

Veterans Support: Accessing Educational Resources

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Veteran support initiatives have been a focus of the U.S. Government and local communities since the conclusion of the First World War. The impact that these programs have had on the livelihood of soldiers transitioning back into civilian life has increased and spread to include such benefits as housing through the VA Home Loan Program, health care through VA Medical Centers, and education support via the Montgomery G.I. Bill of Rights. This discussion will focus on veteran educational support and a review of the Tennessee Board of Regents Community College's veteran web pages.

America's government provided benefits during that period of transition post WWI, when "... all discharged veterans received a \$60 allowance and a train ticket home" (Head vii). Unlike today, where benefits and opportunity are abundant for service members, in the early 20th century veterans support was quite new. The United States Congress began intervention strategies to accommodate disillusioned veterans with the World War Adjustment Compensation Act or the Soldiers' Bonus Act of 1924. As a method of support for service members, this legislation provided monetary support. Moreover, the legislation and the support were received as shortsighted because of the associated stipulations. Further, the "law provided a bonus based on the number of days served. However, the money was not scheduled to be paid to veterans for 20 years" (Head viii). There are not any deep suggestions that the group of veterans who rejected the notion of waiting 20 years to receive monies associated with their service duty were in any manner hostile. The review posited that their interests, food, clothing, and shelter, were indeed dire. When service members returned to their home of record, they were awestruck by the limited number of job opportunities available. The gainful employment options were scarce in large part because of the available workforce left behind.

Returning draftees and volunteers in the armed services needed to seek out means to support themselves and their families. Veterans were determined to receive their benefits and in 1932 over 3,000 veterans marched on Washington to demand their full entitlement. According to military researchers, "... [veterans] were met by federal troops ... forcibly removed from the U.S Capitol" (Altshuler and Blumin 118).

The collateral impact of events in the Capital resulted in the development of arguably the most important form of legislation for veterans. Harry W. Colmery first initiated the G.I. Bill. Colmery, a former leader of the Republican Party, developed his thoughts and ushered forward the completed draft. The G.I. Bill passed on January 10, 1944 in the House of Representatives and on January 11, 1944 it moved to and passed in the Senate. Under the moniker of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, the G.I. Bill of Rights became "a comprehensive benefits package to aid the transition of returning veterans" (Head viii). Veterans who served, at minimum 90 days and had been honorably discharged or medically discharged were eligible.

Today, veterans continue to reap the benefits of the G.I. Bill. There have been several iterations of the legislation that continues to shape how men and women are supported post their Armed Forces Service. Contemporary needs are far more complex than those of the last century and the types of benefits needed to provide real supportive means in today's climate for veteran success continues to evolve.

Between 1944 and 2011, the G.I. Bill has been reconstituted to meet new needs of education and from its strength veterans have enjoyed the heightened awareness of their "must haves" in a more technological era. As the benefit and needs change the following programs have continued to impact veteran support on college campuses:

VA Chapter Benefit Names	Veteran Education Programs
Chapter 30	Montgomery G.I. Bill (Active Duty)
Chapter 32	Veteran Education Assistance Program (VEAP)
Chapter 33	Post 9/11 G.I. Bill
Chapter 35	Dependents Education Assistance (DEA)
Chapter 1606	Montgomery G.I. Bill Selected Reserve
Chapter 1607	Reserve Education Assistance Program (REAP)

The Veteran Education Programs listed provide a broad scope of support for servicewomen and men. Further, it is important to note that Tennessee is a national leader in its support of veterans regarding post-secondary educational access and attainment. The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) System offers veterans 46 institutions to choose from when utilizing their military educational benefits. As the home to 207, 503 students and 614 programs of study, the TBR is one of the nations most comprehensive educational systems. Also, our use of emerging technology and mobilization for instructional purposes to connect our urban, rural, and suburban communities is recognized globally (Melton, 2014, presentation). Often, because of the friendships developed or families birthed during times of service, many Veteran’s take into account moving alternative places instead of their original home of record to raise families and attend post-secondary educational institutions for degrees or certificates. The state of Tennessee is one such locale with a burgeoning economy, no income tax, and

affordable offerings within its Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) post-secondary education system. Currently, there are over 525,000 Veterans across the Volunteer state.

As a state, Tennessee continues to lead the development of job placement and job retention for veterans. According to the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs, 80% of the veterans who become employed are retained (TDVA interview). We have a 56% employment rate for veterans and as of the end of the 3rd quarter our employment rate was as high as 62.8% (TDVA interview).

Post-Secondary colleges, universities, and technical schools have seen the impact of Veterans on their campuses: whether it is Veterans who integrate only into the classroom, or, in many cases, the increased Veteran population on campuses erupts into the development of clubs and organizations that aid in supporting Veterans. Mark Street, an Associate Professor of Visual Arts at Fordham University, makes an apt assessment about veterans who return to post secondary education, “Ultimately, I see the divide—to the extent that there is one—between students who have served in the military and those who haven’t as a healthy addition to the classroom. It can lead to awed silences, moments of tension and misunderstanding, even misguided questions” (Chronicle of Higher Education, n.p.).

Program Examples

East Tennessee State University created the Buc Hero Program which supports veterans who attend by covering up to 60 percent of the out of state tuition. The University of Memphis and its Veterans Resource Center is an example of what the commitment to Veteran Success can do as their institution has seen the number of identified Veteran’s enrollment grow from 397 in the Fall of 2008 to 712 in the Fall of 2012, a 79.3 percent increase (Stout and Green,

2012) or a 15.86 percent increase per year. Motlow State Community College and Volunteer State Community College, both identified as military friendly colleges, exemplify how support for Veterans has been reshaped at the two-year institutional level. These institutions provide detailed support and clear direction on a dedicated Veteran's web-page that assists Veteran's as they navigate through information that can further support their needs as students, both academically and personally. Chattanooga State Community College is also creating a robust platform to educate Veteran's about the many linkages that lead to accelerated degrees, online education options, support services, and provides a resource guide that provides detailed information to further support Veteran's needs. Some of the outreach strategies that veteran programs rely on are the social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, Google Chat, or Skype. Use of these resources enables veterans and their Veteran Affairs offices to stay in contact over time and to access support more efficiently, therefore, web page contents should offer easy navigation.

TBR Community College Veteran Web Page Review Findings

This review provided an overview of all 13 community colleges in the TBR System, their service areas, their rankings from high to low, and the number of veterans for each as reported by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), and the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs (TNDVA). It is important to note that the number of veterans reported and calculated by the Veterans Administration (VA) and the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs (TNDVA) differ in accordance with the reporting cycle for each agency. The Veterans Administration reviews and updates the information annually from the previous calendar year and the TNDVA makes monthly updates.

Community College	Veterans in Service Area	Ranking- Highest to lowest # of Veterans	VA Number of Veterans	TNDVA Number of Veterans
Chatt. State CC	36,130	8	471	270
Cleveland State CC	19,276	12	185	78
Columbia State CC	31,162	11	186	118
Dyersburg State CC	14,380	13	124	67
Jackson State CC	35,992	9	193	121
Motlow State CC	44,795	4	242	138
Nashville State CC	78,129	1	510	272
Northeast State CC	37,346	7	357	196
Pellissippi State CC	48,052	3	554	317
Roane State CC	33,888	10	196	120
Southwest TN CC	65,130	2	660	295
Vol State CC	41,728	5	355	243
Walters State CC	39,586	6	246	149
TN Veterans	521,267	N/A	N/A	N/A

The audit of the TBR Community College web pages provided a clear indication that, as a system, veterans are well supported. After contacting each community college coordinator or director of veteran affairs, each community college web page was reviewed according to the best practices/essential components of an effective website for veterans as found in the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers Helping Veterans

Succeed Handbook (2014). An X notation notes that the website provides a link to the information.

Community College	Veteran Home Page Link	School Contact Information	News Section	VA Regional Office Link	School Certifying Official Link	Institutional Programs for Veterans
CHCSS		X	X	X	X	X
CLSCC		X		X	X	X
COSCC		X	X	X		
DSCC		X	X	X	X	X
JSCC	X	X				X
MSCC	X	X	X	X	X	X
NSCC		X	X		X	
NESCC	X	X	X	X	X	
PSTCC		X	X		X	X
RSCC	X	X		X	X	
STCC	X	X	X			X
VSCC	X	X	X	X	X	X
WSCC		X	X		X	

Community College	Links to Instructions for Applying for Benefits	Types of Benefits	Certification Process Description	Often Used Forms	FAQ	Additional Veteran Support Links
CHCSS	X	X	X	X	X	X
CLSCC	X	X		X	X	X
COSCC	X	X	X			X
DSCC	X	X	X	X	X	X
JSCC	X	X				X
MSCC	X	X	X	X	X	X
NSCC	X	X	X	X	X	X
NESCC	X	X	X	X		X
PSTCC	X	X	X	X		X
RSCC	X	X	X		X	X
STCC	X	X	X	X	X	X
VSCC	X	X	X	X	X	
WSCC	X	X	X	X	X	X

Areas of emphasis for further development are limited across the community college system, but do exist in the area of home page links, which for many veterans serves as the gateway to an institution. Having a clear link on community college home pages provides the veteran with confidence in the institutions commitment to serving their unique needs and

situations. Veterans today, access information in a myriad of ways: print, via social media, digital zines, web sites, and email. The delivery method should match the mode of the recipient, which makes how veteran's affairs offices communicate on their web pages of great importance. Piatkowsky reports, "Printed materials remain a viable means for providing information to student veterans and their families, but websites are increasingly important for delivering information, advertising services offered, and providing critical contact information (2014, p. 147). Communication for community colleges and veterans can be a deciding factor between a veteran attending the institution or moving onward and elsewhere.

Recommendations

The suggested recommendations are limited to the scope of the project. The observations of the review open up the opportunity to suggest recommendation to further engage and support the success of veteran students. (1) Top down support of a visible Veteran Affairs link on institutional home pages. (2) Recognize Veterans during graduation. (3) Provide updated links to Veteran Information, referencing education, benefits, and workforce/business networking possibilities.

(4) Create a communication plan for Veteran coordinators to engage in discussion on a formal and quarterly basis. (5) Create active content for Veterans to review, such as, video or use of YOUTUBE as a medium that celebrates Veteran. (6). Introduce Veterans to institutional Department of Veteran Affairs. (7) Program Administrators may consider engaging in the American Council on Education (ACE), The National Association of Veteran Program Administrators (NAVPA), and the regional VA offices for continued professional development

opportunities. (8) Seek methods to encourage campus dialogue and engagement to support, learn, and recognize veteran student needs.

Conclusion

It is clear that the number of resources that a Veteran has access to can be overwhelming. The programs, projects, and support initiatives for Veterans are utilized, but perhaps the connections between student veteran host institutions could deepen. Veteran support is paramount to the success of our service members upon their return from active duty. The Academic development and support initiatives in place may provide a direct impact on our Drive to 55 visions for the state of Tennessee. Further, placing a concerted effort through institutional outreach and marketing of academic, as well as, support programs may likely garner more attention from those who require the services. The advocates for veterans identify other important and necessary components to engage student veterans. Creating the proper environment and providing ongoing training of community college personnel is a strong first step towards securing legitimacy in the eyes of veterans. As we move forward, the contributions of those who gave up parts of their youth in the hopes or desperation of providing opportunity that would and continues to benefit others is the legacy of a veteran.

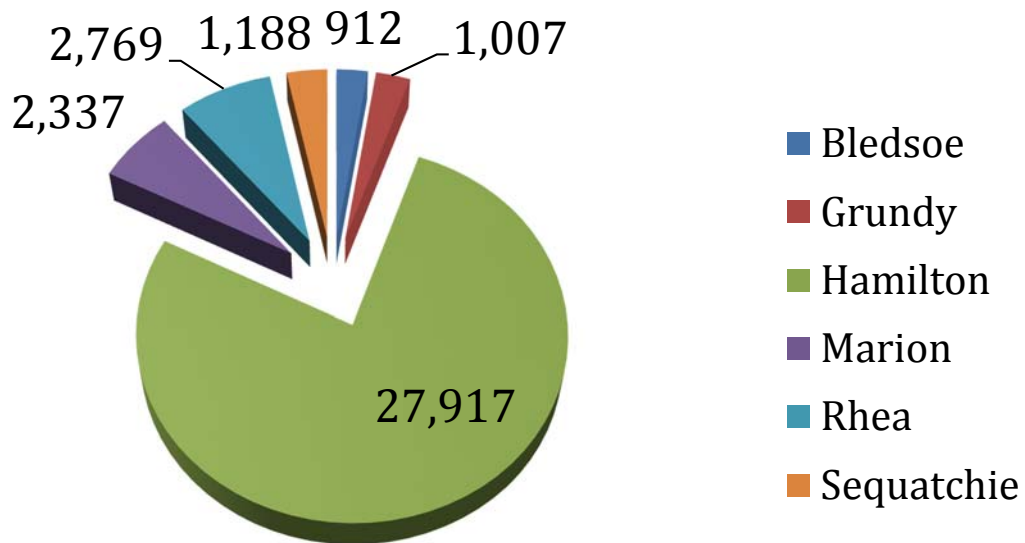
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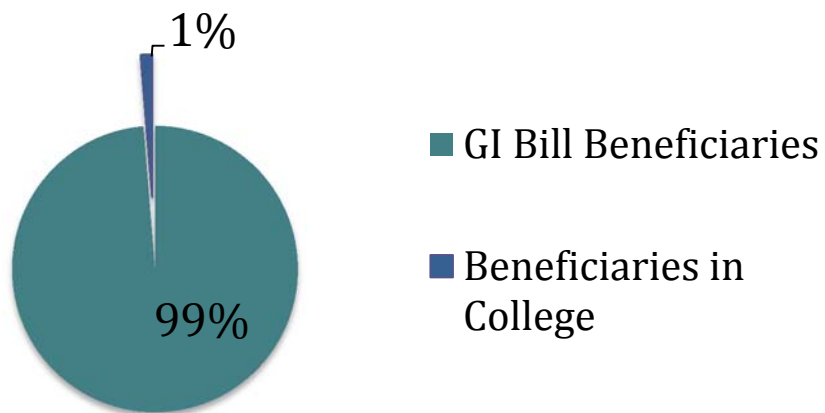
Supplemental Material



Number of Veterans per county within service area

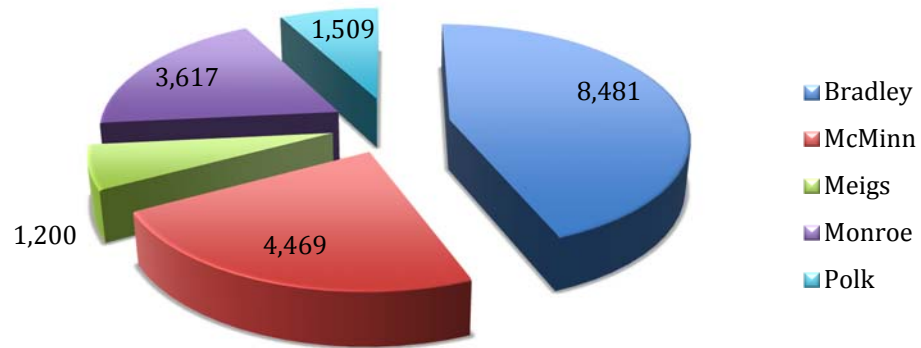


Percentage of GI Bill Beneficiaries (Veterans and Dependents) utilizing GI Benefits

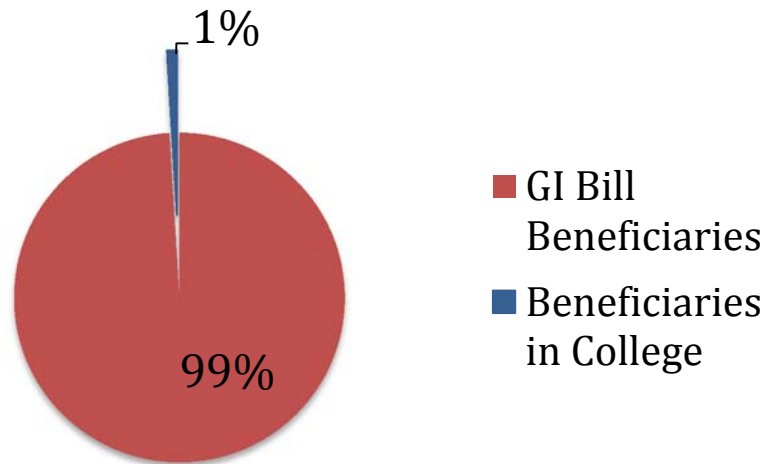


Cleveland State COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Number of Veterans per county within service area

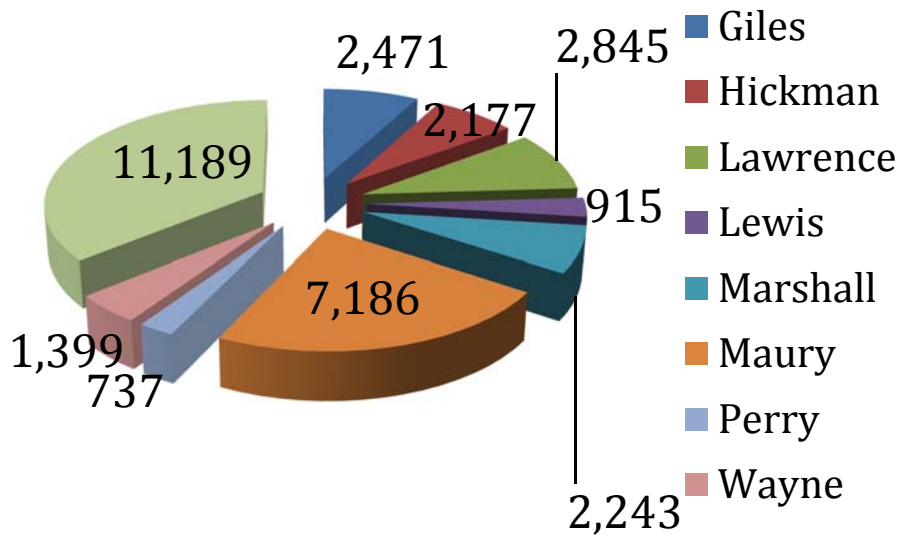


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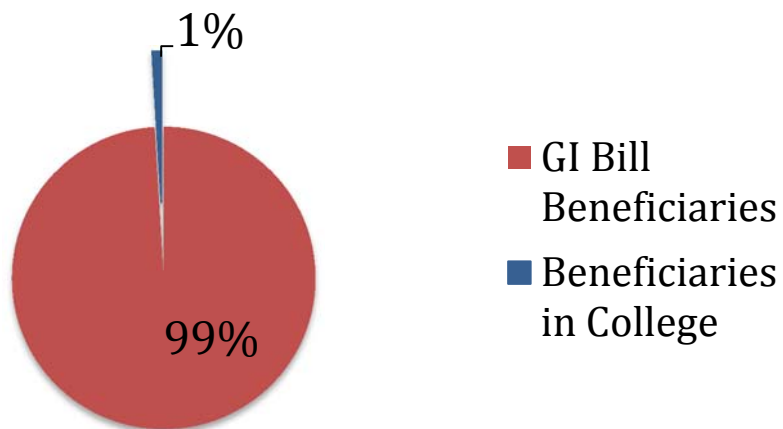




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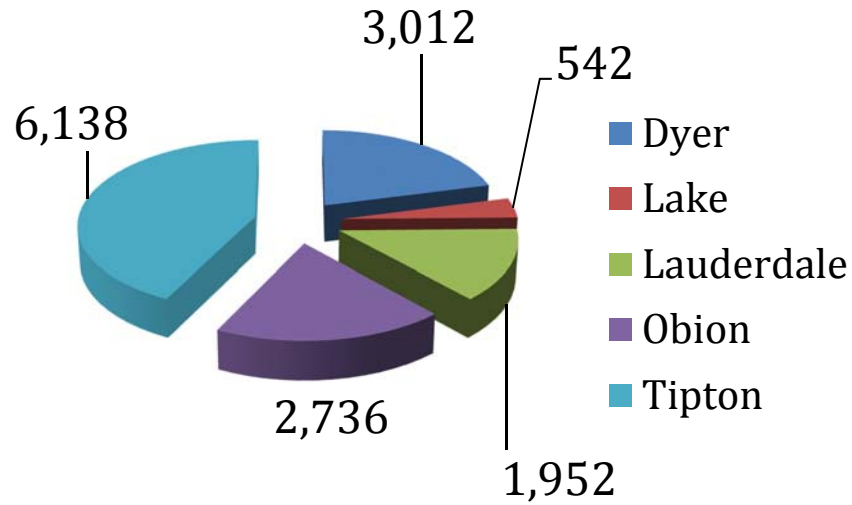


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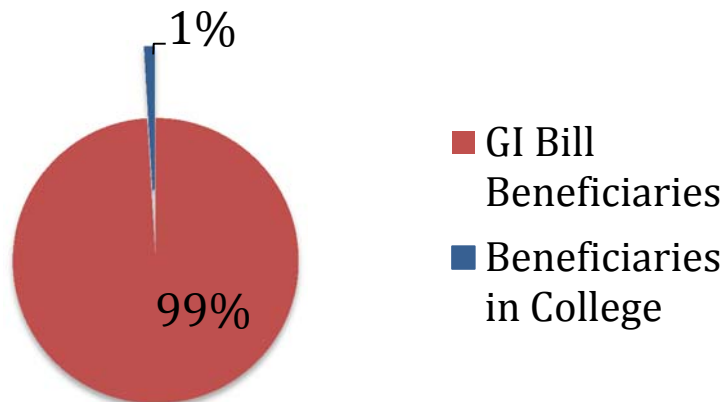




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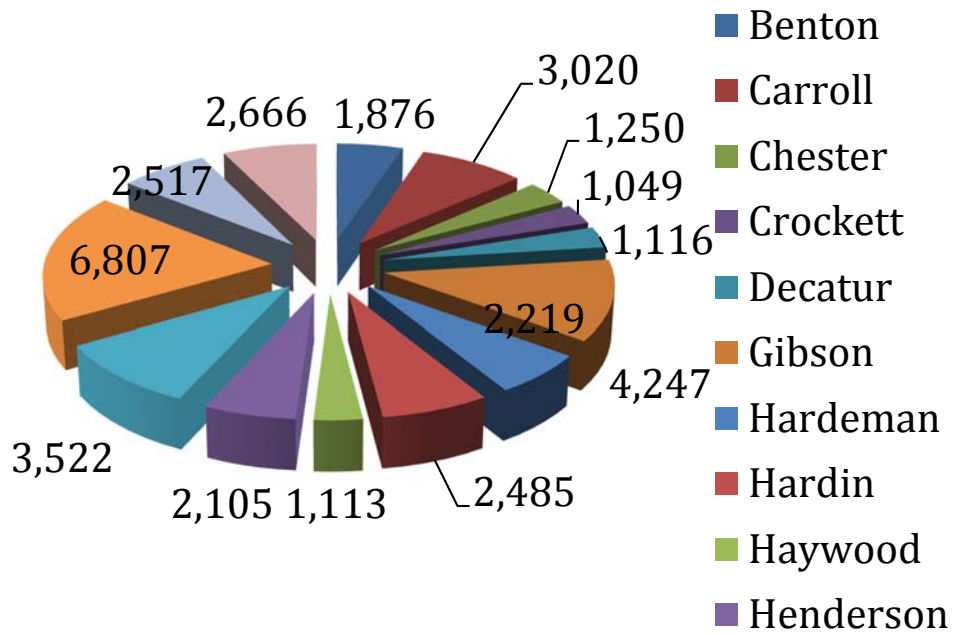


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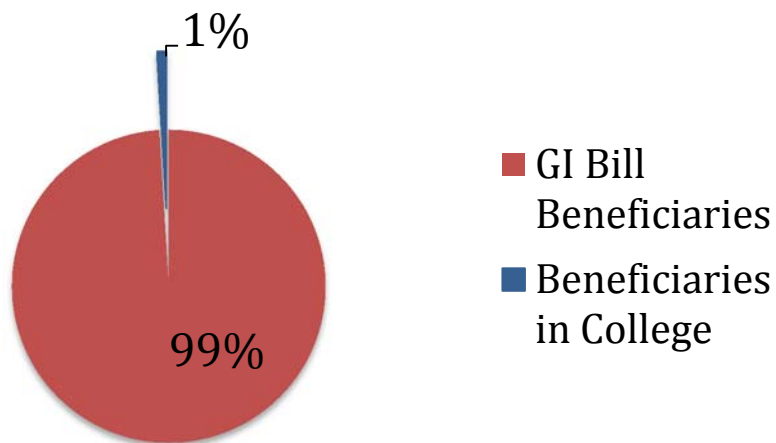




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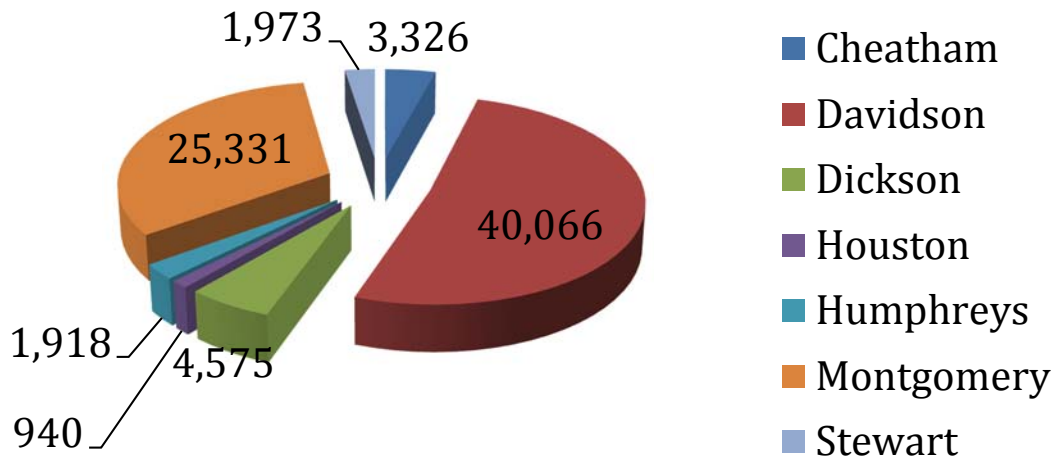


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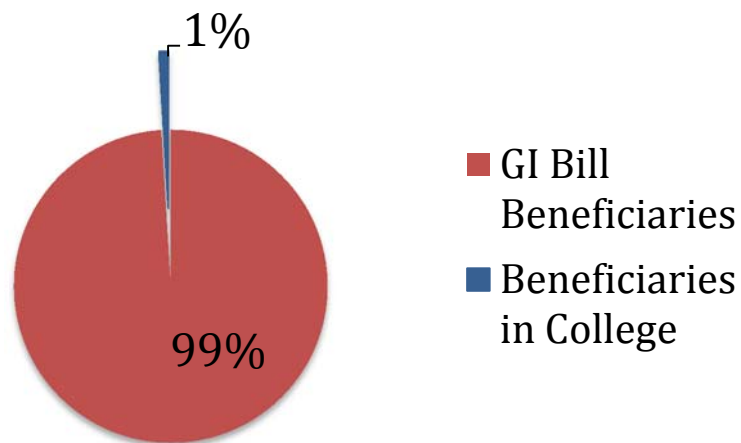




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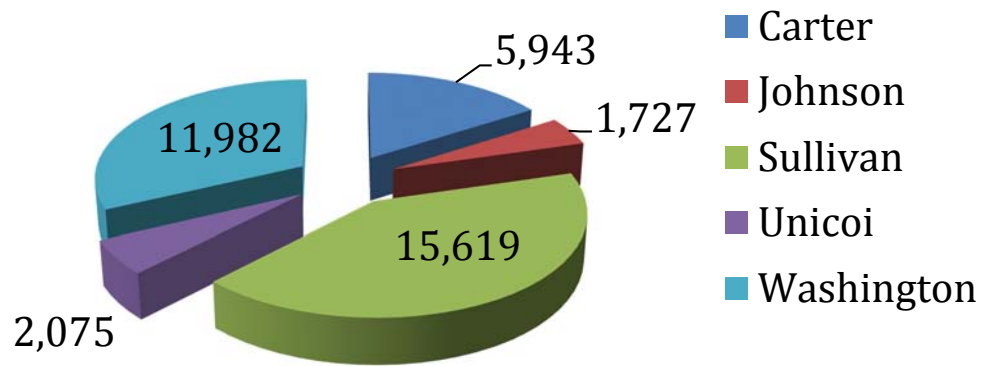


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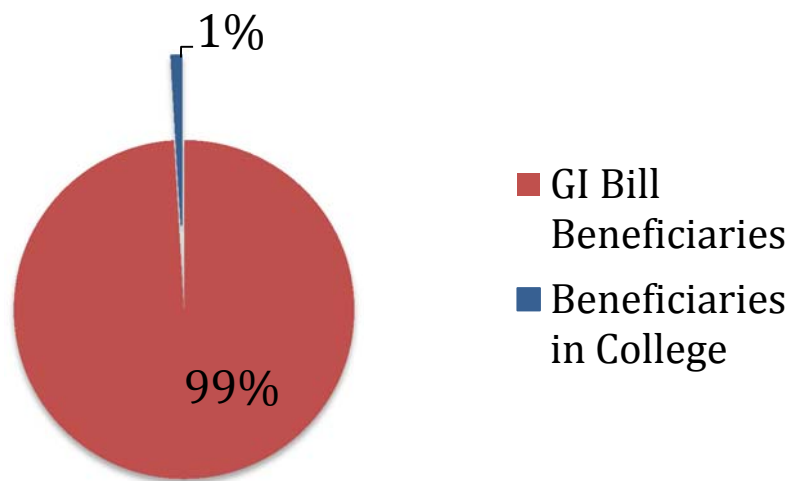




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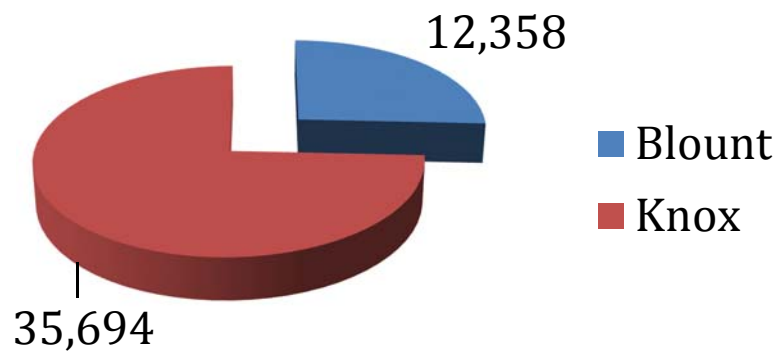


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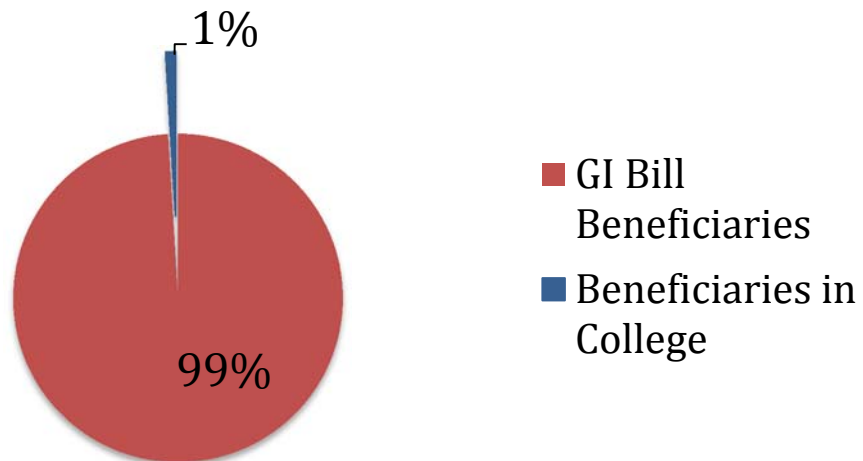




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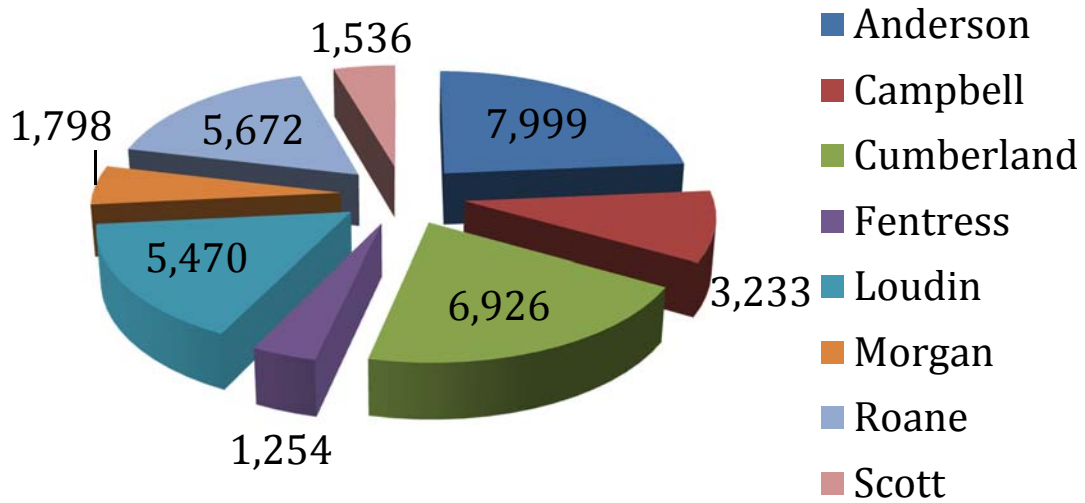


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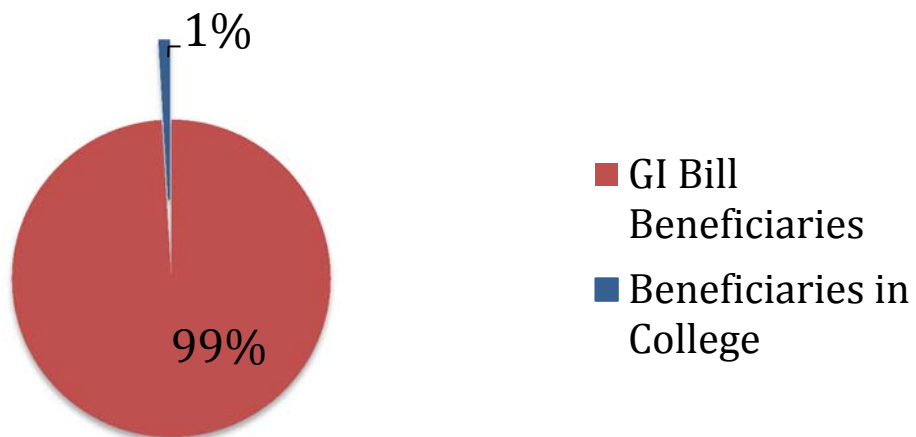




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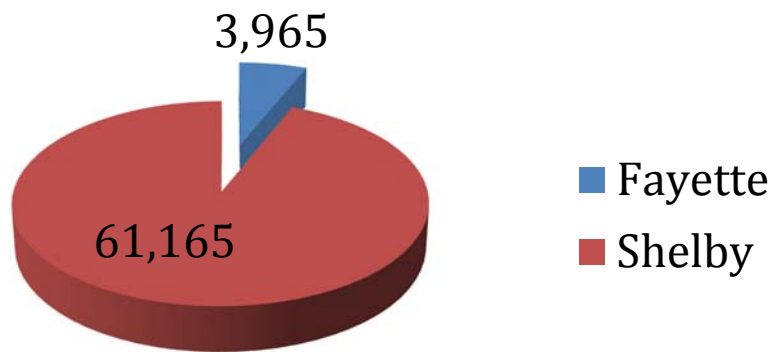


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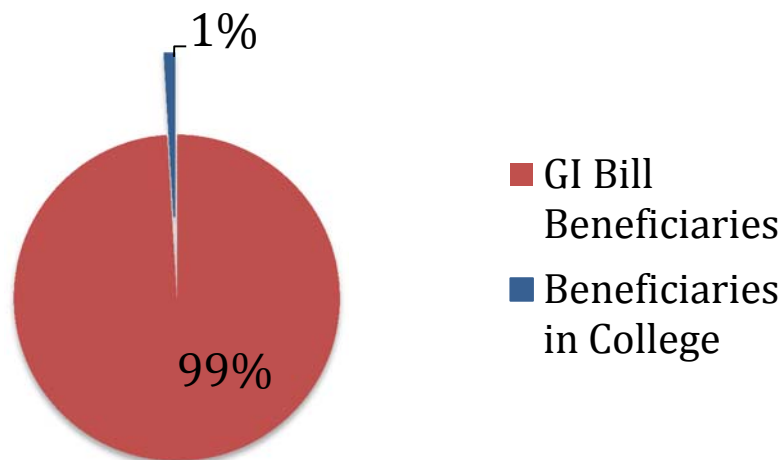




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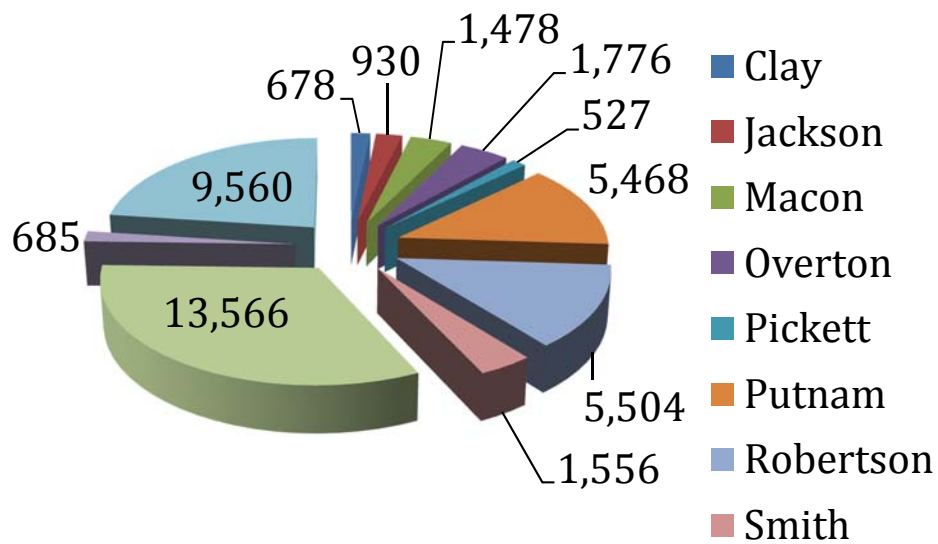


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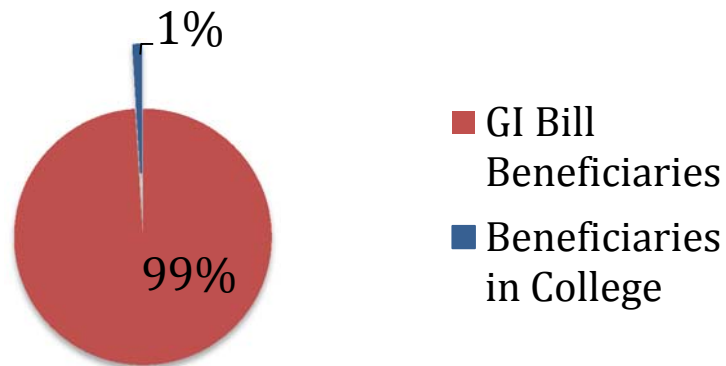




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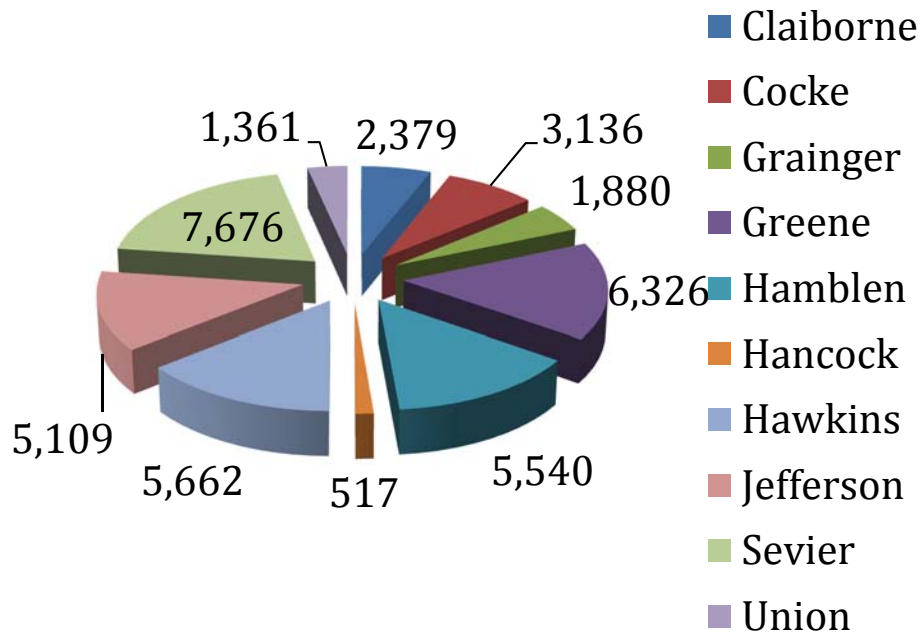


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