Increasing Student Veteran Success in the Post 9/11 Era

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Who Am I?

- Retired Army Officer – 20 years
- Kuwait – OEF 2002-2003
- Iraq – OIF 2003-2004
- UMass Army ROTC 2005-2008
- 2nd year Doctoral Student UMass-Amherst Educational Policy and Leadership program
Our Agenda

- Introduction
- The Problem
- History of contemporary student veterans
- Student veteran socialization to the military
- Connection/Disconnection to research
- Brainstorming to understand student veterans
- Brief back findings to the larger group
- Brainstorming to identify issues (same groups)
- Group discussion/problem solving
- My Recommendations
- Implications for success
- Conclusion
The Student Veteran Problem... (Is There Really a Problem?)

- Are student veterans succeeding in the US?
  - More SV enroll than non-veteran peers
  - Less veterans have earned bachelors degrees
- ...Student Veterans may not be getting the support they need on campus in order to succeed
  - This is an unqualified statement being made by many
- Who is this student population?
  - Special or unique sub-population on campus
  - Closely related to Non-Traditional Students
Background
Unique Nature of Contemporary Veterans

- No Military Peer for US
  - All-Volunteer vs. Conscript Military
  - Educated vs. undereducated
  - Professional vs. Amateur
  - Trained to defeat Cold War enemies
  - Combat Seasoned
Background
Military Socialization

- Initial Entry Training – Boot Camp
- The longer the service, the deeper the socialization
  - Combat increases socialization
- Highly Structured Environment
- Highly Disciplined Environment
- Team-Based work
- Leadership training
- Service-member is the focus of attention in the Military

New Recruit  |  Career Combat Veteran

Civilian  |  Veteran Socialization
Background
Defining the Population

This population is **poorly defined** and **inconsistently labeled**

1. Prior military socialization required
   - Excludes children and spouses of student veterans who may use GI Bill benefits

2. Presence of potential obstacles to success
   - Support structures and mechanisms become the mitigating factors to obstacles

Less than 30% of the contemporary veteran population are physically or mentally injured (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008)
Background
Connecting Student Veteran Research to Existing Research

- Nancy Schlossberg, Counseling Psychologist (DiRamio, Rumann)
- Vincent Tinto’s Theories (widely accepted, shown to be questionable)
- Ernie Pascarella & Patrick Terenzini (non-traditional student longitudinal studies)
- John Weidman
  - Conceptual Model of Undergraduate Socialization

Research into student veterans is not well connected to relevant lines of inquiry
Weidman’s Theory-1989 (simplified)

Family Influences In College

K-12 Socializations

Military Socialization

Pre-College Normative Pressure

The collegiate experience

Obstacle negotiation

In-College Normative Pressure

Other Reference Groups

Obstacle Negotiation Success

Student Success
Group Brainstorm – Understanding Your Campus’ Student Veterans

- Break into 4 small groups
  - Community College
  - 4 Year Public
  - 4 year Private
  - Other

- Guiding Question:

  “In what ways might a veteran's prior socialization to the military affect them as a student veteran?”
Brief Back -

- Understanding Your Campus’ Student Veterans
Group Brainstorm – Student Veteran Challenges on Your Campus

- Stay in your groups

- Guiding Question:

  “What obstacles do your student veterans face on campus?”
Group Discussion/Problem Solving

- **Guiding Question:**

  “How can we create services that student veterans may need in order to succeed in college?”
Recommendations Based on Early Research

- Establish a veteran-specific new student orientation
- Establish a veteran transition course
- Establish special bursar policies for student veterans to avoid late bill statements and penalties
- Establish waiver conditions for student veterans with access to VA health care
- Design an information/education session for faculty and staff to become familiar with veteran basics
- Talk to your veterans and ask them if/what they need
- Treat student veterans as individuals (no assumptions)

Try to look at the college experience from the veteran’s perspective
Implications for Success

- More Veteran Friendly Campuses
  - Faculty
  - Student Body
  - Staff
- Student veteran retention should increase
- Student veteran degree attainment should increase
- The word will get out about your campus being truly veteran friendly

Beware veteran-friendly campus rankings and ratings – they may not represent reality!
The relative veteran socialization continuum may also apply to those who do research and offer recommendations – **Critically consider the source** before you implement programs or recommendations!