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Washington Update – October 2017

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With the enacting of the new **Forever GI Bill**, this month's update is designed to provide a refresher to ensure your school is "military and veteran friendly." Continue reading to learn best practices for your school.

Thanks to the generosity of the **Post-9/11 GI Bill**, an estimated **773,000 veterans and their families** have taken advantage of this benefit at a diverse array of institutions of higher education. The Post-9/11 GI bill provides eligible service members and veterans to complete tuition and fee costs at any public college or university in their state of residence or up to \$17,500 towards a private or foreign institution, with the opportunity to secure additional money at participating institutions through the Yellow Ribbon GI Education Enhancement Program. The Forever GI Bill improved the previous GI Bill most notably to provide a lifetime benefit for eligible veterans and their families to pursue higher education.

Is higher education able to meet the needs of this unique, non-traditional population?

Military and veteran students share many of the same qualities as other non-traditional students—older, have a family, delayed entry—but contend with additional challenges, such as continuing service responsibilities, stress from transitioning from a servicemember to a civilian to a student, and combat-related disabilities. Integration into the postsecondary environment can also prove difficult for some military and veteran students. Some students retreat from opportunities to engage or socialize with faculty/peers because of a perceived "anti-military" environment or culture. They may even conceal their status. These risk factors have a clear impact on retention and degree/diploma attainment. In spite of these challenges; however, **research** released in February 2017 indicates that student veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill outperform their peers in higher education. They are more likely to graduate and to earn a degree in emerging fields such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

Schools across the country should recruit student veterans as recognized high performers who lead on campus and who pave the way for other non-traditional students. These successes are largely the byproduct of schools with strong military and veteran education programs with strong staff in place to implement and operate those programs. Anecdotally, strong levels of support help military and veteran

students graduate at a rate of double the national average. But many students get trapped at schools that offer minimal to no support, and too many do not graduate; the statistics are particularly bad at community colleges.

Simply implementing an institution-wide program geared toward the success of military and veteran students improves outcomes and makes your school a trusted commodity in a close-knit community. The following best practices are for schools who want to strengthen, or create, a successful military and veteran student program.

Admissions/Recruiting

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

- Similar to non-military and veteran students do not engage in any misleading or deceptive recruiting activities. DO NOT use “GI Bill” or other language that implies you represent the government in marketing materials or media.
- Ensure your Admissions Representatives are well-versed in:
 - Tuition Assistance (TA)
 - TA "Top-Up" Program
 - Post-9/11 GI Bill
 - Fry Scholarship
 - Yellow Ribbon Program
 - Montgomery GI Bill - Active Duty (MGIB-AD)
 - Montgomery GI Bill - Selected Reserves (MGIB-SR)
 - Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA)
 - Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)
 - Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP)
 - Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP)
 - National Call to Service (NCS)
- Ensure receipt and understanding of all disclosures and complete transparency in all marketing/recruiting materials.
- Hiring former military staff in your Admissions Department is fine, as long as you also have former military staff members who head your Office of Military and Veteran Student Affairs or facilitate your Military Student Center (MSC). Hiring former military for just Admissions can send the wrong message.

Institutional Commitment



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

- Conduct regular outreach to military and veteran students to gain continual feedback about the programs and services offered.
- Regularly evaluate your institution's policies, practices, procedures, and programs related to the education on military and veteran students.
- Require faculty development to include information about: the unique qualities of military and veteran students; military and veteran student-specific instructional practices; and an understanding of the support services available.
- Become a Yellow Ribbon Program participating institution allowing an unlimited number of veterans to enroll and offering the maximum institution contribution allowed.
- For veterans and their spouses who may not be eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, offer alternative grants to cover any funding gaps.
- Offer reduced military tuition rate for active duty, National Guard, and reserve servicemembers and their spouses to maximize out-of-pocket expenses.
- Establish a policy of evaluating and awarding military training credit based on the American Council on Education (ACE) Military Guide.
- Comply with existing federal requirements related to the postsecondary education of military or veteran students, including:
 - Enter into the **DoD Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** for participation in TA; and
 - Formally agree to accept the Principles of Excellence outlined in Executive Order 13607 – **Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members.**
- Become a member of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium.
- Establish human resources policies that exceed the standards set by the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act (USERRA) particularly during military training activities and deployment status.
- Offer multiple learning formats for military and veteran students to access and interact with program curriculum and course materials, which allow students the freedom to pick the format that best suits their learning style.

Student Services

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

- When warranted by the number of military and veteran students enrolled, institutions should establish an Office of Military and Veterans Affairs with clearly articulated goals and expectations, which complement the mission of the institution, accompanied by the full support and resources from the institution's leadership. The



Office of Military and Veterans Affairs would typically administer and manage the following:

- Military and veteran-specific Student Advisors in the areas of admissions, academics, and benefits;
 - Specific academic counselors for the military and veteran student population trained to address transfer credit and awards for prior academic or military credit (College Level Examination Program (CLEP), portfolio, military training);
 - Trained VA certification specialists to assist with the timely processing of educational benefits documentation to avoid benefit funding delays; and
 - A tailored orientation program for military and veteran students, developed to enable active-duty, Guard, or Reserve students or transitioning veterans to optimize the available institution resources and support programs.
- Another approach is to establish a Military Student Center (MSC), which acts as a hub to guide military and veteran students throughout their postsecondary experience, beginning with recruitment and ending with job placement. The MSC functions as a clearinghouse of information for all military and veteran benefit programs and assists potential and current students with navigating the intricacies of the federal programs for which they may be eligible. More specifically, the MSC may function as follows:
 - Counsel prospective students who self-identify themselves as military- or veteran-affiliated on the best way to access and maximize the benefits for which they are eligible;
 - Staff the MSC with specialists who are either a military veteran or spouse who received specific training in DoD and VA benefits eligibility and processes; and
 - Provide transfer of credit assistance; help with military and prior-college transcript requests upon application and acceptance to a program of study, training to Program Directors and Deans regarding ACE guidelines for the award of military credit, and recommendations for credit acceptance based on review of military transcripts and Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).
 - Support student veterans interested in organizing a campus-based, or online, student organization with necessary resources and use the Student Veterans of America (SVA) as a resource and guide. **Institutional support for student veterans to create a student veteran organization or club is critical to fostering successful veteran student transition, peer support, and camaraderie.** It also provides needed opportunities for student veterans to network and make social connections with other student veterans who possess similar interests or experiences.
 - Establish a Campus Military and Veterans Lounge or Virtual Student Gathering Place, which allow these students to interact, access program-related resources and services, and provide peer-to-peer support.
 - Establish and maintain student chapters of professional organizations and academic honor societies to expose students to potential professional networks. Encourage student membership and participation in relevant local, regional or national professional societies while completing coursework.
 - Introduce and partner with established veteran service organizations, such as the American Legion or Veterans for Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW), within the geographical area of the campus to further connect veteran students to



- community resources and peers.
- Institutions with a sufficiently large military and veteran population should develop a specific career services strategy, including:
 - Partnerships with employers who will work with students while enrolled and offer quality job opportunities upon graduation;
 - Establishing formal alumni networks for military and veteran graduates, allowing students who have completed programs of study to interact with one another, building geographically based or industry-based professional networks; and
 - Engaging with local Employer Support for Guard and Reserves (ESGR), professional associations such as Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), or the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

Tracking Success

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

- Identify and track military and veteran student populations with regard to retention, degree completion, persistence, and other valuable metrics. **Analyze data to identify areas in need of improvement and ways to better serve the military and veteran student population.**
 - Use data to develop measures to evaluate program effectiveness
- Participate in the National Student Clearinghouse to help to provide meaningful data for military and veteran students across higher education (transfer, degree completion, and persistence).
- Provide meaningful data to the VA and DoD for use in developing programs to better serve military and veteran students.

Whether you have a strong military and veteran student population or you're looking to grow this population, these best practices are a good foundation towards creating a strong institutional program geared towards the success of your students. Recent research shows veterans are looking to pursue STEM degrees—and more are using their benefits toward graduate level programs. With more veterans eligible to receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits thanks to the Forever GI Bill, there will likely be a resurgence of students into institutions all over the country. Will you be ready?

Hot topics surrounding industry regulation and inquiry generation are constantly changing within our EDU sector. You may have noticed that the “EDU Update”



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Suzanne has more than a decade of government relations, advocacy and postsecondary education experience. Former Director of Government Relations at the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU), she has also worked closely with Capitol Hill, federal agencies, and key veteran service organizations (VSOs) on policies and initiatives to improve the education and educational outcomes of military and veteran students. If you have any questions concerning these and/or other happenings in Washington, D.C., please contact her at spalmer@bluechairllc.com.