How to Be a Successful School Certifying Official (SCO)

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What is a SCO?

School Certifying Official (SCO)

➢ Face of the VA

➢ Duties and Responsibilities

➢ Where the rubber meets the road

➢ Does it feel like you get no credit when things go well and all the blame when things do not?

➢ *This presentation will help you to be a successful SCO*

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Background

➢ SCO for the University of Pittsburgh from 2009-2015

➢ Certified between 420-450 students receiving education benefits, including 100-125 adjustments each term

➢ Cost approximately $7,000,000- $7,500,000 each year

➢ Current staff member of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Veterans and Military Education (the State Approving Agency (SAA) for PA)

➢ Responsible for approving schools to use the GI Bill® and approving programs at each school in Pennsylvania

Challenges Facing SCOs

➢ SCOs often wear many hats.

     ➢ Financial Aid Director

     ➢ Registrar

     ➢ Counselor

     ➢ SCO duties are often in addition to these jobs

➢ These SCOs may experience difficulties, because this is not their primary job.

➢ Schools that only have one SCO do not have a back-up SCO in the event of a short or long-term absence.

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Challenges Facing SCOs (cont.)

➢ SCOs must conduct online training each year.

➢ Changes in laws and regulations
  ➢ Harry W. Colmery Act - 31 Provisions to the GI Bill
  ➢ Some changes went into effect immediately; others go into effect 2022.
  ➢ Most changes are beneficial to the veteran.
  ➢ SCOs must report where the student is taking classes by zip codes/branch/extension sites.

➢ No workshops this past year due to COVID-19.

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Chapters

➢ Ch. 33 - Post 9/11 GI Bill

➢ Ch. 30 - Montgomery GI Bill

➢ Ch. 32 - Veterans Education Assistance Program (EAP)

➢ Ch. 35 - Dependents Educational Assistance

➢ Ch. 1606 - Montgomery GI Bill-Selective Reserve

➢ Ch. 1607 - Reserve Educational Assistance Program (Phased out)

➢ Ch. 31- Vocational Rehabilitation

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What Is Needed for Certification?

➢ Student class schedule – Use to determine number of credits taken.

➢ Student ledger showing tuition and fees – Use to determine actual net cost.

➢ List of scholarships, grants, student aid that each student receives.

➢ List of students receiving tuition assistance, scholarships and/or EAP benefits.

➢ Where classes are being taken.

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Factors to Consider

➤ Is the school private or public?

  ➤ Public - No tuition cap; VA pays in-state tuition rate

  ➤ Private – Maximum award is currently $25,162.14

➤ 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 tuition cap is reached the cost difference will be split between the school and the VA.

Best Practices

➢ Ask a Question (Right Now Web (RNW))

➢ SCO Hotline (1-855-225-1159)

➢ eBenefits Premium Account - payment history, entitlement remaining, search for jobs, and delimitating dates.

➢ Share ideas and solutions with other SCOs.

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Using Work Studies

➢ Paid by the VA, not the school.

➢ Paid at minimum wage, tax free.

➢ Student works in the office doing VA/Certification support.

➢ Great part-time job for veterans/dependents.

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Using Work Studies (cont.)

➢ Must be receiving a chapter benefit and be enrolled at least 3/4 time in a college degree, vocational or professional program.

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

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SCO Resources

➢ SCO Handbook - First place SCO should turn with 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.

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Develop Tracking Systems

➢ Tools

    ➢ Very important to develop reports to track:

        ➢When a student changes schedule;

        ➢When a student changes schools; and

        ➢When a student receives a non-refundable scholarship.

➢ Reminder

    ➢ You can not rely on students informing you when they change their schedule.

    ➢ ***You must develop tracking systems.***

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Compliance Survey

➢ Number one error?

  ➢ The numbers of credits certified vs. what is on the transcript

➢ Why?

  ➢ The student changes their course schedule and does not inform the SCO.

➢ Reminder

  ➢ Any change a Ch. 33 student makes must be reported.

  ➢ Other Chapters only required to report if the rate of pursuit has changed.

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School Debt vs. Student Debt

➢ Debt Management - School Debt vs. Student Debt

  ➢ School Debt – Debt is charged to school.

    ➢ Example: If a student registers for classes and withdraws prior to the term starting, the school is not entitled to funds since the student didn't attend. In this instance, the 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.

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Advice

➢ Allow SCOs to attend training events so they can stay current.

➢ Have a back-up SCO familiar with the certification process.

➢ Develop a standard operating procedure on the SCO job.

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

➢ Use your resources.
  ➢ Education Liaison Representative (ELR)
  ➢ SAA
  ➢ SCO Hotline
  ➢ Ask a question

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Working with the SAA

➢ Overview

　　➢ The SAA is responsible for approving your programs and your facility.

　　➢ The VA accepts or rejects the SAA's approvals but is not directly involved in the approval process.

　　➢ Keep your approval up to date by talking to the SAA if you have new programs or a new catalog.

　　➢ The SAA has developed a 2-year plan to keep all schools in PA approved and updated regularly.

　　➢ **REMEMBER: The PDE SAA works with over 500 schools and 400 Training Establishments.**

Working with the SAA (cont.)

➢ New programs
  ➢ Alert the SAA if you add programs.

  ➢ Tell us if the new program has a veteran enrolled.

  ➢ New programs with veterans enrolled will be prioritized.

➢ Addendums
  ➢ If you are within your 2-year cycle of approval, we can do an addendum of your currently approved publication instead a full update.

  ➢ This is a much quicker, easier process.

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Summary

➢ The job of an SCO is multifaceted and complex.

➢ Remember:

  ➢ Utilize the tools referenced in this email.

  ➢ Reach out to other SCOs, your ELR, and your SAA.

  ➢ Most of all:

➢ Relax and remember you are important to PA Veterans!

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Contact/Mission

For more information on the Department of Education, please visit PDE's website at www.education.pa.gov

The mission of the Department of Education is to ensure that every learner has access to a world-class education system that academically prepares children and adults to succeed as productive citizens. Further, the Department seeks to establish a culture that is committed to improving opportunities throughout the commonwealth by ensuring that technical support, resources, and optimal learning environments are available for all students, whether children or adults.

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