

# Santiago Canyon College

## VETERAN GENERAL INFORMATION & RESPONSIBILITIES

### For Veterans and Dependents/Spouses using VA Educational Benefits

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#### Santiago Canyon College Veterans Service Office

The Santiago Canyon College (SCC) Veterans Service Office (VSO) assists veterans, active service members, reservists, dependents and spouses of veterans in accessing their VA educational benefits. This informational packet was designed to provide an overview of VA benefit processing at SCC as well as important school policies that can affect your VA educational benefits. As VA regulations change, the VSO communicates via email to relay important updates on policies and certification. Please add the following contact information to your email address book:

VSO Email: [vso@sccollege.edu](mailto:vso@sccollege.edu)

SCC Certifying Official: [bergara\\_elizabeth@sccollege.edu](mailto:bergara_elizabeth@sccollege.edu)

Website: [www.scccollege.edu/vso](http://www.scccollege.edu/vso)

#### APPLYING FOR VA BENEFITS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) determines a student's eligibility for VA educational benefits. You may call the VA (1-888-442-4551) or visit their website ([www.benefits.va.gov](http://www.benefits.va.gov)) to determine which of the following benefits you can apply for: Chapter 33, Chapter 30, Chapter 35, Chapter 1606 or Chapter 1607.

If a student is pursuing a program that will grant a degree at Santiago Canyon College, then the primary school of training listed on the application for VA educational benefits must be Santiago Canyon College. Please ensure that the college address is listed correctly on the application.

If you are a veteran student applying for Chapter 33 (Post 9/11), Chapter 30 (Montgomery), or Chapter 1606 (Reserve) for the first time, apply online at [www.vets.gov](http://www.vets.gov).

If you are a veteran student who has used VA educational benefits in the past and wants to transfer to SCC, change your place of training online at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

If you are a spouse, dependent, or survivor of a veteran, apply online at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

#### PROCESSING AT SANTIAGO CANYON COLLEGE

In addition to completing the VA application, students wishing to use their benefits at SCC must submit all required forms and documents to the VSO. Please check the Steps to Get Started on our website at [www.scccollege.edu/vso](http://www.scccollege.edu/vso) for a comprehensive list of all items need to complete your file with our office. Once your file is completed with the VSO, the processing time for certification can take up to 3 business weeks or longer during peak periods. Once certified, your information is submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Processing Office in Muskogee, OK. It can take 2-6 business weeks for the Regional Processing Office to completely process your certification. Please note that during peak periods, the processing time could be longer.

#### CERTIFICATION REQUEST FORM

Once the student is registered in required classes according to his/her educational plan, he or she must complete the Certification Request Form and turn it in to the VSO in A-210. **The Certification Request Form must be turned in every semester/term you want to be certified to the VA. If this form is not turned in, the VSO will assume that the student no longer wishes to use VA education benefits at SCC.**

#### PAYMENTS

VA payments for educational benefits, such as monthly stipends for Chapter 30, 1606, 1607, 35, and basic allowance for housing (BAH) for Chapter 33, are sent by the VA directly to the student through direct deposit or a check by postal mail. Payments are made by the VA around the first week of each month for training pursued the previous month (contact the VA for more information regarding your pay). If you did not provide direct deposit information to the VA, it is important that your address on the Certification Request Form is up to date, since that is the address we use when submitting your records to the VA.

**Chapter 33 BAH eligibility:** Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is prorated based on the number of units you are actively enrolled in and based on your percentage of eligibility for the benefit. Students must be certified for **more** than half time (more than 6 units) to be eligible for any BAH. Students certified for 6 units or less will not receive a BAH payment from the VA. You must also have at least one full semester, on campus course to receive the regular BAH stipend. If a student enrolls only in online or hybrid courses, the VA will pay only 50% of the national average BAH to the student. Please call the VA Regional Office for more information on your specific payment rates: 1(888) 442-4551.

**Chapter tuition and fee payments:** Mandatory in-state tuition and fee payments for Chapter 33 (Post 9/11) recipients are sent directly to SCC from the VA. It can take the VA 4-6 weeks to send these payments to the district for verification and processing. Any tuition and fees received will be credited to the student's account to cover fees. Reimbursements to students who paid the fees out of pocket will not be processed by the SCC Cashier's Office until after the refund date has passed for that term. Any reimbursements to the student will be based on how fees were paid. If a student pays any of the mandatory fees by cash or check, then a check will be mailed to the student. If it is paid with a credit card, then the funds will be returned to the card that was used for payment. A refund may not be issued if the student did not pay fees out of pocket and the VA tuition and fees payment were applied to pay the fees owed.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** The district policy for non-payment of fees applies to all students including Chapter 33 students expecting tuition and fee payments from the VA. Students are responsible for paying all student fees within the three-day period as outlined in the catalog policy. Students must adhere to this policy to ensure that the classes are not dropped for non-payment. This policy also applies to veteran students utilizing VA educational benefits. The VA does not send tuition and fees payments until 3-6 weeks **after** certification (which also requires verification by the Certifying Official). The student can either pay out of pocket, complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or apply for a Board of Governors Fee Waiver (BOGW) at the VSO. If the student qualifies for the BOGW, the Certifying Official will only request the VA to pay for the mandatory remaining fees, such as the Health fees, representation fees and material fees associated with the classes certified. The VA will not pay for fees that are not mandatory, such as parking fees and student ID fees.

## VERIFYING ATTENDANCE

As an inactive duty veteran (Chapter 30) or selected reserve veteran (Chapter 1606 or Chapter 1607) you are required to verify your attendance in course(s) to the VA Department on the last calendar day of the month. This will generate the payment of your monthly benefit. If you fail to contact the VA Department on the last day of the calendar month, you will have to wait until the following month to verify two months' worth of enrollment. Monthly enrollment verifications can be done by calling 1 (877) 823-2378 or logging on to the WAVES website:

[www.gibill.va.gov/wave](http://www.gibill.va.gov/wave)

The Post 9/11 Bill (Chapter 33), Dependents (Chapter 35), or Vocational Rehab (Chapter 31) do not have to call in monthly to verify enrollment. Changes in enrollment must be reported directly to the VSO. For more information, see the section about withdrawals, drops, changes to registered classes in this packet.

## PRIORITY REGISTRATION

Veteran students need to fill out the Priority Registration Request Form and submit it to the VSO with the appropriate attachments, such as a DD214 member 4 or most recent military orders showing active duty status.

SCC gives priority registration to active duty members and veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States who have been discharged within the last 15 years with a character of service of *honorable* and *other than honorable* only. Veteran students who have received a dishonorable or bad conduct discharge are not eligible to receive priority registration. Dependents of veterans are not eligible for priority registration.

New students must complete the core services of assessment (placement testing), orientation through counseling, and advisement before receiving priority registration. Note: Veteran students who have attended other colleges and have previously take placement test can have those results be reviewed; students must contact Admissions and Records for further information. You must provide documentation to the VSO that the core services have been completed, such as an educational plan from an academic counselor indicating the placement tests have been evaluated.

Continuing students who have received priority registration at SCC in the past must reapply if there is a lapse in enrollment longer than two consecutive terms. Please contact the VSO to reestablish your priority registration if you have had a lapse in enrollment.

To receive priority registration, students must also be meeting academic standards as outlined in the SCC Admissions & Records policy. To remain eligible for priority registration, students must maintain a grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.0 and complete at least 50% of the courses attempted. Students could lose priority registration if they: (1) are on academic or progress probation for 2 consecutive terms, and/or (2) have accrued 100+ units of degree applicable courses at SAC/SCC. Please refer to Admissions and Records website for more information at [www.scccollege.edu/admissions](http://www.scccollege.edu/admissions).

## EDUCATIONAL PLAN

Students using VA educational benefits must have a current and comprehensive educational plan on file with the VSO. A complete educational plan outlines the classes needed for your educational goal as reflected in the SCC catalog. The educational plan must be approved and signed by an SCC academic counselor. Veteran students can schedule an appoint with an academic counselor by contacting the VSO at (714) 628-4793 or by contacting the SCC Counseling Department directly at (714) 628-4800. Bring your official academic transcripts from all previously attended colleges to your counseling appointment for proper credit. All new students must go through the core services of assessment (placement tests) in order to schedule an appointment to receive an educational plan.

Submit a copy of your completed educational plan to the SCC VSO to be placed in your file. The VA will only pay for courses required to obtain your one educational objective as indicated on the catalog. To avoid delays in payment or possible overpayment, it is your responsibility to adhere to your educational plan.

## DEGREE OBJECTIVE

To be in compliance with VA regulations, all veterans and eligible dependents/spouse must be working toward **one** approved educational objective while attending Santiago Canyon College. Double majors or degree minors cannot be certified to VA. The educational goal declared on the Certification Request Form must match the Educational Plan created by the academic counselor. An undeclared/undecided major is only accepted for certification during the first year if a student's ultimate educational objective is to enroll in a transfer program at a four-year institution. However, only general education courses will be certified until a major is declared. You're welcome to take courses outside of your educational plan, but those courses will not be certified to the VA for payment.

## APPROVED PROGRAMS

You must be enrolled in an approved program. You can check the VA website for approved programs and schools at <http://inquiry.vba.va.gov>. All A.A./A.S. degrees and Transfer programs offered at SCC are approved programs for VA educational benefits.

## CHANGING YOUR EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE FOR CONTINUING SCC STUDENTS

If you elect to change your educational goal/program in the middle of the term, you must notify the SCC VSO immediately. You will be required to provide a new educational plan to the VSO. This needs to be done to make sure your current courses apply to the new goal declared according to the new education plan. If your goal does not take effect until the next term, wait to submit your education plan along with the Certification Request Form for the new term when you're fully registered in your new set of classes.

## REMEDIAL COURSES

Remedial courses include non-degree or pre-collegiate basic skills classes in Math, English, Reading, Learning and Study Skills. Depending on the student's educational goals, remedial coursework may be required and indicated on an educational plan by an Academic Counselor as a Pre-requisite for a required course. Required remedial required coursework may be certified for VA payment. However, **distant learning remedial courses are not approved for certification.**

## MILITARY CREDIT FOR VETERANS

Admissions and Records will apply the following credits for students who submit their DD214 for processing: Three (3) units for health education and one (1) unit for kinesiology may be granted on the basis of military service under the Lifelong Understanding and Self-Development area under Plan A (Associate Degree Plan) & three (3) units towards Plan B (Transfer to a CSU Plan). Military credit is not accepted under Plan C (Transfer to a UC Plan). The VSO will not certify courses that apply under these areas for students who have DD-214's. Please avoid taking courses under those areas if you have a DD-214. When a veteran submits a petition to graduate from Rancho Santiago Community College District, the graduation office will verify a request for credit from the form DD-214 if you have submitted a copy to Admissions & Records for processing.

## OFFICIAL ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS (NON-MILITARY)

In accordance with VA regulations, students must submit official academic transcripts from all prior colleges and universities to be evaluated by the SCC Admissions and Records Office. Furthermore, transcripts are needed in order for academic counselors to make an accurate educational plan. If you have satisfactorily completed courses and have elected to repeat them prior to transcript evaluation, **you may be at risk of overpayment by the VA.** The VA may stop or reduce your education benefits and you will be required to repay the debt to the VA. Overpayments may be retroactive to the beginning of any specific term.

## OFFICIAL ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS (MILITARY)

Military transcripts are currently being accepted in Admissions & Records. However, SCC will only evaluate credit from regionally accredited institutions.

## WITHDRAWALS, DROPS, CHANGES, ADDITIONS TO REGISTERED CLASSES

Once the initial certification for the term has been submitted to the VA, students are required to report any changes of classes to the SCC VSO to avoid overpayment or underpayment. After the add/drop course request has been officially processed by the Admissions and Records Office, students must submit the Add/Drop Form to the SCC VSO.

Dropping a class or completely withdrawing from a program can affect your benefits. For example, the VA prorates payments based on the number of units certified. Dropping from a full time student to a  $\frac{3}{4}$  time student may change the monthly benefit payment.

**Reduction in units or complete withdraws may result in an overpayment that you would be liable to repay to the VA.** For Post 9/11 (Chapter 33) students, dropping to exactly 50% or less in rate of pursuit will affect your eligibility for BAH effective the date of the withdrawal. For Post 9/11 (Chapter 33) students, dropping from classes may also affect your book stipend and tuition and fee payments. Check with the VSO first before you drop any courses to see how it may affect your benefits.

## VA REPAYMENT POLICY

A reduction in your enrollment status, such as dropping a course or completely withdrawing from the semester, may result in a debt that you will be liable to repay to the VA. The VA Debt Management Center (DMC) offers a few options for repayment. Please review their website at [www.va.gov/debtman](http://www.va.gov/debtman) for more information. If you have any questions regarding a debt, you can contact the DMC at 1 (800) 827-0648.

If you have special circumstances that were out of your control that contributed to the reduction of your units, you may be able to waive the debt (See Mitigating Circumstances below).

## MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

It is the student's responsibility to submit a mitigating circumstance explanation and documentation if dropping your courses was out of your control. This must be an unexpected occurrence and must be documented (e.g. a letter from your employer regarding shift change or increased hours, a note from a doctor or medical bill, etc.). **Submitting the mitigating circumstance documentation does not guarantee that the VA will waive your debt.** If the VA accepts your explanation, they may waive your debt. If you fail to submit an explanation, or if the VA does not accept your explanation, you will be responsible for any overpayment. Such overpayment is subject to immediate collection or deduction from your remaining benefits. Please contact the DMC for more information.

## DISTANCE COURSES: ONLINE AND HYBRID COURSES

Distance courses mostly affect students using Chapter 33 (Post 9/11). A Chapter 33 student must take at least one campus course for an entire term to receive the full BAH rate based on SCC's zip code. Most hybrid courses are considered distant courses because more than 50% of the work done is online. If a Chapter 33 student takes only distance or hybrid courses in one term, the VA will base the BAH rate on 50% of the national average BAH instead of SCC's zip code. **Remedial distance courses will not be certified for any benefit.**

## ENROLLMENT STATUS: Regular Full Semester Courses

In a regular semester term, full time is considered 12+ units,  $\frac{3}{4}$  time is 9-11.9 units,  $\frac{1}{2}$  time is 6-8.9 units, 5 units and below are less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  time. For Chapter 33 students, 6.0 units or less is ineligible for BAH. Benefits may be prorated based on the number of certified courses you are actively enrolled in during the term.

## ENROLLMENT STATUS: SHORT TERM COURSES AND NON-STANDARD TERMS

Classes not beginning and ending within the regular semester calendar, such as an 8-week course during the fall term, are certified only for the period of time that each course is active. The beginning and ending dates reported to the VA for certification will be determined by the class schedule.

For example: A student is taking 12 units total during the spring semester, where 9 of those units begin in February and end in June and the other 3 units begin in March and end in May. The student would be considered a  $\frac{3}{4}$  time student until the short term class begins in March, increasing the student's enrollment status to full time. At the end of the short term class in May, the student's enrollment status reduces back down to  $\frac{3}{4}$  time status.

For non-standard terms such as summer or intersession, the VA calculates an equivalent enrollment status based on the following formula:  
**Units or Credits X 18 / Weeks of course/s = Credit Hour Equivalent / 12 = Rate of Pursuit Percentage**

## "F" GRADES, NO PASS, AND INCOMPLETE COURSES

If you have earned an unsatisfactory grade of "F" in a certified course, you will not need to repay the benefits back to the VA. However, your academic standings must remain satisfactory as outlined in the SCC Catalog for certification. Continuous "F" grades **will affect** your future certification. Please see the Satisfactory Academic Standing information below.

If you receive an incomplete grade ("I"), it is your responsibility to complete that course and notify the VSO on the outcome grade of that course. See SCC's catalog for further instructions on incomplete grades. If you failed the class, the rules for "F" grades listed above will apply.

## REPEATING CERTIFIED COURSES

**You may repeat courses for VA benefits in the following situations:**

1. A grade of "W" or "NP" was previously received.
2. A grade of "F" was received and the class is listed in the catalog as a requirement for the major (which should also reflect your educational plan).
3. A grade of "F" was received and the class is a Basic General Educational Subject required for graduation.
4. If the grade does not meet minimum requirements for graduation for a specific program.

**You will not be eligible for VA benefits for repeated courses that fall under the following situations:**

1. A grade of "A," "B," "C," or "D" was received in a course.
2. It does not fall into one of the 4 categories listed above.

## SATISFACTORY PROGRESS

Students requesting VA educational benefits must maintain a positive grade point average (GPA) of at least a 2.0 or a "C" average, and after attempting 12 units, have a completion rate of at least 50%. If you do not maintain this Satisfactory Progress requirement as defined in the current RSCCD catalog, you will be placed on academic probation for **one semester**. Students who are placed on academic probation or progress will be required to attend a Counseling Intervention Workshop. Admissions & Records will notify the student by email. If you are still not meeting Satisfactory Progress the **second semester**, your unsatisfactory progress will be reported to the VA as a warning. The VSO can still certify your eligible courses for VA benefits. During the second consecutive semester of unsatisfactory progress, you will lose priority registration and your BOGW eligibility, if applicable.

**If you are still not meeting Satisfactory Progress for the consecutive third semester, you will not be entitled to receive VA educational benefits until you regain Satisfactory Progress.** You must schedule an appointment to see your Academic Counselor for a plan of action to regain Satisfactory Progress.

## ADVANCE PAYMENT

Santiago Canyon College does not participate in the Advance Pay option.

## GUEST STUDENTS

Students primarily attending an institution outside of Rancho Santiago Canyon College District (SAC or SCC) are able to attend and be certified for courses at SCC. In this situation, the primary institution would be the student's "parent school" and SCC would become the "guest school" where the student is a "guest student." The SCC VSO will only need 2 things: 1) Parent Letter from the parent school authorizing us to certify the approved courses, and 2) a completed Certification Request Form. Certification Requests Forms from guest students will be processed in dated order among SCC regular Certification Request Forms.

## CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Students may take courses offered at other colleges/universities while enrolled at SCC in order to satisfy your educational objective. To make sure the course/s can be certified for benefits according to your educational plan, students must complete the Parent/Primary School Certification Request (Parent Letter) along with the Certification Request Form. The parent letter must be signed by an academic counselor or dean at SCC. You will then return it to SCC's VSO for the Certifying Official signature. It will then be submitted to the secondary institution for certification. SCC becomes the "parent school" and the other institution becomes the secondary school or "guest school" where the student is a "guest student." The guest school may have additional requirements for certification, so make sure to contact their Veterans Service Office or Certifying Official for further instruction prior to enrolling at their institution.

If you discontinue the class at the secondary school, you must notify the secondary school's VA Certifying Official. The secondary school will then adjust the certified units. When grades have been posted for the secondary school term, you must provide the SCC Admissions & Records with an Official Academic Transcript reflecting the grade/s you earned for the term. Failure to provide official transcripts may jeopardize future requests for secondary school certification and could affect your payment/s. Concurrent enrollment at another school may cause delays in monthly benefits. During peak periods, parent school certification requests could take approximately three to four weeks. **Courses taken at our sister college, Santa Ana College (SAC), do not require a parent letter or transcripts after completion of the course/s. The SCC certifying official will internally send the Parent letter to the SAC Certifying Official. Because of this additional step in certification, there may be delays in the certification of courses at SAC. You will be certified there as a guest student.**

## ROUNDING OUT

Students with a limited number of required courses remaining in his/her program can round out a schedule with non-required courses to bring his/her course load up to a full-time rate during the last term only. This allows students to continue to receive benefits at the full-time rate in their last term of enrollment, even though fewer credits are required to complete the program. In rounding out a full-time schedule, students may use any unit or subject, including a subject that has previously been successfully completed. This procedure can be done only once per program. It is recommended that students meet with a VSO representative prior to rounding out.

## COLLEGE TUITION FEE WAIVER FOR VETERAN DEPENDENTS

Dependents of veterans may be eligible for the College Tuition Fee Waiver for Veteran Dependents (Dependent Fee Waiver) if attending a California Community College, or any UC or Cal State System in California. You must fill out the Veteran Dependent Fee Waiver Application Form and submit it to your County Veterans Service Office for eligibility and processing. Once approved, the approval letter must be submitted to the SCC VSO's for processing. Make sure your SCC student ID is written on this letter. The VSO may require an additional form to be completed. All fee waivers are subject to state regulations and campus policies. Students approved for the Dependent Fee Waiver must still meet the eligibility requirements for the fee waiver, including but not limited to residency requirements and academic progress standards. Students eligible under Plan A will not be able to use Chapter 35 benefits. Students eligible under Plan B may be eligible for Chapter 35 benefits.

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (CHAPTER 31)

Vocational Rehabilitation is an employment benefit, not an educational benefit. Students must call the VA at 1 (800) 827-1000 for eligibility and application information. Each Vocational Rehabilitation case is unique and is based on the employment plan developed between the veteran and his/her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Although educational plans and the Certification Request Forms are required for certification of Chapter 31, students must first meet with his/her assigned Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and submit his/her approved 1905 Form to the VSO to begin the certification process. Please visit the VA website for more information on this program at [www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab](http://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab). Vouchers for the Tuition & Fees and Bookstore supplies are given by the SCC VSO Certifying Official once the 1905 form is received accompanied by all other documents required for certification purposes (See Steps to Get Started).

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### Questions? Contact our office!

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Veterans Service Office**  
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