

New federal grant can help veterans in Clark College's vocational retraining

Twelve monthly payments can make a big difference for unemployed students without G.I. Bill support

By **JACQUES VON LUNEN**
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A new program for unemployed veterans pays the costs of going to two-year colleges that offer vocational programs, including Clark College.

The Veteran Retraining Assistance Program is part of a bill Congress passed last fall to reduce unemployment among former members of the armed forces. Eligible veterans can receive \$1,473 per month for 12 months. Applications are accepted now on a first-come, first-served basis.

The program is capped at 99,000

veterans nationwide — 45,000 in the coming school year and 54,000 in the 2013-14 school year.

Vernon Mitchell was the first veteran to apply at Clark College, he was told.

The 49-year-old served in the U.S. Army's 79th Engineer Battalion in 1987-91. He was stationed in Germany for much of that time. His unit built roads across rivers for tanks to cross.

When Mitchell came home, he found a job working maintenance. His eligibility for college benefits under the G.I. Bill expired after 10 years.

Then he lost his job six months ago and decided to give school another try.

"I got into a work routine to survive, but now I want more than that," Mitchell said. "You're never too old to learn something new."



Vernon Mitchell
First veteran to apply to a new assistance program at Clark College.

APPLYING FOR VRAP

To be eligible, veterans must:

- Be 35-60 years old.
- Be unemployed when applying.
- Not be eligible for other VA education benefits.
- Not be enrolled in federal or state job programs.
- Not receive VA aid because of being unemployable.

You can apply online at <http://gibill.va.gov>. Click on "VOW to Hire Heroes" at the bottom of the page.

He was so eager to get going, he signed up for his summer classes months ago, while most students were just registering for spring classes at the last minute. When he filled out his registration form, he checked the box for veterans and was advised to go see the folks

Veterans

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in the college's veterans affairs office.

There he found out that he gets a 25 percent tuition discount and was also encouraged to apply for the retraining benefit.

Mitchell was the first Clark student to put in an application and already has his confirmation letter. Between federal and state

grants and the retraining assistance, he won't have to take out student loans for a while.

"This gives me money to take this even further," Mitchell said. "It makes college even more appealing, especially for people who can't afford it."

About 40 veterans had inquired about the assistance program by Friday, said Mike Gibson, the college's program specialist for veterans affairs. Currently, about 200 veterans attending Clark aren't eligible for

money under the G.I. Bill, he said. A little more than 500 veteran students at Clark do receive benefits under the G.I. Bill.

The need for the retraining assistance program is definitely there, Gibson said. In any given week, at least one veteran comes into his office whose Veterans Affairs benefits have expired, he said.

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