

Veterans and College

Research Question: What material is available to help veterans enter and be successful in post-secondary education?

This question is an important one and is highly personal to this author, in that the author's son is a recent 30-year-old veteran with three years of active and combat duty in the United States Army. He received an Honorable (Medical) Discharge and is qualified to receive post-secondary educational benefits under the Post 9/11 GI Bill. With very little guidance from the Veteran's Administration, and virtually no instructions from the U.S. Army, it is frustrating to know where to start. Research for this annotated bibliography provided insight into the process, and the author is pleased to report that as of October 19, 2011 her son is an undergraduate at UMUC, awaiting the start of his first classes this week.

Beason, C.F. (2005). Lessons learned: A successful distance learning collaborative between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense. *Military Medicine*, 170, 5:395. Retrieved from <http://www.amsus.org/index.php/journal>

This 2005 article from *Military Medicine* spoke favorably about using distance education courses to train veterans for a future in nursing. The primary question was using distance education to teach clinical nursing skills. Skeptics felt from the beginning that certain clinical skills could never be taught outside of a traditional classroom. The article described relevant technology, student selection, site support, and more. The two faculty selected to teach this online program (one of whom was very experienced in distance education), resulted in an ideal

pairing of expertise. This article was broken down into readable sections, continuing with administrative costs, evaluation, distance education policy, and conclusions.

The authors included six references on which the article was based. While the article was positive towards distance education, it was most relevant to students or practitioners who would be considering post-military training in a medical field.

Brock, D.M., Wick, K.H., Evans & T.C., Gianola, F.J. (2011). The physician assistant profession and military veterans. *Military Medicine*, 176, 2:197. Retrieved from <http://www.amsus.org/index.php/journal>

This article appeared in *Military Medicine*, and was directed at military doctors, those who determine military service assignments, and those who mentor soldiers to consider post-military training in a medical field. It was technical in nature, referring to a study done using the combined resources of the Physician Assistant Education Association and several medical schools. It addressed veterans who receive many years of health care experience while in the military, often using a high level of decision making in dangerous and difficult situations. The question to be answered was “How and where will they apply their highly developed skills as they re-enter and make the transition to civilian life?” Many of these soldiers leave the military with a wealth of health care training, but lack a bachelor’s degree, which is mandatory for almost any health care related field – certainly fields for which their medical training qualifies them. It is difficult for soldiers to get access to college courses in the middle of deployment or due to frequent reassignments. The article only vaguely referred to distance education, and how some

of the post-military training can be obtained via online learning. The article was not particularly relevant to the research topic, unless the veteran is interested in a medical career.

Brown, P.A. & Gross, C. (2011). Serving those who have served: Managing veteran and military student best practices. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 50:1, 45-49. doi: 10.1080/07377363.2011.544982

Dr. Patricia Brown, Dean of the Division of Educational Outreach at Western Carolina University (WCU), wrote this article in 2011 for the academic publication, *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*. It was easy to read and pro-military and veteran-friendly. The article described how the Post 9/11 GI Bill vastly increased both the funding available and the potential student pool for universities catering to this sub-group of adult learners. However, it cautioned that not understanding the special needs of this group of students will likely lead to dissatisfaction for both the student and the institution of higher education. Some of the special challenges include requirements that the military student be ready and available for deployment at all times, sometimes having learning disrupted by lack of Internet during deployment, and veterans returning from a “command and control” environment to a more open college life.

Being a military-friendly institution requires offering numerous criteria, including priority registration, transfer credit policies that avoid loss of credit and duplication of coursework, deferred tuition payment plans, and academic and counseling services targeted to military students. The article described some of the vast resources that are available to an institution of higher education wishing to either begin or increase their offerings to military and

veteran students. Dr. Brown wrote about WCU's 2005 entrance into the distance education arena, and their challenges and successes educating the military population. Because WCU's geographic location in relation to the state's military bases makes it difficult to service the military with face-to-face classes, their course offerings are fully online.

This article reported good success with the military-friendly program. The author used and listed resources and references such as websites, academic journals, and material from the Veteran's Administration.

Field, K., Hebel, S. & Smallwood, S. (2008). Cost, convenience drive veterans' college

choices. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. 7/25/2008, (54)46. Retrieved

from <http://www.chronicle.com>

This 2008 article appeared in the academic journal *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The primary focus was to compare the recently-introduced Post 9/11 GI Bill with the original GI Bill of Rights, signed into law more than 50 years ago. The article made direct comparisons including the typical military student or veteran, the types of school they chose, and the amount of money spent on each student. The article pointed out the similarity of then and now and how veterans want to stretch their educational dollars and often choose the community college due to the lower cost. The other category of school the veterans are choosing is for-profit schools, in that six of the top ten schools serving the military are for-profit colleges. This suggests that veterans are motivated as much by convenience as by cost. Most veterans are older, between 25 and 34 years of age, often married, and are looking to build on skills learned in the service. As a

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result, the flexibility of the online programs offered by these universities suits veterans well.

Colleges that provide veteran-oriented services gain credibility among soldiers, and soldiers talk to soldiers, asking “is this school supportive?”

The article described five universities that currently serve large numbers of military, have roots in serving the military, or are located near very large military bases. The five universities are Central Texas College, Colorado Technical University, Liberty University, University of Maryland University College, and the University of Phoenix. The last school is the only for-profit institution, and is the largest private university in the U.S., with the most military and veteran students.

This article was helpful in assessing how the original GI bill differs from the Post 9/11 GI Bill, but did not describe the many variations in-between. It provided a good overview of the top schools serving the military, and distinguishing the features of these schools.

Golden, D. (2010). Online colleges target benefit-rich vets. *Bloomberg Businessweek*. 11/8/2010

Issue 4203. Retrieved from [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_46/b4203026910225.htm)

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This article appeared in Bloomberg Business Week in November 2010. It described, in a primarily negative overview, how for-profit, online colleges are going after veterans to add to their bottom line with federal taxpayer benefit dollars. Although it contained a few statistics, it was more of a fluff article than one of substance. The article took particular aim at Kaplan University, noting it is owned by the Washington Post Co. It was interesting to review the Top

Ten schools enrolling veterans and service personnel, and to see that UMUC is not only included, but is one of two public schools, meaning they are non-profit. This article would be helpful for research on the topic of “buy a degree” or “diploma-mill” institutions.

Hefling, K. (2009). New GI bill sending thousands of veterans back to classrooms.

Community College Week, 8/24/2009, 22(1), p. 10. Retrieved from

<http://www.ccweek.com/>

This short article appeared in 2009 in *Community College Week*, a weekly online e-zine for junior and community colleges about topics relevant to this population of students, faculty and administrators. It described how a soldier started his service in Afghanistan and ended up at Columbia University, with his pricy tuition covered almost entirely by the federal government, thanks to the Post 9/11 GI Bill, which took effect August 2, 2009. This bill is meant to transform the lives of these heroic soldiers and to get them on the path to an education following their service to their country. The article was primarily an overview, but indicated that, not surprisingly, there was some resistance in Congress due to the price tag of this new legislation. Additionally, military officials feared soldiers would actually leave the military, perhaps prematurely, in order to take advantage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, once they became qualified through their length of service. To counter this possibility, one popular feature that was added was allowing soldiers to transfer this benefit to a spouse or child in exchange for continuing to serve an additional four years. The article was interesting, but only pointed out how complex the bill is, and the many obstacles that soldiers and veterans must overcome to utilize it.

Pekow, C. (2009). New GI bill rules bar housing benefits for distance learners. *Community*

College Week, 1/26/09, 21(11), p. 2-3. Retrieved from <http://www.ccweek.com/>.

This article came from *Community College Week*, a weekly e-zine for junior and community colleges. It described some of the differences between the “new” and “old” GI bills that involve such details as housing allowances, books, and tutorial assistance. A primary focus was whether distance education qualifies for the housing allowance, which is a significant stipend veterans can receive while they are in college, as opposed to working at a job. It gave an overview of the differences, but did not focus on determining the best path for veterans to take. It acknowledged that “most of the veterans today and most active duty military serving overseas choose online learning. It is their preferred method of learning.” The author admitted that the many choices are daunting not only for the student, but for the college as well. The article was helpful in that it confirms that federal regulations can be overwhelming and confusing.

Radford, A.W. (2011). Military service members and veterans: A profile of those enrolled in undergraduate and graduate education in 2007 – 2008. *Stats in Brief*. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. NCES 2011-163. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/>

This publication presented descriptive data in the form of tables and charts to answer four questions related to military service members and veterans in relation to their college education. The questions included the number of service members and veterans enrolled in college in 2007-

2008 and how many used GI Bill benefits; how the demographics of this group differed from non-military students; and how the independent undergraduate and graduate enrollment characteristics differed for military and non-military students.

The data was easy-to-read and follow, and the tables were clear. There were between one and four tables for each of the four questions. The key findings reported that in 2007-2008 about four percent of all undergraduate and graduate students were veterans or active duty military, and about ten percent of these students used the GI Bill to pay for their education. Most of these students were male, and were more likely than non-military students to be married. Military undergraduates studied at four-year institutions, took courses via distance education, and were more likely to study computer and information science fields than non-military students. The financial aid they received, including the GI Bill benefits, was similar to non-military students. In the graduate studies, a larger percentage waited at least seven years between undergraduate and graduate studies, enrolled in part-time master's degree programs, and took courses via distance learning.

Although this article was heavy with statistics, it was easy to read and would be useful to someone researching characteristics of typical military and veteran college students. The article concluded with technical notes describing the data collection, analysis and reporting. A dozen references for preparation of this statistical report included some of the entries in this annotated bibliography, as well as numerous reports from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

Ruh, D., Spicer, P., Vaughan, K. (2009). Helping veterans with disabilities transition to employment. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*. 22(1). 67-74.

The authors are senior officials with TecAccess, a consulting firm in Maryland that works with, hires and trains employees with disabilities, with a focus on veterans, to mainstream them into the workforce. This well-written article focused on veterans who are returning in great numbers to enter the workforce, and the unique educational needs they face in order to overcome many disabilities they may suddenly have as a result of being an American soldier. The article described how colleges that offer individualized, comprehensive services that are transitional in design can assist veterans in re-entering the workforce.

An emphasis was the impending knowledge and staffing gap, and how properly-trained veterans can fill it. Disabled veterans have often proven they can overcome daunting obstacles, and the article recommended colleges strive to meet their educational needs. The authors described some of the programs being employed by companies such as Home Depot and how they are partnering with agencies such as the Departments of Defense, Labor and Veterans' Affairs to meet the employment and educational needs of veterans. This article is an excellent resource for both educators and employers who want to become knowledgeable in how to educate and train veterans through college courses and programs to bring veterans through the Information Age and into the Interactive Age through the use of distance education, telework and access to professional skill development.

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VonLehmen, G. (2011). Improving educational outcomes for military and veterans. *FDCH*

Congressional Testimony before Senate Committee on Homeland Security and

Government Affairs. Retrieved from http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=9697E1ED-E1CE-4322-9EE9-0A1FB4E68CAB

This was a transcript of recent testimony by Greg VonLehmen, Provost and Chief Academic Officer of University of Maryland University College. The first part of the testimony was a recap of UMUC's involvement with educating America's military and veterans, as well as a snapshot of the traditional UMUC student. Today, UMUC serves about 40,000 soldiers and veterans around Maryland, the United States, and the world with its award-winning distance education program. VonLehman described how UMUC's commitment to the military dates back to UMUC's face-to-face teaching in 1949 in Europe and 1956 in Asia.

The primary focus of this testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management was asking for continued support of key elements of educating the military and veteran student via distance education. This testimony transcript was interesting, especially because it shows UMUC's dedication to their military students and veterans around the world. It was extremely favorable towards the military, veterans and their need for ongoing post-secondary educational opportunities.