

MEETING SUMMARY

Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group
July 27, 2016

Welcome and Introductions

The twentieth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group (VHEAG) was held on July 27, 2016, at 55 East Monroe Street in Chicago. There were 15 attendees, including representatives from 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.


Military-Connected Undergraduates

Exploring Differences between National Guard, Reserve, Active Duty, and Veterans in Higher Education

Amy Sherman introduced Tanya Ang (Director of Military Programs, ACE) and Andrew Morse (Director of Research and Policy Advocacy, NASPA), who provided an overview of ACE and NASPA's *Military-Connected Undergraduates* research study, published in November, 2015. This study focuses on differences between veterans and other military-connected students and how those differences may affect access and success in postsecondary education. Ms. Ang and Dr. Morse covered select findings of the study during their presentation, including demographics, enrollment characteristics, financial aid, and risk factors.

Important findings include:

- Military-connected undergraduates in the National Guard and reserves are more likely to be female (33% and 31%, respectively) than their active duty and veteran counterparts (22% and 21%, respectively).
- Active duty and reservist undergraduates were more likely to identify as racial or ethnic minorities (48% and 47%, respectively) than their National Guard and veteran counterparts (40% and 37%, respectively).
- Average adjusted gross incomes among military-connected undergraduates vary considerably from \$30,538 for veterans to \$47,503 for National Guard members.
- Degree sought and proportion of courses taken online also varied between subgroups.
- The percentage of military-connected undergraduates receiving VA/DoD education benefits ranged from 46% of National Guard members to 68% of reservists.
- National Guard members and veterans had, on average, the highest percentage of loans in their financial aid package.
- The majority of first-year undergraduate student veterans have unmet need after VA/DoD education benefits, and among African-American first-year undergraduate student veterans, the average student loan debt is \$7,500, compared to \$3,500 for their white counterparts.



The study also looks at seven key risk factors that have been associated with lower rates of degree completion: delayed college enrollment; no high school diploma; part-time college enrollment; financially independent; have dependents; single parent status; and full-time work while in college. Among military-connected undergraduates, four or more of these risk factors were exhibited by 60% of active duty personnel, 44% of veterans, 36% of reservists, and 30% of National Guard members. The higher education community can alleviate the pressure caused by these risk factors through student support services (such as childcare), facilitating and fostering positive social connections, and building institutional capacity to utilize credit for prior learning. College and university representatives can visit www.vetfriendlytoolkit.org to view tools, resources, and best practices from other institutions across the United States. Additionally, Ms. Ang discussed the possibility of ACE developing a brief overview of student veteran support strategies. Useful information is also available at NASPA's [Veterans Knowledge Community](#), and VHEAG members may be interested in attending NASPA's [Annual Symposium on Military-Connected Undergraduates](#).

The group closed this portion of the meeting with a discussion on the importance of placing the prevalence of risk factors among military-connected undergraduates in context: despite these challenges, military-connected students exhibit completion rates comparable to other adult students, indicating their resilience. The *Military-Connected Undergraduates* report and the PowerPoint slides presented by Ms. Ang and Dr. Morse are attached with this meeting summary.

Going Forward

Suggestions for future VHEAG activities

Amy Sherman asked meeting participants to discuss ideas for future meeting topics. Bryan Tuike-Soske, Cynthia Rathunde, and Joseph Bochantin discussed challenges on their campus related to post-traumatic stress (PTS), including conflicts between student veterans and faculty. They discussed the need to promote a greater understanding of PTS among faculty, with a particular emphasis on de-escalation and preventative measures. Because there may be barriers to reaching adjunct faculty with in-person training, the group discussed the possibility of creating a distance-learning option, such as a video.

Cynthia Rathunde also described challenges with keeping student veteran clubs engaged, particularly when there are not funds available to send club members to conferences. Opportunities to stimulate creative thinking on how to improve engagement (Ex. online models; childcare co-ops) would be helpful. Amy Sherman suggested that CAEL could reach out to the regional chapter of Student Veterans of America to ask if a representative could speak to the VHEAG on this topic and/or connect the group with institutions in other parts of the country with innovative practices in this area.

The group expressed general agreement that the model of inviting guest speakers to present on recent research was useful, with Brian Gilligan explaining that the distillation of research findings in these presentations make them more readily accessible than they would otherwise be. Because members do not frequently have access to resources to fund conference attendance, Amy Sherman suggested that CAEL look into relevant research presented at recent conferences and invite those speakers to present at VHEAG meetings. Finally, Georges Sanon expressed



interest in learning more about the [Veterans First Act](#), and Amy offered to reach out to a staffer of the lead sponsor to invite them to present.

Update on the IJF Education Working Group

Kim Eck, IJF Education Working Group Vice Chair and ISAC Training Coordinator

Kim Eck provided an update on the activities of the Illinois Joining Forces Education Working Group. She described the group's early accomplishments (such as workshops, webinars, and a quarterly newsletter) as well as more recent ones like the Illinois Military Prior Learning Assessment Scan and Student Veteran Leadership Day. At the working group's recent retreat, a decision was made to redefine its focus, moving from a structure of five subgroups to two more focused lines of effort: resources and informed choice. The first line of effort will aim to identify a comprehensive array of resources to help student veterans and their families successfully navigate the higher education landscape. The second focus area will aim to provide mechanisms and access to tools that can help student veterans and their families make informed decisions about their career and educational goals and how to best utilize the benefits available to them.

One important project of the IJF Education Working Group is 2016-2017 will be training a 'corps' of experts on federal and state resources available to military-connected students. The group discussed the ideal audience for this training (near peers, Veteran Service Officers, etc.) as well as the importance of reaching prospective students early in Transition Assistance Programs (TAP). Additionally, veteran coordinators should expect to receive a survey in the near future in preparation for the Student Veteran Leadership Symposium and VHEAG members are encouraged to complete it and assist in the dissemination of a separate survey for student veterans. VHEAG members are also encouraged to get involved in the Education Working Group, and those who are already involved should consider volunteering for the next slate of officers in 2017. Ms. Eck's PowerPoint presentation is attached with this meeting summary.

Student Veteran Career Summit

October 7-8, 2016

Amy Sherman asked meeting participants to spread the word to their student veterans about the upcoming Student Veteran Career Summit which CAEL will host at the DePaul Center in downtown Chicago in collaboration with National ABLE Network and SVA-IL. The summit will feature an intensive workshop to help participants develop their personal brand by enhancing their resume-writing, job interviewing, LinkedIn, and networking skills. The event will include a reception with employers, providing participants with the chance to grow their professional network. Please see the attached flyer and the [registration page](#) for more detailed information.

Discharged Servicemember Task Force Update

Emanuel Johnson, Program Manager, Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs

Emanuel Johnson provided an update on the Discharged Servicemember Task Force, whose mission is to investigate the re-entry process for servicemembers who return to civilian life after

being engaged in an active theatre. The task force is currently preparing to issue its annual report, which will cover the following topics: the recognition of military learning; veterans' treatment courts; the definition of 'veteran' for eligibility purposes; and access to mental health care. The report's recommendations include: funding the Illinois Veterans Grant and reestablishing the Military Training Counts initiative; expanding the definition of 'veteran' to increase eligibility for state benefits; and supporting existing and new tele-health initiatives and mental health workforce recruitment and retention efforts.

The group also discussed the importance of reintroducing a recommendation in the report that would discourage block transfers of military credits that can lead to excess credit issues. Meeting participants worked together to draft language for the recommendation, which was edited by Amy Sherman and Cynthia Rathunde and sent to Emanuel Johnson for incorporation into the report. Mr. Johnson's PowerPoint presentation is attached with this meeting summary, and the Discharged Servicemember Task Force Annual Report will be disseminated to the VHEAG once it has been finalized.

Open Mic

During the open mic portion of the meeting, participants discussed the following:

- Several meeting participants agreed that the application process for several of the national veteran-friendly school rankings has become intrusive and onerous; at least one VHEAG member school is considering whether to skip the application this year.
- [ADA 25 Advancing Leadership](#) is offering several leadership development opportunities for people with disabilities; please share the attached flyer with eligible individuals in your network.
- The next VHEAG meeting will take place on September 29 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. **Please hold the date.** Details to follow.

In Attendance

Joseph	Bochantin	College of Lake County
Megan	Burda	DePaul University
Christopher	Chalko	Veterans Upward Bound at Roosevelt University
Megan	Everett	Robert R. McCormick Foundation
Brian	Gilligan	Morton College
Gricelda	Gonzalez	Saint Xavier University
Emanuel	Johnson	Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs
Anitra	King	Elgin Community College
Andrew	Miller	CAEL
Haydee	Nunez	DePaul University
Ramon	Prieto	National Louis University
Cynthia	Rathunde	City Colleges of Chicago
Georges	Sanon	Prairie State College
Amy	Sherman	CAEL
Bryan	Tuika-Soske	Wilbur Wright College