

Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group Meeting

McCormick Foundation and CAEL

October 21, 2013

Meeting Summary

Introduction

The tenth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group was held on October 21, 2013 at Northwestern University. There were 29 attendees, including representatives from 24 colleges and programs serving the Chicago area. A full list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary.

IJF and Commercial Club Update

Amy Sherman, co-chair of the Education Working Group, provided an update on Illinois Joining Forces (IJF). Faculty training is a major priority for the working group. Pete LaHaie reported that faculty training has been identified as the number one issue at Roosevelt University. Affinity group members discussed the need for identification of faculty members who work with veterans. Amy suggested that decals be used to identify offices of staff and faculty who have been trained to support student veterans.

Amy reported that the Commercial Club has a strong working group of about 30 employers who are committed to hiring veterans.

Amy announced that while she is sad that Charlotte Cahill has moved to Boston to be closer to her family, she is pleased to announce that Cindy Rathunde, who has served as administrator for Enrollment/Veteran Services at Northeastern Illinois University, will be joining CAEL as its Manager of Veteran Initiatives and Special Projects as of November 4.

State Policy Updates

Rodrigo Garcia, Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, reported on the status of two pieces of legislation and on licensing.

- **In State Tuition.** The “Higher Education Military Tuition” Act, granting state residency to student veterans using the Post 9/11 GI Bill, took effect when signed on August 14, 2013. Both the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and Student Veterans of America (SVA) advocated for this bill.
- **Priority Registration.** SB 2245, Public Act 98-0316, becomes effective January 1, 2014. This Act concerns priority registration for veterans in public higher education institutions that have a priority registration system. Such systems must grant the same priority to a service member or veteran who is a resident of Illinois as graduate students receive. Both the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and Student Veterans of America (SVA) advocated for this bill.

Rules are being drafted for SB 2245. Rodrigo Garcia suggested that Affinity group members participate in the informal comment period, now taking place. Comments during this period can be more impactful than during the public comment period because rules are still being drafted. Rodrigo Garcia will provide information to Amy.

Rodrigo Garcia also discussed Licensing. A grant is available from the National Governors Association to move forward with licenses in the State Office that recognize military training and learning. The focus is on three kinds of licenses: 1) LPN, 2) EMT (Emergency Medical Technicians, 3) Police Officers.

Amy noted that CAEL is a partner in a program called Heroes to Healthcare (H2HC), which offers training that leads to a career path in health care. She suggested making a connection between the programs. Rodrigo Garcia is already in contact with the H2HC project leaders.

Ed Davis noted that the VA is not paying the out of district fee under the Higher Education Military Tuition Act, and some programs are losing money. Rodrigo Garcia responded that he will look into this issue and a legislative remedy may be needed. Amy suggested that Ed Davis prepare a memo about the issue and submit it to Rodrigo Garcia for proper review.

Rodrigo also updated the group about the first payer issue which requires that Illinois veteran grant funds must be paid out before federal benefits. There is a need for a state waiver from this rule so that certain veterans are not disadvantaged. Rodrigo reported that the state is seeking a legislative remedy as it cannot be resolved administratively. **Tell your stories in order to reach legislators:** Amy suggested that personal stories about the first payer issue would be helpful to inform legislators about the impact of this issue. General McArthur III and Cindy Rathunde volunteered to submit stories to Amy and Rodrigo Garcia.

ISVCC

James Flagg, Veterans Affairs Coordinator and Certifying Official of Governors State University, announced a three day Student Veterans Empowerment Congress which will cover Certification, IDVA, and a 2-day workshop, including best practices. Participants will be HR reps, employers, corporate CEOs, executive directors. Watch for further information.

Paul Knudtson, Director of Armed Services Relations, National Louis University, discussed an initiative promote the concept of veterans as “strategic assets” to employers, attributing this concept to Rodrigo Garcia. VHEAG members are asked to support the following student veterans career-related events (watch for further information):

February 25, Pritzker Military Library in Chicago. Student veterans are encouraged to attend the event. There will be a reception where student veterans can learn skills of networking.

March 25, C-Suite Level event with Senior VPs of area employers

March 26, Large Veterans Hiring Event that will be televised on the Today Show

How to support these events:

- 1) Help get the word out about the Pritzker Military Library event to student veterans.

- 2) Reach out to peers downstate. Planners are seeking three downstate sites to duplicate the February 25th event. Let Paul know if you know of any downstate contacts.

CMG: Create a Vision, Make the Case, Get it Done

Amy Sherman introduced a planning process to help affinity group members identify goals, priorities, resources, and action plans for their individual programs. This is a more concrete version of strategic planning called “Create a Vision, Make the Case, Get it Done (CMG).” The process consists of affinity group members engaging in activities facilitated by CAEL over the coming year that will assist members in having an impact on their particular institutions. The CMG process was kicked off with an exercise in which small groups (assigned for initial activities only) identified top priorities for themselves and their superiors.

Feedback:

Facilitator

Amy Sherman’s group

What impact do group members want to have?

- Be able to certify quickly
- Veterans will have sense of belonging on the campus
- Navigation is an issue: should be one stop
- Veterans will have activities, a sense of community
- Veterans’ programs will have more visibility
- Access to information on performance and employment rates

What administrators/supervisors want

- Higher enrollment and graduation rates
- Veterans’ club
- Customer service
- Measure of success is return on investment (ROT)

Cindy Rathunde’s group

What impact do group members want to have?

- Centers for the veterans
- Better retention rates
- Be able to certify quickly
- Communication with internal staff in departments
- Accommodations, how to follow through with these
- Online information for students: What can they do with their degrees?

What administrators/ supervisors want?

- Similar to Amy’s group: looking for outcomes
- Focus on the numbers, get more students
- Know how experiential learning can lead to better numbers

Haydee Nunez’s group

What impact do group members want to have?

- Many of the same issues as other groups
- Graduation

- Retention
- Student involvement
- Address isolation
- Main issue to add is that a student may be coming back – this can be a second iteration. Need to mitigate impact of veterans having to leave and come back for various reasons, such as being called back for service, having children i.e., being an adult student in a college

What administrators/supervisors want

- Many of the same issues as other groups
- Graduation and completion
- Increased enrollment
- Increased community awareness
- Include awareness of family and others connected with military
- Benchmarks for success, a level or number
- Tactics that allow a program to measure success
- Effective marketing to students

Shari Gross's group

What impact do group members want to have?

- Student engagement
- More visibility
- More understanding of the issues faced by veterans on the part of faculty and others
- Be able to certify quickly

What administrators/supervisors want

- Increased retention numbers
- Increased recruitment numbers

Summary of Group Exercise: Amy noted that the process of CMG can be a driver of improved services. Anna Laubach of McCormick Foundation commented that while there were many similarities between the breakout groups, different institutions are at different stages. The process should take account of these different stages.

Next Goal: Amy explained that the next goal is for affinity group members to meet with their dean or supervisor to identify five impact goals. Attendees were provided the “Assignment for Affinity Group Members: Creating a Vision and Making the Case” which contains suggested kinds of data and resources to explore with the assistance of the Institutional Research (IR) person or department. Members are reminded that discovering what data is lacking can help them identify goals.

Tools for Gathering Data: Paul Knudtson suggested that tools are important and recommends Tableau, a spreadsheet tool. Janelle Wade shared that she is the IR in her office. Amy will ask Becky Klein-Collins, Senior Director of Research at CAEL, to make suggestions about tools.

Leverage for Asking for Data: Cindy Rathunde shared that GI bill funding will be requiring data. Therefore, institutions will soon be required on a national level to collect data anyway. Paul

suggested that institutions should be aware of the need to use consistent coding in order to be able to accurately capture the life cycle of the student.

Open Mic

Scott Stratton, who facilitated the open mic time, started by summarizing common themes in the meeting: 1) Capturing and identifying the particular student populations and 2) Mentoring. He invited members to share good ideas concerning the registration process. For example, a check box can be used to identify veterans at the point of registration. Then you can send them a packet of materials and invite them to a meeting. Members of the group have a range of experiences with having access to admissions information. Shari Gross shared that she was able to meet with every one of the veterans on campus because the admissions process uses a check box. Janelle Wade was able to send out a new student orientation video that was created by students. Scott summarized that the best practice is to capture information in admissions, including the kind of benefit being used by the applicant. It is important to make sure to have the applicant's permission to share the data.

The topic of using social media to reach out to veterans came up in the group. Some members said that they have made effective use of social media to list events and to announce what the veterans are doing. On the other hand one member felt that social media can be a waste if the user does not know how to leverage it, for example, failing to update information. Scott suggested some best practices for social media such as having one person in charge of social media, and using pictures to effectively document events.

Scott continued the open mic time with a discussion of mentoring. He suggested identifying the student engagement cycle and distinguishing between people who are simply outliers and those who are not engaged. Veterans may be focusing on academic engagement first. This can be a precondition to other involvement. Discussion moved to funded programs for peer mentoring.

Next Steps

- CAEL will provide a cover letter introducing the planning process that VHEAG members can share with their supervisor and IR staff.
- Amy will obtain information from Rodrigo Garcia about how Affinity Group members can make comments on the bill to lower reporting fees from the VA during the informal comment period prior to the public comment period.
- General McArthur III and Cindy Rathunde will provide stories that show the impact of the first payer rule on students
- The next meeting will be held on December 18, 2013. Anna Laubach is checking to see if the McCormick conference center is available.
- If you know of other institutions that should be part of the affinity group, please let CAEL staff know so that we can reach out to them.

Meeting Attendance

Name	Institution
Richard Kennedy	American Continental University
Linda Owens	Benedictine University
Sandy Bowen	CAEL
Amy Sherman	CAEL
Charles Goodrum	Chicago State University
Michael Hauman	City Colleges of Chicago – Daley College
Robert Thompson	City Colleges of Chicago- Malcolm X College
Tim Davis	City Colleges of Chicago- Truman College
Ed Davis	City Colleges of Chicago- Wilbur Wright College
Ryan Frey	College of Lake County
Haydee Nunez	DePaul University
Scott Stratton	DeVry University
Daniel Quijano	Elgin Community College
James Flagg	Governors State University
Rodrigo Garcia	Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs
Paige Vanderhyden	Joliet Junior College
Janelle Wade	Loyola University
Janira Clark	McCormick Foundation
Anna Laubach	McCormick Foundation
General McArthur III	Moraine Valley Community College
Paul Knudtson	National Louis University
Renard Jackson	North Central College
Cynthia Rathunde	Northeastern Illinois University
Julia Jenkins	Northwestern University
Noemi Oyola	Robert Morris University
Pete LaHaie	Roosevelt University
Michelle Smith	Roosevelt University Veterans Upward Bound
Sheri Gross	Saint Xavier University
Annette Wright	University of Illinois at Chicago