

SERVICE TO SCHOOL: CONNECTING VETERANS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

AFTER CONNECTING AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES, S2S IS HELPING VETERANS
MATRICULATE TO FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS AND BEYOND.

BY JACOB B. BRAY

FOUNDED IN 2011, SERVICE TO SCHOOL (S2S) WORKS TO prepare veterans for the next stage of their lives by helping them gain admission to highly competitive colleges or graduate schools. S2S functions through the efforts of over 500 ambassadors or volunteers who help veterans through the process of applying to college. Many of the S2S ambassadors were themselves guided through the college application process by ambassadors, although some hear about the program and want to lend their expertise.

In 1944, as World War II was ending, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, commonly referred to as the G.I. Bill. In addition to low-cost mortgages, low-interest business loans, and a year of unemployment benefits, the G.I. Bill provided veterans with funds to cover tuition and living expenses at high school, college, or vocational/technical school. The educational component of the bill was popular, with nearly 8 million veterans taking advantage of the program by 1956.

Almost immediately, for-profit institutions populated the higher education space seeking to attract veterans and their lucrative G.I. Bill benefits. In 2012, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to ensure that for-profits did not aggressively target veterans; however, in 2017 roughly 40 percent of all G.I. Bill benefits went to for-profit institutions.

S2S steers veterans away from for-profit institutions, hoping to land students at elite not-for-profit colleges across the country; a number of these veterans begin in community college where S2S does outreach.

Once a veteran enrolled at a community college connects with S2S, a volunteer works with the student to establish their interests, skills, and anticipated major. Students then fill out an intake form that includes information such as their class ranks and grade point averages, and where they might want to continue their educations. At this point, students are paired with mentors and begin working on preparing their applications.

Ambassadors work with soon-to-be applicants through the T.R.A.I.N. methodology. The acronym is taken from each step of the application process S2S assists with: **T**est preparation, **R**esume and transcript reviews, **A**pplication and essay reviews, **I**nterview preparation, and **N**etworking assistance.

S2S also partners with a select group of colleges and universities committed to increasing veteran enrollment on their campuses. This connection, called VetLink, includes Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale, and the University of Michigan among others. VetLink doesn't function as a backdoor into any of these institutions; however, it does allow veteran applicants to showcase their military service and academic preparedness as part of the application process.

The S2S method is working. According to former S2S CEO Andrea Goldstein, veterans who apply to VetLink institutions are accepted at a rate of 46 percent, substantially higher than acceptance rates that dip as low as the single digits for institutions like Harvard and Yale. Even at public institutions within the VetLink network, such as the University of Michigan, the acceptance rate for the general population was 26 percent in 2017.

Veterans aren't just adding their G.I. Bill dollars to these institutions. They also bring a fresh perspective to institutions like Princeton, an Ivy League university that lifted its ban on transfer students in 2016. More veterans will likely be enrolling soon. S2S has grown 20 to 30 percent each year since its beginning in 2011. In 2017 alone, S2S helped 1,700 veterans apply to college.



*Jacob B. Bray is an associate writer with ACCT.
He can be reached at jbray@acct.org.*