

Military OneSource Podcast — The My Career Advancement Account Scholarship

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. We're talking spouse employment today, specifically something called the My Career Advancement Account Scholarship program. We'll refer to it today as MyCAA. Our guest today is Kristen Silverman. She's a SECO career coach. SECO stands for Spouse Education and Career Opportunities. Kristen, welcome to the podcast.

Kristen Silverman:

Thank you, Bruce. Happy to be here.

Bruce Moody:

We're happy to have you with us today. So before we dig into MyCAA, let's go ahead. I'd like you to introduce yourself and tell us what you do as a SECO career coach.

Kristen Silverman:

Sure, sure. So my name's Kristen Silverman, and I've been a career coach here at the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program for the last three years. And specifically, I've been helping support our military spouse community with all things career or education related.

So as a career coach, I help spouses one-on-one through our phone call appointments, navigating anything from the MyCAA Scholarship to job search assistance to helping tailor resumes or cover letters.

Bruce Moody:

Why did the Defense Department establish the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program?

Kristen Silverman:

So the Department of Defense, DOD, established the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities program to provide education and career guidance to military spouses worldwide, so not just here in the states. So we help multiple spouses in other countries as well.

It was created to offer comprehensive resources and tools related to career exploration, education, training and licensing, employment readiness and career connections.

The DOD recognizes the many challenges that military spouses face, as they support their military service members, especially as it relates to a spouse's own career goals. It's been very common for me to work with spouses who are just trying to reenter the workforce after taking a career break, due to the frequent moves of the military.

But, I also see spouses needing support to identify additional education, licensing or training in order to make their career more portable between states. So the Department of Defense has made great progress in alleviating some of these hurdles by providing free coaching services and opportunities to the military spouse community.

Bruce Moody:

I look forward to hearing more about your coaching, but let's get into MyCAA, again, My Career Advancement Account Scholarship program. What is this? What is MyCAA, and why should military spouses take advantage of it?

Kristen Silverman:

Of course. So, MyCAA is a workforce development program that provides eligible military spouses with up to \$4,000 in financial assistance for programs leading to a license, certification or associate degree that's necessary for spouses to pursue an occupation or career field. So the scholarship has been a fantastic opportunity for spouses to take advantage of in order to further themselves in their current career or enter a new career for the first time.

There are many programs under \$4,000, which would mean no additional cost to the spouse but allows them to obtain an industry specific certification, license or associate degree that can help jump-start a spouse's career.

Bruce Moody:

Now, MyCAA is more than just financial aid then. So, what else can spouses use MyCAA for?

Kristen Silverman:

Yes. So, MyCAA can also help military spouses, at any approved institution, to receive assistance with the cost of national test for course credits required for a degree approved under the program. So, this is including the College Level Examination program. So the MyCAA Scholarship can help for that.

But if you're unsure which programs and institutions are currently approved to accept the MyCAA Scholarship, SECO has a school and program search feature on our website. And you can also speak directly with a career coach over the phone who can help you find an approved school or program.

Bruce Moody:

And as we said, you are a career coach, you work with military spouses. So I'd like for you to share with us today a story, an experience you've had, and working with a military spouse specifically in using the MyCAA Scholarship to help them meet a career goal.

Kristen Silverman:

Oh, OK. Oh, man. I've had many great stories, success stories with spouses and using the MyCAA Scholarship. I think one that stood out for me was a spouse I worked with about a year ago. We started working together first to identify possible career paths that she had some interest in.

When we first started, she had a few options of interests, but then after researching career fields together, doing some informational interviewing, looking at career videos, she finally decided and made the decision to pursue a certification program with her scholarship.

Her long-term goal was to become a nurse. And although she could have used her MyCAA Scholarship towards an associate degree program in nursing, she decided it was better for her, and her family at the time, to use it towards a medical assistant certification, where she could get her foot in the door into the health care field, build some confidence, and start her foundation in the health care field before eventually pursuing a nursing degree program down the road.

Bruce Moody:

Interesting. Now I understand that eligibility for MyCAA was recently expanded, and this is part of the secretary of defense's commitment to taking care of service members and their families. So as we look at this expanded program, who is eligible for MyCAA?

Kristen Silverman:

The MyCAA Scholarship has always been available for military spouses who service member is on active-duty orders for pay grades E-1 to E-5, W-1 to W-2, and O-1 to O-2. Spouses with service members within those pay grades who have also successfully completed a high school or GED-equivalent education, have the ability to request tuition assistance while their military service member is on Title 10 military orders.

We've also recently expanded, like you were mentioning, the MyCAA Scholarship to include spouses with service members with pay grades E-6 and O-3, so just one up from what we were doing before. That recent expansion is also based on available funding.

Bruce Moody:

What I'd like to do now is go through the process of registering and applying for MyCAA. Walk us through that, if you would.

Kristen Silverman:

Absolutely. So if you already have a school and program in mind that is approved, I'd first encourage the spouse to create an account on our SECO website. That's usually the first step in any part of the process. Making a SECO account with us will open up your door to your MyCAA Scholarship — you'll be able to search jobs on our website — so that is always a good first step.

Then after your account is made on our website, I would encourage the spouse to give us a call at our SECO Career Center and request to speak directly with a career coach. In that appointment, the spouse and coach will go over any SECO related resources that may be beneficial to them as they go through their program, as well as the labor and market information related to their career goal.

And once the appointment is then complete, a spouse will need to create an education plan in their account, and a SECO team member will review their plan for approval.

Bruce Moody:

Is there something that you wish spouses knew or understood better about MyCAA?

Kristen Silverman:

I would say that the MyCAA Scholarship covers the cost of a program's tuition, so emphasis on that tuition part. But many of the approved schools that accept our MyCAA Scholarship also offer assistance with paying for additional costs, such as books, laptops, exam fees. But the MyCAA Scholarship is going to be covering that tuition-cost part of their program.

Bruce Moody:

Thanks for that information. We're going to put a phone number in the program notes. People can use this number to call for a SECO career coach to schedule a consultation. We'll also put in a link to the MySECO website where people can set up for a live chat.

So in closing, well, you are a career coach, and so I would just invite you to provide your motivational message to military spouses. Maybe they're embarking on a career, maybe they're returning to their career. Or maybe they're just ready to take it to a new level or a different level. What is your motivational message to them?

Kristen Silverman:

I would say ... I see so many military spouses on a daily basis with the appointments. And I would say my message to them would be: there's no wrong time to get support for their own career development. And wherever they are in that career development stage, we can certainly help with coaches and our support here at SECO.

It's never too late to receive support or go back into the workforce after taking a career break. Many employers are also learning about ... We're doing a good job educating employers on the many wonderful qualities that military spouses possess, including the frequent moves and how military spouses have to be adaptable. We have gone through adversity; we are flexible. We have great communication skills. We have to be planners.

So a lot of these skills, even if you are no longer in the workforce, or you're going back, you took a career break to focus on your family, focus on being a military spouse as an identity piece, I think it's important to go after what you've always dreamed of. And we can certainly help support that, whether that's practicing an interview of how we can talk about the skills you have as a military spouse and how they are an asset to any organization.

Or we can also talk about how to tailor it on a resume, or any part of the career development process we can help with at SECO. And I would really encourage any military spouses that are currently listening to this wonderful podcast to reach out to us and help us be another support system for you.

Bruce Moody:

Thanks for that message, Kristen. Kristen Silverman, thank you so much for joining us today. We hope to have you back.

Kristen Silverman:

Yes, thank you so much for having me and lovely to meet you all and share about our SECO program.

Bruce Moody:

Kristin Silverman is a SECO career coach. Great to have you on the podcast.

And want to remind you all that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always look forward to hearing from you. There's a link in the program notes. Click on it, send us a comment, a question, maybe an idea for a future episode.

And be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody, thank you so much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.