

Portal of Higher Education

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GoArmyEd is a One-Stop Gateway to Educational Support and Services.

It's tough being a college student nowadays. Aside from the normal growing pains and rites of passage that all young students navigate their way through, many are juggling the rigors of their course loads with worries about how to pay for the rising costs of tuition with dwindling financial aid options. And of course, students in the Army have the added stress associated with serving the country, which can sometimes make it difficult for them to finish their courses.

GoArmyEd, an online portal that gives Army students a one-stop gateway to educational support and services, helps alleviate some of these concerns for soldiers pursuing their degrees. Through the program, students can receive information about how much tuition assistance (TA) they're entitled to, register for courses, check their grades and communicate with their colleges and universities. As a result, college students in the Army have the amount of flexibility that they need to juggle their responsibilities as a student and as a soldier.

Launched in April 2006 in the wake of budget cuts, GoArmyEd was born out of 2005/2006 Army announcement that there would be severe cuts to the staff that would usually assist student soldiers with their education needs. As a result, the GoArmyEd portal was leveraged from existing technology— eArmyU—developed solely for distance learning. This expanded the capabilities of the eArmyU portal—allowing students to request their TA and register for courses, regardless of whether the students were studying online or in a traditional classroom setting.

Today, the portal services students at about 145 schools and is accessible to all Army students—including 96,000 that registered for over 200,000 courses in the last year alone. In order for schools to participate in GoArmyEd, they must meet criteria that the Army has developed to ensure that the portal is best serving the soldiers using it. According to Kelley Mustion, the GoArmyEd program manager at the education division of the U.S. Army Human Resources Command, schools must be accredited to be listed in the portal, as well as offer programs that soldiers have expressed an interest in, based on a needs assessment administered by the Army.

To further ensure that GoArmyEd is offering the best services for students, Mustion says that the portal is updated every six months to either add new functionality or to improve existing functionality. Many of these updates are based on feedback from the students or from the participating schools. Each month, schools listed in GoArmyEd have a conference call with the military in order to express their concerns about the program and suggest enhancements.

"The lines of communication have been greatly improved as a result of GoArmyEd because schools have direct access to the Army to come forward with any comments or suggestions they have," said Mustion.

GOARMYED BENEFITS

For soldiers that are working hard for their degrees, GoArmyEd has made their education needs more accessible in a number of ways:

- **Streamlined tuition assistance approvals.** Thanks to GoArmyEd, students can get their tuition assistance approved quickly, which can save a lot of time and in some cases, keep students enrolled in their courses. "A lot of these students, especially those deployed overseas, can't walk into their educational services officer's office and find someone to sign off on their tuition assistance. We had a lot of trouble with students that had to drop courses because they couldn't find an ESO on time at these different locations," said Lyn Geer, vice president of student services and university registrar at American Military University—which has a population of 12,000 active Army students. "Putting tuition assistance approval into an online system has completely taken away that issue, which especially helps the deployed students."
- **Freedom from paper trails.** Before GoArmyEd, Ramona McAfee, assistant dean for military and federal programs at Columbia College, regularly saw students carrying huge files containing all of their education records. This was a lengthy paper trail that was often difficult to hold on to. "They carted that file with them from duty station to duty

station—notes would get lost and papers would fall out,” she said. “GoArmyEd supplies an electronic file of this information, so a soldier can go back and see all of the classes they took and all of the schools they attended—everything is in there electronically and nothing is lost. For the student, it’s a huge benefit to have all of their educational information in one place. It’s safe and they can take it with them wherever they go.”

- **Shorter waiting times.** Because GoArmyEd allows students to handle much of their education needs from the convenience of their computers, they no longer have to spend time waiting in lines instead of studying or performing their military duties. Students only go to financial aid offices when they want any extra support that the portal does not provide—and they can count on much shorter wait times when they do.
- **Improved student relations.** The GoArmyEd portal has a customer relations management (CRM) process, which gives students the opportunity to open a help desk case with their questions and concerns. Instead of running around from office to office or spending hours on the phone trying to locate the correct person to speak with, the portal keeps the case open until it has been resolved. “Students can log on and post their question and it will go where it needs to go. They may not know who to ask, but when they put their question in there, it goes up the chain to wherever it needs to go until it gets to the correct person,” said Jeanette Gold, Columbia College’s GoArmyEd coordinator. Generally, a student’s question will be answered through the CRM process within 48 to 72 hours of being posted.
- **Assistance for deployed students.** According to Mustion, there are over 13,000 students in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait, and they have registered for about 35,000 courses. This is not surprising because oftentimes when students are deployed overseas—if they have Internet access and their jobs lend themselves to staying in school—they want to continue their studies for a sense of normalcy that can keep them sane during their missions. GoArmyEd helps schools watch their Army students, so that if they are suddenly deployed, the school can work with them to temporarily take them out of their courses, which they can resume when they return. Some schools, like Empire State College, have implemented check points to keep track of their military students. “The way our reporting system is set up, when we begin the attendance records at the beginning of a term, we identify GoArmyEd students because our military students are taking the same courses as all of our other students and an instructor wouldn’t know the difference if we didn’t flag that student for them,” said Linda Frank, director of corporate and military programs. “If an instructor is doing an attendance record and notices that an Army student has suddenly disappeared, they will automatically know not to do an administrative withdrawal for that student until they find out what the situation is—understanding that the student may have been deployed or have other commitments.”

GoArmyEd has created a partnership between the military and higher education that is all about what’s best for students. Through the portal, students can more easily pursue their educational goals as they complete their military service without worrying about their tuition being paid on time or if their classes are available. And because the portal also ensures timely payment of invoices and has opened communication between student and school, it’s a win-win situation for students, participating schools and DoD-sponsored educational services. ♦