

# MEETING SUMMARY

*Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group  
October 31, 2017*

## Welcome and Introductions

The twenty-fifth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group (VHEAG) was held on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017, at the CAEL headquarters in Chicago. A full list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary.

### *Member Updates*

**Jennifer Gettings:** In her role at Loyola University Chicago, Jennifer is continuing the work of assisting student veterans through the admissions and enrollment process, ensuring that as credits are considered for transfer, credit for military learning is part of that process.

**Weston Polaski:** In his role as Vice President of Outreach for SVA-Illinois, Weston expressed appreciation for the VHEAG network and its role in keeping SVA-IL up to date on policy and benefit changes.

**Ramon Prieto:** National Louis remains committed to helping staff and faculty understand veterans in the higher education space, and doing meaningful work that brings authenticity and sincerity back to the community.


**Georges Sanon:** Prairie State College is honoring Vietnam veterans with a ceremony on November 9<sup>th</sup>, from 2:00-5:00p.m. at the Prairie State Convention Center. The ceremony will include partnering municipalities from these districts: Beecher Creek, Steger, and Olympia Fields.

**Brooke Roche:** Oakton Community College is hosting a lunch-and-learn series aimed at educating student veterans on healthcare benefits and community-based resources. Brooke was also excited to share that Oakton's student veterans club had been on hiatus but is now up and running.

**Rebel Barber:** Rebel serves as Oakton Community College's recruitment and outreach specialist. She noted that Oakton's upcoming lunch-and-learn will include a photographer, providing student veterans the opportunity to have a professional headshot taken for use on LinkedIn and other professional profiles.

**Jacob Hill:** Elmhurst College recently hosted a 9-11 remembrance event, supported by a grant from the American Legion Auxiliary. Going forward, Jacob is working with Giving DuPage to provide student veterans with opportunities to get involved in community service projects.

**Kevin Smith:** Governor's State University is pleased to report that their student veteran population has, in the last several years, grown from 220 to just under 400. GSU will be hosting



its Annual Veteran's Entrepreneurial Boot Camp, on November 28, 2017 from 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m. The event is free to veterans (\$25 for non-veterans). This event educates veterans on the advantages of being a veteran in business, obtaining the tools to plan and leverage a business at any stage, and developing a road map to success.

Cynthia Rathunde: Roosevelt University is focusing on training staff and faculty on how to evaluate the JST and award academic credit for military learning. These processes will be used across the institution, throughout different departments.

Anahi Sariles: North Central College is currently engaged in outreach efforts to area community colleges, informing staff and students on the resources and services available to student veterans who transfer to NCC. Outreach efforts have included the College of DuPage, Harper Community College, and Waubensee Community College, with more in the upcoming semester.

## Resources for Data-Drive Leaders: Findings from Student Veterans of America's Research

Dr. Chris Cate, Vice-President of Research  
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.

### *The NVEST Project*

Chris began the presentation by outlining the methodology behind SVA's Million Records Project, explaining that by cross-referencing data from the Department of Veterans Affairs with data from the National Student Clearinghouse, the NVEST research project was better able to tell the story of student veterans over a period of time.

The research sought to answer two primary research questions:

- What are the post-secondary academic outcomes of student veterans who used the Post-9/11 GI Bill between August 9, 2009 through December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013?
- In its first six years, what has the Post-9/11 GI Bill produced in terms of degrees and graduates?

Additionally, the research aimed to dispel four myths and misconceptions about student veterans:

- Student veterans are dropping out at high percentages
- The GI Bill is not allowing student veterans to earn degrees
- Student veterans are only earning certificates or associate's degrees

- The degrees they are earning under the GI Bill do not prepare them for the civilian workforce or high paying jobs

The NVEST data dispelled these myths by showing:

- 54% of student veterans in the sample completed a post-secondary certificate or degree, with 18% of student veterans actively persisting through a certificate or degree. Overall, student veterans had a 72% success rate in pursuing a certificate or degree.
- Over half of student veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill earned degrees in one of three high-growth, high-demand fields that greatly contribute to the country's economy. 27% of GI Bill users earned certificates or degrees in business, 14% earned degrees in STEM fields, and 10% earned degrees in healthcare.
- 63% earned a bachelor degree or higher

### *Future Research*

#### **Expanding and extending NVEST data**

SVA is continuing its research, with preliminary data showing that half of student veterans are earning more than one degree or certificate. This data is key to showing that student veterans are on an educational continuum which is vital to America's economic future. Preliminary data showed that 34.1% of student veterans who earned an associate degree went on to complete a bachelor degree. 28% of veterans who earn a bachelor degree went on to earn a graduate degree.

Resembling research about non-traditional students in general, SVA's current research is showing that student veterans are adult learners who often take a break from earning a degree or certificate due to planned or unplanned life circumstances (i.e., having a baby, changing jobs, relocating, etc.).

SVA's future research and data will:

- Extend by adding new cohorts to the NVEST Project that will allow for reporting of annual academic outcome trends.
- Expand by adding other external data sources that will allow exploration of factors influencing student veteran academic outcomes

#### **Student Veteran Pathfinder Map Project**

SVA also plans to complete a student veteran pathfinder map project, aimed at showing the life-cycle of a student veteran by identifying key decision points. This multi-year project will explore the decision points for students to, through, and beyond college and result in the creation of an interactive map that transitioning veterans will be able to use to explore different paths and potential outcomes.

SVA will open the survey to student veterans in November, 2017, with initial results presented at [SVA's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference](#). Chris Cate's slide deck is attached with this meeting summary.

## Marketing to Enroll Servicemembers & Veterans

Beth Doyle, Vice President for LearningCounts, CAEL

Beth Doyle led a workshop on messaging and communication strategies to enroll more military servicemembers and veterans and engage them with PLA. Her slide deck is attached with this meeting summary.

### *Adult Learner Personas*

Beth began the session pointing out that current marketing efforts typically focus on traditionally-aged students, ignoring the growing adult learner market. United States Census Bureau data reveals that 36 million Americans, or 22% of adults have earned some college credit but no degree. Also, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the number of veterans using Post 9-11 GI Bill benefits is expected to increase to more than 5 million by 2020. Beth then led a discussion of learner personas, which dig deeper into the motivators, needs, and emotional drivers of a particular market, going beyond a particular demographic.


She pointed to a study by the Parthenon Group called [The Differentiated University](#) study, which used focus groups and surveys to organize students into the following personas: Aspiring Academics (24%), Coming of Age (11%), Career Starter (18%), Career Accelerator (21%), Industry Switcher (18%), and Academic Wanderer (8%). Adult learners are represented by the Career Accelerator, Industry Switcher, and Academic Wanderer categories. Beth noted that members of the Career Accelerator group were particularly likely to express interest in PLA. She encouraged participants to bring this information back to their marketing departments, as it would likely influence messaging to these different personas.

Beth then asked the group to describe the personas of potential military/veteran students. Participants listed the following characteristics:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Retired                                   | Changing Careers                            |
| Providers                                 | Seeking societal validation                 |
| Have children or aging parents to support | Require accommodations                      |
| Don't want to waste their VA benefit      | Age 26(ish)                                 |
| One-term service members                  | Seeking internship/externship opportunities |
| Full-time employee                        | Wanting a promotion                         |

### *Targeting the Market*

Beth then discussed how to effectively target the market, which is necessary to ensure that marketing resources are used wisely. Categories that might help to narrow the target market



include people with some college but no degree, people employed in certain local industries, and people within a specified distance from the institution. One potentially useful tool for targeting the market is [Social Explorer](#), which can be used to explore the density of different populations in specific geographic units (including veterans and people with some college but no degree).

## CAEL in partnership with SVA: Making the business case for student veterans

Amy Sherman, CAEL

Amy described work that CAEL will be conducting in partnership with SVA for spring 2018 that will focus on making the business case for investing in student veterans. CAEL will be setting up meetings with 5-7 Chicagoland college and university presidents, using the NVEST data to inform them about the business case for recruiting and retaining student veterans. With the support of the McCormick Foundation, CAEL and SVA will also engage a larger audience by hosting a symposium will be held in late-spring, where CAEL will ask higher education leadership to commit to one to two new best institutional practices to support their student veteran population.

Amy asked if meeting participants would be available to provide feedback as CAEL works to move this project forward; several participants agreed to be part of the process. Megan Everett suggested that one “best practice” university leaders could commit to is allowing their veteran coordinator to be a regularly attending/contributing member of the VHEAG. Megan also asked CAEL to craft a one-page inventory of the topics that have been covered in the VHEAG, to distribute to symposium attendees.

### Going Forward

When asked about topics for future network meetings, meeting participants expressed interest in learning more about practical strategies for recruiting and retaining student veterans. It was suggested that VHEAG members bring marketing/communications personnel from their institutions to the workshop, to do hands-on planning for marketing initiatives. CAEL committed to working with network members to bring in a presenter with the knowledge and skillset to help them craft effective, cost-effective strategies.

**The next meeting of the VHEAG will be from  
10:00a.m.-2:00p.m. on  
Tuesday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018.**



## In Attendance

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Rebel Barber      | Oakton Community College               |
| Chris Cate        | Student Veterans of America            |
| Beth Doyle        | CAEL                                   |
| Megan Everett     | The Robert R. McCormick Foundation     |
| Jennifer Gettings | Loyola University Chicago              |
| Jacob Hill        | Elmhurst College                       |
| Amy Morys         | CAEL                                   |
| Roman Ortega, Jr. | Lewis University                       |
| Weston Polaski    | Student Veterans of America - Illinois |
| Ramon Prieto      | National Louis University              |
| Cynthia Rathunde  | Roosevelt University                   |
| Brooke Roche      | Oakton Community College               |
| Georges Sanon     | Prairie State College                  |
| Anahi Sariles     | North Central College                  |
| Palak Shukla      | Loyola University Chicago              |
| Kevin Smith       | Governors State University             |
| Amy Sherman       | CAEL                                   |