VARIOUS CHALLENGES FOR MILITARY BACKGROUND STUDENTS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON DISTANCE LEARNING

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Paper/Project Advisor

VARIOUS CHALLENGES FOR MILITARY BACKGROUND STUDENTS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON DISTANCE LEARNING

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

Distance Education Leadership

By

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Year of Graduation – 2015

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Statement of the Problem

Many active military and veterans in the United States do not take advantage of their educational benefits. They tend to experience various barriers to obtaining a college degree or certificate, become disenfranchised, and abandon the use of these benefits (Black, Westwood, & Sorsdal, 2007). The absence of military enrollment and benefit use can negatively affect the student population of higher education institutions, including those enrolled in distance education. If these barriers remain, active military and veterans may choose to avoid attending college. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the significance of encouraging members of the U.S. Armed Forces to use their educational benefits and obtain a degree or certificate to improve their chances at garnering or advancing in a meaningful career.

Scope of the Problem

The issue of American active military and veterans not attending or dropping out of colleges and universities has been going on for decades, if not centuries. Historically, higher education was for white males, who came from affluent families, not minorities or women who may have been veterans and members of either the middle or lower class (Gratto, 2010). With the passage of various pieces of legislation starting in the mid-1800s, colleges and universities slowly became more inclusive in terms of student population. With the advent of distance education, most of the long-standing barriers have been eliminated. Veterans face far less

discrimination now compared to the 1970s. Their main educational issues involve financial aid and engagement with nonmilitary students.

Summary of Results

Colleges and universities have made significant steps to embolden active military and veterans to attend either as a campus student or through distance education. The development of veterans centers at many campuses throughout the United States have provided support and camaraderie to military students working to improve their lives through education. While public four-year institutions are the trailblazers, public two-year schools have made noteworthy strides in educating members of the armed forces. Despite all of the progress over the years, more work is needed to fully integrate the military populace into American institutions of higher education.

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Various Challenges for Military Background Students and Their Effects on Distance Learning

College can be a challenge for any student looking to start a career through post-secondary education. Active United States military members and veterans can face additional challenges when applying at and attending higher education institutions. Finding the correct school and achieving respectable grades can be especially difficult for active military and veterans trying to redeem Veterans Administration (VA) education benefits (Freedom, 2011).

(Vacchi, 2012)

At the conclusion of World War II, 15 million American soldiers returned to the United States. Many returned to an ordinary life, while about two million of them went to college. Prior to the war, higher education was elitist and discriminatory with respect to race, sex, and religion, which were some of the reasons why most people, including veterans, did not go to college (Gratto, 2010). Historically, education of active military and veterans has been dominated by fewer than 200 institutions of higher education. The participating educational institutions have

had a strong presence on military installations worldwide. With the expansion of online learning, access to educational programs has increased by including more institutions in educating military students (Brown & Gross, 2011).

Following the passage of The Morrill Act of 1862, also known as the Land Grant College Act, federal government provisions authorized institutes of higher learning to educate armed forces personnel through campus and distance education programs (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Initiated primarily by faculty and staff, "veteran-specific initiatives were developed to increase veteran enrollment, persistence, and completion rates" (Steele, 2015, p. 63). The ratification of the Post-9/11 Veterans Assistance Act of 2008, commonly referred to as the Post-9/11 GI Bill or the new GI Bill, was considered one of the momentous events for active military and veteran students in terms of educational funding assistance since the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the original GI Bill (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). This powerful enhancement means that while the old GI Bill did not provide ample financial incentive to attend college in recent years, the Post 9/11 GI Bill should make obtaining a degree highly enviable (Hollis, 2009).

While speaking about the Post 9/11 GI Bill, President Barack Obama stated:

> The contributions that our service men and women can make to this nation do not end when they take off that uniform. We owe a debt to all who serve. And when we repay that debt to those bravest Americans among us, then we are investing in our future. Not just their future, but also the future of our own country. (McMichael, 2009, para. 3).

The Post 9/11 GI Bill officially launched on Aug. 1, 2009. It offers nearly every armed forces member with more than three cumulative years of active duty since Sept. 11, 2001, a full

college education, including housing and book allowances. Additionally, career military members are allowed to allocate any unused benefits to family members (McMichael, 2009).

Research concerning active military and veterans enrolled in higher education programs is in its early stages (Vacchi, 2012). The majority of research on armed forces personnel focuses on noticeable and undetectable injuries (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). Vacchi (2012) stated that most student veterans have not suffered physical and psychological injuries. Some of the quality and implications of the research has been found to be problematical (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Virtual Education

Many veterans are choosing higher education as their main path for a transition to civilian life. Faculty should consider fine-tuning their skills to support veterans. By identifying the significant strengths veterans bring to the classroom, instructors can accommodate their differences in learning styles. Conscious, skillful, and appropriate reconciliation for veterans' needs will aid in their learning and strengthen the resolve of classmates. Honoring the differences and vulnerabilities of veterans is fundamental, both within academia and the American society in general (Roost & Roost, 2014).

The U.S. military has a long history of providing education to soldiers by delivering distance learning opportunities and contracting didactic services (Anderson & Kime, 1996; Curda & Curda, 2003). Paper-based courses were an early form of distance education. As technology advanced, those paper-based courses morphed into CD-ROM courses. Now video teleconferencing and online courses are the standard (Curda & Curda, 2003). Online learning environments can offer active military and veteran students many opportunities for flexibility, interaction and collaboration with other students, many of whom share a military background

(Gedera, Williams, & Wright, 2013). According to Lungariello (2013), "4,600,00 college students in the United States are currently taking at least one of their classes online and by 2014 this number will increase to 18,650,000" (para. 10). With the significant growth of virtual education in higher education, students and professors can "explore new ways of constructing knowledge and enhancing teaching and learning experiences outside the four walls of the classroom" (Gedera, 2014, p. 93). Online courses will transform the quality of campus classrooms, making them more engaging and efficient while giving additional education options to military students (Carr, 2012).

The benefits of active military and veterans experiences in the virtual classroom are essential for diminishing the effects of the military/civilian cultural gap. The interactions of these two student groups can also facilitate the process of learning and the actual learning outcomes professors want to achieve (Davis, 2009; Hawn, 2011). Many of the online learning courses offered through professional military education (PME) are increasingly high quality, utilizing collaborative technologies and nurturing critical thinking, research, and writing skills (Mahoney-Norris & Ackerman, 2012). The addition of a synchronous component to online courses helps to facilitate improved communication, which aids armed forces students (Martin, Parker, & Deale, 2012).

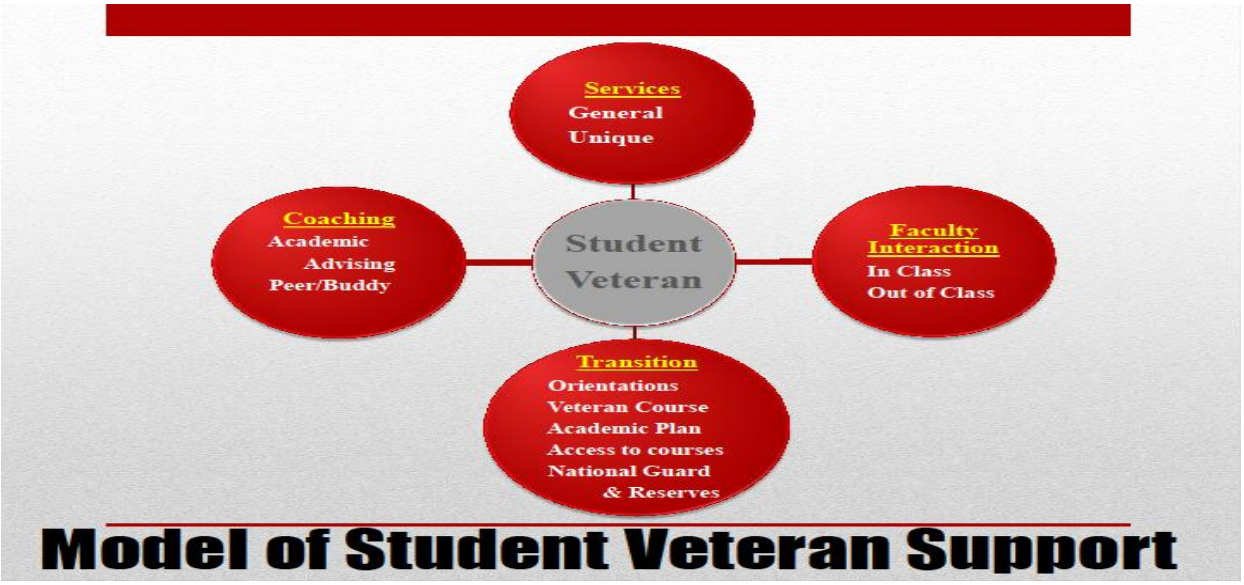
Recruitment

Many institutions actively recruit the military and veteran population for distance learning. Modern young adults choose to enlist in the military for the job training and educational benefits offered through the armed forces (Wang, Elder, & Spence, 2012). Most universities employ military admissions and financial aid representatives who work exclusively with that consortium of students. According to the Director of Military and Veteran Affairs LTC

(ret) C. Andrew Griffin, Ed.D at Northern Arizona University (NAU) in Flagstaff, Arizona, the school's increased growth in that segment of the population is "based on positive publicity and a reputation for superior service and support" (personal communication, March 6, 2015).

Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe, Arizona recruits veterans and military by participation in education fairs that take place at various military installations. ASU Online recently introduced a scholarship program that will cover the difference between cost of attendance (COA) and a military member's tuition assistance (TA). TA is a Department of Defense (DOD) education benefit for active duty and active reserve/guard members. This scholarship will be advertised in the future and is expected to have a significant recruitment effect for active and reserve members (S. Borden, personal communication, April 8, 2015).

Despite the streamlining of the educational benefits process for active military and veterans, there remains a lingering feeling that it is still too complex and proper support continues to be unavailable (Winston, 2010). This mindset hampers recruitment of armed forces personnel for distance education programs. By employing veterans in admissions and financial aid representative positions, potential students with a military background can discuss their future in higher education with someone who can relate to their situation.



(Vacchi, 2012)

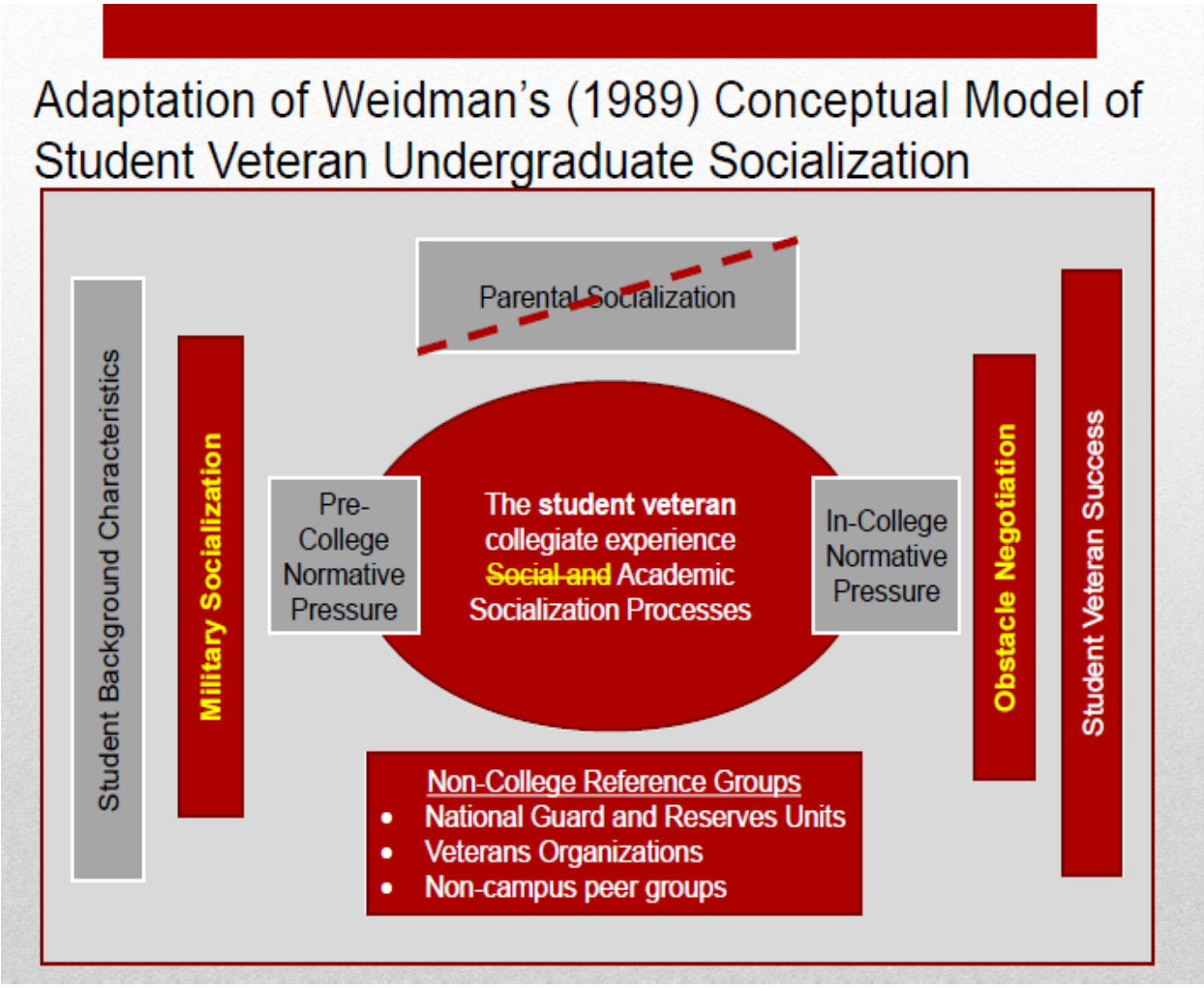
Enrollment

The total United States Armed Forces-affiliated population represents a sizeable student enrollment source of college students, encompassing over 30 million members (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015; U.S. Department of Defense, 2015). Since the 2009 enactment of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, "over 600,000 veterans have entered higher education" (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015, p. 71). Weidman (1989) stated that veterans account for a significant number of non-traditional students in higher education. Previous research on active military and veterans has generally concentrated on academic accomplishment and mental health hardships instead of propounding a widespread interpretation of their higher education transition (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

At the University of West Florida (UWF), active military and veterans, along with spouses or dependents and reservists, denote approximately 30% of the 10,000 students enrolled at the Pensacola, Florida campus. UWF leaders understand the significance of "developing programs and services to meet the diverse educational needs of students serving in the military"

(Ford, Northrup, & Wiley, 2009, p. 61). On the other end of the spectrum, budget deficits have led to enrollment caps at some institutes of higher education in California. For active military and veterans, this budget concern does not affect their VA benefits, however, there is no guarantee they will have instantaneous admission into requisite classes, even in distance education (Winston, 2010).

One of the most consistent messages from veterans is "the need for a strong sense of community and belonging" (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009, p. 45). Military students feel most at ease interacting with each other and tend to enroll in schools with a high concentration of active military and veterans. Since military training and culture has individuals relying on one another for safety and companionship, peer support, even in distance education, is particularly valued (Burnett & Segoria, 2009).



(Vacchi, 2012)

Re-enrollment

Some members of the military have suspended their college education to join a branch the U.S. Armed Forces. When these returning soldiers go back to the college environment to complete their degrees, they may have a difficult time making the transition. Support services should be provided for these students who may have gone through "the most traumatic experiences of their lives" (Jackson & Sheehan, 2005, p. 26). According to McBain et al., (2012), "Only 28 percent of institutions with programs and services for military personnel have

developed an expedited re-enrollment process to help students restart their academic efforts" (p.48).

After the original GI Bill educational stipends were increased through the Readjustment Assistance Act of 1972, more than 50% of all Vietnam veterans who were previously students re-enrolled in a higher education institution. Those veterans achieved higher career earnings than most non-student veterans (Angrist, 1993). Even active military who earned a degree and stayed in the service realized an increase in pay.

Retention

Retention among active military and veterans is an ongoing issue facing every higher education institution. Prior research indicates colleges and universities need to modify their treatment of current and former armed forces personnel in order to promote retention (Berger, 2000; Rendon, 1993). To enhance retention, public two- and four-year institutions are more apt to have programs distinctly tailored for veterans than private, non-profit colleges and universities, especially since September 11, 2001 (McBain et al., 2012).

Most of the organizational management and education literature is comprised of assessments of the variables concerning student retention (Pompper, 2006). To aid in the retention of active military and veteran students, many institutions have acted on the distinctive requirements of this group of students by offering weekend courses, intersession programs, or online classes (Spear, 2002). Online programs best fit the needs of members of the military on or facing deployment. "Until colleges and universities take an in-depth look at their organization and its relationships with key publics, student retention will remain a serious threat to an organization's success" (Pompper, 2006, p. 36), which is comprised of armed forces and distance education students.

Financial Aid

Military Tuition Assistance (MTA) is an education benefit available to eligible members of the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, and Navy. Each branch of the service can pay up to 100% for the tuition expenses of its members and has its own criteria for eligibility, obligated service, application processes and restrictions. This money is typically paid directly to the institution ("Military Tuition Assistance," 2015).

At NAU, the campus is a signatory to the Yellow Ribbon Program. NAU also offers in-state tuition to veteran students living within the state of Arizona. Additionally, those veterans who are Purple Heart Medal recipients are authorized a full tuition waiver. For active duty and reserve forces, NAU accepts the discounted federal Department of Defense (DOD) Tuition Assistance (TA) rate per credit hour for any academic program from undergraduate to doctorate (C. A. Griffin, personal communication, March 6, 2015).

At ASU, the school also participates in the Yellow Ribbon Program. The Director of Enrollment Services at Pat Tillman Veterans Services at ASU, Capt. (ret) Steven Borden, says the program allows the institution to cover up to 50% of the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition and fees and, in turn, the VA will match the portion provided by the institution. This means that military students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill can have their out of state tuition and fees completely covered if they do not qualify for in-state residence (S. Borden, personal communication, April 8, 2015).

Student veterans at ASU receive tuition/fees from the VA, as well as a book stipend. There are no specific tuition/fee discounts for most military students. However, tuition and fee payments, book purchases, and housing expenditures are either deferred until students receive their VA stipends or, in the case of housing, payments are timetabled in a schedule that matches

their monthly housing stipend. ASU provides early registration for veterans using benefits, has a scholarship fund for veterans, and is a Tillman Foundation partner university, which means increased opportunity for ASU students to become Tillman Military Scholars (S. Borden, personal communication, April 8, 2015).

Additionally, ASU has been awarded a Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) grant. VUB allows eligible veterans to take classes at no cost to ensure they are college ready. Historically, these classes have been in English, math, and computer skills, but have been recently expanded to a wide variety of online class subjects (S. Borden, personal communication, April 8, 2015).

In addition to MTA, active military and veterans are eligible to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). By filling out the FAFSA, students are given an Expected Family Contribution (EFC) number that is used to determine eligibility toward Stafford Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans, Federal Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, and Work-Study. The lower the number, the more access a student has to various funds ("iLibrary - EFC Formula Guide," 2015). All students are encouraged to accept Pell Grants and Work-Study as those awards are not subject to repayment. The maximum Federal Pell Grant award for the 2014–15 award year (July 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015) is $5,730 and for the 2015–16 award year (July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2016), the maximum award is $5,775 ("Federal Pell Grants," 2015). Since Stafford and Perkins Loans must be repaid, students receiving MTA should not accept those awards unless their MTA funds are depleted and no other funding sources are available that do not have to be repaid.

Veterans' service organizations are another source to assist in paying for college. The major national organizations, such as the American Legion, American Veterans, Inc. (AMVETS), Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of

Foreign Wars (VFW) provide scholarships to active military and veterans ("Aid for Military Families," 2015). Many other smaller veterans' service organizations throughout the United States may offer scholarships, as well. That information can be obtained by initiating a search via the internet.

Innovation

Veterans' benefits are unique to the United States. There is no French, British, German, Canadian, or Dutch equivalent to the G.I. Bill that even offers any type of educational assistance. None of these countries have a VA hospital system or Veterans Housing Authority (Campbell, 2004).

One example of innovation in distance education for members of the military is by the United States Navy. The U.S. Navy launched the Navy College Program for Afloat College Education (NCPACE). The program provides instructor-led and distance education courses to sailors at sea. NCPACE, originally created in 1974 as the Navy Campus for Achievement, was established as an incentive for United States citizens to enlist in the military. This program is administered by the Voluntary Education (VOLED) directorate of the Center for Personal and Professional Development (CPPD) (Navy College Program for Afloat College Education (NCPACE), 2015; Larned, 2014).

Another example is the Veteran Success Center (VSC) at the main NAU campus in Flagstaff, Arizona. The center, which is the primary advocate for all military affiliated students at NAU, is operated by the Office of Military and Veteran Affairs (OMVA) and provides a synergistic and welcoming university-wide one-stop service, resource, social, and study center for active military and veteran students using their GI Bill benefits. Both the VSC, which is staffed by veterans, and OMVA are nationally recognized for its best practices in service and

support focusing on the transition and retention needs of the total student veteran (C. A. Griffin, personal communication, March 6, 2015).

A third example is the Pat Tillman Veterans Center at ASU's Tempe campus. The Tillman Veterans Center is a "one-stop shop" for veterans to get their questions answered, whether the queries are related to VA education benefits, available support resources, or the ASU community. The Tillman Veterans Center works closely with the Disability Resource Center, ASU Counseling, and other student support entities to help ensure student veterans are connecting with all necessary resources. The last connection is to ensure veterans engage with ASU Career Services. There is significant collaboration within the university and with corporate entities outside ASU to connect veterans with internships and career opportunities that will enable them to take the greatest advantage of the degrees earned (S. Borden, personal communication, April 8, 2015).

Another example of innovation is the Student Veterans Center at the University of Arizona (UA) in Tucson, Arizona. It serves several functions including a refuge for military students, resource center, study area, recreation room, and location for organizing. While some military students desire to experience the college lifestyle that was averted following enlistment after high school, a substantial majority find programs like freshman orientation, Greek life, and residence life are immaterial to them. Members of the center were able to convince UA administration to allow veterans using the GI Bill to get priority registration. The change permitted this group to move to the front of the line during the registration process (Francis & Kraus, 2012).

The penultimate example of distance education innovation for armed forces personnel is at Western Michigan University (WMU). WMU established the Returning Veterans Tuition

Assistance (RTVA) program to provide transitional support to current and future deployed students (Moon & Schma, 2011). The RVTA program awards full tuition for an armed forces student's first semester (Roland, 2007).

A final example of innovation is a third generation transition program, Veteran Educational Transition Success (VETS), at NAU. Director of Military and Veteran Affairs Griffin stated that the campus established VETS in 2014, which encompasses the following components:

- Transition Checklist: A step-by-step guide that serves as the veteran's road map to a successful transition to NAU. The link for the veteran transition check list is: http://nau.edu/Military-Veteran-Education/Next-Step/.

- First-year Seminar (FYS-121): A new first-year seminar as a cohort for new student veterans. The course has been approved in the Liberal Studies Aesthetic & Humanistic Inquiry distribution block. "Veteran Transition Resiliency" introduces the new student veteran to the skills and resources required to succeed in their new university environment and the academic rigor of a NAU classroom.

- College-based (non-residency) Learning Community (CBLC): CBLC is a formal program to aid the new student veteran with their transition to NAU through activities with other student veterans on campus, learning the academic skills and traits needed to be successful in class, begin career planning, and learn what services and support are available to student veterans both on and off campus. CBLC has been integrated into the NAU chapter of the Student Veterans of America (SVA).

- Veteran Peer Jacks: In collaboration with the Transfer and Commuter Connections Center, NAU has current student veterans trained to serve as student peer mentors to new veteran students.

- In-processing for New Student Veterans: A new student veteran is required to attend a new student veteran orientation session. The 4-hour session covers VA benefits, on and off campus resources, academic resources, and the SVA club. This session allows for time to meet staff and fellow veteran students. Immediately following the in-processing, NAU holds a Hail and Farewell Barbeque for all student veterans and their families.

- Veteran Student College Success Workshop: NAU offers an optional workshop to all incoming veteran students to jumpstart their academic endeavor at NAU. This workshop consists of the following sections:

    - College writing and communication: A technical writing review; a guide to reference citation methodology; tips to navigate the NAU learning system; and the nuances of a syllabus.

    - College level math review: A college preparation course to increase math placement test scores.

    - Library Navigation: Training to utilize the NAU library and online resources for academic success.

    - Money Matters: Information to establish a personal finance plan by a certified financial planner.

(C.A. Griffin, personal communication, March 6, 2015)

The role of student veterans organizations at colleges and universities is comparable to other groups created to pursue the interests of distinctive student populations. Veterans want to connect with fellow students with similar experiences. Student organizations provide a conduit through which veterans can convey a collective voice of advocacy while presenting a venue for learning, reflection, and participation beyond the traditional classroom. A student veterans organization can afford an environment to support transition from the military to higher education (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009).

Oversight

The Office of Federal Student Aid is investigating approaches to revise its oversight to the distinctive challenges posed by distance learning programs. However, VA officials have decided not to alter their oversight practices for distance learning courses. VA education program officials support individual school and government entities' audit findings to augment their oversight of institutions with distance education programs (Bertoni, 2011).

The VA focuses its outreach and support for its education benefits to active military and veterans, not specifically those with disabilities. Eligibility is based on length of military service and not disability status. Since the VA has not established performance measures for these activities, the effectiveness of the VA's outreach and support is indeterminate (Bertoni, 2011).

Research

Much of the early research concerning military students was conducted following World War II and the Vietnam War. Several recent studies have investigated the transition experience of active military and veterans enrolled in a higher education program (Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014). Veterans represent a unique group of nontraditional students. Similar to nontraditional students, they are frequently older than their peers, may support families, may

have a career, may partake in fewer campus activities, and consider themselves less a part of the campus community than traditional college students (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011).

ACE Online Survey

On Veterans Day in 2011, the American Council on Education (ACE) emailed requests to 2,929 chief student service administrators to participate in an online survey about the presence, but not the quality, of key services and their utilization to active military and veterans (McBain et al., 2012, p. 13). ACE's Center for Policy Analysis (CPA) received 690 responses to its query "to measure changes in campus programs and services stemming from legislative revisions to the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2010" (McBain et al., 2012, p. 7). Based on the percentage for each type of respondent, public two- and four-year institutions appear to be overrepresented, while private, not-for-profit four-year and for-profit institutions were significantly underrepresented (Table 1).

Table 1: Survey Respondents and Degree-Granting Institutions

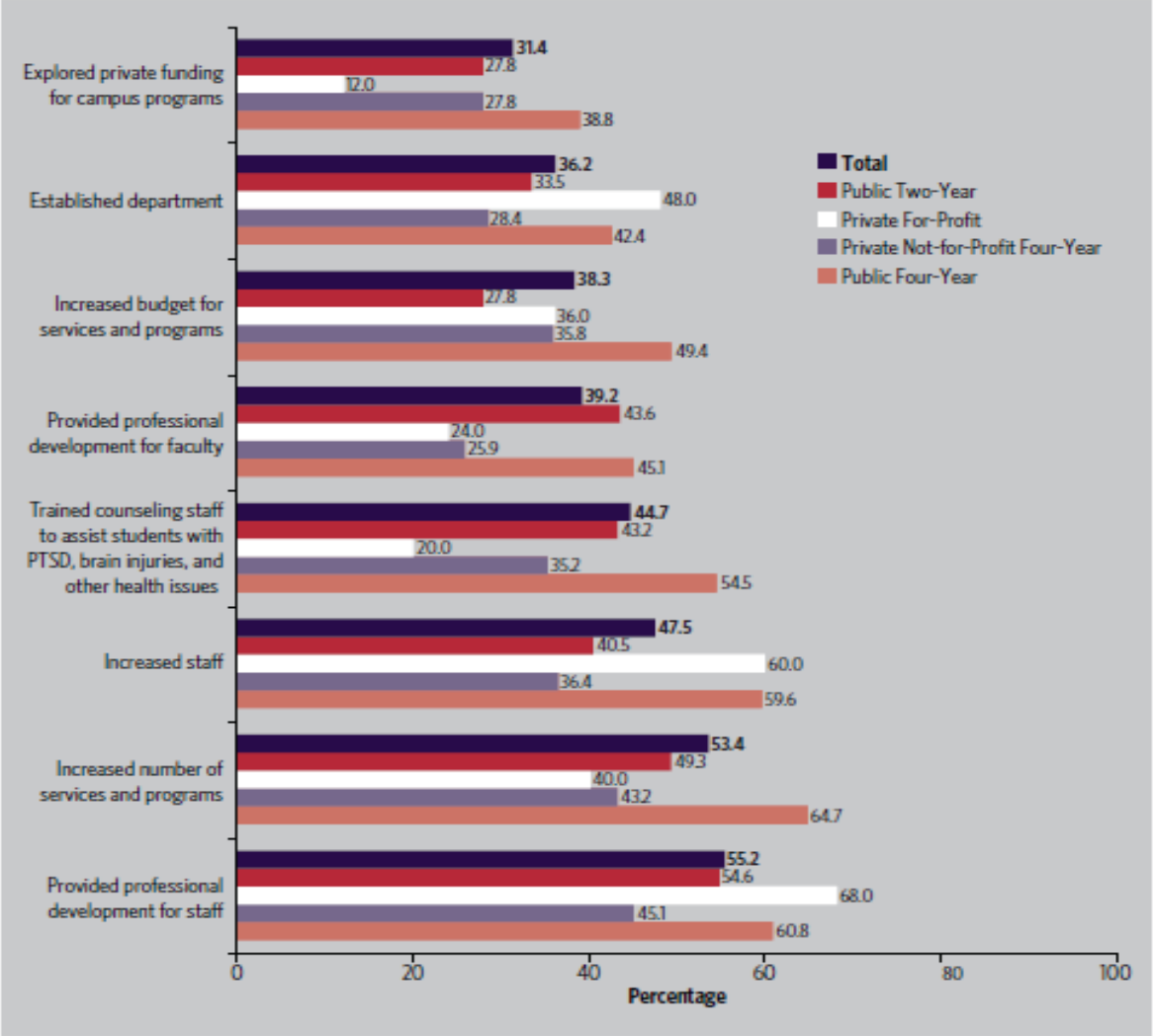
	Survey Respondents		Institutions	
	N	%	N	%
Public Two-Year	238	34	1,000	23
Public Four-Year	262	38	672	15
Private Not-for-Profit Four-Year	164	24	1,539	35
Private For-Profit	26	4	1,199	27
Total	690	100	4,410	100

(U.S. Department of Education, 2015; "Digest of Education Statistics, 2010," 2010)

Public four-year institutions have made the most strides in undertaking initiatives for active military and veterans. In each of the eight categories, these colleges and universities have outpaced the average numbers put up by the other three types of institutions. The private, not-for-profit four-year schools trail its counterparts by a significant margin in the overall score. Less

than 30% of those institutions have established a department that caters to the specific needs of armed forces personnel (Figure 1).

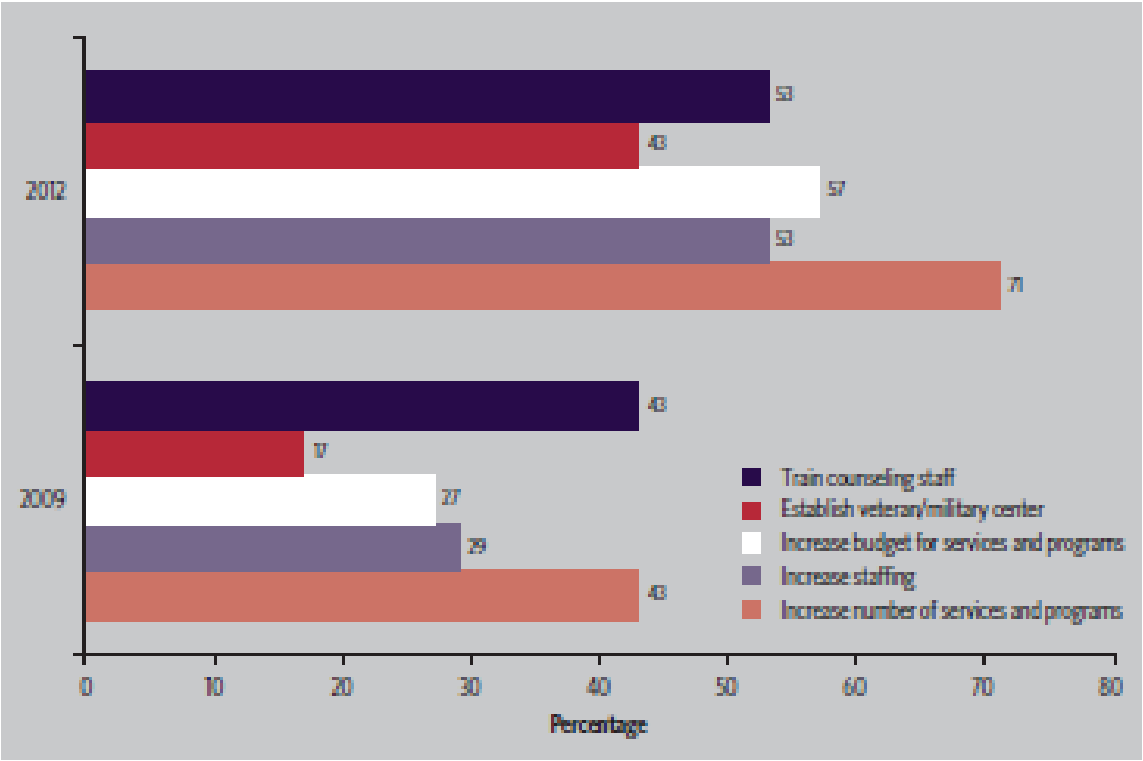
Figure 1: Percentage of Institutions That Have Undertaken Initiatives to Serve Veterans/ Military Students, by Institution Type



(McBain et al., 2012)

In comparing the percentages of institutions planning various actions for active military and veterans during the next five years, the numbers increased significantly from 2009 to 2012 (Figure 2). Especially encouraging was an increase in establishing a veteran military center. Military students enjoy interacting with each other, especially in a place where they feel safe and relaxed (Burnett & Segoria, 2009).

Figure 2: Percentages of Institutions Planning Various Actions for Veterans/Military Students During the Next Five Years, as Reported in 2009 and 2012

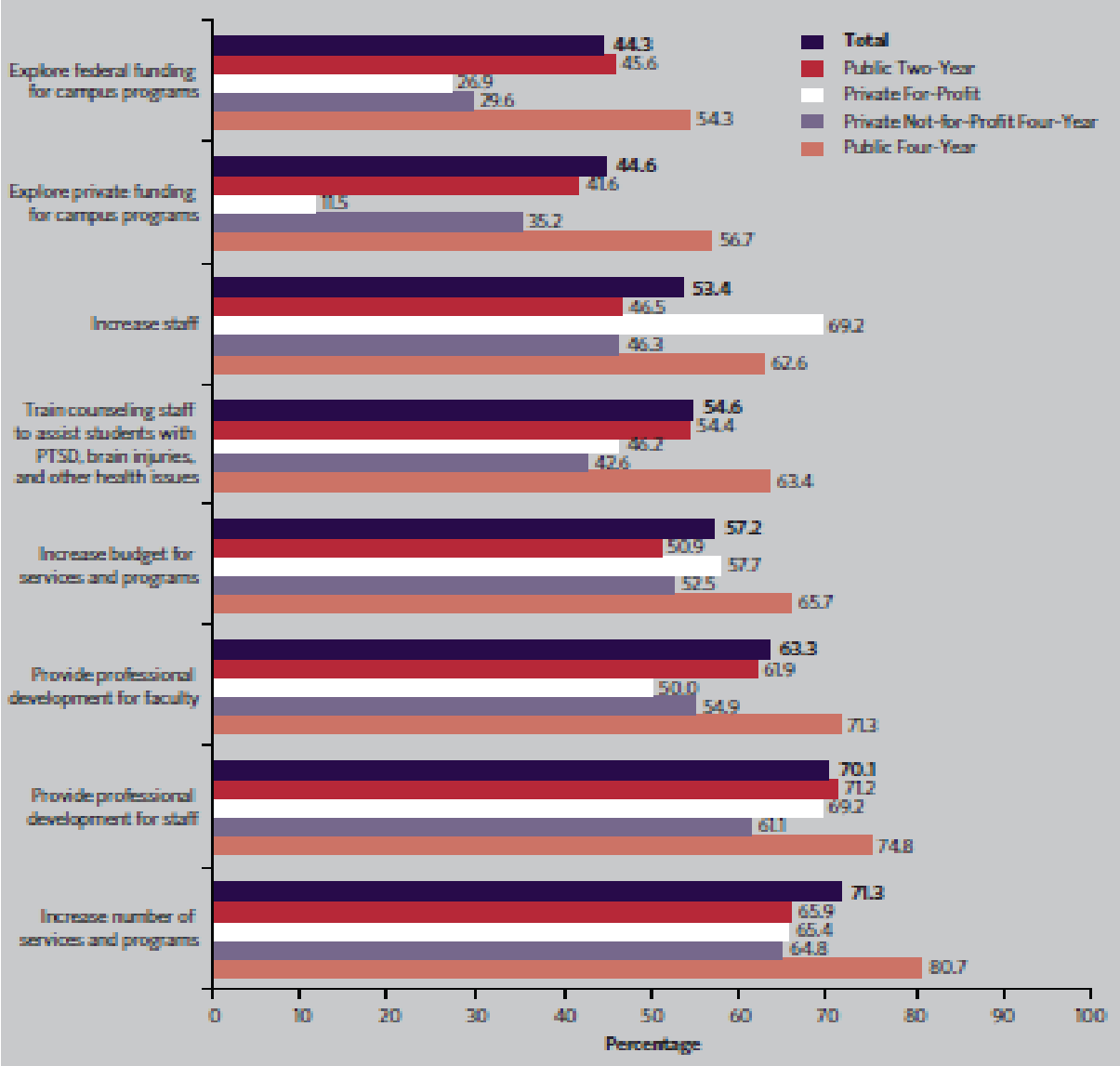


(McBain et al., 2012)

Overall, institutions have expressed a desire to augment staff, training, service, and programs for both campus and distance education students in the next five years for active military and veterans. By comparison, a vast majority of these schools have chosen to investigate the possibility of obtaining additional funds at a far lower rate. How will all these new items be subsidized without procuring further monies?

Public four-year institutions have the highest percentage of planning various actions. More than 80% are steadfast in their pledge to increase the number of services and programs available for armed forces students (Figure 3). Private for-profit schools plan to increase staff and budget, but founder in their commitment to exploring public or private funding to pay for their campus programs. Will the funding be diverted from any profits normally paid to investors or will tuition be increased to offset the added expenses?

Figure 3: Percentage of Institutions Planning Various Actions for Veterans/Military Students During Next Five Years, by Institution Type

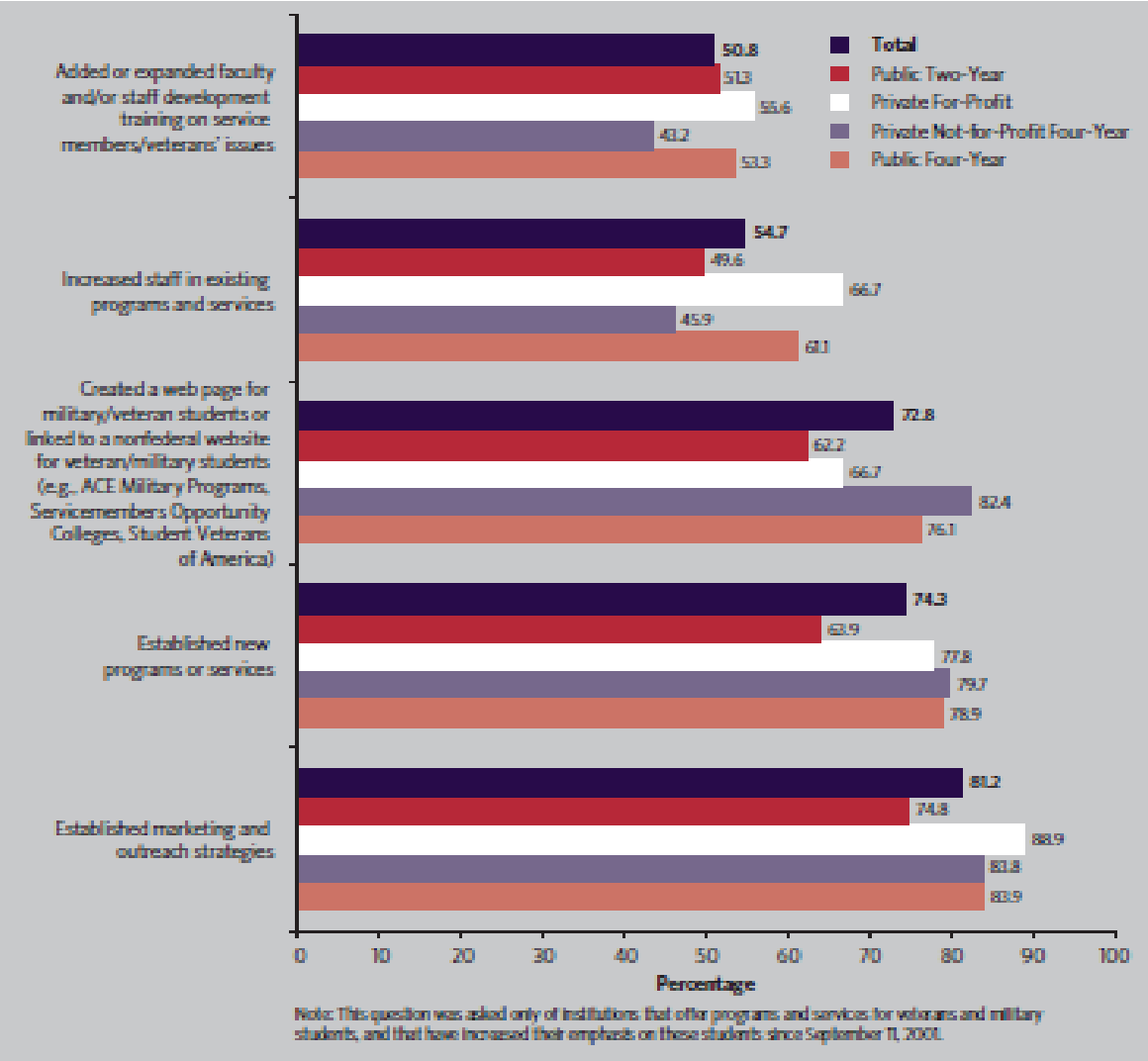


(McBain et al., 2012)

Since September 11, 2001, over 80% of the colleges and universities surveyed established marketing and outreach strategies to better serve active military and veteran students, particularly in the area of distance learning. Nearly three-fourths of the schools either created a webpage or linked to a non-federal website specifically designed for military students (Figure 4). In the months following the September 11th attacks, American higher education faculty were forced to think and teach about the attacks in a manner evoking memories of the Japanese attack

on Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941 (Hoyt, 2000). Some of the education that occurred on September 12 and beyond might best be regarded as therapeutic (Flynn & Boisseau, 2002).

Figure 4: Percentage of Institutions That Have Taken Various Actions Since September 11, 2001, to Better Serve Military/Veterans, by Institution Type

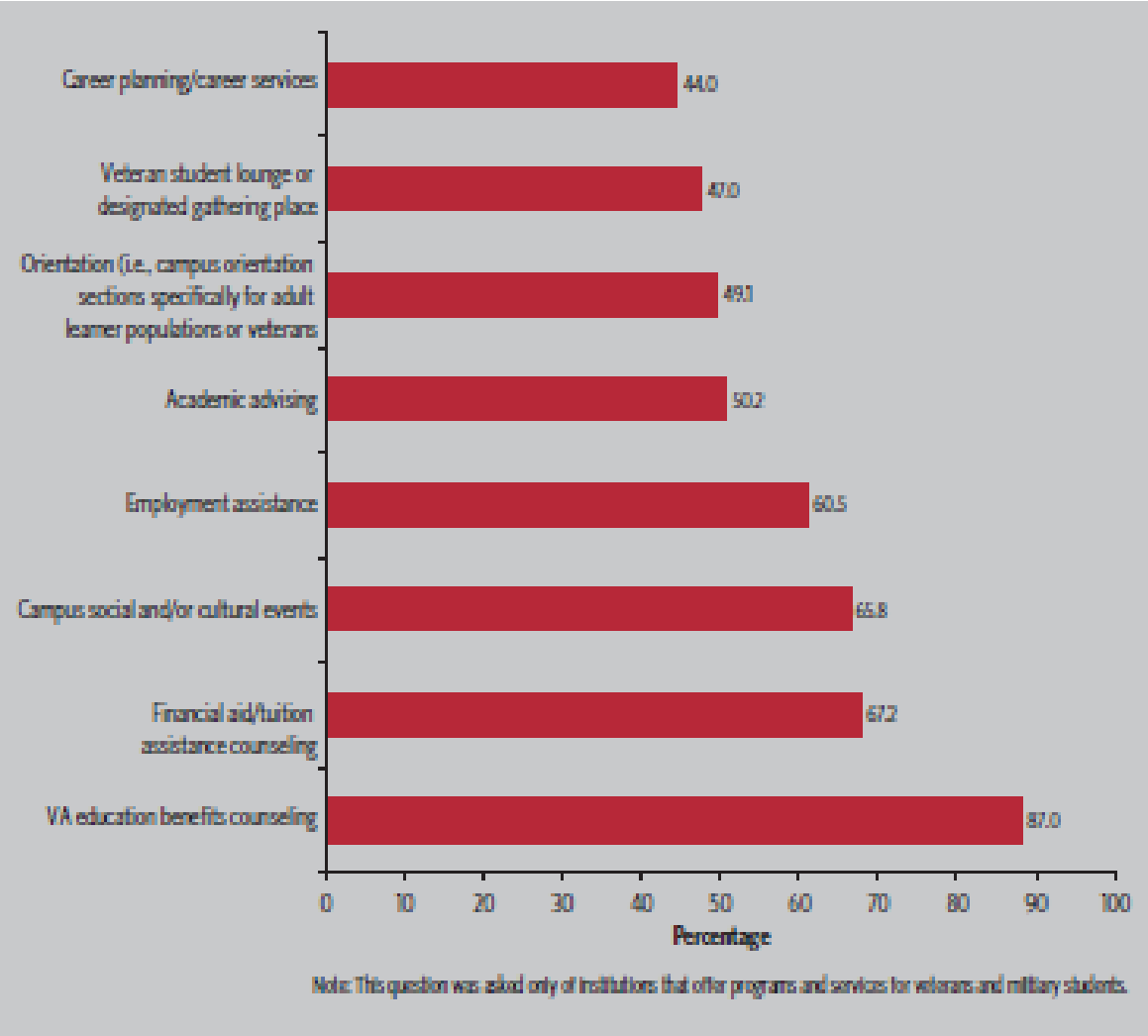


(McBain et al., 2012)

Nearly 90% of the institutions in the survey offer VA education benefits counseling (Figure 5). Although this figure illustrates the importance placed on active military and veterans' attendance at institutes of higher education, why is this number less than 100%? In the areas of academic advising, career planning, and employment assistance, the percentage of colleges and

universities offering these types of assistance is significantly lower that VA education benefits counseling. Financial aid and tuition assistance counseling, which aids armed forces students in selecting the proper funding options, is offered at less than three-fourths of the schools.

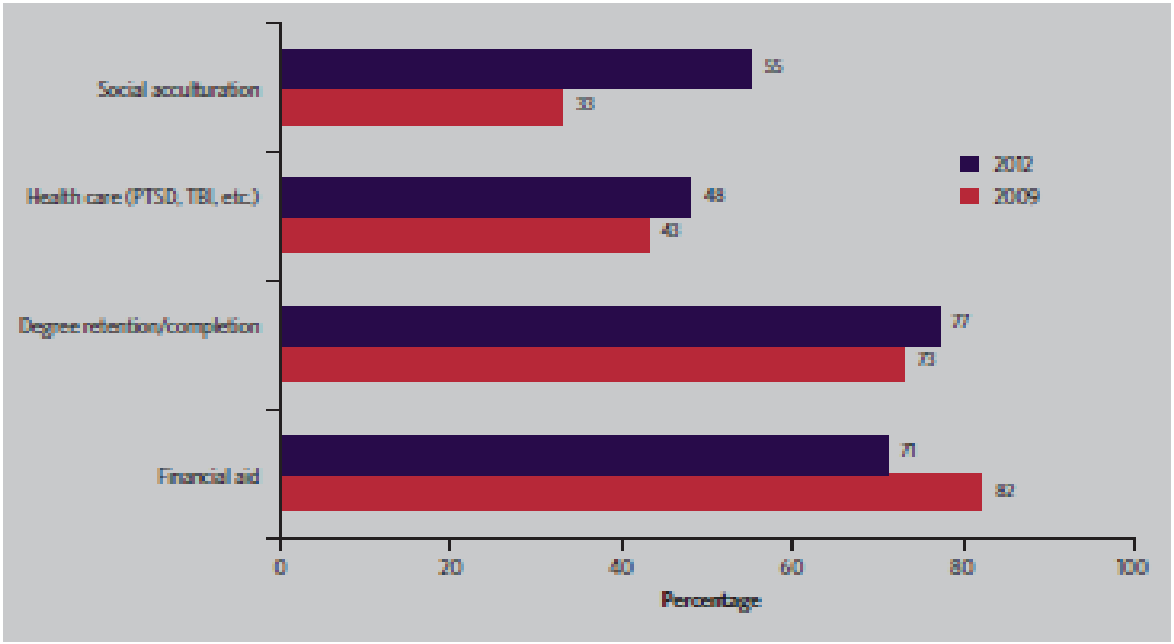
Figure 5: Percentage of Institutions with Various Campus Services for Veterans and Military Students



(McBain et al., 2012)

An area in which the survey results showed that institutions made the highest gains among active military and veteran students was social acculturation. More than half of the campuses made it a priority in 2012, which was up from one-third in 2009 (Figure 6). Health care still remained under 50%. Financial aid for armed forces learners suffered an 11% decline.

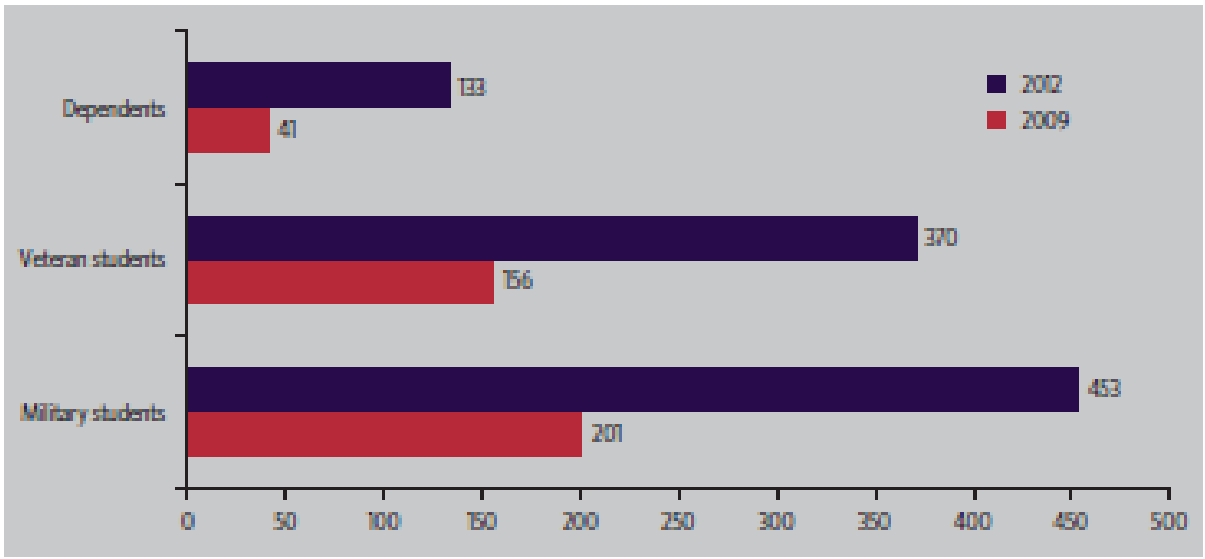
Figure 6: Issues Institutions See as Facing Military and Veteran Students in 2009 and 2012, by Percentage



(McBain et al., 2012)

Between 2009 and 2012, the enrollment of students with a military background skyrocketed. Each campus surveyed witnessed, on average, the armed forces student population had more than doubled during that three year period (Figure 7).

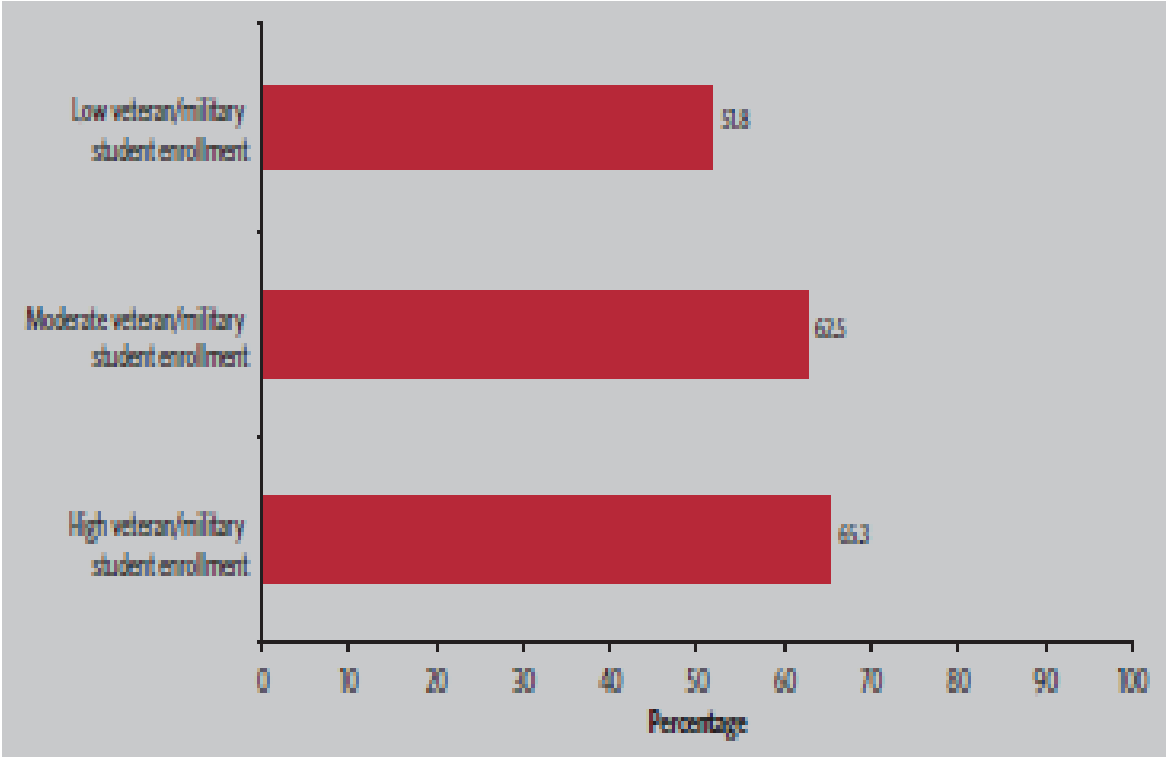
Figure 7: Average Military Student, Veteran Student, and Dependent Enrollment in 2009 and 2012



(McBain et al., 2012)

The percentage of institutions with services and programs offered to military students is divided into three types of institutions (Figure 8): 1. Low veteran enrollment (LVE) - a military/veteran population less than or equal to 1% of total enrollment; 2. Moderate veteran enrollment (MVE) - a military/veteran population between 1% and 3% of total enrollment; and 3. High veteran enrollment (HVE) - a military/veteran population greater than 3% of total enrollment (McBain et al., 2012). The presence of programs and services for military students is correlated to the ratio of active military and veterans in the student enrollment numbers as a whole. Neither version of the survey endeavored to establish a causal nexus between enrollment and services.

Figure 8: Percentage of Institutions with Programs and Services for Veterans and Military Students, by Veteran/Military Student Enrollment

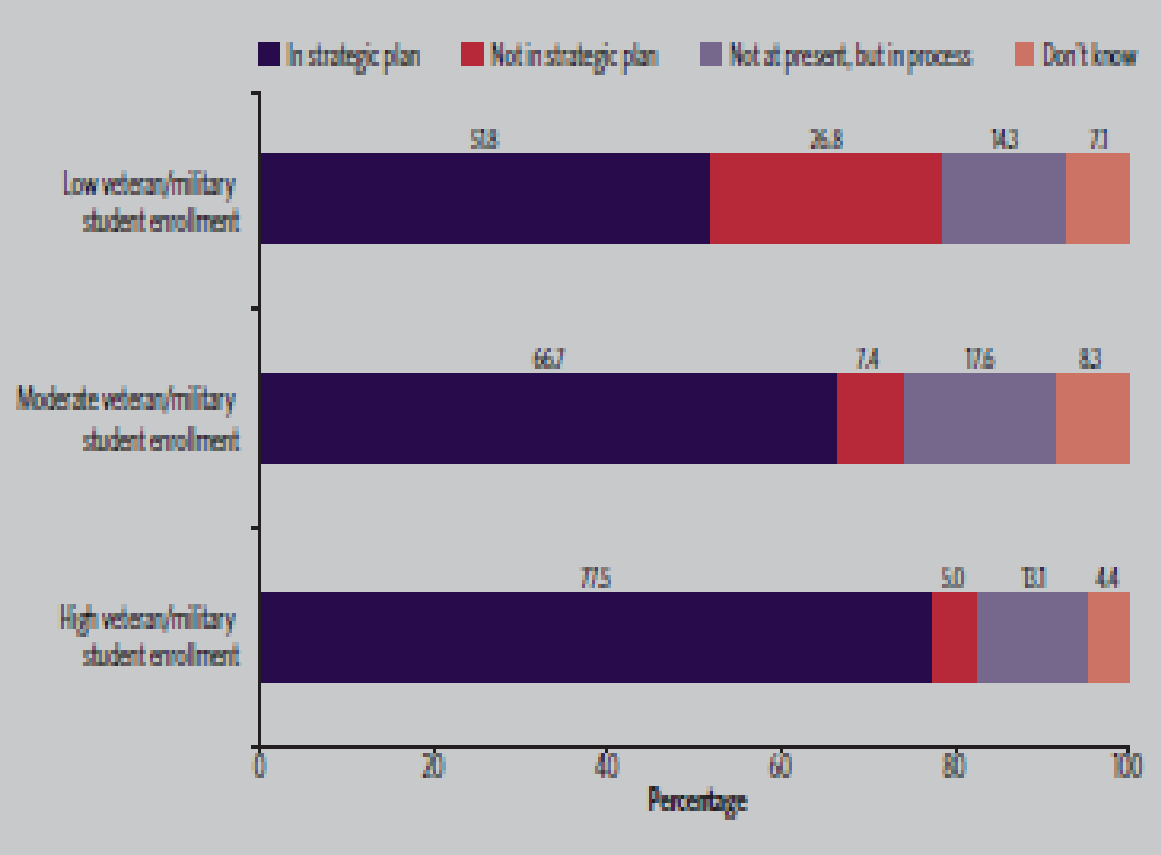


(McBain et al., 2012)

As the share of active military and veteran students at a college or university escalates, the programs and services explicitly designed for this group of students are becoming embedded

in an institution's long-term strategic plan (Figure 9). Over 65% of the survey respondents in all three categories indicated that programs and services for armed forces students were in their strategic plan or in the process of being added to it.

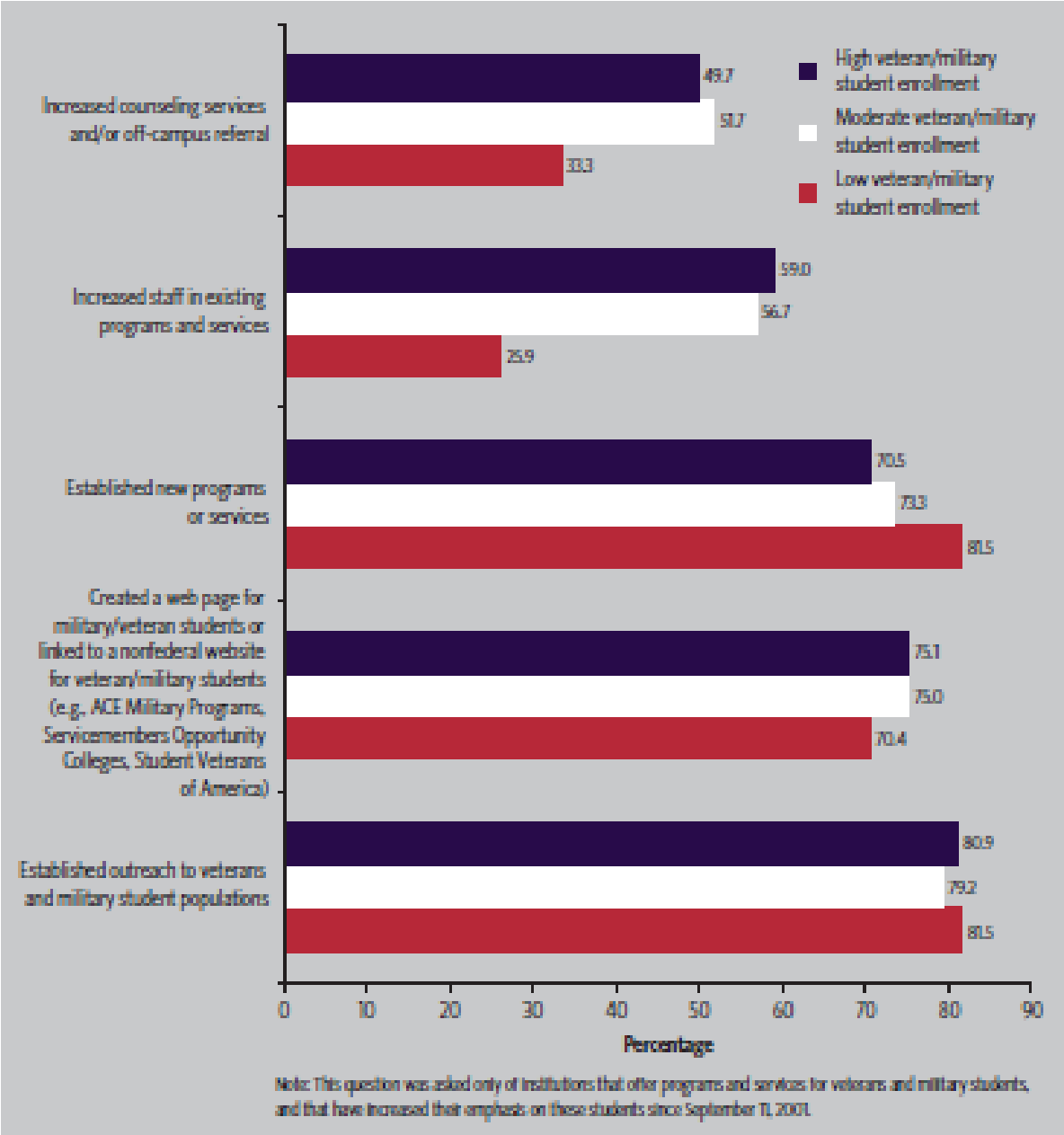
Figure 9: Percentage of Institutions with Programs and Services for Veterans and Military Students in Their Long-Term Strategic Plan, by Veteran/Military Employment



(McBain et al., 2012)

Since September 11, 2001, LVE, MVE, and HVE institutions have all taken various steps to better serve active military and veteran students (Figure 10). Nearly 80% of all schools have launched some type of outreach program to better serve this segment of the student populace. LVE campuses lag behind their counterparts in increasing counseling services or campus referral and adding staff to existing programs and services.

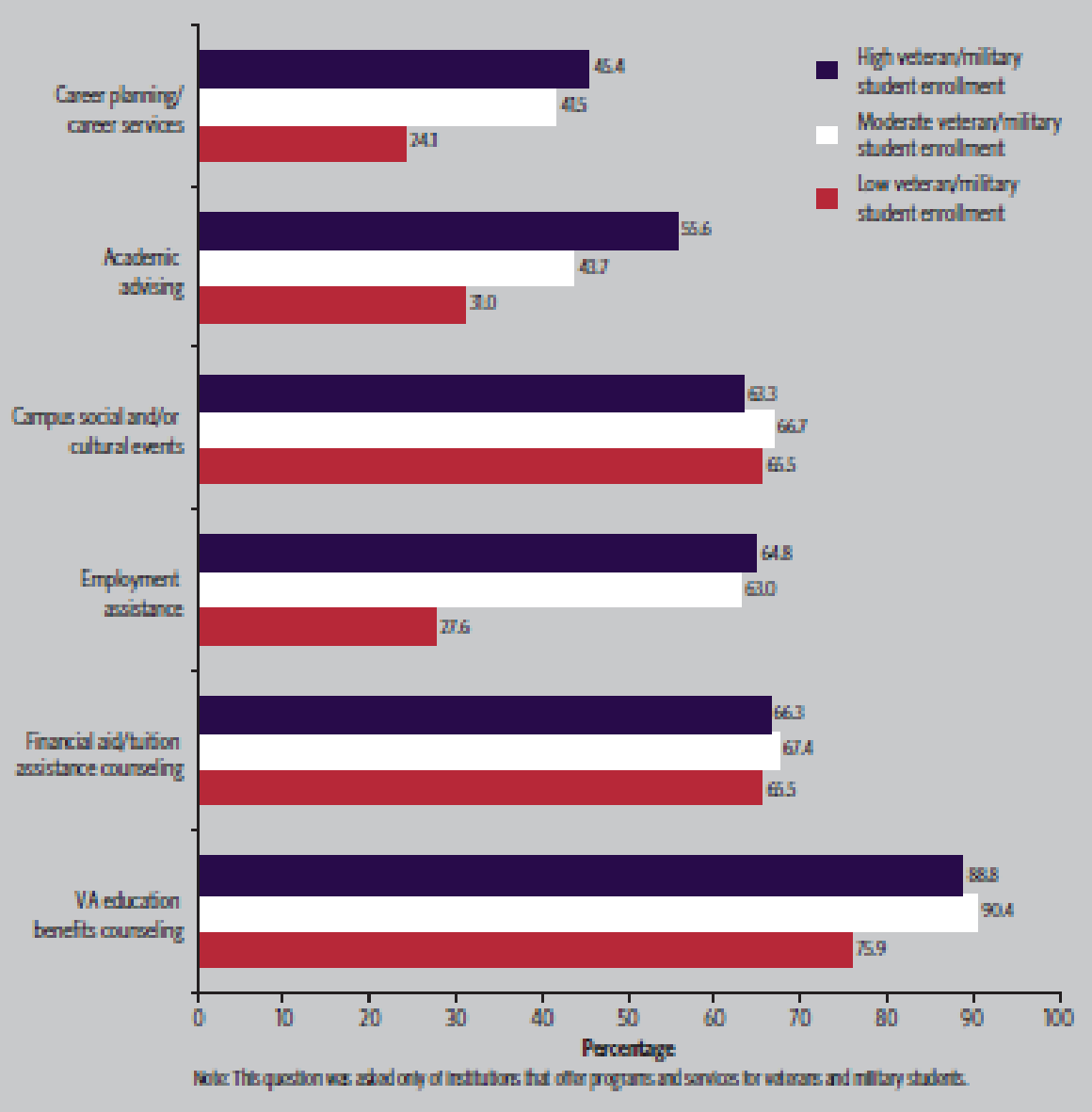
Figure 10: Percentage of Institutions That Have Taken Various Actions to Better Serve Veterans/ Military Students Since September 11, 2001, by Veteran/Military Student Enrollment



(McBain et al., 2012)

Both HVE and MVE campuses have shown a commitment to armed forces students by offering various campus services specifically for that student cluster (Figure 11). With the exception of social or cultural events and financial aid and tuition assistance counseling, LVE institutions have failed to make significant inroads in these areas.

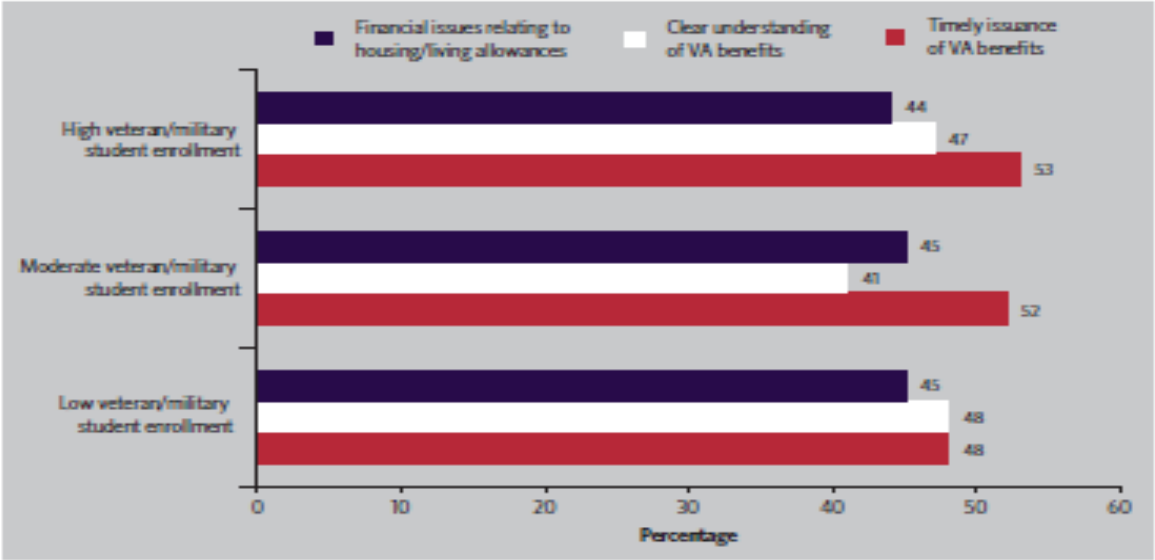
Figure 11: Percentage of Institutions Offering Various Campus Services Specifically for Veterans and Military Students, by Veteran/Military Student Enrollment



(McBain et al., 2012)

Regardless of enrollment level, all institutions ranked timely issuance of VA education benefits as their active military and veteran students' uppermost stressor (Figure 12). This occurrence was most prevalent at HVE colleges and universities, even though armed forces student support was the highest. Financial issues relating to housing/living allowances produced the lowest average amount of stress.

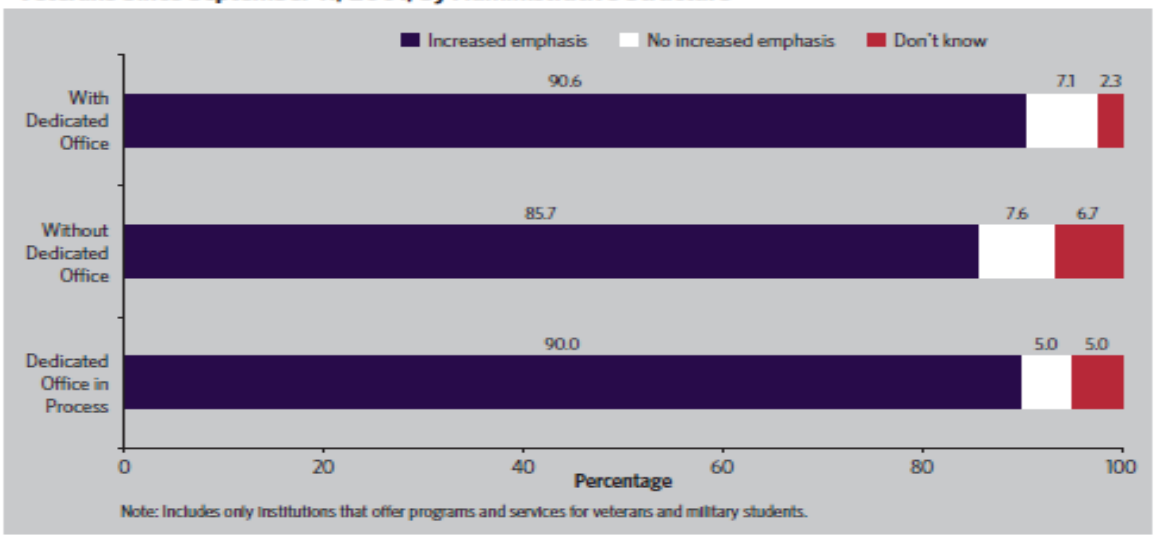
Figure 12: Top Three Stressors Institutions Perceive to be Affecting Their Military/ Veteran Students, by Veteran/Military Student Enrollment



(McBain et al., 2012)

The topic of campus services improvement for active military and veterans came to the forefront on college and university campuses in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Whether an institution had, did not have, or was in the process of establishing a dedicated office for service members and veterans, an overwhelming majority demonstrated an increased emphasis on providing services to that faction of students moving forward (Figure 13).

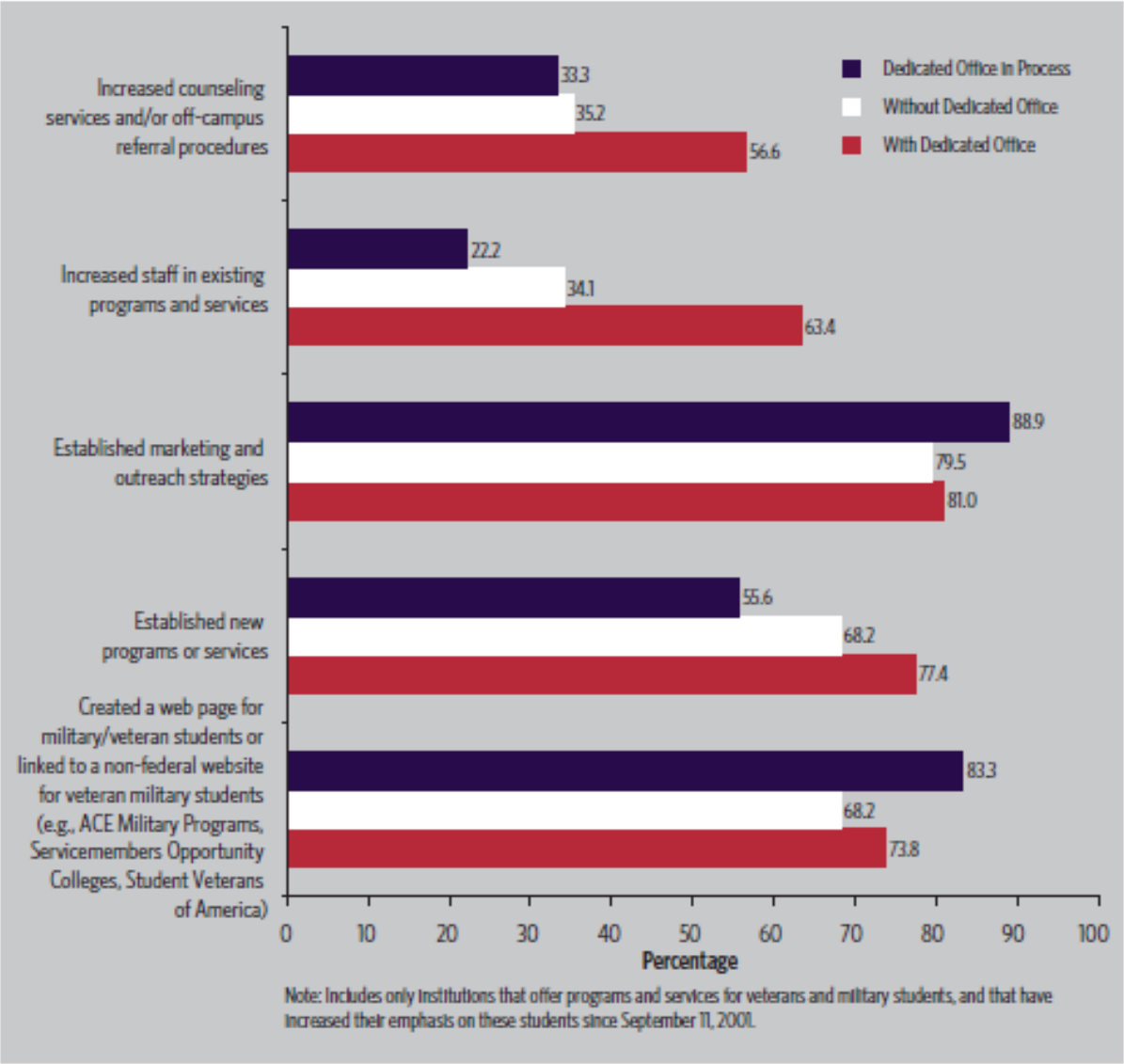
Figure 13: Percentage of Institutions That Have Increased Emphasis on Services Members and Veterans Since September 11, 2001, by Administrative Structure



(McBain et al., 2012)

Institutions with a dedicated office increased counseling services or referral procedures and added staff to existing programs and services after September 11, 2001 compared to institutions lacking a dedicated office (Figure 14). Nearly 90% of colleges and universities with a dedicated office in process established marketing and outreach strategies to notify armed forces students about the benefits of attending their particular school. However, a dearth of staff and new programs and services might be counterintuitive to expected progress.

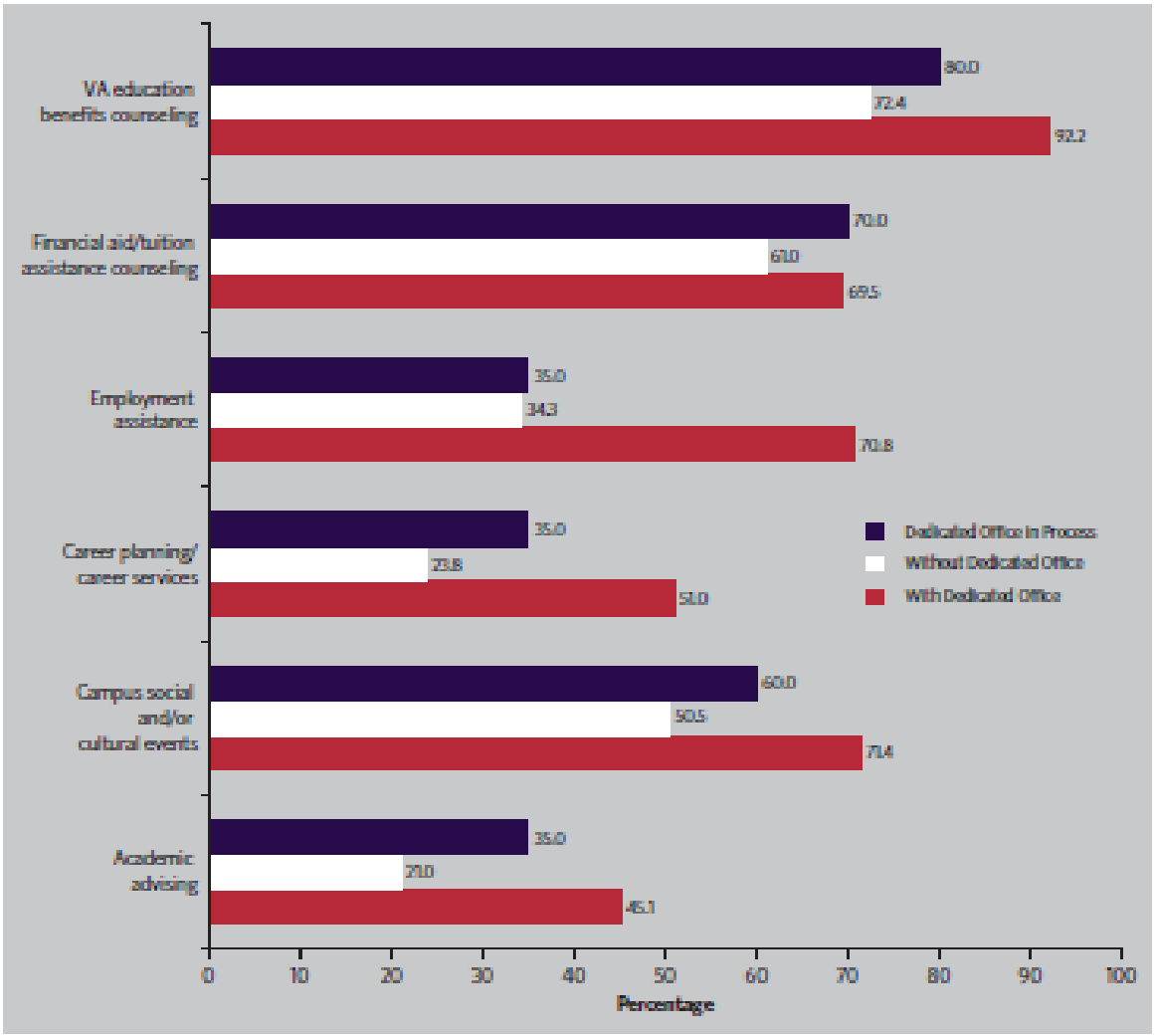
Figure 14: Percentage of Institutions That Have Taken Various Actions to Better Serve Veterans and Military Service Members Since September 11, 2001, by Administrative Structure



(McBain et al., 2012)

Institutions with a dedicated office for armed forces personnel proffered common student services to these learners (Figure 15). Among those with a dedicated office, 70% (versus 61% in 2009) extended financial aid and tuition assistance counseling and 71% (versus 64% in 2009) provided employment assistance specifically for active military and veterans. Ninety-two percent surveyed offered VA benefits counseling (McBain et al., 2012, p. 36).

Figure 15: Percentage of Institutions Offering Various Campus Services Specifically for Veterans and Military Students, by Administrative Structure

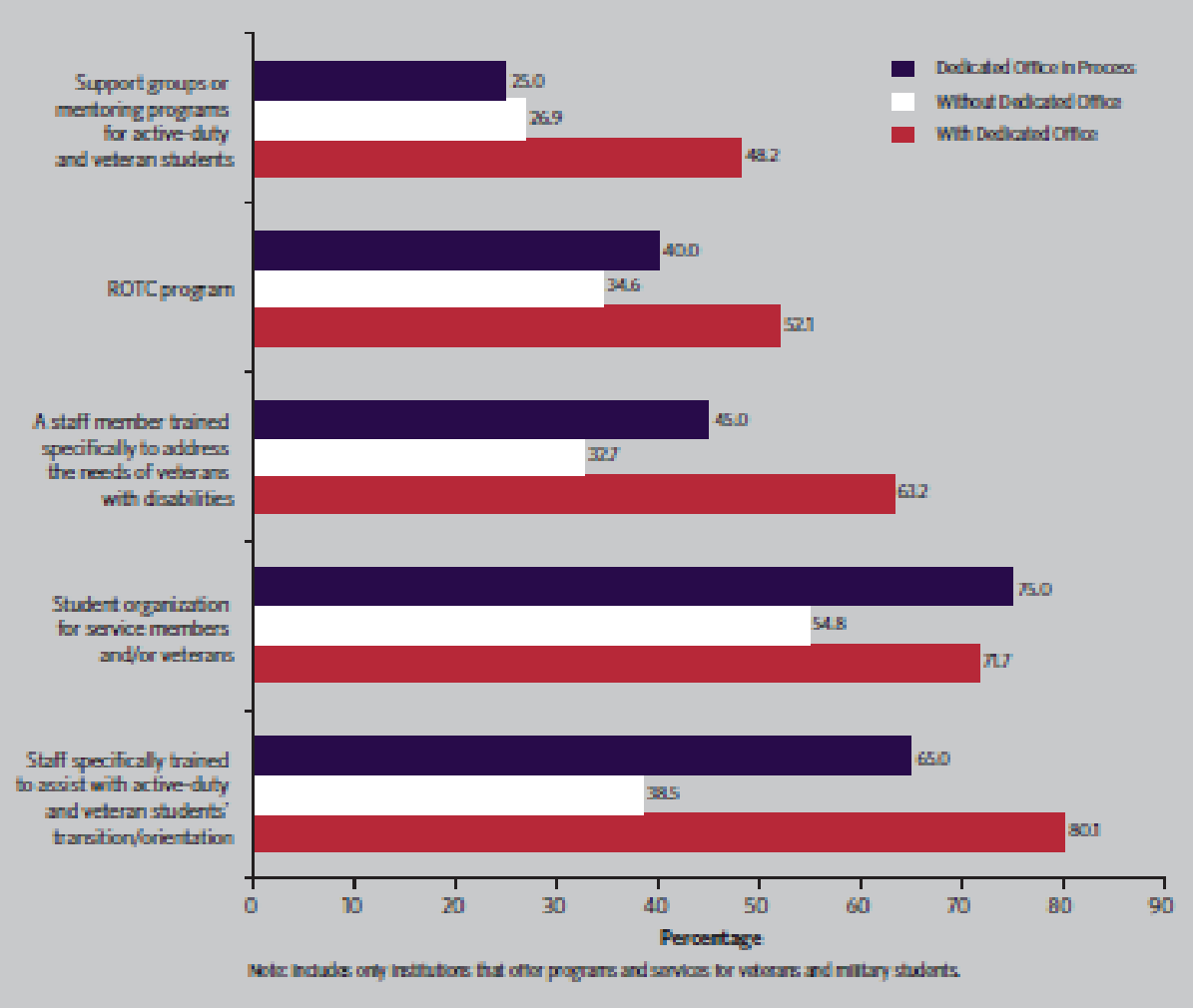


(McBain et al., 2012)

There were some notable disparities in the accessibility to specialized counseling and support services for active military and veteran students. In most cases, schools with a dedicated

office were able to offer these amenities more readily than those institutions without a dedicated office or one in process (Figure 16). Schools with a dedicated office nearly doubled the other two groups offering support groups or mentoring programs.

Figure 16: Percentage of Institutions Offering Various Student Groups and Services for Veterans and Military Students, by Administrative Structure



(McBain et al., 2012)

GPI Research Project

The Graduation Probability Indices (GPI) research project, conducted in the summer of 2013, was the initial step by Operation College Promise (OCP) and the Pat Tillman Foundation (PTF) with the support of Got Your 6 (GY6) in assessing student veterans' advancement toward degree completion. GPI includes 741 military students chosen from 23 institutions (Figure 17).

The students must be utilizing the Post-9/11 GI Bill, in the first or second year of college, enrolled full-time, and degree seeking. No more than 40 students were selected, at random, from each campus (Lang, Harriett, & Cadet, 2013).

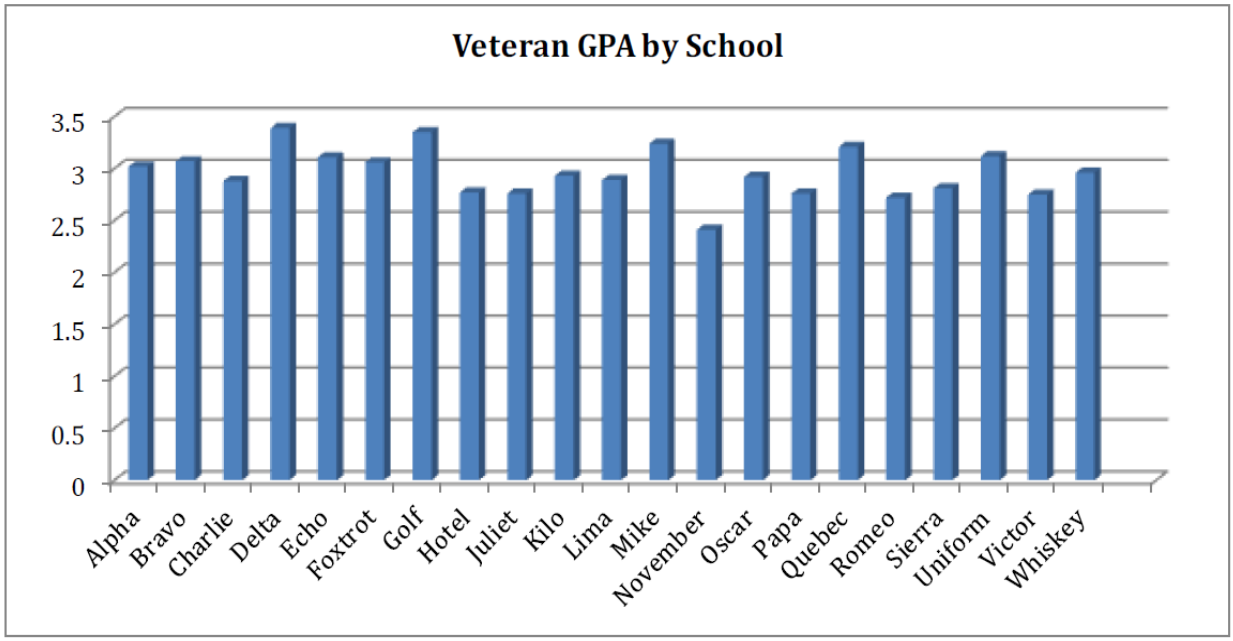
Figure 17

2013 Participating Universities			
	2011-2012 Year		
Institution	**# Total Veteran Students**	**# Total Students**	**Tuition (In-State/Out)**
Arizona State University	1,816	58,404	9,720 / 22,319
Baldwin Wallace University	102	3,509	26,396 / 29,396
Coastal Carolina University	397	8,517	9,760 / 21,560
Colorado State University	1,348	22,500	7,952 / 23,652
Eastern Kentucky University	1,217	13,902	6,960 / 19,056
George Mason University	2,172	20,782	9,266 / 26,744
George Washington University	722	10,406	44,148 / 44,148
Georgetown University	419	7,590	41,393 / 41,393
Mississippi State University	2,111	16,312	5,805 / 14,670
Missouri State University	650	17,187	6,598 / 12,418
Montclair State University	232	14,590	10,646 / 19,394
Purdue University	517	31,988	9,478 / 27,646
Texas A&M University (College Station)	560	39,867	8,421 / 23,811
University of Alabama	453	26,234	8,600 / 21,900
University of Arizona	994	30,665	10,035 / 25,494
University of Denver	259	5,453	37,833 / 37,833
University of Maryland	603	37,631	8,655 / 26,026
University of Michigan—Flint	250	6,959	8,712 / 17,014
University of South Florida	1,750	47,000	32,364 / 32,364
University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee	1,006	24,270	8,675 / 18,404
Institutions in Study That Did Not Participate in Voluntary Survey of Campus Support Services			
University of Minnesota	n/a	34,812	13,022 / 18,022
University of New Mexico	n/a	22,643	5,809 / 19,919
University of Wyoming	n/a	10,163	4,125 / 12,855

(College Navigator – National Center for Education Statistics)

The study of these veteran students showed a correlation between a high grade point average (GPA), defined as 3.0 or greater, and progress toward completing a degree. As GPAs decreased, retention figures shrank by a comparable margin. Students in this study averaged 2.98, still indicative of the possibility of degree attainment (Figure 18).

Figure 18



Note: For statistical purposes, the lowest and highest GPA's were not included in the median calculation.

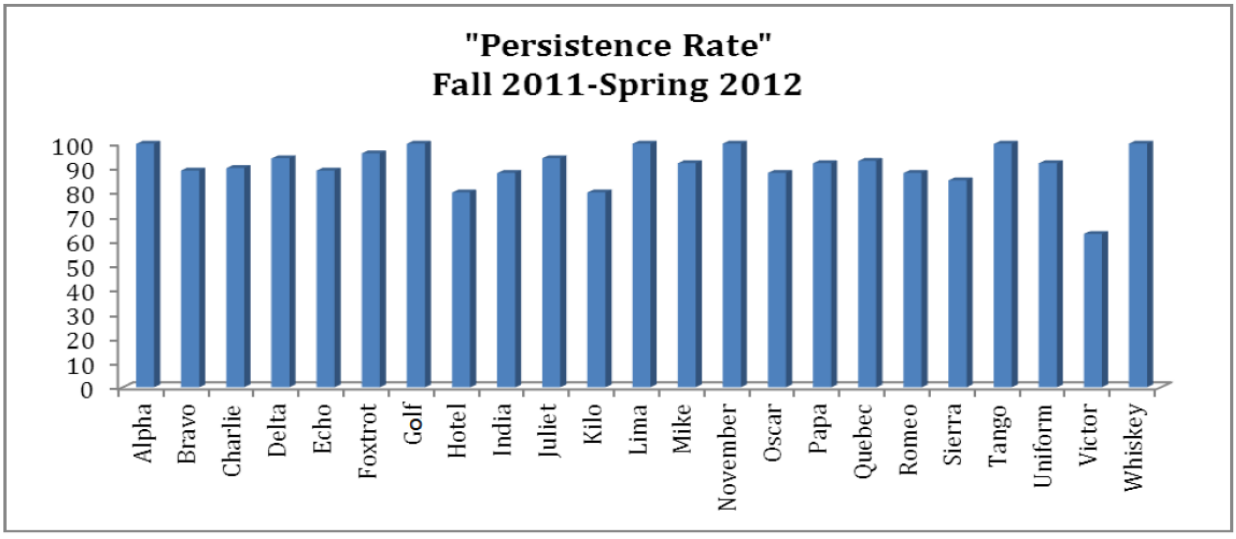
(Lang et al., 2013)

A majority of veteran students fall into the non-traditional category for higher education students. Veterans fall into student groups often overlooked: non-traditional-age, part-time, and mixed enrollment (Shapiro et al., 2012). According to a National Student Clearinghouse Research Center study, the United States college completion rate climbs "from 42 percent to 54 percent" (Shapiro et al., 2012, p. 49) when non-traditional students are included in the equation. More than 75% of full-time students complete college within six years, even though "the vast majority (84.3%) of incoming first-year students believe that they will graduate in four years. This will likely only come true for approximately half of them" (Lang et al., 2013, p. 6; Pryor et al., 2012).

A major trepidation in colleges and universities about student population is persistence. Creativity, self-expression, and critical thinking are generally less accentuated in the military than in college. Once soldiers learn standard operating procedure (SOP), they can apply it in a broad manner in numerous situations. In college, different disciplines have distinctive expectations, writing styles, and citation rules (Roost & Roost, 2014). Administrators are constantly working to reduce the number of dropouts at their institutions, including military students.

Due to the time constraints placed on education benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, it is even more imperative that veterans choose an efficient course of action in pursuing a degree. Additionally, military students who leave school and fail to earn a degree are unlikely to return at some point in the future. Active military and veterans who remain in school and earn a degree find more success in civilian life than those who drop out (Lang et al., 2013). Hotel, Kilo, and Victor are examples of military students leaving college, not earning a degree, having issues finding a satisfying career, and demonstrating the importance of education for those students with a military background.

Figure 19



(Lang et al., 2013)

Per the OCP Survey in August 2013, veterans requested a number of services not currently provided at institutions of higher education:

- Priority class registration
- Separate veteran orientation for new students
- Annual veterans' 'Meet & Greet' with department heads
- Improved alliance between veterans' groups and campus administrators
- Employment prospects tailored to graduating veterans
- Increased interaction with civilians independent of the veteran support office

(Lang et al., 2013, p. 10)

Transition to Civilian Life

The four main elements of a successful transition dialogue originate in the acronym HELP:

• H: higher education/credentialing

• E: employment

• L: lifelong learning

• P: productivity

(Berry & Stanley, 2014, p. 86)

By endorsing the significance of higher education, service members can be groomed for sustainable military or civilian employment. Through the leveraging of military training, active military and veterans can accelerate their schedule to obtain a degree (Berry & Stanley, 2014).

The Schlossberg Transition Model

Schlossberg's model concentrates on general life transitions of veterans, which provides academic advisors with a background for their work with all students. A transition is defined as "any event, or non event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles"

(Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 27). There are four dynamics that shape the quality of transitions: self, situation, strategies, and support. Referred to as the 4 Ss, these four areas highlight the assets and flaws in each area by either facilitating or hindering a successful transition (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011).

The 4 Ss need to be elucidated and customized when advisors work with veterans due to major differences between their transition to higher education and that of nonmilitary students. Veterans with a negative perception of the circumstances regarding their admission into higher education may require greater support than students with a specific plan to enroll in a higher education program. Conversations with military students about the rationale for being discharged from military service must be handled with reverence and care by advisors (Ryan et al., 2011).

The role of armed forces personnel in the military and its culture is in sharp contrast to their position in higher education. The disparities influence matters related to Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) self, situation, and strategy factors. The new expectations connected with higher education indicate a situation factor that can impact a veteran's sense of control and expectation. Some veterans appreciate the change to a college culture, which allows them to abjure the responsibilities and restrictions of military life. Other veterans were well-suited to the military environment and may find the change more problematic (Ryan et al., 2011). Schlossberg et al. (1995) stated:

> A given role change can be more or less difficult (and have greater or lesser impact) depending on whether the new role is a loss or a gain, positive or negative, or has explicit norms and expectations for the new incumbent. (p. 56).

A veteran's assessment of the new role and its compatibility with anticipated life goals will add to the level of complexity faced during a transition. For example, veterans may

recognize the advantage of an education as a way to a better life. They may be prone to consider the transition positively. However, those who deem college responsibilities less important than those experienced in the military may evaluate the transition negatively (Ryan et al., 2011).

The nontraditional status of active military and veterans is another problem linked to the experience of role change. As nontraditional students, armed forces personnel may need to relearn study proficiencies and become familiar with the classroom, a setting most veterans have not entered for many years. Veterans entering college for the first time or those resuming an education after a short-term break, discover that they are unprepared for the academic load of college (DiRamio et al., 2008). Veterans can (re)acclimate to college by enrolling in a part-time class load initially, take review courses, and connect to study skills resources.

The level of support active military and veterans received before, during, and after their military career shapes the transition to higher education. Dill and Henley (1998) brought to light that nontraditional college students receiving healthy reassurance from a close relative or companion better handled demanding academic experiences by benefitting from attainment in diverse life roles. Besides family members, other sources of support frequently include classmates, faculty, friends, and fellow members of the military.

Assistance

All branches of the military provide pre-separation counseling. Transition workshops are offered that incorporate information on veterans' benefits and employment assistance. However, military branch data suggest that not all military members obtain the required pre-separation therapy or participate in the seminars.

Table 2: Participation in Pre-Separation Counseling and Transition Assistance Workshops by Military Branch, Fiscal Year 2001

Participation	Air Force	Army	Marines	Navy	Coast Guard	Total or Average
Total Separated/Retired	43,756	85,190	31,319	57,452[a]	4,037	221,754
Number of pre-separation counselings	39,375	77,146	27,849	30,508	N/A[b]	174,878
Percent receiving pre-separation counseling	90%[c]	91%	89%	53%	N/A[b]	81%
Number attending transition assistance workshop[d]	27,815	28,464	21,397	41,181	1,155[e]	120,012
Percent attending workshop	64%	33%	68%	72%	29%	53%

(Bascetta, 2002)

Although each military branch provides the mandatory pre-separation counseling and offers workshops focusing on employment assistance and veterans' benefits, not all military representatives choose to participate. Disabled military members are supplied with detailed information on benefits and services available to military members with disabilities as well as assistance in retrieving these services. The military branches have considerable flexibility in creating their programs, which permits them to adjust the substance and delivery of their programs. Additionally, the primacies of the military mission can influence delivery and access to transition assistance (Bascetta, 2002).

Military branches have the option to provide additional services. Those additional services include: 1. resume writing; 2. career counseling; 3. job interview preparation; 4. stress management; 5. job fairs; and 6. internet job listings (Bascetta, 2002, pp. 7-8). Tuition assistance is a subsidy that every active military member and veteran should maximize (Berry & Stanley, 2014).

Several studies corroborate participant gratification with transition assistance, but incomplete information is accessible about the inclusive efficacy of the transition assistance

program. Evaluating the value of these services is complicated by data inadequacies and methodological complications. For example, most of the information available is collected for program monitoring and may not be analogous across the branches (Bascetta, 2002).

After examining the September 2014 unemployment rate, which sent the overall unemployment rate to 5.9%, the lowest since July 2008, veterans experienced a surge in hiring. Employers added 248,000 jobs in that month, which contributed to a veteran unemployment rate of 4.7%. In 2013, the veteran unemployment rate was 9%, compared to the overall rate of 7.3% the following year (Sipek, 2014). Twenty-three percent of veterans are underemployed or working in low-paying jobs. This statistic is almost 10% lower in 2014 than in 2013, but is a comparatively high number and exasperating for affected veterans (Timme, 2015).

Additional Training

Military service imbeds an assorted collection of invaluable proficiencies into active and retired soldiers. Many veterans have shown a propensity for technology having worked with some of the most advanced equipment ever invented. They truly comprehend the magnitude of training and recurrent education. Veterans fathom the necessity to fulfill tasks in a timely and precise fashion when completing complex team assignments in distance education (Leventhal & Gorog, 2013).

Veterans separating from military service seeking challenging career paths benefit from pursuing specialized conversion training. This type of training sets them apart from other candidates and make them more appealing in the job market. University degree paths, certifications programs, and specialized industry training are essential tools to meet future job demand (Leventhal & Gorog, 2013). The professionalism, expertise, and exemplary military preparation is insufficient to be competitive in today's labor market. Obtaining an education

serves as an avenue to get them an interview. Without a degree, they may encounter continued underemployment or unemployment (Berry & Stanley, 2014).

Sharp Decisions Inc., a technology consulting firm headed by CEO and President Karen Ross with headquarters in New York, New York, developed the Vocation Education Training and Services (VETS) program. Launched in March 2013, VETS looks to hire tech-savvy, post-9/11 armed forces veterans in their late 20s/early 30s as salaried and benefited employees. The company puts them through technology training to formulate job skills relevant to the positions available (Sipek, 2014).

Troops To Teachers (TTT)

Eligible military members find employment as teachers in schools through Troops To Teachers (TTT). The program was launched in the mid-1990s and has put more than 13,500 teachers with military experience into classrooms across the United States. Many of the people who graduate from TTT assist at-risk schools by teaching high-need subjects. The students find their leadership, training, and mentorship skills extremely fruitful (Berry & Stanley, 2014).

TTT educators are experienced, mature, and responsible. They serve as excellent role models and prepared to teach due to their dedication and the military's credo that no one can be left behind. Their success in a very demanding profession is gauged by the degree to which all succeed collectively. Members of the military are accustomed to serving their country and protecting the next generation. Their classroom mission is treated in a similar manner (Willett, 2002).

More than 27 percent of TTT graduates teach mathematics, compared to 7% of all teachers in the United States. Forty-six percent teach one of the sciences – biology, geology,

physics, or chemistry. Forty-four percent teach special education, compared to 19% of teachers nationwide (Berry & Stanley, 2014, p. 89; Feistritzer, 2005).

TTT has proven effective in delivering quality educators. TTT normally produces a significant number of teachers in high-demand areas, such as inner cities and outlying rural areas, more men and minorities, and more educators with math, science, and special education teaching experience. The overall pool of teachers is 74% female compared with TTT teachers that are 90% male (Figure 20). Twenty-nine percent are from minority or ethnic groups compared with 10% of educators in public schools (Figure 20).

Figure 20

Demographic Profile of Troops to Teachers and Public School Teachers in the United States

	Troops to Teachers 1998	Public School Teachers[1] 1996
Total Respondents	1,171	1,018
	Percent	**Percent**
Gender		
Male	90	26
Female	10	74
Race		
Amer. Indian/Alaskan	1	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1
Black	16	7
White	71	89
Hispanic	8	2
Other	3	*
Age		
Average (in years)	41	41
<24	*	3
25–34	5	18
35–44	36	31
45–54	55	39
55–64	5	9
65+	0	0
Community Where Teaching		
Inner city	24	16
Small town, non-rural	24	30
Suburban	27	31
Rural	24	23
Grade Level Taught		
Elementary	20	47
Middle/Junior High	35	26
Senior High	45	27

* < 0.5 percent

[1] National Center for Education Information survey of 1,018 public school K–12 teachers conducted Mar. 11–Apr. 19, 1996.

Source: National Center for Education Information, *Profile of Troops to Teachers*

Twenty-nine percent, compared with 13% of all teachers, were teaching mathematics. Nearly twice as many TTT teachers were teaching biology, chemistry, physics, physical sciences, or providing general special education or instruction for teaching emotionally disturbed children compared with all public school instructors (Figure 21). Twenty-four percent of teachers are teaching in an inner-city school. Thirty-nine percent of all TTT teachers teach in an inner city school and 68% teach in a rural community. This compares with only 16% of public school educators currently teaching in inner cities and 23% teaching in rural areas (Figure 21).

Figure 21

Subjects Taught by Troops to Teachers and Public School Teachers in the United States

	Troops to Teachers 1998		Public School Teachers[1] 1996
	Number	Percent	Percent
Kindergarten	18	2	7
General Elementary	217	18	35
American Indian/ Native American Studies	7	1	*
Art/Music	35	3	8
Basic Skills & Remedial Education	1	0	3
Bilingual Education	34	3	1
Computer Science	**88**	**7**	**4**
Dance/Drama/Theater	5	0	2
English/Language Arts	152	13	15
English as a Second Language	39	3	2
Foreign Language	79	7	5
Gifted	20	2	3
Home Economics	4	0	1
Journalism	10	1	*
Mathematics	**338**	**29**	**13**
Philosophy/Religion	5	0	*
Physical Education/Health	80	7	7
Reading	108	9	11
Social Studies/Social Science/ History	**305**	**26**	**15**
Biology	99	8	5
Chemistry	35	3	2
Geology/Earth Science/ Space Science	65	5	2
Physical Sciences	**91**	**8**	**3**
Physics	**40**	**3**	**1**
General and Other Sciences	127	11	8
Special Education, General	**119**	**10**	**5**
Emotionally Disturbed	86	7	4
Mentally Impaired	27	2	2
Speech/Language Impaired	15	1	2
Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing	7	1	1
Visually Handicapped	5	0	1
Orthopedically Impaired	6	1	*
Mildly Handicapped	29	2	2
Severely Handicapped	10	1	1
Specific Learning Disabilities	75	6	5
Other Special Education	16	1	1
Vocational Education	180	15	3
All Others	151	13	1

** < 0.5 percent*

[1] National Center for Education Information survey of 1,018 public school K–12 teachers conducted Mar. 11–Apr. 19, 1996.

Source: National Center for Education Information, *Profile of Troops to Teachers*

Veterans Upward Bound (VUB)

Under U.S. Department of Education (DOE) oversight, the Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) program, which traces its roots to the Lyndon Johnson administration in the 1960s, was initiated in the 1970s and is one of eight federal TRIO programs (Steele, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). While some veterans in the early 1970s were enrolling in college for the first time, others were resuming an education disrupted by voluntary enlistment or military conscription. Veterans who interrupted their education often fell behind non-veterans' education levels by at least one grade level (Steele, 2015; Teachman, 2005).

Beginning in 1972, competitive discretionary grant funds were offered through the DOE to individual colleges and universities to oversee VUB ventures. Federal policy compels each individual VUB endeavor to serve 120 low-income and/or first-generation veterans whose goal is to achieve a postsecondary education. In FY 2013– 2014, the average number of veterans in each VUB assignment was 128 with the average award amount for VUB grantees of $260,738. The annual average cost to American taxpayers was $2,038 for each veteran participating in a VUB project (Steele, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Beyond educational preparation, some tasks provide other services such as academic, financial, and personal counseling, additional tutoring, or an introduction to various cultural proceedings. Countless veterans with disabilities struggled academically. Many higher education institutions grappled with the influx of veteran students with disabilities or mental disorders on their campuses. The capacity of project staff to network with veterans' support and socioeconomic groups has been indispensable in representing them to suitable agencies when assistance is required. The VUB program is adept at providing support for veterans along with solid scholastic training (Steele, 2015).

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC)

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) was created in 1972 to offer educational opportunities to members of the armed forces who frequently move from place to place and have issues completing college degrees. SOC Criteria focuses member institutions on blending nontraditional credits earned through training, job experience, and distance learning into traditional higher education degree programs. SOC operates in cooperation with the DOD, and Active and Reserve Components of the Military Services to grow and advance voluntary postsecondary education opportunities for active military and veterans worldwide. SOC is funded by the DOD through an agreement with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). The contract is managed for DOD by the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 2015).

The SOC contract, funded by the DOD, will undergo significant changes to programs and services provided for the 2015 Fiscal Year. SOC's contract has been revised to meet the changing programmatic needs and oversight demands of voluntary education sponsored by the DOD and Military Services. The most notable of these changes is the dissolution of the SOC Consortium, which is the voluntary membership of institutions of higher education across America. The SOC Consortium collectively agrees to abide by the SOC Principles and Criteria in performance and actions to facilitate degree completion. The SOC Consortium will be completely dissolved by December 31, 2014 (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 2015).

A subgroup of SOC Consortium member institutions, the Degree Network System (DNS), is designated by the Military Services to deliver specific undergraduate degree programs to military members and their families (Figure 22). The preeminent benefit the four DNS colleges share is reduced academic residency. Students are required to complete 25% or less of

degree requirements with their home college. For programs completed entirely online, the requirement is 30% (Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 2015).

Figure 22

Current SOC Associate and Bachelor's Degree Networks

Accounting (LA),
AC/Heating/Refrigeration,
Applied Science & Technology,
Automotive Maintenance,
Aviation Maintenance (AD),
Aviation Management,
Aviation Technology,
Banking/Finance,
Business Administration (LA),
Computer Studies (LA),
Construction Technology,
Corrections, Criminal Justice (LA),
Diesel Maintenance,
Digital Electronics (LA),
Drafting (LA),
Electronics Technology,
Food Service Management,
General Business (AD),
General Studies (AD),
Health Services Management,
Human Resources Management,
Information Systems Mgmt (AD & LA),
Interdisciplinary Studies (AD & LA),
Management (AD),
Marketing/Retailing,
Medical Records, Nursing (LA),
Office Management (LA),
Paralegal Studies,
Professional Aeronautics,
Public Administration, Security,
SOCED (Teacher Preparation),
Technical Management,
Training/Instruction, Welding

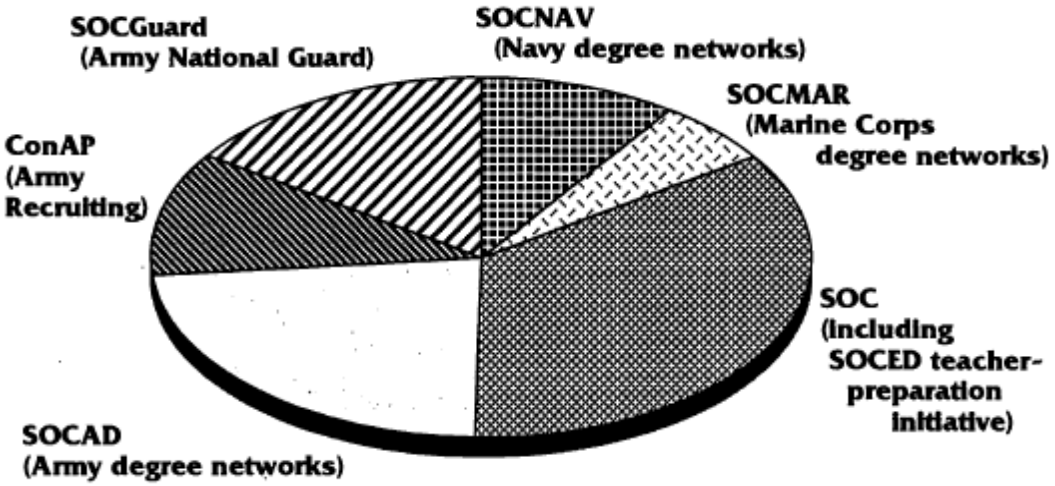
AD = Alternative Delivery LA = Learning Assessment

(Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 2015)

The SOC's organizational components include SOCAD, SOCNAV, SOCMAR, Army recruiting (ConAP), Army National Guard (SOCGuard), and SOCED teacher-preparation initiative (SOC) (Figure 23).

Figure 23

SOC's Organizational Components



(Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, 2015)

Conclusions

Analytical Summary

Many veterans leaving the military find civilian life lacking in intensity and importance. College can be alien to them, perhaps even more alien than their former places of service (Roost & Roost, 2014). For active military and veterans, the future of higher education is through the use of online instruction, either offered through traditional colleges and universities or free, massive open online courses (MOOCS), which are provided by EdX and Coursera, to deliver some courses and elements of many courses. Educational institutions in the United States will see a continued transferal of enrollments out of faculties and colleges of liberal arts and into more practical and technical curricula. This is a nationwide trend, particularly among active military and veteran students, that commenced in the 1960s and has recently been accelerating (Smith Pangle, 2013).

Today, veterans' benefits are more limited than ever. The original GI Bill entitled most veterans to tuition, supplies, and living expenses. Conversely, federal student aid obtained through the FAFSA is based on need and provided mainly through loans that have to be repaid, rather than grants, which have no repayment schedule. Clearly, the original GI Bill provisions were superior to the federal aid available to other students. With the end of the draft and the absence of major conflicts, the numbers of new veterans has dwindled.

New veterans still receive housing loans and civil service benefits. However, modern educational benefits for active military and veterans are far more limited than those of the original GI bill. It is no longer possible to attend a large state university, much less a prestigious

private university, on GI bill benefits. The VA still serves all veterans, but faces vast demands as the once large World War II cohort shrinks on a daily basis (Campbell, 2004).

From 2014 to 2020, the VA estimates that more than 1 million veterans will join the 2.3 million veterans discharged from the military since September 11, 2001. The primary role of the VA is to support veterans transitioning to civilian life. Part of that transition includes preparing veterans to enter institutions of higher education both on campus and online to begin a new career (Bertoni, 2014). The campus and online climate that active military and veterans experience is governed at various echelons. An understanding of the climate assists in outlining a discussion of student veteran organizations. Many factors influence campus climate, including attitudes of faculty, staff, and students, policies, practices, and the local community (Summerlot et al., 2009).

Since the VA controls the distribution of VA education benefits to higher learning institutions, it is important for the VA "to have better measures of the effectiveness of its outreach and support" (Bertoni, 2011, p. 41). Every institution that accepts VA funding should have a VA certifying official whose sole responsibility is to work with VA students attending a campus or online. Giving a VA certifying official tasks outside of this scope diminishes the effectiveness of the position to armed forces students.

Recommendations

Future studies should be conducted to explore the use of new and existing technology as a communications medium for distance education, especially as it relates to active military and veteran students enrolled in distance education programs. One-on-one interviews with campus administrators, VA certifying officials, and current and former students with a military background is another area worth exploring. Campus public relations officers in higher education

settings need to perform "follow-up interviews after conducting communication audits and modifying communication behaviors in order to assess usefulness of the communication audit results" (Pompper, 2006, p. 36; DeWine, James, & Walence, 1985).

Following a systems analysis convention, communication audit devices must be upgraded and reutilized in the future (Pompper, 2006). If the devices proved to be efficient in the past, there is little reason to doubt their future potential. However, modernization is a key step that cannot be skipped or ignored. Active military and veteran students attending an institution through a distance learning format must realize some tangible benefits to make the continued use of these tools worthwhile.

Finally, institutions need to provide improved support for active military and veteran students making the transition to higher education through distance learning. Only 37% offer assistance for armed forces students (Lang et al., 2013, p. 9). That number should be closer to 100%. Providing faculty and staff training to transitional needs of military students has been lacking and requires significant improvement. According to McBain et al., (2012), "Only 47 percent of institutions that service military students and veterans provide training opportunities for both faculty and staff to be better able to assist these students with their transitional issues" (p. 47-48). Overall, educational assistance offered to active military and veterans needs to be augmented to ensure adequate schooling is provided to active military and veterans without the accruing of financial debt.

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