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This guide is designed for those who wish to set up a Veteran’s Center and are seeking a comprehensive document to assist them through the process. It is not intended to be a legal guide or a replacement of government documents or resources or an institution’s already established policies and procedures. Hence, this guide should be used as a starting point and/or supplement for implementing and/or maintaining a Veteran’s Center on an institution’s campus.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is expected to increase the number of student veterans on our nation’s campuses in 2010 by 20 to 25%. There is a growing consensus among higher education leaders that helping these veterans succeed once they arrive will benefit not only the higher education institutions, but the surrounding communities, states, and the nation. Hence, the large number of veterans seeking higher education combined with the unique needs of veterans and military personnel provides the impetus for this publication.

It is often difficult for a service member transitioning from the military to locate, understand and obtain information relating to the resources and benefits for which s/he is entitled. One specific measure to facilitate success and alleviate these additional stresses for veterans and servicemembers include, but is not limited to, the creation & implementation of a comprehensive services package known as a Veterans Center. In 2010, Congress approved a process for helping higher education institutions institute such facilities in order to attract, assist and maintain our military men and women in their pursuit of higher education.

A Veterans Center not only provides college support services for veterans and their dependents, but also serves as a hub for a variety of resources specifically geared toward the unique needs of veterans. These centers are equipped with national scholarships, information on federal benefits, lists of available state benefits, local support services and referrals to the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) and veteran service organizations (VSO). From success of pilot programs across the nation, we know that instituting a Veterans Center will enrich your campus community, create greater access for student veterans, promote support programs, and streamline the process for your veterans and for you.

The Student Veterans of America organization has designed this publication to identify and fill the gaps relating to the creation and implementation of a Veterans Center on higher education campuses.
BACKGROUND

Introduction

As of 2006, only 25% of veterans (age 25 or older) possessed a bachelor’s degree. \(^1\) Thousands of veterans exit military service every month only to find an overwhelming combination of emotional, financial, academic, and cultural obstacles. As of 2008, there were approximately 1.8 million veterans who served during the Global War on Terrorism. \(^2\) Currently, there are approximately 523,000 military veterans drawing VA education benefits \(^3\); but still, this figure does not include a huge number of student veterans that are ineligible for VA education benefits (e.g. delimiting date) or who are entitled but not receiving benefits.

An improved veteran education benefits package (as set forth by the Post 9/11 GI Bill) and continued military operations will cause a substantial increase in student veteran enrollment in the coming years. As a result, many institutions of higher learning will experience a 25% or more increase in student veteran population.

Presently, a variety of community colleges and universities have adapted their services and programs to adequately serve student veterans. Many others have not. In these cases, veterans rely upon one another for guidance on available services and benefits. This fragmentation of services has been shown to place an additional burden on the transitioning student veteran who needs easy-to-use services located in one location that address the full range of needs: financial aid, VA benefits, academic support, disability services, employment assistance, social networking, and references to VSOs.

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\(^1\) U.S. Census Bureau: *American Community Survey 2006*

\(^2\) Office of Policy and Planning, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (008A3)

\(^3\) VA Statistics: *July, 2008*
General Statistics

- There are approximately 23.8 million living veterans. There are 37 million dependents of living and deceased veterans. These numbers represent 20% of the U.S. population\(^4\)

- The percentage of Americans with college degrees increased from 4.6% in 1945 to 25% in 1970 largely due to the GI Bill.\(^5\)

- Approximately 2 million veterans have served in OEF/OIF.\(^6\)

- Unemployment rates for veterans age 20-24 are three times the national average.\(^7\)

- 34% of OEF/OIF veterans were deployed multiple times.\(^8\)

- 54% of OIF/OEF veterans are 20-29 years old.\(^9\)

- Student veterans receive “only slightly” more financial aid than non-veteran students, usually with a lower amount in student loans.\(^10\)

- Approximately 523,000 student veterans receive education benefits with approximately 20% being first time recipients of VA Education benefits.\(^11\)

- More than 100,580 OEF/OIF veterans were diagnosed with a mental health condition.\(^12\)

- 20% of OIF/OEF veterans display signs of PTSD.\(^13\)

- As of September 2007, 223,564 OEF/OIF veterans have filed for disability claims with 89% in receipt of claim decisions and 11% awaiting claim decisions.\(^14\)

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\(^4\) Department of Veterans Affairs: Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008
\(^5\) Vitale: The Question of Accepting Veteran Education Benefits.
\(^6\) Veterans for Common Sense: VA Fact Sheet: Impact of Iraq and Afghanistan Wars
\(^7\) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: Employment Situation for Veterans
\(^8\) Department of Veterans Affairs: Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008
\(^9\) Department of Veterans Affairs: Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008
\(^10\) GAO Report 02-368: Comparison of Federal Assistance Awarded to Veteran and Nonveteran Students
\(^11\) Department of Veterans Affairs: Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008
\(^12\) Veterans for Common Sense: VA Fact Sheet: Impact of Iraq and Afghanistan Wars
\(^13\) Rand Corporation: PTSD Study Press Release
\(^14\) Department of Veterans Affairs: Stat Pamphlet 2-1-2008
Why the Need?

Veterans’ Issues & Concerns

**Focused Support:** Student veterans are often forced to navigate complicated university and college departments in order to identify and utilize the range of benefits and resources available to them. These student veterans must follow extensive red tape to complete simple requests unique to veterans such as financial requirements or military transcript assessments.

**A Complex Array of Information:** There are many difficulties in finding and applying for benefits from various government agencies, corporate entities, and non-profit organizations. Benefits and resources include, but are not limited to: scholarships, grants, home loans, medical care, financial assistance, service-connected compensation and unemployment benefits. As a result, available resources and benefits are administered by many different segments of government and associated entities.

**Accessibility to Information:** Information specific to student veterans is often obscured or organized with bits of information spread across many sources. Additionally, much of the information in the various sources is contradictory and may cause difficulties for the student veteran in the administration of his/her benefits.

**The Transition Process:** Veterans face many poignant readjustment barriers including psychological reintegration when transitioning to civilian life. Difficulties might include issues associated with PTSD, physical impairments, mental health, family issues, and the enveloping hesitation to ask for help.

**The Need for Understanding:** Understanding a student veteran’s unique needs such as physical and mental health issues, academic preparation, and past military credits/experience is critical to the veterans’ success and the institutions success. Limited capacity of disability services and associated resources for the anticipated onslaught of student veterans on campus has already hampered many veterans in achieving their goals—this translates directly to disenrollment.

**Lack of Office Space:** The lack of a specific area where student veterans are able to seek benefits, meet and congregate, seek academic support services and do homework is frequently cited as a need for both campuses and student veterans.

**The Need for Camaraderie:** Student veterans have been in an environment wholly dependent on camaraderie and cohesiveness. The training unique to student veterans must be understood to facilitate a successful transition to civilian life. Hence, these students need to connect with peers and support each other in the quest to integrate into the campus community and partake in social activities with fellow students.
STEPS TO ESTABLISH A VETERAN’S CENTER

Step One: Develop a Veterans Task Force

- Include members from major academic and administrative departments, including
  Academics, Enrollment, Faculty, Financial Aid, Student Services and Veteran Services.
- Assess the number of veterans on campus and the types of educational benefits they
  currently utilize. Identify an approximate number of veterans eligible, but not receiving
  benefits.
- Conduct a student veteran survey on current support services offered
- Establish needs assessment based on feedback and committee recommendations.
- Recommend suggestions to improve current veteran services & school policies:
  - Application Fees
    - Reduce
    - Eliminate
  - Tuition Rates
    - Offer discounted tuition rates
    - Offer in-state tuition for out-of-state veterans
  - Admission Procedures
    - Streamline procedures for student veterans
    - Train and identify a staff member in veterans’ issues
    - Guaranteed acceptance with 36 months of active-duty service
  - Enrollment
    - Delay the drop date (for non-payment) to be consistent with VA
      educational benefit payment policies
  - Registration
    - Offer advanced registration for student veterans
  - Transfer of Military Credit
    - Streamline procedures according to the American Council of Education
      (ACE) or Service-member Opportunity Colleges (SOC) guidelines
  - Students returning to active-duty status
    - Consider policies that create a special enrollment status, offer refunds
      (including textbooks), offer incompletes, or offer independent study to
      complete coursework
  - The deactivation of student from active-duty
    - Consider policies that streamline registration and offer special orientations
      to veterans

Step Two: Support a Student Veterans Organization

- Contact all student veterans regarding the establishment of a student veteran’s
  organization.
  - Example: Send a mass e-mail with recipients in BCC line
• Host a meeting and assist interested veterans in establishing a student veteran organization.
  o Establish Purpose and Goals
  o Implement Charter and By-laws
  o Elect Officers & Advisors
  o Please refer to SVA Website for more information on instituting a student veteran organization on your campus.
• Ensure student veterans have access to all resources available to other student organizations such as funding, marketing materials, and meeting space.
  • An institution may be eligible for additional federal government benefits by setting up a veteran specific center
• Use student veterans as a conduit for information, peer mentoring and support.
  o VA Benefits Seminars
  o Student Outreach & Awareness
  o Student Veteran Orientation
  o Pre Professional Networking

Step Three: Create a Veteran’s Office

Veteran’s Services Liaison/Coordinator
• Establish a position in your institution to be a single point of contact and coordinate veteran services, provide referrals, create programming, and advocate for students with issues related to their military experiences, veteran benefits and student status.
• Coordinate and address the needs and issues of student veterans, military members and their dependents such as financial aid, application procedures, and enrollment.
• Provide office space and information technology resources as needed.

Veteran Benefits Certifying Official
• Processes applicable education benefits certifying paperwork for veterans, military members and their dependents (e.g. VA educational benefits and state grants for veterans).
• Acts as a liaison between the campus and the VA education office/state education agency.
• This person promotes the student veterans’ integration into the campus community and serves a central contact for student veteran issues.

VA Work Study Position(s)
• Determine if your institution is eligible for a VA work-study position for a student veteran.
• File for the work-study position using Form 22-8691
  o Link: http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/22-8691.pdf
• Employ the work-study student veteran to assist current and prospective student veterans and military personnel with associated VA educational benefits and available university and/or community college support services.
• Provide applicable training.
• Please refer to SVA Website for more information on applying for a VA Work-Study

Note: Work Study positions are fully funded by the Dept of Veterans Affairs and can augment a Veteran’s Liaison position. In the absence of a dedicated Veteran’s Liaison, a work-study position can serve as the POC for student support services and referrals.

Student Veteran Volunteers
• Utilize student veteran volunteers to facilitate the process of incorporating a Veterans Office on your campus

Step Four: Set up Space
• Establish Office Space for Veteran’s Liaison Office
• Locate this office space in a central site and in proximity to student support services
• Dedicate an area where the student veteran organization and other student veterans can meet and congregate, seek academic support services, and do homework.
  o Lounge
  o Computers
  o Desks
  o Meeting Areas

Step Five: Develop Online & Print Resources
• Build a website which consolidates information for student veterans including student services, federal benefits, state benefits, student veteran organization, and others
• Create and distribute printed material which specifies available resources.
  o Example: University of Wisconsin  http://registrar.wisc.edu/students/vets/

Step Six: Establish Partnerships
• Establish relationships with agency liaisons in your area that offer support services for veterans, service members and eligible family members.
• Partnerships include, but are not limited to: Student Veterans of America, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), AmVets, OEF/OIF Program Managers, VA Medical Centers, VA Regional Office, Vietnam Vet Centers, State veteran services’ officers, etc.

Step Seven: Educate Administration, Faculty & Staff
• Incorporate educational material on student veterans into routine training regimen.
• Ensure the school’s counseling resources are fully capable to handle veteran issues.
  o PTSD
  o Combat Stress
  o Integration
  o Adjustment
• Ensure faculty members can recognize veterans struggling with the above issues, and know where to refer the veteran for assistance.
Consider instituting “veteran only” orientation services to introduce new student veterans on available services from the community college and/or university, the VA, the state, and the student veteran organization.

Step Eight: Converge all Resources in 1 Place
- Create a formal Veterans Center which fully integrates all facets of student support services, VA programs, state services, and student veteran organizations in one location.
  - University & Community Colleges
    - Academic Advising
    - Career Services
    - Disability Support Services
    - Financial Aid
    - Others (Please refer to Suggested Partnerships below)
  - Student Veterans Organization
  - Veteran’s Liaison Office
  - VA Work Study Positions
  - Referrals (to Partnerships)
  - Online & Print Resources
  - Task Force Recommendations

Step Nine: Evaluate Organizational Success
- Develop a plan to monitor and track the key indicators of student veteran enrollment and success
  - # of applications received
  - # of students accepted
  - # of students enrolled
  - # of students assisted by office
  - Retention rates
  - Persistence rates
  - Graduation rates
- Additional measures can be obtained via surveys, student feedback and/or veteran taskforce/committee recommendations
- Adjust your plan & guidance accordingly

Note 1: Incorporate student veterans from your campus in each phase. They will be instrumental in ensuring your Veteran’s Center accommodates their needs and ultimately a success.

Note 2: The foregoing list of procedures is not exclusive. These recommendations recognize that different community colleges and universities will develop veteran centers and institute veteran programs to suit the needs of their specific student veteran population. This publication serves to facilitate the process that will allow colleges and universities the opportunity to customize and tailor new programs and strategies to assist the student veteran community on campus.
Note 3: Veteran’s Center name is not exclusive to SVA; you have the latitude to name your Veterans Center/Office according to university preference and needs.

VETERAN CENTER RESOURCES

Suggested Online and Print Resources

Provide a resource hub and referral center with available resources within the school, referrals to external agencies, informational packages and benefit applications for veterans from government agencies (federal, state, county, local), corporate and non-profit entities in one centralized location.

- Admissions
  - Admission Guidelines
  - Applications
  - Course Catalog
  - Degree Offerings
  - Enrollment
  - Registration

- Disability Claims
  - How to file for Service-connected claims
  - State Social Security & Disability Offices
  - VSO referrals

- Employment Opportunities
  - Department of Labor VETS program
  - State Employment Offices
  - Available Internships
  - Local Opportunities
  - On-Campus Openings
  - Veteran Job Search Engines
  - Work Study Openings

- Family Assistance
  - ChampVA
  - Operation HomeFront
  - TriCare
  - Other State Services

- Financial Aid
  - Student Grants
  - Student Loans
  - Scholarships (general and veteran specific)
  - VA Educational Benefits
- Financial Assistance
  - American Red Cross
  - Operation HomeFront
  - Salvation Army

- Housing Assistance
  - On Campus
  - Off Campus
  - VA Home Loans

- Mental Health Assistance
  - Available School Counseling
  - Suicide Prevention Hotline
  - Combat Stress
  - PTSD
  - VA Medical Centers
  - Local Vet Centers

- Scholarships
  - Corporate
  - Government
  - Non-profit foundations
  - University/Community College

- VA Educational Benefits
  - Chapter 30 (Active-Duty GI Bill)
  - Chapter 31 (Vocational Rehabilitation)
  - Chapter 35 (Survivors and Dependents GI Bill)
  - Chapter 33 (Post 9/11 GI Bill)
  - 1606 (Reserve GI Bill)
  - 1607 (REAP)

- VA Medical Benefits
  - Local VA Medical Centers
  - Local VA Clinics
  - OEF/OIF Program Managers

- Veterans Service Organizations
  - Student Veterans of America
  - American Legion
  - Disabled American Veterans (DAV)
  - Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
  - Wounded Warrior Project
Suggested Partnerships

University /Community College Services

- Academic Advising
- Admissions
- Career Advising
- Counseling Services
- Crisis Intervention
- Disability Services
- Financial Aid
- Housing Support
- Registration
- Student Health Services
- Student Veterans group
- Tutoring Services
- Veteran Benefits

External Organizations

- Student Veterans of America
- American Legion
- AM Vets
- Armed Forces Recreation Centers
- Department of Labor VETS program
- Disabled Veterans of America
- Employment Search engines
- Local VA Medical Centers/Clincis
- Local OEF/OIF Program Managers
- Military.com
- Military and National Guard Units in the area
- Small Business Administration (Patriot Express Program)
- State-level Employment Agency
- State-level Student Assistance Commission
- State-level Veterans Affairs Agency
- Transition Assistance Program
- Troops to Teachers
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Veteran Legal Clinics
- Vets 4 Vets
- Vocational Rehab Counselors
- Wounded Warrior Project
OPTIONAL ADDITIONS

Establish a Director of Veterans Center Position

The director coordinates campus services and serves as the institutional point of contact for prospective and current student veterans and military service members. The director will create programming and outreach services, provide advice to the administration, and analyze current campus policies, procedures, and services as they relate to veterans and service members.

Additionally the director can:

- Coordinate campus services provided to veteran and military student personnel. These services include specialized "transition services" such as admissions, placement exams, orientation, and enrollment;
- Increase veteran awareness on campus by creating outreach programs and publications;
- Develop processes for the activation and deactivation of students to active-duty service including enrollment status, refunds, and ensuing grades;
- Provide training and assistance to campus departments on veteran and military issues;
- Serve as liaison to external state and federal organizations such as the VA and Department of Labor;
- Analyze pending state and federal legislation that affect student veterans and service personnel (and their dependents) and advise campus administration of potential impact on programs and policies;
- Perform related student veteran research and make appropriate recommendations; or
- Supervise applicable Veteran Center Liaisons/Coordinators, VA Certifying Officials and VA Work Study positions.

Institute Veteran Orientation Programs

The purpose of Veteran Orientation Programs are to facilitate the transition of student veterans to a college setting through the provision of programs and services relating to the institution’s social, developmental and counseling resources and opportunities. The Veteran Orientation Program should also seek to affect the school's retention and graduation efforts by helping student veterans feel welcomed, connect with their new environment, understand their expectations, and know how and where to seek specialized support. A Veterans Orientation Program introduces student services and available resources which will support their educational, financial and medical needs.
Additionally, higher education institutions can incorporate these orientation programs into their curriculum by offering veteran-only general education classes during the student’s first year. This type of program would provide specialized academic support and rectify any academic deficiencies before the student progresses to subsequent years. Example: Cleveland State University SERV Program

Launch Veterans Upward Bound Program

Veterans Upward Bound Program (VUB) is a free U.S. Department of Education program designed to help eligible U.S. military veterans refresh their academic skills so assist the veteran in successfully completing the postsecondary school of their choosing. In order [for a student veteran] to be eligible for participation in a VUB program, a student veteran must meet the following criteria: (1) be a low-income and/or first-generation college (meaning that neither of your parents have a four-year college degree) student, (2) served at least 180 days of active military service, and (3) have a discharge that is other than dishonorable.

Currently, there are 46 VUB programs nationwide, in Puerto Rico, and Guam ready to serve veterans. Below is a list of the areas in which VUB programs assist student veterans:

- **ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION IN:**
  - Mathematics
  - Science
  - Reading
  - Foreign language
  - Various other subjects
  - Tutorial and study skills assistance

- **OTHER SERVICES MAY INCLUDE:**
  - Intensive basic skills development
  - Short-term remedial or refresher classes for veterans
  - Assistance with applications to the postsecondary school of choice
  - Assistance with applying for financial aid
  - Career Counseling
  - Exposure to cultural events, academic programs, and other educational activities

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15 National Association of Veteran Upward Bound Project Personnel: Program Info
OPTIONAL FUNDING SOURCES

DoE Centers of Excellency for Student Veteran Success Grants

Subject to the availability of appropriations, the Secretary of the Department of Education shall award grants to institutions of higher education to develop model programs to support veteran student success in postsecondary education. A grant awarded under this section shall be awarded for a period of three years. To be considered for a grant under this section, an institution of higher education shall submit to the Secretary an application at such time, in such manner, and accompanied by such information as the Secretary may require.

In awarding grants, the Secretary considers these factors: the number of student veterans enrolled at an institution of higher education; and the need for model programs to address the needs of veteran students, including the need to provide: (i) an equitable distribution of such grants to institutions of higher education of various types and sizes; (ii) an equitable geographic distribution of such grants; and (iii) an equitable distribution of such grants among rural and urban areas.

16 Higher Education Opportunity Act
CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Design Military Friendly Policies

Institutions should review, design, and implement military-friendly policies. These policies should take into consideration a service member’s unique experiences and needs. An institution should review and update current policies to assist student veterans in navigating complex issues such as: deactivation, tuition benefits and readjustment. These policies can include, but are not limited to: admissions, financial aid, enrollment, disability services, counseling, registration and military transcripts evaluations (to concur with the American Council on Education guidelines).

Meet the Needs of Student Veterans

A Veterans Center assists student veterans meet their academic, financial, and medical needs. The unit features various academic services/referrals (i.e. registration, enrollment, tutoring, etc.), financial aid (i.e. state and federal educational benefits, scholarships), and medical services/referrals (i.e. disability services, counseling, VA contacts). The Veterans Center assists student veterans through the processes of admissions, financial aid, orientation, registration, credit evaluation of military training, information on state and federal benefits for veterans, and a host of resources veterans can draw upon.

Enrich the Campus Community

Enrich your institutional community by establishing a student veteran presence on campus. Institute a student veterans group and support their outreach endeavors. Be cognizant of the veteran’s unique needs and tailor your institution’s resources/services/referrals based on the needs of your student veteran population. The center can feature computer labs, academic services, special events, meeting space and customized web-based services for veterans.

Be Understanding

Help student veterans overcome the various hurdles they may face upon their return from service. A Veterans Center assists a service member’s multifaceted integration to academia. A community college and/or university should be aware, empathetic, and understanding when assisting student veterans and their unique dilemmas.
VETERAN CENTER REFERENCES


6, 9, 10, 12, 15 Department of Veterans Affairs. 2008. *VA Information Pamphlet.* [www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Pamphlet_2-1-08.pdf](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Pamphlet_2-1-08.pdf) (accessed 12/03/2008).


11 GAO Report 02-368. *Comparison of Federal Assistance Awarded to Veteran and Non Veteran Students.* (Print)


**University Programs**

Cleveland State University

Columbia University

Florida State University

Indianapolis University Purdue University at Indianapolis

San Diego State University

University of California – Los Angeles

University of Houston

University of Iowa

University of Illinois – Chicago

University of Mississippi

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Please direct additional questions to:

contact@studentveterans.org