



Easing the Transition from Combat to Classroom

Preserving America's Investment in Higher Education for
Military Veterans Through Institutional Assessment

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Introduction and summary

“The school that I actually went to knew nothing about [the] military and their concerns. ... they didn’t have a certifying official or anything like that. ... to have somebody there to help you with your veterans benefits is huge.”

— Student veteran enrolled at a community college

This quote speaks to just a few of the concerns of recent military veterans—women and men who have completed their service and been honorably discharged from the military—who are enrolling in college and universities in ever-increasing numbers. According to news reports, more than 400,000 veterans enrolled in institutions of higher education for the 2012 spring semester.

The U.S. government has traditionally shown its commitment to veterans through investment in higher education. The financial support veterans received for college through the 1944 Servicemen’s Readjustment Act,¹ widely known as the G.I. Bill, was a transformational piece of legislation that made college accessible for more than 2 million veterans in the 10 years following the end of World War II.² The first G.I. Bill is credited with increasing the number of college students threefold during the 1940s and 1950s.³ As a result the country gained an additional 450,000 engineers, 360,000 teachers, 180,000 health professionals, and 150,000 scientists,⁴ not to mention how transforming soldiers into civically engaged citizens contributed in large ways to the leadership of the nation.⁵

Amendments to the Veterans’ Readjustment Act in 1952, 1966, 1977, and 1984 placed new restrictions on educational funding that offered lower levels of tuition support and in the last iteration required veterans to contribute \$100 a month for 12 months to gain access to their benefits. That all changed with the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill—the Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008—the most significant increase in educational funding for veterans in several decades. Under the new G.I. Bill, honorably discharged military servicewomen and men are entitled to tuition and fees equivalent to the most expensive rate of in-state tuition at a public

college or university in their state, a monthly housing allowance, and a yearly book stipend. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, according to a Veterans Affairs performance and accountability report,⁶ funded education and training for 555,000 veterans or their dependents in 2011 alone, investing more than \$7.7 billion in education benefits that fiscal year.

This latest G.I. Bill has the potential to have as significant an impact on higher education, the U.S. workforce, and national competitiveness as its 1944 predecessor. But despite these glowing prospects and the fact that veterans are enrolling in college in record numbers thanks to the increased financial support the bill offers, the challenges and barriers being encountered by veterans at many institutions make it more likely that ex-G.I.s will leave college with debts instead of degrees. According to recent reports, news articles, and statements from government officials, returning veterans often face myriad challenges when it comes to higher education, including reacquainting themselves with academic work, navigating complex campus administrative systems, finding support services to meet their needs, encountering negative reactions from the campus community based on their participation in military conflicts, and having difficulty connecting with classmates and faculty. Many institutions are ill prepared to deal with these challenges and are often confused about where to begin determining what services student veterans need and how to provide them.

As the nation strives to reach President Barack Obama's goal of becoming the world's leader in terms of college completion by 2020, the needs and concerns of a growing veteran population must be addressed. Developing strategies that increase the likelihood of veterans completing their studies and earning their degrees will certainly contribute positively to this goal and simultaneously promote national competitiveness as well as appropriately compensating veterans for their service. As part of this effort to develop workable strategies, this report presents the Environmental Evaluation for Veterans Index, or EEVI, which will provide higher education institutions and policymakers with the tools needed to assess campus environments for veterans.

The EEVI is an assessment tool based on a comprehensive review of published research and recommendations related to working with the student veteran population, as well as the findings of a new multi-institutional study. The index allows institutions to clearly and consistently measure whether they have the services, policies, and sources of support necessary to assist returning veterans transition into higher education.

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The EEVI creates opportunities for institutions, students, and policymakers to make sense of campus environments and their contributions to the success of student veterans. While this instrument shares some similarities with the “Veteran Friendly Toolkit” developed by the American Council of Education, or ACE, the EEVI offers an important and unique approach. The index allows an institution to assess its environment by identifying the areas in which a campus is lacking in meeting the needs of veterans before turning to the ACE “Veteran Friendly Toolkit,” which offers detailed guidance on how to develop various “veteran-friendly” programs and policies.

This report demonstrates how the EEVI can be easily used to assess the quality of an institution’s environment as it relates to student veterans based on three dimensions:

- **Personnel and services**—the existence of offices, services, and professionals that can meet and understand unique issues and concerns of student veterans
- **Institutional structures**—the existence of campus policies and procedures related to administering student veterans’ information, benefits, and services
- **Social and cultural support**—the extent of student veteran representation in the student body, veteran-specific groups and services, and quality relationships between student veterans, their peers, and faculty

The use of this instrument has powerful implications for institutions, students, and policymakers. We encourage institutions to use the EEVI for self-assessment, which can identify structural limitations that create barriers to the transition of veterans from combat to the classroom and that hinder the goal of improving student veteran outcomes. Further, institutions can use the EEVI to assess their progress in promoting more beneficial learning environments for student veterans, as well as providing a means to benchmark that progress against other institutions.

Just as the EEVI provides critical information for institutions, it also provides important consumer feedback for student veterans who are seeking learning environments that will optimize their chances of academic success, career development, and degree completion. The EEVI offers previously unavailable information and a way for student veterans to quickly compare and contrast programs, services, and support structures offered by different campuses. We strongly encourage institutions to publicize their responses to items on the EEVI, along with their

overall scores, in institution materials, websites, and other resources that offer college information as a way of enabling student veterans to choose institutions that are most able to meet their needs.

Further, the information the EEVI provides is also beneficial for federal and funding organizations. It provides policymakers with the information they need to determine the availability and quality of services and programs at a given institution. In addition, the index offers a concrete benchmark to compare institutions and can be used as a measure to hold institutions accountable. At the same time the EEVI can be used to encourage the implementation of various strategies and the provision of resources that have been found to be successful in meeting the needs of veterans and fostering their academic attainment.

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