Over 5 million post-9/11 service members are expected to transition out of the military by 2020. Since the enactment of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008, Americans have invested over $42 billion on educating many of these transitioning service members. However, little is known about student veterans and their enrollment characteristics at a time when higher education and policymakers need to better understand the needs of this growing, posttraditional undergraduate population.

Student Veterans Follow Nontraditional Pathways to Higher Education

- Veterans in college make up a small percentage of undergraduates: 4%
- 5 years = the average time veterans delay entering college after graduating from high school
- 44% are in bachelor’s degree programs
- 54% are in associate degree or certificate programs
- A Majority of Veterans are Enrolled in Community Colleges and For-Profit Colleges
- 38% Public 2-year, 23% Private for-profit, 19% Public 4-year, 10% Private nonprofit
- 23% of veterans attend a college located more than 100 miles from their home
- 61% took classes online, at night, or on weekends (alternative coursework)
- 90% of those who took alternative courses did so online
- Most Veterans Apply for and Receive Financial Aid
- 89% applied for financial aid
- 85% of those who applied received aid
- $9,900 is the average amount of total financial aid received
- Not All Veterans Receive Veterans’ Education Benefits
- 59% received veterans’ benefits

1 in 5 Veterans in College Major in STEM Fields

- 20% are in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) fields

A Large Share of Veterans Work While in College

- 42% work full-time while in college (excluding work study)

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011-2012 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. All results are weighted (WTA000), and do not include active duty, reserve, or National Guard undergraduates.

Analysis by Dani Molina, Graduate Research Associate
American Council on Education © 2014