Educational benefits for veterans tighten . . .

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As part of a continuing campaign to tighten up the federal veteran's educational program, the Veterans Administration (VA) is beginning to enforce a host of stricter regulations, according to local VA officials.

Frank Lulich, campus VA representative, says several of the new rules could have a major effect on veterans enrolled at the University summer term and those who receive W, X, Y or I grades on their winter term transcripts. In addition, veterans benefits will no longer be prepaid starting in June.

Lulich says the tighter regulations are a response to abuses in the program which have been publicized in the last several years. The abuses occurred mainly in occupational and trade schools or at the community college level, according to Lulich, and don't reflect the situation at this University.

"The rules are aimed at colleges that had designed programs specifically aimed at maximizing veteran benefits, but we are legislated upon just like everyone else," says Lulich.

More than 1,000 veterans are enrolled at the University and currently receive money from the federal government to attend school. The amount of aid is determined by the veteran's family status as well as the course load he is taking. As part of its new "get tough" policy, the VA requires the University's registrar's office to monitor veterans' academic progress to insure that only veterans who are successfully reaching educational goals partipate in the program.

According to Lulich, all veterans will be affected by the VA's decision to discontinue pre-paying benefits. Starting with June payments, veterans will receive their checks at the end of the month rather than the beginning.

"This means, in effect, veterans should be prepared for a 60-day period this spring in which they won't receive benefits," says Lulich. Veterans will receive their May checks on May 1, but June checks will not be sent until July 1.

The change is aimed at reducing the amount of "overpayments" made to veterans who drop out of school or change their course load during the term, according to Lulich. This national overpayment was estimated to be as high as $446 million during 1975.

Also included in the new regulations, which are explained in Department of Veterans Benefits circular 20-76-84 Appendix M, are rules for dealing with veterans who receive nonpunitive (X,Y,W and I) grades.

Formerly, the VA had not been overly concerned when a veteran received a nonpunitive grade, but beginning this term the receipt of those grades could mean the veteran owes the VA money, if loss of credit hours changes his status.

In the past, a veteran who dropped a class after a 30-day grace period did not change his official status until the end of the calendar month during which he dropped the class. Under the new regulations, however, withdrawals occuring after the 30-day grace period will be considered retroactive to the beginning of the term; in other words, a veteran changing his status on March 3 would owe the VA for January, February and March overpayments. The same provision will also apply to the S, Y and I grades — they will each be considered retroactive to the beginning of the term.

"The VA used to have no way of dealing with these kind of (nonpunitive) grades," says Lulich. "Now they are going to be watching them more carefully."

The final major change in veteran regulations pertains to the 750 to 800 veterans expected to enroll in the University summer term. Because summer term sessions vary in length from 3 days to 11 weeks, says Assistant Registrar Chris Munos, determining a veteran's status becomes very difficult. In the past, this judgment was left to the VA representatives and registrars at the individual institution. But beginning this summer, that judgment will be made by the VA's regional office in Portland.

"I don't know what to tell veterans about their summer term benefits," says Lulich. "We really can't guarantee them anything — all we can do is try to advise."

Lulich says the new rules also change the qualifications veterans must meet to earn "break pay," a special allowance given to veterans for the period between summer and fall terms. Veterans planning to change schools between summer and fall should check with a VA representative to determine his break pay eligibility.

"The regulations are confusing but important," says Lulich. He advises veterans to check with either a VA representative or a representative from the registrar's office before enrolling for summer term or taking any action which may affect his status. He says a circular outlining the major regulation changes will be included in veterans' spring registration packets.

. . .while military personnel receive pensions

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than 141,000 retired military men and women, given the opportunity for a second career by their pension system, have taken a new job with their old employer — the U.S. government.

Under the military's pension system, these retirees — about half in their late 30s and early 40s — can legally receive both full pension checks and full pay for their civilian federal jobs.

The first comprehensive study of military pensioners in civilian federal jobs was conducted by the U.S. Civil Service Commission. A copy of the study was obtained by The Associated Press.

Because military personnel can retire with a pension after 20 years of service regardless of age, they can start new careers and start earning new pensions.

This differs from most private pension plans, which require employes to wait until a certain age — such as 62 — before receiving a pension that is generally smaller than the military stipend.

The cost to taxpayers of pensions and salary for the 141,000 military retirees in civilian federal jobs is $2.8 billion a year.

The pensions alone amount to $870 million a year — but that is only a part of the increasing cost of the over-all military pension system.

On an individual basis, the commission study calculated retired officers with federal civilian jobs received pay and pension averaging $30,970 a year.

For retired noncommissioned officers, pay and pension averaged $22,156. For other retired enlisted men, the average was $17,452.

More than half of the military pensioners with civilian federal jobs were under age 50.

About 8,000 were under 40; 32,379 between 40 and 45; and 32,760 between 46 and 50.

Only 9,246 were over 60 years of age.

The military pensioner gets from 50 to 75 per cent of salary as pension. Many private pensions provide less than half of the final salary as a pension.

A military pension is not reduced when the retiree takes another job. But Social Security, a critical part of many private retirees' income, is cut when a private pensioner takes a job earning $3,000 or more a year.

The military pension system has vigorous defenders.

"If a military retiree is the best qualified, he should have every opportunity to hold a civilian job — just like everyone else," says Maurice Lien of The Retired Officers Association. "Military retirement pay is separately earned."

The annual cost of 311 military pensions has grown almost 10-fold since 1962 to $8.2 billion while the entire defense budget has not quite doubled.

That $8.2 billion is more than the Army pays to its active duty soldiers each year, more than the Air Force spends annually to buy missiles and planes and more than the Navy spends a year to build ships.

The civil service study counted 141,817 military pensioners in civilian federal jobs on June 30, 1975 — about 13 per cent of the total of 1,096,184 persons listed by the Pentagon as drawing military pensions. That meant pensioners made up about 5 per cent of the 2.8 million federal employes on that date.

More than half of these retirees work in civilian jobs in their old agency — the Defense Department, the study showed.

Pensioners holding civilian federal jobs were scattered across the country, with the most in California, Virginia, Florida and Georgia. Most retired officers — including 177 retired generals and admirals — are working in the federal government in the Washington, D.C., area.

Of the total, 2,940 were earning more than $29,000 a year for their civilian jobs. At the other end of the scale, 26,143 of the pensioners were making less than $10,000 in their civilian jobs.

The military retiree is also treated differently from a retiring federal civil servant.

The civilian retiree cannot retire from his job, draw his pension and then take another federal job at full pay. This former civilian employe must give up either the pension or the salary if he gets another federal job.

Military pensioners can also qualify for a civil service pension by working in a federal civilian job. A retired civil servant, however, cannot qualify for a second pension if he returns to federal government service.

Predictable, the practice of drawing a pension and pay is controversial.

"We're not quarreling with anyone's qualifications," said Sidney Taylor of the National Taxpayers Union. "We are quarreling with the taxpayers having to pay them double."

"This all comes into focus when you get into Jimmy Carter's talk about cutting the fat out of the Pentagon," says Taylor. "Here is $1 billion in fat. Nobody's going to tell me that this effects our national defense."

Taylor's estimate of the pension cost is higher than Civil Service figures.

"A military retiree has earned his retirement pay. He has fulfilled a contract with the government," responded Lien.

Here's a hypothetical example of getting pension and pay:

A 45-year-old lieutenant colonel in the Army is passed over for promotion and must retire. His annual salary after 25 years service is $23,781.

As soon as he retires, he starts getting pension checks each month of $1,282 — about $15,380 a year.

He applies for, and after a waiting period, is appointed to a job as supervisor in his old agency at the Pentagon at a civilian salary of $20,440 — a GS-12.

So his salary and pension add up to $35,820.