Collaborating for Change: Assessing the Needs of Student Veterans at Penn State

A PRESENTATION ON BEHALF OF THE MILITARY SUPPORT SERVICES TASK FORCE

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Why are we here?

- Nationally, more veterans going to college
- Veteran student enrollment at Penn State has more than doubled since 2008, making up 3.5% of our undergraduate population and 6.1% of the graduate population.
Why the influx?

- Implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) in 2009

- Over one million veterans have used Post 9/11 benefits, with over 30 billion dollars spent.

- Vocational Rehabilitation (Chapter 31) benefits
Who are we serving?

- Most have served during the United States Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) 2001-2009, and ongoing contingency operations, with nearly one third having been deployed two or more times.

- Veterans who served prior to 9/11/01.
What we think we know about veterans

- Older than the average traditional student – median age of 29
- Many are part-time students
- Often have families to support
- Combat veterans with injuries
- Those with physical and psychological injuries benefit from being close to their support network, requiring distance education services.
Commission for Adult Learner Charge

- Veterans recognized as a special population within adult students
- Subcommittee developed within Commission, a Military Support Services Task Force, consisting of veterans, certifying officials, advocates from UP and WD, satellite campuses and the military team.
Preliminary survey to Certifying Officials:

- 37 certifying officials at 21 campuses
- 17 campus certifying officials of the 21 responded

Questions asked:
- Other roles of certifying officials
- Campus veteran services
- Number of veterans
- Veterans organizations
- Veterans advisory council
- Partnering with other offices on campus for veteran services
- Challenges/barriers for veterans
Certifying Official Survey Results

- **Who are the certifying officials?** –
  - only staff at Vets Affairs at UP are veterans
- **Where are they at the campuses?** – mostly Financial Aid office
- **UP has its own office dedicated to veterans’ services.**
Certifying Official Survey Results

- Number of veterans from all campuses – 20 to 1574
- Services vary - not consistent across all campuses
Certifying Official Survey Results

Challenges/barriers identified by the Certifying Officials:

- Mental Health Concerns
- Instructor sensitivity
- Juggling school, work, family
- Time Management
- Education Benefits
- Adapting to civilian life
Certifying Official Survey Results

Certifying Official Recommendations:

- Veteran Room/Lounge
- Instructor/Adviser Awareness Training
- Veterans Organization
- Veterans Awareness Activities
- Counseling
- Veteran Representative
- Veteran Lion Ambassadors
Committee response to survey challenges/barriers

- Mental Health Concerns
  - Veterans counseling – on and off campus
  - Disability Services can assist

- Adapting to life outside of the military
  - Case management
  - Mentor program
  - Networking
  - Develop programming

- Campus climate
  - Provide training to staff/faculty
  - Incorporate into existing trainings

- Benefits concerns
  - Communicate with students
Committee Recommendations

- Form “Veterans Advocacy Group”
- Hire veterans as Certifying Officials
- Educate faculty and staff (including advisers)
  - Webinars (http://equity.psu.edu/veterans/resources)
- Veterans Forums
- Certifying Officials and vet advocates meeting
- Recognition of graduating veterans
Penn State’s Charge

- March 20, 2014 memo from Rodney Erickson
  - To honor military service members and veterans, their families and loved ones
  - To honor and empower Wounded Warriors and their loved ones
  - To support injured service members and the families of deceased service members
  - To sustain such efforts as an expression of Penn State’s ongoing commitment and contribution to our national security
  - To increase financial scholarships, academic opportunities, and career services to Penn State veterans and their families.
Reputation as Veteran/Military Friendly


- Individual campuses “Military Friendly”
  - Includes: priority registration, yellow ribbon participation, veteran specific services, etc.
Committee Future Exploration Based on Results and Penn State’s Charge:

- Want a more complete picture of veterans and their needs at Penn State
- Evaluate Student Satisfaction Survey
- Pilot survey at University Park
Quick Action Steps

- Get to know your veterans
  - Host a lunch
  - Start a Veterans list serve
- Determine services that already exist
  - Communicate to students
- Create other opportunities for Veterans to connect
  - Fair to connect with community
  - Veterans Day
- Create Veterans Advocacy Group
- Create Veterans organization
- Explore Best Practices
Questions?

Thank you!