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2019 Conference Proceedings (Buffalo, New York)

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Resources for Military Veterans in Higher Education: A Web-Based Content Analysis

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Abstract: This paper presents findings based on research from a web-based content analysis of 13 institutions within the Southeastern Conference (SEC) of on the various resources offered to military veteran students.

Introduction

Military veterans are continuing to seek out higher education opportunities following active duty service, primarily due to the enactment of the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill in 2008 which provides financial assistance throughout enrollment. For the purpose of this research, the term veteran will be defined as a military service member who has transitioned out of the military. As veterans transition out of the military into civilian status, multiple lifestyle factors such as career, financial, and living arrangements will change. Veterans who elect to pursue higher education as well, are required to add the additional transition into the role of student. These transitions indicate the unique experiences a student veteran may face. Resources outside of the average institutional offerings are crucial in educational success. The purpose of this research is to explore the available resources for veterans pursuing higher educational opportunities. A web-based content analysis of four-year, public institutions in the Southeastern Conference in the United States allows recognition and analysis of the financial options, resources, and services that are unique to student veterans. The web-based analysis allows imitation of the experience and information that a student veterans or service member would encounter when deciding which institution could best fit their unique needs. It has been discovered that multiple institutions possess some form of resources for student veterans. However, the amount and type of services offered vary between each. Some institutions were found to have resource centers specifically for the aid of student veteran success. Others were found to provide only the basic requirements by the Department of Veteran Affairs to certify education benefits. Research questions that guided this study were: What resources are available to student veterans to help them succeed? What is the best practice for helping veterans in higher education?

Relevant Literature

According to the American Council on Education (2011-2012), approximately five million military members are anticipated to exit the military by the year 2020. Of that five million, a significant number of veterans are expected to pursue some form of higher education. On average, veterans who attend higher educational institutions are 25 years of age with 42% working full-time jobs, 52% with children, and 44% who are married (American Council on Education, 2011-2012). This age range is typical for enlisted service members who possess the military pay grade of E-1 through E-5. According to the Enlisted Professional Military Education Policy (2015), this pay grade range focuses on individual training, or a "how to do" mentality (p. A-2). It is not until the pay grade of E-6/7 does the focus shift more to professional education opportunities, or a "how to think" mentality (p. A-3), that is more common in higher education. This "how to do" mentality is only one of the many transitional challenges student veterans may face as they embark on higher educational opportunities. The ways of learning and thinking are drastically shifted, as well as new adaptations of a civilian lifestyle. Elliot, Gonzalez, and Larsen (2011) note that universities across the United States are continuing to see an increase in the student veteran population with various backgrounds and experiences. Students are noted as experiencing isolation, learning stress, and PTSD related challenges outside those of a typical non-traditional student. These experiences suggest an increase in

services unique to the student veteran population to increase not only academic success, but overall wellness during their time with their selection institution.

Methods

A web-based content analysis was conducted for this study. Post-secondary, four-year, public institutions within 11 states of the Southeastern (SEC) conference region of the United States were analyzed to acknowledge and examined the available resources that were offered to prospective and current student veterans. The 13 institutions, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, University of Kentucky, University of South Carolina, University of Georgia, University of Alabama, Auburn University, Louisiana State University, University of Florida, University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, University of Arkansas, Texas A&M University, and the University of Missouri were analyzed. The web-based research first examined the funding to determine each institutions acceptance of GI Bill funding, Yellow Ribbon Program participation, and if the institution offered in-state tuition to student veterans. Next, general resources for student veterans were examined to determine if each institution had a resource center on campus specific to veterans, if the institution had a Vet Success on Campus Program, and if Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) credit evaluation of post military education was offered. Finally, an analysis of services provided to veterans at each institution and the extent to the overall effectiveness of success for prospective and current student veterans. A compare and contract of the provided information allowed determination of the best practice to assist student veterans in their educational success.

Findings

Veteran Funding. Initial findings to determine the financial options for student veterans are shown in Table I and indicate that all 13 institutions accept funding toward tuition and fees from GI Bill resources. The GI Bill provides education funding for the student veteran based on their time in service and specific military status (ex. Active duty, veteran, national guard, etc.). Additionally, all institutions, with the exception of the University of Florida, participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program. This program is designed to provide financial aid from the institution to the veteran or service member to accommodate what the designated GI Bill does not provide. Each institution determines their own criteria of qualifications for the Yellow Ribbon Program and range from unlimited assistance, to assistance to those only in Graduate school and only a limited number of students at one time, as indicated in Table II a-b. Further, it was determined that 10 institutions provide in-state tuition rates to veterans or service members based on specific residency criteria as shown in Table I. The Universities of Missouri and South Carolina did not indicate if the in-state option was available, while the University of Arkansas indicated they did not offer in-state tuition.

Table I

Veteran funding

SEC Institution	Receives GI Bill Funding	Yellow Ribbon School	In-State Tuition for veterans
University of Florida	Yes	No	Yes
University of Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Kentucky	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Missouri	Yes	Yes	No indication
University of South Carolina	Yes	Yes	No indication
University of Tennessee, Knox	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Alabama	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Arkansas	Yes	Yes	No
Auburn University	Yes	Yes	Yes
Louisiana State University	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Mississippi	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mississippi State University	Yes	Yes	Yes

Texas A&M University	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Note: Institution's in-state tuition offers vary and depend of eligibility criteria.

Table II a

Yellow Ribbon

Program Criteria	UF	UGA	UK	MIZZ	SCAR	TENN
Degree Level	None	GR	UG & GR	All	UG, GR, Law, & Medical/Pharmacy	GR
Division/school	n/a	Law and Business	All	All	All	GR
Students permitted at one time	n/a	2 per college	UG = 60 GR = 15	Unlimited	UG = 100, GR = 10, Law = 5, Med/Pharm = 2	Business = 4, Social Work = 1
Max school contribution (per student per year)	n/a	Law = $5,000 Business = $9,000	Unlimited	Unlimited	UG = $5,700, GR = $3,400, Law & Med/Pharm = $3,400	Business = $15,000, Social Work = $3,000

Table II b

Yellow Ribbon

Program Criteria	ALA	ARK	AUB	LSU	MISS	MSST	TAMU
Degree Level	All	All	UG	GR	All	All	All
Division/school	All	All	All	Professional	All	All	All
Students permitted at one time	Unlimited	40 total	75 total	50 total	Unlimited	Unlimited	25 total
Max school contribution (per student per year)	Unlimited	$2,000	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	$10,000

Note: University of Missouri College of Vet Med., Law, & Medicine have a $2,000 max.

Note: LSU criteria covers Law only.

Primary Veteran Resources. Table III indicates the primary resources for student veterans and service members and recognizes if the institution provides a physical veterans resource center for students to access daily, if the institution participates in the Vet Success on Campus (VSOC) program, and if the institution provides prior learning assessment (PLA) evaluation of military training for academic credit. Through web-analysis, it was discovered that 10 institutions provided a physical veterans resource center for students to access daily during their time on campus. The University of Mississippi and Auburn University indicated an area that veterans may seek additional resources, but did not mention a physical veteran's resource center. Based on the web-analysis, the University of South Carolina did not indicate the existence of a veteran's resource center. The Vet Success on Campus program was found to only be available at five of the 13 institutions. This program is designed to allow a designated member of the Veteran Affairs office to be present on campus to assist student veterans outside of the academic sphere such as disability claims, or other VA related matters. Prior learning assessment evaluation was found to be present at 11 institutions. The University of South Carolina did not indicate if military credits were evaluated, while the University of Georgia indicated that credits would only be evaluated from an accredited institute.

Table III

Primary veteran resources

SEC Institution	Veterans Resource Center	VSOC Program	PLA Credit Evaluation
University of Florida	Yes	Yes	Yes

University of Georgia	Yes	No	No
University of Kentucky	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Missouri	Yes	No	Yes
University of South Carolina	??	No	No indication
University of Tennessee, Knox	Yes	No	Yes
University of Alabama	Yes	Yes	Yes
University of Arkansas	Yes	Yes	Yes
Auburn University	Yes*	No	Yes
Louisiana State University	Yes	No	Yes
University of Mississippi	Yes*	No	Yes
Mississippi State University	Yes	No	Yes
Texas A&M University	Yes	Yes	Yes

* Indicates uncertainty of physical resource center but does indicate some
form of resource center

?? Indicates no mention of a Veterans Resource Center on campus.

Veteran Services. Table IV a-b shows the services offered to veterans, using the University of Alabama as a basis for services, given this institution provided the largest list with immediate access when accessing the veteran's center online. Additional resources were added when analyzing each institution to identify different services that may be unique to the institution. The findings determined a lack of consistency across the 13 institutions. The most consistent information that the web-analysis determined was the indication of a student veteran association on 11 of the campuses. The next consistent information determined that six institutions provided a computer lab, free printing, lounge space, study rooms, and academic and co-curricular counseling. It is important to note that these services were determined solely on the information provided through web-based analysis.

Table IV a

Analysis of Services provided at each SEC institution

Services Provided	UF	UGA	UK	MIZZ	SCAR	TENN	ALA	
Computer Lab		x	x			x	x	
Free Printing		x	x			x	x	
Textbook Rental						x	x	
Lounge Space	x	x	x			x	x	
Study Rooms		x	x			x	x	
Stress Free Room							x	
Multi-purpose room (presentations, etc.)							x	
Free Test Booklets						x	x	
VA Hospital Enrollment	x			x			x	
Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Services							x	
GI Bill Counseling	x	x	x			x	x	
Academic and Co-Curricular Counseling	x	x		x		x	x	
Personal Counseling	x			x		x		
Student Veteran Association	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Priority Registration & Fee Deferment			x		x	x		
Veteran Specific Orientation		x						
Veteran Success Council		x				x		
First-year Studies veteran course			x			x		
Assistance for families during deployment				x				
Tuition discount					x			
Admissions Fee Waiver			x					
Total Services at each institution	6	9	9	5	3	13		13

Table IV b

Analysis of Services provided at each SEC institution

Services Provided	ARK	AUB	LSU	MISS	MSST	TAMU	Total of Institutions
Computer Lab			x		x		6
Free Printing			x		x		6
Textbook Rental							2
Lounge Space			x		x		7
Study Rooms			x		x		6
Stress Free Room							1
Multi-purpose room (presentations, etc.)			x				2
Free Test Booklets							2
VA Hospital Enrollment							3
Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Services							1
GI Bill Counseling			x				6
Academic and Co-Curricular Counseling	x						6
Personal Counseling							3
Student Veteran Association	x	x		x		x	11
Priority Registration & Fee Deferment		x					4
Veteran Specific Orientation		x					2
Veteran Success Council							2
First-year Studies veteran course							2
Assistance for families during deployment							1
Tuition discount	x						2
Admissions Fee Waiver							1
Total Services at each institution	3	3	6	1	4	1	

Note: U. of Arkansas offers 25% tuition discount to Ark. Natl. Guard only

Discussion

The resources available to student veterans were examined under three separate tiers of funding availability, primary resources, and specific services that are unique to the veteran community. The funding aspect showed overall positive availability for student veterans, with all 13 institutions accepting GI Bill payment toward tuition. The majority of institutions also participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program to supplement costs not covered by the GI Bill. However, the Yellow Ribbon Program was not consistent for every institution, with specific criteria of who can benefit from this program. Additionally, 10 out of the 13 institutions indicated that in-state tuition was offered to student veterans. This offer provides an enhanced benefit for veterans who choose to attend an institution outside of their home of record, given the fact that GI Bill benefits will only provide payment of in-state tuition.

The primary resources were categorized to indicate the basic necessities for an institution that are most effective for student veteran success. While 10 out of the 13 institutions indicated the existence of a physical resource center for veterans, there was a lack of participation in the Vet Success on Campus (VSOC) Program. Veterans who are going into higher education are also met with additional needs from the Veteran Affairs Office to include disability claims, or other non-academic resources. Having the VSOC program on campus reduces the number of organizations a student veteran encounters, thus providing more focus on academics. The various services throughout each institution were not readily consistent through web analysis. While some institutions provided a clear description of the services offered, many others recognized support for veterans but not how this support was implemented. This may cause a lack of interest by student veterans when choosing an institution.

The overall best practice for enhancing the success for student veterans in higher education is the existence of a physical veteran's resource center. A resource center allows staff members to focus solely on the needs of the student veteran and can create extended programs and services that may not exist at an institution. Additionally, having a centralized location can help alleviate the feeling of isolation, as student veterans can interact with others to share their unique experiences. A physical center provides transparency what is offered by the institution for veterans and possesses the ability for continued growth and academic success.

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