



S N A P S H O T

2018 Helping Heroes Grant Program Evaluation

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In 2008, the General Assembly established the Helping Heroes Grant program to provide qualifying veterans with lottery-funded financial assistance to help offset the cost of postsecondary education. State law requires the Comptroller's Office to periodically review the effectiveness of the grant program. This publication reviews the Helping Heroes program for the academic years 2013-14 through 2016-17.

Veterans must successfully pass courses at statutorily eligible postsecondary institutions to receive grant funds. Helping Heroes Grant awards are either \$500 or \$1,000 per student per semester (according to part-time or full-time status). 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 funds may be used as a supplement to other sources of financial aid.

Helping Heroes recipients must be a former member of the armed forces, or a former or current member of a reserve or a Tennessee National Guard unit called into active military service. Recipients must be admitted to, and enroll in, an eligible postsecondary institution seeking an associate's or bachelor's degree. Program participants are not required to meet any academic standard to qualify for the grant.¹

There is no cap on the number of Helping Heroes recipients per semester, but total grant expenditures per year are limited by state law to \$750,000. Grants are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. The Helping Heroes Grant program awarded approximately \$3 million to 1,956 veterans for the academic years 2013-14 through 2016-17.

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 enrolling in a public four-year institution. Close to half of grant recipients pursuing an associate degree graduate within three years of enrolling in a two-year institution.

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

Cohort year enrolled in public two-year institution	Three-year graduation rate	Cohort year enrolled in public four-year institution	Six-year graduation rate
2011	45%	2008	71%
2012	53%	2009	71%
2013	45%	2010	66%
2014	48%	2011	73%

¹ There are additional requirements for eligibility, such as not being in default on a federal Title IV educational loan and not being incarcerated. See OREA's full report *Supporting Tennessee Veterans in Postsecondary Education: The Helping Heroes Grant Program* for a complete list of eligibility criteria.