

DOCUMENT RESUME

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[Survey of the Administration of the Veterans Administration's Educational Assistance Programs]. March 29, 1977. 5 pp.

Report to William F. Connors, Director, Veterans Administration: Regional Office, Boston, MA; by Fred D. Layton, Regional Manager, Field Operations Div.: Regional Office (Boston).

Issue Area: Education, Training, and Employment Programs (1100).
Contact: Field Operations Div.: Regional Office (Boston).
Budget Function: Veterans Benefits and Services: Veterans Education, Training, and Rehabilitation (702).

A survey of the administration of the Veterans Administration's (VA) Educational Assistance Programs, which was conducted at the VA's regional office in Boston, Massachusetts, focused upon whether veterans were taking unnecessary or unapproved courses at two colleges. Findings/Conclusions: Analysis of veterans' records showed that veterans were taking unnecessary courses at Springfield Technical Community College and, to a lesser extent, at Boston State College. In addition, at both of these schools, veterans were found to be enrolled in programs that had not been approved for veteran enrollment by the State approving agency. Recommendations: The director of the VA regional office should: (1) have the compliance survey staff make a detailed review of veterans' records at Springfield Technical Community College to identify overpayments to veterans for unnecessary courses; (2) have the compliance survey staff, during the next regularly scheduled survey, review veterans' records at Boston State College to determine the extent to which they are taking unnecessary courses; (3) collect identified overpayments; (4) encourage school officials to inform veterans that they are not eligible for assistance payments for unnecessarily repeating courses or for courses not applicable to their educational objectives; and (5) encourage the State approving agency to review, as soon as possible, unapproved programs in which veterans are now enrolled to determine if they are of acceptable quality and if they should be approved for veteran enrollment. (SC)

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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

REGIONAL OFFICE

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29 MAR 1977

02160

Mr. William F. Connors, Director
Veterans Administration Regional Office
Room 500 JFK Federal Building
Government Center
Boston, Massachusetts 02203

Dear Mr. Connors:

We have recently completed a survey of the administration of VA's Educational Assistance Programs, focusing on whether veterans were (1) extending or increasing their educational benefits by taking courses not needed to accomplish their stated educational objective, and (2) enrolled in unapproved courses/programs. The survey was conducted at the VA regional office in Boston, the state approving agency, and three selected schools--Springfield Technical Community College, Boston State College, and Newbury Junior College.

In summary, our analysis of veteran records showed that veterans are taking unnecessary courses at Springfield Technical Community College and to a lesser extent at Boston State College. In addition, at both of these schools we found veterans enrolled in programs which had not been approved for veteran enrollment by the state approving agency.

VETERANS TAKING UNNECESSARY COURSES

Springfield Technical Community College

At this 2-year community college we subjectively sampled and reviewed the transcripts of 29 veterans enrolled in associate degree programs who appeared to have accumulated an excessive number of semester hours. An indepth analysis of the transcripts for these students showed that 16 had taken unnecessary courses prior to and/or after meeting graduation requirements as follows:

| <u>Case</u> | <u>Total semester hours accumulated</u> | <u>Unnecessary semester hours</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | 115 | 41 | 36 |
| 2 | 86 | 21 | 24 |
| 3 | 87 | 19 | 22 |
| 4 | 87 | 26 | 30 |
| 5 | 105 | 3 | 3 |
| 6 | 87 | 18 | 21 |
| 7 | 97 | 18 | 19 |
| 8 | 93 | 8 | 9 |
| 9 | 95 | 27 | 28 |
| 10 | 88 | 25 | 28 |
| 11 | 90 | 21 | 23 |
| 12 | 92 | 24 | 26 |
| 13 | 87 | 12 | 14 |
| 14 | 88 | 21 | 24 |
| 15 | 79 | 15 | 19 |
| 16 | <u>104</u> | <u>30</u> | <u>29</u> |
| Total | <u>1,480</u> | <u>329</u> | <u>22</u> |

Courses were unnecessary in these cases because they either did not apply to the veterans' educational objective, or were electives which were taken after all electives had been used.

We estimate that additional benefits totaling \$42,000 were paid to the above veterans for unnecessary courses taken.

We noted some policies at this school which allowed veterans to take unnecessary courses. In the Day College, all students are required to be counseled each semester in scheduling their courses for the next term. Although students are allowed to enroll in courses outside the curriculum of their educational objective, they are advised that the courses will not apply toward their major area of study. Veterans, however, are not advised that these courses are not subject to benefit payments.

In the Division of Continuing Education, the courses taken by veterans are not monitored at all.

We also sampled veterans enrolled in the school's college preparatory program and found that veterans were unnecessarily repeating courses that were previously successfully completed and taking courses not related to their academic objective. We reviewed 500 veteran trans-

cripts; 51 veterans were found to have taken unnecessary courses as shown below:

| | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| Veterans | <u>51</u> | |
| Total courses taken | 857 | <u>100</u> |
| Courses | | |
| Unnecessarily repeated: | 118 | 14 |
| Not applicable to veterans' educational objective | <u>61</u> | <u>7</u> |
| Total taken unnecessarily | <u>179</u> | <u>21</u> |

Additional benefits totaling about \$49,000 were paid to veterans in the above cases as a result of the unnecessary courses.

Boston State College

At this 4-year state college monitoring of courses taken by veterans was also a problem. A determination that a course is acceptable for a particular educational objective is not made by the school until the student applies for graduation. Counseling is optional during the course selection process. Our subjective sample of 13 veterans' records showed that in the following four cases the veterans had taken a total of 59 additional semester hours, thus delaying graduation and extending benefit payments in each case by at least one semester.

| <u>Case</u> | <u>Unnecessary semester hours</u> | <u>Months of additional benefits</u> |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | 9 | 5 |
| 2 | 9 | 5 |
| 3 | 13 | 5 |
| 4 | <u>28</u> | <u>10</u> |
| | <u>59</u> | <u>25</u> |

Additional benefits totaling \$8,600 were paid in the above cases.

CONCLUSION

The lack of monitoring of courses taken by veterans at Springfield Technical Community College and Boston State College has resulted in unnecessary courses being taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that you:

- have your compliance survey staff make a detailed review of veterans' records at Springfield Technical Community College to identify overpayments to veterans for unnecessary courses,
- have your compliance survey staff during the next regularly scheduled survey, review veterans' records at Boston State College to determine the extent to which they are taking unnecessary courses,
- collect identified overpayments,
- encourage school officials in your region to inform veterans that they are not eligible for assistance payments for unnecessarily repeating courses or for courses not applicable to their educational objective.

VETERANS ENROLLED IN UN- APPROVED PROGRAMS

At both schools, veterans were enrolled in programs which had not been approved for veteran enrollment. Veterans receiving educational assistance were enrolled in the following unapproved programs.

Springfield Technical Community College

Telecommunications Technology
Student Development
Special Student

Boston State College

Regional Cultural Studies
Regional Physical Studies
Regional Urban and Planning Studies
Master of Arts
Master of Science
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study

The head of the state approving agency advised us that he is aware of these programs, but because of staffing problems he has been unable to visit the schools to approve the programs.

CONCLUSION

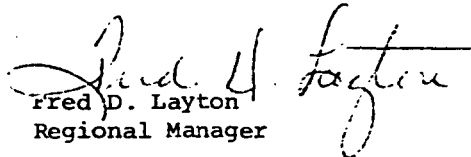
VA has been approving benefit payments to veterans enrolled in programs which have not been approved by the state approving agency.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Director encourage the state approving agency to review these programs as soon as possible to determine if they are of acceptable quality and if they should be approved for veteran enrollment.

We appreciate the cooperation received during our survey and would like to be informed of any action taken on our recommendations. We would be pleased to discuss this report with you or your staff.

Sincerely yours,


Fred D. Layton
Regional Manager