



# MEETING SUMMARY

*Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group  
January 31, 2017*

## Welcome and Introductions

The twenty-second meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group (VHEAG) was held on January 31, 2017, at the CAEL headquarters in Chicago. There were 17 attendees, including representatives from colleges and universities in the Chicago area, guest presenters, and CAEL staff. A full list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary.

## Illinois Military PLA Task Force Report

Cynthia Rathunde, City Colleges of Chicago  
Amy Sherman, CAEL

Cynthia Rathunde and Amy Sherman, appointees on the Illinois Military PLA Task Force, provided an overview of the recommendations the task force issued in December, 2016. The task force was created by Public Act 99-395 to study and make recommendations on how to effectuate prior learning assessment for recognition of military learning. Its recommendations for institutions of higher education include:

- Use JST & CCAF Transcript to award academic credit
- Use DD-214 to award academic credit
- Use ACE Military Guide for evaluation of training and recommendation of credit
- Adopt policies and procedures to protect against awarding of excess military credits
- Participate in Military Training Counts
- Provide orientation and advising specifically designed for student veterans
- Ensure staff members are trained on how to award credit based on DD-214, JSF, & CCAF

The task force also issued recommendations for policymakers, including the establishment of an implementation working group. The full task force report, as well as the PowerPoint presented at the meeting, are attached with this meeting summary.

## VHEAG Best Practices Survey Results

Amy Morys, CAEL

Amy Morys shared the results of the VHEAG Best Practices survey, which was completed by 19 VHEAG members. The survey results provide insight into VHEAG institutions' policies and practices in the following areas:

- Tracking student veterans
- Veterans as staff members

- Fostering a strong veteran community
- Advising
- Faculty training
- Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)
- Peer services
- Institutional commitment

Based on the survey results, it is recommended that VHEAG institutions focus on:

- Improving tracking of student veterans
- Expanding faculty and staff training
- Continuing to introduce veteran lounges/resource centers
- Offering all methods of PLA

VHEAG meeting attendees were particularly interested in the subject of student veteran data collection. Only five survey respondents (26%) reported that their institution currently tracks student veterans. Attendees shared that lack of training and/or access to tracking systems, overly-complicated tracking procedures, and self-identification issues can impede effective tracking efforts. The group expressed interest in further exploring effective tracking strategies as a future meeting topic.

Amy's presentation on the survey results is attached with this meeting summary.

## Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE)


Timothy Nellett, PAVE National Team

Jamie Richards, Purdue University PAVE Program

Timothy Nellett provided an overview of the Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE) program. PAVE is a peer support program that connects incoming student veterans with trained student veterans already on campus in order to help them navigate college life, identify challenges they are facing, refer them to the appropriate resource on or off campus, and provide ongoing support to their academic and personal ventures. PAVE aims to:

- Ease the transition from the military to the university
- Improve student veterans' sense of connectedness to the university
- Create a safe haven and source of support
- Identify mental health issues and other concerns in a timely fashion and connect student veterans with appropriate resources
- Improve student veteran academic performance
- Increase student veteran retention rates

In partnership with Student Veterans of America, PAVE has been implemented on 42 partner campuses in the U.S. PAVE Campus Teams have four key roles: peer advisor, team leader, veteran service coordinator, and university champion. Peer advisors generally provide peer support to 3-5 student veterans for the students' first two semesters. Team leaders are student veterans that support peer advisors and also focus on outreach, recruitment, and sustainability of the program.



The team leader position is paid (usually VA work-study), but the peer advisor position may be paid or volunteer-based (varies from campus to campus). The veteran service coordinator is the lynchpin of the campus program and helps to recruit peer advisors and team leaders and ensure the continuity of the program. The university champion is typically the veteran services coordinator's supervisor and acts as a liaison with higher level leadership.

The PAVE Program consists of four key components:

- Structured training curriculum for Campus Teams
- Ongoing implementation support
- Research and quality improvement
- Portfolio of online tools

Online training for Campus Team members is supplemented by support from PAVE's national staff via emails, conference calls, group chat, feedback on reports, and technical assistance. In addition to training, PAVE's online platform offers a variety of tools, including tracking and a management console (which includes space for a resource guide).

Jamie Richards described his experience with PAVE at Purdue University. Initially, Purdue experimented with a mentorship program that paired veterans on the faculty with military-connected students. Unfortunately, tracking was difficult, there were barriers between the faculty mentors and the students, and there was a lack of engagement. Ultimately, the mentorship program was not successful.

Purdue then decided to implement a new program with PAVE, which has been much more effective than the previous mentorship program. Jamie attributes the PAVE program's success at Purdue to the following characteristics:


- PAVE is peer-to-peer (rather than a mentorship model)
- There is a clear leadership structure
- The program is easy to track and administer
- The PAVE national team provides support as needed

Tim and Jamie's presentation is attached with this meeting summary.

## Updates from NAVPA

Cynthia Rathunde, City Colleges of Chicago

Cynthia Rathunde provided updates from the recent National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators (NAVPA) national conference. One of the resolutions approved at the NAVPA conference was to work with the State Approving Agencies nationally to seek their support in gaining access to funds from reporting fees. Reporting fees have been reduced for the next seven years. One of the main concerns relates to challenges keeping these funds at institutions targeted for serving student veterans and families. They are meant to be in a separate fund (not used for operating expenses) so that they can be used for certification, programming, training, etc.



Another important resolution encourages the VA and DoD to work together to provide VA healthcare enrollment to servicemembers as they are separating. Once they get to school, they often encounter difficulties signing up, monitoring their status in the process, getting transportation, etc. Streamlined VA healthcare enrollment would not only satisfy the Affordable Care Act individual mandate but would also allow student veterans avoid any healthcare fees charged by their institution. There is currently a pilot program and the goal is for it to be expanded.

Finally, there was a push for greater support for Veterans Upward Bound (VUB), which provides assessment and enhancement of basic skills through counseling, mentoring, tutoring and academic instruction in the core subject areas. The primary goal of the program is to increase the rate at which participants enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs. The resolution seeks to ensure that veterans leverage VUB to obtain the support they need before they start school so they don't have to use GI Bill dollars for remedial assistance. There is a VUB program led by Chris Chalko at Roosevelt University, and the group discussed the possibility of inviting him to present on VUB again at a future meeting, as it has been several years since he has presented to the group.

## Going Forward

CAEL's work with the VHEAG is made possible by a grant from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. The current grant term ends in September of 2017. It would be helpful to receive feedback from VHEAG members about the group's activities and impact. If you would like to provide a testimonial to be included with the next grant application, please send an email with a concrete explanation of what your involvement in the VHEAG has meant for veteran services at your institution.

CAEL is working with several VHEAG members one-on-one to help them develop strategies for employer engagement and facilitate contact with employers. All VHEAG members were invited to participate last fall, but if any of you have not filled out the data collection form and would like to participate, please work with your career services staff to submit it to us as soon as possible. The form is attached with this meeting summary.

## Announcements

**February 21:** Black History Month Veterans Event at Malcolm X College. African American veterans will be honored for their service. If you are interested in attending, please contact Robert Thompson at [rthompson82@ccc.edu](mailto:rthompson82@ccc.edu)

**March 11:** Student Veteran Career Summit. Organized by CAEL, this daylong summit will help your student veterans develop essential career search skills like resume-writing, interviewing, networking, and more. Please encourage your student veterans to attend. Participants must register on Eventbrite: <https://vetsummit.eventbrite.com>

**March 22:** Strategies for Advising Student Veterans Workshop. Organized by CAEL, this workshop has been developed to help strengthen academic advising for student veterans. Please

encourage your academic services staff to attend. Participants must register on Eventbrite: <https://vetadvising.eventbrite.com>

**March/April:** Volunteer opportunities will be available at the Shedd Aquarium Veterans Garden this spring. If you or your student veterans would be interested in volunteering, please contact Ramon Prieto at [rprieto@nl.edu](mailto:rprieto@nl.edu)

**April 19:** Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group (VHEAG) meeting at 55 E. Monroe St. in Chicago. Please keep an eye out for a calendar invitation from CAEL.

**June 30 - July 8:** The 2017 Department of Defense Warrior Games will be held in Chicago. Approximately 250 seriously wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans will participate in the competition. The wounded warrior athletes will represent the Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, and Special Operations. For more information, please visit <http://www.dodwarriorgames.com/>

**July 15:** Veterans Softball Tournament organized by the Road Home Program, the Chicago Park District, and the 19<sup>th</sup> Ward. It will be located at Beverly Park. There is a team recruitment event on March 2 at Cork & Kerry (10614 S. Western). If you or any other veterans you know would be interested in participating, please contact Sheri Gross at [Sheri\\_Gross@rush.edu](mailto:Sheri_Gross@rush.edu)

**Baby Brigade: A Parenting Program for Veterans and Their Partners** - The Road Home Program is offering this opportunity to help connect veterans and their partners with other veteran families to share and learn about parenting young children. Please see the attached flyer for details.

## In Attendance

Joseph	Bochantin	College of Lake County (via phone)
Gricelda	Gonzalez	Saint Xavier University
Sheri	Gross	Rush University
Malcom	Heard	Moraine Valley Community College
Andrew	Miller	CAEL
Amy	Morys	CAEL
Timothy	Nellett	PAVE
Roman	Ortega	Lewis University
Weston	Polaski	Northeastern University (via phone)
Ramon	Prieto	National Louis University
Cynthia	Rathunde	City Colleges of Chicago
Jamie	Richards	Purdue University PAVE Program
Georges	Sanon	Prairie State College
Amy	Sherman	CAEL
Robert	Thompson	Malcolm X College
Colleen	Tomanek	Harper College
Kim	Wilson	North Central College