



Serving Student Veterans

AN OVERVIEW OF CAEL'S VETERANS INITIATIVES

Building Capacity at Higher Education Institutions to Serve Student Veterans

CAEL works directly with veterans services coordinators and faculty at Chicago-area colleges and universities to create networks that promote best practices in serving student veterans. For example, CAEL has developed veteran-focused higher education affinity groups in Denver and Chicago. Within these networks, CAEL has organized quarterly professional development opportunities, leveraged the collective voice of members in advocacy efforts, and encouraged cross-learning. Issues that have been addressed include military benefits, recognizing military learning through prior learning assessment, and accommodations and disabilities.

Furthermore, CAEL has developed customized strategic planning frameworks for veterans activities at select individual institutions. Through these planning efforts, CAEL has driven implementation of best practices, as well as the engagement of higher level leadership at those institutions. Outcomes of this planning process have included the introduction of new veterans spaces, veteran-specific advising, and faculty training.

Maximizing Student Veteran Success through Faculty and Advisor Training

In 2014-2015, CAEL designed a faculty training curriculum on student veterans and trained representatives of 51 institutions at train-the-trainer sessions in different regions of Illinois. CAEL equipped workshop participants to deliver this training to faculty at their institutions, thereby building increased faculty awareness of how student veterans contribute to the higher education classroom as well as what they may be experiencing during their transition from the military. CAEL has also conducted faculty training sessions in Colorado with support from the Ford Foundation. In addition, CAEL has developed and delivered training for career and education advisors in Denver and Chicago. These trainings prepare advisors to anticipate student veteran needs and capitalize on their strengths as they navigate academic options and pursue career opportunities.

Fostering Employment Pipelines through the Commercial Club of Chicago

Since February of 2013, CAEL has driven collaboration among local companies seeking to hire veterans by supporting the leadership efforts of the McCormick Foundation to build an active Veterans Working Group (VWG) at the Commercial Club, a private club that represents the top 300+ companies in the Chicago region. Since the launch meeting in May 2013, the VWG has grown to a membership of over 35 companies. VWG members have been highly engaged both at meetings and in promoting the goals of the VWG within their organizations. The vast majority are now members of



Illinois Hires Heroes Consortium (IHHC). Regular meetings cover special topics related to veterans and employment, including Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs regulations, tracking veterans, and best practices in recruitment and retention.

Enhancing Access to Veterans Services through Illinois Joining Forces

CAEL encourages collaboration and promotes coordination of veterans services on a regional and statewide basis by working closely with a wide range of stakeholders in the veteran community. CAEL's leadership serves as a co-chair of the Illinois Joining Forces (IJF) Education Working Group and Vice Chair of the IJF board. In November 2012, the Illinois Department of Military Affairs and Department of Veterans' Affairs launched Illinois Joining Forces (IJF) in partnership with 140 government agencies and nonprofit organizations. IJF recently became a separate 501(c)3 with an independent Board of Trustees. The purpose of IJF is designed to help all veteran- and military-serving organizations in the state to coordinate with each other to ensure seamless service and create a "no wrong door" approach for veterans seeking assistance.

Promoting Recognition of Military Learning through Prior Learning Assessment

Since 1974, CAEL has helped colleges and universities evaluate students' prior learning (from work, life, or military experience) to determine if it is equivalent to college level learning, and, if so, to award college credit for that learning. This process is called prior learning assessment, or PLA. CAEL has been instrumental in the introduction and passage of legislation to create a statewide military PLA taskforce managed by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and expects to be represented on the taskforce. To build a foundation for the taskforce's work, CAEL is currently conducting a statewide scan of military PLA policies and practices at Illinois colleges and universities. For this scan and the resulting report, CAEL is collaborating closely with IBHE, the Faculty Advisory Council of IBHE, the Illinois Community College Board, and the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs. These PLA efforts extend to Montana, where CAEL is assisting the state university system on a TAACCCT grant project to increase PLA opportunities for veterans in healthcare. CAEL is also helping to build the capacity of colleges and universities to conduct crosswalks from military training to college credit.

Linking Military Experience to Careers in the Healthcare Sector

CAEL is leading the Veterans Healthcare Career Pathways (VHCP) initiative with support from the Michael Reese Health Trust. In this project, CAEL is working to improve connections between returning veterans and healthcare degree and credential programs in Chicago-area institutions, with the aim to encourage more veterans to enroll in such programs and pursue civilian healthcare pathways. Through VHCP, CAEL designed and launched a comprehensive online guide for veterans interested in transitioning to civilian healthcare careers and also established a network of healthcare education providers focused on promoting academic innovations to strengthen veterans' access to healthcare career opportunities. Complementing this work, CAEL is currently researching military-to-civilian healthcare education bridge and accelerated programs in other states to determine the feasibility of expanding opportunities for Army Medics in Illinois.