

# **Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group Meeting**

**McCormick Foundation and CAEL  
October 17, 2012**

Meeting Summary

## **Introduction**

The sixth meeting of the Veterans Higher Education Affinity Group was held on October 17, 2012, 2012 in CAEL's office at 55 E. Monroe in Chicago. There were 20 attendees, including representatives from 15 colleges and programs serving the Chicago area. A full list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary.

## **Valuing Veterans Event Debriefing**

### ***Responses From College and University Leaders***

Members of the group shared some of the responses they have had from the leaders at their institutions since the event. Several people shared that the leaders of their institutions have reached out to them to set up meetings or to encourage them to keep in touch about veterans services and programs.

Several group members reported that the event had already led to expanded programs and increased funding. Two group members said that the event had led to increased interest in creating faculty/staff training programs. Another reported the establishment of a 25-member cross-departmental veterans task force, and two said that the event had helped their efforts to develop on-campus spaces for student veterans.

Asia Mitchell suggested that, for some institutions, it might have been helpful to have at the event a mid-level person, such as a dean or vice president, who was directly involved with the institution's veterans programs.

### ***Next Steps***

Cindy Rathunde suggested that it would be helpful to have a clear sense of what programs and services are in place for veterans at other institutions. Becky Klein-Collins suggested that CAEL could put together a survey for the members of the group and then compile and distribute the results.

Keith White said he thought it might also be useful to send a survey to the college and university leaders who attended the event. The survey would ask leaders to share information about the veterans programs at their institutions. Becky said that another option for following up with college presidents would be to send them a letter outlining the impacts of the event. There was

also some discussion of developing a strategy for keeping leaders involved, perhaps through regular meetings convened by the Valuing Veterans host committee.

The group also discussed ways to involve more institutions in the work we're doing. Chris Chalko suggested that it would be helpful to have another event like the Valuing Veterans event for institutions that did not participate in the original event. Becky proposed that a first step would be to reach out to additional institutions in the area and see if they would like to become members of the affinity group.

## **Program Showcase**

### ***National Louis University***

John Dill provided information about the veterans services program at National Louis University. The presentation focused on the program's structure, their outreach to student veterans, and the highlights of their services.

The program has five staff members, including John, who is the Director of Armed Services Relations, a faculty member who serves as Senior Military Advisor to the university's president, a military outreach specialist, and a veterans services representative. In his role as Director of Armed Services Relations, John is responsible for developing a comprehensive support system for all aspects of student veterans' academic experiences.

NLU is involved in several initiatives that aim to recruit student veterans. John noted that they also have developed several strategies for reaching out to student veterans who are already on campus. These include using admissions and financial aid information and working with SVA, other clubs, and career services to identify veterans.

A highlight of NLU's veterans services program is its work with the Office of Student Experience to support initiatives and programming focused on non-academic opportunities. NLU offers a support system that brings together key campus departments and initiatives, including the Response Center, Career Services, Ombudsman, and Student Life.

### ***DeVry University***

Scott Stratton gave a presentation on the programs and services available to the approximately 200 student veterans at DeVry. Although DeVry's veterans services program does not have a dedicated staff or budget, they have developed a variety of ways to support student veterans. Scott noted that VA work-study positions can be a good way to get additional support for veterans programs. There are also numerous free and low-cost options, including veterans clubs, for supporting student veterans from intake to retention to graduation.

Scott emphasized that admissions counselors with military backgrounds can help build connections with student veterans. He recommended that staff without military backgrounds

consider a short course on military knowledge. Welcome packets and checklists of on-campus services for veterans can also help build connections.

Retention services at DeVry include the DeVry Military Resource Club and a chapter of the SALUTE National Honor Society. Although DeVry doesn't yet have physical space for a veterans center, they have used bulletin boards and display cases to provide information on programs and services. DeVry also has military deployment policies in place, works to build awareness of PTSD, and hosts visibility ceremonies to mark occasions such as 9/11, Veterans Day, and Memorial Day.

DeVry's programs for graduating veterans include assistance with interview and resume-writing skills that focuses on how to translate military experience into language that can be readily understood by civilian employers. Student veterans receive special recognition at commencement.

## **Update on Mental Health Workshop**

A workshop on veterans and mental health issues will be held on December 12 from 9 am to 12 pm. UIC will host the workshop. The workshop will be geared toward a non-clinician audience of student services staff members. There will be space for up to three representatives from each affinity group member institution to attend. CAEL will email a link to the registration form by early November.

The purpose and expected outcomes of the workshop are:

- Better understanding of military culture as a barrier or factor
- Better understanding of PTSD, TBI, and how they affect behavior, emotional stability, interactions with others, feelings of isolation, etc.
- What to be watching for/aware of?
- Best ways/strategies for a non-clinician to respond
- Resources for assistance or referral: on campus, in the community, from government agencies
- Immediate things you can do when returning to your campus

Eric Proescher and Holly Passi from the Jesse Brown VA Hospital will provide an overview of mental health issues, which will include their causes and symptoms and a discussion of how to help veterans in need. Laura Gallagher Watkin of Health and Disability Advocates will offer information on available government resources and discuss resources that may be available on campus. The workshop will conclude with a community resources panel.

Becky solicited feedback from the group on the objectives and agenda and asked for suggestions for participants in the community resources panel. Ed Davis said that the workshop should include a discussion of the types of academic accommodations that may be needed by students with PTSD or TBI. Anna Laubach suggested that the panel should emphasize how community groups can work with colleges and universities. Suggestions for panel participants included

Community Counseling Centers of Chicago, Vets Prevail, The Soldiers Project, Thresholds, National Able Network, and Pits for Patriots.

### **Next Steps from This Meeting**

- Valuing Veterans event:
  - CAEL to send survey to group on services they already have in place
  - CAEL to follow up with group on ways, such as a survey or letter, to follow up with leaders at their institutions
  - CAEL to invite additional Chicago-area colleges and universities to join the affinity group
  
- Mental health workshop
  - CAEL to send invitation and link to online registration form by early November
  - Group members to forward the link to 1-2 other student services staff members at their institutions who would find the workshop useful
  - CAEL to follow up with potential community resources panel participants
  
- Next meeting
  - Share information about military transfer credit and PLA
  - Discuss available community resources that work in areas other than mental health
  - James Flagg, Cindy Rathunde, and Keith White will present information on veterans services at their institutions

### **Dates to Remember**

- November 9, 9:00 – 2:00 pm: IDES and City Colleges Veterans Jobs Fair
- December 12, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm: Veterans and mental health workshop at UIC
- February 6, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm: Next affinity group meeting

## Meeting Attendance

<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution</b>
Charles Goodrum	Chicago State University
Kendrea Atkins	City Colleges of Chicago - Daley College
Sharron Williams	City Colleges of Chicago - Olive-Harvey College
Edward Davis	City Colleges of Chicago-Wilbur Wright College
Scott Stratton	DeVry University
Keith White	Governors State University
General McArthur	Moraine Valley Community College
Robert James	National Able Network
John Dill	National Louis University
Cynthia Rathunde	Northeastern Illinois University
Julia Jenkins	Northwestern University
James Flagg	Robert Morris
Asia Mitchell	Roosevelt University
PeteLaHaie	Roosevelt University
Annette Wright	UIC
ChrisChalko	Veterans Upward Bound
Becky Klein-Collins	CAEL
Charlotte Cahill	CAEL
Anna Laubach	McCormick Foundation

