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Supporting Tennessee veterans in postsecondary education: The Helping Heroes Grant program [2017 Update]

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Introduction

In 2008, the General Assembly passed Public Chapter 1142 (PC 1142), creating the Helping Heroes Grant program to provide financial assistance to Tennessee citizens who are decorated, post-9/11 veterans. The grant, established in Tennessee Code Annotated 49-4-938 as part of the state's system of lottery-funded scholarships, is intended to offset the costs of postsecondary education for qualifying veterans.

Helping Heroes Grant awards are either \$500 or \$1,000 per student per semester (according to part-time or full-time status), dependent upon students passing their courses. Veterans who qualify are permitted to use the grants as supplements to other sources of postsecondary financial aid. The Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) administers the Helping Heroes grant program.

PC 1142 requires the Comptroller's Office to review the program to determine its effectiveness in educating veterans, beginning in the fifth year of the program's operation (2012-13) and every four years thereafter.

This brief represents the Comptroller's second review of the Helping Heroes Grant program.

Tennessee's lottery-funded scholarship system

The Tennessee Education Lottery, which began in January 2004, funds several postsecondary scholarships and grants for eligible Tennessee students. Originally, the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship Program consisted of three programs: HOPE, the Access award, and the Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant. (The HOPE scholarship includes the General Assembly Merit Scholarship and ASPIRE.) In subsequent years, the General Assembly passed legislation allowing the Tennessee Education Lottery to fund additional programs. In 2008, three new programs were created: the HOPE scholarship for non-traditional students, the Rural Health Loan Forgiveness program, and the Helping Heroes Grant program.

What are the qualifications for the Helping Heroes Grant?

To qualify for a Helping Heroes Grant, a veteran must:

- Be a former member of the armed forces, or a former or current member of a reserve or a Tennessee National Guard unit who was called into active military service
- Have received an honorable discharge
- Have been awarded
 - ◊ The Iraq Campaign Medal;
 - ◊ The Afghanistan Campaign Medal; or
 - ◊ The Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, on or after September 11, 2001
- Have not yet received a bachelor's degree
- Be admitted to, and enroll in, an eligible postsecondary institution seeking an associate or bachelor's degree
- Be a resident of Tennessee for one year immediately preceding the date of application
- Not be in default on a federal Title IV educational loan or Tennessee educational loan
- Not owe a refund on a federal Title IV student financial aid program or a Tennessee student financial aid program
- Be in compliance with federal drug-free rules and laws for receiving financial assistance
- Not be incarcerated
- Apply or reapply for a Helping Heroes Grant for any semester that the student successfully completes six or more semester hours
- Complete six or more semester hours; no minimum GPA is required to qualify

Program participants are not required to meet any academic standard to qualify for the grant.

Grant recipients may continue to receive the grant as long as they meet the qualifications and until one of the following occurs:

- the student earns a bachelor's degree or
- the eighth anniversary of the veteran's honorable discharge from military service or
- the student receives the grant for the equivalent of eight full semesters (with part-time students accumulating half-semester)

TSAC rules provide grant recipients a means to appeal a postsecondary institution's decision to deny or revoke an applicant's Helping Heroes Grant. Rules require institutions to create review panels and procedures, and to notify applicants and grant awardees about the process and timeframe required to appeal. To date, no Helping Heroes Grant awardees or recipients have made any appeals.



What are the award amounts for grant recipients? For what expenses can recipients use the awards?

TSAC awards Helping Heroes Grants to qualified veterans on a first-come, first-served basis. Grant awards are either \$500 per semester for part-time students (completion of six to 11 semester hours) or \$1,000 per semester for full-time students (completion of 12 or more semester hours). A student must continue to meet the Helping Heroes Grant requirements and reapply to TSAC each academic year to retain the grant. Grant recipients can use the awards to pay for tuition, fees, books, on-campus housing – any expense that is considered part of the total cost of attending the higher education institution. Helping Heroes Grants can be used for remedial and developmental courses and distance education courses, as well.

Helping Heroes Grants may be awarded in addition to other financial aid. A student's Helping Heroes Grant award may be reduced by the receipt of other financial aid sources only if the student's total aid exceeds the total cost of attendance – which includes tuition, fees, cost of on-campus housing, books, etc. – at an eligible postsecondary institution. (For example, if a student's total cost of attendance during a semester was \$2,168 and the student received \$2,200 in financial aid, including \$1,000 from the Helping Heroes Grant program, the Helping Heroes Grant would be reduced by \$32, the difference between \$2,200 and \$2,168.)

How is the Helping Heroes Grant funded?

The Helping Heroes Grant is funded through the state's lottery scholarship program and is administered by TSAC. PC 1142 (2008) originally set a cap of 375 on the number of recipients per semester and \$750,000 on the total grant expenditures per year. In 2009, the General Assembly removed the cap on the number of recipients. The cap on total grant expenditures per year remains in place.

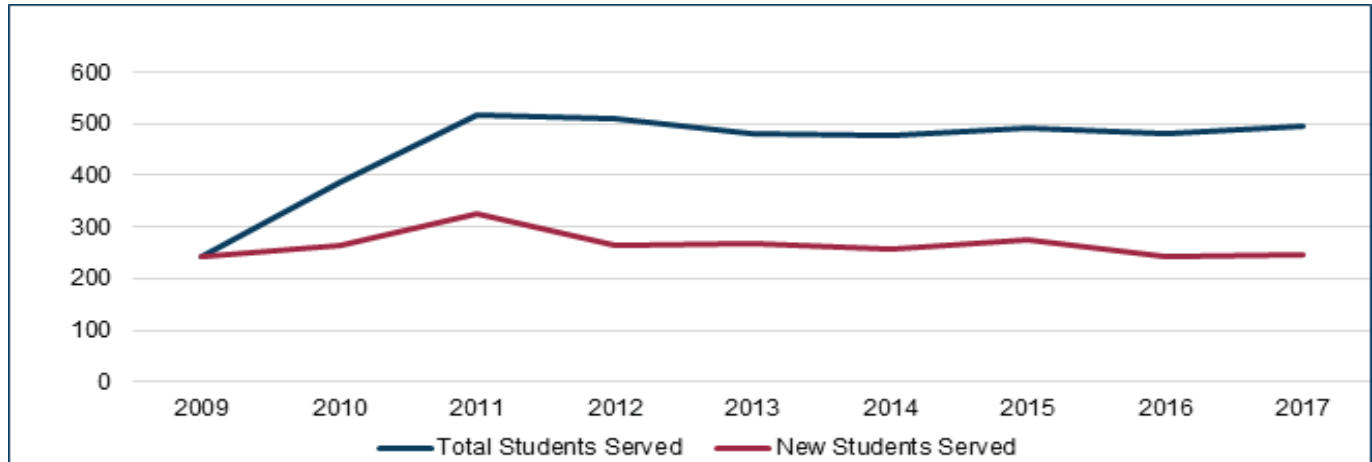
Because funding is awarded at the end of the semester, TSAC must estimate the number of awardees who will successfully complete the specified credit hours. Some students will not complete their courses (i.e., some will fail, some will drop out) and ultimately will not receive funds through the Helping Heroes grant program. In those years where there is a larger unused portion of funding, TSAC opens the program for summer awards to use as much funding as possible. In 2016-17, TSAC opened the program for summer awards and exceeded the statutory cap by about \$20,000.

How many Helping Heroes Grant recipients are there, and how much money did they receive?

The Helping Heroes Act of 2008 directs the Comptroller's Office to review and study the Helping Heroes Grant program in the fifth year of the program and every four years thereafter. The total for academic years 2013-14 through 2016-17 was 1,956 unique grant recipients.



Exhibit 1: Total Helping Heroes Grant recipients, 2009-2017



Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

The Helping Heroes Grant has had relatively stable enrollment over the life of the program.

Exhibit 2: Helping Heroes Grant recipients and total funds awarded by type of institution, 2013-14 through 2016-17

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
	Grant recipients	Total awarded	Grant recipients	Total awarded	Grant recipients	Total awarded	Grant recipients	Total awarded
Private, nonprofit / Four-year	65	\$113,250	66	\$98,500	54	\$83,000	59	\$93,500
Private, nonprofit / Two-year	0	\$0	0	\$0	0	\$0	0	\$0
Private, for-profit institutions	4	\$6,500	9	\$14,000	10	\$15,500	4	\$7,500
Univ. of Tennessee System	60	\$92,500	62	\$100,000	55	\$89,500	52	\$78,500
Board of Regents / Four-year	241	\$385,904	243	\$380,000	259	\$398,750	295	\$469,500
Board of Regents / Two-year	115	\$147,000	114	\$156,500	108	\$147,500	95	\$121,500
Total	478*	\$745,154	493*	\$749,000	486*	\$734,250	499*	\$770,500

Note: *Totals represent a distinct count of students and are not always a sum of the numbers in the column. Students can attend multiple institutions throughout an academic year, but these students are only counted once in each section total.

Source: Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.

For the academic years 2013-14 to 2016-17, the Helping Heroes Grant program awarded a total of **\$2,998,904**.

The average amount awarded is approximately \$1,500 per recipient per year.

Exhibit 3: Average Helping Heroes award, 2013-14 through 2016-17

Academic year	Average award
2013-14	\$1,558
2014-15	\$1,519
2015-16	\$1,510
2016-17	\$1,544

Source: Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.

Appendix A lists the Helping Heroes Grant awards by institution. As of the 2017-18 school year, 62 postsecondary institutions are eligible to receive Helping Heroes Grant recipients.

How successful are Helping Heroes Grant recipients?

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) tracks Helping Heroes Grant recipients. Between 66 percent and 77 percent of grant recipients completed at least 96 credit hours for the years 2012-2015 across all eligible institutions.¹

The Helping Heroes Grant program awarded approximately \$3 million to 1,956 veterans for the academic years 2013-14 through 2016-17. Grant recipients earned 494 bachelor's degrees and 224 associate degrees over the time period.

¹ Helping Heroes Grant rules require recipients to enroll at an eligible institution, and Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) are not eligible institutions.

Exhibit 4: Percent of Helping Hero grant recipients accumulating at least 24, 48, 72, and 96 credit hours by system and cohort year

Cohort year	System	At least 24	At least 48	At least 72	At least 96
2012	Locally-governed institutions	99%	98%	92%	84%
	TBR community colleges	96%	87%	75%	50%
	UT institutions	100%	100%	96%	87%
	Total	98%	93%	85%	69%
2013	Locally-governed institutions	100%	97%	94%	92%
	TBR community colleges	97%	90%	76%	57%
	UT institutions	100%	100%	95%	82%
	Total	99%	95%	87%	77%
2014	Locally-governed institutions	100%	97%	95%	89%
	TBR community colleges	94%	85%	71%	50%
	UT Institutions	100%	96%	91%	74%
	Total	98%	92%	84%	70%
2015	Locally-governed institutions	100%	97%	92%	79%
	TBR community colleges	95%	90%	63%	45%
	UT institutions	100%	100%	84%	63%
	Total	98%	95%	81%	66%

Note: Cohorts are defined as first term in which the student receives the Helping Heroes Grant. For instance, summer 2012, fall 2012, and spring 2013 are all considered the 2012 cohort. Each cell represents the proportion of Helping Heroes Grant recipients who have earned the designated credit threshold through summer 2017 by cohort and postsecondary system. Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

The most popular academic major for grant recipients is liberal arts and sciences, representing just over half of all grant recipients. Business management and administrative services and engineering majors are also consistently popular among grant recipients. For a complete breakdown of the most popular academic majors for Helping Heroes Grant recipients, see Appendix B.

Graduation rates for grant recipients have held steady over time since the grant was first established. The majority of Helping Heroes Grant recipients pursuing a four-year bachelor's degree graduate within six years of first receiving the grant in a public four-year institution.

Exhibit 5: Percent of Helping Heroes Grant recipients enrolled in a public four-year institution graduating within six years of initial grant receipt, by cohort year

Cohort year enrolled in public four-year institution	Six-year graduation rate
2008	71%
2009	71%
2010	66%
2011	73%

Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

Close to half of grant recipients pursuing an associate degree graduate within three years of first receiving the grant in a two-year institution.¹

Exhibit 6: Percent of Helping Heroes Grant recipients enrolled in a public two-year institution graduating within three years of enrollment, by cohort year

Cohort year enrolled in public two-year institution	Three-year graduation rate
2011	45%
2012	53%
2013	45%
2014	48%

Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

Grant recipients earned 494 bachelor's degrees and 224 associate degrees from spring 2014 through spring 2017 semesters.

¹ Graduation data is collected for grant recipients whose first enrollment was in a community college; students who transfer from a community college to a four-year institution and graduate are counted in the three-year associate degree graduation rate.

Appendix A: Helping Heroes Grant awards by institution and academic year

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
Independent / Four-year	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant Total
Aquinas College	2	\$3,750	2	\$2,500	0	\$0	0	\$0
Baptist Mem. Coll. Health & Sci.	0	0	1	1,000	1	1,500	0	0
Belmont University	11	22,000	9	17,000	5	9,000	15	25,000
Bethel University	20	34,000	21	30,000	23	32,000	19	30,500
Bryan College	0	0	1	2,000	1	500	1	2,000
Carson Newman University	1	2,000	1	1,000	0	0	1	1,000
Christian Brothers University	0	0	0	0	2	3,500	3	5,000
Cumberland University	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2,000
Fisk University	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Freed Hardeman University	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hiwassee College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Johnson University	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
King University	3	4,500	6	7,500	4	6,500	4	5,000
Knoxville College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lane College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lee University	0	0	0	0	2	3,000	3	5,500
LeMoyne-Owen College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lincoln Memorial University	1	1,000	0	0	1	1,000	1	1,500
Lipscomb University	16	27,000	13	20,500	6	9,000	3	4,000
Martin Methodist College	0	0	1	1,000	0	0	0	0
Maryville College	0	0	0	0	1	2,000	3	5,000
Memphis College of Art	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Milligan College	1	2,000	1	1,000	0	0	0	0
Rhodes College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Southern Adventist University	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TN Temple University (Ineligible 2015-2016)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tennessee Wesleyan University	0	0	2	4,000	3	6,000	1	1,000
Trevecca Nazarene University	1	2,000	1	1,000	2	4,000	2	2,000
Tusculum College	8	14,000	6	9,500	3	5,000	2	4,000
Union University	1	1,000	1	500	0	0	0	0
University of the South	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vanderbilt University	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Watkins Inst. Coll. Of Art & Des.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Welch College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	65*	\$113,250	66*	\$98,500	54*	\$83,000	59*	\$93,500

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
Independent / Two-year	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant total
John A. Gupton College	0	\$0	0	\$0	0	\$0	0	\$0
TOTAL	0	\$0	0*	\$0	0*	\$0	0*	\$0
Proprietary Institutions								
Art Institute of Tennessee-Nashville	0	\$0	4	\$5,000	4	\$6,000	0	\$0
O'More College of Design	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South College	4	6,500	5	9,000	6	9,500	4	7,500
TOTAL	4*	\$6,500	9*	\$14,000	10*	\$15,500	4*	\$7,500

	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant total	Students	Grant total
University of Tennessee System								
University of TN, Chattanooga	11	\$16,500	11	\$17,500	15	\$25,500	14	\$22,500
University of TN, Health Sci. Ctr.	0	0	1	2,000	2	4,000	0	0
University of TN, Knoxville	38	60,000	41	67,500	31	49,000	29	42,500
University of TN, Martin	11	16,000	9	13,000	7	11,000	9	13,500
TOTAL	60*	\$92,500	62*	\$100,000	55*	\$89,500	52*	\$78,500
Board of Regents / Four-Year (now locally-governed institutions)								
Austin Peay State University	85	\$134,404	82	\$126,500	85	\$129,750	87	\$130,500
East Tennessee State University	26	41,500	24	38,500	18	28,500	21	31,000
ETSU School of Pharmacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Middle Tennessee State University	75	117,500	73	112,500	100	155,000	131	217,000
Tennessee State University	3	5,000	6	10,000	8	13,000	9	15,500
Tennessee Technological Univer.	10	18,000	20	34,500	21	32,500	21	33,000
University of Memphis	43	69,500	38	58,000	27	40,000	26	42,500
TOTAL	242*	\$385,904	243*	\$380,000	259*	\$398,750	295*	\$469,500
Board of Regents / Two-Year								
Chattanooga State Com Coll	12	\$14,500	4	\$6,500	9	\$12,500	7	\$9,000
Cleveland State Comm College	5	8,500	9	11,500	5	7,000	2	3,250
Columbia State Comm College	3	5,000	7	8,000	3	5,000	3	4,500
Dyersburg State Comm College	0	0	0	0	1	1,500	2	1,500
Jackson State Comm College	8	12,000	6	5,500	4	5,000	3	3,500
Motlow State Comm College	7	6,500	3	3,000	8	8,000	4	5,000
Nashville State Comm College	9	12,500	12	21,000	15	17,500	12	13,500
Northeast State Comm Coll	14	20,000	20	29,000	21	32,500	15	18,500
Pellissippi State Comm Coll	26	30,500	26	37,500	24	32,500	32	45,250
Roane State Community College	2	2,000	9	11,500	4	6,000	3	5,000
Southwest Tennessee Comm Coll	12	13,500	6	9,000	0	0	1	500
Volunteer State Community Coll	10	16,500	6	6,500	4	5,500	5	4,500
Walters State Community College	7	5,500	6	7,500	10	14,500	6	7,500
TOTAL	115*	\$147,000	114*	\$156,500	108*	\$147,500	95*	\$121,500

Note: *Totals represent a distinct count of students and are not always a sum of the numbers in the section. Students can attend multiple institutions throughout an academic year, but these students are only counted once in each section total.

Source: Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation.

Appendix B: Helping Heroes Grant recipients' most popular academic majors by cohort year*

2012 Cohort		
Major	Students	Percent
Liberal Arts & Sciences	54	22.78
Health Professions & Related Services	25	10.55
Engineering	24	10.13
Business Management & Administrative Services	23	9.7
Protective Services & Public Affairs	18	7.59
Computer & Information Sciences	14	5.91
Parks, Recreation, Leisure & Fitness Studies	14	5.91
Undeclared	14	5.91
Social Sciences	9	3.8
Education	7	2.95

2013 Cohort		
Major	Students	Percent
Liberal Arts & Sciences	52	23.85
Business Management & Administrative Services	32	14.68
Engineering	26	11.93
Computer & Information Sciences	14	6.42
Protective Services & Public Affairs	12	5.5
Undeclared	12	5.5
Health Professions & Related Services	11	5.05
Parks, Recreation, Leisure & Fitness Studies	11	5.05
Social Sciences	11	5.05
Trades and Industrial	7	3.21

Note: *Cohorts are defined as the first term in which the student receives the Helping Heroes Grant. For instance, Summer 2012, Fall 2012, and Spring 2013 are all considered part of the 2012 cohort. Major during first term of Helping Heroes Grant receipt. Tennessee major categories used. Percentages do not equal 100 because not every major selected by grant recipients is included. Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

2014 Cohort		
Major	Students	Percent
Liberal Arts & Sciences	55	23.01
Business Management & Administrative Services	36	15.06
Engineering	24	10.04
Protective Services & Public Affairs	22	9.21
Health Professions & Related Services	14	5.86
Agriculture	13	5.44
Social Sciences	12	5.02
Computer & Information Sciences	11	4.6
Biological Sciences/Life Sciences	10	4.18
Trades and Industrial	9	3.77

2015 Cohort		
Major	Students	Percent
Liberal Arts & Sciences	53	25.12
Business Management & Administrative Services	29	13.74
Engineering	21	9.95
Health Professions & Related Services	16	7.58
Parks, Recreation, Leisure & Fitness Studies	15	7.11
Protective Services & Public Affairs	11	5.21
Trades and Industrial	11	5.21
Computer & Information Sciences	8	3.79
Agriculture	6	2.84
Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies	6	2.84

2016 Cohort		
Major	Students	Percent
Liberal Arts & Sciences	57	26.27
Business Management & Administrative Services	29	13.36
Engineering	28	12.9
Protective Services & Public Affairs	12	5.53
Computer & Information Sciences	10	4.61
Parks, Recreation, Leisure & Fitness Studies	10	4.61
Social Sciences	10	4.61
Health Professions & Related Services	8	3.69
Visual & Performing Arts	8	3.69
Agriculture	7	3.23

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