

MEETING SUMMARY

*Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group
September 19, 2018*

Welcome and Introductions

The twenty-ninth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group (VHEAG) was held on September 19, 2018, at the CAEL headquarters in Chicago.

Amy Sherman, CAEL's Associate Vice-President for Policy and Innovation opened the meeting by welcoming participants and detailing the itinerary for the meeting, which included short updates from attendees as well as briefings from Student Veterans of America, the new Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Director of Veterans Services at the University of Northern Colorado.

Student Veterans of America: Forever GI-Bill Updates and Policy Priorities Going Forward

Lauren Augustine, Vice President of Governmental Affairs, SVA

Background


Lauren opened by explaining that she has stepped in as the VP for Government Affairs at SVA, coming on board with SVA to ensure that veterans have a voice in Washington while Will Hubbard is away on an active duty deployment. She explained that SVA supports student veterans through:

- Chapter Leader Academies
- Leadership Institutes
- Scholarships
- Chapter Support Grants

While she is relatively new to the higher education landscape, she is learning a lot in this new role. Lauren is also a veteran, having served in the U.S. Army infantry and as a drone pilot.

Forever GI-Bill Provisions Update

Lauren provided an update regarding the implementation process for provisions within the Forever GI Bill. This October, several provisions of the bill were scheduled to go into effect; however, only 28 of the 31 provisions have currently been implemented. Most of the difficulties lie in the process of updating and implementing the new BAH guidelines. While payments continue to go out to students, a significant number of them are either late or incorrect in their amount. At present, **new students** are receiving the 2017 VA rate instead of the DoD 2018 rate, resulting in overpayment. **Existing students** are receiving the 2017 VA rate without the new cost of living increase, which is resulting in underpayment for some. Once these issues are reconciled,



the VA will not issue debts for overpayments but will send out additional payment to students who were underpaid. The other remaining provisions include the STEM scholarship and the VET TEC program. Lauren encouraged VHEAG members who have been negatively impacted by these delays to submit their experiences directly to her and/or reach out to their legislators. Lauren can be reached at contact@studentveterans.org or by calling 202-223-4710.

A question was asked regarding the new date for updating the zip code provision. Lauren relayed that the VA does not have a date, the best “guesstimate” is mid-late October because there is still a need to complete IT coding and systems testing.

SVA Policy Priorities Going Forward

Lauren then detailed SVA’s policy priorities for student veterans going forward. Those priorities are:

- Being a data-driven organization: Coordinating data-sharing and eliminating data barriers across government agencies
- Economic opportunity at the VA: The establishment of the Veteran Economic Opportunity Administration/ Undersecretary position and transition programs at the VA
- Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization: Count VA and DoD educational benefits as federal funds, rename “Master Promissory Note” to “Student Loan Contract” and preservation of gainful employment and borrowers defense.
- Innovation and research: SVA intends to continue research and study of the issues impacting student veterans

One VHEAG member asked Lauren for an update regarding issues surrounding the transferability of GI Bill Benefits to dependents. Lauren shared that the SVA chose not to weigh in on that issue as less than 10% of service members transfer their Post 9-11 benefits and those service members are a small minority of students engaged in bulk of the SVA chapters. However, Wounded Warrior Project has taken the lead on that issue in a very purposeful way. Amy Sherman suggested that the VHEAG set aside time in a future VHEAG meeting where issues of transferability can be addressed and members have the opportunity to ask more detailed questions.

ILDVA’s New Leadership & Vision

Stephen Curda, Director at Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA)

Background

Amy Sherman introduced Retired Brigadier General Stephen Curda, Director, IDVA. Director Curda has been in this new role as director of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs for only four months, but he has been working with veterans for a long time. In his former role at National Louis University, Director Curda headed up all of the important work on smoothly and successfully facilitating through the university’s academic programs and into their careers.

Vision & Mission of the IDVA

Director Curda began by explaining that the mission of the IDVA is to empower our veterans and families to thrive, whether that be in employment, in home life, in life in general. He also reminded VHEAG members that many people get IDVA confused with the federal Department of Veterans' Affairs, but IDVA is an executive agent to the governor of Illinois. In this capacity, IDVA can help with certain endeavors, such as filing a claim, filing a pension, ensuring the medical benefits, etc., but the decision about the actual services that veterans will be receiving is from the federal government.

Priorities of the IDVA

Director Curda noted that the IDVA employs 70 Veterans Service Officers (VSO) who are informed and equipped with information and knowledge to assist veterans and their families. Whether it be information regarding the GI Bill and other education benefits or benefits unrelated to academic pursuit, they have the information. VSOs can also assist veterans in filing a claim with the Federal VA, how to receive your free fishing license or camping permit. The IDVA sees approximately 1500 veterans every week of the year.

The US Department of Veterans Affairs states that the average claim will be complete 30 days faster if they come through a VSO. So, please encourage student veterans to register with a VSO soon. VSOs love assisting veterans and many tell us they feel this is the greatest job in the world! To find the closest VSO, direct students to the IDVA website (Illinois.GOV/Veterans).

Director Curda briefly outlined some of the additional priorities of the IDVA.

- State Veterans Homes: continue to support our heroes who are no longer able to take care of themselves, or their loved ones are unable to take care of them.
- Strategic Community Outreach
- Enterprise Automation
- Internal Staff Processes

Director Curda emphasized that partnering with educational institutions is a priority, whether it be a for-profit institution, non-profit institution, higher ed institution, religious affiliate organizations, or volunteer corporations, is a high priority for IDVA.

IDVA Vets GI-Bill Impact

Director Curda provided information regarding the number of veterans receiving GI-Bill Benefits, noting the following education benefits currently available to qualifying veterans:

- Chapter 30 - Montgomery GI Bill (being phased out)
- Chapter 33 - Post 9/11 bill
- Chapter 35 - Dependent and Survivor Assistance (if member was a POW or killed in line of duty)
- 1606 - Funding for Select Reserve and Illinois National Guard (no Active Duty)
- 1607 - Congresses first attempt at GI benefits - (being phased out due to low participation)

Detailed information and statistics regarding the number of veterans receiving benefits (by institution type), the fiscal impact of the GI-Bill in Illinois, and claims and total waiver amounts can be found in the PowerPoint presentation accompanying this summary.

IDVA Programs for Veterans

Director Curda shared that every year, the IDVA assists Illinois Veterans so they can complete their education. The Illinois Veterans Grant Program pays tuition and mandatory fees at all Illinois state-supported colleges, universities, and community colleges. The IDVA also has a program called *Making Military Training Count* that greatly benefits veterans and service members. This program allows student veterans to enter higher education with earned academic credits that apply toward meeting degree requirements, simply by documenting their already-completed military training, allowing student veterans to complete your education requirements faster.

Other programs that benefit veterans and their families include:

- **Education and Training for Illinois Veterans**
 - Assisting Illinois Veterans with the GI Bill
 - Scholarships
 - Grants for Education

- **Illinois Hires Heroes Consortium**
 - 2017 - 89 Business Members
 - 2018 - 140 Business Members 51+
 - Educating Employers about the Benefits of hiring Vets!
 - Transition from Military to Civilian Careers

- **Illinois Warrior Assistance Program**
 - Available 24 hours every day
 - Call 1-866-554-4927
 - Confidential Assistance

- **Tiny Boots**
 - Free Child Care for Veterans Children
 - Over 350 medical appointments attended
 - Medical Appointment - Job Interview
 - All Child Care Homes licensed by the State

- **Vet Cash Grants**
 - Over \$13.3 Million awarded since 2006
 - Over 300 Organizations who served Veterans
 - SOLD OUT this Year!

Director Curda wrapped up the presentation by thanking everyone for their efforts on behalf of student veterans. The group then recessed for a time of lunch and networking.

Military Students as a Cultural Identity

Dan Turnbeaugh, Director of Veteran Services, University of Northern Colorado

Background

Dan opened the presentation by explaining that military culture is as diverse as the servicemembers themselves. Oftentimes, members embody the cultural differences ingrained by the branch of service he or she served in, by both shared and unique military experiences, and by their feeling of purpose while serving. As student veterans were transitioning from the service into higher education, the University of Northern Colorado adopted a cultural lens through which they serve military-connected students. Dan explained that the UNC Veterans Services is one of seven cultural centers on campus that work synergistically to serve students. The benefits of these synergistic efforts are:

- Networking with non-veteran organizations
- Increased student and staff participation
- Shared financial cost
- Greater sense of purpose
- Increased outreach


Veterans Services Ideologies

Dan shared that the ideologies driving the Veterans Services center are based on five common cultural characteristics: 1. Culture is learned, 2. Culture is shared among group members, 3. Culture is integrated, 4. Culture is based on symbols, and 5. Culture is dynamic. These cultural characteristics work in tandem with the “Big 8 Identities” to form a person’s holistic cultural identity: ability, age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexuality, and class. The Veterans Center uses these cultural traits to help student veterans acclimate to academic and the culture of higher education.

Dan spoke of instances when military culture and civilian culture may be conflicted, and urged meeting participants to consider the impact these cultural differences could have across campus. For instance, military members may have a “gallows humor” and find a situation humorous that a civilian might find offensive. Student veterans should be educated on these cultural dynamics in order to acclimate more easily to the academic environment. Dan also noted that military cultural dynamics can have a very long-lasting impact on student veterans and may not easily be altered or adjusted.

Vet Center Implementation

Dan explained that successful implementation of any veterans center on campus is contingent on two systemic factors: resource availability and administration willingness. Advocating for resources is necessary, and procuring data showing that student veterans are recruited and persist to graduation as a result of the veterans center is vital to gaining buy-in from administration and a larger allocation of resources. Dan wrapped up by explaining that the



core of UNC's Veterans Services mission will always be to enrich the student experience and create a community that works to connect student veterans across campus and into the community.

Meeting Wrap-Up

Amy Sherman encouraged members to mark January 24th on their calendars for a very important event hosted by CAEL and Student Veterans of America at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library. The program will feature a keynote address by SVA President Jared Lyons and will include three discussion panels:

- College and university presidents from across the nation: making student veterans a priority
- Leaders from veterans service organizations: resources for you and your student veterans
- Business leaders: why it is important for employers to recruit veterans

More information on the event will be forthcoming.

**The next meeting of the VHEAG will be from
10:00a.m.-1:30p.m. on
Tuesday, December 4th, 2018.**

Meeting Attendees

GeGe Carr, Director of Veterans Services
Northeastern Illinois University

Ron Carter, Director of Veteran Affairs & Transfer Students
East West University

Stacey Dixon, Veterans and Military Program Coordinator
National Louis University

Megan Everett, Program Officer
McCormick Foundation

Sheri Gross, Outreach Coordinator
The Road Home Program/Rush University

Sean Heraty, Veterans Services Specialist
Truman College

Emmanuel Johnson, Veterans Program Director
McCormick Foundation



Anitra King, Veteran and Student Success Specialist
Elgin Community College

Marco Masini, Associate Vice President for Student Life
Benedictine University

Jesus Monlia, Associate Director of Student Veteran Affairs
UIC

Tom Molony, Associate Director of Military Veterans Services
Loyola University

Bernadette Muloski, Violence Against Women Act Grant Coordinator
Benedictine University

Roman Ortega, Director, Veterans Affairs and Recruitment
Lewis University

Weston Polaski, President and CEO
Student Veterans of America - Illinois

Samuel Rene, Assistant Director of Counseling
Veterans Upward Bound Program, Roosevelt University

Brooke Roche, Student Veteran Advisor Representative
Oakton Community College

Georges Sanon, Coordinator, Student Veterans Center
Prairie State College

Melissa Scanlon, Veteran Support Services Specialist
Moraine Valley Community College

Kevin Smith, Director of Veteran Affairs
Governors State University

Arlene Strong, Director, External Funding & Grant Development
National Louis University

Robert Thompson, Veterans Services Specialist
Malcolm X College

Heather Watson, Transfer/Veterans Advisor
Waubensee Community College

Marcus Williams El, Veterans Services Specialist
Harold Washington College