

EAGLE STUDENT VETERAN NEWSLETTER

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USI.EDU/VETERANS



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Stay Informed

Find out about events involving the Student Veteran campus community by following us on GroupMe, Facebook and Engage!

UPCOMING EVENTS

River City Veterans Resource Meeting

Thursday, January 29

USI Griffin Center 10:00

Join veteran support organizations from across the region to learn about different programs aimed at supporting veterans and their families.



Members of Rolling Thunder, Indiana Chapter 6, Honor Flight of Southern Indiana, USI SVA, community veterans and basketball teams help hold the American Flag during the 2025 Hoops for Troops - Military Appreciation Basketball game. Picture by Mick Hetman, Hetman Design LLC, Jan 18, 2025

Program Spotlight

Chapter 35 DEA to Join Other Programs in VA Mandatory Enrollment Verification

Starting in January 2026, Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (Chapter 35) beneficiaries are required to verify their enrollment each month to receive their benefit payments. Other benefit programs have been performing this action for a long time, but it has finally caught up to the Chapter 35 program. A beneficiary must verify their enrollment for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to begin processing their monthly benefit. Once verified, payment processing can take five to seven calendar days.

To verify enrollment, beneficiaries have the following options available:

- Text: To verify via text, beneficiaries can opt-in when they begin using their benefits to receive a text message from VA on the last day of each month to confirm their enrollment.
- Email: If beneficiaries choose to opt out of text verification, they will receive monthly enrollment verification messages by email.
- Online: Beneficiaries can verify their enrollment through [VA's online tool](#).
- Ask VA: Beneficiaries can verify through [Ask VA](#) by sending a message with their enrollment dates.

If a beneficiary would like to change their enrollment verification method, such as to text or email, they can call the Education Call Center (ECC) at 888-442-4551, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday.

To make sure students receive updates on enrollment verification requirements, and to ensure they have access to text and email verification methods, VA recommends that beneficiaries review and, if needed, update their personal contact information, including email address, mailing address, and mobile phone number. Beneficiaries can update their contact information in [their VA.gov profile](#), through [Ask VA](#), or by calling the ECC.

Staff Feature

REMINDER: VA Benefits have monthly requirements

Student Veterans that use benefits under Chapter 33 (Post 9/11), 30 (Active Duty), 1606 (Selected Reserve - including National Guard) and the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship must certify their enrollment EACH month to receive stipends. The following information is broken down by benefit so you know how to certify your enrollment.

PLEASE NOTE: If you changed your schedule and we already corrected your enrollment, please indicate that your enrollment HAS NOT CHANGED when you contact the VA. Unless you have withdrawn completely, small changes can delay your stipend as they then contact us to make sure you are still enrolled.

CHAPTER 33 - Post 9/11 &

CHAPTER 35 DEA (NEW FOR SPRING 2026)

- By text - The VA will send you a text when you start your program. They will ask if you want to verify your enrollment by text. If you respond "yes," they will send you a text every month asking you to verify your enrollment.
- By email - If you choose not to get text messages or you don't use texting, the VA will email you instead to verify your enrollment each month to the email address they have in their records for you.
- Online - You can verify your enrollment through Ask VA. In your message, be sure to include the dates of your enrollment in school or training.
- By phone - Call 888-442-4551 (TTY: 711) Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET.



NEXT CLUE:

This piece of history honors over 58,000 American's ; but only 8 women.

Find out in 2026!

CHAPTER 30 AND 1606

- By WAVE - You'll need to use the Web Automated Verification of Enrollment (WAVE) website to verify your enrollment for Montgomery GI Bill benefits. To do this, follow this web page:
 - gibill.va.gov/wave/index.do
- By phone - Call 888-442-4551 (TTY: 711) Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. ET.

EDITH NOURSE ROGERS STEM SCHOLARSHIP

You'll need to verify your enrollment each month for the Edith Nourse Rogers Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM) Scholarship in one of these two ways:

- By text - The VA send you a text asking if you want to get messages through our STEMText service. If you choose to get texts, they will send you a message each month by text asking you to verify your enrollment.
- By email - Email the VA each month with the dates of your enrollment in school or training. To do this, send a message to: STEM.VBABUF@VA.gov.



Staff Feature

Parenting Time Center's Giggles for Good at Victory Theater Feb 21

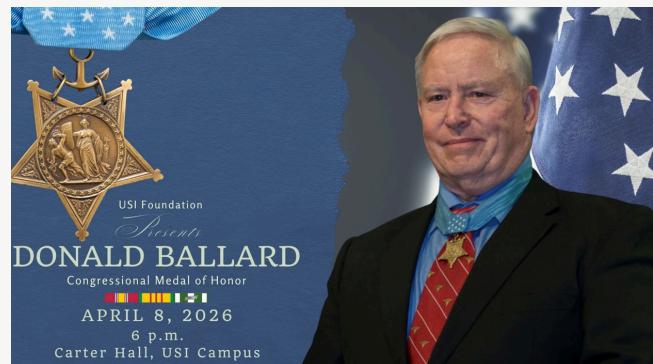
The Parenting Time Center will host its annual fundraiser, "Giggles for Good" at the Victory Theater on February 21, 2026.

This year's event will feature Las Vegas comedy show Tyzen, the Comedy Hypnotist.

Tyzen has been described as "Wickedly Funny" by Harrah's Casino and his show is known throughout North America as the most entertaining comedy hypnosis stage show available today. He's performed for audiences across North America, leaving them all amazed at what he can do.

With a winning combination of comedy, hypnosis, and mind-bending magic, Tyzen is taking the entertainment world by storm. From dazzling audiences at casinos and fairs to mystifying cruise ship passengers, this talented performer is redefining the live entertainment experience one mesmerizing show at a time.

Tickets are available by scanning the QRC below. These are restricted to audience members 18 years of age or older.



Medal of Honor Recipient to Speak in Carter Hall on April 8th

Medal of Honor Recipient Donald Ballard will speak at Carter Hall on campus on April 8th at 6 p.m.

Though he retired as a Colonel from the Kansas Army National Guard, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for actions he performed while serving as a United States Navy Corpsman with the United States Marine Corps.

On May 16, 1968, Ballard treated two Marines suffering from heat exhaustion, and when returning to his platoon from the casualty evacuation helicopter pad, his rifle company was attacked by a unit of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldiers.

While under enemy fire, Ballard was attending to a wounded Marine when an enemy grenade landed near the wounded Marine, four other Marines, and himself. He immediately covered the grenade with his body to shield the five Marines from the blast. Realizing that the grenade failed to explode, he quickly threw it out of harm's way as it exploded, saving the Marines and himself from harm or death. He then continued on attending to wounded Marines during the firefight. For his actions, he received the United States of America's highest military decoration for valor, the Medal of Honor.

Mr. Ballard was presented the medal from President Richard Nixon.

This event is free for all that want to attend and is brought to campus by the USI Foundation.

Community Opportunity

Leadership Everyone Looks for Tri-State Leaders

Leadership Everyone has extended the nomination window for their Celebration of Leadership Awards, and they are specifically hoping to highlight Veteran leaders and Veteran-serving organizations this year.

This is a perfect opportunity to lift up those in our community who demonstrate exceptional service, leadership, and impact—whether a Veteran making a difference, a military family member who leads with heart, or an organization dedicated to serving those who served.

Extended nomination deadline: This Friday

Nomination link: [Celebration of Leadership](#)

If you know a person or organization who deserves to be recognized, please consider submitting a nomination. Even a few sentences can help shine a light on their contribution to our Veteran community.

Progress on Claims and Student Support Returning to 'Normal'

VA Education Service continues to make steady progress in restoring timely service for students, especially for those using Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (Chapter 35) benefits.

Students can check the status of their payments and complete common self-service actions such as updating direct deposit information or changing contact details using their [My Education Benefits](#) page.

Call the VA at 888-GIBILL-1 (888-442-4551), or 001-918-781-5678 if calling from overseas, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. EST.

If a student has a debt due to enrollment changes, they can submit a message through [Ask VA](#) or call the Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648.

National Information

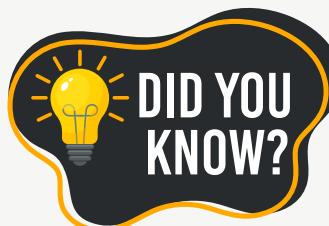
Enrollment verification for VA Education benefits required starting January 2026

Starting in January 2026, all Department of Veterans Affairs education beneficiaries, including Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (Chapter 35) students will be required to verify their enrollment each month to receive their benefit payments. Please note that you must verify your enrollment for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to begin processing your monthly benefit.

Once verified, payment processing can take five to seven calendar days.

You can learn more about the different enrollment verification methods in [this video](#) or [the Verify Your School Enrollment webpage](#).

This new tasking was originally scheduled for the Fall 2025 semester, but was pushed back by the VA. If you have any questions regarding this action, please contact the VA at 1-888-GI-BILL or [ask.va.gov](#).



Object 100: Iraq Burn Pit

A year after returning from Iraq with severe respiratory problems in 2008, Capt. Le Roy Torres and his wife founded Burn Pits 360 to raise awareness of the health hazards of burn pit emissions.

Over a decade of persistent advocacy by Burn Pits 360 and other Veterans groups paid off with passage of the PACT Act in 2022, the largest expansion of Veterans benefits since the 1944 GI Bill.

Read more about [Object 100](#) in the History of VA in 100 Objects digital exhibit.

SVA News

Veteran Writer Says FBI Visit Followed Her Criticism of Student Veterans of America

-Haley Fuller, Military.com, January 20, 2026



The FBI Contact

Elizabeth Hartman, a Marine veteran and writer who reports on governance and accountability issues in the veteran non-profit space, says the FBI came to her home after screenshots of her social media posts were submitted to federal authorities and framed as a potential

national security concern. Hartman attributes the report to Student Veterans of America's then-CEO and president, Jared Lyon, following her public criticism of the organization.

Hartman said the encounter was one of the most frightening moments of her life. She was hunting when she noticed a missed call and saw a voicemail transcription begin with, "Hey, Ms. Hartman... I'm with the FBI." After contacting her attorney, she returned the call and learned the agent was already at her home. According to Hartman, the agent told her he was there to "confirm [she] was not a threat to national security," explaining that reports had been submitted raising concerns about her posts.

Hartman said the agent was professional and courteous, but the substance of the visit was overwhelming. She described shaking uncontrollably and later realizing she had experienced shock. "Finding out the FBI is at your front door is genuinely one of the most terrifying things I think an individual can experience," she said.

Hartman declined to answer questions without counsel. After later addressing the allegations with her attorney, the matter was closed, and no further action was taken against her. Her full account of the incident is detailed in a December 2025 essay, ["Please Stop Digging: The Day the FBI Showed Up at My Door,"](#) published on her Substack, All Due Respect.

What She Was Criticizing

Hartman says the FBI visit followed weeks of increasingly pointed criticism she directed at SVA's leadership and governance practices. Her scrutiny began after she learned SVA allows non-veterans to be members, a policy she viewed as misleading given the organization's name. From there, she began examining SVA's publicly available financial filings and internal practices.

In a series of Substack posts and [LinkedIn updates](#), Hartman focused on executive compensation, board oversight, and what she described as a pattern of insulating leadership from accountability. In one widely viewed LinkedIn post, she wrote that after publishing about SVA, she was contacted by numerous veterans and former staff who told her that financial issues were "just the tip of the iceberg," and concerns about leadership behavior had previously been raised with the board.

Central to her criticism were SVA's IRS Form 990 filings, which the organization posts on its own website. According to SVA's Form 990 for the [FY2023](#), Jared Lyon received \$258,596 in reportable compensation. In the following year, [FY2024](#), Lyon's reportable compensation rose to \$288,939. On the form for [FY2025](#), SVA lists Lyon's reportable compensation at \$412,500, representing an increase of roughly 60% over two years.

Hartman has argued that this compensation growth occurred while SVA reported lower overall revenue than in prior years, a disparity she says raised serious governance concerns. For purposes of this article, the relevance of those filings is that her criticism was grounded in SVA's own public disclosures, not speculation or private accusations.

How Her Posts Were Framed

Hartman said she was later informed multiple posts had been submitted to the FBI for review, including posts depicting firearms related to her hunting activities. "Some of my hunting-related posts were some of the posts that were brought to their attention," she said. She said the focus on firearms became central to how her criticism was portrayed to authorities. Hartman frequently uses marksmanship metaphors such as being "over target" or "sighted in" to describe investigative focus, language she said was stripped of context and treated as literal threats. She said she was asked whether she intended to harm Lyon or commit violence at an SVA event, allegations she has consistently denied.

Hartman's account raises questions about how lawful speech, particularly when paired with firearms imagery

SVA News

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common in veteran culture, can be escalated into a law enforcement matter based on interpretation rather than intent.

The Cease-and-Desist Letter

Shortly after the FBI contact, Hartman received a cease-and-desist letter from an attorney representing Lyon. According to Hartman, the letter threatened potential civil litigation for libel and slander, asserting her public posts constituted death threats and defamatory statements against Lyon, and claiming her conduct had already prompted law enforcement involvement and the confiscation of weapons.

Hartman has publicly denied each of those assertions. "I am not under criminal investigation. I did not make death threats, and no weapons were taken from me by police," she said. Hartman has also stated that law enforcement confirmed she made no threats and her firearms were never confiscated.

What the Law Actually Says

A cease-and-desist letter is not a court order and carries no independent legal force. They are non-binding demands intended to warn of potential litigation, not to establish liability or impose legal obligations. In this case, the letter threatened potential civil litigation for defamation – specifically libel, which concerns written statements, and slander, which concerns spoken statements – based on the claim that Hartman's public posts constituted criminal threats and false statements about Lyon.

Defamation law generally requires proof that a false statement of fact was made about a person, the statement was communicated to a third party, the speaker acted with fault amounting to at least negligence, and it caused reputational harm. Both libel and slander fall under this framework. Truth is a complete defense, and statements framed as opinion, rhetorical hyperbole, or commentary on disclosed facts are not usually actionable.

When speech involves matters of public concern – which includes nonprofit governance, executive compensation, and the conduct of leaders of national organizations – the First Amendment provides heightened protection. In addition to the aforementioned requirements, public

figures must prove "actual malice," meaning the speaker knew a statement was false or acted with reckless disregard for the truth.

Hartman's criticism falls squarely within those protections. She has said her reporting relied on publicly available documents, including SVA's own IRS filings, and her commentary was framed as analysis and opinion on issues of clear public concern.

Why the Weapons Narrative Matters

For Hartman, a veteran and lifelong hunter, the suggestion that her firearms had been seized was particularly alarming. She said the experience has had lasting effects on her sense of safety. "Every time my dog barks, I jump, thinking the FBI is back at my house," she said.

The episode is uniquely troubling within the veteran community. Veterans are more likely than the general population to hunt and to be familiar with firearms, making such imagery common and culturally unremarkable. Hartman said seeing that reality used to portray her as dangerous, especially by leaders of a veteran organization, was deeply disturbing.

"If I dare say something about an organization," she said, "now I have to consider whether that organization will weaponize my use of firearms and attempt to have them taken from my home."

Unanswered Questions

Hartman has called on Student Veterans of America to explain why law enforcement was contacted, why false claims about weapons seizures appeared in legal correspondence, and what steps the organization intends to take to address governance concerns. Military.com also contacted both Student Veterans of America and Lyon seeking comment on Hartman's account. As of publication, neither responded.

The episode highlights how criticism grounded in public records can escalate into federal law enforcement contact and how, within the veteran non-profit ecosystem, firearms ownership can become a powerful and potentially chilling narrative tool when accountability disputes turn adversarial.

SVA National Opportunity

Get career-ready with free, flexible, online certificates designed by Google experts.

Student Veterans of America (SVA), is expanding access to opportunities that support your professional growth; which is why we're excited to offer Google-designed, virtual career trainings...at absolutely no cost!

[Submit your contact information now](#) to learn about how you can build resume-ready, in-demand skills through online, individual courses, or complete a full Google Career Certificate in an in-demand field. Learn at your own pace, on your schedule.

Your SVA Professional Development Series access includes:

- 384 individual Google courses to develop specific skills, and you can enroll in as many as you want.
- Options to complete Google Career Certificates in nine in-demand fields (including Project Management, Cybersecurity, Digital Marketing, and more).

A 100% free, self-paced, no-prior-knowledge-required experience.

USI Public Safety set to retire Rave Guardian, launches a new safety app

BY CADE SMITHSON, NEWS EDITOR

USI is retiring the Rave Guardian mobile app at 9 a.m. Monday, Feb. 2. A new mobile app, Screagle Watch, has been released on iOS and Android app stores in its place.

With a layout similar to Rave Guardian, Screagle Watch allows USI community members and the general public access to a wide variety of safety features with one touch.

The app works on and off-campus, allowing individuals on USI property to call Public Safety with a button. Users may use the 911 option for emergencies outside of campus perimeters.

A flashy, red "Emergency HELP!" button is displayed at the top of the screen for immediate response. The button shares the user's location with USI Public Safety Dispatch and will offer an option to

Campus Information

USI joins a select group of colleges awarded the 2026 community engagement honor

BY CADE SMITHSON, NEWS EDITOR

USI joins a select group of colleges awarded the 2026 community engagement honor

On Wednesday, Jan. 14, the university announced it had been recognized at the national level for its commitment to working alongside communities, earning the 2026 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification.

The elective designation, awarded by the American Council on Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, identifies colleges and universities that demonstrate deep, institutionalized engagement with their surrounding communities.

USI first received the classification in 2008, was reclassified in 2015 and now holds the designation for a third time.

Dawn Stoneking, executive director of outreach and engagement, said the consistency in recognition reflects USI's ongoing commitment to engaging with the regional public and private organizations in the Tri-state area and beyond to exchange knowledge and resources for mutual benefit.

[Read more here](#)

dial the Public Safety emergency line.

The new mobile app also allows users to directly and anonymously contact USI Public Safety Dispatch using a live chat feature to report an incident, share a location, or request assistance. This function is exclusive to on-campus property only.

In the event of a campus-wide emergency, users can send a brief "I'm OK!" notification to their contacts to let them know they are safe.

Screagle Watch is available to download on app stores, but it will officially go live Monday, Feb. 2, in place of Rave Guardian. USI community members can still use the Rave Guardian app until it retires.

