



MEETING SUMMARY

*Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group
January 29, 2018*

Welcome and Introductions

The twenty-sixth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group (VHEAG) was held on January 29th, 2018, at the CAEL headquarters in Chicago. A full list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary.

Saddleback College's Innovation in Higher Education Award for the Pathway to Completion - Veteran Articulation Track (V-CAT) Initiative

Terence Nelson, Veterans Education and Transition Services (VETS) Program Coordinator and Veterans Counselor for Saddleback College in Mission Viejo, California

Background

Saddleback College received the Innovation in Higher Education Award from California's Department of Finance to create an articulation track aimed at creating a more seamless transfer between two- and four-year institutions in their region. The CA Dept of Finance Innovation Award is a \$2 million award that promotes out-of-the-box thinking and programs. You can view Saddleback's grant application on the California Department of Finance's website, under "Innovation Award."

Terence also shared information from a presentation he made at The National Association of Veteran Program Administrators (NAVPA) conference on focus group research examining the academic experience for veterans who suffer from hearing loss as well as the top 10 things student veterans would like faculty to know.

Terence shared that he has been in higher education for approximately 20 years. He joined Saddleback College as Assistant Dean to oversee special populations and build-up of the veterans resource center. Now he is back in the faculty ranks and running the veterans program.

Saddleback College currently enrolls approximately 27,000 students. They offer comprehensive programs, a transfer track, as well as several vocational education programs. Saddleback transfers out about 4,000 students every year. Terence handles student services for veterans, at the Veterans Education and Transition Services (VETS) office, which has existed for 10 years. More information on Saddleback College can be found in the attached PowerPoint presentation.

What Data Sources Exist for You to Have Relevant Information to Gear Your Services and Rationalize Funding?

Student Veterans of America's (SVA) "NVEST Project" includes descriptive data and seminal research about student veteran characteristics and academic performance. NVEST data is a key resource for faculty and staff advocating for student veterans across the institution. It demonstrates that student veterans graduate at a higher rate than their non-veteran peers, they are more likely to go into STEM majors, etc. The PowerPoint presentation on NVEST given by Dr. Chris Cates of SVA at the Oct. 31, 2017 VHEAG meeting is attached for your reference.

Terence pointed out that another data source is the **VA website** which allows you to review employment and disability data as well as comprehensive information about veterans education benefits.

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families - Syracuse (IVMF) is also a valuable open-source of information regarding student veterans. Its reports detail descriptive statistics about veteran income, age distribution, and percentage of total population. The site also provides information about institutions, including Yellow Ribbon status and numbers of matriculated veterans by region. For example, there are 191,000 veterans in Cook County. Twenty-five percent are 75 years and older. You can look at unemployment and age ranges which can inform outreach and support plans.

Columbia University also has an open resource in the form of a free transition course where students can work with a Columbia professor and fellow student veterans. More information can be found at edX.org.


Tracking student veterans is imperative for every institution, but it is not always an easy task. Terence noted that, when possible, institutions may benefit from having a homegrown data system. He recommended starting with a conversation with your IT department to determine the type of data you would like to collect, the reports you would like to be able to run, and the factors you are interested in tracking. Sometimes data storage and retrieval can be accomplished through an existing SMS/LMS, but it also may require additional modules or the creation of a "home grown" database.

Saddleback College Veterans Education & Transition Services (VETS) Program

Terence discussed the motivators for student veteran enrollment and matriculation. He noted that some student veterans enroll solely with the intention of collecting the monthly Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), a benefit afforded through the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Saddleback's VETS Program promotes connecting with student veterans, creating a community, and engaging them in the academic experience. The VETS program provides both personal counseling and career counseling. Terence explained that it is important to help students build a new social "tribe," which fosters trust and connection, which leads to persistence and graduation. Terence also emphasized that it is important to celebrate successes to inspire other students.

Terence highlighted the following resources that may be of interest to faculty and staff working with student veterans:

- **Warrior Scholar Program (<https://www.warrior-scholar.org/>):** If a Saddleback student is accepted to this weeklong academic boot camp, the school will pay for that student's transportation/flight to get to the site. Roman Ortega, Jr. noted



that they may be doing a Chicago-centric program soon, potentially hosted at University of Chicago and Northwestern. Amy Sherman and Roman Ortega will reach out to a Warrior Scholar Program contact to potentially come and talk about their program at the next VHEAG meeting.

- **Boots-to-Books Program:** Saddleback has a three-unit Gen Ed-applicable introduction to college course. 30-35 veterans or active military go through and build their portfolio and explore topics such as majors and career plans.

V-CAT Pathway to Completion

Saddleback conducted an environmental scan and realized that students were taking curriculum redundant to the learning indicated on JST and CCAF transcripts. As a result, Terence called the first consortium meeting for Region VIII (LA and Orange County) in March 2009. Twenty-two colleges and universities came together to discuss creating intersegmental pathways and getting instructional faculty members compensated with release time to look at military curriculum. Meeting outcomes were reported to the Cal State Chancellor's office.

Discussion

Marcus Williams said that, with the help of Cynthia Rathunde, the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) launched a program where they have an official JST sent to their registrar. Marcus and an advisor sit down with military-affiliated students and work with them to discuss credits.

Terence pointed out that military credit is not transcribed at Saddleback until the student submits a petition to receive credit. This process protects students from receiving "excess credits" that can impact financial aid.

Amy Sherman recommended providing counseling around the petition to receive credit. **She requested a sample petition from schools to share with the group.**

Research on student veterans experience with hearing loss in the academic environment

Saddleback found that many student veterans suffer from hearing loss as a result of their time in the service. They launched a study, surveying student veterans and facilitating focus groups on student veteran experiences exploring what they thought faculty should know.

Many veterans don't know who their school's veterans counselor is. Veterans don't mind talking about service-related disabilities but are hesitant to get additional help. The study found that those with a hearing loss are more likely to report that they feel socially isolated.

- The group discussed confusion around the name (special services, etc.) and/or changing the language around disability services
- Terence discussed normalizing the language and experience or changing the language used about services
- The group addressed the stigma around counseling and disability services, tied to shame-based feelings
- The group talked about confusion about disability ratings such as hearing loss reported after service



Student Veteran Focus Group Research: Top 10 Things Student Veterans Would Like Faculty to Know – Focus Group Research

- Terence reviewed 10 things faculty needs to know about student veterans, which can be viewed in the attachment.

News You Can Use: Updates on the Forever GI Bill

Will Hubbard, Vice President of Government Affairs, Student Veterans of America

Background

Will Hubbard followed up on his CAEL presentation on the Forever GI Bill, which he gave prior to the bill's passing. CAEL invited him back to discuss the bill regulations and what this legislation means on the ground.

Will explained that early last year, SVA worked with other partners to advocate for making 9/11 GI education benefits extend beyond 15 years, providing lifetime eligibility. Many said the Forever GI Bill was a non-starter due to the additional costs. The SVA held a large community meeting with over 60 organizations represented, including members from the Department of Defense, the VA, and the Department of Education. They found that most agreed with the majority of the concepts built into package but took issue with the payment mechanism. In the next three months, SVA worked on getting the bill back on track. It was released in late July and within 30 days it passed the House and Senate unanimously.

The bill has over 30 provisions. Will addressed a few key ones as outlined below. You may find the “plain language” version of the bill pinned at the top of Will’s Twitter page (@hubbard_wj).

School Closures

In the case of school closings such as ITT, student veterans were left out of the opportunity to receive a level of restitution if they were using Title IX funds or loans, because they were using the GI Bill. The VA developed a questionnaire to understand the veterans’ situation and based on these responses, they developed an algorithm to determine whether veterans can receive restored eligibility for the GI bill. This is an ongoing process.

The “High Tech Pilot”

This includes \$15 million dollars so that the VA can offer individuals opportunities to achieve certificates or credentials. This is still being worked out at the implementation level.

The Edith Nourse Rogers STEM scholarship

This provision creates a billion-dollar scholarship lasting over 12 years. The intent is to support veterans who are seeking a degree in a STEM field that typically requires over the average four academic years (engineering degrees are typically longer, etc.). The VA is working

out the algorithm for this process and plans to have this fully implemented by August 1st of this year.

The “Forever” Piece

This piece means individuals have no time limit to use benefits that they’ve earned when applying for their Certificate of Eligibility. They can use GI Bill 50 or 60 years later. Will said there are certain provisions that apply to everyone; however, the bill is backdated only to January 1st, 2013 due to budget issues. Concerns arise with older vets, who left pre-9/11. Looking ahead, “forever” will apply to everybody and there will be no time limit.

Potential hurdles

The bill includes \$30 million for technology upgrades. However, it’s currently unclear whether all will go to support this effort as the funds are kept in a centralized pool. The GI Bill is not the biggest thing that the VA does. Disability compensation cost \$75 billion dollars, compared to the GI Bill which is \$5.6 billion dollars.

Economic Opportunity

At present, economic opportunity doesn’t get the attention that it needs. Among VA departments, it stands at the bottom of the administration. Disability compensation takes up 80% of their workflow. SVA is proposing that the VA create a new economic opportunity unit and bring economic opportunity over to its own administration.

Presentation Follow-up

Joe Bochantin asked if they would receive training on the monthly housing benefit at Association of Veteran Education Certifying Officials (AVECO) in June. Will said the VA has indicated that they do plan to do a roll-out about how this works operationally. **He said that he will follow up on the dates.**

Will said there will be more information on the STEM extension no later than August 1st, 2018. CAEL will invite Will to present again a month or two prior to August. Will said that if attendees have feedback or interests, they can contact him via email or cellphone.

Going Forward & Announcements

- On March 1st, the College of Lake County will host the 2018 Veterans Creative Arts Festival at their Grayslake Campus. Contestants may register at the FHCC and at the College of Lake County. First-place finishers may be eligible to advance to the National Creative Arts Festival, which will take place October 29th - November 5th in Des Moines, Iowa, and will include veterans from throughout the U.S. Contact Joe Bochantin for more information.
- Jacob Hill noted that Elmhurst College is working on a case study about a multi-type institution collaboration event in September. They are thinking about a community of best practices for veterans services that aren’t well-funded, as well as possible avenues for scholarship or panel presentations for talking about best practices for limited budget, limited staffing, etc.
Amy Sherman asked about how others manage limited resources and what are ways members raise funds.



- Andrew Carl mentioned that Benedictine University received a grant to build out their offerings for veterans.
- Kevin Smith said that Governor's State University will be bringing over Admissions and Recruiting into the Veterans Resource Center. He also discussed Governor's State University's National Committee for Humanities, "Veterans Speak" event, for which information is available at [Facebook.com/events/1747631615542156](https://www.facebook.com/events/1747631615542156). Contact Kevin for more information.
- Kevin also noted that Pritzker Military Museum and Library is offering a website with information that schools can use with their own branding. This is a resource that is currently transitioning from beta.
- Roman Ortega announced that Lewis University received a grant to create a peer mentorship program. They provide mentors with \$250/semester. The mentors log their activities. It's an opt-out program so everyone gets paired to the mentors at the start. Each mentor is assigned about 10 mentees. The program is female-to-female, male-to-male, two-year to two-year, four-year to four-year as well. Roman said he's happy to share what they've learned, as well as their toolkit and how to implement this at other institutions. The biggest expenditure is food and mentor stipends. The mentee incentive is a gift book card.
- Roman also mentioned that Lewis University is hosting a "Bridges to Employment" event. This will include 30 different employers that are specifically veterans centric. Networking is the topic. Roman will provide/email additional information when it becomes available.
 - Amy Sherman announced that CAEL is reaching out to 6-7 colleges to set up March meetings so that presidents and VSCs can meet with the national SVA and be briefed on NVEST and best practices. SVA will also make the business case for investing in veterans.
 - In addition to the on-campus visit above, CAEL is working with SVA and the McCormick Foundation on a larger event on April 4th at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. The SVA CEO, Jared Lyon, will speak at the event. It will also feature a panel of a few regional colleges who have made significant progress since signing the "Valuing Veterans pledge" in 2012. CAEL will notify attendees when the invitations are sent to presidents by McCormick. After it goes out, Amy asked attendees to reach out to the person who oversees military affairs (could be student affairs, admissions, etc.) and let them know the invitation has been extended to the president and that the president has been encouraged to bring this key person and the VSC to the April 4 event.
- CAEL is working with several collaborators to produce a guide to assist colleges and universities interested in developing crosswalks and/or accelerated bridge programs based on the Medical Education and Training Campus (METC) curriculum. CAEL expects the toolkit to be released in the spring in electronic form. CAEL will be holding a workshop on the guide in the spring.

**The next meeting of the VHEAG will be on
Monday, June 11th, 2018 from 10 am - 2 pm.**



In Attendance

- **Janine Arriola, North Central College:** Student Veteran at and President of the SVA Club
 - **Gary Barnak, Saddleback College:** Project Manager
 - **Joe Bochantin, College of Lake County:** Veterans Coordinator
 - **Andrew Carl, Benedictine University:** Undergraduate Transfer Admissions
 - **Gricelda Gonzalez, St. Xavier University:** Veterans Compliance Advisor
 - **Sheri Gross, Rush University Medical Center:** Road Home Program
 - **Sean Heraty, Truman College:** Veterans Services Specialist
 - **Jacob Hill, Elmhurst College:** Professor and Veterans Services Coordinator
 - **Will Hubbard, Student Veterans of America:** Vice President of Government Affairs
 - **Julia Jenkins, Northwestern University:** Associate Director of Financial Aid and default Veterans Affairs Specialist
 - **Emanuel Johnson, Robert R. McCormick Foundation:** Program Officer
 - **Anitra King, Elgin Community College:** Veteran Coordinator and Student Success Specialist
 - **Jesus Gomez Molina, University of Illinois Chicago:** Associate Director of Student Veterans Affairs
 - **Tom Molony, Elmhurst College:** Adult Admission Counselor that works a lot with veterans
 - **Terence Nelson, Saddleback College:** Faculty Counselor and Coordinator of Veterans Services
 - **Roman Ortega, Lewis University:** Director of Veterans Affairs and Recruitment
 - **Ramon Prieto, National Louis University:** Director of Veterans & Military Program
 - **Anahi Sariles, North Central College:** Graduate Assistant for Veterans Services
 - **Kevin Smith, Governor's State University:** Director of Veterans Affairs and Test Center Administrator
 - **Cari Stevenson, Kankakee Community College:** Professor of Psychology and partial Veterans Programming Coordinator
 - **Marcus Williams, Herald Washington College Community Colleges of the City of Chicago:** Veterans Services Specialist
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- **Amy Sherman, CAEL:** AVP of Innovation and Policy
 - **Amy Morys, CAEL:** Consultant
 - **Elizabeth Ramer, CAEL:** Project Coordinator