

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On behalf of APSCU, our member institutions and the military and veteran students we serve we welcome the opportunity to provide our views on the importance of successful educational outcomes for our returning servicemembers and veterans, the VetSuccess program, and the implementation of the “Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012” (P.L. 112-249).

MEASURING STUDENT VETERAN SUCCESS

- Measuring student veteran success is not fully reflected in current federal databases
- Recent and previous studies show that veterans perform at or above their peers
- New methods for tracking nontraditional students, like veterans, should be explored

VETSUCCESS ON CAMPUS (VSOC)

- The program provides important access to services and supports to veterans on campus
- VSOC is on 94 campuses; only one is located at a private sector institution
- Future program expansion should take into account the diversity of veteran enrollment

IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY OF EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2012 (P.L. 112-249)

- APSCU was an early supporter of H.R. 4057, now P.L. 112-249
- APSCU remains supportive and looks forward to working with VA on implementation

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL DAKDUK
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THE ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE SECTOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Before the
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Committee on Veterans Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

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Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the subcommittee, I am writing on behalf of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU), our member institutions, their faculty and the nearly four million students who attend private sector institutions. We are grateful for the invitation to offer our views on the importance of successful educational outcomes for our returning servicemembers and veterans, the VetSuccess program, and the implementation of the “Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012” (P.L. 112-249).

Since 2009, over one million veterans have used Post-9/11 GI benefits to pay for their educations. Private sector colleges and universities have educated more than 325,000. Private sector institutions continue to grow as the education choice for veterans because our schools offer focused academic delivery and flexible schedules, which veterans favor.

We understand the challenges that arise when our military men and women transition back to civilian life and enter into postsecondary education. Our military and veteran students are not the fresh-out-of-high school, first-time, full-time student living on campus and attending college thanks to the generosity of family. Our military and veteran students are like many of our new traditional students – working, with a spouse and children and paying for their education with

money they have earned. Given the student profile of veterans enrolled in higher education today, many are not captured in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Database Systems (IPEDS), which is narrowed in scope in tracking first-time, full-time students. However, new partnerships and initiatives have been introduced to better understand the success of veterans in higher education.

MEASURING STUDENT VETERAN SUCCESS

Most recently, Student Veterans of America (SVA) in partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the results of their Million Records Project. During my tenure at SVA as executive director, I was responsible for brokering this partnership leaving me with an appreciation for the details captured in the report and the gaps in research on student veteran outcomes. In regards to the Million Records Project, I found the following items of interest:

- The overall completion rate was approximately 52%, above nontraditional peers.
- Existing research on post-WWII and Vietnam veterans indicate that the vast majority of veterans complete their postsecondary programs; post-Vietnam-era veterans have GPA's greater than or equal to their peers.
- Recent research (2010) conducted by the VA showed that 63% of veterans self-reported as completing their postsecondary training. Over half of the post-9/11-era respondents said they completed as well.
- While the private nonprofits had the highest completion rates (64%), approximately 22% later completed at a public or proprietary institution.
- The completion rate for the private sector was approximately 45%.
- Private sector institutions had higher proportions of veterans completing degrees faster.¹

Overall, the report suggests that student veterans are succeeding at levels comparable to, if not greater than, their peers. This refutes previous notions that student veterans drop out in high numbers.

Additionally, the Million Records Project provides the framework for future research and data collection efforts on military veterans pursuing postsecondary education. Moving forward, we expect that new data will be available for Congress and the public to analyze given the President's recent issuance of Executive Order 13607, or Principles of Excellence. Section 3(c) of the order states:

“The Secretaries of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Education shall develop a comprehensive strategy for developing service member and veteran student outcome measures that are comparable, to the maximum extent practicable, across Federal military and veterans educational benefit programs, including, but not limited to, the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Tuition Assistance Program. To the extent practicable, the student outcome measures should rely on existing administrative data to minimize the reporting burden on institutions participating in these benefit programs. The student outcome measures should permit comparisons across Federal educational programs and across institutions and types of institutions. The Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs, shall also collect from educational institutions, as part of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and other data collection systems, information on the amount of funding received pursuant to the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Tuition Assistance Program. The Secretary of Education shall make this information publicly available on the College Navigator Website.”ⁱⁱ

We understand that the process for collecting outcomes data on student veterans is already underway. We suggest a concept similar to the Million Records Project be further explored as a compliment to the IPEDS system. Congress, though, should be keenly aware of the limitations of IPEDS in its current state. As of today, IPEDS does not disaggregate data based on military or veteran enrollment.

We have provided recommendations for tracking student outcomes in our proposal for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). Our proposal offers thoughts around five key areas: retention and progression rates; completion and return on investment; employment of graduates; earnings and/or salary gains; and graduate satisfaction. We believe the Common College Completion Metrics as proposed by the National Governor's Association Chair's Initiative provides a good foundation for advancing dialogue around student outcomes and success metrics.ⁱⁱⁱ Conceptually, this model may be applied to veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other Title 38 programs.

At a minimum, though, we should appreciate the unique life experiences of veterans and servicemembers. They differ drastically from the 18 year old, first-time, full-time college student. Current federal databases are lacking when it comes to tracking student veteran success. They should be updated, or new proposals should be explored, to fully capture the success of new learners that take a different and sometimes longer path to completion.

VETSUCCESS ON CAMPUS

Since the initiative launched in 2009, the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program has expanded to 94 sites. While only one VSOC site is located at a private sector institution, ECPI University, it remains a valuable addition to their veteran support network.

ECPI University has 10 campuses throughout Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. In addition to their ground locations, ECPI University provides online courses and programs that are flexible for adult learners like veterans and servicemembers. ECPI University officially welcomed their new VSOC counselor to the Virginia Beach campus in October 2013.

According to university officials, since being assigned to ECPI University the VSOC counselor has averaged seeing over 100 veterans per month. She also manages a case load of roughly 40 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, or Chapter 31, veterans. Executive Director of Military Affairs at ECPI University and retired Navy Captain, Bob Larned, said the following

regarding their VSOC counselor, “She has an open door policy and always works around her schedule as necessary to see someone. She has put the word out via the student veterans organization on campus that she will assist any veteran, not only those attending ECPI University.”

I have long been a proponent of providing resources to veterans by meeting them where they are located. In the case of student veterans, placing counselors on campuses is a smart approach for connecting with many college-going veterans that may not visit VA centers.

In the event VSOC is expanded, it would be helpful to student veterans for VA to consider diversifying the scope and reach of VSOC sites by including more private sector institutions.

IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY OF EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2012 (P.L. 112-249)

In 2012, APSCU along with other higher education groups and veteran advocates sent a coalition letter to this committee calling for more consumer education and supports for student veterans. Congressman Gus Bilirakis quickly responded by sponsoring H.R. 4057, the “Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities Act of 2012” (P.L. 112-249). We remained supportive of the bill from its inception to eventual passage. Regarding the implementation of the law, we look forward to working with the Department of Veterans Affairs and other agencies to strengthen supports for servicemembers and veterans.

Finally, we want to work with you to ensure servicemembers and veterans are armed with the tools and resources to make an informed, thoughtful decision about which educational opportunities will best prepare them for the workforce. In short, we share your commitment to veteran success.

Thank you for allowing APSCU to provide our thoughts on important topics related to the military and veteran student community. We welcome the opportunity to work with this

subcommittee and members of Congress to support student veterans and student servicemembers.

ⁱ Cate, C.A. (2014). *Million Records Project: Research from Student Veterans of America*. Student Veterans of America, Washington, DC.

ⁱⁱ The White House Office of the Press Secretary. *Executive Order -- Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members*, The White House, Washington D.C., accessed April 24, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/27/executive-order-establishing-principles-excellence-educational-instituti>

ⁱⁱⁱ Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities(APSCU), *Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act*, accessed April 22, 2014 http://www.career.org/policy-and-issues/federal-issues/hea/upload/HEA_Reauthorization_Proposal_032013.pdf