

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Veteran Ally: Practical Strategies for Closing the Military-Civilian Gap on Campus

Osborne, N. J. (2013). Veteran ally: Practical strategies for closing the military-civilian gap on campus. *Innovative Higher Education*, 39(3), 247-260. doi:10.1007/s10755-013-9274-z

SUMMARY: Attending college following Active Duty military service often involves several challenging transitions with few resources or services to help Veterans. Information about Veterans' experiences of college and the effects of a campus awareness and education program about military students were examined. Veterans felt disconnected from their college community due to differences in culture, views, and circumstances, but reported the campus was more Veteran-friendly following an education program.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Many Veterans reported feeling disconnected from college peers due to differences in age, maturity, life experiences, expectations for respect and work ethic, importance placed on self-reliance, and work and family responsibilities.
- Several Veterans indicated they felt that campus civilians spoke negatively about the military and assumed all Veterans experienced trauma and emotional problems or instability.
- At a two and a half year follow-up to the campus military awareness and education program, 96% of 407 student Veterans reported the campus had become more Veteran-friendly.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide information and administrative assistance to Service members regarding higher education (e.g., college applications, military financial aid benefits, student disability plans)
- Offer workshops for Service members beginning college to help them receive social support from other military students and transition to the changes in responsibilities and structure
- Educate Service members and their families on common difficulties faced by military students and helpful programs and resources colleges offer

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of programs that provide Service members with information and practical support throughout their college education
- Recommend collaboration between the Department of Defense and universities to develop on-campus programs for social support of military students and their families
- Encourage education for professionals working with Service members regarding how to help those Service members apply for college, financial aid, and student disability plans

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through the researcher's Veteran student listserv, and 18 of the 280 Veterans responded to the email, with 14 agreeing to participate.
- Data regarding each Veteran's experience of attending college following Active Duty military service were collected via two hour-long focus groups and two hour-long individual interviews.
- The researcher examined Veterans' statements for common themes from the existing literature.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 14 Veterans who were 71% male, between the ages of 22-30 years, and enrolled in a large, public university in the Midwestern United States.
- Veterans identified as White (57%), Latino (21%), Asian-American (14%), and Black (7%).
- Participants had served an average of 3.5 years of Active Duty service and had been deployed during OIF/OEF at least once.

LIMITATIONS

- An individual researcher made decisions regarding themes of the participant interviews and focus groups, and no coding of data, thematic analysis, or inter-rater reliability was completed.
- The number of Veterans endorsing themes was rarely indicated in the article.
- The results were based on a small convenience sample with poor recruitment response rates; therefore, these data may not generalize to the larger population of student Veterans.
- Participants were recruited via the researcher's listserv, and it is unclear whether the listserv was systematically composed or based on potentially-biased researcher selection.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess Veteran students' experiences of college and suggestions for useful programs and resources through widely-distributed surveys in a random sample of U.S. student Veterans
- Examine additional factors that may affect Veteran students' satisfaction with their college experience (e.g., Veteran age, college major, university size and location, available resources)
- Explore the differences in Veterans' satisfaction with their college experience between Veterans who do and do not participate in programs that support transition to higher education

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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