

DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY... & CREDIT

Serving the Education and Learning Needs of
Active Military and Veterans

CAEL Forum and News 2010



CAEL

The Council For Adult & Experiential Learning



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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

Congress recently passed legislation improving the Post-9/11 GI Bill for the millions of eligible Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans to use in their pursuit of education and training. This legislation provides a tremendous opportunity for these valued Americans to obtain the skills necessary for employment at a time when they are often making the difficult transition back to civilian life. The *CAEL Forum and News* is using its annual print issue to share how postsecondary institutions and other organizations are working to help military students succeed in education and, ultimately, employment.

First, we share an interview with Lt. Colonel Jack Amberg (LtC, USA ret), Senior Director of Veterans Programs at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, in which he speaks about the challenges of the returning veteran and the goals for the foundation's new initiative to serve veterans in the Chicago region. We then present articles on postsecondary institutions' use of prior learning assessment for veterans. Representatives of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Consortium, Northern Kentucky University, and the Collegiate Consortium in Philadelphia present current models used in recognizing military learning for credit and for preparing veterans for new careers that build on their military training.

Subsequent articles highlight program features that facilitate the learning experiences and educational successes of veterans at the University of Maryland University College, Penn State University, and University of the Incarnate Word.

Closing out this issue are two pieces giving a national voice to the charge of serving our veterans. First in this section is an article from the American Council on Education on their work with veterans, including their recent Veterans Jam, an online conversation on issues facing returning veterans with respect to education. We also reprint excerpts of the September 16, 2010 testimony of Dr. Alan Merten, President of George Mason University, addressed to the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. Speaking on behalf of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Dr. Merten explained the experiences of colleges and universities with the Post-9/11 GI Bill and offered recommendations for improved administration of the benefit.

We hope you find the stories and information shared in this edition of the *CAEL Forum and News* inspiring as we all work towards a better understanding of the responsibilities inherent in advocating the success of this exceptional learner population.

The Forum and News Editorial Board

Diana Bamford-Rees

Rebecca Klein-Collins

Beth Doyle

Judith Wertheim





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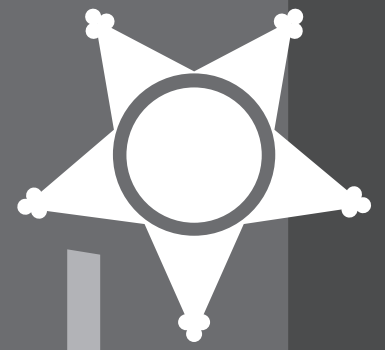
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section 1: BECOMING A CIVILIAN



An Interview with Jack Amberg, Senior Director of Veterans Programs at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation


After 26 years in the army, Jack Amberg (LtC, USA ret) is now leading the Veterans Midwest Employment Fund at the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. Amberg recently sat down with CAEL's Rebecca Klein-Collins for a conversation about the foundation's goals for their new veterans fund and what colleges and universities can do to serve veterans better.

The McCormick Foundation has long funded projects that serve military veterans. Why does the foundation have this history?

Robert R. McCormick was a veteran himself and fought at the Battle of Cantigny in the First World War. He was an artilleryman who was eventually sent back to the U.S. to build a division. (At that time, wealthy people would build divisions and then bill the federal government; it was a for-profit enterprise. That was just how they did it back then.) Throughout his life, Colonel McCormick established a tradition of taking care of his fellow vets. If someone went off to war, McCormick's Tribune Company would have a job for him when he came back. Colonel McCormick's philanthropy extended beyond the military when, upon his death, his Red Oak Farm in Wheaton, Illinois, was renamed Cantigny, offering the people of Illinois today educational and outdoor activities with a golf course, beautiful gardens, and a museum that tracks the history of the first infantry division. In addition, the McCormick Trust became the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. Continuing the tradition begun by McCormick himself and including having three generals serve as CEO, the foundation has throughout its history taken care of veterans.

About three or four years ago, four private equity investors approached the foundation. They wanted to do something for veterans, but they weren't sure what, and they didn't know how. With the foundation's help, their funds created Operation Healing Freedom. In 2008, when our then CEO David Grange met New York Mets owner Fred Wilpon, what resulted was a partnership with Major League Baseball that launched the Welcome Back Veterans initiative. More recently, another individual, who wants





to remain anonymous, has donated one million dollars for veterans' employment. In each of these cases, the foundation matches the funder fifty cents on the dollar, and then we use our expertise to find the non-profits who will make a difference.

The Foundation is about to launch a new initiative that builds on its previous work with veterans in the Chicago area. What is the focus of this initiative? What are your goals for the next 2-3 years?

Our new initiative is the Veterans Midwest Employment Fund, and the intent is to try to figure out—and then fix—why veterans have higher unemployment than everyone else.

One of the things I often say about veterans is that they are “too dumb to fail.” I mean this as a compliment, as in “they don’t know how to fail.” It’s not an option. You give them a job, and they do it. Just think about what they do—from burning the 55 gallon drum from the latrine to rebuilding a village and everything in between—and they go and they do it. They don’t know how to fail. Then they come back home from wherever they’ve been, wanting and needing to integrate back into society. And yet, as civilians, they experience higher unemployment than everyone else.

Understand that the vast majority of these kids enlist at 17, 18, 19 years old. They come out of mom and dad’s “crib” and go immediately into the military “crib.” Initially, the drill sergeants tell them what to eat, when to sleep, and what to wear. Everything is pretty much taken care of for them. While you decide what sweater or shoes to wear, they have a uniform. When they are in theatre, they make about 3,000 decisions a day; today, you as a civilian will make closer to 9,000 decisions a day. When you go to college out of high school, you transition into making all decisions for yourself. You go to the dining hall, and you have to figure out how to give yourself a good diet. When these kids come out of the military as a 24-year-old adult, there is no transition process, and that creates a lot of stress from a veteran’s standpoint.

So, on the one hand, the person in the military has had less experience with day-to-day decisions. However, that same guy or gal at 23 or 24 years old may have had 6-12 direct reports in the military—for example, as a shift leader or squad leader. When you look at their maturity level and understanding of certain tasks, they are head and shoulders above their peers. They are skilled in planning, operations, logistics, administration, and all facets of management.

Besides lacking practical experience in making day-to-day decisions, another thing that veterans have little practice in is self-assessment. Remember, they don’t fail at anything they do. So when an HR manager at a potential employer asks them “What are you good at?,” they will say, “Whatever you need done.” They may have signed up in the army to be a logistics specialist, but now they can also dig a fox hole, they can fire an M-4, they can do first aid. They can manage time, people, and resources. They

When these kids come out of the military as a 24-year-old adult, there is no transition process, and that creates a lot of stress from a veteran’s standpoint.

can do maintenance on a vehicle. They may have signed up for one thing, but they do everything. Yet they don't have a concept of "What I think I bring to the organization is this..." From the civilian perspective the HR manager thinks, "What can I do with this person?" The perception is that this person is an automaton doing what it is told to do when it is told to do it.

If you think about uprooting your entire life and being put with 35 other people—your platoon—then being dropped into a foreign country where you have to feed yourself, take care of yourself, move yourself, keep everybody motivated, and so on, well, that takes a wonderful skill set. And yet the civilian organization doesn't understand what these veterans bring. So there's a disconnect.

What we're trying to do with this new employment fund is to explore this issue and get the two sides connected so that we can get our veterans employed.


What do colleges and universities need to know about veterans in order to serve them well?

Let's take the concept of "the crib" from before. So they're living in mom and dad's crib, and what's the focus there? Getting them through high school and maybe into college. There's a lot of push and focus about what the kid is supposed to be doing. Then in the military, they are very mission focused. Eventually, however, they show up at university and think, "What's my focus?" There isn't someone out there advising them or telling them what their focus should be. They need help developing an understanding of who they are and what they are about. During their military careers, they masked their own wants because they did everything that was asked of them: "Whatever you need done, boss, I'll do it and I'll do it well." That's the mentality. Back home, they have to step away from that. If they can't figure out what motivates them, they will end up in jobs that aren't right for them. So colleges and universities need to help veterans figure out who they are, what it is that motivates that man or woman on a daily basis to get out of bed. What makes them happy working every day?

There's also a need for camaraderie. You remember in high school, we're in our cliques. In the military, you're in your platoon. Now in college, who are you unified with? Who is your group? What universities can do is create a place where vets can go and talk to other veterans.

You've got all those plusses I talked about—like being "too dumb to fail." But they've got some unique challenges to overcome. You've heard of post-traumatic stress disorder. They've all got post-traumatic stress. Whether it becomes a disorder or not—that's what you have to deal with. You've got to understand the unique challenges they are dealing with and their need to work through all of them. They want to share those kinds of experiences with another veteran. It is hard to share with a civilian. Remember, they served that person. In their minds they protected the nation

During their military career they masked their own wants because they did everything that was asked of them.



and that person. They think, “How can I go to that person who’s not a veteran and say, ‘Can you help me?’”

What else do you see as some of the promising trends in serving the educational and workforce needs of veterans?

When you’re focused on fixing the total package, you’ve got to think of it from a community perspective—the total community: healthcare, education, the chamber of commerce. Will the veterans have everything they need? The community has to come together and say, “We have to bring these veterans back. We have to integrate them back into our town.”

Let’s use the example of where my family comes from, Quincy, Illinois. How does the town of Quincy come together and say, “If you’re a veteran and you’re coming back to our town, we’re going to take care of you.”? Is Quincy College working with the local old soldier’s home working with the local hospital working with the rotary club working with the chamber of commerce working with the American Legion? Are they all sitting down and telling each other what they do?

Colleges and universities are never going to be told directly by the federal government who’s going to be coming home and when. But the people in your town will know. So you’ve got to have those networks and that communication opened up in your community so when your local veterans come back, the hospital can take care of its piece, the chamber of commerce is working on the jobs piece, the education piece is there. And that’s what I’d love universities to know. Don’t just look inside your campus. Look outside your campus to figure out how to serve this population better.

What larger policy issues also need to be addressed in order for there to be a well-functioning system—or a more coordinated approach—to serving vets?

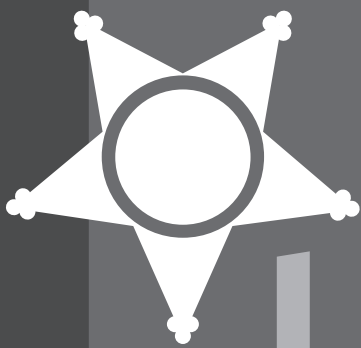
First of all, my belief goes back to the preamble of the constitution, which says, “We the people, in order to form a more perfect union...provide for the common defense.” That tells me that “we the people” need to take care of the veterans who come back. We have a contract with them. They protected us, we take care of them. I think a portion of that responsibility is the government’s. We empower our government; we give them our taxes, so we have to hold their feet to the fire to provide services. But they can’t provide all the services. Let’s be real. Getting the federal government to act is like taking an air craft carrier into the middle of the Sahara desert and getting it to turn. Eventually, if you get enough folks to pick that sucker up you can get it turned. But it takes a long time to get enough folks together and agree that this is the direction you need to go. In the meantime, what can we do within the communities now to make a difference?

I’m not sure how many people can get a baccalaureate degree in 36 months. Especially when during that time they are also making the big adjustment to civilian life.

Second, the GI Bill covers tuition over 36 months up to the amount of the highest tuition in the state. There are two challenges with this: it may not be enough tuition for certain educational options, and it also is probably not long enough. Many schools are now “Yellow Ribbon Schools” to address the first problem. For example, a veteran going to the University of Chicago will find that the GI Bill only covers a portion of the tuition and fees, but the university pays half of the difference and the Veterans Administration pays the other half. But this doesn’t solve the problem of the GI Bill being for such a short duration. I’m not sure how many people can get a baccalaureate degree in 36 months. Especially when during that time they are also making the big adjustment to civilian life.

Lastly: don’t think of veterans as victims. I have yet to meet one that will say, “I lost my leg.” They gave it. They served you. Hold them to the same standards as everyone else. They aren’t asking for anything to be given to them. They will work their tails off to succeed. Make sure they know what success looks like at your college or university. But they are not looking for a handout. What they want is a chance.





section 2: RECOGNIZING PRIOR LEARNING



Awarding College Credit for Military Training and Experience: Campus Strategies for Adopting ACE Guide Credit Recommendations

By Kathy M. Snead, Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Consortium & Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Clinton L. Anderson, United States Army

Some college officials are skeptical about giving servicemembers and veterans credit for learning acquired as part of their military training and professional job performance. At the same time, they value these students' service to their country, particularly in times of war and often at great personal sacrifice.

Military students, on the other hand, are adamant that they should receive credit for military learning that closely mirrors many of the learning objectives in their academic or occupational programs offered by institutions in which they are enrolled. These cohorts of students are not just out of high school. They have undergone the rigors and maturing aspects of the military's initial entry training and other schooling required for their occupational specialty, rate, or rating. Often their formal training has involved considerable time, effort, and performance testing. Now, they want to pursue a college degree as expeditiously as possible and get on with their lives. Nearly half are married and have family responsibilities. Credit for their prior military learning jumpstarts their academic progress, reduces the amount of coursework required, and motivates them to strive seriously toward degree completion.

This article describes the specific processes undertaken to assess the learning of military students in a way that ensures academic integrity, thereby addressing some of the concerns raised by faculty and institutions, while also helping to establish colleges and universities as welcoming to students from military backgrounds.

Institutional Concerns about Recognizing Military Learning for Credit

College officials and faculty are rightfully concerned over anything they perceive as lessening program quality and challenging institutional integrity. Some worry about the impact on their institutional and programmatic accreditation. Some do not fully

understand and appreciate the rigor that is involved in developing guidelines for awarding credit for military learning. Some professors are concerned that awarding “applied” credit for “theoretical” knowledge may disadvantage military students. Some may see a financial incentive for refusing to award credit for military learning, thereby requiring students to take more courses from that institution and pay more tuition and fees. Regardless of their specific concerns, often persons who have spent their lives in the academy are not fully knowledgeable about military culture and the extent or levels of military training.

Accreditation Fears

The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium is a vehicle to help coordinate voluntary postsecondary educational opportunities for servicemembers. Recently, the SOC staff conducted an informal review of current accreditation standards, guidelines, and positions on award of credit for prior learning, particularly as they relate to award of credit for military training and experience. Results of the review showed a general recognition among both regional and national accrediting commissions that an institution may transfer in and/or award credit for experiential learning consistent with its mission, but the institution must ensure that the learning is at an appropriate level and comparable to the institution’s own learning program outcomes. Perhaps the most consistent accreditation requirement is that an institution has a defined and published policy for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for such learning. Typically, the institution is required to employ sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit being awarded regardless of format or mode of delivery.

Over the years, the accreditation commissions have worked closely with the American Council on Education in maintaining and improving the *ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Service*. One such collaborative effort was an ACE Task Force in 2002-03.


In the following paragraphs we describe what tools and strategies are used within colleges and universities to help military students earn credit for what they have already learned during their time in service.

ACE Guide

The *ACE Guide* is the standard reference work used by institutions to document recognized learning acquired in the military. ACE’s process for translating military learning into academic credit began during World War II. With the advent of the GI Bill and tuition assistance paid by the military services, ACE’s efforts became all the more important, and they have continued systematically over the years. ACE military program staff acquire experienced faculty members from a broad spectrum of American colleges and universities who serve on evaluation teams that review military curricula in depth and make visitations to military service schools and other

Military students' formal training has involved considerable time, effort, and performance testing.





troop locations to determine as precisely as possible what learning occurs. Faculty members are selected based on their expertise in the subject matter being evaluated.

Evaluation teams must agree not only on the subject, amount, and level of credit but also on a detailed justification for whatever credit they recommend be awarded. Military evaluations occur on a scheduled basis to reflect as best as possible currency in military training and learning. ACE military evaluation teams have a long history of being extremely careful, even stingy, in the amount of credit they recommend. *Credibility* is their watchword.

Since the mid 1970s, military training has been based primarily on job task analysis. After completing needs analyses, training programs are designed, developed, and implemented to meet identified needs and evaluated to ensure that those needs are fulfilled. Military training has often been characterized as competency-based education. ACE teams evaluate military training and experience “as is” and do not advise military trainers on how their training can be revised to produce more academic credit. General knowledge and theoretical concepts often are not taught, and ACE military evaluation teams take this factor into consideration as they develop and render their credit recommendations.

Military Transcripts

In the past, American colleges and universities often found *ACE Guide* credit recommendations difficult to apply in official evaluations of student’s prior learning. In response, the Air Force produced a Community College of the Air Force transcript that made it easy to award and apply credit for military learning.

The other military services did not want a “military community college,” but did want civilian colleges and universities to have available to them an official transcript system, documenting *ACE Guide* credit recommendations as they pertain to each individual servicemember. The Army developed and now maintains AARTS (Army American Council on Education Registry Transcript System); the Navy and the Marine Corps developed and maintains SMART (Sailor/Marine American Council On Education Registry Transcript); and the Coast Guard developed and maintains its own Coast Guard Institute transcript system. The result is that each servicemember and veteran should have an official transcript documenting his or her military learning.

Colleges and universities can use official AARTS, SMART, and Coast Guard Institute transcripts as reliable documentation in evaluating a student’s prior military learning using *ACE Guide* credit recommendations. A significant percentage of respondents to ACE surveys of American colleges and universities place a premium on the AARTS and SMART transcripts’ detailed descriptions of military courses and occupations and on the detailed descriptions of the ACE recommendations, thereby assisting in the institution’s award of credit for military learning.

Each servicemember and veteran should have an official transcript documenting his or her military learning.

Campus Strategies

In addition to the *ACE Guide* and military transcripts serving as useful tools for recognizing the learning of military students, there are also strategies that colleges and universities can employ to make their programs more accessible and their policies more transparent for military students. For example:

- College campuses can have well-defined and published policies for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit in transfer for military learning, ideally displaying these policies on a military web page on their institutional website.
- Colleges can provide campus training, professional development, and informational experiences to share military culture with faculty and administrators. Such experiences might include guided discussions in faculty senate committees, student veteran panels, or forums to share both their military instructional training and occupational specialty knowledge acquisition.
- Colleges can invite an available military liaison officer, as well as a veterans' program administrator/certification official, to engage actively with servicemembers and veterans.
- College officials can coordinate “educator tours” of military installations and arrange for faculty and staff to observe military training exercises to gain a better appreciation of the technical training and “soft” skills that servicemembers acquire in the military.
- Colleges can have military personnel and some of their campus veterans as guest lecturers addressing topics that demonstrate skills and knowledge acquired in the military.
- College officials can take the lead to host campus, regional, and state-wide workshops to help articulate and better understand formal military training and the *ACE Guide* military evaluation process that translates it into academic credit recommendations.

A shared lack of mutual understanding of the evaluative credit process is at the heart of the gap between military student expectations about college credit for their military training and what colleges deem “appropriate” collegiate-level learning. Educating students, faculty, and college administrators about the evaluative credit process and sharing *ACE Guide* procedural knowledge can go a long way to bridging the communication gap. Being truly a military-friendly campus requires a fair and balanced understanding of military learning and its place in academia.

Expanding PLA Options for Veterans

By Vicki Berling, Northern Kentucky University

In spring 2009, Northern Kentucky University established a Veterans Advocacy Committee (VAC) to identify ways to make the university more “friendly” to veterans. The committee represented a university-wide cross section of faculty, staff, students, and administrators. According to Committee Chair Dave Merriss, the purpose of the committee is “to provide a collaborative platform from which we can work to increase campus awareness of issues faced by veterans, develop programs and activities that promote access and success for veterans and family members on campus, partner with other organizations that can help veterans, and engage the community in this process.”



Most students ended up getting bulk credit for their military work even though... their military training provided [other] valuable educational experiences.

The Need to Go Beyond the ACE Recommendations

One issue that quickly rose to the top of the committee’s priority list was revisiting the university’s policies for awarding credit on the basis of military experience. Student veterans had voiced concerns that their military experience equated to lower-level bulk transfer work that had little impact on their degree-completion goals. The committee investigated and found that this was largely the case.

“The university does follow American Council on Education recommendations with regard to military credit,” Merriss said. “But we found that most credit recommendations address technical courses not offered at NKU. As a result, most students ended up getting bulk credit for their military work even though our committee agreed that their military training provided [other] valuable educational experiences.”

Merriss formed a subcommittee to discuss options for awarding more course-specific, upper-division credit. The subcommittee identified two avenues to address the issue: the first involved the university’s credit-by-examination policies and the second involved credit by portfolio.

Credit by Examination for Military Students

With regard to the first option, the subcommittee found that several College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests commonly taken by servicemembers were not

accepted by NKU. The subcommittee worked to resolve this problem by educating university leaders. The subcommittee hosted a luncheon meeting for key department chairs at which a CLEP representative presented data about test development procedures and the validity of results. The representative also shared a list of the CLEP tests most likely to be taken by military personnel. Among these were three tests that were not accepted at NKU (sociology, college algebra, and precalculus). Upon subsequent review, the department chairs agreed to begin accepting credit resulting from these tests.

Further, the subcommittee found that university policies did not include the opportunity for students to receive credit for similar testing programs, such as DSST (formerly DANTES) tests. DANTES tests were originally developed and administered by the Department of Defense to allow servicemembers to receive credit for their military training and education by nontraditional methods. They are now administered by a third-party vendor but are still offered at many military bases as well as at many designated testing sites. Eligible active duty servicemembers and their families may take DSST tests at no cost. At NKU, a proposal to expand the policy to accept DSST tests and other tests was approved by the Academic and Admissions Policy Committee in the fall 2010. This approval enables department chairs to review available tests and determine which may be appropriate for their programs.

Expanding the Use of Portfolio Assessments

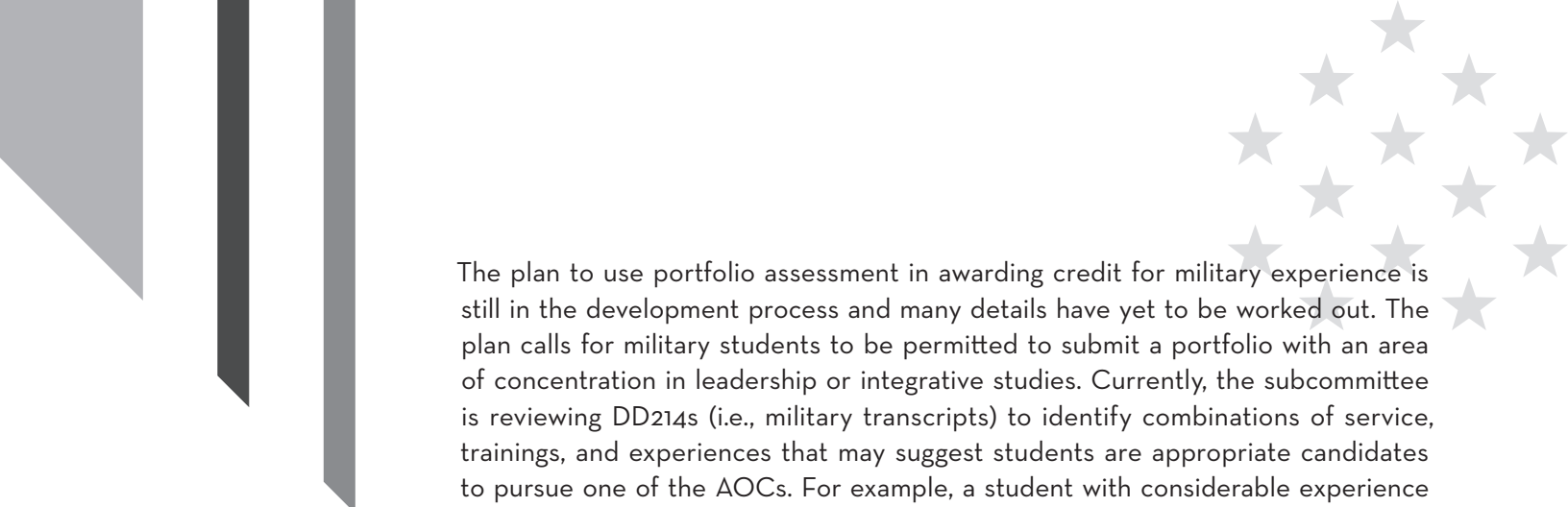
The subcommittee also proposed a plan that would allow veterans to complete an area of concentration (AOC) via portfolio. NKU has long offered credit for prior learning via portfolio, using the CAEL standards as guidelines. The portfolio process enables students to document the learning that has taken place as a result of their work and professional experiences. In addition to providing an avenue for receiving credit, the process validates the students' experiences and tends to motivate them for continued study. One portfolio student explained how the process affirmed her experiences in public speaking and safety/first aid. She also noted an added benefit that derived from working closing with faculty.

By documenting my experience in these two areas under the guidance of supervising faculty members, I was able to earn credit for my life experience and view that experience in the context of the academic learning objectives associated with the courses. During the process, core components of each topic were revisited as we made those intentional, critical learning connections. For public speaking, my supervising faculty member and I formed a faculty/student relationship that continues to this day.

Another student said the process made her appreciate her occupational field more: "I am more excited about graphic design. [The portfolio process] made me realize all that I have accomplished."

Military students will be permitted to submit a portfolio with an area of concentration in leadership or integrative studies.





The plan to use portfolio assessment in awarding credit for military experience is still in the development process and many details have yet to be worked out. The plan calls for military students to be permitted to submit a portfolio with an area of concentration in leadership or integrative studies. Currently, the subcommittee is reviewing DD214s (i.e., military transcripts) to identify combinations of service, trainings, and experiences that may suggest students are appropriate candidates to pursue one of the AOCs. For example, a student with considerable experience training others or leading teams in a staff capacity may be a good candidate for the leadership track. A student with extensive experience working in another country and interacting with the native population may be a good candidate for the integrative studies track.

It will enable us to recognize in the very real way the hard work and commitment of our veterans and will speed them toward the completion of their academic goals.

Once identified as good candidates, students will be invited to enroll in a 3-credit portfolio development class. Through this class, students will learn to identify the learning that has occurred through their military service. The instructor will guide them through the preparation of a life-learning statement that details their learning and aligns their experiences with the content of specific NKU courses. Each portfolio will be reviewed by a faculty evaluator who is a content expert in the academic discipline. As proposed, students could apply for a range of credits from as few as 3 to as many as 12, depending on how extensive their military experience was.

The proposed plan was approved in fall 2010. It is hoped that by spring 2011 NKU can begin identifying students who would be appropriate to enroll in the course the next academic year.

“This is an exciting step in our development as a military-friendly institution,” said Subcommittee Chair Dr. Vicki Berling. “It will enable us to recognize in the very real way the hard work and commitment of our veterans and will speed them toward the completion of their academic goals.”

Other Initiatives

The potential establishment of an area of concentration on the basis of military experience is another way NKU is working to better serve military personnel and veterans. The university also supported the development of a student organization for veterans and has sponsored a variety of staff development events to help advisors and faculty identify and address the special needs of veterans returning to the classroom. Other initiatives (including a checklist of admission procedures and key contacts for incoming veterans, and a university-wide celebration of Veteran’s Day) have also resulted from the VAC. The committee will continue to explore opportunities to support veterans as they pursue their academic and occupational goals.

Building a Bridge between Military Jobs and Advanced Manufacturing

By Joseph P. Welsh, Collegiate Consortium, & Phyllis Snyder, CAEL




The Collegiate Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development represents a strategic partnership of five community colleges (Bucks County Community College, Camden County College, Community College of Philadelphia, Delaware County Community College, and Montgomery County Community College) along with Drexel University in the Greater Philadelphia region. The consortium is known for its ability to deliver programs that support regional economic and workforce development strategies.

In 2006, the Greater Philadelphia region began to experience the return and discharge of a significant number of veterans who served in the National Guard, Reserves, and active military in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our challenge was to design a program that would allow for easy access to education and training options and to create opportunities for veterans to be employed in our regional economy.

Identifying Barriers to Education Facing Veterans

In the initial stage of the project, we assembled a team of veteran's personnel from our six campuses, one-stop providers, and the Pennsylvania and New Jersey Veterans Affairs offices. We determined that our first step as a group would be to identify barriers to our educational programs for returning veterans.

The consortium worked with college faculty to interview veterans on campus who were taking advantage of their educational benefits, and we contacted veterans' outreach programs and regional workforce boards to interview those who had not. We learned that the timeline to apply for classes and obtain approval for GI benefits was a barrier for veterans enrolling in their first semester back at school on our campuses. Once a veteran decided to return to school, completion and approval of the required paperwork took so much time that it discouraged many veterans from enrolling. Our response was to create a scholarship program for qualified veterans where approval for funding was based on their DD214 document and their service in support of Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom. By using the scholarship to pay for the classes, the veterans could return to school immediately



and did not need to wait through the normal approval process. This program provided enhanced enrollment, and now more than 420 veterans have participated in our scholarship program.

Selecting the Industry

The consortium next focused its attention on creating a model that would assist veterans to leverage their military training and take advantage of our non-credit certificate and training programs for jobs with regional employers. We chose to develop a program specifically for the advanced manufacturing industry because of our already strong relationships with employers in that industry. We knew from our conversations with these employers, and from a survey we conducted with them, that many believed veterans needed to develop new skills in order to compete successfully for advanced manufacturing jobs in the region. Employers recognized the value of the veterans' military training but felt that there was a knowledge gap between military training and the requirements of current advanced manufacturing jobs.

We also learned that, despite the decline in manufacturing in the United States, many employers could not find qualified personnel who had sufficient technical skills to work in this field. This skills gap was putting the region's high-tech manufacturing sector at risk—a sector that includes shipbuilding and repair, rotorcraft, defense industry, bio-pharmaceutical manufacturing, and the larger number of small component manufacturing companies that serve as part of the manufacturing supply chain.

Mapping Military Skills to Manufacturing Jobs

In order to better understand the linkage between a veteran's military training and these jobs, we undertook a study with CAEL entitled "Veterans in Advanced Manufacturing." This study linked the Military Occupation Specialty code (MOS) from each service to a particular field of expertise on advanced manufacturing and our college-based training programs. The purpose was to give the military student a clear picture of what skills and competencies they already had and how those skills transferred to specific jobs in a growing industry. The resulting picture would be a roadmap of sorts from military occupations to private sector jobs, as well as an understanding of what additional training the student might need to facilitate a transition to that new occupation. The appeal of this approach is that it recognizes the very real and transferable skills and competencies that military students already have.

Successful Students

Military students responded positively to this approach through increased enrollment. It has allowed us to recruit veterans and pilot training in a number of fields that include composite fabrication training for the rotorcraft industry, PV solar technology, welding for shipbuilding and repair, and fiber optic training for linemen.

This approach recognizes the very real and transferable skills and competencies that military students already have.

We have already trained eight veterans in the fiber optics training program taught by the Northeastern Apprenticeship and Training program (NEAT). It is a 48-hour program that has been delivered during the weekends so that the participants, who are already working as linemen, could continue to carry out their jobs. All participants successfully completed the program and attained a certificate that will allow them to advance in the field.

One successful participant was Second Class Petty Officer for the United States Navy, Kurtis Weise. Weise served in Iraq as a medic for the Marine Corps during two tours of duty. Upon returning home and completing his time for the Navy in September 2007, Mr. Weise entered the Northeastern Apprenticeship and Training program. While working as an apprentice lineman for several contractors within Pennsylvania, Weise recently completed training through the Collegiate Consortium for Fiber Optic Training. The training has certified Mr. Weise in the splicing and terminating of fiber optic cables through the Fiber Optic Association.

Replicating the Model for Other Industries

As we explore other training models in our region, we do not intend to limit our work to manufacturing. We are already planning training programs for entry level jobs such as pharmacy technicians while also developing a model program for entrepreneurship and small business support for veterans. We are additionally working on collaborating with the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce to engage regional businesses in employing veterans.

There is no simple answer to what veterans want to do with their careers for the future. Our team is piloting several models as we continue to learn from our participating veterans on our campuses and in our workforce. Our hope is that we can continue to explore opportunities that will assist our veterans so they can help us rebuild our economy.





section 3: INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES



Building Upon Tradition, Relationships and a Keen Understanding of each Moving Part: The Historic Partnership between University of Maryland University College and the U.S. Military

By John F. Jones, Jr., University of Maryland University College

Intense competition for the military and veteran student is a relatively new phenomenon in the higher education market. Competition, of course, can breed both positive and negative results. On the one hand, there are countless conferences and workshops on best practices for serving veterans on campus, and institutions are creating service centers and support organizations to ensure that veterans are welcomed into the campus community. On the other hand, competition has driven predatory recruiting practices and egregious marketing tactics. Between the extremes, the marketing industry has created ads that focus on military students, heavy with military images and patriotic themes and proudly claiming that institutions are “military friendly” or “veteran friendly”—a strange choice of words that suggests that military and veteran students are somehow outside the norm. But of course, military and veteran students have attended colleges and universities for decades, and serving this group can be a source of pride for an institution and a rewarding experience for faculty and staff. This article describes one university’s relationship with the U.S. military and its experience serving military and veteran students.

UMUC’s Long History of Serving Military Students

University of Maryland University College has a relationship with the U.S. military that provides enviable sound bites for those who find sound bites meaningful—“first to send faculty to teach in a combat zone,” “more than 50 flag officers are graduates,” “first to teach at military bases overseas,” and so on. But those sound bites were only possible because of a wonderful relationship. UMUC, a state university that serves nontraditional students in Maryland, across the United States, and around the world, has a proud history of working with the military.

UMUC—or “Maryland,” as the military has traditionally called it—began providing educational services to U.S. military personnel in 1947 at various installations in the

Washington, D.C., area, including the Pentagon. The first overseas program began in 1949 when the university's European Division was established. The Asian Division followed in 1956, serving military communities in Asia and the Pacific (current students are mostly in Japan, Okinawa, Korea, and Guam). Today, UMUC offers classes under government Tri-Services contracts at U.S. military installations across Europe, the Pacific, and in the Middle East.

Further, thousands of military students across the continental United States take online classes in pursuit of undergraduate and graduate degrees. Even before the advent of the World Wide Web, UMUC had already established a tradition of making higher learning accessible to the U.S. military—anytime, anywhere—even in some of the most nontraditional places imaginable for learning. UMUC has been on a remote mountaintop outpost in Korea, near the flight line of an air base in Italy, and in combat zones from Vietnam to Afghanistan. UMUC has served over 1,000,000 military students in its history.

Serving the military student and working with the military is rewarding, but it requires an institutional commitment to both the student and the military organizations. While the military servicemember is a student like any other, there are often unique challenges associated with his or her profession that faculty and staff must consider. Additionally, the U.S. military brings a range of requirements and procedures that do not always mirror university practices, so the institution must be willing and able to adapt.

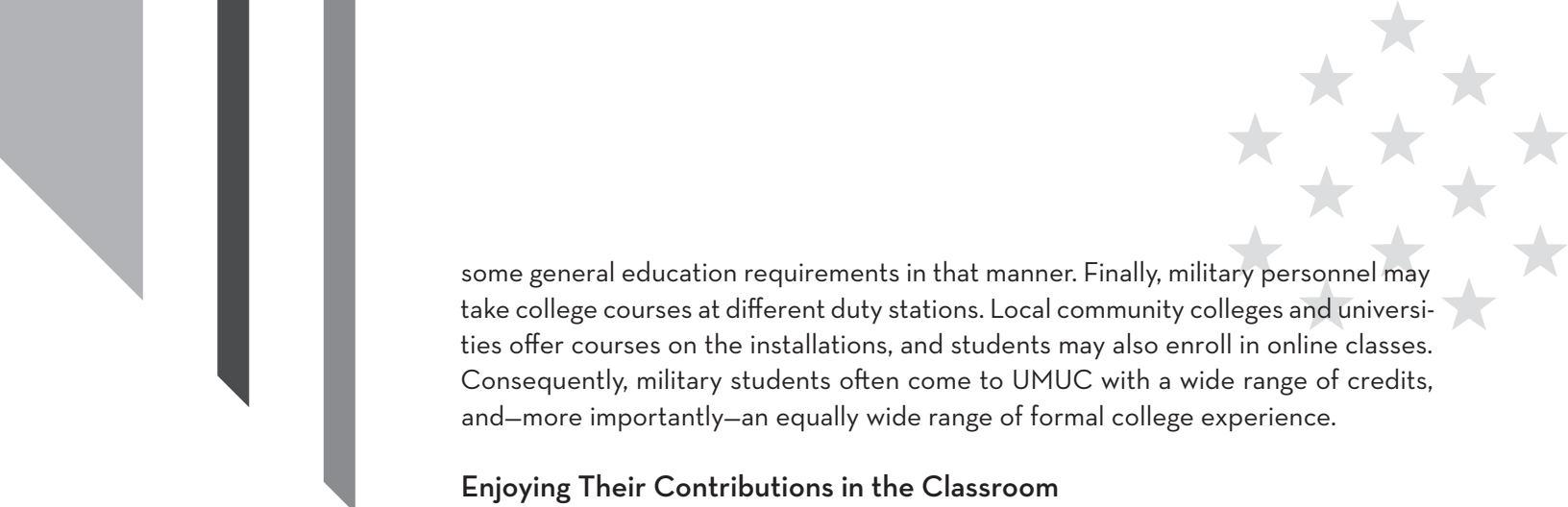
Accommodating Unpredictability

Like many nontraditional students, the military student must juggle work duties, personal and family needs, and classroom responsibilities. Time management is of utmost importance. Many military members have routine, predictable schedules, but all military students are susceptible to short notice travel, military exercises, deployments, and other events that make the job a 24/7 occupation, especially for those stationed overseas. UMUC faculty appreciate that unpredictability and are adept at accommodating the situations that impact the military. This is not to suggest that military students are treated differently, but faculty work with every student to ensure that he or she has the opportunity to complete the class assignments and course requirements.

Recognizing a Wide Range of Learning Experiences

Faculty also understand that military students come to class with different levels of academic preparation, and this may mean that some need more individualized instruction than others. Military members can transfer credit from military education and training courses such as basic training, skills training, and professional development. Most of these courses have been evaluated by the American Council on Education, and ACE recommends credits at the undergraduate or graduate level. Additionally, military members are encouraged to take CLEP tests, and many satisfy

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some general education requirements in that manner. Finally, military personnel may take college courses at different duty stations. Local community colleges and universities offer courses on the installations, and students may also enroll in online classes. Consequently, military students often come to UMUC with a wide range of credits, and—more importantly—an equally wide range of formal college experience.

Enjoying Their Contributions in the Classroom

One of the pleasures of serving military students is that, in general, they are good students who participate in class and enrich the classroom experience. It is risky to over-generalize a group of people, but many military students take classes because they want to. Their motivations may differ—a desire to get promoted, to prepare for a post-military career, for professional development, or simply because they like the subject—but they typically enroll with a goal in mind. As adult learners, they understand the value of education and are motivated to succeed. Second, they tend to be students who follow instructions and complete the readings and assignments on time. They come from a structured environment and usually respect both discipline and the chain of command. They carry that respect into the classroom, where they see the instructor as an authority figure and view class activities as important. UMUC faculty consistently report that they enjoy having military and veteran students in their classes and that these students add to the classroom and enrich the experience for their fellow students.

Adding Needed Value through Supportive Services

The classroom is, of course, the primary venue for the relationship between the student and the university, but the entire complex of student services is equally important to the military student. At UMUC's headquarters in Maryland, there are several units and departments whose sole responsibility is to serve the military student. These include the Military Advising Team and a new unit—the Veteran Advising Team—that was established following the implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Both are dedicated to providing academic advising and general support to military students, and the individuals on these teams are experienced in dealing with the military student, understand the various sources of credit students bring to the university, have a solid understanding of the military tuition assistance process and military service requirements, and are sensitive to the schedule and location challenges military students often encounter. (Students in Afghanistan, for instance, may not have easy or continuous access to basic communication capabilities that most of us take for granted—Internet, fax, and phone.)

Another dedicated unit at UMUC is the Veterans Affairs Office, which advises students and processes GI Bill requests. Another office prepares SOC agreements, and a dedicated section in the finance unit is responsible for tuition assistance invoicing and handling additional payments from the military students. The overseas

They come from a structured environment and usually respect both discipline and the chain of command. They see the instructor as an authority figure and view class activities as important.

divisions in Europe and Asia are organized around the Tri-Services contracts, so their staffs have significant experience dealing with military students and their spouses and families, as well as with military services.

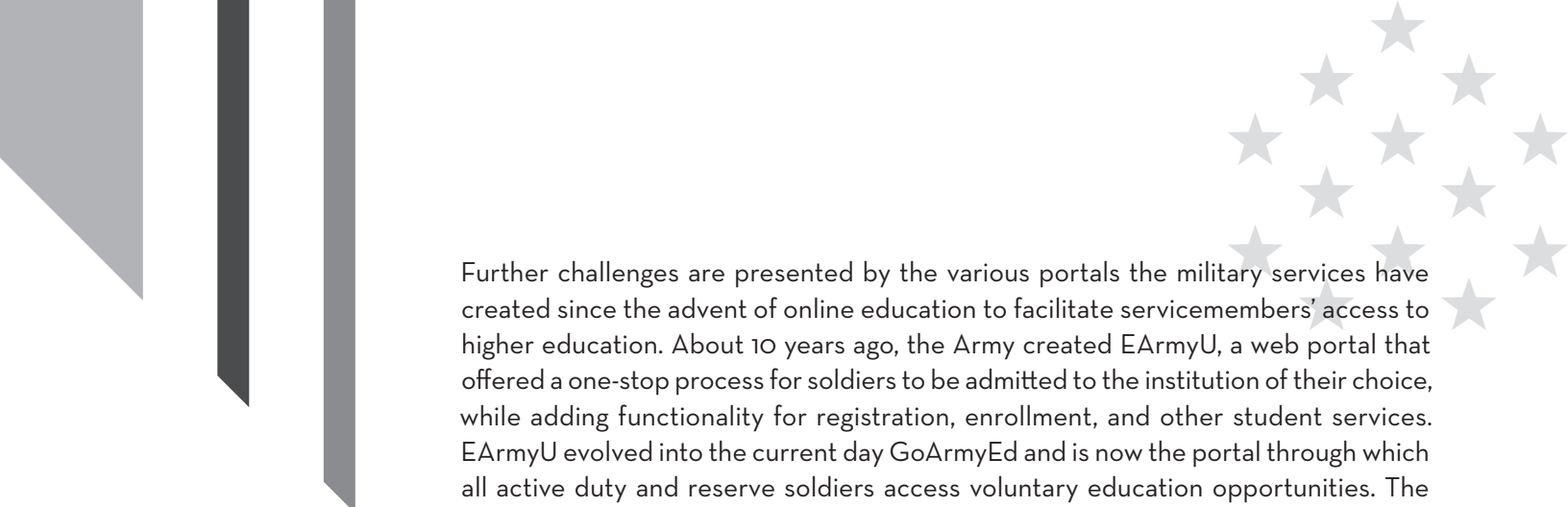
Understanding Where the College Fits in the “Big Picture” of Educating the Military Student

Interacting with the military can be complicated, so understanding the organization and its requirements is paramount to a successful partnership. The vast majority of military students attend college while they are off-duty. The off-duty education program is officially known as “voluntary education,” and there is an intimidating list of acronyms, organizations, and offices associated with it that university personnel are expected to understand. For example, the Department of Defense (DOD) provides overall policy guidance on voluntary education, and it accomplishes this through a relatively small office staffed by wonderfully talented and dedicated professionals.

DOD voluntary education policy is implemented in each of the military services—Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. The Coast Guard, under the Department of Homeland Security, has a similar program, and all five armed services have their own policies and operational guidance. In addition, all five have largely unique processes and procedures, requiring the institution to develop five separate internal processes to interact with each agency. The voluntary education program, commonly called “vol ed,” follows the typical military approach to management, with centralized policy-making at the service headquarters and decentralized execution of policies and operations at the installation level. There are intermediate headquarters in services to help manage the program, but for the university, the service headquarters and installations are the focus of the relationship.

Additionally, the Department of Defense relies on two organizations to help administer and manage the vol ed program. The first is the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES). DANTES supports special programs, such as oversight for the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and other testing activities, and Troops to Teachers; it also provides other services to the education and training community. The second group is the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), which was created 38 years ago to help establish reasonable credit transfer guidelines and residency rules that were accepted by the member institutions, which now number almost 1,800. SOC is funded by a joint contract through both the DOD and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and is managed by DANTES. SOC requires that military personnel have an SOC agreement, which is a standard template education plan, and the institutions must provide this SOC agreement to the student, SOC, and the military. Maintaining currency in the SOC system and participating in SOC credit transfer networks requires significant institutional commitment and resources.

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Further challenges are presented by the various portals the military services have created since the advent of online education to facilitate servicemembers' access to higher education. About 10 years ago, the Army created EArmyU, a web portal that offered a one-stop process for soldiers to be admitted to the institution of their choice, while adding functionality for registration, enrollment, and other student services. EArmyU evolved into the current day GoArmyEd and is now the portal through which all active duty and reserve soldiers access voluntary education opportunities. The institution is required to upload catalogs, course schedules, current tuition and fees, grades, and other information, and also to use the portal to invoice the Army for tuition assistance payment.

The Air Force has created the Academic Institution Portal that provides similar functionality, although Air Force personnel apply and register directly to the university instead of through the portal. The Marine Corps portal largely provides catalog and scholarship information, while the Navy does not have a portal but does provide institution information on the Navy College website.

In addition to these administrative sites, the Army, Navy, and Air Force all have academic agreements with institutions through which the institution creates paths to associate's or bachelor's degrees using the credit the military member receives through their education and training programs. Creating and maintaining these articulation agreements, which—in UMUC's case—number in the hundreds, is a critical function when serving the military.

Making It Seamless for the Student

Because the DOD and military services programs and requirements are so important, UMUC has a separate unit, DOD Relations, that manages programs, instructions, and portals, while providing a level of centralized monitoring of the registrar, finance, and student affairs activities supporting the military. This office—along with the overseas divisions and units across the home campus organization—ensures that UMUC's partnership with the U.S. military remains productive and successful and meets all the requirements of the Department of Defense, the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. The military is a top priority for the university, and the partnership that began 63 years ago is a source of tremendous pride for university faculty and staff.

At UMUC's 60th anniversary celebration, the keynote speaker, former Secretary of State and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell, reflected on the magnificent partnership with the military, and those words serve as a fitting close to this article.

"In my 40 years of public service both in the military and as Secretary of State, there was never any place where I was assigned or went to, where UMUC did not have a presence. You were out there taking care of our troops, giving them the opportunity to continue their education even while they served their nation in the most dangerous places on earth. You were there to give their spouses, children, and other family members the opportunity to gain an education while they were far away from what might be called traditional universities and colleges. As a soldier, as a diplomat, I want to say [thank you] to all of you here this evening, to the president and to the entire institution, and give you my heartfelt thanks for what you have done for the people I love so dearly, the Armed Forces of the United States. Thank you."



Going Global: Extending Penn State World Campus and Financial Assistance to Military and Veteran Students

By Deborah A. Benedetti, Pennsylvania State University

Students can earn credit for the knowledge and skills they have gained from life experiences through institution-specific challenge exams, individualized portfolio assessment, and standardized exams.

Kimberly DeLong of Oklahoma City is making the Air Force her career, but she also wants a college degree to enhance her knowledge and skills. Enter Penn State, which offers military servicemembers and veterans a wide range of academic assistance and support services. Like many other military-friendly colleges and universities, Penn State offers recognition of prior learning and support services.

In addition, however, Penn State's approach includes tuition assistance and online learning opportunities. As a result, in 2008-09, there were more than 2,600 online course enrollments by military servicemembers and veterans, or 11 percent of total enrollment, in Penn State World Campus, the university's online campus. And 2,033 veterans were enrolled in courses at a Penn State campus.



Recognition of Prior Learning

As at other military-friendly schools, prior learning assessment is an important part of Penn State's offerings. Students can earn credit for the knowledge and skills they have gained from life experiences through institution-specific challenge exams, individualized portfolio assessment, and College-Level Examination Program® exams from The College Board. For military and veteran students, Penn State also accepts American Council on Education academic credit recommendations for military transcripts, as well as the Department of Defense's DANTES courses and Subject Standardized Tests and U.S. Armed Forces Institute courses.

Academic Support Services

World Campus also has a dedicated admissions and advising team whose members understand the special requirements of military and veteran students. Two team members are Army and Air Force veterans, and all team members participate in training opportunities by attending military Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges workshops, DANTES workshops, Council of College and Military Educators annual symposiums, and DOD Worldwide Education Symposiums. Team members also

attend the monthly meetings of Penn State's World Campus Military Team, which provides oversight and strategy in support of the military/veteran student population.

In addition, military and veteran students have access to Penn State support services through the Office of Veterans Programs, Office of Disability Services, and Center for Counseling and Psychological Services.

During spring 2011, Penn State will launch a new series of five webinars, developed in collaboration with the Penn State's Human Resource Development Center, for faculty and staff members who assist military and veteran students with admissions, advising, financial aid, outreach, psychological, and disabilities services. A separate online training program is being developed by World Campus to help faculty better understand the education needs of this population.

Tuition Assistance

To help military and veteran students achieve their education goals, World Campus offers a military grant-in-aid that reduces the public tuition rate by 38 percent for all undergraduate courses and programs. The grant is available to all members of the U.S. Armed Forces, including Guard and Reservists, all Armed Services branches of the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Coast Guard in the Department of Homeland Security.

For Kimberly DeLong, the Penn State grant, coupled with Air Force tuition assistance and the Post-9/11 GI Bill, is enabling her to pursue a bachelor's degree in business online through Penn State's World Campus. Her only cost is books.

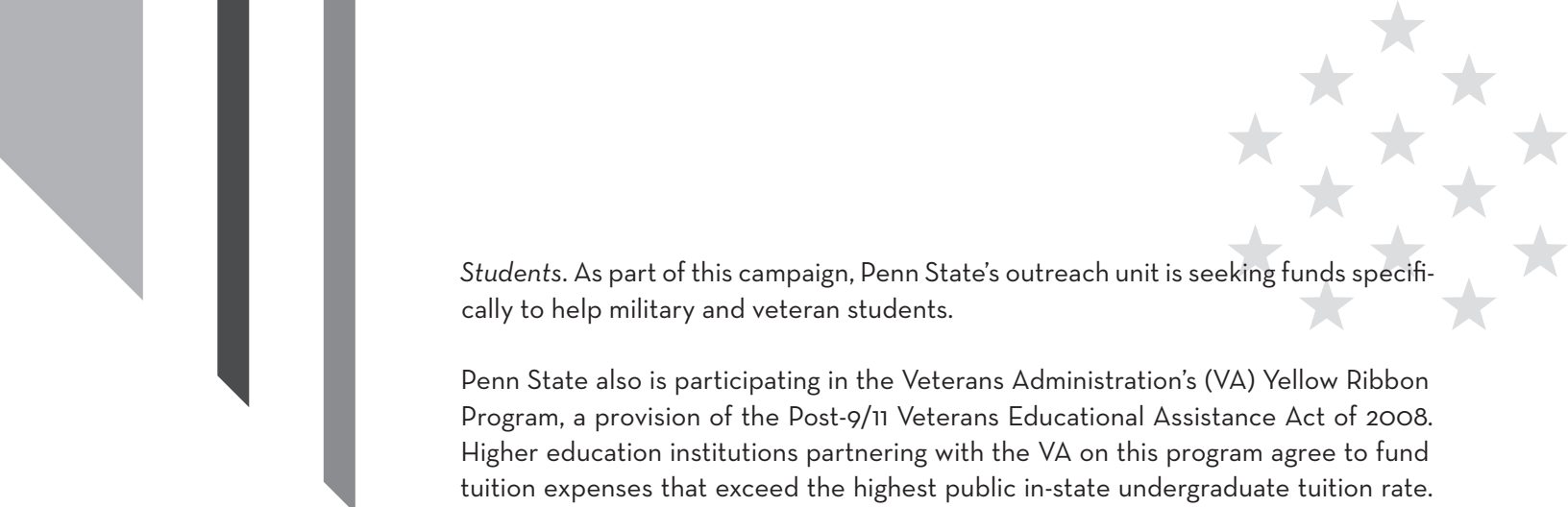
"It's a huge reason I chose this degree," Senior Airman DeLong said. Now stationed in Southwest Asia, she is working long hours as a contracting officer but is still able to pursue her education, thanks to Penn State.

"The current economic climate is challenging for all adult learners, but it's especially so for military servicemembers and veterans," said Wayne Smutz, Ph.D., executive director of Penn State World Campus and associate vice president for Academic Outreach. "Many have access to government benefits, but they don't cover all education expenses. That's why Penn State is actively pursuing military scholarships and other financial aid programs for these students."

As Office of Veterans Programs Director Brian Clark pointed out, "In spite of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which is a very good benefit, we always have veterans whose benefits have expired or who have needs that go beyond the traditional sources of financial aid."

Making a Penn State education more accessible is a top priority of the current University-wide capital campaign *For the Future: The Campaign for Penn State*

The flexibility of online learning allows me to complete course assignments while enduring an unpredictable work schedule.



Students. As part of this campaign, Penn State's outreach unit is seeking funds specifically to help military and veteran students.

Penn State also is participating in the Veterans Administration's (VA) Yellow Ribbon Program, a provision of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. Higher education institutions partnering with the VA on this program agree to fund tuition expenses that exceed the highest public in-state undergraduate tuition rate. Participating institutions can contribute up to 50 percent of tuition expenses, and the VA matches the institution's amount. During fiscal year 2010-11, Penn State plans to offer 340 Yellow Ribbon Scholarships for military and veteran students enrolled at University Park campus locations, including World Campus.

For these and other initiatives designed to help and support military and veteran students, the university has been recognized with the 2009 Ray Ehrensberger Award for Institutional Excellence in Military Education. *Military Advanced Education* also has included World Campus in its annual "Guide to Military-Friendly Colleges and Universities" for the second year, and *G.I. Jobs Magazine* has included the World Campus in its 2011 "Guide to Military Friendly Schools".

Learning Anytime, Anywhere

First there was the correspondence course, delivered by Penn State via Rural Free Delivery in 1892. Students completed assignments at home and returned them by mail. Then in 1998, Penn State debuted its virtual campus. Today, more than 9,600 students in all 50 states and 62 countries are enrolled in World Campus, which offers more than 70 graduate, undergraduate, and professional education programs.

Being able to learn anytime and anywhere there is a computer and Internet access is ideal for active-duty military, as Senior Airman Kimberly DeLong's case illustrates.

That's also true for David Baus, an Army specialist with the Pennsylvania Army National Guard stationed in Tallil, Iraq. He doesn't always have Internet access, but when he does, he quickly "switches gears from a battle mindset to maximizing the opportunity for a college education." The Uniontown, Pa., native said "the flexibility of online learning allows me to complete course assignments while enduring an unpredictable work schedule." The grant-in-aid is helping Baus complete his bachelor's degree in organizational leadership.

For World Campus graduate Kriss Berry of Harrisburg, Pa., Penn State's military grant-in-aid enabled him to complete a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. The grant and Pennsylvania Army National Guard benefits covered all of his education expenses. Staff Sgt. Berry chose to study "online, because it's the easiest way to get classes done, considering my work schedule," he said. He is with Recruit Sustainment Detachment

13, where he trains newly enlisted soldiers before they enter basic training. He served in Khost Province, Afghanistan, in 2005–06.

Combat veteran Kevin King of Bellefonte, Pa., spent his first three months in Afghanistan in 84 firefights. In one, a rocket-propelled grenade exploded about 20 feet in front of him, throwing him backward into a Humvee, injuring his head and shoulder. A Pennsylvania Army National Guard infantryman, King quickly returned to the firefight and later refused transfer for medical treatment so he could remain with his unit. “I was really lucky to be alive,” King said. He is using the same dogged determination to pursue an organizational leadership degree at University Park campus.

Another Penn State student, 1st Lt. George Webb of Centre Hall, Pa., serves on the Pennsylvania Army National Guard’s Stryker Combat Brigade Team. While stationed in Baghdad in 2008–09, he took online courses and is continuing his education now that he’s back home. Thanks to the grant-in-aid, Webb said, “I’m able to gain an education without a big financial burden.” Webb plans to complete a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice before deploying to Afghanistan in 2012.

After earning an associate degree online, Jarret Walters of Slatington, Pa., decided to continue his education by pursuing a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. “The grant allowed Penn State to be just as affordable for me as the local community college,” Walters said. The leading petty officer of the Naval Air Station Patuxent River Physical Therapy Department, HM1(FMF) Walters works with wounded warriors and supervises the daily operations of the department. In 2003, he was in Iraq providing initial care and treatment to combat injured personnel.

Being Military Friendly

Penn State is committed to increasing access to a Penn State education for military and veteran students, their spouses, and children. One way the university is doing that is by creating new scholarships for these students. The outreach unit has established a scholarship for military students with a gift from an anonymous donor who wanted to honor a family member who served in World War II. In addition, Outreach is raising funds for other programs with the help of Penn State alumnus and retired Navy Capt. Ryan J. McCombie, who chairs the Outreach World Campus Military Scholarship Advisory Board.

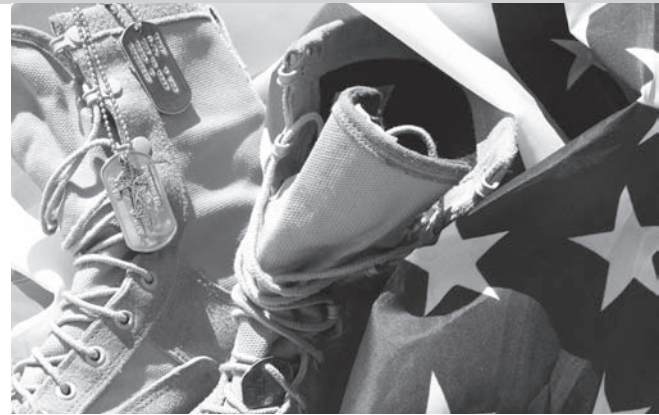
In a letter encouraging Penn State alumni and friends to support World Campus scholarships and funds for military and veteran students, McCombie writes: “As our veterans continue to make sacrifices in Afghanistan and Iraq, we can ensure they have the knowledge to succeed both in war and in peace. Education remains a critical component of this success, as the last ‘Greatest Generation’ demonstrated. The Penn State World Campus can be an integral part of providing that education.”

Boosting Basic Skills, Building Better Businesses, and Bringing Resources to the Community: The Boots to Books Approach by the University of the Incarnate Word

By Cyndi Wilson Porter, University of the Incarnate Word

The university formed the Division of Extended Academic Programs (EAP), which consists of two schools specifically developed for the adult learner.

The University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) is situated in “Military City, U.S.A.,” better known as San Antonio, TX. San Antonio earned its nickname because of the number of military posts and bases that ring the city. In addition to the sheer number of installations, the citizens of San Antonio have long embraced our military and servicemembers by showing support in many ways. Like others, UIW has been a good partner to the military over the years by helping to educate our servicemembers. Ask any Army nurse you know if they have heard of Incarnate Word, and they will smile and tell you, “Of course!”



UIW has a long history of serving active duty military members, as well as veterans. We have worked long and hard to make sure we serve those who have sacrificed for us. That includes great tuition rates, deployment-friendly courses, and the willingness to go the extra mile to make sure that we help our military students and their families. In terms of national leadership in serving students from the military, we are founding members of eArmyU and GoArmyEd, which are education programs for the U.S. Army. In addition, we are members of both the Air University-Associate to Baccalaureate Cooperative and the Navy College Distance Learning Partnership. We hold seats on the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Advisory Board, as well as the GoArmyEd Advisory Board. Both of these work with the U.S. Army leadership to help determine the future of Army education. The dean of the Virtual University is also the president of the Council on Military Education in Texas and the South.

With respect to UIW course offerings, in order to better serve our adult populations, military and civilian, the university formed the Division of Extended Academic Programs (EAP), which consists of two schools specifically developed for the adult learner who, because of work and other commitments, cannot attend a traditional program. Students can select to enroll in one or the other, or combine both. The

courses in the Adult Degree Completion Program, ADCaP (pronounced “Ad Cap”), and the Virtual University (VU) consist of accelerated eight-week terms. ADCaP students attend classes on a two-nights-a-week format or on a Saturday format. VU is asynchronous, allowing students to determine the time of day that works best for them. Both schools enroll a total of 2,200 students annually, with a large number being active duty and veterans.

While many other schools across the nation are working with military populations, UIW has always sought to do what we can to make it easy for servicemembers to start their education, make it affordable, and support them until they graduate. In EAP we have sharply discounted our tuition so that no active duty military member has to pay anything out-of-pocket for both undergraduate and graduate level courses. Additionally, veterans, retirees, and active duty dependants receive a similarly sharp discount compared to what they might receive in traditional programs. All members of the EAP programs, military and non-military, receive their textbooks free, and we assess no academic fees. We have dedicated academic advisors that work with veterans as well as advisors that are focused exclusively on active duty military, making sure that the veterans and the servicemembers get the one-on-one service they need.

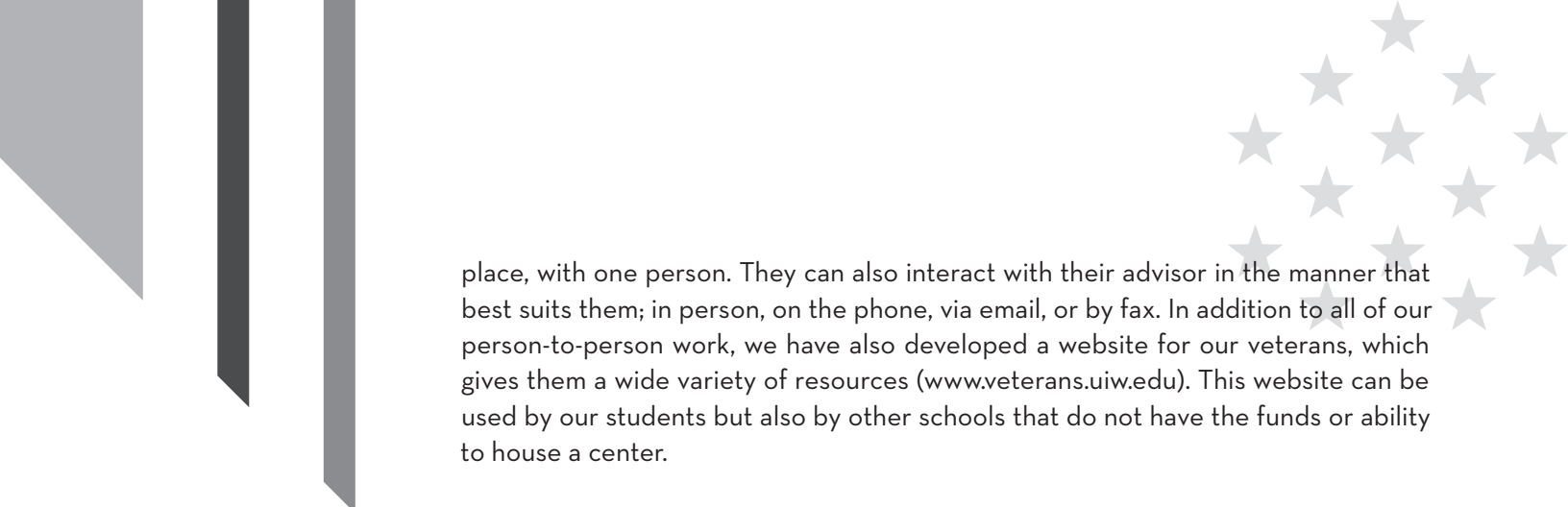
Being a caring and innovative institution means that UIW is constantly looking at how to increase access for all of our students as well as how to meet any unaddressed needs for our students and our community. Analysis has led us to begin four initiatives that will make a difference in San Antonio and in the lives of our students around the world.

The Center for Veterans Affairs

In the spring of 2009 the university recognized that we could better serve our veterans population by opening the Center for Veterans Affairs. The center is located in the new Extended Academic Programs offices less than five minutes away from main campus. In this new location, veterans have access to meeting space, computers with Internet access, and supporting resources. The director of Veterans Affairs and certifying official has an office adjacent to the space to cater to all of their anticipated needs, and counseling is available in this location upon request. It is also easier for students to get parking and access. In addition to commuter access, the university provides a shuttle for our main-campus students that need a ride to our offices. Veterans are very happy with the center and its services.

The Center for Veterans Affairs creates a community environment that brings together all of our student veterans. We advocate for our veterans and for our military students. We are there to cut through the red tape, to make sure that they get what they need. Our holistic, dedicated advising from the beginning to the end of their programs, as well as a one-stop-shop, means they do not have to shuttle between the business office, certifying officer, and the registrar. They get it all done in one

Holistic, dedicated advising from the beginning to the end of their programs means they get it all done in one place, with one person.



place, with one person. They can also interact with their advisor in the manner that best suits them; in person, on the phone, via email, or by fax. In addition to all of our person-to-person work, we have also developed a website for our veterans, which gives them a wide variety of resources (www.veterans.uiw.edu). This website can be used by our students but also by other schools that do not have the funds or ability to house a center.

We have worked to develop relationships between our university counselors and Department of Defense contractors, who are licensed psychologists familiar with PTSD, to get our students information and help at any time they need it. Our Veterans Affairs director and certifying officer is a veteran of the U.S. Navy and is dedicated to making sure that their needs are met promptly and with empathy. She has been integral in understanding and solving a variety of issues that our veterans have had as they start their academic careers and, for some, integrate back into everyday life. In the upcoming year we will be enhancing our outreach to the military and veteran populations with a range of programs and services designed to address a variety of needs.

Project Per-sist!

Adult students, including military and veteran populations, frequently have trouble committing to and staying in school. While many of them eventually re-enroll, it may take three to six terms, or even more than that, before they resume their studies. The result is that it often takes many of them too long to earn their degree, sometimes as long as five years or longer to earn an average of 80 credit hours. Consequently, they take longer to qualify and compete for higher paying jobs either with their current employer or with another.

The reasons for this lack of persistence are many, but the most prominent is that during the first term the student may realize his or her academic and study skills are weak and is discouraged by poor grades. Survey responses from our faculty indicated that there is a need for remedial courses in math and writing, in addition to development of better time management and study skills. Furthermore, some students stop out after the first or second year due to a lack of funding. Active duty military members have a variety of ways to pay for education; however, these funds have an annual cap that runs out before the end of the year when students take a full load of classes. Veteran benefits are also readily available, but not necessarily all-inclusive for every person.

UIW's new program to address these issues is called Project Per-sist! All students who enter EAP will be required to enroll in the program at no cost. In two eight-week, back-to-back sessions, students will have their math and English skills assessed and strengthened. They will learn how to study, how to plan wisely to finance their education, and how the earned degree can improve their lives personally and economically.

Students will learn how to study, how to plan wisely to finance their education, and how the earned degree can improve their lives personally and economically.

At the end of the first eight-week session, they will again be assessed. Those who demonstrate a readiness to begin taking the regular credit courses will do so immediately, while those who need still more preparation will be required to enroll in the second eight-week session. Successful students will then begin taking college-level courses.

They will also be encouraged to examine their work and life experiences to determine if they are eligible to pursue Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). PLA allows students to earn college credits for college-level learning they have acquired as part of their work experiences. Active duty and veterans will have their military service transcripts evaluated for credit. Students may elect to take advantage of testing or portfolio evaluation to receive credit. Students may earn up to 24 hours of college credit by developing a portfolio, or up to 30 hours in combination with portfolio and testing, to reduce the amount of time it takes them to earn a degree through the Division of Extended Academic Programs.


Currently EAP measures performance by evaluating the grade in each class, pre- and post-test assessment of writing through the programs, and student satisfaction through the use of surveys. To objectively measure the success of Project Per-sist!, we will use a number of new assessment measures that will include:

- evaluating the number of students who apply to the university as well as the number who enroll in their first course.
- administering a pre- and post-test that will evaluate student readiness at the beginning of the program and again at the end.
- tracking the number of students that persist until graduation.
- administering a questionnaire to assess student comfort levels with math and English skills, study skills, as well as with financial literacy at the end of the program.
- tracking the number of students who attempt PLA and also how many credits they earn when the portfolio is evaluated.

Institute for Business Development

The Institute for Business Development (IBD) will help veterans who want to start their own business get the education and skills they need to begin a venture. Using both online and on-ground learning methodologies, veterans will be able to pick from a variety of short courses that are aimed at developing specific skills such as Basic Accounting, Writing for Business, Taxes and Your Small Business, Payroll Basics, Writing a Business Plan, Internet Marketing Strategies, Basic Computer Skills, Excel Skills for Business, Designing a Website, Email Marketing, Customer Service, and Managing Employees.

Veterans will get a certificate when these courses are completed, or they can elect to go on and finish a specific business degree in an area of interest. The IBD will be



focused on helping our veterans build a small business and develop the skill sets to make it successful.

UIW Center of Excellence for Veterans Education

The UIW Center of Excellence for Veterans Affairs will be an enhanced online resource for the city of San Antonio, as well as the United States. Using our experience with the online educational environment, we will be developing a comprehensive website that will allow students, as well as schools, to use the resources that we develop for themselves and their own veteran populations.

Many schools would like to do more for the military populations but do not have the expertise or the resources at hand. By using online technologies, we can have a better reach and allow more access for schools to share information with their students in a flexible and convenient manner.

Plans for the enhanced website include document sharing, common forms that can be filled out and submitted online, a blog for VA issues, an area for UIW's Student Veterans of America branch, discussion boards for different topics, an area for articles by member schools, live chat with a VA advisor, as well as links to partner websites so that veterans can have easy access to military friendly programs.

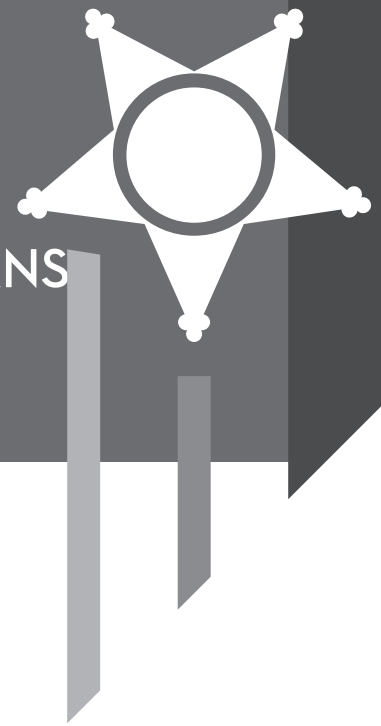
Making a Difference in the Lives of Soldiers

UIW is proud to work with our military to help develop exciting educational opportunities for students. To be able to have an impact on the direction and scope of such significant programs is always rewarding. However, a greater sense of pride comes from watching a soldier who had previously attended 10 different schools, racked up over 150 hours, but still did not have a degree, finally finish that degree online, come back to the U.S. to walk the stage and get his degree, and then head back to the "sandbox" to defend his country. With our new initiatives we will have even more great stories to share in the future!

We will be developing a comprehensive website that will allow students, as well as schools, to use the resources that we develop for themselves and their own veteran populations.



section 4: NATIONAL VOICES ON SERVING VETERANS



Recognition of Veterans' Skills and Other Support of GIs in Higher Education

By the American Council on Education

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 provides today's returning veterans and their family members the financial benefits necessary to make their dream of attending college a reality. The American Council on Education (ACE), the major coordinating organization in higher education representing more than 1,800 two- and four-year institutional presidents, has assumed a leadership role in responding comprehensively and responsibly while acknowledging that access and success for our nation's veterans will require more than an investment in affordability.

ACE and Prior Learning

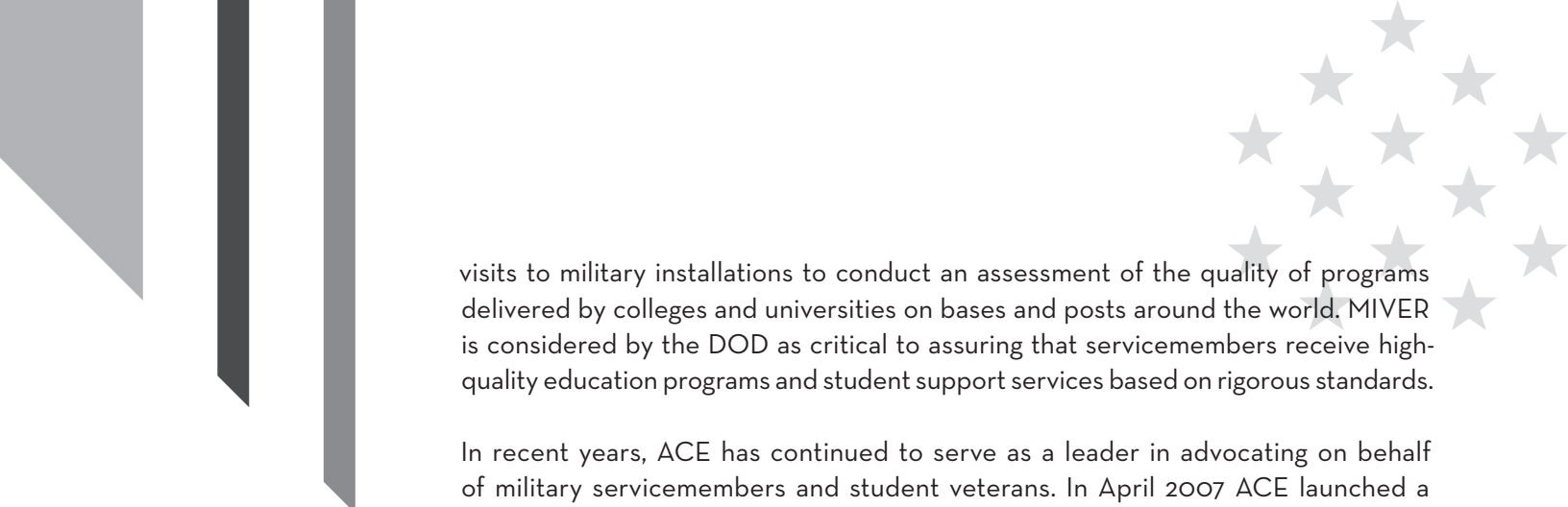
ACE has a long and distinguished history in the development of programs intended to create pathways to higher education for the men and women of our nation's armed services. In 1945, ACE published the Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services, a resource designed to assist colleges and universities in determining the amount and type of academic credit to award for military training. Publication of the Guide coincided with an aggressive outreach campaign and, as a result, represented the first time in the history of American higher education that credit was awarded for learning acquired outside of the traditional classroom.

Today, ACE annually evaluates hundreds of military courses and occupations. In addition to publishing the results of these evaluations in the Guide, ACE collaborates with the Department of Defense to detail this work on nationally recognized transcripts for members of the Army, Army National Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps. The registry for these transcripts holds the records of more than 6 million service-members who request approximately 200,000 transcripts per year that are sent to more than 2,200 accredited institutions of higher education.

ACE Advocacy

ACE also serves as the home for the Military Installation Voluntary Education Review (MIVER). The MIVER initiative convenes teams of higher education professionals for





visits to military installations to conduct an assessment of the quality of programs delivered by colleges and universities on bases and posts around the world. MIVER is considered by the DOD as critical to assuring that servicemembers receive high-quality education programs and student support services based on rigorous standards.

In recent years, ACE has continued to serve as a leader in advocating on behalf of military servicemembers and student veterans. In April 2007 ACE launched a program to assist severely injured servicemembers and their families in making the transition from patient to civilian to student. More than 300 injured veterans and their family members have enrolled in postsecondary programs as a result of this initiative.

Continued Advocacy: Serving Those Who Serve

In June 2008 ACE convened a summit hosted by Georgetown University that brought together nearly 200 college and university presidents, other senior campus leaders, and student veterans to openly and candidly discuss barriers faced by veterans and best practices for serving their needs.

During the summit, student veterans and campus representatives identified promising practices that ACE has since published in their brochure *Serving Those Who Serve: Making Your Institution Veteran-Friendly*. Recommendations covered in the brochure include publishing concise information on transfer credit for military experience, taking a community-based approach, and establishing a specific point of contact for student veterans.

The Georgetown summit contributed directly to ACE's *Serving Those Who Serve* initiative, a broad-based campaign designed to promote access to and success in higher education for the servicemembers and families who are eligible for newly expanded benefits under the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. The initiative's website also houses additional publications and reports from ACE's work with veterans and higher education, such as *A Transfer Guide: Understanding Your Military Credit Recommendations*, *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus*, and *Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education Report*.

Success for Veterans Award Grants

More recently, ACE and the Walmart Foundation awarded \$2 million in Success for Veterans Award Grants. These \$100,000 grants were awarded to 20 institutions across the U.S. that operate model programs advancing access and success in higher education for veterans and their families. The grants will support efforts to create online veteran-specific orientation programs, expand on-campus veterans' service centers, enhance prospective student outreach efforts, and increase capacity for counseling and psychological services.

A Valuable Web Resource

In addition, ACE has launched www.TodaysGIBill.org, a comprehensive college guidance website that provides information and inspires veterans to enroll and succeed in higher education. Created with the support of Lumina Foundation for Education, TodaysGIBill.org is designed for returning and about-to-return veterans interested in going to college, as well as family members and dependents receiving transferable benefits.

The Veterans Success Jam

In May 2010 ACE, with the generous support of The Kresge Foundation, hosted the Veterans Success Jam, an unprecedented national online dialogue examining how higher education can contribute to the successful reintegration of returning veterans. The three-day brainstorming event brought together thousands of veterans and their families, servicemembers, campus leaders, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies in a conversation about the challenges and opportunities facing veterans in higher education. A number of well-respected and knowledgeable leaders served as forum hosts and special guests in the Jam and were integral to the success of the event.


For 72 hours, nearly 3,000 individuals had the opportunity to discuss issues faced by returning veterans and generated ideas in the following areas:

- Promising practices on college campuses
- Education benefits and financing an education
- Navigating a path to college
- College credits for military service
- Supporting the families of veterans
- Transitioning to employment and training
- Removing the myths and misconceptions of physical and psychological health challenges

Together the participants shared valuable resources, identified recurring barriers, and brainstormed innovative ways to improve the support of veterans and their families as they transition from the military to and through higher education. The Jam yielded nearly 3,000 individual comments, and participants also had the ability to attend a series of online webinars.

Several recurring topics surfaced in the Jam:

- The importance of a campus task force with high-level institutional representatives as well as current student veterans.
- The barriers posed by military and civilian terminology when veterans pursue an education and a career.

- 
- Specific or additional services for women veterans
 - The gaps and difficulties with the Post-9/11 GI Bill
 - The ever-increasing use of the term “veteran friendly” by marketers and others is diminishing the real meaning of the phrase
 - The need to create greater awareness of current programs and of the difficulties in determining effective resources from a large and often overwhelming pool of available resources

ACE has released a summary report of the Jam, *Ensuring Success for Returning Veterans*, which is available for download as a PDF at www.acenet.edu/STWS. The report provides overviews of each of the forum discussions, participation metrics, key insights, and a list of the web resources posted by participants in the Jam. ACE will continue to analyze this information and collaborate with others in honing its agenda for the second year of Post-9/11 GI Bill implementation.

The following are excerpts from testimony presented to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, September 16, 2010.

Update of the Post-9/11 GI Bill

Statement of Alan G. Merten, Ph.D., President, George Mason University, on behalf of American Association of State Colleges and Universities



Madame Chairwoman Herseth-Sandlin, Ranking Member Boozman, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Dr. Alan Merten and I am president of the George Mason University. Today, however, I am here to present the perspective of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) related to the implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits program at its 430 institutions located in 49 states, the District

of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. Thank you for holding this hearing and providing the opportunity to present this testimony. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is an excellent, timely opportunity for veterans and their families to pursue postsecondary education. [...]


When the Post 9/11 GI Bill was first introduced it was anticipated that colleges and universities would see a 20-25 percent increase in enrollment of veterans. At Mason, we saw a 30 percent increase in our Fall 2009 enrollment of veterans and a 79 percent increase in Spring 2010. [...]

The Committee asked us to address three areas:

- concerns heard from veterans regarding their educational benefits,
- feedback from institutions about implementation and administering benefits,
- improvements to the Chapter 33 program that AASCU would suggest are needed.

Historically, GI Bill benefits were provided directly to the veteran student. As Vietnam-era veterans, my wife and I received benefits in this manner. The creation





and implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill program altered this dynamic by having the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) issue tuition and fee payments directly to the institution after a certifying process. The compressed timeline the VA faced in implementing this program created a difficult situation.

I would like to highlight some of the issues faced by veterans on our campuses. The VA's delays and problems in implementing Chapter 33 are well-documented in both hearing testimony and the press. In fact, VA has gone on record to say that its performance was not acceptable. Thus, one of the major and universal issues being faced by veteran students is delays. In addition to delays in processing original benefits, many Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit delays have occurred in reprocessing and in payment of other allowances, such as housing and book stipends. In addition, delays of up to a year are occurring with regard to appeals for claim re-evaluations.

Given that tuition and fee benefit payments are now directed to institutions, veteran students rely more heavily on school officials to provide guidance and information related to their benefits. The VA's guidance to both institutions and veterans has been generally basic in nature. This has frustrated both institution officials and the veteran student population. Veteran students have informed institutions that they find the VA Web site—which VA has heavily publicized as a way of providing Post-9/11 GI Bill information to veterans and institutions alike—difficult to navigate. Reportedly, VA's responses to inquiries submitted online are often inadequate and do not address the specific problem about which they have inquired. Students also find they cannot get through to the VA toll-free number (a problem shared by institutions). Institutions report that staff at the VA toll-free hotline provide information to students that is later found to be incorrect, which places more administrative burden on institutions.

The school official is not a VA employee and in many cases does this task as a collateral duty. As a result of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the workload on these staff members has increased to the point that many schools like Mason have had to hire additional personnel to handle not only the certification process but the billing process as well. While the VA does pay schools an annual reporting fee of \$7.00 for each certified veteran, that amount hardly covers the costs. Senator Chuck Hagel (R-Neb) said, "the biggest obstacle might be reintegrating soldiers seamlessly into society," and he suggests that higher education can do that better than any other institution. Higher education can do this but it needs to be supported and equipped to ensure this success.

The Post 9-11 GI Bill has also presented higher education institutions with a number of challenges that many are not yet prepared to meet. These include a number of student veterans with academic need, mental health and disability issues.

There are academic issues that many veterans face. Some veterans require some remedial education before starting college, some because they have lost skills in the

Given that tuition and fee benefit payments are now directed to institutions, veteran students rely more heavily on school officials to provide guidance and information related to their benefits.

years since high school and others because they were not college-ready in the first place. Some have received their GEDs through the military. Some may benefit from first attending community colleges whose open enrollment policies and education model is often more conducive to adult learners.

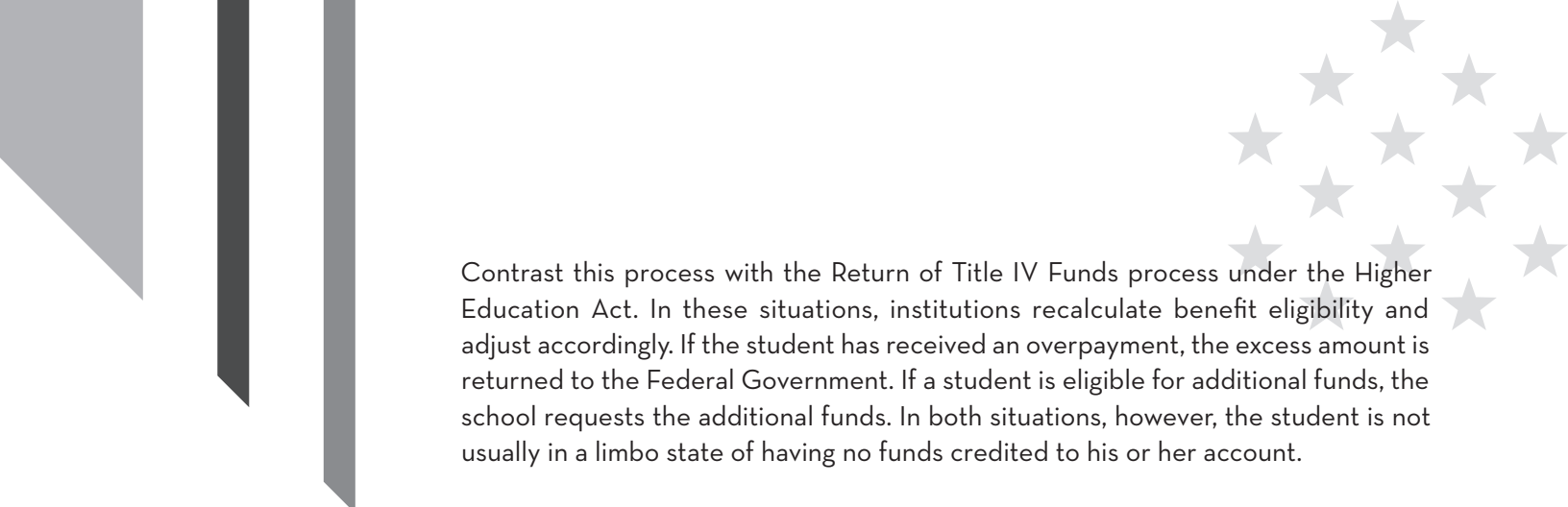
A recent RAND report indicated that 1 in 5 Post 9-11 veterans will suffer from combat stress or cognitive issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury. These potential student veterans require additional support from university staff who must work with military specific combat stress issues as the veteran attempts to cope with battlefield experiences. Not all schools and not all student health centers are equipped to address these needs.

In addition to the mental health issues, the Department of Defense indicated recently that there are over 36,000 service members who have been wounded in action. Some of these wounded warriors have catastrophic combat injuries that are not typically found on campuses where disabilities have a far different meaning. Such injuries represent a growing concern in higher education on how to be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant since most institutions of higher learning are only prepared for historic disabilities. Since this service is mandated by law regardless of cost, there appears to be no legally acceptable response if the institution were to fail in providing these services.

Despite the implementation pressures facing the VA—which AASCU fully understands—more effort on VA’s part to understand how institutions operate and work with the Federal Government should have occurred. For many decades, programs directing federal funds to institutions on behalf of students have existed, namely Title IV programs under the Higher Education Act. Even a cursory examination of these programs would have guided the VA toward a more efficient implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Further, the VA interpretation of the higher education term “tuition and fees” caused significant confusion. The higher education community usually refers to tuition and fees as a single amount, not two separate ones; VA’s separation of “tuition” and “fees” into two discrete charts, while well-intentioned, was confusing for not only veteran students, but institutions. [...]

A common concern is that administrative burden has increased throughout the implementation of the program, mainly due to the necessity to resolve over- or underpayments by VA. The issue of over- and underpayment requires close examination. When students change majors, drop or withdraw from a class, or have other life circumstances affect their finances or attendance, the institution must recalculate benefits. This reevaluation may result in either decreased or increased benefit eligibility. The VA issued guidance on how to handle these circumstances that required institutions to return *all* of the originally issued benefit and start the certification process over from scratch.

1 in 5 Post 9-11 veterans will suffer from combat stress or cognitive issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury.



Contrast this process with the Return of Title IV Funds process under the Higher Education Act. In these situations, institutions recalculate benefit eligibility and adjust accordingly. If the student has received an overpayment, the excess amount is returned to the Federal Government. If a student is eligible for additional funds, the school requests the additional funds. In both situations, however, the student is not usually in a limbo state of having no funds credited to his or her account.

If, for some reason, federal Title IV grant funds received directly by a student (i.e., a refund of grant monies in excess of tuition and fees) are later determined to be an overpayment and thus must be repaid by the student, the institution can receive those funds from the student and conduct appropriate fiscal transactions with the Department of Education on the student's behalf. That way, the institution is always acting on behalf of the student. However, this is not the case with Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits administration.

VA's requirement that institutions return the entire initial benefit amount issued has placed veterans in the position of owing significant monies to the Federal Government. The VA is being extremely diligent in pursuing these veteran students; however, there are instances where funds returned to the VA by institutions were not properly credited by the VA to individual students' accounts. [...]

To further complicate the return of tuition and fee funds in an over- or underpayment situation, the VA established two different procedures for the flow of funds. If classes have not begun, the institution must return the funds directly to the Federal Government. After classes have begun, VA directs that the payment—even if an overpayment—should be issued to the student. The VA will then collect any monies owed to the Federal Government directly from the individual. This further complicates an already convoluted process. Further, based on past experiences with over- and underpayments of Post-9/11 funds, some schools are reluctant to issue a check for over \$20,000 to a student but would rather act as the responsible agent. By contrast, the benefit adjustment process for Title IV education benefits is the same throughout the entire academic calendar.

Given the above examples, it is difficult not to wonder whether if VA had better consulted with the Department of Education and/or higher education institutions during the ramp-up to Post-9/11 GI Bill implementation, some of its 2009-10 performance failures might have been mitigated and taxpayer money saved.

As noted earlier, Chapter 33 is a tremendous opportunity for veterans and their families to pursue higher education; therefore, we offer the following as suggestions to further enhance and improve the current program.

First and foremost, Congress needs to clearly define the benefit amount for which an individual veteran student is eligible. This specifically entails eliminating the separate tuition and fee charts constructed by the Veterans Administration as the means to determine Post-9/11 GI Bill payment eligibility. The current tuition and fee charts as constructed by VA are not only an interpretation of the current Post-9/11 GI Bill language that we believe Congress did not intend, but are also inconsistent with commonly accepted higher education practices, as noted earlier.[...]

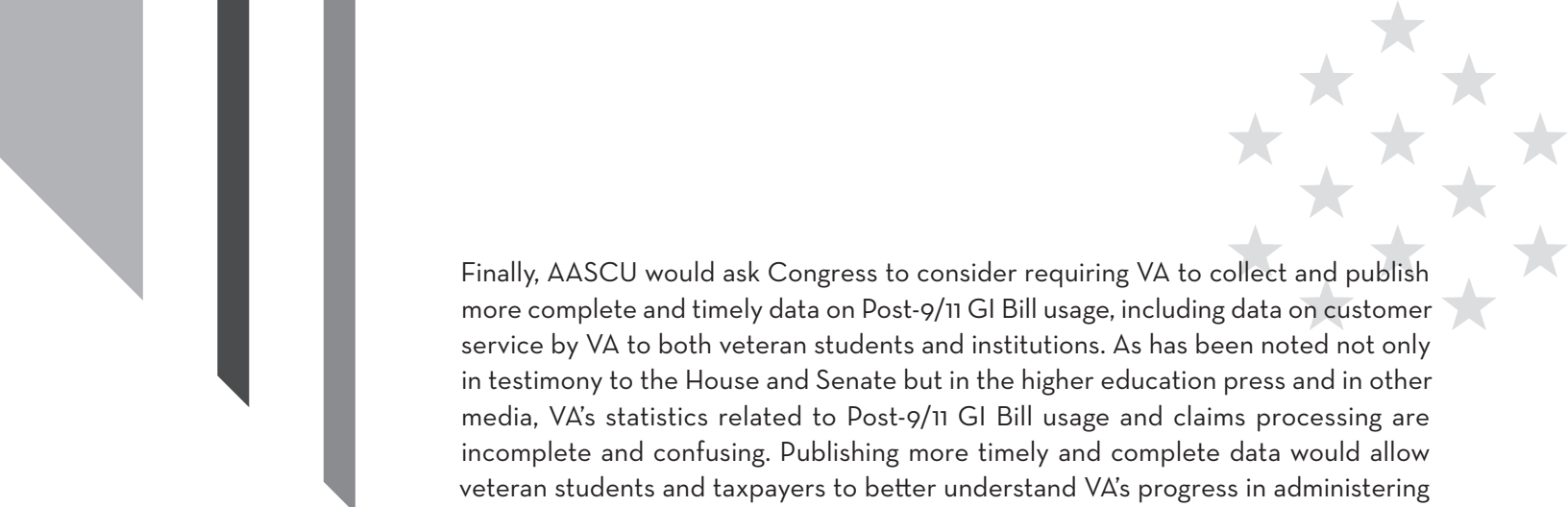
The underlying tenet of the Post-9/11 GI Bill is to ensure that costs at a public institution are covered for a veteran student. As such, any future legislation should clearly establish the benefit equal to the established charges for the program of education at a public institution. This removes any confusion between “tuition” and “fees” in different states and gives the veteran student a clearer idea of what he or she is eligible for in advance of enrollment.

In addition, there is a notion being discussed of designating the VA as the “last payer” for the veteran. While AASCU understands some of the reasons for this notion, please understand that the idea will not simplify Chapter 33 or reduce confusion for veteran students. Let me be clear: Should Congress pursue this notion, it will again be faced with rewriting this legislation within the next two years due to the intolerable chaos it will inflict on both veteran students and program administrators.

Even before the Post 9-11 GI Bill, Mason experienced a similar issue with our ROTC program. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is an entitlement for a veteran’s service to the armed forces but it cannot be used in conjunction with ROTC benefits, which are paid to a student for future service. When we questioned this dilemma the VA stated that the student has to choose which federal benefit he/she wishes to receive. A veteran shouldn’t have to forgo a benefit they have earned to take advantage of another.

Another issue that Congress should address on behalf of veteran students is related to providing a basic allowance for housing (BAH) for online students. Currently, BAH benefits are only awarded to veterans taking at least one course on campus. Nearly 70 percent of active-duty servicemembers take online courses; thus, as students transition to veteran status, they are already accustomed to utilizing distance learning options. The lack of this benefit has resulted in decisions creating further hardship. For example, a student who otherwise would have taken an online course who now must travel to a face-to-face classroom may incur transportation costs or child-care costs that would have otherwise been avoided. Also, veteran students recovering from service-related injuries (particularly those students suffering from PTSD or TBI) report feeling forced to go into a classroom to keep their BAH even though to them, a distance-learning environment would better suit their recovery process.

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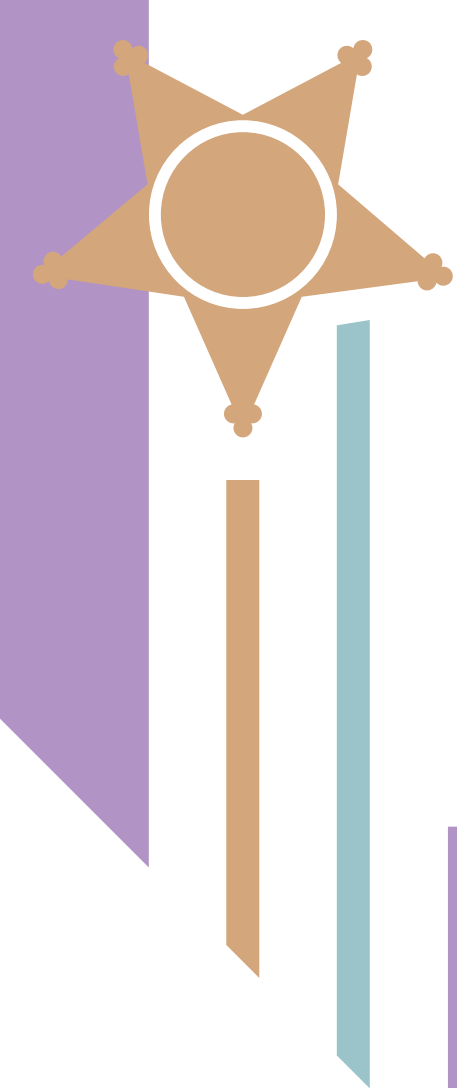
Finally, AASCU would ask Congress to consider requiring VA to collect and publish more complete and timely data on Post-9/11 GI Bill usage, including data on customer service by VA to both veteran students and institutions. As has been noted not only in testimony to the House and Senate but in the higher education press and in other media, VA's statistics related to Post-9/11 GI Bill usage and claims processing are incomplete and confusing. Publishing more timely and complete data would allow veteran students and taxpayers to better understand VA's progress in administering this complex program. Furthermore, given that this is a new program, a unique opportunity exists for VA to use the data collected to refine and streamline its processes and functions. In addition, it will be useful for the larger higher education community to use the data in improving programs and services for veteran students.

According to the American Council on Education 2009 report on "Serving Those Who Serve: Higher Education and America's Veterans," only about 71 percent of eligible service members use their VA education benefits, only 6 percent use their full benefits, and on average, they only use 17 months of a 36-month entitlement."

While many of the circumstances highlighted today are a direct result of the Post-9/11 GI Bill implementation process, institutions like Mason stand ready to work with the VA in order to ensure ease of access for veterans enrolling in postsecondary education. Many of the issues discussed are operational in nature; thus legislative fixes are not necessarily appropriate. Furthermore, institutions of higher education were extraordinarily flexible and generous in the 2009-10 academic year at the request of VA when dealing with veteran students whose Chapter 33 benefits were delayed by VA's implementation problems.

The good news is that the VA has increased its outreach to schools and appears much more willing to work collaboratively and openly with the higher education community to understand how the VA processes—and their interface with higher education business practices—could be improved to better and more effectively assist veteran students. We are encouraged that this effort will continue and can resolve the operational issues that have plagued implementation.

The initial unwillingness on the part of the VA to reach out to schools hurt veteran students first and foremost. It also hindered the efforts of higher education institutions across the country to assist veteran students' enrollment and facilitate their success. The higher education community is prepared and eagerly looks forward to working collaboratively with the VA to streamline this program and reduce the confusion to institutions, the VA, but most importantly the veteran.



CAEL
The Council For Adult & Experiential Learning

