

MEETING SUMMARY

*Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group
July 19, 2017*

Welcome and Introductions

The twenty-fourth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group (VHEAG) was held on July 19, 2017, at the CAEL headquarters in Chicago. There were 17 attendees. A full list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary.

Member Updates

Julia Jenkins: Northwestern University is working on large initiative with four different working groups involving faculty, staff, students, and alumni. The groups are looking at how the university serves its military-connected populations. Findings will be presented to the university's executive leadership team in the fall.

Jacob Hill: Elmhurst College was just approved for an American Legion auxiliary grant. The grant will fund a September 11th remembrance event that will also include a presentation on veteran pathways to higher education.


Anitra King: Elgin Community College just opened veterans resource center in May and is working with the American Legion to have them meet with student veterans and help get them involved.

Megan Everett: The Robert R. McCormick Foundation Veterans Program has three major areas: employment (including entrepreneurship and higher education), behavioral health and wellness, and assistance navigating existing resources. Currently, most funding takes place in the Chicago area, but the program may expand to other parts of the state as resources allow.

Amy Sherman: CAEL's Veterans Team has been presenting 'Returning to Learning' briefings to Chicago-area Illinois National Guard and Reserve units since 2015. These briefings aim to assist servicemembers interested in pursuing higher education by providing important information on such topics as GI Bill benefits and military prior learning assessment. The team is currently in the process of developing an animated video to share a condensed version of this briefing with a broader audience.

Ashley Becker: The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) has found that there is often a disconnect on how to interact with student veterans in various settings on campus. To help remedy this issue, a special training has been developed that will soon be expanded so that it will soon be available to all community colleges in the state.

Julie Carballo: North Central College has a new graduate assistant position open for the veterans program, so if you know anyone interested in the opportunity, please contact her.



Taylor Colliau: Student Veterans of America - Illinois (SVA-IL) is launching a new program called “Fall-In!” during which SVA-IL members will participate in a leadership summit as well as a social event.

Student Veterans of America Policy Priorities

William Hubbard, Vice President of Government Affairs
Student Veterans of America (SVA)

SVA is a chapter network with 1,459 chapters in 50 states and 4 countries with about 140,000 active chapter members. Its focus is to empower veterans to be informed consumers, both in terms of the GI Bill as well as education in general. SVA invests in high impact programs to sustain chapters and help student veterans navigate their transition.

SVA’s Department of Government Affairs is a relatively new unit that seeks to advocate on behalf of student veterans by informing policy makers in both the legislative and executive branches and change laws and policies to benefit veterans. In addition to working with the White House and relevant agencies and legislative committees, the unit also partners with many external organizations, including military/veteran serving organizations as well as higher education and consumer advocacy groups.

SVA’s role in policy is to:

- Educate and inform policy makers on the issues student veterans face
- Gather and exchange relevant information
- Testify at hearings as subject matter experts for student veterans
- Lobby to implement laws and policy that benefit student veterans

Currently, SVA’s Department of Government Affairs is focused on the Forever GI Bill, which is on track to be voted on in the U.S. House and Senate before the next recess. Key highlights of the Forever GI Bill:

- **Purple Heart Equity:** Grants full GI Bill benefits to Purple Heart recipients regardless of total time in service
- **Yellow Ribbon for Survivors:** Removes technical oversight that excludes survivors from the Yellow Ribbon Program
- **Reservist Equity:** Addresses technical oversight and adds 12304b and 12301h order codes to VA’s definition of “active duty service”
- **School Closure Equity:** All students using the GI Bill would now have a chance for restitution, just like their civilian counterparts using Dept. of Ed. programs
- **Making It “Forever”:** Ends the arbitrary 15-year use-it-or-lose-it time limit and recognizes we shouldn’t punish veterans and family members who go back to school later in life



Q&A Session

Jacob Hill asked about SVA's recruiting strategies. Will stated that SVA does not actively engage in recruiting. The network is entirely organic. They do have a chapter engagement team that can help with chapters that are just getting started. This strategy appears to be working, as SVA performs a full scrub every year to ensure that chapters are active and has not seen any challenges with chapter growth.

Megan Everett asked if SVA is working with the VA to help make sure veterans know how to maximize their GI Bill benefits. Will replied that this is an important challenge, and SVA views it as a priority to help veterans understand and use benefits effectively. For example, SVA often encourages veterans to start at a community college and pay out of pocket so they can reserve their benefits for 2 years of a bachelor's degree and then 2 years of master's degree. The organization works the VA as well as the DoD to help veterans become informed consumers.

Anita Lumpkin asked if there have been discussions about Yellow Ribbon for Active Duty personnel. Will responded that, while there has been some discussion on this topic, generally speaking, the recommendation is typically to pursue Tuition Assistance instead of the GI Bill. In cases where Tuition Assistance is not sufficient to cover costs at a private institution, it is important for veterans to understand that they can also explore Department of Education funding options - sometimes, veterans are concerned that this would be 'double dipping' but it's absolutely not.

In response to several questions from Amy Sherman, Will shared the following information:

Low-cost tests: Currently, if veterans using the Post 9/11 GI Bill take a national test like CLEP or LearningCounts, it is rounded up to a full month of entitlement instead of actual cost. Fortunately, once the Forever GI Bill is passed, beneficiaries will be able to use funds for low-cost tests on a prorated basis of payment.

Online programs & housing allowance: One provision of the Forever GI Bill addresses the issues that can arise when students do not live near their school; the bill will make the housing allowance reflective of housing costs where the classes actually happen.

The 85/15 rule: After the Forever GI Bill is passed, SVA will take a close look at the 85/15 rule, which is intended to prevent predatory practices but can pose problems for institutions seeking to create gap or accelerated programming that recognizes military learning for college credit.

In response to questions from Anita Lumpkin, Will explained 1) that the housing allowance for dependents will not change and 2) that the current bill does not address problems with veterans who must weigh financial implications against academic ones when they consider withdrawing from a class. However, this issue will be examined next year after the Forever GI Bill is passed.

Updates on Student Veteran Initiatives from ICCB and IBHE

Ashley Becker, Senior Director for Academic Affairs

Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)

Amanda Winters, Assistant Director for Academic Affairs

Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)

Illinois Military PLA Task Force

As a result of recommendations issued by Illinois Military PLA Task Force in December, 2016, Illinois has a new law that requires all public institutions to make their military PLA policies visible on their website. ICCB is working to make sure that Illinois community colleges not only comply with this law, but also post this information front-and-center on their websites to make sure it is easy for student veterans to find. In addition to this new law, it is also hoped that, within the next several years, the Task Force recommendations will result in the establishment of a faculty panel to evaluate military PLA credit for statewide transfer.

Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit (MCMC)

As a member of MCMC, Illinois has received a portion of the grant funds the collaborative received from the Lumina Foundation. One effort these funds will support is a new project to explore opportunities to streamline education pathways for veterans in the field of criminal justice. IBHE and ICCB hope to expand the project's focus in the future to include human resources and TDL (Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics). These three fields were chosen after an analysis of Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs data indicated that they align with some of the most common military occupational specialties among military veterans in Illinois. Initial results from this project are expected in spring of 2018.

Community Engagement Opportunities for Veterans

Dan Alberti, City Impact Manager

The Mission Continues

The Mission Continues is a nonprofit organization that aims to empower veterans who are adjusting to life at home to find purpose through community impact. The organization's Fellowship Program provides a monthly living stipend to support post-9/11 veterans who perform 20 hours of service per week for 26 weeks at the local nonprofit of their choice. Fellows receive three days of orientation and training in advance of the fellowship, as well as coaching through the process. Sixty percent of Fellows are enrolled in school at the time of their fellowship, which can provide them with valuable professional experience. Ninety-three percent of Fellows are employed full-time, enrolled in school, or retired after completing their six-month service commitment.

The Mission Continues also operates the Service Platoon Program, which consists of veteran-led teams of volunteers who live in the same community. Each platoon has a specific mission and coordinates with local organizations. In addition to platoon leader role, veterans can also gain valuable experience in roles such as project coordinator, social media specialist, etc. There are currently 71 Service Platoons in 21 states across the country, with three in the Chicago area.



In addition to these two programs, The Mission Continues also organizes ‘Mass Deployments’ during which teams of approximately 100 veterans “deploy” to a specific city for a week-long project, as well as a women veterans leadership summit called Her Mission Continues. The benefits of being a Mission Continues member not only include a monthly living stipend (for Fellowship Program and Service Platoon Leaders), but also opportunities to translate existing military-based skills to the civilian workforce, develop new professional skills, grow personal and professional networks, and connect with the civilian community. If you would like to recommend The Mission Continues to your students, please direct them to The Mission Continues website.

Going Forward

Meeting participants were asked to share suggestions for future meeting topics. The following suggestions were shared:

- Training for Joint Services Transcript (JST) review
- Training on changes to the GI Bill
- Exploring strategies to streamline communications with servicemembers/veterans who are inundated with information
- More information about CAEL’s Return to Learning briefings
- More information about what careers veterans are pursuing
- Exploring connections with the American Legion and/or other community organizations

In Attendance

Dan	Alberti	The Mission Continues
Ashley	Becker	Illinois Community College Board
Julie	Carballo	North Central College
Taylor	Colliau	Student Veterans of America - Illinois
Megan	Everett	Robert R. McCormick Foundation
Jacob	Hill	Elmhurst College
Will	Hubbard	Student Veterans of America (on phone)
Julia	Jenkins	Northwestern University
Anitra	King	Elgin Community College
Anita	Lumpkin	Loyola University Chicago
Andrew	Miller	CAEL
Amy	Morys	CAEL
Ramon	Prieto	National Louis University
Cynthia	Rathunde	National Association of Veterans’ Program Administrators
Amy	Sherman	CAEL
Bryan	Soske	Wilbur Wright College
Amanda	Winters	Illinois Board of Higher Education