Serving Those Who Serve

Initial Outcomes from
the Military Veterans Working Group

New Services and Enhanced Services
for student veterans
at North Carolina State University

Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion
October, 2010
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2008, Congress passed the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act. This new program for military veterans significantly expanded the educational benefits available to military veterans and increased the likelihood that many more military veterans will enroll in North Carolina colleges and universities. We estimate that as many as 75,000 military veterans in North Carolina will take advantage of their educational benefits under the new Post-9/11GI Bill. Military veterans who qualify for the new GI Bill can start using their new benefits beginning August 1, 2009.

In order to better serve our military veterans, the Office for Diversity and Inclusion established the Military Veterans Working Group to study our current military veteran services and recommend improvements to provide the most comprehensive, fully-integrated and seamless array of military veteran student support services in the country. Given this ambitious goal, a very large and broadly representative group of volunteers from campus and from various state and federal veteran administration offices met several times between October 2008 and January 2009. The working group reviewed our current military veterans’ services, examined best practices across higher education and generated a number of recommendations designed to facilitate the enrollment and the success of military veterans at NC State University.

The working group concluded that the current military veteran services at NC State provided a basic foundation for future enhancements, but does not meet the needs of this growing population. The current array of campus services for military veterans are decentralized and do not reflect emerging best practices in higher education. In addition, the current services are not widely known or easily accessible to the campus community. There was some confusion about exactly what services were provided and it was clear that insufficient resources were being dedicated to providing these services.

The Military Veterans Working Group made several recommendations in five major areas to help an increasing number of military veterans enroll and succeed at NC State University. The recommendations include, creating a central “hub” or administrative office for veteran’s affairs and a review of the university’s non-traditional credit policy to give veterans credit for military training, work experiences and standardized tests. To enhance campus climate we recommend establishment of a new student orientation program and a transition course for military veterans, as well sensitivity and awareness education about military veterans for the campus community. We strongly recommend that UNC-General Administration, the North Carolina Community College System and the Installation Commanders at Fort Bragg and Camp Lejuene partner to market, recruit, and help prepare military veterans for educational opportunities in the North Carolina higher education system. In addition, NC State should expand disability services, counseling and mental health resources to better serve this growing population. These are a few of the recommendations made in this report that we believe will help NC State serve as a model for creating a welcoming and inclusive campus community for our nations military veterans.
Introduction

Over forty-six thousand veterans have returned from the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and are eligible for GI educational benefits. Many of them will start or return to college under the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. The Post-9/11 Educational Assistant Act is a new education benefit program for individuals who served on active duty on or after September 11, 2001 (see Appendix A: VA Pamphlet 22-09-1 dated October 2008 for a detailed description of the program). Based on the veterans length of active duty service he or she will be entitled to a percentage of cost of tuition and fees, a monthly housing allowance, a yearly books and supplies stipend, and a one-time payment if relocating from highly rural areas to attend college. In addition to probable emotional needs, many of these veterans will also need special help navigating the campus system and their benefits.

As host of one of the largest military populations in the country (104,000 active duty service members), it is likely that a significant number of these veterans will want to use their educational benefits right here in North Carolina (see Appendix B). In 2003, military veterans were 23 percent of the entire population in Fayetteville, NC (US Census, 2003). Approximately 21 percent of the adult male population in North Carolina is military veterans in the age group (18 – 44) and most of these veterans are probably eligible for the new Post-9/11 education benefits program. Based on national trends, the current numbers of military veterans in NC and the growing military presence in North Carolina, we can expect as many as 750,000 military veterans in North Carolina to be eligible for the new G.I. Bill. Without any university intervention approximately 5% to 10% of these eligible veterans will use their new GI Bill. Therefore, we estimate that as many as 75,000 military veterans in North Carolina will enroll in NC colleges and universities under the new GI Bill over the next five years.

Given this large population of potential new students and our historical commitment to military veterans, the Military Veterans Working Group was established to study and recommend ways to facilitate the enrollment and success of military veterans seeking to earn a degree at NC State University.

Purpose of the Military Veterans Working Group (MVWG)

To encourage military veterans to achieve their educational goals at NC State University by providing the most comprehensive, fully integrated and seamless array of military veteran student support services in the country.

Members of the NCSU Military Veterans Working Group

John Ambrose          Assoc. Dean Undergraduate Academic Program
Shannon Brandt        Asst. Director of Advising Services, First Year College
Cheryl Branker        Assoc Vice Provost & Director Disability Services Office
Bruce Capehart        Physician, Durham Veterans Admin Medical Center
Carson Cook           Office for Equal Opportunity & Equity, Asst. Vice Provost
Current Services for Military Veterans at NC State as of March 2009

1. **Administrative and Physical Infrastructure**
   a. VA Assistance through Registrar’s Office for accessing/utilizing GI Bill benefits
   b. Risk Assessment Case Manager

2. **Academic Support Services**
   a. Financial and Tuition Assistance counseling
   b. VA Education Benefits Counseling
   c. SOC status for Leadership in the Public Sector Program
   d. Tutoring covered by VA benefits

3. **Student Support Services**
   a. One staff member in enrollment management to assist veterans and active duty soldiers with transition and orientation to NC State
b. Several licensed counselors trained to address unique needs of veterans with disabilities

c. Local Vet Center provides one counselor to meet with veterans during designated hours
d. ROTC programs
e. Coordination of referral to support services off-campus
f. Disability Services Office

4. **Enrollment Management/Financial Assistance**

a. Eligibility for in-state tuition rates for military personnel assigned to the state or for whom NC is their state of record
b. Eligibility for in-state tuition for spouses/dependents of active-duty military members stationed in NC
c. Eligible for federal/state and institutional financial assistance

5. **Institutional Climate**:

a. Annual home football game designated for Veteran’s recognition
b. NCSU Chapter of the Student Veterans of America (submitted Feb 1, 2009)

The working group determined that the current array of campus services for military veterans are minimal and will not adequately meet the needs of this growing population. Furthermore, the current services do not reflect emerging best practices in higher education. In addition, the current services are not widely known or easily accessible to the campus community. There was some confusion about exactly what services were provided and it was clear that insufficient resources were being dedicated to providing these services.

**Best Practices for Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Campus**

The working group examined a number of best practices across higher education and concluded that with a relatively small investment of resources, NC State University could significantly enhance its services to military veterans. Furthermore, the working group concluded that NC State could create partnerships with other UNC campuses and Department of Defense (DOD) and state Veteran Services Agencies to better serve the needs of military veterans interested in attending NC State University. Following is a sample of the types of best practices and partnerships that were discussed:

1. Create a single hub or office for military veteran programs and services.
2. Create a website for military veterans which is accessible from the university home page and serves as a repository of key information about services and programs.
3. Modify non-traditional credit policies to award military veterans credit for examinations, military training and experience, and ACE Training Programs Guide.
4. Create a Military Veterans Student Organization.
5. In partnership with UNC-GA, establish an information and advisement office at each of the major military installations in the state.
6. Establish relationships and partnerships with local federal and state VA services and agencies to expand the services readily available to military veteran students.
7. Partner with civilian employment agencies to help military veterans who
graduate from NC State find jobs in businesses and corporations that specifically target military veterans.

MILITARY VETERANS WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Administrative and Physical Infrastructure

1. Establish a centralized military veteran’s office adequately staffed to serve as a “one stop shop” or hub for all campus veteran services.
2. Establish a Military Veterans Advisory Council for this office to help inform campus policies and programs related to military veteran student.
3. Establish a comprehensive website to inform and serve as a repository and resource for all veteran services and programs.
4. Ensure all student military veterans have continued easy access to disability services, reasonable accommodations, assistive technologies, and are able to access all campus facilities.
5. Develop a process for military veteran students to identify themselves and volunteer to be managed in an information database. Confirm veteran’s status category in SIS as an option for selection by military veterans (add information about available veteran’s services/options).

II. Academic Support Services

1. Review our non-traditional academic credit policies to award credit for military training, experiential learning and standardized exams.
2. Waive or give automatic credit to military veterans for the Physical Education requirement.
3. Train academic advisors to effectively advise the military veteran population.
4. Create more Distance Education, certifications, non-credit, and professional development academic programs that serve military veterans.
5. Expand the university’s involvement and participation in the Servicemember’s Opportunity Colleges (SOC) program.
6. Consider development and implementation of a USC transition course or other academic transition programs for military veteran students.

III. Student Support Services

1. Develop a strategic network of alliances and relationships with key off-campus Veteran Administration and other veteran support offices.
2. Establish a vet-to-vet mentorship program.
3. Develop and print a military veteran’s resource brochure and checklist including key points of contact on campus.
4. Establish a NC State Chapter of the Student Veterans of America.
5. Encourage diversity coordinators to expand their responsibilities to include the retention and success of military veteran students in their college.
6. Establish a new student orientation program or symposium specifically for military veterans.
7. Review resident housing assignment policies to better serve military veteran students.
8. Enhance and increase mental health counseling services and expertise commensurate with the needs of the growing military veterans student population.

9. Consider designation of a time and some space in the Talley Student Center for student military veterans to meet/gather periodically.

10. Plan special campus activities to celebrate veterans and their families during the week of Veterans Day.

11. Establish an NC State Military Veterans Alumni affinity group.

12. Request that the Hugh Shelton Leadership Center consider providing at least five (5) scholarships for military veteran students to attend the General Hugh Shelton Leadership Conference.

13. Involve the Parent and Family Services Office in support of military veterans and their families.

**IV. Enrollment Management/Financial Assistance**

1. Develop a strategic military veterans recruitment and marketing plan.

2. Link success in specific academic programs at NC State University directly to enhanced potential for job/employment opportunities that target military veterans.

3. Market Distance Education Programs at all NC military bases and military job fairs.


5. Develop and implement collaboration between UNC-GA System, the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and all NC Military Installation Commanders to provide individual counseling and information about education opportunities available to military veterans and their families in the NC higher education system and to facilitate their enrollment in a NC community college or university.

6. Recruit from the North Carolina Army National Guard through their Beyond The Yellow Ribbon Program.

**V. Institutional Climate for Veterans**

1. Establish new military veteran student traditions, rituals and ceremonies:
   a. Periodic recognition of student veteran on university home page
   b. Recognition of veteran graduates in commencement booklet
   c. Special graduation sash for military veterans

2. Develop sensitivity and awareness training programs on veteran and military dependent issues for the entire campus community, led by the staff of the new Military Veteran’s Office, OEO and Disability Services.

3. Identify and implement meaningful ways in and outside the classroom that military veteran students can enrich the lives of other students.

4. The Military Veterans Advisory Council and the Office for Diversity and Inclusion should conduct a survey and several focus group sessions (include ROTC and current Military Veteran Students) to determine the needs of the military veterans, identify what information is needed on the resource web site and to assess the viability of the recommendations emerging from Military Veterans Working Group.
IMPLEMENTATION

The task force recommends that these recommendations be implemented in a phased incremental process that proceeds as resources become available. Below is a recommended timeline and order for implementation of the first phase:

MAY – JUNE 2009  Enhance the current capabilities of veterans services in the Registrars office by making it a full-time Military Veterans Services Office and adding a full-time administrative assistant/advisor.

JULY – AUGUST 2009  Establish a Veterans Services website with a link from the NC State home page.

AUGUST 2009  Establish the Military Veterans Advisory Council to advise the head of the Military Veterans Office.

AUGUST – DECEMBER 2009  Review existing non-traditional credit policies and explore opportunities to award veterans credit for military experiences, training and standardized tests scores in all our programs.

DECEMBER 2009  Partner with UNC-General Administration and NCCCS to place an enrollment advisor in the Education Centers at Fort Bragg and Camp Lejuene.

Once the Military Veterans Services Office, the Military Veterans Advisory Council and website are in place, other recommendations can be pursued concurrently or in an order that makes sense to the Military Veterans Advisory Council and as resources become available. In addition, following these enhancements, the Military Veterans Services Coordinator should apply for an ACE/Wal-Mart Success for Veterans Award Grants to support further development of these programs and services, and to participate in the dissemination of lessons learned and best practices (See Appendix C).

The NC State Military Veterans Service Office should be modeled after a similar unit in the University of Michigan’s Office of New Student Programs. The NC State Veterans Affairs Coordinator and Veterans Affairs Office will provide the following services and programs:

- Chair the NC State Military Veterans Advisory Council.
- Work with the Military Veterans Advisory Committee to obtain feedback from student veterans on issues critical to their academic success and wellbeing.
- Work with other campus units to accommodate the needs of students who are deploying or are deployed.
- Coordinates staff development workshops for faculty and staff to understand the needs of student veterans.
- Oversee the online Military Veteran’s Website, the “virtual office” of Student Veterans Services.
- Develop specialized orientation content for freshman and transfer student veterans.
• Develop and implement the Student Veterans Mentoring program to connect new student veterans with current students, faculty and staff who have military experience.
• Provide resources and referrals to student veterans to help students understand and access all services and options available to them.
• Provide advocacy services to help student veterans resolve issues once usual procedures have been exhausted.
• Collaborate with other campus units to assure resolution of problems encountered by student military veterans.
• Identify and help eliminate institutional practices and policies that negatively impact student success or satisfaction.
• Act as an advocate for deployed military service members to facilitate efficient departures and returns.
• Serve as a liaison throughout the University to identify academic, administrative, and support services needed by deployed military service members.
• Serves as a liaison to off-campus veteran affairs and veteran support offices.

In conclusion, we are pleased to report that two of the recommendations in this report are already being considered for implementation by the university. First, the Department of Physical Education is presently considering recommending that student military veterans (with certifying documentation) be awarded credit, for the two credit, physical education requirement in the General Education Program (GEP). Second, a formal application for establishment of a NCSU Chapter of the Student Veterans of America has been submitted to Student Affairs. On November 12, 2008, the Student Senate adopted Senate Resolution 35 encouraging and supporting the establishment of a campus chapter of Student Veterans of America.
Appendix A - The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (VA PAM 22-09-1, October 2008)

The Post - 9/11 GI Bill is a new education benefit program for individuals who served on active duty on or after September 11, 2001.

**When Can I Receive Benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill?**
Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are payable for training pursued on or after August 1, 2009. No payments can be made under this program for training pursued before that date.

**Am I Eligible?**
You may be eligible if you served at least 90 aggregate days on active duty after September 10, 2001, and you are still on active duty or were honorably-
- discharged from the active duty; or - released from active duty and placed on the retired list or temporary disability retired list; or - released from active duty and transferred to the Fleet Reserve or Fleet Marine Corps Reserve; or - released from the active duty for further service in a reserve component of the Armed Forces.

You may also be eligible if you were honorably discharged from active duty for a service-connected disability and you served 30 continuous days after September 10, 2001.

**If I am eligible for the Montgomery GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve, or the Reserve Educational Assistance Program, am I eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill?**
If, on August 1, 2009, you are eligible for one of these programs and you qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, you may make an irrevocable election to receive benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

**Note:** Once you elect to receive benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, you will no longer be eligible to receive benefits under the program from which you elected the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

**How much will I receive?**
Based on your length of active duty service, you are entitled to a percentage of the following:

- Cost of tuition and fees, not to exceed the most expensive in-state undergraduate tuition at a public institution of higher education (paid to school);
- Monthly housing allowance* equal to the basic allowance for housing payable to a military E-5 with dependents, in the same zip code as your school (paid to you);
- Yearly books and supplies stipend of up to $1000 per year (paid to you); and
- A one-time payment of $500 paid to certain individuals relocating from highly rural areas.
*NOTE – The housing allowance and books and supplies stipend are not payable to individuals on active duty. The housing allowance is not payable to those pursuing training at half time or less or to individuals enrolled in distance learning.

Individuals serving an aggregate period of active duty after September 10, 2001, of:

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<th>Percentage of Maximum Benefit Payable</th>
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<tr>
<td>At least 36 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>At least 30 continuous days and discharged due to service connected disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 30 months &lt; 36 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 24 months &lt; 30 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>At least 18 months &lt; 24 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>At least 12 months &lt; 18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 6 months &lt; 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 90 days &lt; 6 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What does the Post-9/11 GI Bill cover?
You may receive benefits for any approved program offered by a school in the United States that is authorized to grant an associate (or higher) degree. Visit our website at www.GIBILL.VA.GOV/GI Bill Info/programs.htm to verify that the program at your school, or the program at the school you would like to attend, is approved. You may also receive benefits for tutorial assistance or up to $2,000 for the reimbursement of one licensing or certification test.

If you transferred to the Post-9/11 GI Bill from the Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty, Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserves, or the Reserve Education Assistance Program, you may also receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits for flight training, apprenticeship or on-the-job training programs, and correspondence courses.

Can I transfer my entitlement to my dependents?
If you are a member of the Armed Forces on August 1, 2009, the Department of Defense (DoD) may offer you the opportunity to transfer benefits to your spouse or dependent children. DoD and the military services will issue policy on entitlement to transferability in the coming months. Visit www.GIBILL.VA.GOV for up-to-date information on this and other education benefits.
Department of Veterans Affairs Washington, DC

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008
VA Pamphlet Veterans Benefits 22-09-1 Administration October 2008
Appendix B: Distribution of Military in North Carolina (September 30, 2007)

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<th>NAVY</th>
<th>USMC</th>
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DoD PERSONNEL & PROCUREMENT STATISTICS
Personnel & Procurement Reports and Data Files (2007)
Appendix C: Implementation of Recommendations by the Task Force:

Existing Services that were Modified with Immediate Impact for Students

- Information about services offered via the Counseling Center, the Raleigh Veterans Center, or other offices on campus were incorporated into the existing Veterans Affairs website www.ncsu.edu/veterans by providing links to their offices' information.

- As the Post 9/11 GI Bill was being implemented, the Veterans Affairs Coordinator in Registration & Records and the Student Accounts Supervisor in the Cashier's Office created a payment agreement form to ease the burden of worry for students while they waited for payments to arrive from the VA.

- The Veterans Affairs website was reorganized to include a larger “Announcements” area and to be more user friendly.

- The Veterans Affairs Coordinator in Registration & Records (VA Certifying Official) began tracking walk-in veteran student traffic so volume could be monitored. This allowed her to better gauge peak times and make arrangements to reorganize work or obtain assistance, thus reducing student wait time and frustration. There are currently more than 545 veterans using GI Bill funds at NC State University.

- The Veterans Affairs Coordinator in Registration & Records began attending some of the meetings of the newly formed veteran student organization in order to address questions and concerns.

- Registration and Records worked to create a paperless catalog approval process between NCSU and the VA State Approving Agency, which in turn alleviated significant administrative overhead and allowed the VA Certifying Official more time for student assistance.
New Services for NCSU Veteran Students

- Dr. Picart and Dr. Stafford worked with NCSU veteran students to form a chapter of the Veteran Student Organization on our campus.

- Dr. Picart, Dr. Ozturk, Dr. Hunt, and others worked to create a process for accepting some military coursework or military experience as PE and Military Science transfer credit. This process involves military transcript evaluation by the VA Certifying Official in Registration & Records and is a relatively easy process for students.

- The Office of Registration & Records, as part of its goal to improve communication with veteran students, created a bi-annual VA Newsletter (electronic) which provides information, reminders, and instructions, and highlights a veteran student’s campus experiences. http://www.ncsu.edu/veterans/newsletter1.pdf

- A transition course was created to help our veteran, non-traditional students adjust to civilian, campus life.

- The Office of Advising and Student Services (OASIS), as part of its Adviser Institute training, hosted forums where advisers could learn about the special needs of veteran students.

- The University began participating in the GI Bill Yellow Ribbon Program, which, along with funds from the VA, covers part or all of the difference between a student’s tuition bill and what the VA would normally pay. This is especially helpful to our out-of-state undergraduates and some graduate students.

- Our Student Information System was modified to allow the Veterans Affairs Certifying Official the ability to send an email to a student at the time of certification, without leaving the page in the system. This expedites communication to students about the specifics of their semester certification to the VA.

Long Range Goals

Dr. Picart and Dr. Robinson are forming a committee to research long range plans to create a veteran service center-a “one stop shop” for veteran students-on our campus.