

July 22nd 2019 : The following is an outline of my recent experience on my Chapter 31 Journey

Stayed up the night before gathering and organizing my 3 – ring binder to have the following tabs and documents (not all is mandated but it's better to go in prepared to defend your case):

1) **28-1902w** (RNI Document) - will be emailed and sent out to your mailing address

2) **Acceptance Letter / Occupational Outlook** (PharmD)

A) Accreditation of Program

<http://inquiry.vba.va.gov/weamspub/buildSearchInstitutionCriteria.do>

B) Occupational Outlook Handbook and Bureau of Labor Statistics of your field

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

C) 50 Descriptive Jobs available currently with your desired career - I recommend quoting Veteran Affairs and USA jobs as they will catch the eye of your counselor

3) **Resume / O*Net Results**

A) Updated a current resume as well as “ideal resume upon graduation.” For Assistance visit the following: <https://www.myperfectresume.com/>

4) **College Transcripts – Joint Service Transcript**

5) **68Q Description (pharmacy specialist)**

A) If separated from service within 5 years, I recommend obtaining this at the following site (for Army) and search for your MOS: <http://www.army-portal.com/> all other branches can google search within your branch resource center for a description

6) **Chapter 31 Questionnaire** (CFR codes)

A) Go to the law cornell-website and look up codes related to your claim:

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/38/part-21>

7) **Employment History**

8) **Disability Income**

A) Log on to your E-benefits portal: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>

a) Under Manage Benefits click on *VA Letter*:

b) Click “*Benefit Summary Letter Benefits*”

c) At the bottom of page click on “*Generate Benefit Summary Letter*”

9) **Budget Information** (Be as precise as you can and generate a budget spreadsheet)

10) **Functional Limitations**

A) Application Letter for the basis of my career change (See my example in Application Letter)

Prior to my July 22nd appointment, I was mandated to complete the 28-1902w RNI form (it is provided online but also sent to your email and stamped to your home address prior to your meeting) as well as an online career scope module with your personal user ID and password (this is also included in your email and letter packet). RNI will ask some background information as far as employability in the past, current limitations you have, and the ideal environment you see yourself progressing towards without aggravating your limitations. The career scope is a short-timed test to see your capabilities and will define your strengths and weaknesses with ideal career paths.

****Orientation****

I showed up to orientation professionally dressed (white buttoned long sleeve shirt, tie, black slacks, etc.) and waited in the lobby section of the federal building. Be prepared to be checked-in to the federal building as if you were boarding to your terminal in an international airport. Remove your items and do not bring any lighters, pocket knife, etc. You will start the day by signing in and prepare to watch a video clip talking about the ends and outs of the Vet-Success program including a go-to website. Personally, I only used E-Benefits portal to prepare for this meeting and nothing else. The video presentation took about an hour followed by a couple of staff members introducing themselves and giving an overview of what to expect throughout the day. Part of the presentation was having each one of us being assigned to a Voc-Rehab Counselor at specific times throughout that day. For example, the orientation started at 0830 and I was given a VRC to interview with me at 1000. Depending on the number of veterans, you could meet your counselor earlier or later. I was 1 of 12 veterans at this particular meeting. At this point we turned in our RNI Documentation and signed an additional document stating we have been informed of what was to come and may not qualify that day for Chapter 31 Benefits.

****Interview****

Once your paperwork and video presentation has finished, you will be asked if you took the career scope exam from your email. If you did no such thing, you will either take it that day or be delayed to a further date to finish the career scope exam (Take it before your appointment date). If you are caught up and documents turned in, you will meet with your assigned VRC who will determine if you are entitled to the program based on your evidence and reasoning for a new career goal. **It is very important you go in prepared to expedite the final decision.** Most of the VRC's will send you home with homework to do. However, if you go in prepared with the lists I have talked about before Orientation, it is absolutely possible that they will complete your career goal at the first appointment. Expect 3-5 meetings over a span of 2-3 months to get a contract signed for a career goal, especially if you wait to see what the VRC will ask you to complete. On top of what I have listed above, I also included my "School Schedule" along with my acceptance letter.

Once I met with my new counselor, the first two questions I was asked was "Am I currently employed?" of which I answered "No." Second question was "Does your disabilities prevent you from working?" of which I responded "Yes." Then comes the automatic questions revolving around your disabilities. In short, I was asked "How" and "Why." At this point, I gave my counselor a copy of my Personal Summary and Application Letter. Here is my summary letter I turned in (omitting personal information):

****Personal Summary Application Letter****

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing this letter in order to express my interest in retraining, and qualifying for entry level employment as a Pharmacy (PharmD) license holder.

My service-connected disabilities of PTSD and obsessive-compulsive disorder (100%), degenerative lumbosacral disc disease in my lower back (10%), and both left and right ankle lateral collateral ligament sprains with bone spurring (10%) has affected the previous job position I had held while on active duty serving as a technician in outpatient pharmacy. I have applied to technician jobs similar to my military training and have been denied from said jobs. This was all due to my diagnosed PTSD symptoms and inability to lift and carry heavy objects while pivoting in a closed environment. Due to all these current disabilities, I have not retained outpatient technician roles for more than six months and consequently, had let my pharmacy technician certification lapse. I do not currently, nor have I ever been interested in administrative, office assistant, or clerical roles since all of this lacks the esprit de corps environment I have grown to love while working in the healthcare environment within the Department of Defense.

Before working within the military, I worked 24 months overseas as a missionary giving community service while communicating in the Samoan language. The beauty of the island outdoors led me later in life to obtain a Bachelors with specialized training in Interdisciplinary Studies. With such a degree, I had hopes to collect wildlife reservoir samples in national and recreation parks. By collecting these samples, I would assist in pollution control while validating the health of the wild animals and fish throughout the seasons. Unfortunately, such a task requires hiking and carrying heavy equipment while traveling to specific designated spots in a timely matter. Although my love for the outdoors and community service has not changed, my physical abilities to perform an outdoor job has only aggravated my current disabilities. As such, I have learned to control my physical and emotional health by the guidance of healthcare providers. This has led me to giving service toward other patients and being with a healthcare team. Thus, counseling and assisting others with medicinal therapeutics would allow me to give back to the community as well as be integrated as a pharmacist within a healthcare setting.

In addition to being a licensed pharmacist, I have researched three other entry level career choices of becoming an inpatient clinical pharmacist, a certified pharmacist in academia medicine, and working with an Insurance Benefit Management Company. I have a desire for wanting to work with patients due to a temporary assignment dealing with organizing IV medication units for specific trauma patients that were required to have one on one help. I also enjoy teaching about the use of medications and what insurance benefits is best for the patient(s). Expanding my drug knowledge to that of a pharmacist is what I desire most. This would not be obtainable as a technician along with my physical and mental ailments under such a role.

I would like a career goal of "Licensed Pharmacist" to be implemented within my IWRP. I have utilized my research through the Occupational Outlook Handbook and the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the job prospects of a pharmacist. Employment as a pharmacist is projected to grow 6% from 2016 – 2026 which is as fast as the average of all occupations. Along with this projection, I have experienced the necessary elements desired in healthcare which include patient care, problem solving, and strict obedience of state and federal drug laws. I plan on growing within these attributes by accepting my enrollment at the (Name of Institution). Unlike many other programs, this institute allows maximum

study throughout the year in order for the students to graduate within 36 months instead of the traditional four-year pharmacy path. Although the program is a private institute, it participates in the Yellow Ribbon Program which I have been granted.

In conclusion, PTSD with obsessive compulsive-disorder, degenerative lumbosacral disc disease in my lower back, and both left and right ankle lateral collateral ligament sprains with bone spurring have prevented me from retaining employment working in the field I recently was certified and qualified to work within. My education needs additional training that is within an area of employment that correlates and fits my abilities, aptitudes and interests. Working as a licensed Pharmacist would not impact my disabilities, but instead allow me to gain employment to the maximum entry level extent possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very Respectfully,

****Name of Applicant****

****Interview Continued****

At this point, my counselor took what was written coupled with my own simplistic facts of recent examples of my disabilities, and implied I could be hired through a 501(c)3 agency with my current certifications. Of the which, I pointed out in my binder 38 CFR & 21.51 section (a) highlighting all three factors of abilities, aptitudes, and interests that are reflected in my desired career and its future growth output as highlighted in my Bureau of Labor Statistics documents. I then linked my top 50 career locations and explained that the majority are indeed within the VA setting and would allow me to be a top candidate within a 501(c)3 agency. At this point, I handed in my acceptance letter and explained that my certifying official already has me in the yellow ribbon program with current GI Bill. This was important information because I was able to show the cost differences of attending a 36 month pharmacy program vs. A normal 4 year degree with mandated intern or summer work services. I took 3 top choice careers from my career scope exam, and pointed out my specific limited abilities (ie cannot lift heavy objects or constantly moving around from city to city) and pointed at the overall cost and applications that would need to be cover vs the overall cost of my current desired program (little difference).

At this time in the interview, my counselor's mood and demeanor changed as he understood I had all my resources and references outlined in front of him from official or notarized documents. He dismissed me for a moment to wait in the lobby area while he talks with his supervisor as well as interview the next veterans that he knew were not as detailed as I was (and he was right). After 1 hour of waiting in the lobby, he had gone through 4 veterans that were denied or sent home to gather more information and given "homework." After calling me back in with the supervisor, I reiterated again my evidence of the role of a pharmacist vs technician and why it wouldn't work. I pointed out that office jobs and related computer jobs would hinder my OCD and PTSD to the point of being let go. I once again reiterated my 6 months of unemployment and compared by specialty skills outlined in my career scope with the title "pharmacist" showing up from that career exam. They spoke once again and after up to date references and notes from my specialty care providers were handed in, the eventually approved me and gave me a copy of official VA FORM 28-8872 outlining my Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP). With it, I

will have tuition, fees, books, supplies, needed electronic services (laptop and printer as required by my program), necessary tutoring, and subsistence allowance (BAH from Chapter 33 Benefits). They will also cover study material and payments for pharmacy law and licensure exams. As time goes on I have the right to submit a need to cover traveling costs to my rotation sites.

****Closing Remarks****

For those who are attempting to use these benefits in undergrad, or for an extension without an acceptance letter in hand, I have a file attachment taken from the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Chapter 31 Veteran Support Group on Facebook. This is the experience of another individual who was accepted a few years ago and did another angle of getting accepted based on 3 different career goals. You can find the location under my signature block that deals specifically with disabled veterans. I want readers to understand that my first attempt with seeing a VRC resulted in my denial for benefits. 8 months later, I gathered more evidence, based my feedback and tone off of my new counselor. **Half the battle is reading your counselor. Another fourth of the battle is going on organized and overly prepared while dressing professional.** Be simple but direct. If your disabilities are in a gray area for a work environment, have a meeting with your provider to “write out your abilities within a career scope of your choosing.” Desputing another professional keeps your counselor within the bounds and rules you have now set for yourself.

This is not a one size fits all, rather a brief lay-out of my experience of getting accepted into the program. For further guidance and knowledge, please ask here. For more files and experiences from other individuals, please login to my signature block to obtain free information from other veterans that are going through the same path as you. I wish you all the best in your journey!