

Briefing Paper: Landscape of Outreach Efforts & Campus-Based Support Programs

Best Practices: Outreach & Retention

Outreach Best Practices

Make Support Services for Student-Veterans and Military Students on Campuses More Prominent - Many times campuses do not make their support services or the fact that they have service members and veterans on their campus obvious. This can deter other potential military-connected students from applying to that institution of higher learning out of fear of not fitting in. Making support services more prominent on the institution's website will make it more welcoming for service members and veterans who are considering applying.

Make Available Institutional Aid That Exists for Other Students - While the Post-9/11 GI Bill offers generous benefits, cost is a greater barrier at many private highly selective schools than it is at state institutions of higher learning. This can be a barrier to students who are considering top-tier colleges and universities. By law, students using their GI Bill benefits must be treated the same as all other students when it comes to aid and therefore should be eligible for the same benefits as others.

Residency Requirements - Many military-connected students come with dependents and families. Others are much older than the more traditional students who are living on campus. While some student veterans and service members might want to live on campus, others are not able to. Forcing military-connected students to live on campus can deter them from applying. If your campus has different residency requirements for adult students, it is important to clearly articulate that on your website and other outreach material.

Market to Student Veterans and Service Members - Often times military-connected students will self-select out of applying to highly selective schools because they do not think they would do well or get accepted at these institutions of higher learning. It is important for representatives from a college or university to encourage and empower service members and veterans to apply. Admissions counselors should not dismiss opportunities for outreach to these potential students. While it might not look the same as going through a high school counselor, military-connected students can be reached through Education Service Officers on Bases, Community Colleges, Education Fairs at local bases, and other venues such as VFW and Legion posts, Service to School, the Posse Foundation, and Warrior Scholar Project.

Transfer Policies - Many military-connected students come with transfer credits. While some institutions of higher learning with high-graduation rates do not accept transfer credits, this can be a deterrent. At the bare minimum, colleges and universities should make sure their transfer policies are transparent. This includes, not just credits earned at another college or university, but whether or not an institution accepts military training and experience, recommended credits on the individual's Joint Services Transcript (JST), CLEP and DANTES tests, and/or other forms of credit for prior learning. Be sure to consider the following questions:

- If the school does accept these credits, how are they actually applied to a degree program?

- What, if anything, does a student need to do to get the process started?

Retention Best Practices

Have a Task Force or Coordinating Committee - Consistent messaging is integral to ensuring military-connected students get the best support necessary. Staff from multiple offices on campus work with military-connected students and consequently it is important to make sure everyone is on the same page. A task force is a good way to do this.

Designate a Single Point of Contact - While students will ultimately work with multiple offices, having one go-to person allows them to build trust, feel as if they are not getting the run-around, and know there is always one person who, if necessary, can act as a liaison between the student and other offices.

Campus-Based Resource Center - Having even a small space where they can heat up their food, get coffee or water, print out an assignment, work on an assignment, and connect with other service members and veterans has proven to be significantly helpful for military-connected students.

Incorporate the Student Voice - Some colleges have built programs they thought their students wanted only to find out they were not actually meeting their needs. Having a student participate on the task force and conducting regular student surveys allows an institution of higher learning to be able to better meet the needs of its service members and veterans.

Provide Faculty and Staff Training - Challenges with the military-civilian divide can impact the ability of a faculty or staff member in serving these students. One faculty member, not aware of the many student veterans he had in his class, went on a tirade about his strong dislike of the military on the second day of class. He lost those students and some wanted to drop out of school completely because of how unwelcome they felt. There are different training programs available free of charge or at a low cost.

Articulate Transparent Policies - Remove barriers to access and ease transition into higher education by outlining and addressing the following to prospective military-connected students:

- Process for certification of GI Bill benefits
- Actual cost of attendance
- Any institutional financial aid available for military-connected students

Campus-Based Support Programs and Resources

Example Programs on Campus

Campus-Based Resource Center - Can be big or small as stated above. Connect with local communities to see if anyone is willing/able to donate a couch, some comfortable chairs, a tv, a microwave, etc. Have snacks, drinks, a printer, and anything that will make it welcoming. Use the center as a central location to host student organization chapter meetings, volunteer opportunities, academic advising sessions, etc.

Peer Mentoring - Pairing new student veterans with those who have been around for at least a year helps new students feel welcome and have a fellow service member or veteran they can talk to about some of the challenges they might be facing.

Mental Health Support - Some colleges and universities have their Veteran's Center in close proximity to the counseling center. Others have a mental health practitioner who is well versed in supporting military-connected students in their veterans center. Some coordinate continued mental health services from the VA.

Career Placement Services - These services should be specific to an older student population who already has work experience and will most likely be placed in higher level positions than the more traditional student. Incorporate partnerships with local companies to offer internships and externships as part of that career development and placement process.

Tutoring Services in the Veteran Center - Create a peer tutoring program in the Veteran's Center with other student veterans using federal work study.

Extra Support Services or Emergency Funds - While students using their GI Bill benefits do get a housing allowance it is often not enough to cover the costs for a family and does not cover any cost during breaks. Some schools offer food pantries, child care services, a one-time temporary student loan or gift of \$500, and other scholarships to help alleviate some of the financial burden for their military-connected students.

Resources to Create + Sustain Campus Programs

Community Engagement - There are multiple local businesses and community partners who are willing and interested in donating resources for programs that support military-connected students.

Foundations - Institutions of higher learning have been able to garner support from foundations looking to identify promising practices for supporting military-connected students. Student veterans using their education benefits are easy nontraditional student population to identify and find what support services work for other nontraditional students. Conversely, what is working for other nontraditional students most likely will also work for service members and veterans on your campus.

Federal Grants - The federal budget for 2020 included \$7 million to restart the Centers of Excellence for Veterans Student Success Program which is a grant program for colleges and universities looking to build and enhance their programs for student veterans. The National Institute for Humanities also has a grant for programs encouraging military-connected students pursuing humanities courses.

Making the Case for Institutional Support - Resources on campuses are often limited and it can be challenging to try and make the case for getting some of those resources designated for a smaller student population. It is possible. Getting support from a high level administrator, making an effective business case for the return on investment for supporting military-connected students and that much of what works for this student population can be transferable to other nontraditional students are all ways in which other colleges and universities have been able to garner financial support.

Further Reading

1. Hill, Catharine B., Martin Kurzweil, Elizabeth D. Pisacreta, and Emily Schwartz. "Enrolling More Veterans at High-Graduation-Rate Colleges and Universities." Ithaka S+R. Last Modified 10 January 2019. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.310816>.

2. [*Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions*](#) (2018). American Council on Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
3. [*Choosing A School*](#), 5th Edition (2016). U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.
4. [*Paying for College*](#) (2019). Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Washington, D.C.
5. [*Choosing A College: Questions to Ask*](#) (2015). Federal Trade Commission, Washington, D.C.
6. [*From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members*](#) (2012). American Council on Education, Washington, D.C.

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