

Our Student Veterans

Higher education in the United States will soon have the opportunity to serve more than 2 million military veterans who have been to Iraq and Afghanistan (ACE Issue Brief, November, 2008). The Department of Education has little to no data on the veteran population to understand enrollment trends, persistence rates, and other information specific to veteran engagement in higher education. Veterans transitioning out of the military are “focused on jobs, family, housing, adjusting to civilian life and often managing physical and emotional injuries” (p. 5). This population is nontraditional in terms of age, delayed entry to college, first generation, lower and middle quartile of socioeconomic status and served in a combat environment. Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans are returning with physical and mental health needs. Colleges and universities across the country will need to seek creative solutions to improve outreach, access, and retention efforts to military veterans and remove unnecessary educational roadblocks to enhance their success.

American Council on Education. (November, 2008). Serving those who serve: Higher education and america’s veterans. Retrieved March 5, 2009, from http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/serving/Veterans_Issue_Brief_1108.pdf

Student Veterans of America (September, 2008). Campus kit: For colleges and universities. Retrieved March 5, 2009 from <http://www.studentveterans.org/resource/library/documents/CAMPUSKITforCollegesandUniversities.pdf>

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Veteran Best Practices in Higher Education: Ten Ways to Become More Vet Friendly

During June 2008 the American Council on Education sponsored Serving Those Who Serve: Higher Education and Americans Veterans, where more than 200 college and university representatives (presidents, senior military leaders, student veterans) engaged in an open forum to discuss the barriers veterans face as they journey through higher education. Out of this Veterans Summit arose ten strategies by which to build policy and practice to become a more veteran friendly campus.

- I. **Listen to Veterans** – Hold a roundtable of high-level campus administrators and student veterans, or a veteran focus group. Establish some other activity where veterans can feel safe and supported to express their experience.
 - How many veterans attend your campus?
 - How often do you send information and updates to them?
 - Hold a brown bag lunch gathering or a veteran’s panel where members of the campus can ask questions.

- II. **Assess Your Institution’s Strengths/Weaknesses** – Consider programs, services, and policies that could be initiated and improved.
 - How are new student veterans greeted and processed?
 - How accessible is vet-related information on your college website?
 - Is there a point of contact for veterans to deal with issues beyond educational benefits?
 - How would a veteran know that your campus is Vet aware or friendly?
 - How are tuition waivers and other resources advertised or communicated to veterans?

- III. **Start a Student Veterans Group** – Start a veteran’s club or Association.

- IV. **Design Gathering Space** – Offer a lounge area, space for advertising, access to computers, printers and tutors.
 - Where is veteran-related information and resources located on your campus? How is it posted? Are there multiple locations where the information is made available?

Steigmeyer, R. (2009, February 21) From combat to college: A tough transition that few understand. Wenatchee World. Retrieved <http://wenatcheeworld.com/article/20090221/NEWS04/702219970>

- V. **Establish a Point of Contact** – Establish a dean as point person (University of Wisconsin-Madison) or establish a Veterans Resource Team (Veterans Work Group, Veterans Support Team, Veterans Education Team) comprised of interested stakeholders or key leadership across campus.
- VI. **Re-orient Student Orientation** – Offer veterans an orientation about campus policy, legislative and benefits updates; about the veterans club and veterans resource team; and provide for an opportunity to interact with peers, faculty and staff in order to ease their transition.
- VII. **Build Programs and Access Strengths** – This could be a local or community program. For example, Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV) with disabilities is a growing national consortium of universities that is dedicated to assisting veterans. Student Veterans of America (<http://www.studentveterans.org>) is an organization that provides ample on-line electronic resources for students and campuses.
- VIII. **Educate Faculty, Staff and Students** – Provide a comprehensive training that creates a supportive environment for veterans, staff, faculty and administrators. For example, Montgomery College has the Combat2College program to assist veterans and Student Veterans of America the
- IX. **Partner with Other Organizations** – Colleges need the expertise and support of other sectors such as the Veterans Administration, Veterans of Foreign War, American Legion, Vet Center, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and other agencies. Broad-based collaboration can ease the veteran from military to school and school to work.
- Invite the leadership of these organization to campus.
 - Invite members to a veterans club meeting or to be a part of the veterans resource team?
- X. **Engage Community** – Community members and alumni can take pride in an institution's program for veterans.
- XI. **NOTE:** The families and dependants of veterans are a population that require assistance and support. The aforementioned can also include them as well.

Veterans Best Practices Checklist

- √ Campus homepage has a welcome for vets and link to vets resource page.
- √ Evaluate admissions and other processes and policies to determine their impact on veterans.
- √ Host a forum to explore avenues on how to enhance and streamline services for military veterans.
- √ Explore why veterans choose not to participate in higher education and come to campus.
- √ Veteran resource information is posted at key locations on campus.
- √ Identify campus and local resources that are available to veterans and their dependents and disseminate the information to them (e-mail, mail etc.).
- √ Dedicate space for veteran use.
- √ Create a veterans club.
- √ Create a veterans resource team.
- √ Establish a veteran peer mentor program.
- √ Employ activities that demonstrate a vet aware and friendly campus:
 - Host an event to welcome veterans and their dependents each term.
 - Post signs that welcome veterans to campus and that can be found in an employee office or cubicle.
 - Host Vet Info Day/Fair which includes the VFW, American Legion, VA, WorkSource and other veteran personnel.
 - Celebrate Veteran's Day, Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day.
 - Challenge Coin.
 - Monument or Memorial.
 - Freedom Run.
 - Post stories and photos on website or on a dedicated wall.
 - Establish an audio/video history project to interview and record veteran stories.
 - Develop a list of all campus employees who are vets or dependents of vets.
- √ Partner with veteran-related community organizations.
- √ Create transitional support programs.
- √ Create a psycho education course on PTSD or on military culture.
- √ Provide training to campus employees about BATTLEMIND, military culture, issues particular to the transition from military to civilian life.
- √ Identify additional information and training resources to further develop knowledge, skills and abilities related to the retention of recently returned combat veterans, in particular to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and related issues and services.
- √ Educate faculty and staff about Post 911 GI Bill Benefits.
- √ Create a study skills course specific to veterans.
- √ Provide vets only introductory courses.
- √ Create tuition waiver program and eliminate nonresidency tuition.