

PERSPECTIVES

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“When Johnny [or Janelle] Comes Marching Home” National, State and Institutional Efforts in Support of Veterans’ Education

by Lesley McBain

Overview

On June 30, 2008, the “21st Century GI Bill” was signed into law by President Bush, providing veterans the financial means to attend any public college in the nation as well as benefits for those who choose to attend private colleges. Taking this into account and considering the rising number of veterans leaving service (375,000 per year¹), current consensus is that higher education can expect many more veteran students on their campuses in the near future. This era of returning veterans raises many critical questions:

- What is—or what should be—the responsibility of federal and state government, as well as higher education institutions, to both veteran students and current servicemembers?
- What challenges are involved in integrating veteran students into civilian higher education institutions, supporting their transitions, and equipping them for either continued service or for a post-military career? What best practices are evolving?
- What types of issues are involved in assisting severely injured veterans attempting to make the transition to a civilian higher education environment? What programs are currently available?
- What benefits are available to the spouses and dependents of veterans to improve their own access to higher education? What is the societal

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responsibility toward spouses and dependents who have made their own sacrifices as part of the military family?

- What policy implications are involved regarding the funding of veterans' attendance at public higher education institutions versus private higher education institutions?
- What are the societal benefits of having more veterans on campus at a time when the civilian and military worlds are seemingly drawing further apart?
- What are the implications for institutions of an influx of veteran students?

This paper discusses the implications of the new GI Bill as well as provides a history of and context to veterans' education policy on the federal, state and institutional levels. It also spotlights some initiatives already in place at various levels to help veterans gain access to and succeed in higher education. While the initiatives discussed are laudable and replicable, they are only the beginning of what should be a comprehensive national agenda for recognizing the tremendous debt owed by America to veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Encouraging veterans' enrollment helps increase America's competitiveness in the global economy and expand its human capital supply. This is particularly important since, according to the Campaign for a New G.I. Bill, 90 percent of enlisted men and women joined the military right after high school or shortly thereafter without earning a bachelor's degree.² Given the number of veterans separating from the service each year and rejoining a civilian society where knowledge-based jobs are more common than not, facilitating their earning of undergraduate degrees is a benefit that works to both the advantage of individual veterans and America's intellectual competitiveness in the global arena.

The Federal Role: History of the GI Bill and Veterans' Education

The Birth and Evolution of the GI Bill, 1944–2008

The signing into law of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944—more popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights (or the GI Bill for short) and renamed the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) in 1984 to honor former Mississippi Congressman Gillespie V. "Sonny" Montgomery—was a catalyst for sweeping social change. A little over half of returning veterans, 7.8 million in total,³ used the GI Bill to further their education at colleges, vocational schools and on-the-job training. National leaders (former U.S.

presidents, senators and representatives) as well as Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winners used the GI Bill to get an education.⁴

The GI Bill was a reaction to the Bonus Army incidents after World War I, when more than 20,000 destitute, homeless World War I veterans who had been promised bonuses by the federal government—then told they wouldn't see them for 20 years—marched on Washington, D.C., in 1932 to protest and set up camp. Some even brought their impoverished families. Their protest camp was eventually razed by the U.S. military on direct orders from President Hoover, in a soldier-on-soldier conflict led by General Douglas MacArthur and General George S. Patton. Post-World War II era fears of a repeat of the Bonus Army debacle led to the passage of the first GI Bill.⁵

The GI Bill not only allowed veterans to receive a college or other vocational education and cross class lines in the process, but also contributed greatly to the post-World War II economic boom. Veterans enrolling in college under the GI Bill ultimately produced “450,000 engineers, 240,000 accountants, 238,000 teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, 22,000 dentists, 17,000 writers and editors, and thousands of other professionals.”⁶

But the experience of more recent veterans—at least until June 30, 2008—differed. As Patrick Campbell, an Iraq veteran and legislative director for the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, wrote in a recent op-ed article for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, “Everyone said they were going home [from Iraq] to get that college degree that Uncle Sam promised us when we enlisted. . . . I still laugh when people ask me whether the military paid for my education. When I tell them how meager the actual education benefits are, their shock always make[s] me feel like I just told a child that there is no such thing as the tooth fairy.”⁷

Was this an accurate depiction?

The full-time MGIB benefit rates for the 2007–2008 academic year, effective October 1, 2007 and prior to the passage of the New GI Bill, are \$1,101/month for active duty (Chapter 30) beneficiaries who completed an enlistment of three years or more.⁸ Multiplied by a nine-month academic year, this works out to \$9,909 in annual MGIB assistance. It is a valid point that nonveteran students might consider this amount more than “meager” assistance, particularly since it does not include the possibility of other financial assistance from the federal Title IV program or other state/institutional financial aid sources.

However—leaving aside the moral argument of how much veteran students should be compensated for their service to the country and focusing

strictly on numbers—the average cost of tuition, required fees, room and board at a public four-year college for the 2007–2008 academic year, according to the College Board, is \$13,589.⁹ The MGIB covers approximately 73 percent of the cost of tuition, fees, room and board at a public four-year college, and covers much less of the cost at a private nonprofit four-year college: 31 percent when using the 2007–2008 College Board estimated average cost of \$32,307.

By comparison, the original post-World War II GI Bill covered full tuition, fees and book costs, in addition to a living stipend, at most public and private colleges for a period of up to 48 months depending on the veteran's length of service. It also only required a 90-day enlistment with an honorable discharge.¹⁰

The New GI Bill of Today—and Tomorrow

To correct this disparity between past and present veterans' educational benefits, a new piece of legislation called the "Post 9/11 GI Bill" was introduced by a bipartisan group of senators who all served in the military—Jim Webb (D.-Va.), Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), Chuck Hagel (R.-Neb.), and John Warner (R.-Va.). The new GI Bill, signed into law on June 30, 2008, awards veterans who have served for three years on active duty after September 11, 2001 funds that cover tuition up to the cost of in-state tuition at the most expensive public college or university in that veteran's state. It also provides an additional \$1,000 stipend for books and supplies and a housing stipend based on the college's location, though students enrolled in online or distance education courses are not eligible for the housing stipend.¹¹

While exact terms have not been finalized pending regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Defense, the bill permits servicemembers with a minimum of six years' enlistment who agree to an additional enlistment of at least four years to transfer at least 18 and possibly up to 36 months' worth of educational benefits to dependents and/or spouses. Thus, spouses may receive benefits after the servicemember has served for six years; dependents may receive benefits after the servicemember has served for 10 years.

Veterans' groups vocally supported the bill as a way to demonstrate commitment to the troops and help them readjust to civilian life. As President James Wright of Dartmouth College, a former Marine and ardent advocate for veteran students in higher education, put it, "We need to ensure that this generation of veterans is helped just as World War II veterans were aided by the G.I. Bill of that era."¹²

What will this legislation mean to a veteran who wants to attend college after August 1, 2009? The bill can be analyzed using the average College

Board public full-time four-year college tuition and fees figure of \$6,185 as a hypothetical “most expensive state college” tuition and fees figure. (It is important to keep in mind that state college tuitions vary.) The bill would thus cover \$6,185 of a veteran’s tuition and fees and allot him or her an additional \$1,000 for the educational year in a books and supplies stipend plus a housing stipend based on the location of the college if she or he was not taking correspondence or online courses. Assuming a nine-month academic year and an average of \$1,000 per month in housing stipend, the veteran would receive a \$9,000 stipend and \$1,000 for books and supplies, for total educational assistance of \$16,185 in one academic year.

This differs from the original GI Bill in that the cost of attending private college is not automatically covered. The new GI Bill would fund approximately 26 percent of the average \$23,712 tuition and fee cost of a private college in 2007–2008, not including room and board. However, there is a provision in the bill that private colleges may enter into a voluntary agreement with the Department of Education to match 50 percent of the remaining costs and have the Department pay for the remaining 50 percent of costs.¹³ Continuing to use the average cost as a hypothetical example (though it is again important to point out that private colleges can be more or less expensive) means the remaining average \$17,527 tuition cost would have \$8,763 paid by a participating institution and \$8,764 paid by the Department, not including the location-based housing stipend or the \$1,000 books and supplies stipend.

State Roles in Veterans’ Education

States have responded in different ways to the educational and other needs of veterans (both those currently deployed and those returning to civilian lives), as well as their spouses and dependents. At present, there is no centrally coordinated effort among states to work together to meet these needs given the combination of veterans and servicemembers’ mobility and states’ individual governance structures. However, there is increased attention and goodwill toward veterans’ higher education efforts. But some of states’ obligations to servicemembers and their families will change with the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), which at this writing is poised to become law.

Prior to the HEA reauthorization, the most common forms of state responses centered on the adjustment of veterans’ residency status and tuition waivers or reductions. Ohio recently announced a program, the “Ohio G.I. Promise,” that declares all veterans, spouses and dependents to be considered “honorary Ohioans” regardless of state of residence and charged in-state tuition rates for attending college on the GI Bill.¹⁴ Another generally common benefit has been reduced or waived tuition rates for

dependents and/or spouses of servicemembers killed on active duty.¹⁵ Currently, states can allow veterans and/or their dependents to either maintain residency status for in-state tuition when reassigned out of state or have the usual mandatory waiting period waived when they move into a state as a result of changing duty stations/assignments.

As of 2006, 45 states charged in-state tuition for nonresident active-duty military personnel stationed in their state, though tuition charges are different if personnel have been assigned to a particular state for educational purposes only. In addition, 46 states allowed dependents of military personnel to be charged the same tuition rate (generally in-state) as their military parents, though with caveats in some states relating to the servicemembers' state residency status. Four states—Alabama, Illinois, Iowa and Kansas—allow institutions to determine in-state tuition charges for nonresident active-duty military personnel on an individual basis.¹⁶ HEA language will prohibit public institutions from charging more than in-state rates to dependents of active-duty servicemembers whose duty stations or domiciles are in the same state; it will also require public institutions to allow dependents and servicemembers to continue to pay in-state tuition rates while continuously enrolled, even if servicemembers' permanent duty stations are changed to somewhere outside the state.

In-state tuition eligibility is important not only for servicemembers, but for their dependents and/or spouses who are just as affected by frequent involuntary relocations. In respect to military dependents as opposed to military spouses, one case was highlighted in House Resolution No. 122 in the Michigan legislature urging exemptions allowing in-state residency status for military dependents whose active duty parent(s) had been transferred by the military. The bill specifically noted that “a Michigan resident who graduated from high school in Michigan, attended community college in Michigan, and works in Michigan was recently denied resident tuition status at the University of Michigan merely because his father, who is in active military service, was transferred to Illinois.”¹⁷ Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case.

Dependents and spouses of servicemembers being granted in-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities is a long overdue acknowledgement of the sacrifices military spouses and dependents also make for their country. However, states will need to carefully consider funding and legislative issues in order to respond to new federal legislation related to veterans' education as well as the projected influx of veterans (and possibly their families) into state colleges and universities based on the new GI Bill. Given the current economic climate, this will be a delicate task.

Institutional Roles in Veterans' Education

The importance of institutional roles in veterans' education is underscored by the recent American Council on Education (ACE) summit, "Serving Those Who Serve: Higher Education and America's Veterans." Student veterans were invited to the conference and addressed concerns ranging from finances to bureaucratic red tape to bridging the cultural gaps between them and their civilian classmates. The information provided by the student veterans emphasizes the unique position in which higher education institutions find themselves: they can provide not only support services for veterans entering (or re-entering, for those deployed in the middle of their studies) higher education, but also an opportunity for civilian and veteran students to learn from each other's experiences rather than be alienated by them. This enriches students, institutions and American society.

There is concern that the military and civilian worlds continue to draw away from each other. As Daniel Byman, director of the Center for Peace and Security Studies at Georgetown University (D.C.) and a senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, cautions in a 2007 article, "The professionalization of the services has meant that many segments of the American population, particularly among the educated civilian elite, rarely interact with the military in any capacity. . . . That gap is dangerous for society, as wars can occur that do not engage the nation as a whole. The result is a growing divide, where a small part of the nation pays the price for the decisions of the majority of citizens who simply go about their lives with little change."¹⁸ Thus bringing more veterans into civilian classrooms serves to bridge the gap and integrate higher education, as was done previously by World War II veterans using their version of the GI Bill.

The question, it seems, is how to integrate the two worlds as seamlessly as possible. Some specific areas and ideas used by colleges and universities to bridge the gap between veteran students and civilian colleges are discussed below. President James Wright of Dartmouth College (N.H.) points out that in some ways this is *not* a new experience for campuses:

Most campuses have, at some time or another, experienced a shift in their student demographics. Whenever this happens, the institution must consider what concerns or needs the newest members will need to succeed as students. A college or university may find that very little additional support is required beyond the services already in place, but they may also find that faculty or staff need to develop some additional procedures to be of help to students, or that some policies or structures present unnecessary challenges. Veterans are just one example of this sort

of demographic shift and I anticipate that institutions will be able to adapt successfully to include them.¹⁹

Services and Supports for Student Veterans: Dismantling Barriers

How can institutions enroll and retain more veteran students given U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs data showing that while 71 percent of veterans use some portion of their GI Bill benefits, only 6 percent exhaust them?²⁰ What institutional departments need to work together to keep veteran students from dropping out in frustration or never enrolling in the first place? How can institutions integrate the needs of their veteran students (including veteran students with disabilities) with those of all the other student populations they serve?

The message from student veterans themselves thus far has emphasized that multiple barriers to their enrollment and retention exist and that with the anticipated wave of returning veteran students using GI Bill monies to attend college, they will need to be dismantled. A sampling of barriers include:

- **Informational Barriers**—How do veterans obtain information on postsecondary education options, including transfer credit policies and financial aid policies, without experiencing Catch-22 situations such as having their phone calls being transferred from office to office and finally being told that no one can help them because they are not yet students?²¹
- **Financial Barriers**—What can institutions do to help veterans finance an education while not shortchanging the rest of the student body? Even though the new GI Bill promises more benefits for veterans, even current MGIB benefits are often not received by colleges until well after veterans enroll. This is because it takes the VA months to certify eligibility, meaning that many veterans have to find a way to pay tuition and fees out of pocket and wait for refunds. Those who lack money to pay up front frequently cannot enroll.
- **Cultural Barriers**—How can institutions make veteran students feel more comfortable on campuses given gaps between collegiate and military culture? These gaps are exacerbated by views on both the current Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts and historical differences stretching back to Vietnam, age, and socioeconomic differences between some veteran students and their classmates, among other cultural barriers. How can institutions do what they can to prevent the kind of experience described by a Korean-American woman veteran attending classes in the strongly anti-war atmosphere of the University of Oregon after having been deployed to Guantanamo? The student was quoted as saying, “I just had to keep to myself, keep my head down, go to class, come home. Honest to god, it was like me having to pretend I wasn’t Asian.”²²

- **Injury and/or Trauma-Related Barriers**—What are the needs of disabled veteran students? Are they covered by services and supports already in place for disabled students, or will more and/or different services be necessary given the predominant kinds of battlefield injuries suffered by servicemembers? How will service-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and other mental health issues affect some veteran students' enrollment and success?

In addition, other barriers are possible, such as dependent/spouse issues, which are not unique to veteran students but can differ from those of other nontraditional students supporting spouses and/or dependents while attending college. Also, state of residence problems can affect tuition and other costs for veterans at state colleges and universities in ways particular to the involuntarily migratory status of military personnel.

While the barriers are significant, they are not insurmountable or unique to this generation of veteran students and colleges. Campuses managed the post-World War II GI enrollment boom through innovative solutions such as buying and anchoring a surplus Coast Guard vessel in Muskingum River as a floating dormitory (Marietta College, Ohio) and converting an old military hospital into apartments (Stanford University, Calif.).²³ A number of institutions and organizations have already begun to address today's obstacles for veteran student enrollees.

Third-Party and Institutional Veterans Education Support Programs: Examples Across the Higher Education Spectrum

As institutions and their surrounding communities recognize their growing veteran student populations, solutions and support programs for those students have sprung up at colleges, universities and associations across the nation to augment those already in existence (e.g., the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges program, which has operated since its joint establishment by civilian and military educators in 1972²⁴). The programs noted here are far from being an exhaustive listing, but provide insights into creative programs facilitating veteran students' enrollment and success.

American Council on Education

- **Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams Project**—This program, sponsored by the American Council on Education and funded by private donations, is limited to veterans who have suffered severe injuries and are returning to civilian life. It is open to veterans as soon as they begin recovering from injuries at one of four military hospitals: Bethesda Naval Hospital (Md.); Walter Reed Army Hospital (D.C.);

Brooke Army Hospital (Texas); and Naval Medical Center San Diego, aka Balboa (Calif.).

Academic advisors meet with injured veterans at these hospitals to develop personally tailored education plans and strategies for success and find resources for the veterans to achieve their educational goals. Once on campus, the veteran students are paired with volunteers from the campus community including students, administrators or faculty who are veterans themselves, family members of veterans, and others simply interested in helping veteran students. These volunteers serve as veterans' advocates on campus as well as liaisons to other organizations when needed.

President James Wright of Dartmouth College (N.H.), who helped create the Fulfilling Their Dreams project in conjunction with ACE after visiting severely wounded Marines at Bethesda and Walter Reed and encouraging them to consider college as an option, says of the program:

The ACE project was designed with a particular focus on severely injured veterans and has maintained that focus throughout its development. Recent figures I've seen show that the number of injured veterans is slowing somewhat and if these numbers continue to decline I don't anticipate that the Fulfilling Their Dreams program will expand in scale. We will need to continue to think of innovative ways to encourage and support these veterans.²⁵

Boots to Books

- The Boots to Books program at Citrus College in Glendora, California combines both a credit-bearing course for the veteran student and a noncredit course (with materials available on CD-ROM and an online bulletin board, as well as access to a counselor)²⁶ for their family, friends and other supporters. Both courses are intended to help veteran students and significant people in their lives make the transition from the military to college studies. The program is specifically designed for veterans—in particular, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans—and covers material on interpersonal and coping skills, managing the transfer to civilian life, and other areas affecting returning veterans.

Combat2College

- The Combat2College program, located at Montgomery College in Maryland, pairs a Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center and a community college to enhance and adapt existing campus resources to help OEF/OIF veterans through college. The program focuses on viewing military training and experience as positive assets that can help students develop behaviors and attitudes necessary for academic success.

Operation Education

- This scholarship and support program for injured veterans who served after 9/11 and their spouses, located at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho, hopes to have other colleges and universities use its design to start similar programs at their own institutions. The program—a collaboration between the university administration, faculty, staff and students, along with local businesses and individuals—offers veterans with disabilities a wide range of educational, financial and personal supports.

Hometown Heroes Teach

- The University of West Florida in Pensacola, Florida, in conjunction with workforce development agencies and K-12 school districts in the Florida Panhandle, sponsors this program. It assists in retraining wounded and disabled veterans for K-12 teaching careers; the veterans must hold bachelor's degrees and be sufficiently mobile to teach in an ADA-compliant school facility. The program offers financial and relocation assistance, teaching certification, placement, employment assistance, counseling, and a laptop for teaching-related purposes.

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges

- The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), located in Washington, D.C., is a consortium of national higher education associations and participating member institutions that has functioned cooperatively since 1972 with the Department of Defense and military (including the National Guard and Coast Guard) to assist servicemembers in meeting their voluntary educational needs. It operates by means of a contract between AASCU and the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES). Its focus is on access and admission to accredited higher education institutions for veterans, credit transfer and academic credit for military experience and extra-institutional learning, and residency issues.

SOC operates programs that allow servicemembers in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps or Coast Guard to earn associate or bachelor's degrees while on active duty, select colleges concurrently while enlisted in the Army or Army Reserve, and earn college credits/degrees as they serve in the Army National Guard. SOC also coordinates a degree network system allowing servicemembers and active-duty servicemembers' family members to take civilian classes off-duty in classrooms either near or on military installations in the United States, abroad or on Navy and Coast Guard ships. Distance education courses are also offered using various delivery systems.

Sonny Montgomery Center for America's Veterans

- Named for Congressman Gillespie V. "Sonny" Montgomery, an alumnus of Mississippi State University who revamped the GI Bill, this center

uses existing resources at Mississippi State to facilitate interpersonal and academic counseling, provide its own counseling on veterans' educational benefits, and serve as a liaison between veteran students and the VA; it also has a computer center for veterans and is setting up a job fair/career placement program.

Supportive Education for the Returning Veteran (SERV)

- The Cleveland State University (Ohio) SERV program calls itself “Your campus CO [commanding officer] . . . without the yelling or insults.”²⁷ It offers personalized assistance to veterans navigating campus and GI Bill-related bureaucracy, veterans-only classes for many first-year courses, evening classes so veterans can work during the day, and an individualized orientation program.

Troops to College

- This statewide initiative encompassing the California State University (CSU), the University of California and the California Community Colleges systems is led by the CSU system chancellor and aims to reach the large numbers of both active duty and retired servicemembers either stationed in or who reside in the state (9.2 percent of active duty veterans reside in California and an estimated 27,000 veterans migrate to California every year²⁸). The three systems that make up California's public colleges plan to increase outreach, admissions, financial aid advising, and academic advising specifically aimed at the state's veteran population. They will also add courses for veterans both on bases and via distance education. The Troops to College oversight committee is composed of top academic and government officials and military commanders from all the branches of service.

Policy Implications of the New GI Bill

Federal Policy Implications

While increasing GI Bill coverage is a sorely needed reaffirmation of the nation's commitment to veterans, there are federal policy implications that will need to be examined as the program evolves and more veterans utilize it:

- **Military Recruiting and Retention**—While most constituencies support increased higher education access for veterans, concerns were raised (most notably by Senator John McCain [R.-Ariz.] when putting forth an alternative GI Bill) that a more generous GI Bill would affect military retention by encouraging servicemembers to leave the military to use educational benefits. However, the Congressional Budget Office argued differently, estimating that while a potential 16 percent loss in servicemembers could result from more generous benefits, the increase in GI Bill benefits would lead to a 16 percent increase in recruits.²⁹ The

compromise language accepted by President Bush allowing transfer of educational benefits to servicemembers' spouses and dependents may also serve to increase military retention and recruitment.

- **Economic**—The total economic impact of an increased GI Bill cannot be estimated until enough veteran students utilizing it have graduated and entered the workforce. However, according to a Department of Veterans Affairs survey (still unreleased, but obtained by veterans' advocacy groups and published in various media) 18 percent of recently returned veterans are unemployed; of those who are employed, 25 percent earn less than \$21,840 per year.³⁰ Given that statistics show the average college graduate earned \$50,900 in 2005 and the average high school graduate earned \$31,500,³¹ increasing veterans' attendance and graduation from college has real economic benefits not only for individual veterans but society as a whole. If veterans can use the new GI Bill to earn college diplomas and as a result obtain jobs that pay more, the economy will benefit from both the increased taxes they pay and increased income they have to spend.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-Related**—The number of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with service-connected disabilities (physical and/or psychological) presents a federal policy challenge in terms of monitoring ADA compliance by higher education institutions. Colleges and universities are already required to comply with ADA if receiving federal funds; therefore, this is not a new issue but simply requires continued monitoring by the appropriate federal departments.

State Policy Implications

Potential state policy implications posed by the new GI Bill and the prospective influx of veteran students into public colleges and universities fall into multiple categories:

- **Enrollment**—How big an influx of veterans can we expect? How will increased enrollments and demographic shifts of veterans caused by reassignments and base realignment/closings affect state colleges on the two- and four-year level? How will veteran enrollment drive class size?
- **Staffing**—How will an increased influx of veteran students affect staffing (both faculty and non-faculty) for state colleges, particularly in the current fiscal climate? Will state legislators support increased appropriations, or will state colleges suffer through budget cuts to properly serve returning veteran students and their traditional enrollment populations?

- **Deployment and Re-Enrollment Issues**—What policies need to be enacted to keep veteran students from being dropped from public colleges and universities due to mid-semester deployment, and what policies need to be enacted to make it easier for them to re-enroll?
- **Finance**—What state and/or institutional policies need to be changed or enacted to help veterans actually use their new GI Bill benefits? What steps do states need to take to ensure that the financial costs of states enacting veteran-friendly policies—such as in-state tuition eligibility—are not borne solely by public colleges?
- **Infrastructure**—What will states need to commit to public colleges and universities’ infrastructure—already suffering, in many cases, from a decade-long backlog of deferred maintenance—to accommodate an influx of veteran students, some with disabilities that may require newer assistive technology or other infrastructure modifications under the ADA?

Institutional Policy Implications

While each institution must be free to establish its own policies and procedures and thus no one-size-fits-all proposal is appropriate, some common institutional policy themes to consider emerge in the wake of the new GI Bill:

- **Outreach and Admission**—How can institutions reach out to veteran students undergoing the transition from military to civilian life and make them feel comfortable enough with a civilian institution to apply for admission?
- **Enrollment and Student Life**—How can institutions meet the particular needs of veteran students? These needs include, but are not limited to, a veterans’ center where they can relax with fellow veterans, “one-stop” assistance with various VA paperwork and help crafting resumés that effectively showcase both their military training and their civilian scholarship. How can institutions successfully integrate the veteran student population with the myriad of other student constituencies on campus without offending or patronizing any one group?
- **Disability Services**—How can current disability services at institutions adapt to an influx of veterans who, due to modern medical advances, have survived physical injuries that were fatal to previous generations of battlefield veterans—and who have also come home with PTSD-related issues, in some cases? While disability services offices have been adapting to the growing population of students with various disabilities for years, this new group’s issues will need to be examined in light of what accommodations are reasonable, legal and practical at a given institution.

Summary and Conclusions

Higher education is facing a new influx of veteran students utilizing the GI Bill to further their educations and move up the economic ladder. These veterans, as a population, have certain unique educational and cultural needs in order to make a successful transition from the military to the civilian college environment. Some bring with them physical and other challenges.

These veterans' needs require the investment of finances and other resources on the part of colleges. Given the precedent of post-World War II adjustments by the higher education establishment to veterans enrolling en masse, colleges and universities are well equipped to handle this specific task. Colleges and universities have made adjustments for student demographic shifts on campuses over time; veterans may have different needs than other cohorts, but can be accommodated just as they have been in the past.

Educating veterans also makes good economic sense from both the national and state point of view. Given the fierce competition in the global market and recent studies (including the Spellings Commission) warning that America is in danger of losing its pre-eminence in higher education, having more Americans earn college degrees is a national economic imperative. Many veterans possess technical skills that can be adapted to a civilian job market by way of majoring in a subject that utilizes those skills in a civilian environment. On the state level, states benefit economically from educating more of their residents, who then are in a better position to find higher-paying jobs and bring more money into their states' economies through both taxes and the purchasing of goods and services.

Quite simply, America owes its veterans a debt of honor for their service to their country. Expansion of the GI Bill, as well as state and institutional programs to assist them in entering (or re-entering) college, will begin paying that debt of honor and give this new generation of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans the same chance the World War II veterans received to attend college. These measures also offer a chance for both civilian and veteran students to learn from each other and enrich the entire higher education community—and their surrounding communities—by so doing.

The author would like to extend a special thank-you to President James Wright of Dartmouth College (N.H.), who generously took time from his presidential duties to be interviewed via e-mail for this paper.

Resources

This brief listing of electronic resources available to institutions on veterans' educational issues does not pretend to be comprehensive in a rapidly evolving field and is not an endorsement of any particular organization, but is offered as a service to readers.

U.S. Government Links

U.S. Department of Defense

Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES):

- **Severely Injured Service Member and Spouse Scholarship Opportunities**—Links servicemembers and spouses to schools that are either currently offering or willing to offer educational programs/scholarships via distance learning or when servicemembers and spouses return home from treatment or convalescence facilities. www.dantes.doded.mil/sfd/index.asp?Flag=True
- **Troops to Teachers** (federal program funded by the U.S. Department of Education but administered by DANTES to assist servicemembers and spouses in transitioning to second careers as teachers in high-need specialties and areas). www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_Web/troopstoteachers/Overview.asp

U.S. Department of Education

Veterans Upward Bound (free federal program to assist low-income and/or first-generation college students who are veterans refresh academic skills; also may include college application assistance, academic counseling and other assistance). <http://navub.org/programinfo.htm>

U.S. Department of Labor/U.S. Department of Defense

DOL-DoD Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts—Partnership between the U.S. Departments of Labor and Defense to address the educational and career needs of military spouses. Funding available in eight states. www.voled.doded.mil/voled_web/spousecaa/spouse_caa.asp

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

- Official GI Bill Web site: www.gibillva.gov/GI_Bill_Info/benefits.htm
- “Seamless Transition” Web site for Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans: www.seamlesstransition.va.gov/index.asp

Association/Organization/Institutional Links

American Council on Education (ACE)

- **Military Programs**—General link for information on ACE military programs. www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/index.htm
- **Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams**—ACE initiative helping severely injured veterans and their families manage the transition to higher education. www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/veterans/index.htm

Other Association/Organization/Institutional Links

Boots to Books—Course offered at Citrus College (Calif.) for veteran students and their friends, family and supporters on transitioning from the military to college studies. www.bootstobooks.org/Home_Page.html

Combat2College (C2C)—Collaboration between the District of Columbia Veterans Administration Medical Center and Montgomery College (Md.) to provide services for veteran students. www.montgomerycollege.edu/coinbat2college/

Hometown Heroes Teach—University of West Florida program aiding wounded/disabled servicemembers to transition into K-12 teaching and provide teachers for high-need areas. www.uwf.edu/hometownheroesteach/

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)—National organization of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and civilian supporters focusing on veterans' issues including the GI Bill. www.iava.org/

National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators—Professional association for campus-based and community-based veterans' programs administrators. www.navpa.org/NAVPA_Web/index.htm

Operation Education—University of Idaho scholarship program assisting wounded veterans and their spouses in obtaining a college education. www.uihome.uidaho.edu/operationeducation

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC)—Consortium of national higher education associations (AASCU and AACC) and participating member institutions functioning in cooperation with the Department of Defense and military services to help meet servicemembers' voluntary higher education needs. www.soc.aascu.org

Student Veterans of America—National organization of veteran students focusing on providing a smooth transition into higher education for veterans. www.studentveterans.org/

Supportive Education for the Returning Veteran (SERV)—Cleveland State University (Ohio) support program for veterans on campus, offering veteran-only classes and other services. www.csuohio.edu/academic/serv/

The Partnership for Veterans Education—National coalition of higher education associations and veterans' advocacy organizations focusing on veterans' education.

- **Troops to College**—California statewide initiative at all public colleges to provide educational opportunities and assistance to active duty servicemembers and veterans. www.troopstocollege.ca.gov/
- **Vets for Vets**—Student veteran support group located at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. <http://vets.studentorg.wisc.edu/>

Other Links

Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)—Offers scholarships to dependents of servicemembers who meet certain criteria. www.moaa.org/serv/serv_education/serv_education_assistance/serv_education_assistance_grants.htm

National Military Families Association—Offers scholarships to military spouses. www.nmfa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Spouse_Scholarship

The Fund for Veterans' Education—Privately funded scholarship organization for veterans who served after September 11, 2001 and are now enrolled in a college or vocational-technical school. www.veteransfund.org/

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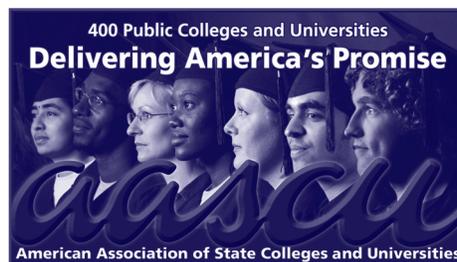
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