

AN EVALUATION OF VETERAN SERVICES AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT

by

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ABSTRACT

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Since the Fall of 2001, many UW-Stout students serving in the National Guard or Reserves have been activated to support Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and other missions within the United States and abroad. The high profile that GI Bill benefits get from widespread recruitment advertising often leads to general perception that a college education is possible through enlisting into military service, but being called to duty has disrupted many students' lives by affecting their careers and academic goals. The University of Wisconsin-Stout Veterans Services Office has seen increased communications with these students while activated and re-entry back to school and it is important that the Veterans Services Coordinator be informed and up to date with current Federal and State Legislation concerning VA Education benefits.

This study determined the effectiveness of UW-Stout's Veterans Services as perceived by current Veterans and eligible students certified for Veteran benefits for the 2003-2004 academic year. Data was collected through an online customer survey administered through an email to students during April of 2004. This study identified the office's greatest strengths and weaknesses as perceived by respondents. It also provided what services they would like to see added. One specific recommendation was to communicate all related education benefits that are available to them as a Veteran. The findings and recommendations identified many possible areas increased involvement with new students from the first day of campus orientation.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER I.....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i> .....	3
<i>Research Objectives</i> .....	3
<i>Significance of the Study</i> .....	4
<i>Limitations of the Study</i> .....	4
<i>Assumptions</i> .....	5
<i>Definition of Terms</i> .....	5
CHAPTER II .....	7
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
<i>GI Bill Background</i> .....	7
<i>Veteran Services in Higher Education</i> .....	11
<i>MGIB Evaluations</i> .....	12
CHAPTER III.....	13
METHODOLOGY.....	13
<i>Subject Selection and Description</i> .....	13
<i>Instrumentation</i> .....	13
DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES.....	14
<i>Data Analysis</i> .....	14
<i>Limitations</i> .....	14
CHAPTER IV.....	15
RESULTS .....	15
<i>Research Objectives</i> .....	15
<i>Subject Selection and Description</i> .....	15
<i>Cross tabulations</i> .....	25
<i>Research Objectives</i> .....	32
<i>Limitations of the Study</i> .....	33
<i>Conclusions</i> .....	33
<i>Recommendations</i> .....	35
REFERENCES .....	37
APPENDIX A: SURVEY .....	39
APPENDIX B: INITIAL CONTACT EMAIL .....	43
APPENDIX C: FOLLOW-UP EMAIL.....	44
APPENDIX D: QUESTION 14 RESPONSES .....	45
APPENDIX E: QUESTION 15 RESPONSES.....	46

APPENDIX F: QUESTION 16 RESPONSES.....47

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Question 5 Branch of the Military.....	18
Table 2: Question 6 Rank in the Military .....	19
Table 3: Question 7 Received other military benefits while attending UW-Stout.....	20
Table 4: Question 8 Reasons for seeking an education using the G.I. Bill .....	21
Table 5: Question 9 First learn about VA educational benefits .....	22
Table 6: Question 12 Amount of information received from the Veterans office .....	23
Table 7: Reasons for contacting the Veterans Office .....	24
Table 8: Experiences with the Veterans office .....	25
Table 9: Year in School and courtesy of the Veterans office workers .....	25
Table 10: Year in school and accuracy of obtained information.....	26
Table 11: Year in school and timeliness of response .....	27
Table 12: Year in school and knowledge of the Veterans office.....	27
Table 13: Year in school and the Veterans office willingness to solve problems.....	28
Table 14: VA benefits receiving and courtesy of the office workers .....	28
Table 15: VA benefits receiving and accuracy of obtained information.....	29
Table 16: VA benefits receiving and timeliness of response .....	29
Table 17: VA benefits receiving and knowledge of the Veterans office.....	30

## Chapter I

### *Introduction*

The University of Wisconsin-Stout Veterans Services has had a long history of being an entity within the Registration and Records Office, an office under the division of Academic and Student Affairs. The UW-Stout Veterans Services Coordinator is also the Assistant Registrar and is supervised by the Registrar. The Coordinator is the institution's representative responsible for completing all paperwork necessary to certify the enrollment and changes in enrollment for students eligible for State and Federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits (Krecek, 2000). As a representative of the institution, the Coordinator not only provides information to the Veteran, but also helps facilitate the transition from military to civilian life (Douglass, 2002). The certifying official must be familiar with the university calendar, catalogs, majors, and a thorough knowledge of all policies and procedures of the VA educational programs. The UW-Stout Veteran Services staff includes a coordinator and three VA work study students.

The VA administers several education programs as set down in law, Title 38 United States Code. Each program is found in a different chapter of the law and this chapter number is often used to refer to the different benefit programs (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Atlanta Regional Processing Office, 2003). The UW-Stout Coordinator certifies for four different Federal VA education programs in the beginning of each semester. At the end of the semester, each certification is reviewed for satisfactory completion by the eligible students. The Coordinator also certifies for two types of

Wisconsin VA tuition and fee reimbursement grants and the Wisconsin National Guard tuition reimbursement grant. It is important that all of these certifications are done accurately and in a timely manner.

Since going live with Datatel Colleague, the UW-Stout campus integrated student database, in the summer of 1999, the Registration and Records Office has held to its mission "...to insure the accuracy, integrity, and the security of the academic records..." (Registration and Records mission statement, n.d.). Its success has also provided a means of accurately tracking and reporting Veteran student information to the VA as changes happen throughout the semester. The VA has also taken great strides in the providing a means of reporting certifications and changes electronically. The VA's new computer program for electronically certifying student enrollments and changes in their enrollment is called VA-Once (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Muskogee Regional Processing Office, 2003). Prior to 2001, these certifications and changes were done through the mail with carbon copy forms that were provided by the VA. With VaCert, the students receive a faster response from the VA for certification approvals.

Since the Fall of 2001, many UW-Stout students serving in the National Guard or Reserves have been activated to support Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and other missions within the United States and abroad. Being called to duty potentially disrupts the students' lives by affecting their careers and academic goals. As a whole, the Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that as many as 25 percent of those activated National Guard or Reserve members are either full- or part-time college students (Padilla & Shapiro, 2003).

While the UW-Stout Dean of Students Office handles the formal military withdrawal process, the Veterans Services Office has seen an increase in communications with these students while activated and re-entry back to school. Therefore, if the pace of our Reserve forces continues, it is important that the Veterans Services Coordinator be informed and up to date with current Federal and State Legislation concerning VA Education benefits. In doing this, UW-Stout will continue to support and be sensitive to students who are called to serve their country.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of UW-Stout's Veterans Services as perceived by current Veterans and eligible students certified for Veteran benefits for the 2003-2004 academic year. Data will be collected through an online customer survey administered through an email to students during April of 2004.

The scope of this project is the Veteran Services at UW-Stout and the current Veterans and eligible students certified for VA education benefits for the 2003-2004 academic year.

At the completion of this study, the following things will be available: a survey, a comprehensive literature review, quantitative data to identify service needs, and recommendations for future Veteran Services evaluations.

#### *Research Objectives*

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine the satisfaction of Veteran Services at UW-Stout. Examples of these services include: assistance with filling out VA paperwork, communicating

registration information, helping new students with campus/community questions, and providing person to person contact during regular business hours.

2. Identify the student's perception of Veteran Services that are needed, but not currently offered.
3. Determine the greatest strength and weakness of the UW-Stout Veteran Services as perceived by students.
4. Identify the training needs among Veteran Services Coordinator and VA work-study students in the UW-Stout Registration and Records Office.

### *Significance of the Study*

The study will evaluate the UW-Stout Veteran Services provided to current Veteran and eligible students. The findings will provide data and training recommendations to the UW-Stout Registrar and Federal VA Education Officials to revise services for students of UW-Stout.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There are three limitations of this study:

1. The results of the survey are limited to the current Veteran and eligible students that received education benefits while attending UW-Stout during the 2003-2004 academic year.
2. This study will not look at Veterans Services Offices at other higher education institutions.
3. The researcher produced the survey instrument.
4. This study will not provide a time-line for proposed changes.

### *Assumptions*

The assumptions of this study are:

1. The survey respondents will see the importance of participating in the study for the benefit of improving the Veteran Services Office at UW-Stout.
2. The survey respondents will provide an accurate and truthful effort to reading all questions and answering them to the best of their knowledge.
3. The VA will continue to use and update electronic means of certifying veterans.
4. The Veteran Coordinator's position will continue to be one of the primary duties of the Assistant Registrar.
5. The researcher will effectively evaluate the information received and produce meaningful data.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following terms are defined for clarity:

1. *Active Duty* - full time duty in the Armed Forces. This also includes full time duty performed by commissioned officers of the Public Health Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (American Association of College Registrar and Admissions Officers, 1998).
2. *Eligible Person* - A child, spouse, or surviving spouse of a veteran who served on active duty and who died on active duty, or who died of a service-connected disability, or who has a total disability permanent in nature resulting from a service-connected disability, or who died from any cause while a total and permanent service connected disability was in existence (American Association of College Registrar and Admissions Officers, 1998).

3. *Integrated Student Database* - an integrated software package that maintains, supports, and provides inquiry, analysis, and communication tools that organize student accountability data into information to support the educational process (Barrett, 1999).
4. *Selected Reserve* - the term means, with respect to the Armed Forces, the Army Reserve, the Naval Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, the Air Force Reserve, the Coast Guard Reserve, the Army National Guard of the United States, and the Air National Guard of the United States (American Association of College Registrar and Admissions Officers, 1998).
5. *Serviceperson* - An individual who is currently serving on active duty. Same as "servicemember" (American Association of College Registrar and Admissions Officers, 1998).
6. *VA-Once* - Computer program used by schools to prepare enrollment certifications and notices of change in student status. The enrollment certifications and notices of change are transmitted by modem (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Muskogee Regional Processing Office, 2003).
7. *Veteran* - In accordance with Title 38, United States Code, Section 101(2), a veteran "...means a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released there from under conditions other than dishonorable." This definition should not be confused with the eligibility requirements for the Montgomery GI Bill which specify that the veteran must have an honorable discharge (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Atlanta Regional Processing Office, 2003).

## Chapter II

### *Literature Review*

This chapter will provide a historical review of VA education benefit programs and literature relevant to past evaluations done on these programs. Several sources will be reviewed and several issues will be discussed concerning the impact that the Veterans Services has on the students they serve.

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine the satisfaction of Veteran Services at UW-Stout. Examples of these services include: assistance with filling out VA paperwork, communicating registration information, helping new students with campus/community questions, and providing person to person contact during regular business hours.
2. Identify the student's perception of Veteran Services that are needed, but not currently offered.
3. Determine the greatest strength and weakness of the UW-Stout Veteran Services as perceived by students.
4. Identify the training needs among Veteran Services Coordinator and VA work-study students in the UW-Stout Registration and Records Office.

### *GI Bill Background*

One of the most important pieces of federal legislation to affect higher education in the twentieth century was the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill (Simon, 2003). The original GI Bill of Rights, created at the end of World War II, gave returning service members a comprehensive package of benefits to compensate for opportunities lost while in the military and to ease their transition back into civilian

life. The Bill provided federal subsidies for war veterans to attend the college of their choice and forever changed the educational services in the United States. Public and private institutions alike faced dramatic and immediate challenges to these accommodate veterans, and since the late 1940's enrollment in US college and universities has increased tremendously (Clark, 1998). Since World War II, the GI Bill has also gone through tremendous changes to its most current version, the Montgomery GI Bill.

The current Chapter 30 Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) is a two tiered program that is very different from the GI Bill used by our fathers and grandfathers. While all earlier GI Bill programs were designed to ease the transition to civilian life from a conscripted military force, since 1973, we have defended this nation with volunteers. The current MGIB is not only designed to aid in recruiting, but also for the first time recognizes the vital role of the reserve components in our defense and extends educational benefits to these citizen-service members (U.S. Senate Committee on Veteran's Affairs, 2002).

The specific goals of this program are to:

- Assist in readjustment to civilian life
- Extend educational benefits to people who might not otherwise be able to afford them
- Provide vocational readjustment and restore lost educational opportunities
- Aid in recruitment and retention for the all volunteer force.
- Provide special emphasis on retention
- Enhance the nation's competitiveness through the development of a more highly educated and productive work force (Klemm Analysis Group, 2000).

To ensure enlistees fully understand the structure and benefits of the program, they are briefed at military entrance processing stations during in-processing and again at recruit training. It is here, within two weeks after enlistment, that the final decision is made whether to participate in the Montgomery GI Bill program. Finally, at separation, eligible individuals again are briefed on the MGIB and encouraged to take advantage of the educational opportunities it provides. In fiscal year 1999, 96 percent of all active duty eligible enlistees enrolled in the MGIB (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2002). If the enlistee does not enroll at this time, they may never have the opportunity to enroll again. It also requires a contribution of \$100 each month for the first twelve months of their military service and benefits may be used after the first two years of their service obligation. Lastly, the serviceperson must receive an honorable discharge (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Atlanta Regional Processing Office, 2003). In 2002, \$15.7 million went to 5,673 Veterans participating in the MGIB in the State of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, 2003).

The MGIB is paid out in monthly installments and the maximum benefit the Veteran can receive is 36 months or four academic years. Veterans must attend a VA approved school and attend full time to receive the maximum monthly benefit. The monthly benefit is prorated accordingly for Veterans attending less than full time (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Atlanta Regional Processing Office, 2003). Most Veterans use their MGIB Benefits to pursue an undergraduate degree. In fiscal year 2001, 88 percent of MGIB beneficiaries were pursuing an undergraduate degree. In addition, 62 percent of MGIB beneficiaries were enrolled in school full time (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2002). Women have used MGIB benefits relatively

more often than men. Among those who enrolled in 1989, as of 1999, 52 percent of women and 44 percent of men had used their benefits (Klemm Analysis Group, 2000).

The Montgomery GI Bill also includes a program for the Selected Reserves. The Chapter 1606 Montgomery GI Bill–Selected Reserves (MGIB-SR) are for those who sign up for a six year enlistment. While the Reservist receives a lower benefit, they do not have to contribute any money to the program. Unlike previous GI Bill programs and the Montgomery GI Bill for the active components, the MGIB-SR provides for receipt of education benefits before the qualifying military service is completed. It is used as a recruiting and retention tool helping to meet the goal of retaining members of the Selected Reserve for at least six years (Klemm Analysis Group, 2000). Evidence of this program's effectiveness is reflected in high overall participation. During fiscal year 1995, more than 97,000 Selected Reservists received Montgomery GI Bill educational benefits. Since the inception of the program, 378,000 National Guard members and reservists have applied for educational assistance (U.S. Senate Committee on Veteran's Affairs, 2002).

The Chapter 35 Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program (DEA) provides educational benefits for spouses and dependents of service members whose death or total permanent disability was a result of serving in the Armed Forces (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2002). The purposes of this program are to:

- Provide educational opportunities to children whose education would otherwise be impeded or interrupted by reason of the disability or death of a parent as a result of service in the armed forces
- Aid such children in attaining the educational status to which they might normally have aspired and obtained but for the disability or death of such parent

- Assist spouses in preparing to support themselves and their families at an expected standard of living but for the veteran's death or service-connected, permanent and total disability (Klemm Analysis Group, 2000).

### *Veteran Services in Higher Education*

The department is making attempts to maximize existing educational programs, which are used during service as an effort to give separating service members a "leg-up" on their educational goals. As part of its off-duty voluntary education effort, the department operates a number of programs that allow service members to receive academic credit without enrolling in traditional college and university courses. Two of these programs, the Military Evaluations Program and the Examinations Program, produce college credit at considerable cost savings to both the service member and the government.

Under the Military Evaluations Program, the American Council on Education, under contract with the department, develops recommendations for the award of college credit based on its evaluation of military training (formal courses and on-the-job training) and work experience. These recommendations are published in the "Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Forces," commonly referred to as the ACE Guide. Many colleges and universities award college credit based on these recommendations. For example, the guide recommends three semester hours in supply management, three semester hours in clerical procedures and one semester hour in interpersonal communication for a sailor attending the Navy's eight-week storekeeper class-A course. For an Army information systems operator separating at the completion of one term of service, the guide recommends three semester hours in introduction to

computers and computing and three semester hours in introduction to computer operations.

UW-Stout, like many schools around the country, in an effort to efficiently document and maintain accountability data, are relying more on technology in the form of an integrated student information system (Telem, 1990). Being able to generate reports gives administrators the ability to track and analyze data in ways that may not have been available just 10 years ago.

### *MGIB Evaluations*

In 2000, the Klemm Analysis Group was tasked to perform a comprehensive evaluation of the three VA education programs: the MGIB, the MGIB-SR, and the DEA. These three programs delivered over \$8 billion in benefits from 1985 to 1998 (Klemm Analysis Group, 2000). Their study was conducted based on the main goals of the programs:

1. MGIB benefits are intended to assist in transition to civilian life
2. MGIB-SR benefits are designed to recruit large numbers of qualified individuals into the Selected Reserve.
3. Benefits of all three programs are intended to enhance the beneficiaries' ability to achieve educational and career goals.

In their findings, the Group found that VA school officials needed increased information access to both potential and current students. While many Veterans view school officials as VA employees

## Chapter III

### *Methodology*

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of UW-Stout's Veterans Services as perceived by current Veterans and eligible students certified for Veteran benefits for the 2003-2004 academic year. This chapter will explain the research methodology used. The methodology for this study was chosen in correlation with the research questions and objectives.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

The population for this study was all students currently receiving MGIB, MGIB-SR, and DEA VA education benefits at UW-Stout for the 2004 spring semester. The population was selected because of their experiences with VA education benefits and the UW-Stout Veterans Services Office. A list of current students receiving VA education benefits for the 2004 spring semester was obtained from the UW-Stout Registration and Records Office. Due to the size of the population, all were asked to participate in the study including both undergraduate and graduate students.

#### *Instrumentation*

The instrument consisted of a quantitative survey (Appendix A), a cover letter email (Appendix B), and a follow-up email (Appendix C). The questions for the survey were developed by the researcher with the knowledge gained from the literature review. A consultation with the research advisor and validity testing with members of the Federal and State VA yielded minor changes. The survey contained 13 closed-end questions using the following types: dichotomous, multiple choice, and likert scale. In addition to these questions, 4 questions were provided for participants to provide feedback.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

The UW-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the survey instrument prior to distribution to the participants. After approval was granted, an Internet survey was distributed via email to 129 students. For purposes of anonymity, email addresses were pasted into the Microsoft Outlook Blind Carbon Copy (Bcc) field and no personal identifiers were in the cover letter email (Appendix B). Participants were requested to access the website where the survey was posted. Once the survey was completed, an automatic email response was returned via email to the researcher. In an effort to gain a higher response rate, a follow-up email letter (Appendix C) was sent to all 129 participants approximately one week after the initial email letter.

### *Data Analysis*

Data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel, 2003 version. Various pivot tables were used for cross tabulation and other statistics were accomplished using different Function tools within Excel.

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this study include:

1. The instrument had no documented measures of validity or reliability.
2. The population included new students as well as students that have been attending UW-Stout for more than four years.
3. There is no guarantee that the survey will be returned by the subjects, therefore, the rate of return is unknown.
4. Because of no personal identifiers, participants could submit multiple surveys.

## Chapter IV

### *Results*

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of UW-Stout's Veterans Services as perceived by current Veterans and eligible students certified for Veteran benefits for the 2003-2004 academic year.

#### *Research Objectives*

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine the satisfaction of Veteran Services at UW-Stout. Examples of these services include: assistance with filling out VA paperwork, communicating registration information, helping new students with campus/community questions, and providing person to person contact during regular business hours.
2. Identify the student's perception of Veteran Services that are needed, but not currently offered.
3. Determine the greatest strength and weakness of the UW-Stout Veteran Services as perceived by students.
4. Identify the training needs among Veteran Services Coordinator and VA work-study students in the UW-Stout Registration and Records Office.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

The population for this study was all students currently receiving MGIB, MGIB-SR, and DEA education benefits at UW-Stout for the 2004 spring semester. The population was asked to participate due to the fact that all students receiving VA education benefits must visit the UW-Stout Veterans Services Office at least once each semester. Students

must sign a consent worksheet prior to being certified for benefits each semester. The population included both undergraduate and graduate students.

### *Instrumentation*

The instrument consisted of the survey (Appendix A) and a cover letter email (Appendix B), which will state the purpose and importance of the study. The researcher administered the survey via an email to 129 students. The questions for the survey were developed by the researcher with the knowledge gained from the literature review. The survey was also evaluated for validity by members of the Federal and State VA.

For purposes of anonymity, email addresses were pasted into the Microsoft Outlook Blind Carbon Copy (Bcc) field and no personal identifiers were in the cover letter email (Appendix B). Participants were requested to access the website where the survey was posted. Once the survey was completed, an automatic email response was returned via email to the researcher. In an effort to gain a higher response rate, a follow-up email letter (Appendix C) was sent to all 129 participants approximately one week after the initial email letter. These efforts yielded a 54.2% response rate.

### *Item Analysis*

Initial survey questions attempted to identify subjects' demographics.

#### Question 1:

Item one asked subjects their gender. Of the 70 participants, 14 were female (20%) and 56 male (80%).

#### Question 2:

Item three asked participants to indicate their age. Fifteen (21.4%) individuals indicated their age between 18 and 20 years of age. The majority of participants (44.3%)

indicated their age between 21 and 24. Fifteen point seven percent (n=11) of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 27. The remaining participants are between 28 and 30 or 31 and older, 5 (7.4%) and 8 (11.4%) respectively.

Question 3:

Item three asked participants for their academic classification. Ten (14.3%) of participants are Freshman, 18 (25.7%) are Sophomores, ten (14.3%) are Juniors and 29 (41.4%) are Seniors. The remaining three (4.3%) participants are Graduate students.

Question 4:

Item four asked subjects to identify which type of Federal VA Education benefits they are presently receiving. Forty-four point three percent (n=31) of individuals are receiving Chapter 30 Montgomery GI Bill benefits. Forty-seven point one percent (n=33) receive Chapter 1606 Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserves benefits and the remaining 8.6% (n=6) participants are receiving Chapter 35 Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance.

Question 5:

Table 1: Branch of the Military

Military Branch	Count of Respondents	% of Total Respondents
Army	9	12.9
Army National Guard/Reserves	26	37.1
Air Force	7	10
Air National Guard/Reserves	7	10
Coast Guard	0	0
Coast Guard Reserves	0	0
Marine Corps	7	10
Marine Corps Reserves	1	1.4
Navy	7	10
Navy Reserves	0	0
Survivors' and Dependents	6	8.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 indicates that the greatest number of the respondents are in the Army National Guard/Reserves; 37.1% (n=26). There were no respondents in the Coast Guard, Coast Guard Reserves or the Navy Reserves. Six (8.6%) of the respondents were Survivors' or Dependents'.

Question 6:

Table 2: Rank in the Military

Military Rank	Count of Respondents	% of Total Respondents
E1	0	0
E2	1	1.4
E3	9	12.9
E4	39	55.7
E5	15	21.4
E6 or higher	0	0
Survivors' and Dependents	6	8.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 indicates that over half of the respondents were in the E4 rank, 55.7% (n=39). There were no respondents with E1 or E6 or higher. Six (8.6%) of the respondents were Survivors' or Dependents'.

## Question 7:

Table 3: Received other military benefits while attending UW-Stout

Other military benefits	Count of Responses	% of Total Responses
None	15	17.4
Army Tuition Assistance	13	15.1
Part-Time Study Grant	3	3.5
Tuition and Fee Reimbursement	21	24.4
WI National Guard Tuition Grant	20	23.3
Other	8	9.6
Survivors' and Dependents	6	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note.* Respondents were given the option to choose more than one answer to Question 7.

There were a total of 86 responses from the 70 respondents.

Table 3 indicates that the majority of respondents are receiving Tuition and Fee Reimbursement and/or the WI National Guard Tuition Grant, 24.4% (n=21) and 23.3% (n=20) respectively. Only 3.5% (n=3) of respondents are receiving the Part-Time Study Grant. Six (7%) of the responses were Survivors' or Dependents'.

## Question 8:

Table 4: Reasons for seeking an education using the G.I. Bill

Reasons for seeking education	Count of Responses	% of Total Responses
Career change	4	2.8
Complete a college degree	51	35.9
Improvement of existing job skills	9	6.3
License or certification	4	2.8
Personal interest	21	14.8
Preparation for further education	14	9.9
Preparation for obtaining job	33	23.2
Survivors' and Dependents	6	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note.* Respondents were given the option to choose more than one answer to Question 8.

There were a total of 142 responses from the 70 respondents.

Table 4 indicates that the majority of respondents are seeking an education using the GI Bill to complete a college degree, 35.9% (n=51). Only 2.8% (n=4) are seeking a change in career or a license or certification. Six (4.2%) of the responses were Survivors' or Dependents'.

## Question 9:

Table 5: First learn about VA educational benefits

When first learned of VA benefit:	Count of Respondents	% of Total Respondents
Before recruitment	31	44.3
At time of recruitment	24	34.3
Soon after recruitment	6	8.6
At separation	1	1.4
Other	1	1.4
Refuse to respond	1	1.4
Survivors' and Dependents	6	8.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 indicates that over half, 44.3% (n=31) and 34.3% (n=24) of respondents first learned about VA educational benefits before recruitment or at the time of recruitment, respectively. Only one (1.4%) person first learned about VA educational benefits at separation. Six (8.6%) of the respondents were Survivors' or Dependents'.

## Question 10:

Item ten asks participants to confirm or deny that the information received about VA education benefits was accurate and beneficial. Fifty-nine (84.3%) indicated that the information was accurate and correct, and 5 (7.1%) did not feel the information was accurate and correct. Six (8.6%) of the respondents were Survivors' or Dependents'.

Question 12:

Table 6: Amount of information received from the Veterans office

Information received from Stout	Count of Respondents	% of Total Respondents
All	6	8.6
Most	32	45.7
Little	13	18.6
None	4	5.7
Received information before Survivors' and Dependents	9	12.6
	6	8.6
<b>Total</b>	70	100

Table 6 indicates that the majority of respondents received most of their information from the UW-Stout Veterans Service contact person on campus; only 5.7% (n=4) indicated that they received no information from the UW-Stout Veterans Service contact person. Six (8.6%) of the respondents were Survivors' or Dependents'.

Question 13:

Table 7: Reasons for contacting the Veterans Office

Reasons for contacting Office	Count of Responses	% of Total Responses
Get information before applying	21	13.1
Apply for benefits	54	33.8
Check on status of application	32	20
Change status of enrollment	14	8.8
Verify enrollment to VA	30	18.8
Other	3	1.9
Survivors' and Dependents	6	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note.* Respondents were given the option to choose more than one answer to Question 13. There were a total of 160 responses from the 70 respondents.

Table 7 indicates that the 33.8% (n=54) of respondents contacted the UW-Stout Veterans Office to apply for benefits. Six (3.8%) of the responses were Survivors' or Dependents'.

Question 14:

Table 8 indicates responses of likert scale based questions regarding the subjects' experiences with the UW-Stout Veterans Office. The scale was one through five, with one being very dissatisfied and five being very satisfied.

Table 8: Experiences with the Veterans office

Service	M	SD
Courtesy of office workers	4.17	<b>1.2</b>
Accuracy of obtained information	4.11	<b>1.14</b>
Time of response	3.99	<b>1.19</b>
Knowledgeable	3.99	<b>1.26</b>
Willingness to solve problems	4.04	<b>1.29</b>

Table 8 shows the average responses regarding how participants feel about their experiences with the UW-Stout Veterans office. There is little cohesion throughout any of the respondent's responses. It is apparent that the respondent's experiences with the Veterans office is varied.

#### *Cross tabulations*

Table 9: Year in School and courtesy of the Veterans office workers

Year in School	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Freshman			1	3	6
Sophomore	3	2		3	10
Junior	1	1	1	5	2
Senior	1	1	1	8	18
Graduate Student				1	2

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied; V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 9 shows that the majority of respondents, regardless of their year in school are satisfied or very satisfied with the courtesy of the Veteran's office workers, 82.8% (n=58).

Table 10: Year in school and accuracy of obtained information

Year in School	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Freshman				4	6
Sophomore	1	2	3	3	9
Junior	2	1	2	3	2
Senior	1		3	9	16
Graduate Student				2	1

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied;

V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 10 indicates the responses of respondents regarding the accuracy of information obtained from the Veterans Office. Of all respondents, 78.5% (n=55) of Veteran students were either satisfied or very satisfied with the accuracy of information that they had received. However, there is little cohesion with the Junior respondents as 50% (n=5) felt less than satisfied with the accuracy of information that they had received. Thirty three point three percent (n=6) of Sophomore respondents felt less than satisfied as well.

Table 11: Year in school and timeliness of response

Year in School	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Freshman		1		6	3
Sophomore	2	3	2	3	8
Junior	1	2		3	4
Senior		2	5	7	15
Graduate Student				2	1

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied; V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 11 indicates that 74.2% (n=52) of all respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the timeliness to their questions being answered. Sophomore respondents felt differently though, as 38.9% (n=7) were less than satisfied with the timeliness of their response.

Table 12: Year in school and knowledge of the Veterans office

Year in School	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Freshman			1	4	5
Sophomore	2	4		6	6
Junior	2		1	4	3
Senior	1	2	2	7	17
Graduate Student		1		1	1

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied; V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 12 indicates that 77.1% (n=54) of respondents feel satisfied or very satisfied with the Veterans office overall knowledge of education benefits. However, 33.3% (n=6) of Sophomore respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Table 13: Year in school and the Veterans office willingness to solve problems

Year in School	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Freshman		1		3	6
Sophomore	2	3	1	2	10
Junior	2	1	1	4	2
Senior	1	2	3	6	17
Graduate Student				1	2

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied;

V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 13 shows the majority of respondents felt that the Veterans office was willing to help them solve their VA education benefit questions, 75.7% (n=53). Forty percent (n=4) of Juniors felt less than satisfied with the Veterans office willingness to solve their problems.

Table 14: VA benefits receiving and courtesy of the office workers

VA benefits receiving	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Active Duty – Chapter 30	3	2	1	8	17
Reserve/National Guard – Ch 1606	1	1	1	11	19
Survivors' and Dependents – Ch 35	1	1	1	1	2

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied;

V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 14 shows the respondents by VA education benefit received and their feelings towards the courtesy of Veteran office workers. Fifty percent (n=3) of Chapter 35 students felt less than satisfied with the courtesy of the workers.

Table 15: VA benefits receiving and accuracy of obtained information

VA benefits receiving	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Active Duty – Chapter 30	4	1	2	9	15
Reserve/National Guard – Ch 1606		1	5	11	16
Survivors' and Dependents – Ch 35		1	1	1	3

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied; V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 15 indicates the respondents by VA education benefit received and their responses to the accuracy of the information that they have received from the Veterans office. Twenty two point six (n=7) of Chapter 30 students felt less than satisfied with the accuracy of the information that they have received.

Table 16: VA benefits receiving and timeliness of response

VA benefits receiving	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Active Duty – Chapter 30	2	3	2	12	12
Reserve/National Guard – Ch 1606	1	4	4	7	17
Survivors' and Dependents – Ch 35		1	1	2	2

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied; V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 16 indicates the respondents by VA education benefit received and their feeling towards the timeliness to questions answered by the Veterans office. Twenty seven point

three percent (n=9) of Chapter 1606 students felt less than satisfied with their questions being answered in a timely manner.

Table 17: VA benefits receiving and knowledge of the Veterans office

VA benefits receiving	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Active Duty – Chapter 30	4	2	1	10	14
Reserve/National Guard – Ch 1606	1	4	3	10	15
Survivors' and Dependents – Ch 35		1		2	3

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied; V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 17 indicates the respondents by VA education benefit received and their feelings on how knowledgeable the Veterans office towards VA education benefits.

Twenty four point two percent (n=8) of Chapter 1606 students felt less than satisfied with the knowledge the Veterans Office processes.

Table 18: VA benefits receiving and the Veterans office willingness to solve problems

VA benefits receiving	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Active Duty – Chapter 30	3	4	1	6	17
Reserve/National Guard – Ch 1606	2	2	3	8	18
Survivors' and Dependents – Ch 35		1	1	2	2

*Note.* V\_Dis = Very Dissatisfied; Dis\_S = Dissatisfied; N = Neutral; Sat = Satisfied; V\_Sat = Very Satisfied.

Table 18 shows the respondents by VA education benefit received and their feelings on the Veterans office willingness to help them. Twenty five point eight percent (n=8)

and 21.2% (n=7) of Chapter 30 and 1606 students felt less than satisfied with the Veterans office willingness to help them solve their benefit problems.

## Chapter V

### *Discussion*

Since the Fall of 2001, many UW-Stout students serving in the National Guard or Reserves have been activated to support Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and other missions within the United States and abroad. Being called to duty potentially disrupts the students' lives by affecting their careers and academic goals. As a whole, the Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that as many as 25 percent of those activated National Guard or Reserve members are either full- or part-time college students (American Association of College Registrar and Admissions Officers, 2003).

While the UW-Stout Dean of Students Office handles the formal military withdrawal process, the Veterans Services Office has seen an increase in communications with these students while activated and re-entry back to school. Therefore, if the pace of our Reserve forces continues, it is important that the Veterans Services Coordinator be informed and up to date with current Federal and State Legislation concerning VA Education benefits.

This chapter will present limitations, conclusions and recommendations of this study.

### *Research Objectives*

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine the satisfaction of Veteran Services at UW-Stout. Examples of these services include: assistance with filling out VA paperwork, communicating registration information, helping new students with campus/community questions, and providing person to person contact during regular business hours.

2. Identify the student's perception of Veteran Services that are needed, but not currently offered.
3. Determine the greatest strength and weakness of the UW-Stout Veteran Services as perceived by students.
4. Identify the training needs among Veteran Services Coordinator and VA work-study students in the UW-Stout Registration and Records Office.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There were two primary limitations of this study. The first limitation was the response rate of 54% (n=70) with an error margin of 5% +/-.

The second limitation was the results of the survey were limited to only Veterans and eligible students that received VA education benefits while attending UW-Stout during the 2003-2004 academic year. A number of students in the National Guard and Reserve were activated and not enrolled at this time.

### *Conclusions*

The benefits of administering this survey online proved to outweigh the benefits of delivering the study via U.S. Mail. Email within the UW-Stout campus community is becoming the preferred way to communicate to each other. The researcher should not assume that one method may yield a better rate, but rather choose a method of gathering data that best fits with the demands of research. In order to remain responsive to students receiving VA education benefits, a similar study should be completed at least every three years.

With a 47.1% (n=33) response, the majority of students indicated that they were receiving Chapter 1606 MGIB-SR benefits. Of these students, 78.7% (n=26) are

currently serving in the Army National Guard or Reserves, see Table 1. These students must be an active member with the National Guard or Reserves to receive their Chapter 1606 education benefits.

Ineffective communication typically happens when students lack all the necessary information or certifying officials lack access to VA information they need to assist beneficiaries (Douglass, 2002). The knowledge the UW-Stout Veterans Office provided was very positive as 78.5% (n=55) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the information that they had received, see Table 10. Of those students, 69.1% (n=38) received most or all of the VA education benefit information from the UW-Stout Veterans Office.

As student years in school increased, their satisfaction level increased as well. Many students also expressed their satisfaction with the services they had received as one of the greatest strengths of the office. Overwhelmingly, one of the greatest strengths of the office is the staff, see Appendix E. With an attitude of “Vets helping Vets”, the VA work study students are the ones actively helping their fellow students on a daily basis.

Students provided a variety answers to what VA related services they would like to see added at UW-Stout. While each response was unique, most students were clearly interested in knowing about all related education benefits that are available to them as a Veteran, see Appendix D. Veterans have identified financial problems with Federal Financial Aid deducting the amount of benefit received and their GI Bill money not being paid before the start of classes. The Department of Education’s Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form is widely used to determine the eligibility for sources of financial aid. The formula used in evaluating financial need indicates the MGIB and

MGIB-SR benefits are counted as a resource. This effectively reduces the other opportunities for many other sources of financial aid for many Veterans (Klemm Analysis Group, 2000).

This research shows that an overwhelming majority of the students agreed that the Office's greatest weakness was the Veterans Office desk not being occupied when the student stopped by, see Appendix F. While the Veterans Coordinator is a full-time UW-Stout employee, the Coordinator should ensure that the desk hours are clearly posted when a work-study student is not at the desk. There are many reasons why students come to the desk, as identified in Table 13. The most popular reason for visiting the office was to apply for benefits, with 77.1% (n=54) students responding. It is important that students know UW-Stout and VA websites to possibly answer their own questions. Applying for benefits and other frequently asked questions are all identified on the UW-Stout Veterans website. This information could be worked into a training program for the Coordinator and the work-study staff.

### *Recommendations*

After reading over the responses of the Office's greatest weakness, it is obvious that many students have never met the Veterans Coordinator. The education process begins and ends with the student eligible for VA education benefits as soon as they select a school they want to attend. Therefore, the Coordinator should have an increased presence in meeting with the new Veteran students or potential students from the first day they are on campus for orientation. Participating in college fairs and recruiting new students from local Guard/Reserve units in the area are ways that the Coordinator can start increased communications in asking questions concerning their educational background and credits

for previous training. All of these items need to be addressed with the UW-Stout Director of Enrollment Services to form a better relationship with the admission counselors and the Coordinator. The Coordinator has no experience with admission counseling and the counselors have no background in VA education benefits. Creating this relationship would support the Klemm Analysis Group (2000) recommendation of “building relationships with beneficiaries from recruitment to transition to civilian life.”

The high profile that GI Bill benefits get from widespread advertising often leads to general perception that a college education is possible through enlisting into military service. Most UW-Stout Veterans want to use their education benefits to pursue an undergraduate degree with a response rate of 72.8% (n=51), see Table 4. In fiscal year 2001, 88% of GI Bill beneficiaries were pursuing an undergraduate degree with 62% of them enrolled in school full-time (U.S. Senate Committee on Veteran’s Affairs, 2002). Successful utilization of these benefits is only accomplished when the Veteran takes an active role in pursuing this college education. As a representative of the institution, the Coordinator not only provides information to the Veteran, but also helps facilitate the transition from military to civilian life (Douglass, 2002).

Since the attacks on September 11, 2001, many UW-Stout students in the National Guard or Reserves have been activated to support Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and other related missions within the United States and abroad. Being called to duty potentially disrupts the students’ lives by affecting their careers and academic goals. With current Federal Legislation looking into more VA Educational benefits for activated guard/reserve students, it will be important that these changes and updates be communicated to these students in a timely manner.

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## Appendix A: Survey

### Veterans Service Study

The purpose of this study is to determine your opinions and attitudes towards the UW-Stout Veterans Service Office. This survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and all information you provide will remain strictly confidential. You may withdraw from this study at any time. Thank you for your time and assistance in an effort to make quality education services available to all veterans and other eligible students.

#### **Section 1 Demographic Information**

1. What is your gender?
  - Female
  - Male
  
2. What age bracket best describes you?
  - 18-20
  - 21-24
  - 25-27
  - 28-30
  - 31 or higher
  
3. What is your current academic classification?
  - Senior (90+ Credits)
  - Junior (60-89 Credits)
  - Sophomore (30-59 Credits)
  - Freshman (0-29 Credits)
  - Graduate Student
  
4. What type of Federal VA Education (GI Bill) benefits are you presently receiving?
  - Discharge or Active Duty – Chapter 30, Montgomery GI Bill
  - Selected Reserve/National Guard- Chapter 1606, Montgomery GI Bill
  - Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance - Chapter 35 – Chapter 35 (Please skip to question 13)

**Section 2 Military**

5. What branch of the military are you part of or currently serving in?
- Army
  - Army National Guard/Reserves
  - Air Force
  - Air National Guard/Reserves
  - Coast Guard
  - Coast Guard Reserves
  - Marine Corps
  - Marine Corps Reserves
  - Navy
  - Navy Reserves
6. What was your highest military rank?
- E1
  - E2
  - E3
  - E4
  - E5
  - E6 or higher
7. Do you receive any other military benefits? (mark all that apply)
- No, I do not receive any other benefits.
  - Army Tuition Assistance Program
  - Part-time Study Grant-Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.
  - Wisconsin National Guard Tuition Grant
  - Tuition and Fee Reimbursement Grant (Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs)
  - Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_
8. What were your reasons for seeking an education using the G.I. Bill? (mark all that apply)
- Career change
  - Complete a college degree
  - Improvement of existing job skills
  - License or certification
  - Personal interest in studies/self-fulfillment
  - Preparation for further education
  - Preparation for obtaining a job/employment
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

9. When did you first learn about VA education benefits?
- Before recruitment
  - At the time you were recruited
  - Soon after you joined
  - At separation
  - After separation
  - Other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_
10. Was the information that you received accurate and beneficial?
- Yes
  - No
11. What could be improved?
12. How much information did you receive from the UW-Stout Veteran Service contact person on campus?
- All
  - Most
  - Little
  - None
  - Received information before I applied for benefits

**Section 3 UW-Stout Veterans Office**

13. In the past year, have you contacted the UW-Stout Veterans Office for any of the following reasons? (mark all that apply)
- Get information before I applied for benefits
  - Apply for education benefits
  - Check on the status of my education application
  - Change status of the of enrollment
  - Verify enrollment to VA
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. Please read and rate the following experiences with the UW-Stout Veterans office.

Service	Level of Satisfaction				
	V_Dis	Dis_S	N	Sat	V_Sat
Courtesy of office workers	1	2	3	4	5
Accuracy of obtained information	1	2	3	4	5
Time of response	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5
Willingness to solve problems	1	2	3	4	5

14. Are there any special services that you would like from the UW-Stout Veterans Service Office, but is not currently offered?

15. In your opinion, what are the greatest strengths of the UW-Stout Veterans Service Offered?

16. In your opinion, what are the greatest weaknesses of the UW-Stout Veterans Service Offered?

## Appendix B: Initial Contact Email

Veteran Services Office  
109 Bowman Hall  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790

April 8, 2004

Dear Student:

In cooperation with the University of Wisconsin-Stout, I need your assistance in obtaining accurate information about your educational experiences with Veterans education benefits and UW-Stout Veteran Services. This information will be used in strict confidence to assist us in making improvements to the services that we provide you.

The short survey may be filled out online at:  
<http://www.uwstout.edu/regrec/veteranstudy.html>

Once you have entered all your responses, please click on the "submit" button at the end of the survey and your results will be saved. There are no personal identifiers on the survey and I would appreciate your prompt attention to this survey. I will also be contacting you by email in about two weeks as a gentle reminder to fill out the survey if you have not done so.

If you would like more information, have any questions or would like a copy of the findings of this survey, please contact me at: 715/232-1233 or [gravesl@uwstout.edu](mailto:gravesl@uwstout.edu) or Thor Burntvedt at: [burntvedt@uwstout.edu](mailto:burntvedt@uwstout.edu)

Thank you for your time.

Larry Graves  
Assistant Registrar/Veterans Coordinator  
University of Wisconsin-Stout

## Appendix C: Follow-up Email

Veteran Services Office  
109 Bowman Hall  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790

April 14, 2004

Dear Student:

Last week I sent you an email asking you to complete a survey for evaluating your educational experiences with Veterans education benefits and UW-Stout Veteran Services. If you have already filled out the survey, thank you! If not, please take a moment to fill out the short survey at your earliest convenience at:

<http://www.uwstout.edu/regrec/veteranstudy.html>

If you would like more information, have any questions or would like a copy of the findings of this survey, please contact me at: 715/232-1233 or [gravesl@uwstout.edu](mailto:gravesl@uwstout.edu) or Thor Burntvedt at: [burntvedtt@uwstout.edu](mailto:burntvedtt@uwstout.edu)

Thank you for your time and participating in this survey!

Larry Graves  
Assistant Registrar/Veterans Coordinator  
University of Wisconsin-Stout

## Appendix D: Question 14 Responses

Employment assistance while attending, as it is difficult to search properly for work and perform well in class at the same time.

It would be great for the university to recognize the situation that veterans are in with getting tuition reimbursement and allow tuition costs to be DEFERRED until we receive our check or to DEFER our tuition until we start to receive our check for the GI bill, as is the case for students new to the campus. I attended UW-Madison and they had NO problem with deferring payment until we received our money. They knew that they were going to get their money, so it wasn't a problem. For some reason, Stout is in desperate need of every dollar at tuition time and is greatly unwilling to bend in their policy. They will be happy to let you go on their payment plan, which accrues interest. I think that Stout should offer that service, just as was the case at Madison.

Know your job and be more helpful there isn't much else to it.

Need to be more knowledgeable about all benefits, seemed clueless.

Stop screwing up and causing me to be in debt losing all pay.

The tuition reimbursement forms. This may not be for your office but it would be nice to set up something for tuition to be deferred for the tuition reimbursement -- this way vets don't have to take out unnecessary loans

"What is offered at other universities? And can we get tem here?"

When I went into the VA office at Stout for the first time, I was not made aware of the tuition reimbursement from WI. I had to find out through the VA office at the court house. Please make students aware of this entitlement.

## Appendix E: Question 15 Responses

## Accessibility

Availability of staff, and efficiency (this is the only office in the UW system that returned ALL of my inquiries with a direct answer)

## Experienced workers

Great staff!!

Highly enthusiastic and pleasant work staff.

I have not had a lot of interaction with the office, but felt they were very professional when I did make contact with them.

Initiative to solve problems. Quick response time.

Just being there on campus

## Money

"Professionalism; knowledge of benefits; customer service"

## Response time

## Speedy processing

That they show up once in a while and do paperwork right sometimes.

The friendly staff; their willingness to assist is incredible.

The individual that worked with me was very kind and understanding...

The people working there are nice and helpful.

They are friendly and very willing to help. I have always been satisfied with the help I have received from them, except for the comment I entered in line 15.

They helped me get started with the paper work and get things in on time. E-mails to let me know of deadlines are good.

When people are there they are very willing to help

Willing to help

## Appendix F: Question 16 Responses

Always are waiting for someone to get to the desk

## Availability

I have had no negative experiences. Expanded support and social organization would be excellent (military life and college life have little in common, and I had a hard time fitting into the college environment due to the vast difference in general values)

I have received nothing short of stellar services.

I will tell you when I see them.

Informing people what's going on

Knowledge on graduate student benefits

Maybe the follow ups, telling you and reminding you where you stand.

Not always being there when I go into the office for a question.

Not being there! Understandably class schedules overrule work schedule!

Not following through

Occasionally hard to get in touch with, but they do an over all good job

Office hours - not always there

Online information

The amount of time the desk is occupied. Seemed like every other time I went to the office no one was there to even take a message.

The desk is empty most of the time I go in there

The office isn't given any power to help veterans. When I confronted the Veterans office about the response to question 15, they said that they didn't have that power. Why don't they have that power? That needs to be something that should be looked into. There is something wrong with the system when a veteran needs to go pull a student loan for month just so the university can get their money at a certain time. A few tuition dollars doesn't determine whether or not the university holds class the next semester.

There is no one there when I go in there

There are no real follow-ups concerning the beneficiary. That is to say that it would be nice, albeit not required, to be notified of the status of benefits as soon as they change.

There should be more information for programs regarding Graduate studies and financial aid that may be available.

They are rarely in the office and they make mistakes and they spread bad info