

GI Bill A Law Worth Celebrating

At FIU we pride ourselves on being a beacon of hope and opportunity for our community. We are committed to providing access to higher education to everyone with the preparation, drive and determination to pursue a university degree. To accomplish this, we are always seeking ways to remove the barriers that keep our neighbors from pursuing their university dreams.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 — better known as the GI Bill — is one of the most significant pieces of U.S. legislation ever signed into law, particularly when it comes to removing the barriers to higher education. Now celebrating its 70th anniversary, the GI Bill has helped millions of veterans, who have served and sacrificed for our country, obtain university degrees. The GI Bill has educated three presidents, three U.S. Supreme Court justices, and so many more hard-working Americans who have built this great country.

At FIU, we have many examples of veterans who have taken advantage of this unique opportunity.

In the post-9/11 era, the GI Bill was updated to give even more financial support to veterans who pursue higher education, in the form of full in-state tuition, a housing allowance and money for books and supplies.

In the past five years, we have seen the number of FIU students on the GI Bill grow from just over 400 to about 1,300 today. Earning their degrees is the key to a prosperous future, for them and for our community, where our students stay and build their careers.

One of those students is Lt. Georgina "Gina" Cohen, an intelligence analyst with the U.S. Army Reserves. Like many of our students, who come from all over the world, Gina was born in Venezuela. Because of security concerns, Gina's mom brought her and her sister to Miami when Gina was a little girl.

Gina, 26, grew up near FIU. In fact, she went to elementary school just down the street. She joined the National Guard right out of high school, went to Miami Dade College and ultimately came to FIU to obtain her bachelor's degree in social work and participate in our ROTC program. She earned her degree, became a commissioned officer, joined the Reserves and served a tour of duty in Afghanistan. Now back in Miami, we're proud to count her among our graduate social-work students.

Gina's goal is to use the tools of her FIU education to help her fellow servicemen and women who are making transitions — such as those who are re-integrating into civilian life and those who are coming home from deployment or are being deployed.

Gina knows that these transitions can be difficult for members of the military. Gina wants to take a pro-active approach that will ensure veterans make a successful transition while trying to prevent the darkest consequence of failing to make that transition — suicides among our war-tested veterans.

Gina is combining her experience in the military with the tools of her FIU education to make a difference. She is accomplishing her goals in the FIU spirit of hope and opportunity and proving herself to be a bright, shining example of the commitment and dedication of our country's soldiers.

At FIU, our director for veteran and military affairs, Michael Pischner, is also a product of the GI Bill. Just a decade or so ago he was working as a transmission mechanic at a Ford dealership. He had three children in diapers and he wanted a better future for his family.

So, with his GI Bill benefits, he earned an associate degree in early childhood education, and came to FIU, where he added a bachelor's degree in environmental studies and a master's in higher education administration. Soon he will begin a doctorate program in our College of Education.

Michael is in the best position to see the positive impact the GI bill has had on our student veterans and on our university. Michael tells us that, on average, our veterans tend to have higher GPAs. They are mature. They are committed to their university education and to a brighter future. By virtue of that, they are tremendous role models for all our students.

This GI Bill is as relevant and necessary today as it was seven decades ago.

Just as the GI Bill rewards the hard work and sacrifices of our soldiers with the keys to a brighter tomorrow, we as a country must

-MARK B. ROSENBERG

President, Florida International University