

NCA Self Study
Criterion 1 Documents

Eastern Illinois University

Year 2013

Veterans Services Office Annual Report
2012–2013

Military Student Assistance Center

This paper is posted at The Keep.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/eiunca_mission_docs/35

As you are preparing this report, please keep in mind President Perry's priorities for the University:

1. Enhance service and leadership opportunities for students.
2. Enhance fine arts programming and outreach.
3. Enhance study abroad opportunities.
4. Enhance honors programs.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Map and Publish Processes
 - Class Registration process for military students
 - No Fee Application process updated
 - Validation of Military Records process identified
 - Ongoing: VA "Blue Form" accepted for Disability Services
- Support on Project Hero Veterans Week
 - Luncheon
 - Veterans Service Fair
 - Illinois Traveling Memorial Wall
 - Self-Defense Class
- Integrating and synchronizing with other campus resources to include
 - NSP and PROWL
 - Marketing
 - Admissions.
 - Veterans Benefits
 - Veterans Services Advisory Committee
- Integrating and synchronizing with external resources
 - RSVP: Retired and Senior Volunteer Program of Coles County
 - IJF: Illinois Joining Forces
 - SVA: Student Veterans of America
- Establish "Students and Veterans of Eastern" RSO that focuses on service.
- Monthly Socials
 - January – Pizza Social
 - February – Basketball Game and Veterans Appreciation
 - March – Bowling at Union Lanes
 - April – Ice Cream Social

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS

- New Student Programs
 - On Prowl calendar
 - Transitions Workshop during PROWL for new military students
- Marketing
 - Ongoing work with to standardize and align logos and artwork with EIU.
- Admissions.
 - Ongoing to map recruitment communications, setting alerts for letters to veterans for inquiries, applications, acceptance, and enrollments.
- Veterans Benefits
 - Establishing Military Records data warehouse
 - Recurring meetings for close coordination
- Veterans Services Advisory Committee

- Housing, Counseling, Career, Admissions, Benefits, Advising, New Student representation with a student veteran on committee
- Disability Services
 - Coordinated with students with TBI Traumatic Brain Injury
 - Coordinated on process to accept VA expedited physician process for disability services.

PROGRESS ON FY13 GOALS

1. Maintain programs from previous Veterans Services Coordinator.
 Goal 1 was partially accomplished. Programs that continued from the previous Veterans Services Coordinator were Hoops for Heroes, Project HERO, and Rucksacks to Backpacks.
 - Hoops for Heroes are working with the Athletic Department, SAAC, and the OVC to send 4 student veterans to the OVC Men's Basketball Tournament. Through coordination, we found and coordinated four volunteers.
 - Project HERO is the Spring Semester military student awareness week. This year we did the event over 2 days which increased marketing over last year. The best practices was coordinating with the Library to host the Illinois Veterans Memorial Wall and having the Veterans Services Fair in the University Ballroom. Both locations increased foot traffic over last year.
 - Rucksacks to Backpacks are a project so local and campus groups can donate school supplies and backpacks for incoming military students. During transition cycle out of the armed services, much of a person's assets are tied up in bureaucracy and moving expenses. Providing a welcome backpack with school supplies to incoming military students provides immediate assistance, notice that Veterans Services is here, and a feeling of camaraderie and belonging to EIU.
2. Conduct expectation management with students, staff, and faculty on the duties and responsibilities of the Veterans Services Office.
 Goal 2 was successful and needs to continue. Media, events activities, and coordination with other university staffs continuously reinforced the office talking points that Veterans Services will "provide a single coordination point for student veterans, military personnel, and members of military families and enhance military enrollment, academic and social integration, and future career opportunities in order to support those who have made sacrifices for the state of Illinois and the United States of America." A brief at the EIU Unity Conference enabled understanding of the military mind and encouraged cultural awareness with students, faculty, and staff.
3. Create internal office procedures and control measures to enhance continuity and efficiency.
 Goal 3 is successful and needs to continue. Office has continued to reorganizing external office data feeds for reports, surveys, and information flow. While strides have been made, more work needs to be done to establish and then market the internal processes for admission and integration for military students.

FY14 GOALS

Will submit by August planning is still underway.

ASSESSMENT

Conducted

- Call all currently enrolled veterans to determine awareness office, current needs, and satisfaction of services.
- Developed a needs analysis survey that was conducted on-line.

PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND UTILIZATION STATS

Table 1 (Total Supported Population)

	Fall09	Spr 10	Fall10	Spr 11	Fall 11	Spr 12	Fall12	Spr13	Fall 13	Spr 13
Military Student Pop	191	196	205	232	262	249	236	263		
Mil Student %Change	5.4%		6.8%		21.8%		-10.0%	10.0%		
Non-Mil Supported Pop	60		68		70		83	79		
TOTAL	251		273		332		319	342		

Tracking total military population in the past has been complicated because there is not one report or system that accounts for all military members. Creating a comprehensive, reliable, and recurring list is still ongoing.

Military Student Population prior to Spring 2013 only included self-selected veterans and those using federal financial aid. Non-Military Supported Population only included ROTC students.

Military Student Population includes students who are self-selected veterans and current military members, veterans and military members seeking federal financial aid and state financial aid (2 separate reports), and students who have made use of the Veterans Services who are not on any previous list and captured at the Veterans Services Office. We conduct a reconciliation of all reports to eliminate duplicates.

Non-Military Supported Population includes ROTC students, Military Family Members who are utilizing the 9/11GI Bill or other veterans designated assistance like the MIA/POW scholarship. Again, we conduct a reconciliation to eliminate any duplicates both on the military and non-military students.

Table 2 (Retention and Graduation Percentages)

Overall effectiveness of the Veteran Services Program must be linked to military student retention rates, graduation rates, and job placement rates; and comparing these rates to the general student body population. Further, veteran's education surveys are asking for these statistics to demonstrate the support of the university for veterans. Currently, Veterans Services Office does not have a tracking mechanism to measure these rates and has begun work with the Planning, Budget, and Institutional Research Office to create a means to track these statistics.

SY12-13

New Military Students – 62

Student Retention – unknown quantity and percentage

Graduating Military Students – 65

Student Job Placement – unknown quantity and percentage

Table 3 (Assistance Tracker)

	Fall 09	Spr 10	Fall 10	Spr 11	Fall 11	Spr 12	Fall 12	Spr 13	Fall 13	Spr 14
Walk-In								35		
Phone								43		
Email								25		
TOTAL								100		
Financial								47		
Enrollment								32		
Academic								12		
Event/PSO								22		
Career								7		
Other								26		

The Veterans Services has not been tracking the number of veterans who have made use of the office in past semesters. Draft tracking system started on 20 February. Of significant note, the number of assistance requests in the last 3 weeks of the semester after Project Hero (4-5 April 2013) nearly equaled the number of assistance requests through the first 13 weeks. We further anticipate the numbers will change as personnel are trained more on the tracking system.

Above the line is the Total number of students who contacted the Veterans Service Office for assistance. Below the line identifies the type issues. There are more issues than people reflected that some people had more than one issue per visit.

HOT TOPICS OR ISSUES IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL AREA

- Continue to have an Interim Coordinator. An interim coordinator is only a stopgap measure to provide federal and state mandated services to the military student population. With two search committees in the past year that did not close on a suitable candidate, I recommend a re-evaluation of criteria for the search to include mandatory qualifications, military service requirement, and compensation. The current packet and EIU being outside the geographical bounds of either a major city or a military post drastically reduce the available pool of qualified candidates.
- EIU Internal Systems for Military Students. We have improved process and procedures for supporting veterans with admissions, registration, disability, financial aid, and awareness of issues. However, confirming these procedures are the best support, codifying into one administrative desk guide, and educating faculty, staff, and administration on what are the procedures are still in its infancy. Much more work is required to set the systems into general use.
- Tuition Assistance program. From 05 March to 10 April 2013, Department of Defense announced suspension of any future Tuition Assistance for active duty personnel. On 10 April, 2013, officials announced the reinstatement of the Tuition Assistance program which would pick up where it left off, meaning that eligibility rules have not changed and tuition coverage will remain at 100% for the remainder of the fiscal year. EIU had 8 students potentially affected by this sequester measure, and we are monitoring to ensure they have no issues for Fall 2013 semester.
- GI Bill Delays. Payment of GI Bill benefits for veteran students to universities has been delayed this year due to an increased number of applicants coupled with a massive VA overhaul which has reduced the VA workforce that handled the GI Bill benefits. Fall 2012 average was 68 days, threatening several EIU student veterans with off-campus housing evictions and tuition late payments. Veterans Services, Veterans Benefits, and Registrars coordinated to ensure those veterans' students on GI Bill did not receive late charges for Fall 2012. Spring 2013 average has decreased to 38 days, but is still over the VA goal of 30 days to process a GI Bill benefit.
- **H.R. 357, G.I. Bill Tuition Fairness Act of 2013 (Pending in Federal Congress).** H.R. 357 would expand education opportunities for veterans by allowing them to attend the state-run higher-education institution of their choice at the in-state tuition rate. It would do this by requiring public schools to charge in-state tuition rates to all veterans in order for the school to be eligible to receive G.I. Bill education payments. This requirement would take effect Aug. 1, 2014. G.I. Bill students enrolling before Aug. 1, 2014, at schools that choose not to charge veterans' in-state tuition could still apply their benefits toward tuition at those institutions.

STAFF PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT

- EIU UPD (Field Training Officer, Drug Task Force) Screening Committee, member
- Student Veterans of America, membership since 2007
- Illinois Joining Forces, member and Veterans Education Board, member as of March 2013.
- Congressman Shimkus Veterans Board, member as of May 2013

GRANTS AND AWARDS (Provide bullets points.)

- Governor's Award for Excellence in Education in supporting veterans, Fall 2012
- GI Jobs Magazine Military Friendly School, 2013 (4 years in a row)

PUBLICATIONS

- NONE

STAFF CHANGES

- Interim Veterans Coordinator, Stephen Knotts, begins 9 July 2012; continues

SUMMARY (1 paragraph describing your overall thoughts related to the Spring 2013 semester)

Veterans Services Office enhances the support of military students (veterans, current service personnel, and military dependants) by providing opportunities in enrollment, integration, academic, and career placement support. We have made great strides in establishing and improving veterans support and integration with EIU support structures, but there is a long way to go before we are truly an excellent veteran's education institution. VSO has successfully enhanced the awareness of military students and EIUs support on and off campus, bringing EIU state-wide attention on our veterans support. Internal processes to continue to improve support are initiated, although great improvements still remain before we are at a high level of sustainability. Also, internal EIU processes and training of faculty, staff, and administration must continue to be pushed forward to enhance the cultural understanding of this non-traditional student set.