

STUDY ABROAD FOR U.S. VETERANS

IMPROVING THE G.I. BILL

LEGISLATIVE GOAL

- Congressional action directing the Veterans Administration to permit G.I. Bill beneficiaries to use their benefits to pay for study abroad

RATIONALE

Study abroad prepares Americans to live in a global economy and an interdependent world. Our veterans and their families should have the same access to these vibrant educational experiences as do other American students. The G.I. Bill, enacted in the wake of World War II, proved to be an unqualified American success story. In 1947, veterans accounted for 49 per cent of college admissions; by 1956, 7.8 million vets out of the 16 million who served in World War II had participated in education or training programs. Another 2.4 million veterans from the Korean War and 8.2 million post-Korean and Vietnam-era veterans used the G.I. Bill to bolster their education.

In an exciting new update, Congress passed the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, not only providing education benefits to qualified veterans but also authorizing spouses or offspring of qualifying veterans to access education benefits, *if* the veteran does not. Qualifying veterans – or spouses/offspring – can access tuition, a housing allowance, support for books and supplies, and other benefits.

Unfortunately, the Veterans Administration currently prohibits paying “fees” for study abroad unless the overseas course(s) is required by the institution. Very few U.S. post-secondary institutions require students to study abroad as a condition of graduation. This VA rule effectively prohibits study abroad for veterans studying under the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill. Given the growing national consensus on the importance of study abroad and increasing participation by American students, it seems unreasonable and unwise to prohibit our veterans and their families from taking advantage of these excellent opportunities to enhance their education.

We seek Congressional action directing the Veterans Administration to lift restrictions on study abroad fees and to allow qualifying veterans to participate in study abroad programs approved by the universities, colleges, or community colleges in which they are enrolled. This modest change would put our veterans and their families on equal footing with other American students, and would significantly broaden their academic experience.