

# Drexel pledges free degrees to returning vets

SEAN SCULLY

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Drexel University has pledged to make its college degrees essentially free to veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan under the federal government's new "Yellow Ribbon" supplement to the GI Bill.

The "Yellow Ribbon" program, passed by Congress last year and effective as of last month, is a federal government subsidy for returning service members seeking college credit.

The program pays veterans based on the maximum in-state tuition and fees in each state. In Pennsylvania, students can get federal grants up to \$886 per credit hour, and up to \$6,391 in fees per term (the most generous state is Texas, at a maximum of \$1,471 per credit, and the least is South Dakota at \$93. Pennsylvania is fifth on the list).

But there is a catch — the grant is a match, based on how much each participating university is willing to put up out of its own money, so the benefit can fall far short of the full cost of education.

Drexel is setting aside \$2 million in financial aid for veterans, making it one of the most generous institutions in the program. Unlike many universities nationwide, Drexel did not limit the pro-

gram to certain degrees, or put a cap on the number of students it would accept under the program.

"We're opening it up for everything," said Melissa Englund, assistant vice president of enrollment planning and retention services. "We really didn't want to say you can do this, but you can't. We really felt it was important to have all the options for people who have served their country."

The school already has about 100 veteran students and by the end of the semester expects to have more than 200, about a quarter of whom will be graduate students.

A Drexel graduate degree generally costs \$915 per credit; the university has agreed to make up the difference between that and the federal subsidy. The undergraduate cost per credit is more difficult to calculate specifically, since it is based on a per-year tuition rather than credit hours, Englund said, but the university will make up the difference for any programs that cost more than the federal limit.

Local participation varies widely, though most major universities and many smaller schools have some level of participation.

The University of Pennsylvania sets limits department by department, according to the Veterans

Administration. Penn's School of Arts & Sciences, for example, will accept 10 students each at the graduate and doctoral level, while the law school set the limit at seven.

St. Joseph's University graduate programs have no limit on students, but set tuition assistance at \$620 or \$1,060, depending on the program, or \$140 for online graduate degrees.

In New Jersey, the federal government will pay up to \$450.67 per credit and up to \$5,736 in fees. Rutgers has set an overall limit of 200 students, while some smaller schools, such as Strayer in Cherry Hill and the Fairleigh Dickinson University campuses, have no limits on students.

A few major universities don't participate in the Yellow Ribbon program at all. Temple University, for example, accepts students under the conventional GI Bill, which offers smaller assistance to veterans, but the cost of a Temple degree is lower than Drexel and many other universities, said spokesman Hillel Hoffmann, so there really was no need to sign up for Yellow Ribbon. ■



*For information on the Yellow Ribbon program at Drexel and other area universities, see the Veterans Administration Web site at [http://www.gibill.va.gov/GI\\_Bill\\_info/ch33/yellow\\_ribbon.htm](http://www.gibill.va.gov/GI_Bill_info/ch33/yellow_ribbon.htm).*