

Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group Meeting

September 17, 2015

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves. Amy Sherman introduced Chip Gross, the new Manager of Veterans Initiatives and Special Projects for CAEL. Chip served a total of thirty-three years in the U.S. Army and Army National Guard, retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Dr. Gross also has twenty-one years of experience teaching in higher education, serving as music department chair for eight years at Judson University and chairing two major faculty committees during that time.

Erica Jeffries: Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Erica Jeffries, Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, stressed the importance of building ties with the VHEAG because of its shared mission with the IDVA. She described education as a critical component of a successful military to civilian transition and thanked attendees for their work.

Erica noted that the main areas of focus for IDVA are mental health, veterans' housing, and to encourage veterans to stand up and be counted. There are over 720 thousand veterans in IL but only 128 thousand in IDVA database. IDVA just hired Emanuel Johnson as Program Manager to work with veterans' service coordinators. His role will be 100% community engagement.

The Director asked VHEAG members to promote the benefits available to veterans. For example, Montgomery G.I. Bill numbers have been stagnant at 20,000 per year. The **Troops to Teachers** program is another such program; its leadership is doing a lot of re-imagining and we should expect to see a more robust program in 12-18 months. MIA/POW scholarships last received funding in 2009, which was \$2,000,000 below what was needed.

She identified the Illinois Veterans Grant as an unfunded mandate costing schools in Illinois millions of dollars. Recipients have fallen from 534 in 2008 (highest in the past 20 years) to 157 in 2015. A member shared students' concerns that some schools place holds on students' accounts due to the lack of State funding for the IVG and ING. VHEAG members should advocate for the programs to the state legislature.

Amy asked those VHEAG members who see problems related to the unfunded mandate to document stories and send them to CAEL so we can submit them to IBHE and ICCB and perhaps draft a white paper.

Another member shared that some students at his institution may have to begin paying for their trucking program due to the unfunded mandate. Amy said that this is exactly the kind of story we need.

Kevin Smith and Sheri Gross raised concerns about the St. Louis VA Regional Processing Offices delaying student veteran certification. Erica said she would ask Dan Wellman, Director of Veterans Education and Training Section of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs to determine the cause of the delays.

Amy said that we shouldn't forget about the factors that mental health plays in student success and encouraged people to think about ways we can integrate the two areas. Erica told all that she would love to hear from members about these issues.

Update on Illinois Joining Forces

Amy explained that IJF was created by legislation and became its own nonprofit, organized into working groups. She encouraged VHEAG members to get involved

Roman is co-chair with Amy in the IJF Education Working Group (EWG). EWG is a collection of institutions and state agencies sharing best practices. The next IJF EWG meeting is at 55 E. Monroe, Mezzanine level, on Sept. 29, 10-11:30 am.

Roman also announced a health and wellness event, the Grunt Ghoul Run, Saturday, October 24, 2015, at Dirt Runner, 2725 E 2625th Rd in Marseille. Roman added that a health and wellness event is a good way to mobilize your base on campus.

Accommodations & Disabilities Workshop Recap

The workshop was held in Chicago and UIC student Center on July 30, 2015. The keynote speaker, Dr. Jose Coll, of St. Leo University, provided best practices on working with students with disabilities. There were panel discussions on moral injury and adaptive strategies, including therapeutic riding and service dogs. It is important that schools create policies regarding service animals so that students who need them are allowed to use them in the classroom.

Amy suggested some of the members present may want to go to an upcoming moral injury symposium. Members were asked to let CAEL know if they would know if they would be interested in attending. The symposium is to be held at 65 E. Jackson, on October 8, 2015, from 8:00 am to 5:30 pm.

Due to VHEAG member interest, Amy said that we will present a webinar on service animals. One member pointed out that the VA service animal policy only allows dogs that perform tasks. Amy plans to ask for more information on this topic from the IJF Behavioral Health Working Group.

Orientations for Student Veterans

Brooke Roche and Sheri Gross described the orientations offered to student veterans and passed around materials offered at Oakton and St Xavier, respectively. Brooke's program includes a discussion of benefits, an overview of student services, a resource fair, and a dinner. Sheri's program is more informal and includes both morning and evening options to encourage attendance. She provides a handbook and invites members of their SVA chapter to do a panel presentation.

Annette stated that UIC holds an orientation for all incoming students at the college's veteran services center in an effort to raise students' awareness of the center with all non-veterans and veterans alike.

Future VHEAG Topics

Kevin said he would be interested in all-inclusive on-campus programming and diversifying the audience for veterans-related programming. Kevin Smith of Governors State and Robert Thompson of Malcolm X College volunteered to share their programming.

Update on CMG Strategic Planning Reports

The CMG-Create Your Vision, Make Your Case, Get It Done project is in its final stages. This planning process included four primary components targeted to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on the veteran services provided by the participating institution: 1) the perspectives of the affinity group member on the veteran program's goals and on needed programs and services; 2) interviews with the VHEAG member's supervisor; 3) data on the student veterans attending the institutions; and 4) the perspectives of the student veterans as collected through a voluntary online survey. A report was generated from the results and presented to senior teams at the participating colleges. The process is nearly complete with only City Colleges of Chicago and Joliet Junior College remaining.

The reports generated good discussions with the institutions, with some colleges adding veteran advisors positions and new veteran spaced based on the information gathered from the reports.

Annette asked about common themes were in the reports. Georges wanted to know the percentage of community colleges involved in the reporting.

Amy suggested that CAEL might be able to provide VHEAG members with the aggregate results from the CMG surveys, but also noted the issues of confidentiality. There was general agreement that this would be helpful. CAEL will look into this next quarter.

Future Activities for VHEAG

Amy announced that the VHEAG would be funded by McCormick for another year and that the work will focus on building capacity around employment of student veterans. One strategy is to create workshops/trainings for career and veteran service staff on how to better market veterans and understand the employment landscape and employer partnerships.

There may be employers who are members of the Commercial Club Veterans Employment Initiative who may be interested in a natural alliance.

The following agreed to provide input and advice, and take part in planning phone calls:

Martin Gahbauer and Susan Wortman, Loyola University
Anitra King, Elgin Community College
Julie Carballo, North Central College
Kevin Smith, Governors State University

Members were then asked to sign sheets that were passed around to indicate their interest in the employment workshops (Please refer to the attached sign-up sheet).

The next few topics for VHEAG might be employment and IVG, as well as the service animal webinar.

Anita asked if CAEL could get directly involved with executives at schools to make them aware of guidelines-perhaps a white paper. Amy said it is something to consider.

Open Mic

Amy mentioned the art exhibit at IBHE that was referenced in a handout given to each member at the meeting. She also encouraged everyone to follow up with the Illinois Humanities Council about the grants they offer.

Sherri announced that the student veterans association at St. Xavier won a \$10,000 grant from Home Depot and would be renovating their resource center. She also noted that Danielle Green Byrd, an Iraqi war veteran who recently won the *Pat Tillman* award at the ESPYs, will be on campus at St. Xavier meeting with veterans.

Kevin announced that Governors State University has been named to *U.S. Veterans Magazine's* Best of the Best List for 2015 as one of the top veteran-friendly schools (with only two schools receiving the honor, the other being Western Illinois University).

Meeting Adjourned

The next meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Working Group meeting will take place at CAEL 55 E. Monroe, on January 27, 2016, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Please email Chip and Andrew with ideas.

Attendance

Julie Carballo	North Central College
Megan Everett	Robert R. McCormick Foundation
Martin Gahbauer	Loyola University
Jeremy Giacomino	Elmhurst College
Chip Gross	CAEL
Sheri Gross	St. Xavier College
Erica Jeffries	Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs
Connie Johnson	CAEL
Anitra King	Elgin Community College
Anita Lumpkin	Loyola University
Andrew Miller	CAEL
Roman Ortega	Lewis University
Weston Polaski	Northeastern Illinois University
Ramon Prieto	National Louis University
Cynthia Rathunde	City Colleges of Chicago
Brooke Roche	Oakton Community College
Georges Sanon	Prairie State College
Amy Sherman	CAEL
Kevin Smith	Governors State University
Robert Thompson	Malcolm X College
Carrie Timmermans	Moraine Valley Community College
Susan Wortman	Loyola University
Annette Wright	University of Illinois at Chicago