

# GETTING VETERANS BACK TO WORK

## A critical mission



Each year about 13,000 military personnel leave the service and select Washington state as their home, bringing with them a wealth of experience and a wide range of skills. Washington ranks among the top five most popular states for military personnel separating from the service.<sup>1</sup>

Washington's 34 community and technical colleges are a perfect fit for returning veterans who are transitioning to civilian life and private-sector jobs. Two-year colleges offer small class sizes, flexible hours, veterans services and real-world education and training so veterans can hit the ground running.

## Another type of courage

Veterans need to reconnect with academic work, navigate the registration process, handle the transition from combat to classrooms and join a student population where military structure is no longer the norm. Moving back to civilian life requires another type of courage; community and technical colleges are with our veterans every step of the way.

## Home base on campus

About 22,000 veterans, active-duty personnel and their assisted dependents were enrolled in Washington community and technical colleges in the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>2</sup> Pierce College provides educational programs at Joint Base Lewis-McChord specifically designed for active duty military personnel and their families.

Community and technical colleges provide:

- Dedicated resources to serve veterans, such as support personnel or veterans centers.
- Specialized training aimed at transitioning service members into high-demand careers.
- Educational advising.
- Counseling and assistance.
- Financial aid and tuition assistance, including help with Post-9/11 GI Benefits.
- Services for students with disabilities.
- Tutoring and job support.
- Flexible class schedules and online learning so veterans can study at their own pace and manage work and family responsibilities.
- An older student population where veterans feel at home. The average student enrolled in the college system is 26 years old.

At more than half our colleges, VetCorps members offer peer support, connect students with resources and support college staff. The VetCorps program is administered by the state Department of Veterans Affairs and is funded by the national AmeriCorps program.

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## In-state tuition

Veterans and their family members automatically qualify for in-state tuition at Washington public colleges and universities. State law typically requires nonresidents to live in Washington a full year before they are eligible for in-state tuition, but a law signed April 2014 removes the waiting period for veterans and family members.

The GI Bill covers only in-state tuition, so nonresident service members formerly faced a tough choice: wait a year to enroll in college, or pay the difference in tuition cost. Now they can advance more quickly from the military to college and into their civilian lives.

## Credit for military occupations

All 34 community and technical colleges award college credit for military training, coursework and occupational specialty. Transfer specialists consult ACE (American Council on Education) recommendations when awarding credit.

## Succeeding in the work arena

Washington's community and technical colleges look beyond campus-based efforts at the entire labor market that awaits veterans.

Community and technical colleges have won a combined \$55.4 million in federal U.S. Department of Labor grants to train veterans in high-demand fields across the state. Students are training for jobs in aerospace, information technology, health information technology, registered nursing, STEM fields, orthotics and prosthetics, advanced manufacturing and other industrial technologies, and clean energy.

The grants are part of the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) initiative. This supports training programs for unemployed veterans, trade-impacted workers and other unemployed or underemployed people.

Colleges are also working to train veterans for jobs that fit well with their military experience. Examples include training army health care specialists for allied health or nursing careers; military police for criminal justice jobs; and flight and mechanics for certain FAA certifications.

Pierce, Bates, Green River and Olympic colleges are working on a statewide process to help veterans succeed in the allied health industry. The colleges are devising a statewide process for transitioning military medics and internet technology specialists into counterpart roles in allied health fields.

## Joining forces

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges participates in two broad coalitions focused on removing barriers for transitioning service members.

Partners for Veterans Supportive Campuses is a statewide coalition dedicated to supporting veterans as they pursue college credentials. The State Board reaffirmed its participation by resigning a memorandum of understanding in November 2014.

The Washington State Military Transitions Council fosters cross-jurisdictional collaboration among military, federal, state and local agencies, and other jurisdictions. Council efforts have led to:

- A focus on the entire spectrum of help needed by service members, from their final years in the military through separation and entry into civilian lives.
- Data-share agreements to support evidence-based decisions and measurable results.

The council is Washington's response to the federal "Vow Act," meant to smooth the transition to civilian life. The council's work was one of the reasons why the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs received a prestigious Pillars of Excellence Award from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in 2015.

Our nation has an obligation to ensure veterans and military families can move into promising careers and succeed after their years of service and sacrifice.

### Characteristics of student veterans <sup>3</sup>

- 73% of student veterans are male; 27% are female.
- Only 15% are traditionally aged college students (18-23).
- 47% of student veterans have children.

### Washington state facts <sup>4</sup>

- Washington is home to about 600,000 veterans.
- One in nine Washington citizens is a veteran.

Washington's community and technical colleges are honored to answer that call of duty.

Sources: 1) Transition Services, Joint Base Lewis-McChord; 2) SBCTC data warehouse; 3) National statistics from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website, last reviewed April 22, 2014; 4) Confirmed by WA State Department of Veterans Affairs, May 2014.

