

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs e-mail to student veterans regarding Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS)

Dear Student,

We are sending you this email because our records indicate you are a current or recent GI Bill student attending one of over 700 GI Bill approved programs of education accredited by the Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS).

This email contains important information that may affect your ability to continue to receive GI Bill benefits at your school. You can see if your school is affected by clicking <http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/docs/ACICS.xlsx>.

You may have seen or heard that the U.S. Department of Education has terminated ACICS's recognition as a nationally accredited agency because of scrutiny from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for allegedly failing to provide consumer protection measures.

How does this impact me?

GI Bill benefits may only be used at higher education institutions that are accredited by a federally recognized accreditor. Fortunately, just this week, the Congress passed and it is expected the President will sign legislation that provides an 18-month grace period for schools to seek accreditation by another federally recognized accreditor. **Bottom line – you can continue to attend school using your GI Bill for another 18 months.**

What happens while my school seeks alternate accreditation?

This recent legislation allows the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to continue GI Bill benefits for up to 18 months following the withdrawal of recognition of an accrediting agency such as ACICS. This means you can continue to receive GI Bill benefits for up to 18 months while your school seeks alternate accreditation or program approval.

How did this happen?

ED recently released a report to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) recommending ED no longer recognize ACICS as an accreditor. NACIQI, a federal advisory committee that reviews all accrediting agencies for federal purposes, reviewed this report and made its own recommendation to end federal recognition of ACICS. ED has reviewed the report

and NACIQI recommendations and has made the determination to terminate ACICS' federal recognition.

What's the current status?

If ACICS does not appeal to the Secretary of Education, or if the appeal is taken but the Secretary of Education concurs in the Senior Department Official's negative decision, ACICS will lose federal recognition. There is no time limit for the Secretary to make a decision if an accreditor appeals the decision of the Senior Department Official. During the entire appeal process, ACICS would remain a recognized accrediting body and there would be no impact on Veterans benefits.

Where can I get more information?

If you want to learn more about what happens regarding student aid from the Department of Education (Pell Grants, federal student loans, etc.) when ED withdraws federal recognition of an accreditor, please read ED's blog post, "What College Accreditation Changes Mean for Students" on their [website](#).

What is VA doing?

VA is actively monitoring this situation and has worked with Congress and with the Department of Education, Department of Defense, and the State Approving Agencies to identify solutions that would mitigate disruption in your educational pursuits in the event ACICS loses federal recognition. As always, please feel free to contact our Education Call Center at 1-888-442-4551 (Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. – 6 p.m. CST) for any questions about your [GI Bill benefits](#) and remaining entitlement, or join the conversation on our [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.

What should you do?

At this point nothing changes for you for at least the next 18 months. We would, however, suggest you may want to re-evaluate your educational goals and decide that your current school and program will either meet your need for the next 18 months or that you may want to consider other options, courses and/or schools. We would suggest leveraging some of the tools we have developed on the GI Bill website such as CareerScope to help evaluate your interests and aptitudes, our 'Choosing the Right School' guide, the brief video '*Know Before You Go*' and finally our GI Bill Comparison Tool that provides a lot of information on every school approved for the GI Bill. Always keep in mind details such as will other schools accept that school's credits, what kind of accreditation (regional or national) and does that school provide you the flexibility you need for your career goals.

We will continue to stay in touch and send updates as soon as they occur so you can make the choices you need to make with the best information available. As in all

situations like this, it is important that you do what is necessary to plan for all possible outcomes.

Thank you for your service....more to follow. We believe we are sending this note to all GI Bill students at ACICS-accredited institutions, but please do not hesitate to pass this on to other GI Bill students in your program.

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