

October 2017

“Master your trade and never, never, never quit! Enough motivation, persistence, and willpower will get you through everything.” - 1st Sergeant Sandra Cruz

Happy Halloween



In The News

Director of Financial Aid and Veterans Services, Shanae Williams was interviewed for the newsletter this month. Veterans Services put together a variety of Financial Aid questions students would like to know the answers to.

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1. How long have you been working in Financial Aid? I have been working in the financial aid profession for more than 20 years. I came to Mt. San Jacinto College in 2002 in the capacity of the Financial Aid Supervisor and recently promoted as the Director of Financial Aid and Veteran Services in 2015. Prior to MSJC, I worked at California State University Long Beach for 6 years in the capacity of Financial Aid Technician and Financial Aid Counselor.

2. What are your duties as the Director of Financial Aid and Veteran Services? In short, I oversee all operations related to financial aid and veterans department, maintain regulatory compliance and protect the integrity of financial aid and veteran services at MSJC.

3. What does Financial Aid mean to you? As a first generation college student and a previous financial aid recipient, I know firsthand how access to the available financial resources can transform lives. Financial Aid means to me removing barriers and leveraging the playing field for all students regardless of their socioeconomic background to achieve their education goals. Financial Aid is any grant, scholarship, loan, and/ or paid employment offered to help a student meet his/her college expenses. The federal and state government are the biggest sources of financial aid.

4. Can anyone apply for financial aid? Yes, all students are encouraged to apply by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at [FASFA](#) or DREAM Act at [Dream Act](#) to be considered for all types of state and/or federal aid.

5. What do you need to apply for Financial Aid? Students would gather the necessary information to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and/or DREAM Act application:

- Your Social Security Number (if applicable)
- Your Alien Registration Number (if you are not a U.S. citizen)
- Your federal income tax returns, W-2s, and other records of money earned.
(Note: I recommend using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to transfer your federal tax return into your FAFSA.)
- Bank statements and records of investments (if applicable)
- Records of untaxed income (if applicable)
- An FSA ID to sign electronically.

For dependent students, most of the same information above will be needed for their parent(s).

6. How often should students apply for Financial Aid and is there a due date for submitting applications? Students must complete a new FAFSA for every year in which they hope to receive aid. One important reason to fill out the FAFSA every year is your eligibility for financial aid can differ from year to year. Students sometimes get confused about which FAFSA or DREAM Act application to use, but the rule of thumb is quite simple; if you want financial aid for the 2018-2019 academic year (August 2018 through May 2019), you complete the 2018-2019 application. Each year, the new FAFSA and DREAM Act becomes available on October 1st. The funding for many state financial aid programs are limited, so the sooner you apply, the better your chances. The CA priority deadline is March 2nd.

7. Where can students check their status of their financial aid and if they are missing any documentation? Students can view the status of their financial aid application on their MSJC Student Eagle Advisor account. Students can also check to see what outstanding verification documents are required to complete their financial aid file and their award status. The Financial Aid Office sends all communications to students via their student email account. Therefore, students are also encouraged to check their student email regularly.

8. For students who are awarded financial aid, when does the school begin disbursing funds for a specific term? The Financial Aid Office begins to disburse fund the 1st week of each semester. Students should be advised that the timing of their 1st disbursement is dependent on the date in which he/she completes the FAFSA or DREAM Act application and submits any additional "verification" document requests to the Financial Aid Office. Students can view the disbursement schedule on the Financial Aid website.

9. What is the number one recommendation you have for any college student trying to apply for financial aid?

Apply early. Even if you think you and/or your parents make too much money to qualify, submit the FAFSA or DREAM Act application anyway. Many factors besides income from the size of your family to the age of your older parent- are taken into account. You may be missing the opportunity to receive addition funding for your education. If you have questions and/or difficulty with the financial aid process, we are here to help. Please come visit us in the Financial Aid Office.



“The Forever GI Bill”



Since the passage of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act in late August of 2017, we've received a significant number

of inquiries on its significance and impact. In response, here are some highlights:

The “Colmery GI Bill” is officially called the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act named after Harry W. Colmery, a World War I Army Air Service pilot and the architect of the original GI Bill.

Frequently cited as the “Forever GI Bill,” the Colmery GI Bill negates an expiration date. Previously, Veterans had to use their Post 9/11 GI Bill within 15 years of their last 90-day period of active duty service. No longer. The provision impacts Veterans who left the military after January 1st, 2013.

Effective August 1st 2018, eligibility for the Colmery GI Bill expands to all Veterans who earned a Purple Heart on or after September 11th 2001, regardless of time in service.

Spouses and children eligible for Survivors and Dependents Educational Program (aka Chapter 35) will see a \$200 increase in benefits every month. However, there is a downside -- the program previously provided 45 months of benefits, that decreases to 36 months in August 2018 and brings the benefit eligibility in line with the 36 months provided under the GI Bill. Currently, the Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) provided by the GI Bill is slightly higher than the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) active Servicemembers E-5s with dependents receive.

Effective January 1st, 2018, and this only applies to Servicemembers who begin to use their GI Bill on or after January 1st 2018, the MHA will be the same as the BAH for active duty Servicemembers E-5s with dependents. No one currently receiving a housing allowance from the VA will see a reduction.

Currently the VA utilizes the zip code of a

school's headquarters to determine the MHA. For example, if you attend the Modesto campus of a school headquartered in San Diego, you would be eligible for the San Diego MHA even though you lived in Modesto. Beginning August 2018, housing stipends will be based on where a student takes most of their classes. This provision of the legislation does not impact military students at MSJC since the BAH for Riverside County is the same across all five (5) MSJC campuses.

Beginning August 1st 2019, available on a first-come first served basis, the VA will offer the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship. The scholarship will provide additional GI Bill funds to help student Veterans complete a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degree.

“Certain eligible students will be eligible to apply for the program if they are at least halfway through a STEM degree and expect their GI Bill benefits to be exhausted before completing their program. The scholarship pays for nine (9) additional months of the GI Bill benefit, up to a maximum of \$30,000.”

Beginning August 2018, the VA will measure eligibility for benefits differently. Previously, Servicemembers with at least 90 days but less than six (6) months of active-duty service would be eligible for up to 40 percent of the full GI Bill. Under the new regulations, the same 90-days to six-month window is equal to 50 percent of benefits while Servicemembers with at least six (6) months and less than 18 months of service will be eligible for 60 percent of benefits. This change will tend to benefit reservists more due to the nature of their service.

Additionally, beginning August 2018, members of the National Guard and Reserve will be able to count time spent receiving medical care or recovering from injuries received while on active duty toward their Colmery GI Bill eligibility. This will apply to all who have been activated since 9/11. The Colmery GI Bill also allows individuals who lost their Reserve Education Assistance Program (REAP) when the program ended in 2015 to credit their previous service toward their eligibility for the Colmery GI Bill.

Source – [Forever-GI-Bill](#)

Female Veterans Have More Than Double the Suicide Rate of Civilian Women

According to recent figures released by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the suicide rate among women who have served in the U.S. military is more than twice as high as that of adult civilian women. Additional findings in the recently released report found that ex-servicemen and women generally have a 20 percent higher suicide rate than civilians. Additionally, for the first time ever, the VA released suicide data by state and found suicide rates were higher in the western U.S. and rural areas. Montana, New Mexico, Nevada have the highest rates of veteran suicide. A full copy of the report may be found here - [Mental Health](#)

According to the RAND Corp, "it was hard to pinpoint specific causes behind veteran suicide but likely involved factors social isolation, limited health care access, gun ownership and opioid addiction." Nationally, 70 percent of veterans who take their lives had not previously been connected to VA care.

“These findings are deeply concerning, which is why I made suicide prevention my top clinical priority,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “I am committed to reducing Veteran suicides through support and education. We know that of the 20 suicides a day that we reported last year, 14 are not under VA care. This is a national public health issue that requires a concerted, national approach.” Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat, or text to 838255. (Source -va.gov)

October 1st 2017 - September 30th 2018

VA Education Benefit Rate Increases

Every year VA Education Benefit rates increase based on the Consumer Price Index as calculated by the government. Based on these calculations, the VA has released the Fiscal Year 2018 GI Bill rates. These rates are effective from October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2018.

The increased GI Bill rates are effective for:

The Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty – (Chapter 30) [GIBILL](#)

The Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserves – (Chapter 1606) [GIBILL](#)

The Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP – Chapter 1607) [GIBILL](#)

The Dependents Educational Assistance Program (DEA – Chapter 35) [GIBILL](#)



Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act

It takes six years on average for veterans to resolve an appeal for a disability claim with the VA. A new law aims to cut that. H.R. 2288 the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act, was signed into law on August 23, at the American Legion national convention in Nevada. When a veteran files a claim for disability that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rejects, they have the right to appeal. However, the average wait before a final decision is six years. As a result, the number of pending appeals has increased sharply, rising in the past two years alone from 380,000 to now 470,000 pending appeals. The law established three new "lanes" for veterans appeals, to separate them out into separate categories and hopefully ease the speed with which they go through, rather than all funneling them together into one bureaucratic catch-all as before.

1. The "Board lane" instantly moves a pending appeal over to the Board of Veterans' Appeals and skips the intervening layers of VA hierarchy.
2. "The local higher-level review lane" moves a rejected claim to another adjudicator higher up on the VA hierarchy to take a second look at.
3. The "new evidence lane" allows veterans to submit new evidence related to their disability claim. [GOV Track](#)



SUPPORT THE ENLISTED PROJECT

In Need of Emergency Assistance? Support the Enlisted Project (STEP) provides Emergency Financial Assistance for junior active duty enlisted and recently discharged enlisted Veterans and their families in Southern California facing financial crisis achieve long term financial self-sufficiency through counseling, education and grants to alleviate critical near term obligations.

Categories of support include auto payments and insurance, auto repair, critical baby items, emergency food, emergency travel, major appliances, rent and mortgage, and utility payments

Emergency Financial Assistance applicants must meet three primary prerequisites:

1. Applicants must be active duty military or a recently, honorably, discharged (within 18 months) veteran in the pay grades of E1- E6.
2. Applicants must reside in one of the seven supported counties (San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside and Imperial).
3. Applicants must be in a verifiable financial crisis – as defined by imminent loss of a basic need.

For additional information, please visit <https://www.stepsocal.org/>

Applications for Emergency Grants may be found at [STEP SOCAL](#)

VA Authorization Act 2017

During September 2017, the House and Senate unanimously passed the [VA Authorization Act 2017](#). This bipartisan piece of legislation reauthorizes 20 programs within both the Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefit Administration for fiscal year 2018, such as the Homeless Women Veterans and Homeless Veterans with Children Reintegration Program; the Specially Adapted Housing Program; and authorizes VA to keep the Manilla VA Outpatient Clinic and Regional Office open for an additional year. The bill also provides technical clarification for the *Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017* regarding housing stipend calculations and the restoration of benefits for veterans who were enrolled in schools that closed abruptly. [See the full list of extensions authorized in this bill](#)

Veterans Networking in Southern California

“Operation Connect”

The North County San Diego Chamber of Commerce offers a program, “Operation Connect” which provides Veterans with opportunities to network with professionals in Southern California. The program connects transitioning service members to business leaders, owners and influential people in the community. The program offers a free one day networking” workshop which provides Veterans with a Mentor from the Chamber, complimentary professional development training, and connections to business leaders through free admission to monthly Regional Connect networking events.

Free breakfast and lunch are also included. The workshops are generally offered every month. The next workshops are scheduled for October 27th and December 1st 2017 at the North County Chamber of Commerce. Transitioning military personnel must either be within two years of separation from the service OR have been enrolled as a student since separation.

Additional information and the application for Operation Connect may be found here [SD Business Chamber](#)

U.S. Navy Celebrates 242 Years Sea Power to Protect and Promote

The United States Navy celebrates 242 years of service October 13th 2017. The U.S. Navy is the naval warfare service branch of the United States Armed Forces and one of the five branches of the U.S. military. The U.S. Navy is currently the largest, most powerful navy in the world, with the highest combined battle fleet tonnage. The service has over 340,000 personnel on active duty and more than 71,000 in the Navy Reserve. Since its earliest days, the U.S. Navy has deployed forward to deter our adversaries and fight and win if deterrence fails, to safeguard our interests and preserve our way of life. In today’s increasingly complex global security environment, the Navy continues to provide constant forward-presence in areas where our interests are being challenged, including the Persian Gulf, South and East China Seas, Red Sea, North Atlantic and beyond.



Menifee Veterans Resource Center (VRC)

Bldg. 1017
Hours: Monday-Thursday
8:00-5:30
(951) 487-3247
veterans@msjc.edu

San Jacinto Veterans Resource Center (VRC)

Bldg. 1560
Hours: Monday-Thursday
8:00-5:30
(951) 487-3247
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