of education benefits. Contact Veterans Services for more information.

Get connected to the USM community in whatever way you can, whether it is spending time in the VRC, (Veterans Resource Center), joining a study group, being part of a student group, or even running for office. You bring a lot to the USM community and we welcome your input.

Don’t:
Think that you are the only student struggling to understand your GI Bill, or trying to figure out the myriad of policies and procedures at USM, or feeling alone and frustrated. All those things happen and that is why we are here. Use the Veterans Resource Centers in Portland and Lewiston, come by the Veterans Services office, talk with your advisors, or reach out to your professors. If you are having a tough time chances are that others are too. Let us know so that we can help you, and also so that we can help the person that comes after you. We want to work with you as you move from the military to college to career.

Never drop a class without talking with your professor, advisor, or Veterans Services. Let someone know what you are planning to do so that we can either work with you to stay in the class, or so that we can help you navigate the possible GI Bill ramifications.

Don’t be too proud to ask for help. We have a lot of free resources at USM, including tutoring, accommodation requests, and counseling.

In summary, college is a big shift from the military, you are going from a very structured environment to a very ambiguous one and it can be very hard. You are going from being known by your rank and job, to being unidentifiable, BUT YOU MATTER. You are not alone and we are glad that you chose USM as your school.

How to reach us: https://usm.maine.edu/veterans – Lorrie Spaulding, Coordinator of Veterans Services, Lorraine.spaulding@maine.edu, 207-780-5232