



24 top technical colleges for troops and veterans

By: [George Altman](#), November 11, 2016 *(Photo Credit: Savannah Technical College)*

The Best for Vets: Career & Technical Colleges 2017 aren't big-name schools.

You won't see them playing football on TV. They haven't done research that you saw on the nightly news. Your buddy from out of town has never heard of them.

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degrees you can earn quickly that will result in high-paying jobs, they might be perfect for you.

"You get a lot more personal, sort of a one-on-one approach," said Greg Scargall, veterans resource specialist at Santa Fe Community College in New Mexico. "We're all working from the heart, man. I mean, no one here has a big check. No one here has a big title behind their name."

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- [Our methodology](#)

Santa Fe Community College took the fourth spot in this year's Career & Technical Colleges rankings. Savannah Technical College landed the top position, followed by St. Cloud Technical and Community College, Fayetteville Technical Community College and Columbus State Community College.

Schools from across the country filled out our detailed, roughly 150-question survey for a chance to be recognized in these rankings. Those that self-designated as general education institutions, rather than career and technical colleges, are ranked in our [Best for Vets: Colleges 2017](#) feature.

In addition to considering survey responses to evaluate schools, we also took a deep dive into federal data, collecting and comparing key metrics from the Education Department, Veterans Affairs Department and Defense Department.

While there is still much less information on how vets do in school than traditional civilian students, those agencies have made efforts to increase and improve the veteran-



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specific data they collect.

At the same time, schools appear to be doing more than ever to collect such information themselves. This year, more than six in 10 schools were able to provide us with veteran-specific academic outcome measures, an all-time high.



Greg Scargall, left, veterans resource specialist at Santa Fe Community College in New Mexico, receives Student Veterans of America's Chapter Advisor of the Year Award for 2015 from SVA president and CEO Jared Lyon at the organization's "NatCon" event in January 2016.
Photo Credit: Student Veterans of America

In our survey, schools reported a veteran course completion rate of 82 percent and a veteran graduation rate of 55 percent, on average.

Veterans and active-duty service members accounted for about 7 percent of the student population at responding schools.

On average, these schools had one staff member spending at least half their time on veterans issues for every 107 veteran students.

Money and benefits

Students with full GI Bill benefits can expect to attend almost every school that responded to this survey without having to dig into their own pockets for tuition and fees. Many schools had costs within the GI Bill limits, and nearly every school that exceeded the limits offered full Yellow Ribbon scholarships.

In addition, many colleges offered special scholarships to vets on top of such benefits.

Most of the career and technical institutions also use prior learning assessment or credit-by-exam programs to give their veteran students academic credit for military learning and ease their paths to a degree.

Streamlined, targeted programs

Traditional universities may take a broad approach to education, front-loading degree programs with classes that may turn out not to be related to a student's degree. But technical schools are often similar to military training, with a tight focus on the main objective, said officials with Moraine Park Technical College in Wisconsin.

"What's attractive to a lot of our veterans is that we have a lot of two-year or one-year tech diplomas or associate degree programs," said Scott Lieburn, dean of students at Moraine Park. "They can get a really good-paying job in one or two years."

What should you study to land one of these high-paying jobs? That depends on where you live, what companies are nearby, and what types of positions they have open.

And how do you figure that out? Ask your local technical school.

"As a technical college, we focus on needs within our local area, and so we've really got our fingers on the pulse of what local employers are looking for," said Jeff Ashmen, military outreach coordinator for Savannah Technical College in Georgia. "We don't offer programs that aren't of a great need to our community."

Military credit

Additionally, technical schools such as St. Cloud Technical and Community College in Minnesota will carefully review your military record and transcripts, look for overlap in their degree programs and credit you for what you've already learned, thus shortening your time to a degree — and a nice salary — even more.

"One of the advantages of a technical college and a community college for veterans is the ease with which they can use their military education to receive credits," said Kelly Halverson, St. Cloud's dean of natural and health sciences.

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Earning your degree quickly will also minimize how much of the total 36 months of the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit you have to use, allowing you or maybe your dependent to pursue more education later.

"We want them to maximize their benefit," said James Favuzzi, manager of the Military and Veterans Services

Department at Columbus State Community College. "Thirty six months is a long time. We want to make sure you're doing what you need to do to get in here, get out of here, and get a job. ... We want you to get that next degree."

Connecting on campus

Trading in camo and boots for a book bag and flip-flops can come with some unique challenges.

"Something I really wasn't prepared for ... is the age gap," said Gunnar Gilmore, an Army sergeant who transitioned to the National Guard last year. Gilmore is only 27, but the age difference between him and his peers can sometimes feel much bigger. "You have to grow up quick in the military."

Gilmore was also very nervous about going back to school after such a long time away.

But finding battle buddies helped.

"There's a few [other students] in every class that really want to excel," and often they're fellow vets, Gilmore said.

"The key for me was to just kind of find those two people and work with them."

And that military work ethic is also key.

"If I took the same type of energy and motivation — and put it into school — as I did into being a soldier, [I knew] I was going to be OK."