

## Creating a Better GI Bill Calculator

**Issue:** Currently policymakers have little insight into the effectiveness of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the return on investment it brings to the American people.

**Background:** Individual student-level data systems exist in many federal agencies, but federal data remains siloed, inhibiting the study of student outcomes. Even when agencies recognize the value of linking their data, there is no regularized infrastructure to facilitate such data sharing. This widespread problem manifests itself in the inability of the U.S. government to report on the basic outcomes and return on investment of the billions of dollars spent on the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

As a result, Veterans and their family members who often take advantage of GI Bill benefits all too often enroll in programs that have low student success rates and low ROI. In turn, Veterans spend precious time and scarce taxpayer dollars on pursuing a degree or credential that will not produce desired results.

Better data could be used immediately to improve the GI Bill Calculator, a tool designed by VA to help Student Veterans make the most of their education benefits. At present, the GI Bill Comparison Tool is not on par with the data presented in U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard. The Scorecard displays a range of student outcomes, like the average salary of an institution's graduates, since it is linked with IRS data, or debt data derived from the office of Federal Student Aid. The Scorecard will soon be presenting student outcome data at the even more meaningful program level. Why, then, has the GI Bill Calculator fallen so far behind in the data that it presents?

Needed improvements can happen only by interweaving data that *already exists* in the VA with data already held by the Education department. This data sharing is already established in 20 U.S. Code § 1015, which directs the Commissioner of Education Statistics to: develop a uniform methodology of reporting postsecondary spending, design systems capable of receiving and analyzing data from other federal agencies, disseminate data to stakeholders, and work with the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs to collect, study, and disseminate information on financial aid and education benefits.

### **Recommendation:**

The Veterans Education Project (VEP) recommends that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) form a partnership with the Department of Education (ED) to share its data with ED. We encourage VA and ED to determine points of granularity to best serve this purpose, but we suggest VA send:

- The name of the institution receiving benefits
- The program attended
- How much benefit used
- Age and rank, if a Veteran
- Whether it is a Veteran or their family using Post-9/11 GI Bill Dollars

The cross-pollination of data between these agencies will empower the federal government to calculate the ROI of every Post-9/11 GI Bill dollar at the degree level. This will generate an improved GI Bill Calculator that is relevant to every Student Veteran who enters higher education, boosting the socio-economic value of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and saving the American taxpayer millions annually.