



Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges

Picking Up Where They Left Off: *Making the Transition to Higher Education*



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Discussion Points

- **Introduction**
- **Supporting facts**
- **Challenges and Resourcefulness**
- **Combat to the classroom**
- **Adjustments**
- **Opportunities and programs for returning veterans**
- **Support services for family members**
- **Transition hints for returning servicemembers**
- **Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges role**
- **Information on the Web**
- **Other campus-based projects to reach out to veterans**
- **Questions?**

Supporting Facts

Active Duty Servicemembers:

- In FY 2006, DoD-wide, there were nearly 800,000 individual enrollments in undergraduate and graduate courses
- In FY 2006, Over \$556M in Tuition Assistance for Voluntary Education expended
(Source: FY VOLED Fact Sheet)

Guard and Reserves:

- Most soldiers deployed involuntarily
- Majority of Guard/Reserve Soldiers who use education benefits are college students
- GAO estimates that 82% of nation's colleges enroll Guard/Reserve soldiers
- Overall, 18-20% of *deployed* Guard/Reserve soldiers are students

Veterans:

- Over 523,000 veterans received VA education benefits in FY07
(Source: Department of Veterans Affairs)
- The percentage of veterans using GI Bill benefits has increased 24% since 2001
(Source: USA Today)
- 19% of those serving in combat zones will suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
(Source: Science Daily, April 2008)
- 71% of eligible veterans use some portion of their GI Bill benefits; only 6% exhaust them

College Support of Servicemembers

- **Policies that help servicemembers pursue education opportunities and complete degrees**
- **Procedural and policy accommodations as appropriate for military students who withdraw for a call to active duty**
- **Policies that encourage re-enrollment and aid transition back to the classroom for servicemembers and veterans returning from military service**

Issues and Challenges

- **Reuniting with Family**
- **Returning to Work and School**
- **Accessing Services, Benefits, and Information**
- **Rehabilitation**
- **Rejoining Community**

Challenges Before

- **Rapid deployments can complicate official withdrawal from school**
- **Financial aid/tuition refund issues**
 - **Rules for submitting refunds confusing**
 - **May be hardship if tuition not waived**
- **Grading Issues**
 - **Withdraw or complete course**
 - **Some incompletes converted to grade of “F” - students unaware of limited time for “I”**
 - **Students/professors overestimate feasibility of completing coursework while deployed**

Challenges During

- **Impact of duty location, military job, OPTEMPO (Battle Rhythm)**
- **Being away from the “home” college**
- **Distance from family**
- **Changes in rules governing tuition and enrollment**
- **Adjusting to course delivery through distance learning**
- **Internet connectivity**



Resourcefulness in the Field

- **Online instruction during downtime while deployed relieves boredom, keeps soldiers connected to campus**
- **Soldiers in Iraq with laptops jointly purchased a high-speed Internet link**
- **Soldiers apply classroom education to their military job (civil affairs; problem solving; law enforcement)**
- **Soldiers take initiative to work with professors on innovative program-related internships while deployed**

Challenges After

- **Readjustment to family and civilian life - returning from a highly structured system to one supporting more independent thought and decision making**
- **Life experiences brought to campus different from civilian experiences**
- **Lost classroom time; maintaining class status**
- **Financial impact**
- **College friends moving on or graduating**
- **Psychological/physical vestiges of serving in a war zone**
- **Comments within campus community about the war; some well-intentioned comments may be uncomfortable**
- **Re-application process**
- **Qualification for student aid following deployment**



Combat Zone to Campus Life

Easing students' acclimation:

- **Students returning from active duty will seek to re-enroll following their period of adjustment**
- **Ease application process for readmission**
- **Some schools offer priority course registration for returning military students**
- **Special university web pages for returning military students**
- **Scholarship opportunities**
- **Extend enrollment deadlines**
- **Academic and counseling services**

Combat Zone to Campus Life

Student-Servicemember orientation:

- **Goal-oriented**
- **Focus on earning degree; no interest in activism**
- **Mature; motivated; older than most students**
- **Better students - more dedicated to education**
- **Leadership skills**
- **Priorities are different - may change due to combat experience**

How Colleges Are Responding

Priority registration for returning military students

Simplified/expedited application process for readmission

Extended/flexible enrollment deadlines

Course schedules adapted for transitioning active-duty servicemembers

Academic and counseling services focused on military students

Special Web pages for returning military students

Veterans support groups; Veteran centers and lounges

Scholarship opportunities

Deferred tuition payment plans (to accommodate TA and VA paperwork lags)

Academic research addressing the needs of returning servicemembers

How Colleges Are Adjusting

How are colleges and universities in your state(s) responding?

Barriers to Enrollment and Retention

Challenging adjustments for both the student and the institution and an opportunity to develop creative/innovative solutions

- **Informational Barriers**—easy access to good information about transfer credit, financial aid, orientation for adult learners
- **Cultural Barriers**—helping them feel comfortable on campus; an opportunity to broaden the horizons of others and integrate military and civilian worlds
- **Injury and/or Trauma-Related Barriers**— providing services and support for the needs of disabled veterans; mental health issues affect enrollment and student success
- **Financial Barriers**—tuition waivers and financial assistance until GI Bill funding kicks in, grants and loan eligibility

Source: *AASCU Perspectives, Summer 2008, "When Johnny [or Janelle] Comes Marching Home": National, State and Institutional Efforts in Support of Veterans' Education* by Lesley McBain; <http://www.aascu.org/media/index.htm>



Helping Fellow Servicemembers

- **Returning veterans sensitive to the needs of those who follow**
 - **Student veterans groups help soldiers adjust to a return to school**
 - **Mentorship program matches returning veterans with vets in their field of study**
 - **Campus student veterans organizations**
 - **Veterans affairs office**
- **Many schools provide counseling services for returning servicemembers**

Additional Resources

Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams

- **American Council on Education (ACE)**
- **Direct support to veterans with severe injuries and their families align their career goals with educational opportunity**
- **Combines individualized academic advising with campus advocacy**
- **Program access at three military hospitals: Bethesda Naval Hospital in Bethesda, MD; Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, DC; and Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio, TX.**
- **<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/veterans/index.htm>**
- **Web site also provides a list of other resources**

Additional Resources

Severely Injured Joint Operations Center established by DoD in February 2005

- **Operates under the direction of the Office of Military Community and Family Policy**
- **1-888-774-1361; 24 hours a day and seven days a week; supports all the services**
- **Personalized assistance in:**
 - **Medical care and rehabilitation**
 - **Education, training and job placement**
 - **Personal mobility and functioning**
 - **Home, transportation and workplace accommodations**
 - **Personal, couple and family issues counseling, and**
 - **Financial resources**

National Resources

Severely Injured Servicemember and Spouse Scholarship Opportunities

- Available through DANTES
 - Purpose: to connect the potential student to an institution's special programs and scholarship opportunities
- Institutions interested in participating may visit
<http://www.dantes.doded.mil/sfd/index.asp>
and fill out the online form provided
- Complete list of schools offering scholarships and their programs:
<http://www.dantes.doded.mil/sfd/participantSearch.asp?param=school>
- Education programs available to returning servicemembers and spouses
- POC link with schools offering programs and scholarships

Support Services for Families/Dependents

A few examples:

- **Military family support programs**
- **National Military Family Association (NMFA)**
- **DoD Yellow Ribbon Initiative - support and outreach services to Reserve Component service members, their families, and communities throughout the deployment cycle**
- **Military OneSource**
- **Scholarships and grants**
- **Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University**



Hints for Successful Transition

- **Time Management**
- **Family support**
- **Good study environment**
- **Connect with the university community**
- **Education - a goal toward other opportunities (job enhancement; promotion; a new career)**



Suggestions for Successful Transition

- **Information programs for key educational staff administered through appropriate departments to improve the understanding of veterans, their challenges, and the benefits associated with recruiting them**
- **Federal and state incentives for educational institutions to design veteran-centric curricula, recruit veterans, and ultimately improve their educational status or skill set**
- **Local resources in easily accessible locations (libraries, community colleges, local Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), employment offices)**
- **National registry; leverage social networking technologies and peer-to-peer support programs through information provided by the national registry to match veterans and their families with needed resources**
- **Community-based peer support programs with an outreach component and publicize them where veterans live, work, and congregate**
- **Peer support or mentorship programs in schools/workplaces, to offer recently returned veterans a support group of peers who have overcome reintegration-related challenges**
- **Engage veterans who have benefited from peer support to promote the advantages of the program, encourage other veterans to take part, and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help**



Welcome Back to Campus

- **Serve as the homecoming/military appreciation parade Grand Marshall, float judge, or guest commentator;**
- **Recognize returning Soldiers from the football field during pre-game, halftime or timeouts. Alumni-sponsored tail gate parties for vets;**
- **Guest commentator in the broadcast booth; pre-game coin toss or ceremonial tip-off;**
- **Serve on a panel or in workshops as a way to educate students about the Soldier's experiences;**
- **Serve as a guest speaker to ROTC cadets or to the larger student body**
- **Have returning students, faculty, staff and alumni Soldiers stand up to be recognized at pep rallies, concerts, religious services or other special events**
- **Make an office call with the university president;**
- **Interview returning students, faculty, staff and alumni who recently returned from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan for stories in campus publications;**
- **Air Public Service Announcements (PSAs) recognizing and thanking the students, faculty, staff and alumni who recently returned from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan**

Source: Operation Tribute to Freedom (<http://www4.army.mil/otf/backtoschool.php>)

A Few Guidelines

- **What can schools do?**
- **Who speaks for veterans?**
- **Who is veterans' champion?**
- **Who understands the veteran population?**
- **Who helps with transition to the academic world?**
- **Who speaks their language?**



DISCUSSION