

Impact of the Reset of the 35% Waiver and 85/15 Rules on Private, Nonprofit Colleges & Universities

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) conducted an online survey of its membership to gain a better understanding of how the Department of Veterans Affairs' reset of the 35 percent waiver and 85/15 rules will impact colleges and universities and veteran students. The survey was conducted from May 18-25, and was distributed to 935 NAICU private, nonprofit institutions. The survey generated responses from 345 institutions.

Key Findings

- Nearly ALL respondents (**99%**) serve veteran students and nine-in-ten (**89%**) participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program
- Nearly ALL respondents (**99%**) have fewer than 35% veteran student enrollment
- **35%** say the new 85/15 rules “reset” will restrict access to programs that have been popular with veterans
- **54%** have submitted their 85/15 “reset” report to the VA and just over half of this group (**55%**) have already heard back from the agency
 - Of the 55% who have heard back from the VA, **21%** have programs deemed ineligible for veteran enrollment

Types of Programs Deemed Ineligible

- Information Systems, Computer Science, Cybersecurity
- Criminal Justice
- Liberal Arts and Education Teaching Credentials
- Healthcare Administration, Nursing, Radiology, Mental Health Counseling
- MBA, MS in Manufacturing Management, MA in Leadership, Supply Chain Management

NAICU received hundreds of comments from open-ended questions on the survey. The responses are still being sorted, but the comments and quotes below are a sampling of the feedback.

Examples of how institutions are supporting veteran students.

- Providing dedicated staff
- Providing a central veteran services office
- Providing support for academics, counseling, transition to career and civilian life, and other areas to ensure their success

Concerns institutions have regarding their dealings with the VA Educational Liaison Representative.

- *“The ELR did not answer our questions in a timely fashion, and the VA had given ambiguous, and sometimes conflicting guidance on how to calculate 85/15.”*
- *“We were told not to worry because we are always efficient and on top of things. We submitted follow up questions to our ELR once we received the suspension letter. Those question have gone unanswered.”*
- *“There is no clear guidance from VA, and it depends on which ELR you ask, and what mood they are in that day.”*
- *“ELR is not responsive.”*

Concerns institutions have with the new policies for calculating the 85/15 ratio limiting access to education for veteran students.

- *“Limited the number of programs veteran students can take though there are only two or three people in the program.”*
- *“It creates false advertising if those receiving institutional aid are deemed the same as those receiving VA benefits. WEAMS listing will be highly inaccurate and misleading for prospective applicants.”*
- *“The new policy limits veterans’ choices for program enrollment.”*
- *“We have 31 programs on the report submitted to the VA that exceed 85% “supported student” but three have not a single VA beneficiary enrolled.”*
- *“The programs that have been deemed ineligible based on our spring 85/15 calculation are almost entirely because the students enrolled are receiving institutional aid, which artificially bars our veteran students from enrolling in these programs at all.”*
- *“We will struggle to accommodate the needs of incoming VA students. The new definition of “supported student” will result in essentially eliminating the Yellow Ribbon Program, an agreement we pride ourselves on participating in. The bulk of veterans stay in the geographical area of their home and their ability to afford an education is being taken from them.”*