



APSCU

ASSOCIATION OF
PRIVATE SECTOR COLLEGES
AND UNIVERSITIES

BEST PRACTICES FOR
***MILITARY AND
VETERAN STUDENTS***

FEBRUARY 2013



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1101 CONNECTICUT AVENUE, NW
SUITE 900
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
(202) 336-6700
WWW.APSCU.ORG

MISSION STATEMENT

The Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU) has established this “Blue Ribbon” Taskforce to ensure that every service member, veteran, and family member utilizing their earned, postsecondary education benefits are provided with the quality education to which they are entitled at every institution of higher education. The Taskforce is comprised of a broad group of individuals who share a common commitment towards the education of service members and veterans representing a diverse range of institutions, including non-APSCU members, as well as representatives of nationally-recognized leadership organizations in the area of military and veteran postsecondary education. The Taskforce has been specifically charged with identifying, discussing, and documenting the very best postsecondary education practices and support services that meet the specific needs of military and veteran students. The primary objective of the Taskforce is to publish a set of recommended institutional standards and associated operational practices that foster persistence, program completion, and other factors that will enable the military and veteran student population to achieve its academic and professional goals. The final product will represent a condensed, practical set of suggested actions and policies for all institutions of higher education.



To view a full copy of the report of the APSCU Blue Ribbon Taskforce for Military and Veteran Education visit www.apscu.org/blueribbon.

MEMBERS OF THE APSCU BLUE RIBBON TASKFORCE FOR MILITARY AND VETERAN EDUCATION

The Taskforce has been led by **Jeff Cropsey**, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at Grantham University and Chair, Public Affairs, Council of College and Military Educators and **James Hendrickson**, Vice President of Military Relations at Colorado Technical University and Executive Director of the CTU Wounded Warrior and Spouse Scholarship Program.

Other Members of the Taskforce include:

- **Jeff Arthur** - CIO and Vice President of Financial Assistance, ECPI University
- **Mike Betz** - General Manager, Military Student Initiatives, Education Corporation of America
- **Scott A. Kilgore** - Senior Vice President of Military of Affairs, Kaplan University
- **Russell Kitchner, Ph.D.** - Vice President for Regulatory and Governmental Relations, American Public University System
- **Scott D. Palumbo, LCDR. USNR** - formerly National Director of Military Affairs, DeVry University
- **James Shane, Jr., BG. USA (Ret.)** - Director of Military and Veterans Affairs, Sullivan University
- **Kathy Snead** - Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Consortium President and Vice President for Military and Veteran Partnerships, American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- **Dennis Trinkle, Ph.D.** - Provost and Chief Academic Officer, Harrison College
- **Joseph W. Wescott, Ph.D.** - Executive Director, Veterans and Military Education Programs, North Carolina State Approving Agency and Vice President, National Association of State Approving Agencies
- **Garland H. Williams, Ph.D., Col. USA (Ret.)** - Associate Regional Vice President, Military Division, University of Phoenix

Special Advisors:

- **Michael Dakduk** - Executive Director, Student Veterans of America
- **Ryan M. Gallucci** - Deputy Director, National Legislative Service, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.
- **Steve Gonzalez** - Assistant Director, National Economic Division, American Legion

BEST PRACTICES FOR MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENTS

PREAMBLE

These Best Practices represent the collective efforts of the work of the Blue Ribbon Taskforce. The institutions represented on the Taskforce are incredibly diverse in size, ownership structures and academic programming and provide career-centered education ranging from skilled trades to post graduate degrees. However diverse, these Best Practices were created to encourage all institutions of higher education to aspire to high levels of service for this special group of students.

The Best Practices are organized under four subject areas:

- Full transparency and accuracy of information in the recruitment and enrollment process.
- Institutional commitment supporting the military and veteran students' academic needs.
- Appropriate student services reflecting the numbers and needs of their military and veteran student population.
- Pursuit of outcomes data related to retention, degree completion and other metrics for an institution's military and veteran students, enabling us to learn and improve our services in the future.

The Taskforce is mindful that the diversity of institutions – in size, number of veterans and/or military students, types of academic programming, and other factors – will result in implementation of many, but not necessarily all the Best Practices, in ways appropriate to the needs of each institution and its military and veteran students. We recognize and celebrate this diversity of service while being unified in our commitment to excellence in military and veteran education.



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I CONSUMER INFORMATION, ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITMENT:

Prospective military and veteran students should receive appropriate, relevant information in order to make a sound, informed decision about their postsecondary education. Information should be provided in clear and understandable language. Prospective students looking to utilize their U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) or U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits should not be the subject of aggressive or misleading recruiting practices. Institutions should follow all federal and state laws and regulations to ensure that the recruitment of military and veteran students is appropriate.

A. Consumer Information

- i. Provide accurate and complete information to prospective students on:
 - Institutional and programmatic accreditation status for each offered program;
 - Whether program meets minimum requirements to qualify student for state licensure in relevant occupation(s);
 - Potential earnings and employment pathways of program completers;
 - Financial obligations and cost of educational program;
 - Institution participation in various military and veteran programs and partnerships; and
 - Institution transfer of credit policies.
- ii. Require prospective students to affirm receipt and understanding of the required disclosures.

- iii. In an effort to achieve complete transparency, include information in catalogs, websites, and other media outlets that adheres to the following minimums:
 - Clearly articulated and defined mission statement;
 - Clearly defined academic and financial information about program requirements; and
 - Total cost of admission, tuition, instructional materials, and all mandatory fees.
- iv. Provide in-depth financial counseling, so that prospective students fully understand their financial obligations upon enrolling in an educational program.
 - Explain the extent to which DoD Tuition Assistance and VA education benefits will pay for the cost of the education;
 - Explain the ramifications of student loan debt, in terms of monthly repayment obligations when feasible;
 - Explain long term financial obligations related to use of educational benefits as compared to borrowing under federal or private loan programs; and
 - Always encourage responsible borrowing if a student needs or chooses to borrow to pay for education costs or other personal expenses which may be covered by federal loan funds.

B. Recruitment

- i. Develop and/or maintain enrollment and recruitment policies appropriate to higher education institutions and compliant with federal and accrediting agency regulations.
- ii. Use only promotional and recruitment materials and practices that do not have the capacity to mislead or coerce students into enrolling and are consistent with policies of the VA, Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Department of Education (ED), and all applicable federal and state regulations.
- iii. Create reasonable internal policies for contacting potential students that do not exert high pressure to enroll through unsolicited follow-up calls or other forms of personal contact.

For example:

- Marketing and outreach systems, including third-party vendors, must have an opt-out feature for individuals who do not wish continued recruiting contact; and
 - Establish and enforce internal call limits on unsolicited recruiting calls, such as a “Three Calls then Stop” policy.
- iv. Employ appropriate sanctions, including termination of employment, on recruiters and managers found to have engaged in predatory recruitment practices.

C. Enrollment

- i. Ensure students are appropriately placed and prepared for the programs in which they enroll. Consider employing any of the following practices: (a) assess academic readiness prior to enrollment; (b) offer appropriate remediation if necessary; (c) offer limited course loads; (d) offer a reasonable “Trial Period” for enrollment; (e) offer penalty-free drop/add periods upon enrollment.
- ii. Offer military and veteran students a tailored orientation program, which would provide an overview of specific information regarding VA certification requirements, satisfactory academic progress, and additional tutorial assistance, as appropriate.



II INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENT SUPPORT

Institutions should actively support and promote programs and services for military and veteran students. Institutions should employ an engaged faculty that understands the needs of military and veteran students and provides mentoring and advising to ensure the success of these students. Institutions should consider instituting the following, as applicable:

A. Personnel/Faculty

- i. Appoint a senior-level administrator to lead the institution's military and veteran support programs (or Office of Military and Veteran Affairs).
- ii. Designate an employee, or team of employees (as student enrollment numbers dictate), to provide support/services tailored to the needs of the military and veteran students.
- iii. Appoint a Military and/or Veteran Student Ombudsman to escalate and resolve issues related, but not limited, to DoD or VA educational benefits, academic enrollment issues, and institutional policies and procedures.
- iv. Conduct regular roundtable discussions, focus groups, and/or interviews with service-member military and student veteran organizations, either on-campus or virtually, to establish a continual understanding about the needs of the military and veteran student population enrolled at the institution and how to meet those needs.
- v. Appoint an interdepartmental military and veteran education taskforce to evaluate the institution's policies, practices and procedures relating to the military and veteran students.
- vi. Institute faculty development training to ensure that faculty members:
 - Receive the necessary tools and information regarding the unique qualities of the military and veteran learner;
 - Learn effective classroom instructional practices to better meet the needs of this non-traditional student population; and
 - Understand the various support services available to military and veteran students and the associated referral processes for accessing those services.
- vii. Institute campus wide training on the specific needs and resources available for military and veteran students and their families.

B. Administrative Policies and Practices

- i. If applicable, become a Yellow Ribbon Program participating institution, offsetting the unmet cost of an education for eligible VA education beneficiaries and consider the following:
 - Allow "all" or an unlimited number of eligible veteran students to enroll; and
 - Offer the maximum institution contribution allowed under the program.
- ii. Offer alternative grants to veterans and their spouses who may not be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to cover any funding gaps not covered by other financial aid benefits, such as the Montgomery GI Bill.
- iii. Offer a reduced military tuition rate for active duty, National Guard, and reserve service members and their spouses to minimize out-of-pocket student expenses beyond what DoD Tuition Assistance (TA) benefits cover.
- iv. Adopt a policy for evaluating and awarding credit for military training and experiences, maximizing the use of military training credit recommended by the American Council on Education (ACE).
- v. Comply with existing federal requirements related to the postsecondary education of military or veteran students, including:
 - Enter into the DoD Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for participation in TA; and
 - Formally agree to accept the Principles of Excellence outlined in Executive Order 13607 – Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members.
- vi. Become a member of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium.
- vii. Establish Human Resources policies that exceed the standards set by the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act (USERRA). Institutions of higher education with employees currently serving in the military should exceed USERRA guidelines for employees during military training activities and deployment status.
- viii. Offer multiple learning formats for military and veteran students to access and interact with program curriculum and course materials, which allow students the freedom to pick the format that best suits their learning style. These formats may include videos, text, a library of archived audio content of classroom instruction, problem-solving activities, and practice tests.

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ENSURING MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH STUDENT SERVICES

Recent studies and anecdotal information related to military and veteran student success reveal a growing trend toward centralized student services at institutions with significant populations of military and veteran students. Building on the success of existing programs, institutions of higher education should strive to provide the following services and programs tailored to the specific needs of their military and veteran students:

A. Centers

- i. When the number of students necessitates its creation, institutions should establish an Office of Military and Veterans Affairs with clearly articulated goals and expectations, which complement the mission of the institution, accompanied by the full support and resources from the institution's leadership. The Office of Military and Veterans Affairs would typically administer and manage the following:
 - Military and veteran-specific Student Advisors in the areas of admissions, academics, and benefits;
 - Specific academic counselors for the military and veteran student population trained to address transfer credit and awards for prior academic or military credit (College Level Examination Program (CLEP), portfolio, military training);
 - Trained VA certification specialists to assist with the timely processing of educational benefits documentation to avoid benefit funding delays; and
 - A tailored orientation program for military and veteran students, developed to enable active-duty, Guard, or Reservist students or transitioning veterans to optimize the available institution resources and support programs.
- ii. Another approach is to establish a Military Student Center (MSC), which acts as a hub to guide military and veteran students throughout their postsecondary experience, beginning with recruitment and ending with job placement. The MSC functions as a clearinghouse of information for all military and veteran benefit programs and assists potential and current students with navigating the intricacies of the federal programs for which they may be eligible. More specifically, the MSC may function as follows:
 - Counsel prospective students who self-identify themselves as military- or veteran-affiliated on the best way to access and maximize the benefits for which they are eligible;
 - Staff the MSC with specialists who are either a military veteran or spouse who received specific training in DoD and VA benefits eligibility and processes; and

- Provide transfer of credit assistance, help with military and prior-college transcript requests upon application and acceptance to a program of study, training to Program Directors and Deans regarding ACE guidelines for the award of military credit, and recommendations for credit acceptance based on review of military transcripts and Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).

B. Partnerships

- i. Support student veterans interested in organizing a campus-based, or online, student organization with necessary resources and use the Student Veterans of America (SVA) as a resource and guide. Institutional support for student veterans to create a student veteran organization or club is critical to fostering successful veteran student transition, peer support, and camaraderie, and providing needed opportunities for student veterans to network and make social connections with other student veterans who possess similar interests or experiences.
- ii. Establish a Campus Military and Veterans Lounge or Virtual Student Gathering Place, which allow military and veteran students to interact, access program-related resources and services, and provide peer-to-peer support.
- iii. Establish and maintain student chapters of professional organizations and academic honor societies to expose students to potential professional networks. Encourage student membership and participation in relevant local, regional or national professional societies while completing coursework.
- iv. Introduce and partner with established veteran service organizations, such as the American Legion or Veterans for Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW), within the geographical area of the campus to further connect veteran students to community resources and peers.
- v. Institutions with a sufficiently large military and veteran population should develop a specific career services strategy, including:
 - Establishing partnerships with employers who will work with students while enrolled and offer quality job opportunities upon graduation;
 - Establishing formal alumni networks for military and veteran graduates, allowing students who have completed programs of study to interact with one another, building geographically based or industry-based professional networks; and
 - Engaging with local Employer Support for Guard and Reserves (ESGR), professional associations such as Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), or the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

IV ESTABLISH INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH GUIDELINES FOR TRACKING MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENT SUCCESS

Tracking data related to credit completion, degree completion, and student satisfaction is vital to understanding successful student outcomes. Accurate data collection is essential to understanding and addressing the needs of military and veteran students and their families. To the extent practicable, institutions should:

A. Collect/Use Data

- i. Identify and track military and veteran student populations with regard to retention, degree completion, persistence, and other valuable metrics.
- ii. Analyze and use data to identify areas in need of improvement and ways to better serve military and veteran students.
- iii. Use data to develop measures to evaluate program effectiveness.

B. National Student Clearinghouse

- i. Participate in the National Student Clearinghouse to help to provide meaningful data for military and veteran students across higher education (transfer, degree completion, and persistence).
- ii. Provide meaningful data to the VA and DoD for use in developing programs to better serve military and veteran students.



APPENDIX

APPENDIX I: INSTITUTION RESOURCES

- i. Supportive Education for the Returning Veteran (SERV)
- ii. Veteran-Civilian Dialogue
- iii. Veterans in Transition Course
- iv. Military to Civilian Transition Manual
- v. Mobile National Test Center (NTC) for CLEP and DSST exams
- vi. Transfer credit evaluation at no cost – awards transfer credit for ACE approved military training
- vii. Webinar series for veterans and employers of veterans
- viii. Institution Skills Translator
- ix. ACE Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions, March 2012

APPENDIX II: COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

- i. Veteran Stand Down (KCMO) – volunteer annually
- ii. Toys for Tots – collect toys annually
- iii. Partners with Veterans Today Network to hire veteran employees
- iv. Teamed up with CCME Cares to send care packages to deployed troops over Valentine's Day
- v. Fundraising for Wounded Warrior Project over Veterans Day
- vi. Annual sponsor of KC Association of the United States Army's Army Birthday Ball

APPENDIX III: MEMBERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS

- i. SOC
- ii. CCME
- iii. Yellow Ribbon Program
- iv. DoD MOU
- v. Principles of Excellence

APPENDIX IV: PUBLICATIONS

- i. From Boots to Books: Applying Scholssberg's Transition Model to the Transition of Today's American Veterans to Higher Education
- ii. From Combat to Campus: Voices of Student-Veterans
- iii. A New Generation of Student Veterans: A Pilot Study
- iv. The Difficult Transition from Military to Civilian Life
- v. Veterans' Post-Secondary Education: Keeping the Promise to Those Who Serve
- vi. Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium Publications/Forms/Resources (Principles and Criteria, Standards of Good Practice for Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, Pocket Guide for College Outreach to Military Students, Veteran and Military Family Programs and Services, and Military Student Bill of Rights)
- vii. Educational Attainment: Tracking the Academic Success of Servicemembers and Veterans, July 2012, Education Working Group convened by SOC

- viii. From Soldier to Student II Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members, July 2012, prepared by American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and National Association of Veteran's Program Administrators (NAPVA)
- ix. Time is the enemy, September 2011, Complete College America
- x. Service Members in School: Military Veterans' Experiences Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Pursuing Postsecondary Education, November 2010, prepared by the RAND Corporation, with support from Lumina Foundation for Education for the American Council on Education (ACE)
- xi. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Major Differences: Examining Student Engagement by Field of Study, Annual Results 2010, sponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- xii. Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education: What the New GI Bill May Mean for Postsecondary Institutions, July 2009, prepared by Alexandria Walton Radford, MPR Associates, Inc. with support from the ACE Center for Policy Analysis Center for Lifelong Learning and the Lumina Foundation for Education
- xiii. From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus, July 2009, prepared by ACE, SOC, AASCU, NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and NAPVA with support from the Lumina Foundation for Education



SPECIAL ADVISORS

American Legion

The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veteran's organization. Focusing on service to veterans, service members and communities, the Legion evolved from a group of war-weary veterans of World War I into one of the most influential nonprofit groups in the United States. Today, membership stands at over 2.4 million in 14,000 posts worldwide. The posts are organized into 55 departments: one each for the 50 states, along with the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, France, Mexico and the Philippines. The birth of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known informally as the GI Bill of Rights, was a law that included several key parts: educational opportunity; on-the-job training; unemployment benefits; home, farm and business loans; review of discharges; health care; disability claims and veteran employment services. Today, the American Legion continues to work with all stakeholders in protecting and creating meaningful veterans education benefits that truly meet the needs of our 21st century veterans.

Student Veterans of America (SVA)

The mission of SVA is to provide military veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education and following graduation. Today's veterans face numerous obstacles in their path to attaining a college degree. These challenges range from a missing sense of camaraderie to feeling like an outsider amongst 18 year old traditional students to a lack of understanding by university faculty. When coupled with the visible and invisible wounds of war, a college degree can be an elusive goal for men and women returning from military service. SVA makes that goal a reality. SVA is a coalition of student veterans groups on college campuses around the globe. These member chapters are the "boots on the ground" that help veterans reintegrate into campus life and succeed academically. Each chapter must be an officially recognized student group by their university or college and provide a peer-to-peer network for veterans who are attending the school. Additionally, chapters often coordinate campus activities, provide pre-professional networking, and generally provide a touchstone for student veterans in higher education.

Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW)

Since 1899, the VFW has continued to be a leading voice in veterans' advocacy, helping to enact nearly every major Quality of Life initiative for the benefit of every generation of veteran, military service member and their families. Composed of 2 million VFW and Auxiliary members in 7,200 VFW Posts across the country and around the world, the VFW creates, protects and enhances these benefits and programs by actively engaging with Congress and the White House. From the passage of the original World War II GI Bill of Rights in 1944 to the Montgomery GI Bill and now Post-9/11 GI Bill, the VFW will continue to advocate for student-veterans to improve their earned educational benefits and the consumer product information they deserve to receive.