

VETERAN CENTER HANDBOOK

FOR STUDENT VETERANS



Student Veterans of America

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FOREWORD

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is expected to increase the number of student veterans on our nation's campuses in 2009 by 20 to 25%. There is a growing consensus among higher education leaders that helping these veterans succeed once they arrive will benefit not only the colleges and universities, but the surrounding communities, the states, and the nation. A specific measure includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a comprehensive services package known as a Veterans Center.

It is often difficult for a service member transitioning out of the military, to locate information on, understand, and obtain the resources and benefits s/he is entitled to. A Veterans Center not only provides a college support services for veterans and their dependents, but also serves as a hub for a variety of resources. A Veterans Center is equipped with national scholarships, information on federal benefits, lists of available state benefits, local support services and referrals to the Department of Veteran Affairs and veteran service organizations. By instituting a Veterans Center, it will enrich your campus community, create greater access for student veterans, promote support programs, and streamline the process for your veterans and for you.

The Student Veterans of America and affiliated student veterans groups attempt to identify and fill these gaps as possible for student veterans. The large number of veterans seeking higher education combined with the unique needs of veterans and military personnel provides the impetus for this publication.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

As of 2006, only 25% of veterans of veteran's age 25 or older had a bachelor's degree.¹ Thousands of veterans exit military service every month only to find an overwhelming combination of emotional, financial, academic, and cultural obstacles. As of 2008, there were approximately 1.8 million veterans who served during the Global War on Terrorism.² Currently, there are approximately 523,000 military veterans drawing VA education benefits;³ this figure does not include a huge number of student veterans that are ineligible for VA education benefits (e.g. delimiting date) or who are entitled but not receiving benefits.

An improved veteran education benefits package (as set forth by the Post 9/11 GI Bill) and continued military operations will cause a substantial increase in student veteran enrollment. As a result, many institutions of higher learning will experience a 25% or more increase in student veteran population.

Presently, a variety of community colleges and universities have adapted their services and programs to adequately serve student veterans. Others have not. In some cases, veterans rely upon one another for guidance on available services and benefits. The fragmentation of services may place additional burden on the student veteran, who seeks easy-to-use services located in one location that handles the full range of needs: financial aid, academic support, disability services, employment assistance, social networking, and references to veteran service organizations.

1 U.S. Census Bureau: *American Community Survey 2006*

2 Office of Policy and Planning, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (008A3)

3 VA Statistics: *July, 2008*

General Statistics

- There are about 23.8 million living veterans. There are 37 million dependents (spouses and dependent children) of living veterans and deceased veterans. Together they represent 20% of the U.S. population⁴
- The percentage of Americans with college degrees increased from 4.6 percent in 1945 to 25 percent 1970 largely due to the GI Bill⁵
- Approximately 2 million veterans have served in OEF/OIF⁶
- Unemployment rates for veterans age 20-24 are three times the national average⁷
- 34% of OEF/OIF veterans were deployed multiple times⁸
- 54% of OIF/OEF veterans are 20-29 years old.⁹
- Student veterans receive “only slightly” more financial aid than nonstudent veterans, usually with a lower amount in student loans¹⁰
- Approximately 523,000 student veterans receive education benefits with 20% being first time recipients of VA Education benefits¹¹
- More than 100,580 OEF/OIF veterans were diagnosed with a mental health condition¹²
- 20% OIF/OEF veterans display signs of PTSD¹³
- As of September 2007, 223,564 OEF/OIF veterans have filed for disability claims with 89% receiving claim decisions and 11% awaiting claim decisions¹⁴

⁴ Department of Veterans Affairs: *Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008*

⁵ Vitale: *The Question of Accepting Veteran Education Benefits*.

⁶ Veterans for Common Sense: *VA Fact Sheet: Impact of Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: *Employment Situation for Veterans*

⁸ Department of Veterans Affairs: *Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008*

⁹ Department of Veterans Affairs: *Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008*

¹⁰ GAO Report 02-368: *Comparison of Federal Assistance Awarded to Veteran and Nonveteran Students*

¹¹ Department of Veterans Affairs: *Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008*

¹² Veterans for Common Sense: *VA Fact Sheet: Impact of Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*

¹³ Rand Corporation: *PTSD Study Press Release*

¹⁴ Department of Veterans Affairs: *Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008*

WHY THE NEED?

Veterans' Issues & Concerns

- a. ***Focused Support:*** Student veterans often navigate multiple university and college departments to identify and utilize the range of benefits and resources available to them. They navigate a multitude of staff offices to complete simple requests unique to veterans such as financial requirements or military transcript assessments
- b. ***An Array of Information:*** There are many difficulties in finding and applying for benefits from various government segments, corporate entities, and non profit organizations. Benefits and resources might include, but are not limited to: scholarships, grants, home loans, medical care, financial assistance, service-connected compensation and unemployment benefits. As a result, available resources and benefits are administered by many different segments of government and associated entities.
- c. ***The Accessibility to Information:*** Information specific to student veterans is often not easy to find or is organized with bits of information spread across many sources. Much of the information is contradictory.
- d. ***The Transition Process:*** Veterans face many poignant readjustment barriers such as psychological issues in transition to civilian life. Difficulties might include dealing with PTSD, physical and mental health issues, family issues, and the enveloping hesitation to ask for help.
- e. ***The Need for Understanding:*** Understanding a veteran's unique needs such as physical and mental health issues, academic preparation, and past military credits/experience is critical to the veterans' success, and to the institutions success. Limited capacity of disability services and associated resources for the anticipated onslaught of student veterans on campus has already hampered many veterans in achieving their goals – and translates directly to disenrollment.
- f. ***Lack of Office Space:*** The lack of a specific area where student veterans are able to seek benefits, meet and congregate, can seek academic support services and do homework is frequently cited as an unmet need of both campuses and veterans.
- g. ***The Need for Camaraderie:*** Student veterans must fulfill the need to connect with peers and support each other in their quest to blend in and be part of the campus community and partake in social activities with fellow students with similar backgrounds.

STEPS TO ESTABLISH A VETERAN'S CENTER

Step One: Develop a Veterans Task Force

- Include members from major departments, including Academics, Enrollment, Faculty, Financial Aid, Student Services and Veteran Services.
- Assess the number of veterans on campus and the types of educational benefits they currently utilize. Identify an approximate number of veterans eligible, but not receiving benefits.
- Conduct a student veteran survey on current support services offered
- Establish needs assessment based on feedback and committee recommendations.
- Recommend suggestions to improve current veteran services & school policies:
 - Application Fees
 - Reduce
 - Eliminate
 - Tuition Rates
 - Offer discounted tuition rates
 - Offer in-state tuition for out-of-state veterans
 - Admission Procedures
 - Streamline procedures for student veterans
 - Train and identify a staff member in veterans' issues
 - Guaranteed acceptance with 36 months of active-duty service
 - Enrollment
 - Delay the drop date (for non-payment) to be consistent with VA educational benefit payment policies
 - Registration
 - Offer advanced registration for student veterans
 - Transfer of Military Credit
 - Streamline procedures according to the American Council of Education (ACE) or Service-member Opportunity Colleges (SOC) guidelines
 - Students returning to active-duty status
 - Consider policies that create a special enrollment status, offer refunds (including textbooks), offer incompletes, or offer independent study to complete coursework
 - The deactivation of student from active-duty
 - Consider policies that streamline registration and offer special orientations to veterans

Step Two: Support a Student Veterans Organization

- Contact all student veterans about establishing a student veteran's organization.
 - *Example: Send a mass e-mail with recipients in BCC line*
- Host a meeting and assist veterans in standing up a student veteran organization.
 - Establish Purpose and Goals
 - Implement Charter and By-laws
 - Elect Officers & Advisors

- Please refer to [SVA Website](#) for more information on instituting a student veteran organization on your campus.
- Ensure student veterans have access to all resources available to other student organizations such as funding, marketing materials, and meeting space.
- Use student veterans as a conduit for information, peer mentoring and support.
 - VA Benefits Seminars
 - Student Outreach & Awareness
 - Student Veteran Orientation
 - Pre Professional Networking

Step Three: Create Veteran's Office

Veteran's Services Liaison/Coordinator

- Establish a position in your institution to be a single point of contact and coordinate veteran services, provide referrals, create programming, and advocate for students with issues related to their military experiences, veteran benefits and student status.
- Coordinate and address the needs and issues of student veterans, military members and their dependents such as financial aid, application procedures, and enrollment.
- Provide office space and information technology resources as needed

Veteran Benefits Certifying Official

- Process applicable education benefit certifying paperwork for veterans, military members and their dependents such as VA educational benefits and state grants for veterans.
- Acts as a liaison between the campus and the VA education office/state education agency

Veterans Affairs Work Study Position(s)

- Determine if your institution is eligible for a Department of Veterans Affairs work-study position for a student veteran.
- File for the work-study position using Form 22-8691
 - Link: <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/22-8691.pdf>
- Employ the work-study student veteran to assist current and prospective student veterans and military personnel with associated VA educational benefits and available university and/or community college support services.
- Provide applicable training.
- Please refer to [SVA Website](#) for more information on applying for a VA Work-Study

Note: Work Study positions are fully funded by the Dept of Veterans Affairs and can augment a Veteran' Liaison position. In the absence of a dedicated Veteran's Liaison, a work-study position can serve as the POC for student support services and referrals.

Student Veteran Volunteers

- Utilize student veteran volunteers to facilitate the process of incorporating a Veterans office on your campus

Step Four: Set up Space

- Establish Office Space for Veteran’s Liaison Office
- Locate in a central site and in proximity to student support services
- Dedicate an area where the student veteran organization and other student veterans can meet and congregate, seek academic support services, and do homework.
 - Lounge
 - Computers
 - Desks
 - Meeting Areas

Step Five: Develop Online & Print Resources

- Build a website which consolidates information for student veterans including student services, federal benefits, state benefits, student veteran organization, and others
- Create and distribute printed material which specifies available resources.
 - *Example: University of Wisconsin* <http://registrar.wisc.edu/students/vets/>

Step Six: Establish Partnerships

- Establish relationships with agency liaisons in your area that offer support services for veterans, service members and eligible family members.
- Partnerships include, but are not limited to: the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, AmVets, OEF/OIF Program Managers, VA Medical Centers, VA Regional Office, a state’s veteran services officers and others.

Step Seven: Educate Administration, Faculty & Staff

- Incorporate educational material on student veterans into routine training regimen.
- Ensure the school’s counseling resources are fully capable to handle veteran issues.
 - PTSD
 - Combat Stress
 - Integration
 - Adjustment
- Ensure faculty members can recognize veterans struggling with the above issues, and know where to refer the veteran for assistance
- Consider instituting “veteran’s only” orientation services to introduce new student veterans on available services from the community college and/or university, the VA, the state, and the student veteran organization.

Step Eight: Converge all Resources in 1 Place

- Create a formal Veterans Center which fully integrates all facets of student support services, VA programs, state services, and student veteran organizations in one location.
 - University & Community Colleges
 - Academic Advising
 - Career Services
 - Disability Support Services

- Financial Aid
 - Others (Please refer to Suggested Partnerships below)
- Student Veterans Organization
- Veteran's Liaison Office
- VA Work Study Positions
- Referrals (to Partnerships)
- Online & Print Resources
- Task Force Recommendations

Step Nine: Evaluate Organizational Success

- Develop a plan to monitor and track the key indicators of student veteran enrollment and success
 - # of applications received
 - # of students accepted
 - # of students enrolled
 - # of students assisted by office
 - Retention rates
 - Persistence rates
 - Graduation rates
- Additional measures can be obtained via surveys, student feedback and/or veteran taskforce/committee recommendations
- Adjust your plan & guidance accordingly

***Note 1:** Incorporate student veterans from your campus in each phase. They will be instrumental in ensuring your Veteran's Center accommodates their needs and ultimately a success.*

***Note 2:** The foregoing list of procedures is not exclusive. These recommendations recognize that different community colleges and universities will develop veteran centers and institute veteran programs to suit the needs of their specific student veteran population. This publication serves to facilitate the process that will allow colleges and universities the opportunity to customize and tailor new programs and strategies to assist the student veteran community on campus.*

***Note 3:** Veteran's Center name is not exclusive to SVA; you have the latitude to name your Veterans Center/Office according to university preference and needs.*

VETERAN CENTER RESOURCES

Suggested Online and Print Resources

Provide a resource hub and referral center with available resources within the school, referrals to external agencies, informational packages and benefit applications for veterans from government agencies (federal, state, county, local), corporate and non-profit entities in one centralized location.

- Admissions
 - Admission Guidelines
 - Applications
 - Course Catalog
 - Degree Offerings
 - Enrollment
 - Registration

- Disability Claims
 - How to file for Service-connected claims
 - VSO referrals

- Employment Opportunities
 - Department of Labor VETS program
 - Available Internships
 - Local Opportunities
 - On-Campus Openings
 - Veteran Job Search Engines
 - Work Study Openings

- Family Assistance
 - ChampVA
 - Operation HomeFront
 - TriCare
 - Other State Services

- Financial Aid
 - Student Loans
 - Scholarships (general and veteran specific)
 - VA Educational Benefits

- Financial Assistance
 - American Red Cross
 - Operation HomeFront
 - Salvation Army

- Housing Assistance
 - On Campus
 - Off Campus
 - VA Home Loans

- Mental Health Assistance
 - Available School Counseling
 - Combat Stress
 - PTSD

- Scholarships
 - Corporate
 - Government
 - Non-profit foundations
 - University/Community College

- VA Educational Benefits
 - Chapter 30 (Active-Duty GI Bill)
 - Chapter 31 (Vocational Rehabilitation)
 - Chapter 35 (Survivors and Dependents GI Bill)
 - Chapter 33 (Post 9/11 GI Bill)
 - 1606 (Reserve GI Bill)
 - 1607 (REAP)

- VA Medical Benefits
 - Local VA Medical Centers
 - Local VA Clinics
 - OEF/OIF Program Managers

- Veterans Service Organizations
 - Student Veterans of America
 - American Legion
 - Disabled American Veterans
 - Veterans of Foreign Wars

- Wounded Warrior Project

Suggested Partnerships

University /Community College Services

- Academic Advising
- Admissions

- Career Advising
- Counseling Services
- Crisis Intervention
- Disability Services
- Financial Aid
- Housing Support
- Registration
- Student Health Services
- Student Veterans group
- Tutoring Services
- Veteran Benefits

External Organizations

- Student Veterans of America
 - American Legion
 - AM Vets
 - Armed Forces Recreation Centers
 - Department of Labor VETS program
 - Disabled Veterans of America
 - Employment Search engines
 - Local VA Medical Centers/Clinics
 - Local OEF/OIF Program Managers
 - Military.com
 - Military and National Guard Units in the area
 - Small Business Administration (Patriot Express Program)
 - State-level Employment Agency
 - State-level Student Assistance Commission
 - State-level Veterans Affairs Agency
 - Transition Assistance Program
 - Troops to Teachers
 - Veterans of Foreign Wars
 - Veteran Legal Clinics
 - Vets 4 Vets
 - Vocational Rehab Counselors
 - Wounded Warrior Project

OPTIONAL ADDITIONS

Establish Director of Veterans Center Position

The director coordinates campus services and serves as the institutional point of contact for prospective and current student veterans and military service members. The director will create programming and outreach services, provide advice to the administration, and analyze current campus policies, procedures, and services as they relate to veterans and service members.

Additionally the director can:

- Coordinate campus services provided veteran and military student personnel. These services include specialized "transition services" such as admissions, placement exams, orientation, and enrollment.
- Increase veteran awareness on campus by creating outreach programs and publications
- Develop processes for the activation and deactivation of students to active-duty service including enrollment status, refunds, and ensuing grades.
- Provide training and assistance to campus departments on veteran and military issues.
- Serve as liaison to external state and federal organizations such as the Department of Veteran Affairs and Department of Labor.
- Analyze pending state and federal legislation that affect student veterans and service personnel (and their dependents) and advise campus administration of potential impact on programs and policies.
- Perform related student veteran research and make appropriate recommendations.
- Supervise applicable Veteran Center Liaisons/Coordinators, VA Certifying Officials and VA Work Study positions

Institute Veteran Orientation Programs

The purpose of Veterans Orientation Programs are to facilitate the transition of student veterans to a college setting through the provision of programs and services outlining the college's social, developmental and counseling resources and opportunities. The Veteran Orientation Program should also seek to affect the school's retention and graduation efforts by helping student veterans feel welcomed, connect with their new environment, understand their expectations, and know how and where to seek specialized support. A Veterans Orientation Program introduces

students to student services and available resources which will support their educational, financial and medical needs.

Additionally, colleges and universities can incorporate these orientation programs into their curriculum by offering veteran-only general education classes for a student's first year. This type of program would provide specialized academic support and rectify any academic deficiencies before progressing to subsequent years. *Example: [Cleveland State University SERV Program](#)*

Launch Veterans Upward Bound Program

Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) is a free U.S. Department of Education program designed to help eligible U.S. military veterans refresh their academic skills so that they can successfully complete the postsecondary school of their choosing. In order [for a student veteran] to be eligible for participation in a VUB program, a student veteran must be a low-income and/or first-generation college (meaning that neither of your parents have a four-year college degree) student, having served at least 180 days of active federal service, and have a discharge that is other than dishonorable. Currently, there are 46 VUB programs nationwide and in Puerto Rico and Guam ready to serve veterans. Here are some of the areas in which VUB programs help student veterans¹⁵:

- **ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION IN:**
 - Mathematics
 - Science
 - Reading
 - Foreign language
 - Various other subjects
 - Tutorial and study skills assistance

- **OTHER SERVICES MAY INCLUDE:**
 - Intensive basic skills development
 - Short-term remedial or refresher classes for veterans
 - Assistance with applications to the postsecondary school of choice
 - Assistance with applying for financial aid
 - Career Counseling
 - Exposure to cultural events, academic programs, and other educational activities

¹⁵ National Association of Veteran Upward Bound Project Personnel: *Program Info*

OPTIONAL FUNDING SOURCES

ACE/Wal-Mart Success for Veterans Award Grants¹⁶

The ACE/Wal-Mart Success for Veterans Award Grants will recognize higher education institutions for demonstrated leadership in developing programs to increase access to and success in postsecondary education for veterans and their families. Each recipient will be presented with an award grant to support the further development of these programs/services and to participate in the dissemination of lessons learned and best practices.

Examples include:

- Programs, services, and policies that provide seamless transitions that support students before, during, and after deployment.
- College assimilation programs
- Student veteran orientation programs.
- Community-based collaborations.
- Peer support and peer mentoring programs.
- Integration of veterans into strategic enrollment management plans.
- Intervention and treatment of combat-related stress and anxiety disorders.
- One-stop resource centers, dedicated support teams, work-study placement, and employment support.

The American Council on Education (ACE) has released [application guidelines](#) for its ACE/Wal-Mart Success for Veterans Award Grants. Applications for the 20 available \$100,000 grants are due by noon EST on Monday, March 2, 2009.

DOE Centers of Excellency for Student Veteran Success Grants¹⁷

Subject to the availability of appropriations, the Secretary shall award grants to institutions of higher education to develop model programs to support veteran student success in postsecondary education. A grant awarded under this section shall be awarded for a period of three years. To be considered for a grant under this section, an institution of higher education shall submit to the Secretary an application at such time, in such manner, and accompanied by such information as the Secretary may require. In awarding grants the Secretary shall consider: the number of veteran students enrolled at an institution of higher education; and the need for model programs to address the needs of veteran students at a wide range of institutions of higher education, including the need to provide— (i) an equitable distribution of such grants to institutions of higher education of various types and sizes; (ii) an equitable geographic distribution of such grants; and (iii) an equitable distribution of such grants among rural and urban areas.

Note: *At the time of this publication, there were no appropriations made for this program. Once grants are appropriated, this publication will be updated.*

¹⁶ American Council on Education: *Serving Those Who Served*

¹⁷ *Higher Education Opportunity Act*

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Design Military Friendly Policies

Review, design, and implement military-friendly policies. These policies should take into consideration a service member's unique experiences and needs. A community college and/or university should review and update current policies to assist student veterans in navigating complex issues such as : deactivation, tuition benefits and readjustment These policies can include, but are not limited to: admissions, financial aid, enrollment, disability services, counseling, registration and military transcripts evaluations (to concur with the American Council on Education guidelines).

Meet the Needs of Student Veterans

A Veterans Center assists student veterans meet their academic, financial, and medical needs. The unit features various academic services/referrals (i.e. registration, enrollment, tutoring, etc.), financial aid (i.e. state and federal educational benefits, scholarships), and medical services/referrals (i.e. disability services, counseling, VA contacts). The Veterans Center assists student veterans through the processes of admissions, financial aid, orientation, registration, credit evaluation of military training, information on state and federal benefits for veterans, and a host of resources veterans can draw upon.

Enrich the Campus Community

Enrich your campus community by establishing a student veteran presence on campus. Institute a student veterans group and support their outreach endeavors. Be cognizant of the veteran's unique needs and tailor your college or university's resources/services/referrals based on the needs of your student veteran population. The center can feature computer labs, academic services, special events, meeting space and customized web-based services for veterans.

Be Understanding

Help student veterans overcome the various hurdles they may face upon their return from service. A Veterans Center assists a service member's multifaceted integration to academia. A community college and/or university should be aware, empathetic, and understanding when assisting student veterans and their unique dilemmas.

VETERAN CENTER REFERENCES

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- ¹⁶ National Association of Veteran Upward Bound Project Personnel. 2008. *Program Information* www.navubpp.org (accessed 1/5/2009).
- ¹⁷ American Council on Education. 2008. *Serving Those Who Served Initiative*. www.acenet.edu (accessed 1/5/2009).

University Programs

Cleveland State University

Columbia University

Florida State University

Indianapolis University Purdue University at Indianapolis

San Diego State University

University of California – Los Angeles

University of Houston

University of Iowa

University of Illinois – Chicago

University of Mississippi

University of Wisconsin-Madison

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