

Serve Veterans to Support their Success

Recommendations that California Community Colleges Can Put Into Action



Challenges Faced by Veteran Students

- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) can result from a blow, jolt, or brain penetration. Learn more at www.polytrauma.va.gov/understanding-tbi
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can follow events such as assault, combat, or disaster. When stress interferes with daily life or does not ease over time, it may be diagnosed as PTSD. Learn more at www.ptsd.va.gov
- Be mindful that not all veterans have engaged in combat. Do not assume veteran students face mental or physical challenges. Instead, many face challenges similar to other older students, such as balancing school with work and family.

California is home to over two million veterans, which is a greater number and proportion than any other state. Approximately 44,000 veterans attended a California Community College in 2010-11, a number that was rising as those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan returned home. This document presents leading research on how best to meet the needs of veteran students, so that the California Community Colleges can serve them effectively.

Meet the Challenge

Research shows that college benefits are one of the primary reasons service members give for entering the military. Yet young veterans are less likely today than their non-veteran peers to earn Associate or higher degrees. This may explain in part why recent veterans have higher unemployment rates than their non-veteran peers. This contrasts to previous generations of veterans, who were more likely to pursue higher education than their non-veteran peers, and who have done well in the civilian labor market. This suggests we can do better.

Colleges are Prepared for Duty

Community colleges offer an excellent fit for veterans. They have a diversity of courses, degrees and certificates that fall under the GI Bill, and they usually have campus services that benefit veterans. They also have a higher proportion of students who are over the age of 25 and that attend school part time while also working or raising a family, creating a relatable college environment for many returning veterans. For veterans seeking Bachelor's Degrees and beyond, community colleges can bridge the gap to four-year schools, providing a transferable college foundation at a far lower cost.



How to Serve Veteran Students

Target Enrollment

- Encourage students to indicate their veteran status early in order to connect them with relevant resources.
- In identifying service members, ask “Have you ever served in the United States Armed Forces?” as some may not self-identify as “veterans” (e.g., those without combat experience, National Guard and Reserve members).
- Offer veteran-specific information as part of students’ initial orientation.
- Develop veteran-specific courses (e.g., “Introduction to College”) where veterans can explore transitional issues, academic and career supports, and connect with other veterans.
- Communicate credit transfer guidelines from previous higher education, particularly military education.
- Develop ways to identify and manage combat-related injuries and disabilities.

Encourage Veterans to be at Ease on Campus

- Designate a single person to contact and develop a webpage where veterans can go to learn about all the services and support available to them, both on campus and in the broader community.
- Establish a support center specifically for veterans where they can connect with academic and career support, including advising, financial aid, tutoring, and health services.
- Designate a “community” space where veterans can use computers and televisions, eat together, and socialize, thereby strengthening information-sharing and support.
- Support student-veteran organizations where students can gain advice and develop friendships.
- Encourage students with a military background to become involved in student government and/or peer mentorship programs.
- Hire counselors who have previously served in the military.
- Educate administrators on the terms of the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- Ensure access to courses required for degree completion, given the time constraints of the GI Bill.
- Provide specific assistance in transitioning to careers, such as how best to represent military experience to potential employers. This can include help with resumes, job searches, and interviewing, as well as workshops to allow practice in representing their military and academic backgrounds.



Develop an action plan for your campus by reviewing these recommendations that are based on research. These approaches can welcome and support veterans in achieving their education and career goals.

Tactics to Use in the Classroom

- Provide training for faculty and staff on addressing common challenges of military students, including being older than other college students, balancing school with work and family, and transitioning from a military culture ([va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders/military.asp) offers materials providing insight into military culture via <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/communityproviders/military.asp>).
- Facilitate students balancing school with outside responsibilities by scheduling classes on evenings and weekends and providing both face-to-face and online options.
- Include information on class syllabi about veteran services available on campus. This is both informative and indicates to veterans that the campus/classroom welcomes them.
- Communicate with veterans in person when possible. In the service, they often received instructions by word-of-mouth without access to texts or emails.
- Keep veteran students in mind as you craft classroom lessons and assignments, just as you do race, gender, and religious background. Be particularly mindful of the possible presence of veteran students in classroom discussions of the military or war.

Understand the Post-9/11 GI Bill

The Post-9/11 GI Bill represents the greatest increase in veterans' educational benefits since their origin in 1944. It helps those who served in the military on active duty after September 10, 2001, including those who "served at least 90 aggregate days on active duty" or were "honorably discharged from active duty for a service-connected disability after serving 30 continuous days" (learn more at: www.benefits.va.gov/gibill).

- Learn more about the breadth of military educational benefits at: www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/comparison_chart.asp
- Compare estimated benefits for different educational programs at: www.vets.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool
- Find out how to apply for benefits (with a link to the online application) at: <http://benefits.va.gov/gibill/apply.asp>
- Discover a great deal more about VA educational benefits at: www.benefits.va.gov/gibill



GI Bill Benefits

- Tuition and fee payment for colleges, universities, trade schools, apprenticeships, flight schools, and on-the-job training
- Funds for tutorial assistance, licensing (e.g., cosmetology), and qualification tests (e.g., SAT, LSAT)
- Housing allowance
- Stipend for books and supplies





Additional Resources Available to Veterans Pursuing College in California

- The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office has information related to current efforts to serve veteran students: extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/StudentServices/VETS/VETSBestPractices.aspx
- CalVet offers educational waivers for the families of veterans with disabilities: <https://www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/Pages/College-Fee-Waiver.aspx>
- County Veteran Service Officers provide veterans assistance in applying for benefits: <http://www.cacvso.org/>
- The Veterans Administration offers apprenticeship programs for veterans: www.gibill.va.gov/resources/education_resources/programs/on_the_job_apprenticeship_training.html
- The Employment Development Department includes the opportunity for veterans to review job listings 24 hours before they become available to the public: http://www.edd.ca.gov/jobs_and_training/Services_for_Veterans.htm
- Helmets to Hardhats, offered by the Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (JATC), facilitates careers in construction: <https://www.helmetstohardhats.org/>
- VetSuccess supports veterans with disabilities seeking employment: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp>

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This brochure is based on a research paper with full citations by Elizabeth Dayton, Ph.D., available at cccspecialpopulations.org and sierraschoolworks.com. Funding for this publication was provided by the Special Populations Collaborative Project, with funding from the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, grant #15-165-001, awarded by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to West Hills Community College District.

