

Staff Sergeant Nicole Meyer, USAF (Honorably Discharged)

I began my separation process from the Air Force a year prior to my separation date. I began researching schools and trying to learn how the Post 9-11 GI Bill worked. I attended the Transition Assistance Programs (TAPS). Very little of the week-long class helped me with the transition from Active Duty to Civilian. The majority of the class focused on searching for jobs and building a resume. But because I was headed to college, very little of it applied to me. TAPS went very briefly over the process of filing a claim, but mainly focused on going through an individual on base that would help you go over everything in your medical record to submit your claim. I was unable to use this person due to time constraints, and had to figure out how to file a claim on my own through E-Benefits. The class never went over assistance organizations such as Disabled American Veterans, or Veterans of Foreign Wars having Veteran Service Officers that could assist with filing a claim.

Dealing with the Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical System has been a long, convoluted process. This began with my initial claim for disability, during which I was denied for my chronic back problems that had been on-going for three years at the time. The doctor I was sent to for my compensation and pension exam is well-known by local veterans to recommend that Veterans did not incur their injuries while in-service. The decision I was handed by the VA stated that there was no evidence of a disability for my back. I have since been diagnosed with having developed scoliosis while on Active Duty. My appeal for disability concerning my back has been on-going for a year.

As a woman, it can be difficult to receive medical treatment for women's health issues. Anything other than very basic processes, such as prescribing medication, is referred out to the Veterans Choice Program. Unfortunately, funding is tight, and many providers no longer accept the Choice program. As of 2015, there are over 2 million female Veterans in the US. I do not understand why receiving treatment for women's health issues is such an arduous process. It took well over two months to finally see a women's health doctor to get treatment for a reoccurring health issue.

When I first contacted the Veteran's Educational and Transitional Services (VETS) Office at Angelo State University, they were extremely helpful in explaining the process of applying for my education benefits. They offered much more help than the TAPS program, or the Education Office at Holloman Air Force Base. Most of the time, the Education Office either never answered the phone, or were too busy to assist with questions. When I finally was able get hold of them, the Education Office would give me very brief and general answers on Education Benefits available. The VETS Office at Angelo State University is the first organization I have encountered that actually bothered to answer my questions. The only time I had any problems with my benefits was when the VA was late on my Basic Allowance for Housing payment for the first month. This was however, due to an oversight on my part, not realizing that I needed to inform the VA that I was no longer Active Duty.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today. I hope that today can result in improvements to the current process, and that more Veterans are able to get the help that they need.