

MEETING SUMMARY

*Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group
May 26, 2016*

Welcome and Introductions

The nineteenth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group (VHEAG) was held on May 26, 2016, at 55 East Monroe Street in Chicago. There were sixteen (16) attendees, including representatives from eleven (11) colleges and universities in the Chicago area, as well as CAEL staff. A full list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary.

The State of the American Veteran: The Chicagoland Veterans Study

Chip Gross introduced Dr. Sara Kintzle, Research Assistant Professor at the University of Southern California's (USC) Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families. Dr. Kintzle provided an overview of The Chicagoland Veterans Study, which USC conducted in partnership with Loyola University Chicago. The survey questions focused on veterans' experiences transitioning to civilian life, as well as the current state of their overall needs. The report summarizes responses from nearly 1,300 veterans living in Cook, DuPage, Lake and Will Counties, as well as supplementary focus group interviews. An electronic copy of the full report, as well as Dr. Kintzle's PowerPoint presentation, is included with this meeting summary.

Among the key findings of The Chicagoland Veterans Survey were high rates of homelessness (19%), probable PTSD (40%), probable depression (36%), and suicide risk (33%) among post-9/11 veterans. Meeting participants discussed how these issues impact their work and the student veterans they serve. For example, group members have worked with students who rely on GI Bill benefits to cover their housing costs and who may risk homelessness if they do not maintain full-time student status. Participants also emphasized the importance of connecting student veterans with campus mental health services and working to foster a sense of community so that these students do not feel isolated.

Moving Forward

Amy Sherman announced that CAEL is currently preparing to develop a proposal for continued funding from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, whose support has allowed CAEL's involvement with the VHEAG. Amy asked meeting participants to share their thoughts on the value of the VHEAG, as well as ideas for activities to include in the proposal. Several group members, including Georges Sanon, Ramon Prieto, and Brian Gilligan, expressed their belief that the VHEAG has not only fostered a sense of community among Chicago-area veterans services coordinators, but also provided important learning opportunities through the exchange of best practices and access to researchers like Dr. Kintzle.

Meeting participants also expressed interest in the following ideas for future VHEAG activities:

- A presentation on key policy issues affecting student veterans, such as the GI Bill changes proposed by recent bills in the Senate and House of Representatives, as well as advocacy efforts by such organizations as NAVPA
- A survey of VHEAG members on the services to which they refer student veterans, the results of which to be shared with the group. Additionally, meeting participants expressed interest in meeting with service providers
- A webinar or meeting to update members on the activities of the Discharged Service Members Task Force and the Military Prior Learning Assessment Task Force
- Assistance developing work-study job descriptions
- A workshop focused solely on the Joint Services Transcript (JST) and the American Council on Education's (ACE) credit recommendations

There was also discussion around promoting employer partnerships (possibly with a focus on internships) with VHEAG member institutions to strengthen the student veteran employment pipeline. Amy proposed conducting a survey of group members to gauge interest in such an initiative. Before this survey is distributed, **VHEAG members are asked to speak with their career services staff** to determine their willingness to become actively involved this proposed effort.

Military Prior Learning Assessment Workshop

Cynthia Rathunde, District Director of Student Veterans Services at City Colleges of Chicago, led a workshop on military prior learning assessment (PLA) to improve the capacity of meeting participants to advocate for the recognition of student veterans' military learning. The presentation covered the following topics:

- Identifying basic types of military prior learning assessment
- Identifying ways to utilize DSST exam information for articulating credit recommendations
- Learning the different parts of the Joint Services Transcript (JST)
- Identifying ways to evaluate the American Council on Education (ACE) credit recommendations on the JST
- Understanding the difference between information the JST and the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) Transcript

Following the presentation, meeting participants discussed problems that can arise when military transfer credits are not applied toward a student's degree requirements. Cynthia emphasized the importance of acting as ombudsmen for military PLA and working with evaluators to encourage the proper application of military credit. Amy Sherman reminded those present that CAEL's research study *Fueling the Race to Postsecondary Success* found that PLA improves persistence and graduation rates as well as students taking more classes. An electronic copy of this research report is included with this meeting summary, as is Cynthia's presentation on military PLA.

Updates from the Field

Amy Sherman and Roman Ortega (co-chairs of the Illinois Joining Forces (IJF) Education Working Group) encouraged all VHEAG members to attend the IJF Education Working Group Retreat at the University of Illinois - Urbana Champaign on July 12. This meeting is of particular importance because participants will be planning future activities and it is an opportunity to have your voice heard. The retreat is open to all, not just current working group members. More detailed information will be provided via email.

Roman also shared information about Roll Call, a networking event for student veterans hosted by Exelon Corporation, which will take place at The RAM - Schaumburg from 5:30 to 7:30pm on June 7th. Please encourage interested student veterans to go to SVA-IL's Facebook event page (<https://www.facebook.com/events/250104902013943/>) for more information.

The Illinois Military Prior Learning Assessment Task Force has been meeting regularly and intends to release a report with recommendations by the end of the calendar year.

CAEL is currently collaborating with SVA-IL and the National ABLE Network to plan a weekend career retreat for student veterans to take place in late September or early October. The retreat will feature National ABLE's 'Employment Bootcamp' content, but with a more professional development look and feel as well as networking opportunities with employers. CAEL will provide VHEAG members with more detailed information as soon as the venue is confirmed. If possible, members are encouraged to incorporate this information into their student veteran orientation materials.

Open Mic

- Ramon Prieto (National Louis University) asked for guidance on how to update his school's information on the VA Comparison Tool. Cynthia Rathunde advised him to contact his Education Liaison Representative to update WEAMS (the Web Enabled Approval Management System).
- Anitra King (Elgin Community College) explained that she has a student who has been locked out of benefits certification for her chosen AS program due to electives that were posted to her transcript. Several members advised Anitra to explore bumping this student into a four-year chemistry or biology program.
- Kevin Smith (Governors State University) announced that a profile of one of his students has been published in GI Jobs. An electronic copy of the article is included with this summary. Kevin encouraged those present to take advantage when they have an exceptional story like this to encourage recognition of student veterans' successes.
- Meeting participants agreed that they would prefer in-person meetings to webinars for future activities. The next meeting is scheduled for July 27. Details to follow.



In Attendance

Megan	Everett	Robert R. McCormick Foundation
Brian	Gilligan	Morton College
Gricelda	Gonzalez	Saint Xavier University
Chip	Gross	CAEL
Anitra	King	Elgin Community College
Andrew	Miller	CAEL
Roman	Ortega	Lewis 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
Bryan	Tuika-Soske	Wilbur Wright College
Marcus	Williams El	Harold Washington College