How to be a Successful SCO

October 8, 2019

School Certifying Official

➢ Duties and Responsibilities

➢ Where the rubber meets the road

➢ Face of the VA

➢ Get no credit when things go well, and all the blame when things do not

Background

- ➢ I was the SCO for the University of Pittsburgh from 2009-2015.

- ➢ Each term I certified between 420-450 Students receiving Education Benefits. Submitted certifications for each student to include 100-125 adjustments each term.

- ➢ Cost was approximately between $7,000,000- $7,500,000 each year.

- ➢ Current member of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, State Approving Agency. Responsible for approving schools to use the GI Bill ® and approve programs at each school within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Understanding the Various Chapters

- CH33- Post 9/11 GI Bill

- CH 30- Montgomery GI Bill

- CH32- Veterans Education Assistance Program

- Ch35- Dependents Educational Assistance

- CH1606- Montgomery GI Bill- Selective Reserve

- CH 1607- Reserve Educational Assistance Program (Phased out)

- CH 31- Vocational Rehabilitation

What is needed for each Certification?

➢ Student Class Schedule- Determine Credits taken

➢ Student Ledger showing tuition and fees-Determine Actual Net Cost

➢ List of Scholarships, Grants, Student Aid that each student receives

➢ List of students receiving Tuition Assistance

➢ Are classes Resident, Hybrid, or Distance Education

➢ Study Abroad

➢ Remedial & Deficiency Courses

➢ Where are classes being taken

➢ Is the school Private or Public?

➢ Public- No cap, the VA will pay the Instate Tuition rate

➢ Private- Currently $24,476.79

➢ Yellow Ribbon Program- Student must be at the 100% benefit level to be eligible for the Yellow Ribbon Program

➢ School must apply and be approved to be a Yellow Ribbon School

➢ Once Cap is reached, the difference will be split between the school and the VA.

Using Resources

What Resources are Available to SCO's

➢ SCO Handbook- First place SCO's should turn to when they have a question

➢ VA Once- System to process certifications

➢ State Approving Agencies, Education Liaison Representative, Workshops, Webinars, Conferences, Newsletters

➢ Organizations such as PASFAA, NAVPA, AVECO

➢ Title 38 CFR USC, M22-4, State and Federal Regulations, Policy Letters, Policy Advisories

Best Practices

➢Submit a question-Ask a Question - Right Now Web (RNW)

➢SCO Hotline 1-855-225-1159

➢eBenefits- Everyone using benefits should have a premium account. See payment history, how much entitlement veterans have remaining, search for jobs, and delimitating dates.

➢Partner with a similar school- NCD, IHL, See how they handle issues. You're not the only one who has had an issue.

Best Practices

➢ Work Study Program- Paid by VA, not the school.

➢ Paid minimum wage, tax free. Work in office doing only VA/Certification support.

➢ Great part time job for veterans/dependents.

➢ Must be receiving a chapter benefit at 75% or 3/4 –time or greater.

➢ Works 30 days prior to start date and up to last day of certification.

➢ Signs a contract with VA. Work study manager sends them. SCO sets time schedule, signs time sheet.

Develop Systems

➢ Reports for when a student changes schedule, changes schools or receives a Non-Refundable Scholarship

➢ You can not rely on Student's informing you of when they change their schedule. You must develop some sort of tracking system

➢ Debt Management- School Debt & Student Debt

➢ School Debt- Charged to school, example is if a student registers for classes, then withdraws prior to term starting. School is not entitled to funds since student didn't attend. School would be liable for debt

➢ Student Debt- When a student takes action to create a debt such as withdrawing from classes. The debt will be charged to the student

Challenges that SCO's Face

➢ Regulations are consistently changing

➢ Harry W. Colmery Act- 31 Provisions to the GI Bill ®

➢ Some changes went into effect immediately, some don't go into effect until 2022

➢ Most changes are beneficial to the veteran, how ever will make the process more difficult for SCO's

➢ SCO's must report by zip codes/branch/extension sites where the student is taking the classes

Challenges that SCO's Face

➢ Most SCO's wear many hats, they are the Financial Aid Director, Registrar, Counselor, and the SCO duties are the last job they do

➢ In my experience these are the SCO's that have difficulties because this is not their primary job

➢ School's that only have one SCO, SCO hit's the lottery and leaves suddenly and no one to fill in that knows what they are doing or even where to begin

Advice

➢ If you have SCO's that work for you allow them to attend any and all training events so they can stay current

➢ Have a back up SCO that is familiar with the certification process

➢ Develop a job book of how to do their job

➢ Seek out another SCO in your area that has a similar school

➢ Use your resources, Education Liaison Representative, State Approving Agency, SCO Hotline, Ask a question

Contact Information/Questions

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For more information on the Pennsylvania State Approving Agency please visit PDE's website at www.education.state.pa.us

The mission of the department is to academically prepare children and adults to succeed as productive citizens. The department seeks to ensure that the technical support, resources and opportunities are in place for all students, whether children or adults, to receive a high quality education.