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# How Higher Ed Can Better Support Military Students

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Since the end of World War II many veterans have utilized their education benefits to assist in their transition into civilian society; however, the transition is not without challenges. Last month, President Obama reaffirmed his commitment to protecting a generation of young veterans against predatory practices by some for-profit colleges when he signed an executive order. The practiced that some schools employ to prey on members of the military is quite troublesome.

However, as colleges develop programs to assist veterans in this transition or to ensure that they meet the President's Executive Order, they should keep in mind that transition from military life to civilian life can be a daunting task, and for many a confusing task. Many leaving the military may find that their military occupation skills [MOS] are not transferable. An individual who was an infantryman in the service may only find those skills translatable into security, police force, border patrol, and the like, while an individual with computer technology training may have skills more easily translated into the civilian world. Additionally, some veterans may not always know how to translate military terminology into civilian language for potential employers, faculty, and counselors to appreciate their knowledge and skills. For some service members, separation from the military can be an overwhelming personal experience, create financial hardship and contribute to the already challenged system.

With a potential increase of veteran students attending college for the first time, there are protocols that will help student matriculate and prepare them for academic success.

## **Enlist the help of faculty veterans**

Develop an opportunity for faculty who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces to participate in discussions and assist (mentor) veteran students with the challenges of meeting academic expectations, time manage, and balance academic life with other responsibilities. Utilizing

faculty who understand the culture of the military can appear simplistic but will provide the student a welcoming relief to what is a stressful transition. Moreover, veteran faculty typically welcome the opportunity to be mentors to veteran students and see it as a way of staying connected to the mission.

### **Know the basics**

Those active duty military personnel and veterans coming to our institutions have fought for our freedom and have served our country well. It is important that colleges and universities respect that by developing training programs that educate staff members on basic acronyms and military culture. Not only does this show respect, but it is also helps an institution serve its students.

### **Develop military partnerships**

Higher education institutions should attempt to develop partnerships with local non-profits and VA facilities such as Vet Centers, which provide outreach and resources to veterans. The development of partnerships allows for a wider range of resources and services for veteran students. By developing an open dialogue, many agencies will welcome the opportunity to provide veteran student resources within the institution, increasing accessibility and services. The key is to offer and provide students access to resources while limiting barriers and this can be achieved through community partnerships.

### **Train faculty members to become great academic advisors**

Although many institutions have and support a centralized academic advising model for undergraduate education, it is recommended that a decentralized advising model in which all faculty take responsibility for good teaching, advising, and mentoring be implemented. Veteran students will be looking for leadership, mentors, and will predominantly seek that among our faculty. Therefore, faculty should have a clear understanding of the institution's general requirements and at minimum guide the student to the correct resource.

### **Eliminate the "Veteran Friendly"**

Lastly, we need to get away from the "veteran friendly" metaphor and become a true "Veteran Supportive Environment," in which we take a proactive look at what works best in order to ensure academic success. Just because a school meets Yellow Ribbon requirements doesn't make them "veteran" or "military friendly."

Institutions should want to lead by example and develop the appropriate services to assist veteran students, who, like any other student, strive to better themselves and their families. At the very least, advisers, faculty, and administrators can develop a stronger cultural awareness of the veteran experience, thereby fostering a more veteran-supportive environment on campus that will likely promote academic success.

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