

Start Strong with VA Education Benefits: How to support dependents using education benefits for the first time

- **Adapting to college takes time:** First-year students may be too busy at first to take full responsibility for their VA benefit right away. We can help!
- **Support self-advocacy:** Please encourage your dependent to contact the school and/or VA before you intervene. The VA considers this education benefit to be the dependent's (not the sponsoring veteran's). Winthrop is required by law to protect the privacy of student records. Dependent students have the option to allow Winthrop employees to discuss their records with parents or sponsoring veterans. Learn more at <https://www.winthrop.edu/recandreg/ferpa.aspx>.
- **Help with benefit basics:** Students should know which VA benefit they're approved to use and what it includes (and doesn't include).
- **Discuss financial expectations:** All federal VA benefits include a monthly stipend. Students should know their VA benefit payment rates and any expectations you have regarding the management of those payments.
- **Review course schedule with VA benefits in mind:** Students should be aware that the VA bases monthly benefit payments on their school-certified enrollment status for each part of term, which can range from full-time to less than half-time, depending on the number of credits taken. Learn how enrollment status affects VA benefit pay at <https://www.winthrop.edu/veteransbenefits/enrollment-status.aspx>.
- **Prepare for Winthrop's payment deadline:** Federal VA benefits DO NOT cover up-front costs, such as housing, meal plan, or parking, and most do not cover tuition and academic fees. All federal VA benefits include a monthly stipend that the VA pays directly to students AFTER Winthrop's payment deadline and classes start. Students approved for VA benefits are responsible for planning to pay their Winthrop bill by the payment deadline to avoid having their courses dropped or being charged late fees. Contact Student Account Services sas@winthrop.edu before the payment deadline to set up a payment plan if necessary.
- **Encourage students to opt-in now for VA notifications by text or email:** All school-certified students using VA benefits must self-verify enrollment at the end of each month for the VA to release that month's payment. **GI Bill Hotline 1-888-442-4551.**