



STUDENT VETERANS

A Valuable Asset to Higher Education





SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES AT (IVMF)

is the first national institute in higher education singularly focused on advancing the lives of the nation's military, veterans and their families. Through its professional staff and experts, the IVMF delivers leading programs in career and entrepreneurship education and training, while also conducting actionable research, policy analysis, and program evaluations. The IVMF also supports veterans and their families, once they transition back into civilian life, as they navigate the maze of social services in their communities, enhancing access to this care working side-by-side with local providers across the country. The Institute is committed to advancing the post service lives of those who have served in America's armed forces and their families. For more information, visit ivmf.syracuse.edu.



STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA (SVA)

With a focused mission on empowering student veterans, SVA is committed to providing an educational experience that goes beyond the classroom. Through a dedicated network of more than 1,500 on-campus chapters in all 50 states and 4 countries representing more than 750,000 student veterans, SVA aims to inspire yesterday's warriors by connecting student veterans with a community of like-minded chapter leaders. Every day these passionate leaders work to provide the necessary resources, network support, and advocacy to ensure student veterans can effectively connect, expand their skills, and ultimately achieve their greatest potential. For more information, visit us at studentveterans.org

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Introduction

Since August 2009, colleges and universities have seen over two million veterans return to school to obtain associate's, bachelor's, and graduate degrees throughout the country. With the implementation of the GI Bill along with a global workforce that requires, at minimum, a bachelor's degree for marketplace entry, more and more veterans are aspiring for higher degrees to launch the next chapter of their lives.

As of 2014, almost all (96%) higher education institutions in the United States enroll veterans, and more schools are beginning to focus on recruitment as a strategy to further increase their student veteran population.

We aim to spark a new discourse on how our colleges and universities view and empower student veterans, a discourse that pushes higher education past the "veteran-friendly" rhetoric to realize the long-term value of veteran students and alumni, and one that delivers upon the intended promise of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The most current research indicates that student veterans earn higher GPAs than their civilian counterparts, acquire technical skills that are highly transferrable to academic settings, and offer unique perspectives that enhance campus diversity and learning.

In June 2008, President Bush signed the Post-9/11 GI Bill into law to expand educational benefits for military veterans. As the bill went into effect the following year, President Obama proclaimed/ explained, "We do this because these men and women must now be prepared to lead our nation in the peaceful pursuit of economic leadership in the 21st century."



Student veterans are uniquely positioned for academic achievement and success due to their military training, personal characteristics, work ethic, and steadfast commitment. Post-graduation, they are more likely to demonstrate appreciation, affiliation, and loyalty towards their institution and experience, lower unemployment rates than those without degrees, similar unemployment rates to civilians, and even higher annual incomes. As agents for social good, veterans, as a group, are members of society that consistently demonstrate their goodwill through their volunteerism, civic engagement, philanthropic activities, and generous contributions.

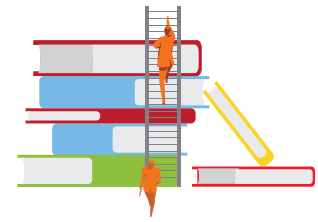
Based on evidence from academic literature and practice highlighted here, it is clear that student veterans are valuable assets whose contributions make lasting impact on higher education institutions, both while they are on campus and well after they graduate. This paper, a product of collaboration between the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University and the Student Veterans of America (SVA), aims to build on that evidence to inform, dispel prevailing myths, and inspire high-level administrators, faculty, admissions, development, alumni relations, and academic advising divisions to engage with student veterans in more meaningful and strategic ways. The following sections detail each of the five areas highlighted in the above figure and make the case for how student veterans may be valuable in that area, how higher education can leverage them, and some action items to put into practice today.

Academic Performance

The stereotype that military veterans will not succeed in college has been circulating since the first enactment of the GI Bill in 1944. The University of Chicago's President at the time, Robert M. Hutchins, predicted that year that "[c]olleges and universities will find themselves converted into educational hobo jungles," and believed that student veterans would be unable to find jobs and handle the academic rigors of college.¹ However, the notion of veterans being incapable of achieving academic standards quickly dissipated as student veterans not only met but often exceeded expectations. Three years following Hutchins' ill-fated prediction, the New York Times noted that student veterans were "hogging the honor rolls and Dean's lists . . . [and] walking away with the highest marks in all of their courses."²

Contrary to what many have presumed, veterans are more likely to persist and ultimately graduate at higher rates than their nonveteran counterparts.³ As a case in point, the mean comparison of GPA between student veterans and nonveterans indicates that veterans continue to outperform their nonveteran peers, earning a 3.34 on average compared to a 2.94, respectively.^{4/5} Post-9/11 veterans have achieved even higher levels of educational attainment than earlier generations and continue to outperform the general student populous.⁶ Abundant research from the Post-WWII Era to the present day supports these findings, indicating that student veterans are performing slightly better than their nonveteran peers across the board on all measures of academic performance.⁷

Many student veterans continue to push themselves to achieve even higher levels of education over the course of their lifetime. For example, 31 percent of those who earned a vocational certificate, 36 percent who earned an associate's, and 21 percent of those who earned a bachelor's went on to pursue an advanced degree.⁸ Other researchers note that student veterans are successfully completing their post-secondary education at rates (54%)⁹ on par with the national average completion rate (53%) and higher than most other adult learners (39%).¹⁰ Overall, veterans were more likely to have graduated high school and to have attained some college or an associate's degree than their nonveteran counterparts, and these data points are in stark contrast to what is often reported.¹¹ According to another study, veterans surveyed from nine academic institutions had higher GPA's and retention rates than traditional students and were progressing toward their degrees at comparable rates.¹² More recent data lend credibility to the fact that the vast majority of student veterans are graduating within time frames similar to more traditional students, and 9 out of 10 are earning their degrees at the associate level or higher.¹³ Moreover, military students who utilize Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are more likely to be enrolled full-time during the school year¹⁴ and earn certificates (10%), associate's (27%), bachelor's (43%), and graduate (20%) degrees.¹⁵



Many student veterans continue to push themselves to achieve even higher levels of education over the course of their lifetime. For example, **31 percent** of those who earned a vocational certificate, **36 percent** who earned an associate's, and **21 percent** of those who earned a bachelor's went on to pursue an advanced degree.

“The strong knowledge base and transferrable skills are earning veterans degrees in high-demand fields including business (27%), health (10%), and STEM (14%). Military experience enhances aptitude across a wide variety of technical fields, and two-thirds report that their military specialization or job promoted their interest in STEM-related careers. Given that the demand for STEM professions will only increase in the coming decades, recruiting student veterans who clearly carry a competitive advantage into the academic arena should be at the forefront of every institution of higher learning.”

Student veterans are unique in many respects and arrive to college with advanced technical skills along with proficiency in multiple languages.¹⁶ Military training actively promotes diversity through international partnerships that hone characteristics such as adaptability, self-discipline, leadership and management skills, work ethic, teamwork, professionalism, resilience, and mental fortitude.¹⁷ This specialized and rigorous training also promotes the development of “cognitive heuristics that readily facilitate knowledge and skills transfer between disparate tasks and situations.”¹⁸ For example, it is interesting to note that the majority (63%) of student veterans are pursuing majors not at all similar to their military specialty, and only two percent are pursuing degrees exactly similar to their prior military background as time passes.¹⁹ The strong knowledge base and transferrable skills are earning veterans degrees in high-demand fields including business (27%), health (10%), and STEM (14%).²⁰ Military experience enhances aptitude across a wide variety of technical fields, and two-thirds report that their military specialization or job promoted their interest in STEM-related careers.²¹ Given that the demand for STEM professions will only increase in the coming decades, recruiting student veterans who clearly carry a competitive advantage into the academic arena should be at the forefront of every institution of higher learning.

While a majority of student veterans are first-generation college attendees (62%),²² a status perceived as one that undermines college preparedness, a body of research indicates that veterans are unmatched in their resilience, perseverance, and commitment,²³ traits that confer an educational advantage. Many are particularly attracted to STEM disciplines and exhibit strong aptitude coupled with relevant practical and applied skills (43%) in these areas²⁴ as a direct result of military training. Traits of leadership, achievement, and high-level performance are the norm for service members and veterans. These characteristics not only endure post-military but are also carried into the academic setting,²⁵ especially when an institution affirms the value that student veterans add to campus life through their experiences, leadership, engagement, and performance.

Pursuing an education stands at the forefront as a primary motivating factor for joining the military, and many return to higher education post-deployment to earn more advanced degrees through the course of their lifetimes.²⁶ When asked in a 2015 national survey, an overwhelming majority of service members (92%) either agreed or strongly agreed that higher education is a crucial component in navigating the post-service transitional process from military to civilian life and more than two-thirds noted that military experience effectively prepared them for higher education.²⁷ The fact that almost three-fourths of those surveyed affirmed that advancing their education was one of the top motivations to serve indicates that military service does not diminish the importance of higher education.²⁸ Rather, it raises the eminence of scholastic achievement through the service member’s time spent in the military. More importantly, it effectively prepares them for adapting to and navigating through multiple roles and expectations, such that they often exceed normative measures of academic performance. In total, these are motivating factors that impel student veterans to persist and earn their degrees, despite any obstacles or barriers.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE



STUDENT VETERANS HAVE HIGHER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (GPA) COMPARED TO TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

3.34

AVERAGE STUDENT VETERAN GPA

2.94

AVERAGE TRADITIONAL STUDENT GPA

POST-SECONDARY COMPLETION

STUDENT VETERANS COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATION AT RATES SIMILAR TO THE NATIONAL AVERAGE AND HIGHER THAN OTHER ADULT LEARNERS

STUDENT VETERAN COMPLETION RATE **54%**

NATIONAL COMPLETION RATE **53%**

ADULT LEARNERS (FIRST ENROLLED AT 25 YEARS OR OLDER) **39%**

VETERANS USING THE POST-9/11 GI BILL TO EARN HIGH-LEVEL DEGREES

BACHELOR DEGREES **43%**

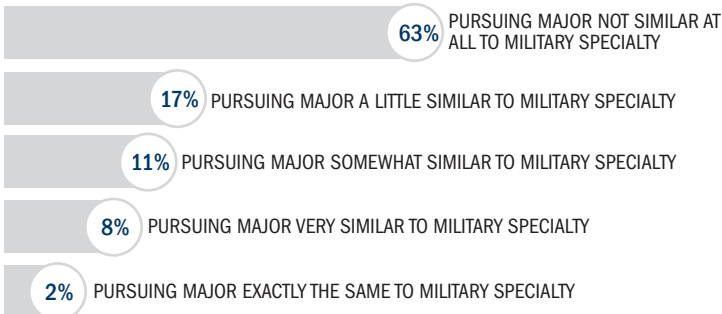
ASSOCIATE DEGREES **27%**

GRADUATE DEGREES **20%**

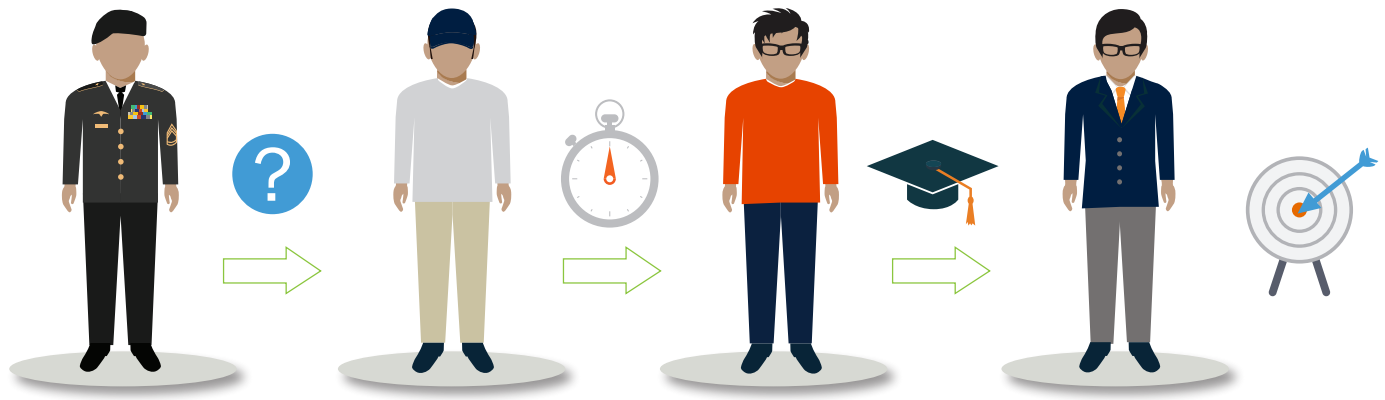
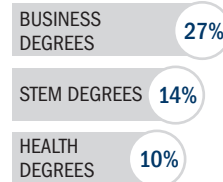
CERTIFICATES **10%**

DEGREE FIELDS

STUDENT VETERANS PURSUE FIELDS DIFFERENT FROM THEIR MILITARY SPECIALTY



STUDENT VETERANS EARNING A DEGREE IN HIGH-DEMAND, HIGH-GROWTH FIELDS



ACTION ITEM



ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- Offer tailored, culturally competent academic advising, career services, and campus counseling supports to student veterans without perpetuating stigmas or stereotypes.





Campus Diversity and Environment

Diversity is an important aspect of the college campus experience as it enriches learning, generates new knowledge and innovative thought, enhances creativity, and strengthens relationships among the student body. More importantly, diversity is the foundation of engagement as graduated students enter the workforce. As a highly diverse group, veterans are endowed with skills, attributes, and cross-cultural experiences that create a competitive advantage for any college or university.³⁰ Research consistently highlights the fact that the military represents a very heterogeneous population across the dimensions of race, ethnic background, culture, values, occupations, and aspirations.³¹ Presently, veterans comprise only three to four percent of the entire student population in U.S. higher education institutions, yet, the contributions they make to academic settings far surpass these seemingly small numbers. This is especially relevant for those schools aiming to increase diversity across their campuses.³²

Indisputably, the veteran population is highly diverse in most aspects, especially compared to a typical college campus cohort. On average, student veterans are more likely to be older, have a disability, working full or part-time, and be a first-generation student.³³ Further, they have a greater propensity for financial independence, maturity, and self-sufficiency earlier on compared to their non-military peers, and this can foster self-confidence that can strengthen one's GPA in college.³⁴ Additionally, student veterans are more likely to be married with dependents.³⁵ Approximately one-half of student veterans who benefit from the Post-9/11 GI Bill are between 25 and 34 years of age,³⁶ while one-third are married with dependents and 15 percent are single with dependents.³⁷ Women comprise a substantial proportion of the student veteran population as well, representing a little less than one-third of all military undergraduates, and these numbers are projected to increase.³⁸ Student veterans are also proud of their military service and are comfortable and willing to share their story and experiences with other students, enriching the interactions students have while on campus.³⁹ Yet, their investments and interests do not end there. Similar to their more traditional peers, veterans have reported in a 2015 survey consistently seeking out educational opportunities to facilitate self-improvement and personal growth (71%), increase career prospects (86%), enhance technical skills (31%), and pursue professional advancement (56%).⁴⁰ Veterans who leverage their earned benefits (51%) can achieve their long-term goals and obtain greater economic security and stability (69%).⁴¹ More importantly, veterans identify with their service and consider themselves as instrumental members of society. This propels them toward activities that contribute to society in meaningful ways (43%).⁴² While these factors may be important to others as well, it is veterans who truly stand out in their unusual capacity for maturity, self-discipline, resilience, and technical aptitude,⁴³ qualities that can generate large-scale returns for the institutions and communities to which they belong.

“While culture, race and gender are the more traditional lenses through which life is viewed, veterans bring a very unique perspective to college and university campuses. Older than the traditional student, the veteran has seen life through international conflict and on-the-ground humanitarian aid, invaluable experiences that enrich the classroom in incalculable ways.”²⁹

— Timothy A. Barbari, Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs, Boston University

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

DIVERSITY

STUDENT VETERANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO:



- ✓ BE OLDER;
- ✓ BE MARRIED;
- ✓ HAVE CHILDREN;
- ✓ HAVE A DISABILITY;
- ✓ WORKING FULL OR PART-TIME;
- ✓ FIRST GENERATION STUDENT



MILITARY SERVICE

TOP MOTIVATIONS FOR MILITARY SERVICE



- 53%** EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS
- 52%** DESIRE TO SERVE MY COUNTRY
- 49%** OPPORTUNITY TO PURSUE NEW EXPERIENCES, ADVENTURES, OR TRAVEL

TOP SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES STRENGTHENED BY MILITARY SERVICE

WORK ETHIC AND DISCIPLINE	87%
TEAMWORK	86%
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS	82%
MENTAL TOUGHNESS	81%
ADAPTATION TO DIFFERENT CHALLENGES	78%
SELF-DISCIPLINE	77%
PROFESSIONALISM	78%

MILITARY INFLUENCE ON POST-SERVICE ASPIRATIONS

- 73%** reported that the military service experience promoted their interest in education
- 68%** of service members surveyed stated that the military prepared them for higher education
- 43%** percent indicated that their military specialization, job, or training was STEM-related



TOP MOTIVATIONS TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION

CAREER OR JOB OPPORTUNITIES	86%
SELF-IMPROVEMENT AND PERSONAL GROWTH	71%
POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVING ECONOMIC STATUS	69%
PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT	56%
LEVERAGE EARNED BENEFITS	51%
A DESIRE TO "HELP PEOPLE/SOCIETY"	43%
ENHANCE TECHNICAL SKILLS	31%



ACTION ITEM



DIVERSITY AND CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

- Higher education institutions should facilitate and encourage collaboration between student veterans organizations and other student clubs and organizations on campus to share student veterans' military experiences, expertise, and interests with the wider civilian student body.

Financial Aid

Many historians affirm that the original GI Bill—the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944—is one of the most significant legislative acts in our history. Following World War II, it empowered more than 8 million veterans to pursue higher education upon leaving military service. Among that group were 3 Presidents of the United States, 3 Supreme Court justices, 14 Nobel Prize winners, 24 Pulitzer Prize winners, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 doctors, 450,000 engineers, and countless other members of what has been famously referred to as the “Greatest Generation.”⁴⁴ Unquestionably, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 has transformed the lives of millions of veterans and has steadily granted a surplus of benefits for those aspiring toward higher education.⁴⁵ Since the World War II Era, the Bill has undergone several modifications from the Korean War Era Bill of 1952 to the Montgomery GI Bill of 1984 - up to the most current Veterans Educational Assistance Act (Post-9/11 GI Bill), passed into law on August 1, 2009.⁴⁶ Through these periods, student veterans have reaped abundant financial rewards and continue to profit from incentives that assist them in completing their post-secondary degrees. A new law referred to as the “Forever GI Bill,” was signed into law in 2017 and removed the expiration date for GI Bill benefits, allowing veterans who separated from the military after January 1, 2013 the ability to use their benefits at any point during their lives.⁴⁷ All military members who have served a minimum of 90 days of aggregate active duty and were honorably discharged after September 10, 2001, including those with or without a service-connected disability, are entitled to these benefits.⁴⁸ An annual book stipend up to \$1000, monthly housing allowance, and up to the full amount of tuition costs may be covered as well. Advancing one’s education not only assists those transitioning back to the workforce but also has further implications for alumni loyalty and financial giving.

Since its implementation into law in 2009, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has increased overall college enrollment by about 3 percent.⁴⁹ Since inception up until present day the Post -9/11 GI Bill has paid approximately \$102 billion to 2.1 million distinct beneficiaries for tuition, fees, book stipends, and monthly housing allowances.⁵⁰ In addition to school costs, the Post-9/11 GI Bill can cover on-the-job, vocational/ technical training, apprenticeship programs, and provide reimbursement for licensing and certification. This is important, as ensuring adequate funding via federal, state, and institutional means stimulates greater college participation and academic involvement,⁵¹ thereby leading to higher academic achievement. It should be noted that certain criteria limit the extent of benefits, which is determined on an individual basis. For example, months of coverage is calculated by benefit tier percentages, and the total amount allocated to students may vary depending upon service time and discharge status. Further, monthly housing allowances are provided only to those students who are registered full-time during the semester. Thus, obtaining additional sources of funding may be required for those who wish to attend more costly schools not covered under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.⁵² Nonetheless, many student veterans already arrive onto campuses with ample financial support from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for their education. This provides colleges and universities with reliable and consistent funds as student veterans progress toward their degrees.

In addition to offsetting costs, the Post-9/11 GI Bill will continue to assist more student veterans in gaining access to higher education post-service. However, delays in verification and certification along with certain restrictions may negatively affect timely access and impede academic progress. The unique needs and diverse

“Since its implementation into law in 2009, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has increased overall college enrollment by about 3 percent. As of May 2017, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has already paid \$75 billion in tuition, fees, book stipends, and monthly housing allowances. In addition to school costs, the Post-9/11 GI Bill can cover on-the-job, vocational/ technical training, apprenticeship programs, and provide reimbursement for licensing and certification.”

“Additionally, student veterans who meet the VA’s requirements for the 100 percent maximum benefit rate of the Post-9/11 GI Bill have the option of participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program at no additional charge. As a beneficiary of this supplementary program, the VA will match the selected institution’s dollar for dollar contribution in order to provide funding for educational costs that exceed the Post-9/11 GI Bill threshold, following enrollment verification.”

backgrounds of student veterans warrant flexibility due to the case that many are simultaneously negotiating family and career responsibilities along with their education. Additionally, some may be called back to service or need to take a leave of absence for other reasons. Thus, more time may be required to complete a degree. These are important considerations that colleges and universities must incorporate into their decision-making. Nonetheless, the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits available to student veterans ensure that financial aid remains accessible and abundant to support those pursuing their post-secondary degrees. As such, financial barriers that may preclude educational access are mitigated or eliminated altogether, providing greater availability of more traditional financial aid opportunities to the broader student body. In a similar vein, student veterans can provide the means for higher education institutions to achieve a competitive advantage within their broader institutional marketplace. With the expansion of educational benefits, an increasing number of veterans are returning to school for the opportunity to complete their degrees and attain higher academic achievement to secure greater financial and economic stability. Currently, over 2.9 million Post-9/11 veterans (64%) have decided to enroll in college, a number expected to increase as more returning service members transition back to the civilian sector.⁵³

Additionally, student veterans who meet the VA’s requirements for the 100 percent maximum benefit rate of the Post-9/11 GI Bill have the option of participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program at no additional charge.⁵⁴ As a beneficiary of this supplementary program, the VA will match the selected institution’s dollar for dollar contribution in order to provide funding for educational costs that exceed the Post-9/11 GI Bill threshold, following enrollment verification.⁵⁵ This option provides the student veteran with greater opportunity and flexibility to meet financial needs while selecting a more expensive private school, out-of-state college, or university. Both full-time and part-time students who qualify at the maximum level may utilize these benefits that are paid directly to the school of choice by the VA. Participating Yellow Ribbon colleges and universities have an agreement with the VA that determines which divisions or schools have slots available for a specified number of students per year and which ones will offer unlimited enrollment.⁵⁶ A student’s status and school are factored into these decisions. Based on the VA’s current Yellow Ribbon information available, some states have a predominance of slots designated while the majority of states offer unlimited enrollment at participating institutions.⁵⁷

With the recent surge of veterans returning to school, due to the generous benefits provided, veterans have the potential to generate significant returns for institutions of higher learning, particularly since they are more likely to enroll in two and four-year programs than nonveteran applicants.⁵⁸ In fact, more than 453,000 degrees and certificates have been earned since 2009 alone, with many veterans using GI Bill benefits to earn masters degrees.⁵⁹ During the fiscal year 2016, approximately 790,000 individuals (veterans and dependents) benefitted from the Post-9/11 GI Bill alone,⁶⁰ which pays for a school’s tuition and fees up to the state’s tuition cap—typically the highest public-school tuition within the state. Student veterans have up to 36 months (four academic years) of benefits provided and are eligible to receive these benefits for 15 years starting from the last day of separation from active duty.⁶¹ As more students are capable of meeting financial needs due to the Post-9/11 and Forever GI Bills, responding to the challenges within an academically rigorous

environment becomes more viable. With minimal financial constraints along with higher academic achievement, retention and graduation rates will increase.

Consequently, given that veterans receive a great deal of funding from the VA for GI Bill and Yellow Ribbon Program benefits, colleges and universities' financial aid resources can be freed up and used to meet other institutional recruitment and enrollment goals from admissions and financial aid offices. Even those schools with lower veteran enrollment can experience exponential gains taking "saved" funds from veteran enrollment and directing them to other recruitment efforts or to academic improvement. Clearly then, a focus on the quality of resources and services is optimally achieved through recruitment efforts that can assist the institution in increasing enrollment among those who receive educational entitlements, thereby allowing the university to re-direct funding toward additional purposes. Increased enrollment of student veterans is a worthy endeavor even for those institutions that have significantly less veteran enrollment overall and can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of trends to refine the quality of programs and services offered. This will further strengthen commitment on the part of those enrolled and subsequently, the school's return on investment. As a result, future student veterans will be endowed with the very strengths, characteristics, and crucial support systems that will ensure our veterans will carry the torch passed on by previous generations.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

POST-9/11 GI BILL

100%
OF TUITION AND FEES



UNIVERSITY
FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS



PROVIDES VETERANS WITH A MONTHLY HOUSING ALLOWANCE AND ANNUAL STIPEND FOR BOOKS AND SUPPLIES.

SINCE INCEPTION UP UNTIL PRESENT DAY THE POST -9/11 GI BILL HAS PAID APPROXIMATELY

\$102 BILLION

TO 2.1 MILLION DISTINCT BENEFICIARIES FOR TUITION, FEES, BOOK STIPENDS, AND MONTHLY HOUSING ALLOWANCES.



YELLOW RIBBON PROGRAM

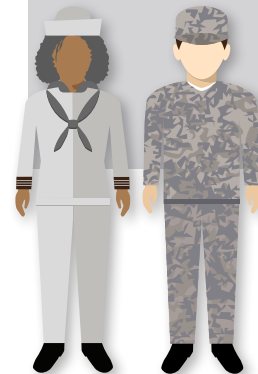
PROVIDES MATCHING FUNDS FOR SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS THAT COST MORE THAN THE IN-STATE PUBLIC TUITION RATE.

ACTION ITEM



POST-9/11 GI BILL

- Higher education institutions should consider developing a student veteran-specific recruitment and financial aid strategy with financial aid and admissions offices in order to inform decision making on recruitment and enrollment of student veteran applicants.





Post Education Outcomes

Overall, veterans are outperforming civilians within the labor force with respect to higher earnings and similar, if not slightly lower, unemployment rates. In addition, among their veteran peers, those with a college degree have a lower unemployment rate compared to those without one (2.6% compared to 3.9% for those with a high school diploma/GED) and an even lower unemployment rate compared to those with less than a high school degree (7.0%). Over the past two years, total veteran unemployment rates have been consistently lower than the nonveteran population and continue to decrease,⁶² while Post-9/11 veterans with a college degree have similar unemployment rates compared to their nonveteran counterparts (2.5% vs. 2.3%).

Veterans are also experiencing rising wages and income, earning on average \$11,000 more than their nonveteran counterparts. This is especially true among veterans with post-secondary education. Veterans with bachelor's degrees earn about \$84,255 compared to their nonveteran counterparts who earn \$67,232. Veterans with more than a bachelor's degree earn closer to \$129,082 relative to their degree-earning civilian counterparts, who earn approximately \$99,734. Further, female veterans fare better than female and total civilians combined, earning approximately \$5,000 more than the average civilian.⁶³ Obtaining an advanced degree can be a powerful mechanism for veterans entering the workforce, and Post-9/11 veterans with bachelor's degrees will earn approximately \$71,399 while those with graduate degrees will earn almost \$124,534 annually.

There is a clear link between military-conferred skills and civilian-sector skills which companies and organizations value.⁶⁴ In addition to the financial and economic security that an education provides, veterans with advanced degrees and higher earnings are able to derive a stronger sense of connection, purpose, and value from their lives that leads to stronger commitment and loyalty to their organization's ethics and values.⁶⁵ In particular, military socialization fosters discipline, respect, leadership, and a strong sense of personal responsibility that carries over into their career.⁶⁶ For example, CEO's of private sector firms with military experience outperform nonveteran CEO's during economic downturns and are more likely to engage in ethical behavior.⁶⁷ Veterans exhibit a high degree of self-efficacy as well, and this is correlated with greater pro-social behavior and commitment to the institution's values.⁶⁸ Overall, veterans fare better than civilians in terms of purpose, social, and economic well-being and strongly value fiscal responsibility.⁶⁹ The loyalty and integrity that veterans display when functioning in their respective leadership roles fosters trust and reliability that strengthens relationships in the workplace. They are more likely to be disciplined, mature, and financially independent as a consequence.⁷⁰ This predicts later success and retention in the workplace. "Companies value military experience because it's seen as demonstrating maturity. All things being equal, it's that extra plus that companies want."⁷¹

In total, higher educational attainment, higher earnings, and lower unemployment rates reduce risk factors for homelessness, drug or alcohol abuse, and crime. Decreased rates for these risk factors are associated with greater economic well-being and overall quality of life.⁷² Veterans earning their post-secondary degrees have an even better prognosis for long-term outcomes. In fact, "workforce readiness, preparation, and vocational planning are integral aspects of the veteran transition process and are paramount to achieving later financial and economic stability."⁷³ Education paves the way for these processes to unfold, and it is clear that gaining

meaningful employment in one's chosen career is not only important for the sense of stability and personal fulfillment it provides but is crucial to job satisfaction and retention.⁷⁴ Further, veterans consistently demonstrate that they possess a broad range of applicable skills that provide an organizational advantage in a variety of contexts and settings, and this only strengthens their prospects for job security, increased earnings, and landing in their preferred career field over time.⁷⁵

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

EARNINGS⁷⁶

IN GENERAL, THE HIGHER THE DEGREE THE HIGHER THE INCOME.



VETERANS WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREES EARN ABOUT \$84,255

This is higher compared to their non-veteran counterparts who earn about \$67,232.



VETERANS WITH MORE THAN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE EARN ABOUT \$129,082

This is higher compared to their non-veteran counterparts who earn about \$99,734.



POST-9/11 VETERANS WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE EARN ABOUT

\$71,399

Post-9/11 veterans with more than a Bachelor's degree earn about \$124,534.



UNEMPLOYMENT



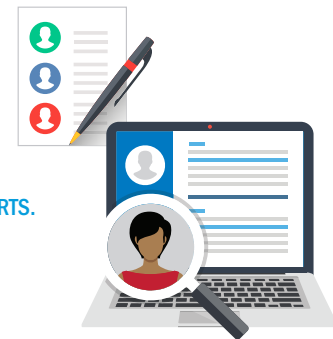
IN GENERAL, THE HIGHER THE DEGREE THE LOWER THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE.



VETERANS WITH A COLLEGE DEGREE HAVE A LOWER UNEMPLOYMENT RATE COMPARED TO THEIR NON-VETERAN COUNTERPARTS.

(2.6% compared to 3.9% for those with high school or some college or 7.0% for those with less than a high school degree) in 2017.

POST-9/11 VETERANS WITH A COLLEGE DEGREE HAVE A SIMILAR UNEMPLOYMENT RATE COMPARED TO THEIR NON-VETERAN COUNTERPARTS. (2.5% compared to 2.3%) in 2017.



ACTION ITEM



POST-EDUCATION PERFORMANCE

- Work with your institution's career services center(s) to create student veteran-specific programs and advising sessions to enable them to be successful in job fairs, interviews, and long-term employability.

“Simply put, veterans become the most loyal and dedicated alumni. Military culture engenders integrity, loyalty, and responsibility – characteristics that are sustained across a variety of contexts, which has important implications for higher education institutions.”

Post Education Commitment

Higher education doesn't exist in a vacuum of time by exclusively educating students for a period of two to eight years. Its survival as an institution relies on the successes of its students and the return that these students bring for the university, particularly in financial giving. James M. Langley, former vice president for advancement at Georgetown University, notes that appreciation, affiliation, and agency determine the likelihood of donor giving.⁷⁷ These characteristics reign supreme among veteran alumni who express unsurpassed commitment to their respective institutions as a direct result of military training and a commitment to service.⁷⁸ The military is highly adept in socializing service members to various roles that must be fulfilled in order to meet the demands of the organization. The military lays the groundwork for organizational commitment by encouraging responsibility, unity, cohesiveness, and greater capacity to transition between these different roles and expectations. This contributes to less burnout, greater job satisfaction, and higher work productivity.⁷⁹ Research suggests that in environments where organizational commitment is high, the norms, customs, and ethical standards of the corporation are more likely to be adopted and internalized.⁸⁰ Veterans in particular are primed for organizational commitment, institutional loyalty, and individual responsibility and are able to carry these traits into all post-service settings. More importantly, their post-education commitment is exemplified through their gratitude, loyalty, and desire to foster goodwill through their philanthropic activities.

Simply put, veterans become the most loyal and dedicated alumni. Military culture engenders integrity, loyalty, and responsibility – characteristics that are sustained across a variety of contexts, which has important implications for higher education institutions. As beneficiaries of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the financial situation following graduation is substantially improved in comparison to nonveteran graduates and are therefore more able to contribute and generate larger financial returns for their colleges, universities, and communities. For this reason, veteran alumni are an asset to any institution of higher learning. Moreover, they make exceptional recruiters that can serve as indispensable resources to prospective student veterans. In fact, veterans indicate that personal contact with family members or friends (37%) and veteran networks (35%),⁸¹ are some of the most valuable sources of information when transitioning and returning to higher education.⁸² As more student veterans connect with veteran alumni, colleges and universities will profit from these enhanced networks that contribute to social support and ultimately, academic success.

Military experience promotes loyalty and commitment to one's education and affiliated institution. Veterans consistently demonstrate this through their engagement with student veteran and ROTC programs across campus⁸³ and view their vocational and philanthropic activities as agents for social good for the community



at large. Veterans are more likely to have the highest levels of educational, religious, secular, and total giving relative to nonveterans⁸⁴ and often become local, state, and national leaders among military, government, medical, private sector, and non-profit organizations.⁸⁵ According to a 2014 survey by GotYour6, military civilian respondents were five times more likely to say that Post-9/11 veterans are valuable assets to their communities and five times more likely to say that Post-9/11 veterans are stronger leaders than non-military civilian respondents.⁸⁶ Following graduation, veterans and military service members (54%) are also more likely to thrive in purpose, social, financial, and economic well-being than civilian members (43%) according to a Gallup-Purdue University study conducted in 2014.⁸⁷ Their academic, personal, and professional successes substantially increase the likelihood for community participation and institutional contribution. In short, veterans value their education and strive to give back in meaningful ways. Research consistently highlights the fact that civic engagement is greatest among those who feel valued and have a strong sense of solidarity and belongingness to their communities, irrespective of personal characteristics,⁸⁸ and their achievements are assets to any college or university.

Regardless of their profession, veteran alumni add value to higher education communities through their commitment, public service, and civic engagement and markedly improve the world through their exceptional gifts and talents. Veterans strive to give back through their civic duty, loyalty, and leadership which can generate significant returns for the institutions and organizations to which they belong. In the search for community impact, legacy, and philanthropic giving, higher education institutions should look no further than veterans as excellent additions to their alumni communities.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

54%

of veteran and service members are more likely to thrive in purpose, social, financial, and economic well-being than non-civilians (43%) post-graduation.



According to a 2014 survey by GotYour6, military civilian respondents were five times more likely to say that Post-9/11 veterans are valuable assets to their communities and were also five times more likely to say that Post-9/11 veterans are strong leaders, compared to non-military civilians.



A majority of service members and veterans either agreed or strongly agreed that the university understood their unique needs while obtaining their post-secondary degrees.

ACTION ITEM



POST-EDUCATION COMMITMENT

- Alumni Relations and Career Services offices should collaborate to stay connected with student veteran alumni and encourage them to bring their firms and organizations to campus for recruiting events, informational interviews, and networking opportunities.



HIGHER EDUCATION ACTION ITEM



- Higher education institutions should consider developing a student veteran-specific recruitment and financial aid strategy with financial aid and admissions offices in order to inform decision making on recruitment and enrollment of student veteran applicants.
- Higher education institutions should facilitate and encourage collaboration between student veterans organizations and other student clubs and organizations on campus to share student veterans' military experiences, expertise, and interests with the wider civilian student body.
- Offer tailored, culturally competent academic advising, career services, and campus counseling supports to student veterans without perpetuating stigmas or stereotypes.
- Work with your institution's career services center(s) to create student veteran-specific programs and advising sessions to enable them to be successful in job fairs, interviews, and long-term employability.
- Alumni Relations and Career Services offices should collaborate to stay connected with student veteran alumni and encourage them to bring their firms and organizations to campus for recruiting events, informational interviews, and networking opportunities.

Conclusion

Student veterans are a valuable asset to any institution of higher learning and offer a wide array of diverse experiences, skills, and talents that enrich any academic environment. Moreover, they value their education and are unparalleled in their loyalty and generous contributions. Veterans continually extend their dedication through their post-service contributions. Their steadfast determination and commitment are the driving forces—and the foundation—that undergirds their achievements and noteworthy accomplishments in the academic arena, workforce, community, and beyond.

Higher education institutions benefit when they seek out avenues of sustainability and academic support to ensure that all student veterans flourish and achieve their objectives. In order that this be accomplished, it is imperative that higher-level administrators foster top-down support and invest in strategies that facilitate ongoing communication regarding the unique issues of returning service members and veterans. Furthermore, faculty, staff, and stakeholders must incorporate student veterans into the decision-making process with respect to admissions, enrollment, and academic advisement. More fully integrating student veterans into the fabric of the campus community and academic experience will prepare higher education institutions to strategically plan for growth and respond to the most pressing needs of the student veteran population.

Consider that one of the most significant barriers student veterans face in the pursuit of a post-secondary degree is the perception among some that they would not be welcome, supported, or valued in an academic setting.⁸⁹ While a majority of veterans (84%) indicate there is a place for veterans' leadership and achievement in higher education, many (53%) feel that colleges and universities do not acknowledge veteran-specific skills and strengths within these settings.⁹⁰ Dispelling these notions requires that institutions develop a keen awareness and understanding of the individual and social factors that underlie and influence these perceptions to mitigate the particular challenges that student veterans face. Moreover, schools must be vigilant in supporting transitioning veterans through the recruitment, enrollment, and attendance phases while building military cultural competence into the institution. With enhanced collaboration, the establishment of valuable alumni networks, and an unwavering commitment to developing quality support systems, low and high veteran enrollment schools alike will achieve a remarkable return on investment. It is without question that by ensuring all student veterans receive the crucial support and quality education that they so desire and deserve, we will generate immeasurable gains for the institutions and communities of our future generations.



Appendix

Table 1. Average Total Personal Income for All Veterans, 2011-2015

Highest Education Attainment	All Veterans	Veterans in STEM Occupations	Veterans in Non-STEM Occupations
Less than High School Diploma/ GED	\$42,363	\$72,206	\$41,996
High School Diploma/ GED	\$47,653	\$71,104	\$47,034
Some College but Less Than Bachelor's Degree	\$56,126	\$76,164	\$54,449
Bachelor's Degree	\$84,255	\$95,939	\$82,229
Higher Than a Bachelor's Degree	\$129,082	\$127,152	\$129,345
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	\$102,985	\$107,430	\$102,284

Data source: ACS 2011-2015, population 18 and over, in the labor force only.

Table 2. Average Total Personal Income for Pre-9/11 Veterans, 2011-2015

Highest Education Attainment	Pre-9/11 Veterans	Pre-9/11 Veterans in STEM Occupations	Pre-9/11 Veterans in Non-STEM Occupations
Less than High School Diploma/ GED	\$43,101	\$72,075	\$42,769
High School Diploma/ GED	\$49,376	\$74,315	\$48,760
Some College but Less Than Bachelor's Degree	\$58,720	\$78,894	\$57,024
Bachelor's Degree	\$88,036	\$99,839	\$86,000
Higher Than a Bachelor's Degree	\$130,373	\$128,053	\$130,666
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	\$105,807	\$109,876	\$105,186

Data source: ACS 2011-2015, population 18 and over, in the labor force only.

Table 3. Average Total Personal Income for Post-9/11 Veterans, 2011-2015

Highest Education Attainment	Post-9/11 Veterans	Post-9/11 Veterans in STEM Occupations	Post-9/11 Veterans in Non-STEM Occupations
Less than High School Diploma/ GED	\$35,127	\$72,922	\$34,343
High School Diploma/ GED	\$38,146	\$58,686	\$37,415
Some College but Less Than Bachelor's Degree	\$47,505	\$66,910	\$45,909
Bachelor's Degree	\$71,399	\$82,939	\$69,361
Higher Than a Bachelor's Degree	\$124,534	\$124,729	\$124,500
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	\$93,243	\$99,921	\$92,074

Data source: ACS 2011-2015, population 18 and over, in the labor force only.

Table 4. Average Total Personal Income for Nonveterans, 2011-2015

Highest Education Attainment	Nonveterans	Nonveterans in STEM Occupations	Nonveterans in Non-STEM Occupations
Less than High School Diploma/ GED	\$25,933	\$53,345	\$25,793
High School Diploma/ GED	\$33,471	\$55,416	\$33,182
Some College but Less Than Bachelor's Degree	\$38,669	\$62,167	\$37,700
Bachelor's Degree	\$67,232	\$87,041	\$64,678
Higher Than a Bachelor's Degree	\$99,734	\$106,787	\$98,822
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	\$79,499	\$94,503	\$77,563

Data source: ACS 2011-2015, population 18 and over, in the labor force only.

UNEMPLOYMENT

- Veterans with a college degree have a lower unemployment rate compared to veterans with no college degree (2.6% compared to 3.9% for those with high school or some college or 7.0% for those with less than a high school degree) in 2017.
- Post-9/11 veterans with a college degree have a similar unemployment rate compared to their non-veteran counterparts (2.5% compared to 2.3%) in 2017.

Table 5. Unemployment Rate for Veterans and Nonveterans, 2017

Highest Education Attainment	All Veterans	Post-9/11 Veterans	Nonveterans
Less than High School Diploma/ GED	7.0	9.3	6.5
High School Diploma/ GED	3.9	5.9	4.7
Some College but Less Than Bachelor's Degree	4.1	5.1	3.7
Bachelor's Degree or higher	2.6	2.5	2.3

Data source: CPS 2017, population 25 and over.

Table 6. Unemployment Rate for Veterans and Nonveterans, 2016

Highest Education Attainment	All Veterans	Post-9/11 Veterans	Nonveterans
Less than High School Diploma/ GED	6.0	—	7.5
High School Diploma/ GED	4.6	6.8	5.2
Some College but Less Than Bachelor's Degree	4.6	5.6	4.0
Bachelor's Degree or higher	3.3	2.9	2.5

Data source: CPS 2016, population 25 and over. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>

Appendix

Table 7. Unemployment Rate for Veterans and Nonveterans, 2015

<i>Highest Education Attainment</i>	<i>All Veterans</i>	<i>Post-9/11 Veterans</i>	<i>Nonveterans</i>
Less than High School Diploma/ GED	6.3	-	8.0
High School Diploma/ GED	4.8	6.6	5.5
Some College but Less Than Bachelor's Degree	4.9	5.6	4.5
Bachelor's Degree or higher	3.5	3.8	2.5

Data source: CPS 2015, population 25 and over. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet_03222016.pdf



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