

Virginia Tech MPA Program
PAPA 6214 Policy Process

Virginia Military Survivors & Dependents Education Program

A VMSDEP Case Study and Push for
Raising the Eight Semester Cap

Laura L. Raya
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I. BACKGROUND

Since 2007 the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (“VMSDEP”) provides a waiver of tuition and mandatory fees at Virginia colleges and universities for spouses and children of military service members who were killed, MIA, or are at least 90 percent permanently disabled because of military service. This program succeeded the Virginia War Orphans Program (“VWOP”) and is administered by the Department of Veterans Services (“DVS”) in Richmond, VA. DVS implemented the program with an eight-semester benefit maximum for beneficiaries which may be applied toward undergraduate or graduate studies.

II. THE PROBLEM

Traditional full-time students can successfully complete a degree within the allocated timeframe of eight semesters.¹ However, given that a full semester of benefits is deducted regardless if a student takes a single class or five of them, those attending school part-time exhaust their benefits long before graduation and must either drop out, get a loan, or pay the remaining tuition and fees out-of-pocket.² As an example, to complete a 48 credit MBA at the pace of one class per semester for 16 semesters, VMSDEP will cover the first eight semesters but the student pays the remaining eight out of pocket at a cost exceeding \$30,000.³ For a second example, to complete a 39 credit MPA at the same pace will require five semesters paid out of pocket, costing \$13,686. These figures do not factor in the rising cost of tuition, making the actual price much higher. I switched in Fall 2022 from the MBA program to the MPA program, so I have firsthand knowledge of these costs. Below, in Figure 1, are numbers from my actual tuition bill:

¹ A full course load is 12-15 credits/semester for undergraduate or 9 credits/semester for graduate programs. A Bachelor’s degree requires 120 credits (40 classes) and a Master’s degree requires 36 – 48 credits (12 to 16 classes).

² Taking two undergraduate courses per semester requires 20 semesters (12 of which must be paid out of pocket). Taking one graduate course per semester requires 13 -16 semesters (5 -8 of which must be paid out of pocket).

³ Virginia Tech’s MBA rate is \$1,075 per graduate credit hour plus \$175/credit hour supplemental fee, not including the technology fee, library fee, and potential tuition increases.

Figure 1: Tuition Bill



As you can see, VMSDEP works great for full-time students but not part-time students who are penalized for receiving the same education at a slower pace. In addition to paying tuition and fees out of pocket, part-timers also do not receive the full benefit of the Tier 2 stipend. While full-time students receive up to \$2,200 per year, benefits are pro-rated for the rest. Yet, if one semester of benefits is counted the same for full-time students and part-time students, then why shouldn't everyone receive the same stipend? Furthermore, if the stipend can be prorated, why can't tuition benefits?

This disparity affects more than simply a handful of students and as such it cannot be disregarded. In fact, it is a major problem considering nearly 40% of college students are estimated to be “non-traditional,” *i.e.*, not fitting into the mold of the traditional 18–24-year-old high school graduate who entered college right away to study full-time.⁴ VMSDEP’s outdated structure needs to be reconfigured to ensure supports are in place for a wide range of students. NASPA estimates that the percentage of non-traditional students is only expected to rise, so the problem will only worsen over time if nothing is done.

⁴ See NASPA Article for Non-traditional student references

You might think the solution is simple – why not take more classes each semester? Well, spouses and children of disabled veterans already face an uphill battle to benefit fully from this program and it's not that easy for us. Attending to the unique challenges of combat veterans suffering from physical disabilities and/or mental conditions such as PTSD and anxiety is a labor of love that is difficult, stressful and time consuming. In addition to serving as a caregiver, many of us already work full-time jobs and/or have young children, rendering it impossible to attend school full-time.

The legislative intent of the program was to allow disabled veterans' families to further their education without cost at any public college or university in Virginia.⁵ To better align the benefit with the intention it was created to bestow requires a policy change to introduce flexibility in the program's administration. As is, the current policy of an eight-semester cap undermines this honorable goal as all those who are eligible for benefits are not adequately being served.

III. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Colleges generally allow five years (15 semesters counting spring, summer, and fall) to complete a degree, with extensions granted as needed. This pace allows a student to take two to three undergraduate courses, or one graduate course, per semester and still graduate. If VMSDEP were to offer more semesters to match this timeframe, virtually all students could attend part-time and still successfully complete a program without having to pay out-of-pocket tuition and fees. Other small-scale options would be to prorate the eight semester benefits for part-time study or at the very least allow tax credits to help cover tuition paid out of pocket by beneficiaries.

⁵ See Appendix A: Code of Virginia.

If the long-term goal, however, is for Virginia to become the most veteran-friendly state to live in, as Governor Youngkin proclaimed last year,⁶ then those in power might consider thinking bigger and consider removing the cap completely. Allowing students to complete a bachelor's degree and master's degree, or even a medical or law degree, will eventually benefit the state with more tax revenue and raise the educational bar for our region. It will help lift families out of poverty and inspire interest to join the military. A highly educated population will generate new businesses and encourage other companies to relocate to our state. With unlimited educational pursuit, the potential for organically increasing the number of doctors and engineers becomes within reach. With a Governor who is favorably in tune to veterans' issues, there is a window of opportunity for redesigning this program to not only improve the individual situation of beneficiaries, but also to make the Governor's goal to establish Virginia as the most veteran-friendly a reality.

IV. STRUCTURAL ENVIRONMENT

VMSDEP passed on July 1, 2007 and took effect in the 2007-2008 school year, expanding eligibility of children from ages 16-24 to include ages 25-29 and now spouses. VWOEP's history is important to understand because it influenced the context of VMSDEP's current policy with its legacy of setting a cap on the maximum amount of free tuition to be waived. Under VWOEP, beneficiaries were entitled to a *maximum of 48 months of tuition assistance*.⁷ However, as shown in Table 1, below, the cap has been altered quite frequently over the years since VMSDEP was enacted.

Table 1: VMSDEP language regarding the cap over time

⁶ <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/youngkin-says-he-wants-virginia-to-be-most-military-friendly-state-in-america>

⁷ <https://catalog.radford.edu/content.php?catoid=10&navoid=243>

	POLICY	TECHNICAL HANDBOOK	FAQS	ANNUAL REPORT
2007	---	---	---	up to four years of education benefits
2008-2012	---	---	---	no mention of cap
2013	---	---	---	in Appendix D there is a reference to Chapter 806, 2013 Acts of Assembly, Item 462, which states: B. No child may receive the education benefits provided by § 23-7.4:1, Code of Virginia, and funded by this or similar state appropriations, for more than four years or its equivalent
2014	---	thirty-six (36) years* of education benefits...approximates 36 months to equate to four (4) academic years of school attendance, not to include summer sessions. <i>*Note: the 36 YEARS is obviously a typo in the handbook</i>	maximum of 36 months	in Appendix D there is a reference to Chapter 2, 2014 Acts of Assembly Special Session I, Item 461, which states: B. No child may receive the education benefits provided by § 23-7.4:1, Code of Virginia, and funded by this or similar state appropriations, for more than four years or its equivalent.
2015	---	---	maximum of 4 academic years	(same as 2014)
2016	---	thirty-six (36) months of education benefits...(DVS) approximates 36 months to equate to eight (8) semesters of school attendance, not to include summer sessions.	4 academic years or 8 semesters	(same as 2014)
2017	---	thirty-six (36) months of education benefits...(DVS) approximates 36 months to equate to eight (8) semesters of school attendance, not to include summer sessions.	---	(same as 2014)
2018	an eight term basis	---	4 academic years or 8 semesters	(same as 2014)
2019	---	eight semesters	8 semesters of program benefits	---
2020	---	...thirty-six (36) months of education benefits...(DVS) approximates 36 months to equate to eight (8) semesters of school attendance, not to include summer sessions.	---	---
2021	a maximum of eight semesters	---	benefits for eight semesters	---

	POLICY	TECHNICAL HANDBOOK	FAQS	ANNUAL REPORT
2022	---	...eight (8) semesters.... (DVS) approximates 36 months to equate to eight (8) semesters of school attendance, not to include summer sessions.	benefits for eight semesters	---

Since 2007, the 48-month cap became 36 months, then 4 academic years, later 4 academic years *or* 8 semesters, eventually arriving at the latest DVS interpretation of 8 semesters. A detailed summary of the changing cap is provided in Appendix B. The first time the cap was codified was in 2013 Acts of the Assembly (“AoA”), which is cited subsequently in Annual Reports and program brochures.

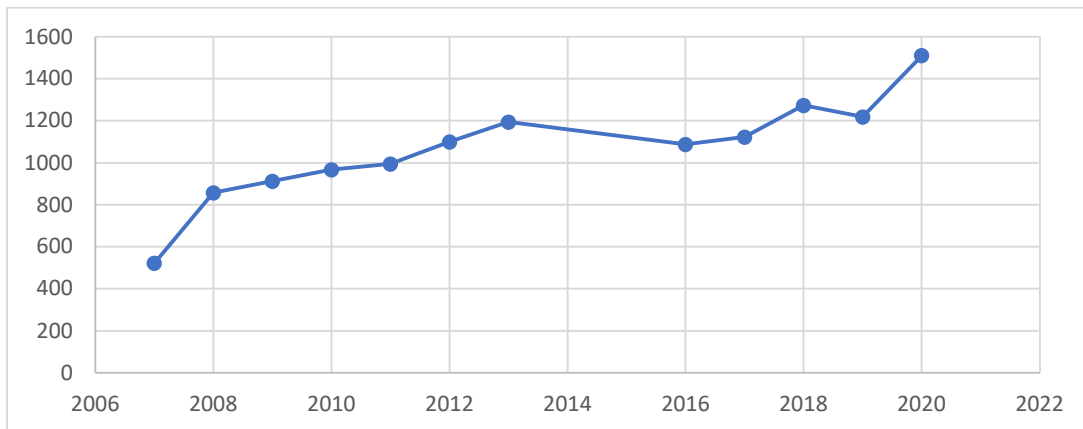
Interestingly, the AoA specifically states “no child may receive the education benefits ... for more than four years or its equivalent.” With no reference to a program cap for spouses or other dependents, spouses weren’t technically subject to a cap until a 2021 AoA correction. Notwithstanding, the key words “four years or its equivalent” are still present and meaningful because any reasonable person might interpret this as allowing accommodation for part-time students who take longer to finish a program.

Notably, the written documents published by DVS appear to contradict each other. An assessment of the Annual Reports provides conflicting information about the number of veterans, beneficiaries, as well as other errors. DVS failed to state key program details. It is uncertain whether the careless reporting, erratic interpretations of the cap, and information asymmetry could be growing pains or simply stem from an inherently disorganized structure. At worst, the data, as shared, could be purposefully done to manipulate key information. This is mentioned not to point fingers, but to make a better path moving forward. We cannot do so unless past mistakes are acknowledged. With some of the key data excluded and other being contradictory, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment.

V. SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

There are over 730,000 veterans in Virginia. At over 10% of the population, we have the second highest per capita population of veterans of any state. In the last five years Virginia had 214,030 veterans receiving disability compensation with 63,567 whose dependents could potentially qualify for VMSDEP.⁸ As shown in Figure 2, below, in 2007 there were 523 VMSDEP beneficiaries and the latest Annual Report shows 1,511 beneficiaries in 2020. This is almost 300% growth over the last 14 years. The current largest category of Virginia veterans is those who served in the Gulf War & Post 9/11, which is significant because this demographic is most likely to have children approaching college age. As such, substantial growth can be expected to continue over the next decade and funding will need to be expanded to match these projections in order for the program to sustain itself, not only with stipends but with the administrative readiness to process applications and provide support customer and technical support to beneficiaries.

Figure 2: The growth trend of VMSDEP Participants



⁸<https://lawyersforthedisabled.com/veterans-law/how-many-veterans-receive-disability-compensation/>

VI. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The DVS is a newer agency, created in 2003 under Governor Mark Warner. The Commissioner of Veteran Affairs is appointed by the Governor for a term of five years, but the actual turnover is higher. The current Commissioner, Dr. Gade, has been in office less than a year and is a disabled veteran himself. The preceding three Commissioners only served two, four, and four years, from what I could gather through online sources. As a political appointee, the Commissioner's goals reflect those of the Governor who appointed him and the strategic plan changes accordingly.

On September 12th, I spoke with the Dr. Gade about the cap. He said this was interesting as he hadn't considered its effect on part-time students, but it was worth trying to correct. He agreed to run it up the flagpole and thanked me for bringing it to his attention. He said the issue would have to be addressed via legislation, so it is not a quick fix. The next day I spoke with Montwace Cunningham, the VMSDEP Program Manager. He was pretty sure the eight-semester cap does not stem from legislation but from the policy administration. He also told me he receives at least one phone call per day from students or prospective students inquiring about attending part-time and the pro-ration of benefits. I highlight these two conversations to illustrate that, if taken at face value, there seems to be a severe disconnect between the situation on the ground and what is being communicated to Leadership. For the cap to be reassessed and any change to be meaningful, the decision-makers will have to be on the same page going forward.

VII. THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

VMSDEP's expenses have grown commensurably with the steadily increasing number of beneficiaries. \$2,311,960 in stipends were given out in 2021, an increase from \$801,407 in 2007. The proposal for Fiscal Year 2024 has a \$415,000 operating budget to include three full-time

employees, much higher than Fiscal Year 2015's \$65,000 operating budget with one full-time employee.⁹

A major economic factor at play is the rising cost of college tuition. SCHEV estimated it costs \$12,836 per year for the average tuition and mandatory fees for in-state undergraduates at four-year public colleges. Accordingly, DVS in 2020 valued the waiver of tuition and fees at \$52,000 for a four-year degree.¹⁰ This cost will only continue to rise as Virginia has seen a whopping 79% increase in the average cost of public college tuition over the past ten years.¹¹ The more the tuition increases, the more vital this program becomes to families. Numerous students have fallen into significant debt by taking student loans, highlighted in recent months with President Biden's loan forgiveness program. When considering that interest rates have risen this year to the highest point since 2008, student loans become even more unsustainable.

The figures above do not even factor in room and board, for which the average 2021 cost in public colleges was \$11,950.¹² The cost right now would be much higher with inflation at 8.3%. The \$2,200 Tier 2 stipend helps with buying textbooks but does not even put a dent in other supplies needed such as a computer, internet, software, etc. Fortunately, there are federal programs such as VA Chapter 35 which pays an allowance of up to \$1,298 per month. Neither of these programs alone would be sufficient to cover the astronomical cost of tuition, fees, room & board, etc. Below, in Figure 3, is a visual aid showing the increasing trend of rising college attendance costs.

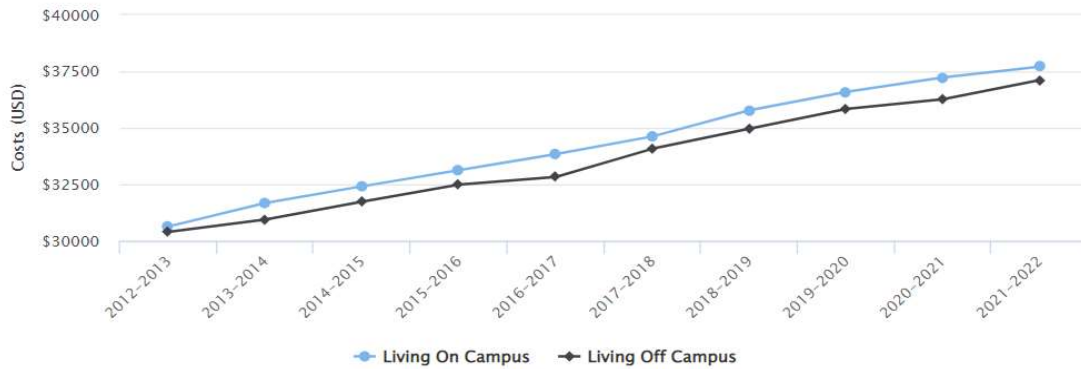
Figure 3: Cost of Attendance Changes in Virginia

⁹ DVS Annual Reports

¹⁰ 2021 DVS Annual Report

¹¹ <https://vadogwood.com/2019/08/28/how-much-does-college-cost-in-virginia-a-lot/>

¹² <https://research.com/education/what-is-included-in-room-and-board-in-college#:~:text=For%20the%202021%2D2022%20academic,food%20plans%20that%20you%20choose>



<https://www.collegetuitioncompare.com/trends/?state=VA>

For many families, these veteran benefits may be the only way the dream of college is attainable. It makes sense, then, to carefully consider how the program is administered to make sure students’ needs are adequately considered and that the interpretation of the legislative intent is correctly applied and not unnecessarily hindered by rigid and/or arbitrary interpretation.

VIII. ACTORS

There are three main official actors in the program administration of VMSDEP: The first is DVS located in Richmond. The DVS Commissioner is Daniel Gade, PhD and the Chief Deputy Commissioner is Steven J. Combs, both appointed by the Governor for a four-year term. The DVS VMSDEP team has a program manager, Montwrace Cunningham, three specialists, three coordinators, and two wage employees, although some positions are unfilled. The second official actor is the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (“SCHEV”), also located in Richmond, with its VMSDEP team of two people: Associate Director of Financial Aid Lee Andes and Abby Handford, who works for him. The third official actor is the numerous Virginia public colleges and universities. There is no collective representation; every college has its own point of contact. To a lesser extent, the Office of the Attorney General is an official actor working behind the scenes to interpret legislation to ensure that those who administer the program do so in the spirit in which

the law was enacted. The current Attorney General is Jason Miyares, an elected official serving the first year of a four-year term.

Each actor plays an important role in administering the program. DVS drafts the policy and produces an annual report providing updates on its outreach efforts, the enrollment numbers, educational institutions attended, completion rates, and annual costs. DVS also processes applications as they come in and reviews them on an ongoing basis to determine eligibility. After acceptance into the program, beneficiaries must submit their intent online to DVS to use benefits in advance of each semester. Prior to enrollment, and each semester afterwards, students also apply to use their benefits directly through the school. The school certifies the student's enrollment to DVS and SCHEV and then applies the fee waiver to his or her account. Notably, it is up to each individual school to decide which fees are waived. SCHEV manages the stipend portion of the program for those in Tier 2 eligibility. SCHEV identifies when schools should submit stipend requests, advises when funds will run out, and authorizes funding disbursement to the schools, which then apply the funds to eligible students' accounts. The amount granted is based on credit hours, with a maximum of \$2,200/year for full-time students. In the summer, SCHEV staff prepare funding recommendations for the next year and the SCHEV Council meets in September and October to discuss. Once approved, the funding recommendations are communicated to the General Assembly and Governor. SCHEV also tracks costs and annually reports completion rates to the Commissioner of DVS.

The next official actors are on the legislative side of making and amending the laws regarding eligibility and benefits and allocating funding: the state legislators of the Virginia General Assembly (Senate and State Delegates). Unlike the US Congress, the Virginia Senate and Delegates do not have a designated veterans committee. Per Mr. Cunningham, there is no particular

person or group in the state legislature with whom DVS collaborates. It was Delegate Reid, however, who last submitted a budget amendment to increase the funding for SCHEV to allow for the current VMSDEP stipend amount.

The final official actor is the Governor, currently Glenn Youngkin. In addition to appointing the commissioner and board members, he kicks off the budget process in December by submitting his introductory budget to the General Assembly, which convenes in January for debate. The General Assembly completes its edits by the end of February or March and the Governor may either approve, veto, or suggest amendment(s). Afterwards the General Assembly reconvenes for a few days to compare the Governor's changes to their changes. Ideally the budget is wrapped up by April or early May but sometimes it is approved in June when there are issues.

There are several unofficial actors. The first is the Joint Leadership Commission of Veterans Service Organizations ("JLC"), consisting of 22 veterans' services organization, *i.e.*, VFW and DAV, to name a few. This collective interest group meets quarterly and each has one representative nominated by their organization and appointed by the Governor. The chairperson is Denice Williams, and their main purpose is to propose legislative initiatives to best serve veterans in the Commonwealth. One of the JLC's successful initiatives expanded VMSDEP to non-combat disabled veterans back in 2019.¹³

A second unofficial actor is the Board of Veterans Services ("BVS"), an advisory board with 26 members: four ex-officio, four Delegates appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates, three Virginia Senators appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules, and the remaining 15 are regular citizens. Its role is to monitor the welfare of Virginia veterans and set policies to enhance their lives. The Chairman is Michael Dick and they meet semi-monthly.

¹³ JLC's 7/14/21 meeting minutes

Other unofficial actors are veterans and their dependents, like me, who call and inquire about the policy and reach out to their legislator requesting changes. I have been working to bring awareness to this issue and will continue attempting to reach those who have a vested interest as well as those in a position to help make changes to the policy.

IX. INTERACTIONS

VMSDEP holds an annual summit; invites are targeted to beneficiaries, schools, and veteran groups, but it is open for all. College representatives attend and give workshops and the DVS Commissioner and heads of veteran groups are some of the keynote speakers. It is advertised as an opportunity to connect and network with schools, employers and other student veterans.

On an informal basis, DVS stays in constant contact with other actors. I asked Mr. Cunningham how the actors worked together, and he said “communication, communication and communication. We stay in constant communication with each other by phone and email and schedule meetings as needed to make sure beneficiaries are maximizing the program. DVS meets with SCHEV regularly and schools too but informal meetings throughout the year.” (10/14/22 telephone interview). According to Lee Andes, SCHEV talks to DVS informally a couple of times per year. The Veterans groups are very involved, but more on the legislative side of the program. Each year the JLC lays out their policy initiatives that they are lobbying to institute.

X. POSITIONS, INFLUENCE & AGENDA SETTING

The ultimate visionary and strategic decision-maker, the governor, is tasked with appointing the DVS Commissioner and board members to the JLC and BVS. His commissioner serves as an ex-officio member on the BVS and JLC, thus he sets the table to his liking by picking the key players. Moreover, his introductory budget anchors the negotiations by setting the initial

reference point. Much of his influence, of course, depends on which party is in control of the Senate and House of Delegates at the time, but he also has veto power.

Delegates and senators can override a governor's veto with a two-thirds majority. They have terms of 2 and 4 years, respectively. Their power is derived from John Locke's theory of the consent of the governed, just like the governor, but it increases with seniority and committee assignment. They may be re-elected, while a governor may not serve consecutive terms. The longest serving legislator, Del. Lacey Putney, in office for 52 years, outlasted a dozen governors.

Mr. Cunningham stated that "veterans are pretty powerful and always have the loudest voice; it's always been this way."¹⁴ What does he mean by this? Well, it turns out that in Virginia there are 912 military/veteran organizations generating more than \$79 million in revenue each year, with assets of \$183 million.¹⁵ This money comes from grants, fundraising, donations, and from due paying members. These groups, especially the more established ones, yield significant influence due to their access to legislators and the Governor, and from prestige as SMEs. Alone, veterans would not have accomplished so much, but, united, it's amazing what can be done.

Colleges and universities play a large role in effecting the VMSDEP program, but they are more of a silent partner as they do not have a choice whether to provide the waivers. They are legally mandated to do so and thus they must comply. In fact, schools lose revenue with every tuition & fee waiver applied, which is why they understandably resist any program expansion or increase to benefits. Their only recourse is appealing to state legislators wielding the ultimate power through their control of budgeting and eligibility. Schools' limited influence comes only from being able to dictate the pace of the program; they provide information to SCHEV and certify student enrollment. Holding up this process could be detrimental to beneficiaries as well as to

¹⁴ 10/14/22 phone interview with M. Cunningham

¹⁵ Cause IQ article

SCHEV and DVS's reporting and forecasting needs. Yet, this doesn't happen, and for a very good reason.

SCHEV's influence on the VMSDEP program and state schools runs deep. Interestingly, it was greatly downplayed when I spoke with Mr. Andes, who stated they simply handle the stipends and defer to DVS on program matters as it is considered the primary lead. A little digging shows SCHEV holds much more power than that. SCHEV is tasked with making budget and policy recommendations for the entire state. They also evaluate post-secondary schools' needs for academic and administrative space, *i.e.*, they make recommendations to fund a school's expansion or renovation. As the sole authority on matters of higher education, SCHEV has the ear of the governor and legislators, and its recommendations carry a tremendous amount of weight. In our assembly of actors, SCHEV is the personification of Laswell's definition of politics: they decide who gets what, when, and how.¹⁶ Therefore, it behooves the schools to maintain good relations with SCHEV.

Tasked with outreach by Code of Virginia, program growth in recent years has been remarkable. One of DVS's objectives seeks to increase the number of approved beneficiaries by 50% by December 2022.¹⁷ Similar to any other government agency, an increase in beneficiaries translates into receiving more funding and resources. Such growth, however, inherently puts them at odds with the schools who pay the price for the program in loss of tuition and fees. Mr. Cunningham said it would be a challenge to get the schools and SCHEV to agree to any change in how the program is administered and by understanding the intricacy of the partnership it becomes easy to understand what he meant. Raising or prorating the cap would lower revenue for the schools and would require more manhours from DVS without the glory of showing higher number

¹⁶ Birkland, p. 15

¹⁷ BVS Education Report 8/2022

in new enrollment. It would also oblige SCHEV to reassess their assumptions and budget forecasts. Unfortunately, the focus seems to be on quantity, rather than quality of experience, for enrollees.

DVS has wide latitude in implementing the VMSDEP program, evidenced by the various interpretations of the cap over the last decade. It is precisely here that change needs to be made. I have been venue shopping over the last several months to remedy this: I already reached out to DVS, the Commissioner himself, and my delegate to no avail. I also communicated with the JLC and applied to be a board member with BVS. I created a Facebook group for VMSDEP part-time recipients and have connected with several other people sharing my interest. Next, my plan is to reach out to the Attorney General to explain the situation and request his opinion. Many people I've spoken with agree that this change should be made, allowing me to believe it's feasible enough to progress from the agenda universe to the systemic agenda. My next endeavor is to move from the systemic agenda to the institutional agenda, but it will not be an easy task as others have requested this change to DVS but have not been successful.

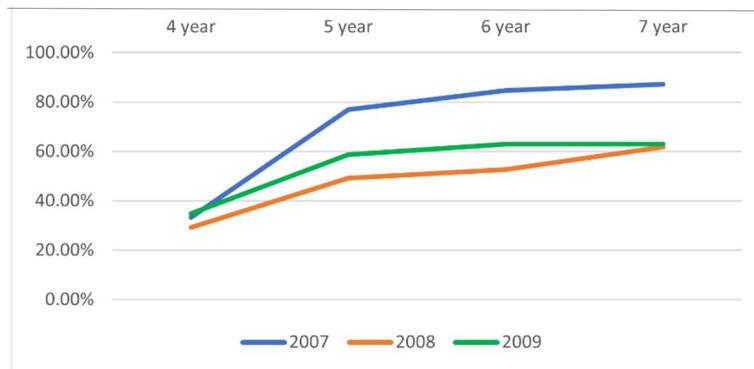
XI. GRADUATION RATES

The principal measure of any program's success relies on accurate reporting and data analysis. SCHEV began tracking program completion rates with the incoming 2007-08 school year and its findings were first released in 2013.¹⁸ Year after year, graduation rates overwhelmingly demonstrate that four years/eight semesters is not enough time for most students to complete a program. The aggregate data in Figure 4, below, shows that for students entering a four-year institution between 2007 and 2009, only 32.4% graduated within the allotted time. On the other hand, the graduation rate jumps to an average 61.6% at five years, 66.8% at six years, and 70.7%

¹⁸ See Appendix D for yearly completion rates and the raw data for Graph 1.

in seven years, after which it plateaus.¹⁹ The most substantial increase in graduation rates occurs between years four and five, but there is still a noteworthy rise between years five and seven. My own circumstances require 12 semesters, which is the premise of my research on this program.

Figure 4: VMSDEP Program Completion Rates



The 2018 VMSDEP Annual Report, excerpt below as Table 2, states “63.6% who entered in Fall of 2008 in to a four-year institution and who used VMSDEP stipends graduated within 10 years.” Yet, this statistic is grossly misleading to someone who doesn’t understand the program’s fine print. It presents a higher graduation rate than the program merits. As program benefits are only able to be used for eight semesters within a four-year period, graduation rates after the fourth year are not fully attributable to VMSDEP. Within the funded time period, in fact, only 29.1% students were able to complete their program. So why, then, is VMSDEP claiming success for anything after the fourth year in this annual report? Naturally, a 63.6% graduation rate projects a better light on the program than a measly 29.1% graduation rate, so it’s understandable why they chose to highlight a stretched figure instead of the one that really reflects the program’s output. Aside from the lucky minority who graduated ‘timely’, the remaining ones had to pay out-of-

¹⁹ As illustrated in Appendix C, there is a disparity between the data provided in the DVS Annual Reports vs. what is found by running the report directly on the SCHEV website. For my analyses I use the DVS Annual Reports, except for the charts with gender and race, which come from the SCHEV website reporting tool. My raw data for producing this graph is included in Appendix D as well.

pocket, find alternative funding, or discontinue their studies altogether. This is not mentioned in the annual reports, which ultimately gave up on reporting the dismal completion rates after 2019.²⁰ Fortunately, 63.6% of the 2008 entering students went on to graduate on their own merit outside the four-year period. Yet of the 36.4% who did not graduate at all, how many could have done so had the waiver been provided for more than eight semesters/four years? But for the cap, certainly we would have seen higher graduation rates.

Table 2: Completion Rates for Students Entering Fall 2008

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2008

Degree Completion Rates								
	W/in 3yrs 2010-11	W/in 4yrs 2011-12	W/in 5yrs 2012-13	W/in 6yrs 2013-14	W/in 7yrs 2014-15	W/in 8yrs 2015-16	W/in 9yrs 2016-17	W/in 10yrs/ 2017-18
Public Four-year Institutions	1.8%	29.1%	49.1%	52.7%	61.8%	63.6%	63.6%	63.6%
Public Two-Year Institutions	14.4%	19.6%	25.8%	27.8%	28.9%	28.9%	29.9%	29.9%
Virginia Community College System	14.9%	20.2%	26.6%	28.7%	29.8%	29.8%	30.9%	30.9%

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

Looking at the prior year, the 2017 Annual Report, excerpt below as Table 3, shows that only a third graduated within four years while 76.9% of students graduated within five years and an astounding 92.3% of students completed their degree within nine years.

Table 3: Completion rates for Students Entering Fall 2007

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2007

Degree Completion Rate								
	W/in 3yrs 2009-10	W/in 4yrs 2010-11	W/in 5yrs 2011-12	W/in 6yrs 2012-13	W/in 7yrs 2013-14	W/in 8yrs 2014-15	W/in 9yrs 2015-16	W/in 10yrs /2016-17
Total Public Four-year Institutions	2.6%	33.3%	76.9%	84.6%	87.2%	89.2%	92.3%	92.3
Total Public Two-Year Institutions	21.9%	27.1%	37.5%	43.7%	49.0%	49.0%	53.1%	53.1
Virginia Community College System	21.9%	27.1%	37.5%	43.7%	49.0%	49.0%	53.1%	53.1

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

²⁰ Refer to Appendix D.

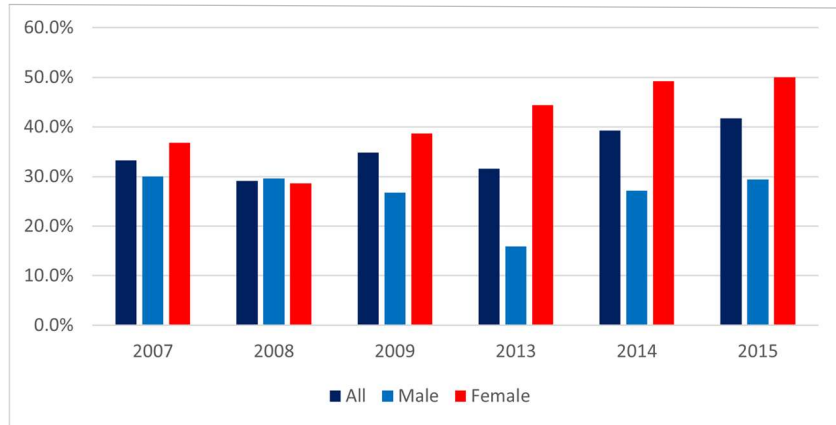
To further explore the 36.4% who entered in 2018 but were left behind: These ‘but for’ students might have been dealing with health or family issues related to a disabled veteran parent or spouse that disallowed a full-time school schedule. Veteran benefits, although above the state poverty line, are often insufficient to meet family needs, especially in an expensive area of the state such as Fairfax County, which may require students to work or leave school altogether. Many beneficiaries come from disadvantaged families without the funds to self-pay or who lack the wherewithal to be able to seek scholarships or federal loans to continue a degree. In fact, the federal government estimates that 11 percent of veterans aged 18 to 64 experienced food insecurity in 2015-2019.²¹ In tune with this revelation, it is understandable why everyone cannot graduate in eight semesters/four years. This demographic already faces more challenges than many: An accommodation of extra semesters for study would be a good starting point to help level the playing field for those who most need it.

To better understand program beneficiaries’ needs, there are other factors to consider when reviewing graduation rates. I started this research with the hypothesis that veteran spouses, like myself, (presumably a female majority) are the most disadvantaged by the four-year cap (vs. the younger students aged 18-29). My hypothesis proved false and I was surprised to learn that female VMSDEP recipients generally fared much better than males, per Figure 5, below.²²

²¹ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-12-million-low-income-veterans-including-thousands-in-every>

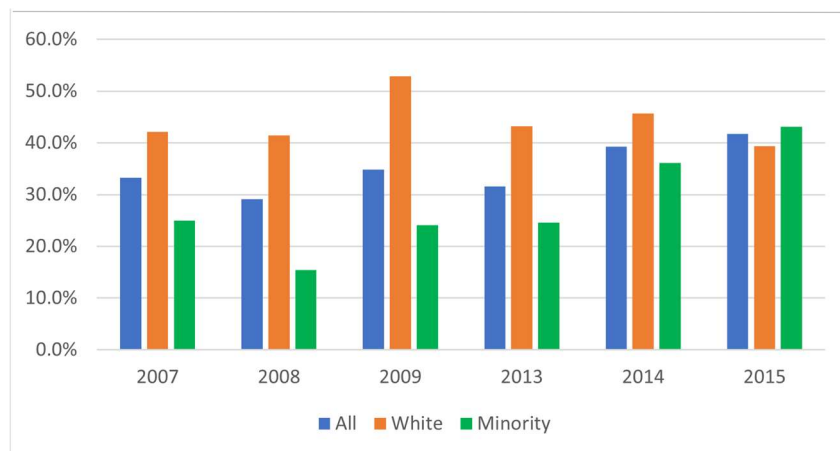
²² Per SCHEV’s website report feature

Figure 5: Completion Rates within Four Years, by Gender



I then decided to explore other considerations, namely race. On the SCHEV website I discovered who indeed fared the worst under the eight-semester cap: minorities. My research uncovered a stark difference between graduation rates for whites and minorities that merits further discussion. As reflected in Figure 6, below, of the students who entered a four-year program and graduated on time, the overwhelming majority were white. With 2015 being the exception, beneficiaries' race had a major impact every year in determining which students were able to fully benefit from the program versus those had to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps to succeed.

Figure 6: Completion Rates within Four Years, by Race



As shown, there appears to be a discord between equality of opportunity and equity of circumstances to reach a successful outcome. One might even wonder if this is a case of disparate

impact. Whether or not this program reaches the legal threshold, a lawyer would be better positioned to say. Regardless, there is certainly a problem that needs to be addressed. This potential issue, however, can easily be remedied going forward by adding flexibility in program administration: preferably sooner rather than later.

XII. CONCLUSION

With program completion data now available that wasn't before and being that it shows extremely low success rates in graduating in a 'timely manner', the program should undoubtedly be reassessed and retooled. Based on the data from SCHEV, students clearly need more than eight semesters before benefits are cut off. For whatever the reasons were in selecting to implement an eight-semester cap, what has been in place the last decade does not seem to be working well.

There are many paths to success and the goal should not be just to check the box for offering a program: it should be inclusive of students' needs to set them up for success. "Four years or the equivalent" could also mean taking 12 semesters (spring, summer and fall) in four years OR it could mean five years of part time study with 15 semesters. The AoA legislation already granted the "four years or equivalent" flexibility in administration, so it is a completely feasible goal that DVS can conduct a review, draft and then implement an improved policy.

This circles back to reassessing the program's strategy to be more forward-thinking and inclusive of today's rise in non-traditional students. It also means taking another look at Virginia's long-term goals, discussed earlier in [III. Proposed Solutions](#). There is a vast number of beneficiaries who are disadvantaged instead of empowered because of the eight-semester cap arbitrarily imposed by VMSDEP. It doesn't have to be this way. Together, we can do better for the families of our heroes, and we certainly should. I would love to be part of the process to help make Virginia the most veteran-friendly state to live in.

XIII. APPENDIX A: CODE OF VIRGINIA

§ 23.1-608. Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program; tuition and fee waivers.

A. As used in this section, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Domicile" has the same meaning as provided in § [23.1-500](#).

"Program" means the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program.

"Qualified survivors and dependents" means the spouse or a child between the ages of 16 and 29 (i) of a military service member who, while serving as an active duty member in the Armed Forces of the United States, Reserves of the Armed Forces of the United States, or Virginia National Guard, during military operations against terrorism, on a peacekeeping mission, as a result of a terrorist act, or in any armed conflict, was killed, became missing in action, or became a prisoner of war or (ii) of a veteran who served in the Armed Forces of the United States, Reserves of the Armed Forces of the United States, or Virginia National Guard and, due to such service, has been rated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as totally and permanently disabled or at least 90 percent permanently disabled and has been discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. However, the Commissioner of Veterans Services may certify dependents above the age of 29 in those cases in which extenuating circumstances prevented the dependent child from using his benefits before the age of 30. For purposes of this section, a child who is a stepchild of a deceased military service member described in this section shall receive all benefits described in this section as a child of such military service member if the military service member claimed the stepchild on his tax return or on his Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System while serving on active duty.

B. The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program is established for the purpose of waiving tuition and mandatory fees at a public institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School for qualified survivors and dependents who have been admitted to such institution and meet the requirements of subsection C, as certified by the Commissioner of Veterans Services.

C. Admitted qualified survivors and dependents are eligible for a waiver of tuition and mandatory fees pursuant to this section if the military service member who was killed, became missing in action, became a prisoner of war, or is disabled (i) established domicile (a) at the time of entering such active military service or called to active duty as a member of the Reserves of the Armed Forces of the United States or Virginia National Guard; (b) at least five years immediately prior to, or had a physical presence in the Commonwealth for at least five years immediately prior to, the date on which the admission application was submitted by or on behalf of such qualified survivor or dependent for admission to such institution of higher education or Eastern Virginia Medical School; or (c) on the date of his death and for at least five years immediately prior to his death or had a physical presence in the Commonwealth on the date of his death and had a physical presence in the Commonwealth for at least five years immediately prior to his death; (ii) in the case of a qualified child, is deceased and the surviving parent, at some time previous to marrying the deceased parent, established domicile for at least five years, or established domicile or had a physical presence in the Commonwealth for at least five years

immediately prior to the date on which the admission application was submitted by or on behalf of such child; or (iii) in the case of a qualified spouse, is deceased and the surviving spouse, at some time previous to marrying the deceased spouse, established domicile for at least five years or had a physical presence in the Commonwealth for at least five years prior to the date on which the admission application was submitted by such qualified spouse. In any case under this subsection, the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services shall have the authority to consider the domicile or physical presence requirements under clause (i) (c) through the surviving spouse or under clause (iii) through the surviving student if the military service member or surviving spouse dies after having established physical presence within the Commonwealth but before such requirements can be met.

D. The Department of Veterans Services shall disseminate information about the Program to those spouses and dependents who may qualify. The Department of Veterans Services shall coordinate with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to identify veterans and qualified survivors and dependents. The Commissioner of Veterans Services shall include in the annual report submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly pursuant to § [2.2-2004](#) an overview of the agency's policies and strategies relating to dissemination of information about the Program and Fund.

E. Each public institution of higher education and Eastern Virginia Medical School shall include in its catalog or equivalent publication a statement describing the benefits available pursuant to this section.

1996, cc. [931](#), [981](#), § 23-7.4:1; 1998, c. [377](#); 2001, c. [330](#); 2003, cc. [657](#), [670](#); 2005, cc. [773](#), [783](#); 2006, c. [793](#); 2007, cc. [116](#), [161](#), [717](#); 2011, cc. [572](#), [586](#); 2012, c. [776](#); 2013, c. [719](#); 2014, cc. [184](#), [657](#); 2015, cc. [38](#), [730](#); 2016, c. [588](#); 2019, cc. [317](#), [491](#); 2022, c. [442](#).

<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title23.1/chapter6/section23.1-608/>

XIV. APPENDIX B: DETAILED SUMMARY OF THE CHANGING CAP

VMSDEP Annual Reports (2007-present)

According to VMSDEP's 2007 Annual Report, the program provides “*up to four years of education benefits*”. There is no mention of the cap in the 2008-2012 Annual Reports. In Appendix D of the 2013 Annual Report there is a reference to Chapter 806, 2013 Acts of Assembly, Item 462, which states:

B. No child may receive the education benefits provided by § 23-7.4:1, Code of Virginia, and funded by this or similar state appropriations, for more than four years or its equivalent.

The 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 & 2018 VMSDEP Annual Report contain the same reference to the language but cite the “2014 Acts of the Assembly” instead of 2013 (presumably because the full text is unavailable online before 2014). Interestingly, the 2013 and 2014 Acts of the Assemblies appear to permit pro-ration to accommodate part-time students. Furthermore, the cap appears to only apply to children of the disabled veteran as spouses are not mentioned. This is presumably a legislative oversight. After 2018 the VMSDEP Annual Report became incorporated into the Commissioner's Annual Report on DVS instead of being a stand-alone report, containing significantly less program detail.

VMSDEP FAQ sheets

Another helpful source I found are the yearly VMSDEP FAQ sheets. I did not find online anything before 2014 or the 2020-21 FAQ.

The VMSDEP 2014-15 FAQ states there is a 36-month cap on benefits:

8. **How does the waiver of tuition and fees work?** Eligible individuals are entitled to a **maximum of 36 months** of program benefits as specified in the existing Acts of Assembly. This means your desired school will waive your tuition and required fees for 36 months. This also applies if you attend one school for part of your eligibility period and another school for the remainder. Please note that enrollment, not academic credit earned, is the standard measure of used entitlement.

The VMSDEP 2015-16 FAQ states a maximum 4 academic year cap on benefits:

11. **How does the waiver of tuition and fees work?** Eligible individuals are entitled to a **maximum of 4 academic years** of program benefits as specified in the existing Acts of Assembly. This means your desired school will waive your tuition and required fees for 4 academic years. This also applies if you attend one school for part of your eligibility period and another school for the remainder. Please note that semesters, not academic credit earned, is the standard measure of used entitlement.

The VMSDEP 2016-17 and 2018-19 FAQ states two definitions of the cap:

11. **How does the tuition and fee waiver work?** Eligible students are entitled to **4 academic years or 8 semesters** of program benefits, as specified in the existing Acts of Assembly. This also applies if you attend one school for part of your eligibility period and another school for the remainder. Please note that semesters, not academic credit earned, is the standard measure to determine benefit usage.

The VMSDEP 2019-20 FAQ states an eight-semester cap:

11. How does the tuition and mandatory fees waiver work? Eligible students are **entitled to 8 semesters of program benefits**. This also applies if you attend one school for part of your eligibility period and another school for the remainder. Please note that semesters, not academic credit earned, is the standard measure to determine benefit usage.

The VMSDEP 2021-22 and 2022-23 FAQ are worded slightly different from the 2019-20 FAQ but all three guides state an eight-semester cap:

11. How does the tuition and mandatory fees waiver work? Beneficiaries are **able to use the benefits for eight semesters**. This also applies if you attend one school for part of your eligibility period and another school for the remainder. Please note that semesters, not academic credit earned, is the standard measure to determine benefit usage.

DVS Veterans' Education and Transition and Employment State Approving Agency Technical Handbook

I could not locate a Technical Handbook for every year. The earliest manual I could find was the 2014 Technical Assistance Handbook, which states on page 40:

In most instances, students will not be required to apply each academic year and will receive **thirty-six (36) years of education benefits**. If a student is not granted the full 36 months of entitlement, the student will be notified of the requirement to reapply. The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) **approximates 36 months to equate to four (4) academic years of school attendance, not to include summer sessions.**

The above reference of years, instead of months, is certainly a typo. The 2016 and 2017 Technical Assistance Handbook (p. 33 and p. 34, respectively) both provide the same language:

In most instances, students will not be required to apply each academic year and will receive **thirty-six (36) months of education benefits**. If a student is not granted the full 36 months of entitlement, the student will be notified of the requirement to reapply. The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) **approximates 36 months to equate to eight (8) semesters of school attendance, not to include summer sessions.**

The 2019 Technical Assistance Handbook states on page 36:

Eligible students are guaranteed waiver of all tuition and mandatory fees **for eight semesters** at one of Virginia's public colleges and universities.

The 2020 Technical Assistance Handbook states on page 34:

In most instances, students will not be required to apply each academic year and will **receive thirty-six (36) months of education benefits**. If a student is not granted the full 36 months of entitlement, the student will be notified of the requirement to reapply. The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) **approximates 36 months to equate to eight (8) semesters of school attendance, not to include summer sessions.**

The 2022 Technical Assistance Handbook states on page 35:

In most instances, students will not be required to apply each academic year and **will receive eight (8) semesters of education benefits**. If a student is not granted the full 8 semesters of entitlement, the student will be notified of the requirement to reapply. The Department of Veterans Services (DVS) **approximates 36 months to equate to eight (8) semesters of school attendance, not to include summer sessions.**

VMSDEP Policy

I located two policy documents. I found a reference to an earlier Policy 2-05 but could not locate it online. Policy 2-14 (effective July 1, 2015, revised December 15, 2017, and signed July 19, 2018 to supersede and replace the former DVS Policy 2-05) states:

VIII. Eligibility, D. Continued Eligibility. Eligible individuals will be certified under the Program on an eight term basis... Summer Semesters are not included on the initial authorization letter. However, eligible individuals may apply VMSDEP benefits towards summer semesters. The individuals must notify DVS of such intent. In the calendar year in which VMSDEP benefits are used towards a summer semester, said summer semester, regardless of length or number of credits taken, shall count as one term of VMSDEP eligibility.

Policy 2-15 (effective July 1, 2015, December 11, 2020, and signed February 16, 2021 to supersede and replace the former DVS Policy 2-14) states:

2.8 Program Overview. ... Eligible individuals are entitled to a maximum of eight semesters of Program benefits, as specified in an existing Acts of the Assembly (Title 2.2, Chapters 20, 24, 26, and 27, Code of Virginia).²³ Enrollment, not academic credit earned, is the standard measure of used entitlement.

²³ Refer to first paragraph of Appendix B for Acts of the Assembly language.

XV. APPENDIX C: DISPARITY IN STATISTICS

Here are the SCHEV statistics as quoted in Annual Report:

COMPLETION RATES STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2007

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2007

	Degree Completion Rate							
	W/in 3yrs 2009-10	W/in 4yrs 2010-11	W/in 5yrs 2011-12	W/in 6yrs 2012-13	W/in 7yrs 2013-14	W/in 8yrs 2014-15	W/in 9yrs 2015-16	W/in 10yrs /2016 -17
Total Public Four-year Institutions	2.6%	33.3%	76.9%	84.6%	87.2%	89.2%	92.3%	92.3
Total Public Two-Year Institutions	21.9%	27.1%	37.5%	43.7%	49.0%	49.0%	53.1%	53.1
Virginia Community College System	21.9%	27.1%	37.5%	43.7%	49.0%	49.0%	53.1%	53.1

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

And these are the SCHEV statistics directly from SCHEV website when I went to the link and ran the report:

Completed, Anywhere

Students: First-Time in College with Military Survivor/Dependent Award, Entering Institution in Fall 2007

Cohort survival mapping of students from the first-term of enrollment.

Gender: All Students, Race/Ethnicity Status: All Students

First-Time in College with Military Survivor/Dependent Award

Degree Completion	W/in 3yrs 2009- 10	W/in 4yrs 2010- 11	W/in 5yrs 2011- 12	W/in 6yrs 2012- 13	W/in 7yrs 2013- 14	W/in 8yrs 2014- 15	W/in 9yrs 2015- 16	W/in 10yrs/ 2016- 17
Total Public Four-Year Institutions (Rate Profile) (detail)	2.6%	33.3%	64.1%	69.2%	71.8%	71.8%	74.4%	74.4%
Total Public Two-Year Institutions (Rate Profile) (detail)	20.8%	26.0%	30.2%	34.4%	35.4%	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%
Virginia Community College System (Rate Profile) (detail)	20.8%	26.0%	30.2%	34.4%	35.4%	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%

1st Note: The three- and four-year figures match but there is a tremendous difference between the figures for years 5-10.

2nd Note: I clicked on the hyperlinks for the SCHEV report to view the rate profile and detail surrounding these numbers but the links are broken. It would have been my preference to get the actual numbers instead of just percentages to get better statistics.

XVI. APPENDIX D: COMPLETION RATES PER VMSDEP ANNUAL REPORTS

2013 Annual Report

COMPLETION RATES STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2007

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2007

Degree Completion	W/in 3yrs 2009-10	W/in 4yrs 2010-11	W/in 5yrs 2011-12
Total Public Four-year Institutions (Rate Profile) (detail)	2.6%	33.3%	61.5%
Total Public Two-Year Institutions (Rate Profile) (detail)	21.9%	27.1%	31.2%
Virginia Community College System (Rate Profile) (detail)	21.9%	27.1%	31.2%
Total Public Institutions (Rate Profile) (detail)	16.3%	28.9%	40.0%

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

2014 Annual Report

COMPLETION RATES STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2007

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2007

Degree Completion	W/in 6yrs
Total Public Four-year Institutions	66.7%
Total Public Two-Year Institutions	37.5%
Virginia Community College System	37.5%

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

2015 Annual Report

COMPLETION RATES STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2008

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2008

Degree Completion	W/in 6yrs
Total Public Four-year Institutions	72.7%
Total Public Two-Year Institutions	37.8%
Virginia Community College System	38.9%

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

2016 Annual Report

COMPLETION RATES STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2007

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2007

	Degree Completion Rate						
	W/in 3yrs 2009-10	W/in 4yrs 2010-11	W/in 5yrs 2011-12	W/in 6yrs 2012-13	W/in 7yrs 2013-14	W/in 8yrs 2014-15	W/in 9yrs 2015-16
Total Public Four-year Institutions	2.6%	33.3%	66.7%	71.8%	74.4%	76.9%	76.9%
Total Public Two-Year Institutions	21.9%	27.1%	33.3%	38.5%	42.7%	44.8%	44.8%
Virginia Community College System	21.9%	27.1%	33.3%	38.5%	42.7%	44.8%	44.8%

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

2017 Annual Report

COMPLETION RATES STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2007

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2007

	Degree Completion Rate							
	W/in 3yrs 2009-10	W/in 4yrs 2010-11	W/in 5yrs 2011-12	W/in 6yrs 2012-13	W/in 7yrs 2013-14	W/in 8yrs 2014-15	W/in 9yrs 2015-16	W/in 10yrs /2016-17
Total Public Four-year Institutions	2.6%	33.3%	76.9%	84.6%	87.2%	89.2%	92.3%	92.3
Total Public Two-Year Institutions	21.9%	27.1%	37.5%	43.7%	49.0%	49.0%	53.1%	53.1
Virginia Community College System	21.9%	27.1%	37.5%	43.7%	49.0%	49.0%	53.1%	53.1

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

2018 Annual Report

COMPLETION RATES STUDENTS ENTERING FALL 2008

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2008

	Degree Completion Rates							
	W/in 3yrs 2010-11	W/in 4yrs 2011-12	W/in 5yrs 2012-13	W/in 6yrs 2013-14	W/in 7yrs 2014-15	W/in 8yrs 2015-16	W/in 9yrs 2016-17	W/in 10yrs/ 2017-18
Public Four-year Institutions	1.8%	29.1%	49.1%	52.7%	61.8%	63.6%	63.6%	63.6%
Public Two-Year Institutions	14.4%	19.6%	25.8%	27.8%	28.9%	28.9%	29.9%	29.9%
Virginia Community College System	14.9%	20.2%	26.6%	28.7%	29.8%	29.8%	30.9%	30.9%

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

2019 Annual Report

Table 2: Completion Rates

First-Time in College (FTIC) with Military Survivor/Dependent Award Completion Rates, entering institution in Fall 2009

	Degree Completion Rate							
	W/in 3yrs 2011-12	W/in 4yrs 2012-13	W/in 5yrs 2013-14	W/in 6yrs 2014-15	W/in 7yrs 2015-16	W/in 8yrs 2016-17	W/in 9yrs 2017-18	W/in 10yrs 2018-19
Total Public Four-year Institutions	0.0%	34.8%	58.7%	63.0%	63.0%	63.0%	63.0%	63.0%
Total Public Two-Year Institutions	13.6%	22.7%	28.8%	28.8%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
Virginia Community College System	13.6%	22.7%	28.8%	28.8%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%

Source: SCHEV <http://research.schev.edu/gradrates/subcohorts.asp>

2020 & 2021 Annual Reports

These last two reports did not include completion rates; the focus shifted to Number of Recipients and Amount Awarded.

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Raw data from Annual Reports, with the average, used produce line graph:

	2007	2008	2009	Average
4 year	33.30%	29.10%	34.80%	32.40%
5 year	76.90%	49.10%	58.70%	61.57%
6 year	84.60%	52.70%	63.00%	66.77%
7 year	87.20%	61.80%	63.00%	70.67%
8 year	89.20%	63.60%	63.00%	71.93%

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