

Improving College Opportunity for Veterans and Service Members February 10-11, 2020

Session 1A: Expanding the opportunity set

Speakers: Camilla Hill (Warrior Scholar Project), Deborah Marconda (U.S. Marine Corps), Elana Duffy (Pathfinder.VET), Tanya Ang (Veterans Education Success)

Summary:

This session focused on how to connect service members and veterans with a broader range of promising educational opportunities and programs. As discussed by the panelists, engaging with external partners and resources like Pathfinder.VET, the Posse veterans program, Service to School, and Warrior Scholar Project can help institutions and organizations looking to expand educational opportunities for veterans and service members. In addition, there are military-connected programs like the Leadership Scholar Program and Marine for Life network that help service members transitioning out to connect with education services and employers. Panelists and participants discussed the importance of building partnerships and having points of contact in admissions offices that shepherd veterans through the transitioning process. Panelists also stressed the importance of peer-to-peer engagement amongst military-connected students, utilizing peer networks, and “word-of-mouth” recommendations to help network and identify prospective candidates.

Session 1B: Optimizing benefits for military and post military education

Speakers: Barrett Bogue (Evocati), Benjamin Lotto (Vassar College), John Kamin (The American Legion), COL Prescott Farris (Soldier for Life), Rachel Cardwell (Georgetown University)

Summary:

This session focused on how to optimize GI Bill benefits, BAH housing, Yellow Ribbon, vocational rehabilitation benefits, and state/local benefits for postsecondary education. As discussed by the panelists, awareness of resources is key. Service members and veterans are more likely to use their educational benefits at programs that are open enrollment, shorter, and have lower tuition costs. However, these preferences often do not align with traditional institutional models. As mentioned by the panel, working together with Education Service Officers (ESOs) can help institutions and organizations to better understand benefits while also providing collaboration opportunities that can improve college awareness for service members. Participants also discussed the need for training in understanding benefits and the importance of providing supports that meet family, occupational, and financial literacy needs.

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Session 2A: Tracking, reporting, and measuring veteran and service member data

Speakers: Chris Cate (Student Veterans of America), Kiersten Downs (ScoutComms), LeNaya Hezel (Georgetown University), Walter Ochinko (Veterans Education Success)

Summary:

This session explored best practices in tracking, reporting, and measuring undergraduate student veterans. The panelists and participants discussed the importance of terminology when asking student veterans and service members to self-identify. The panelist and participants also focused on how data can help inform decisions related to supporting student veterans and service members. This includes understanding what data are available and how data can be used in programmatic efforts. Recommendations included using VA work study programs as a creative way to start a data collection process or using integrated marketing platforms to manage data.

Session 2B: Ensuring progression and post-graduation success

Speakers: Beth Morgan (Columbia University), Marcus Felder (Posse Veterans Program), Mona Dexter (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation-Hiring Our Heroes), Regan Jones (University of Notre Dame)

Summary:

This session focused on how to support student veterans as they transition from pre-matriculation to post-graduation. As discussed by the panel, mentoring opportunities and building a bridge between those who have served and the civilian community is critical. As service members and veterans transition, utilizing advising and career services is a way to promote post-graduation success. Panelists discussed the need to educate employers on student veterans and how they can open up internship programs and other career opportunities to non-traditional students. Institutions and organizations can also leverage their previous experiences of serving underrepresented students when creating inclusive and veteran-friendly spaces. Panelists and participants also discussed the need to pay attention to the unintended consequences of certain policies (e.g. housing and campus life policies, limited child care resources) which can negatively impact student veterans.

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Session 3A: Recognition for military training and experiences

Speakers: Emily Paulsen (College Board), Karen Allen (Texas A&M University), Lauren Runco, (Lumina Foundation), Terrell Odom (University of Chicago)

Summary:

This session focused on best practices for recognizing, understanding, and using information about military experience, training, and prior education in admissions and other academic settings. Panelists discussed utilizing prior learning assessments or transcript services like the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and the American Council on Education (ACE) military evaluation program to evaluate military training experiences. Panelists also recommended sitting with students to discuss their experiences and Joint Service Transcript (JST), with the hope of accepting credits and applying them to degree programs. It is also important to connect with student veterans and service members when they are enrolling and help them articulate what they enjoyed during their service and how they might apply those skills to an academic discipline or career. It is also important to understand what their priorities are (e.g., financial needs, living preferences) to help them make the best decision for them. There are lots of opportunities to partner with external organizations to address evaluation issues and build pipelines that encourage partnerships with industries and job markets. It's important for institutions to be transparent with students about how the credits are accepted, transferred, and applied to degree programs.

Session 3B: Creating and sustaining transfer pathways

Speakers: Christine Schwartz (Service to School), Paula Compton (Ohio Department of Higher Education), Marshall Thomas (California State University)

Summary:

This session focused on how to sustain veteran-focused partnerships between community colleges and four-year institutions. Some of the best practices highlighted during the panel and group discussions included: developing relationships with community colleges by attending regional conferences, contacting veterans contacts at community colleges, having a single point of contact throughout the transfer process, and creating partnerships with community colleges in states with large service member populations, like California, Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida. Panelists also stressed the importance of being flexible and transparent about credit transfers with student veterans and service members .