DEFINING AND IMPROVING SUCCESS FOR STUDENT VETERANS

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

OF THE

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CONTENTS

Page

Thursday, May 8, 2014

Defining and Improving Success for Student Veterans 1

OPENING STATEMENTS

Bill Flores, Chairman 1
Mark Takano, Ranking Member 2

WITNESSES

Mr. Michael Dakduk, Vice President of Military and Veterans Affairs, Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU) 3
Prepared Statement 28
Mr. William Hubbard, Vice President of External Affairs, Student Veterans of America (SVA) 5
Prepared Statement 32
Mr. Ricardo D. Torres, President and CEO, The National Student Clearinghouse 7
Prepared Statement 43
Letter of Testimonies From: The National Student Clearinghouse 48
Mr. Thomas W. Ross, President, The University of North Carolina System, *On behalf of* The American Council on Education (ACE) 9
Prepared Statement 49
Dr. Melissa Vito, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management and Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives and Student Success, The University of Arizona 10
Prepared Statement 54
Mr. Curtis L. Coy, Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 20
Prepared Statement 69

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Universal Technical Institute 72
Reserve Officers Association 80
The American Legion 86
Northern Arizona University 92

DEFINING AND IMPROVING SUCCESS FOR STUDENT VETERANS

Thursday, May 8, 2014

U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY,
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m., in Room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Bill Flores [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Flores, Takano, Brownley, Titus, and Kirkpatrick.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL FLORES

Mr. FLORES. Good morning. The subcommittee will come to order.

This morning, we will be examining how to define and improve success for student veterans. VA's education and training programs have been credited with successfully transitioning and readjusting returning servicemembers for generations.

In fact, many historians believe that the passage of the GI Bill following World War II kept this country out of a recession that very well could have spiraled into another depression.

It has been reported that post World War II GI benefits educated 10 million returning veterans, among them 14 Nobel Prize and 20 Pulitzer Prize winners, three presidents, a dozen senators, and three Supreme Court justices.

It was through this lens that Congress authorized and expanded several education and training programs throughout the years, including the newest and by far the most generous program to date, the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

VA estimates that during the next fiscal year, they expect to pay out $15 billion in payments to students and schools for education and training. While I firmly believe that our veterans deserve every penny of these benefits, it has become clear to me and to most in the veteran community that there simply have not been enough metrics to track the return on taxpayer investment through student success.

Given our Federal Government's fiscal challenges, we owe it to hard-working American families to develop, track, monitor, and report these metrics.

I was surprised to learn that up until a few years ago, we did not even begin to start tracking graduation rates or many other statistics that track student success. That is why I am happy to see

that there seems to be a growing partnership between advocacy groups, students, schools, and VA to truly understand the rates of success for our student veterans.

I look forward to hearing about the Million Records project and how this data will positively mold the future for student veterans, schools, and the VA's administration of GI Bill benefits.

Why is this important? It is important because this data will help inform Congress about student veteran behavior and show schools and the VA what type of best practices and policies will improve outcomes for student veterans.

I also want to comment on VA's implementation of the Transparency Act from last Congress. I know that the VA created the new comparison tool and complaint system on a shoestring budget. And while there are many limitations to these tools, I think that they have the potential to be a game changer and will allow for better transparency for our student veterans.

I look forward to hearing more about these and other VA programs, including the VetSuccess on Campus program during today's hearing.

In the end, it is up to the student to make the right choice and to use their hard-earned benefits wisely. It is our job to ensure that they have the tools they need to be successful and to make the right decisions to help both themselves and their families.

With that, I recognize the ranking member, Mr. Takano, for his opening remarks.

OPENING STATEMENT OF MARK TAKANO, RANKING MEMBER

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.

I want to start by congratulating Student Veterans of America for their hard work on the Million Records project that has yielded such interesting and useful information.

This hearing will give us an opportunity to delve deeper into the findings from the recently released project done by SVA in collaboration with the National Student Clearinghouse and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This key empirical study compares the academic outcomes of student veterans to those of traditional students and highlights the need for this information. The findings shed light on the amount of time it takes student veterans to complete higher education programs, the type of degrees they typically attain, and common areas of study.

SVA will elaborate on the impact of the initiative and how lawmakers can use these findings to improve educational programs for veterans.

Today we will hear testimony about how different organizations define the success of student veterans and what measures are still necessary to help veterans achieve their academic goals.

We will also hear commentary on the implementation of the Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act, Public Law 112–249, which is designed to improve a veteran's access to information on an institution of higher education's accreditation and federal student aid programs.

Finally, I want to add that Chairman Flores and I have introduced H.R. 4248, the Veterans Education Outcomes Act, which

would require the disaggregation and dissemination of data on student veterans with respect to completion rates, employment rates, and retention rates of recipients of GI Bill funding.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for scheduling this hearing today, and I yield back.

Mr. FLORES. I thank the ranking member.

And I now invite our first panel to the table. Your complete written statements will become part of the hearing record and each of you will be recognized for five minutes for your oral statement.

We have joining us today Mr. Michael Dakduk, vice president of Military and Veterans Affairs, at the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities; Mr. William Hubbard, vice president of External Affairs, for Student Veterans of America.

Will, I understand that you proposed in the last few days and that she said yes. And so congratulations on your upcoming nuptials.

And next we have Mr. Ricardo Torres, president and CEO of the National Student Clearinghouse; Mr. Thomas Ross, president of North Carolina System, who is here on behalf of the American Council on Education; and we have Dr. Melissa Vito, senior vice president for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management and vice provost for Academic Initiatives and Student Success at the University of Arizona.

I do not know how you get all that on one card, but—so thank you all for being here.

Let's begin with Mr. Dakduk. You are now recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL DAKDUK

Mr. DAKDUK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the subcommittee, for inviting the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities or APSCU to testify here today.

I am representing APSCU, our member institutions, their faculty, and the nearly four million students who attend private sector institutions, including the 325,000 plus military veterans that attend our member institutions.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer our views on the successful educational outcomes for returning servicemembers and veterans, the VetSuccess program, and the implementation of Public Law 112–249.

To begin, please allow me to offer a short summary of my background. I previously served in the marine corps where I deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. I used military tuition assistance while in the service and studied on base and onboard a navy ship preparing for my second combat deployment.

After the service, I used the Montgomery GI Bill and other Title 4 funds like the Pell Grant. Once the Post-9/11 GI Bill passed, I began using that benefit and I am still using that benefit today to earn my master's degree.

In brief, I have a special appreciation for the programs discussed in this committee and Congress as a whole when it comes to supporting student servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

I would like to begin by discussing outcome measures specific to veterans. You will likely hear from the Student Veterans of America representative, who will go into more detail on the recent results from their Million Records program, a comprehensive study of veterans on the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Given my previous tenure at Student Veterans of America as their CEO and my specific efforts on this project, I would like to offer a few thoughts I found relevant to this hearing.

The overall completion rate was approximately 52 percent, well above the nontraditional peers. Existing research on post World War II and Vietnam veterans indicate that the vast majority of veterans complete their post secondary programs. Post Vietnam era veterans have GPAs greater than or equal to their peers.

Recent research in 2010 conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs showed that 63 percent of veterans self-reported as completing their post secondary training. Over half of the post-9/11 era respondents said they completed as well.

While the private nonprofits had the highest completion rates, approximately 22 percent later completed at a public or proprietary institution. The completion rate for the private sector was approximately 45 percent. And private sector institutions or the for profits had higher proportions of veterans completing degrees faster.

Overall, the reports suggest that student veterans are succeeding at levels comparable to, if not greater than, their peers. This refutes previous notions that veterans drop out in high numbers.

We understand that the process for collecting outcomes data on student veterans is already underway at the federal level given the recent charge by President Obama under Executive Order 13607 or the Principles of Excellence, although Congress should be keenly aware of the limitations in current federal databases like the integrated post secondary education database systems or IPEDS.

As of today, IPEDS does not disaggregate data based on military or veteran enrollment. We have provided at APSCU recommendations for tracking student outcomes in our proposal for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Our proposal offers thoughts around five key areas, retention and progression rates, completion and return on investment, employment of graduates, earnings and/or salary gains, and graduate satisfaction.

We believe the common college completion metrics as proposed by the National Governors Association chair's initiative provides a good foundation for advancing the conversation around student outcomes and success metrics. Conceptually this model could be applied to veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other Title 38 funds.

At a minimum, though, we should appreciate the unique life experiences of veterans and servicemembers. They differ drastically from the 18-year-old, first-time, full-time college student. Current and future attempts to track their academic success should be done with an appreciation for their exceptional life trajectories.

And I would like to say a few words on VetSuccess and Public Law 112–249. With the VetSuccess on program or VSOC, the program provides important access to services and supports to vet-

erans on campus. The VetSuccess on Campus is on 94 campuses, but only one is located at a private sector institution.

With Public Law 112–249, our association was an early supporter of H.R. 4057, which is now the Public Law, and we remain supportive and look forward to working with the VA on implementation.

I look forward to your questions and thoughts. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Members of the subcommittee.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL DAKDUK APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you for your testimony and thank you for your service and thank you for the numerous trips you have made to help this committee do its job better.

Mr. Hubbard, you are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM HUBBARD

Mr. HUBBARD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I appreciate your kind words earlier.

Ranking Member Takano and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America to submit our testimony today. As the premier advocate for student veterans and higher education, it is our privilege to share our on-the-ground perspective with you this morning.

As quintessential nontraditional students, student veterans face a myriad of challenges that most of our peers in the classroom do not. Fortunately, this generation of veterans has proven that they are well equipped to succeed.

Take, for example, Abby Kinch. Abby served as a Chinese linguist in the Air Force for more than two years before leaving to have her first child. Today Abby attends classes part time in pursuit of her Ph.D. at Florida State University while caring for two children and having to work full time to support her family, a shining example of what student veterans can accomplish.

Since the release of our Million Records project, we have the data now, for the first time ever, proving that veterans of the post-9/11 generation are broadly succeeding in higher education.

SVA defines student veteran success as: student veterans making well-informed educational decisions, achieving personal academic goals without incurring student loan debt, and securing gainful employment that propels them forward in their career aspirations.

With veterans graduating across the country, we believe that the debt burden for some of them will ultimately be the single largest inhibiting factor to long-term success. There is a common misconception that veterans who go to school on the GI Bill have a free ticket, but we know that that is simply not true.

An earned benefit, the GI Bill is, not only not free, but for some it does not cover the full cost of their education. As the MRP results indicate, some student veterans take longer to complete their degree due to being nontraditional students, resulting in the need to take out additional loans. Others face abusive or misleading practices across sectors of education that can result in undue and unnecessary debt burdens.

We also remain concerned with some of the technical and career colleges that claim to offer credentials and certifications, whose exams students are not able to sit for at the end of their course of study due to a lack of proper accreditation. This results in the loss of valuable benefits and years of study.

Beyond the typical understanding of student success and higher education, it is important to recognize that due to the nature of the Post-9/11 conflicts, traditional definitions of time to completion may create a false narrative of student veterans. Many of these veterans face multiple deployments that interrupted their academic efforts or put their education on hold to complete a tour of service.

When the timeframe is extended out by a few years, these completion rates increase significantly. The story here is one of persistence as student veterans continue to work towards graduation, even if it takes longer than traditional students.

Using data from the last fiscal year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics illustrated the importance of higher education. For those who achieved an associate's degree, unemployment dropped to 5.4 percent and for those with a bachelor's degree or greater, that drops even further to four percent and below.

Being able to support student veterans so they pursue fields that positively impact the economy is a top priority for us.

In fiscal year 2014, the Department of Defense budget request was approximately $526 billion. Unfortunately, the billions of dollars invested is often lost when servicemembers exit the service and reenter civilian fields unable to cover the cost of a longer education track required for fields like STEM that would capitalize on previous advanced training.

We believe there may be opportunities to encourage these individuals to pursue those rigorous fields of study. Together with programs like VA's VSOC and VITAL, the community around each student veteran is critical to their success. The community acts as a web of support to create an environment where all veterans will succeed.

Schools are recognizing the unique role that this web plays in the achievement of student veterans and some have created veteran liaison networks. In these networks, schools like American University have established various points of contact in different offices to provide a holistic support system to student veterans. These touch points exist from financial aid offices to career offices and beyond.

Given the new data from our MRP, we see there is more work to be done for generations of student veterans to come like Abby. Our next phase will seek to build and expand upon the findings of the initial research by beginning to explore what institutional factors influence student veterans' persistence and degree attainment.

In collaboration with our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Student Clearinghouse, and the Institute of Veterans and Military Families, the end goal of this research will be to inform institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders of what works.

We thank the chairman, the ranking member, and the subcommittee Members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of student veterans and higher education. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILLIAM HUBBARD APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Hubbard.

Mr. Torres, you are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF RICARDO D. TORRES

Mr. TORRES. Good morning. The National Student Clearinghouse is a nonprofit organization which for the past 21 years has been focused on reducing administrative burdens on students and school administrators from Title 4 institutions that enroll 96 percent of our Nation's post secondary students.

The clearinghouse was founded to cost effectively address Title 4 student loan program compliance related inefficiencies. Participating institutions continuously provide access to enrollment and degree information on each of their students allowing the clearinghouse to offer student level coverage encompassing more than 144 million students and counting.

Most clearinghouse verification and research services are provided to colleges and universities at no charge. Think of us as a back office to the university registrar, financial aid office, and institutional researcher.

The clearinghouse performs over one billion secure and legally compliant transactions annually. The public/private partnership of the clearinghouse can be a model of a way to better serve our veterans while reducing the burdens on both governments and educational institutions.

We have recently issued reports that broaden perspectives and inform many of the pressing questions about student educational pathways and outcomes for states, school districts, institutions, and policymakers.

Through the Million Records project, we were able to help inform the Nation about the return in our Federal Government's investment of more than $34 billion for veterans' education benefits. For the first time for this collaboration among the VA, the SVA, and the clearinghouse comprehensive national statistics on veterans' educational pathways and outcomes were made available.

The data that we provided highlighted the nontraditional, multi-institutional journey of veterans' educational pathways. Given the influx of veterans expected into higher education over the next few years, it is imperative that we have the ability to successfully meet veteran program demands in a way that responds to the varied needs of these nontraditional students.

The first opportunity to further assist veterans is facilitating entry to colleges and universities. Among the many challenges returning veterans face upon their separation from service, understanding and managing the complex information about their education benefits and multiple aid programs available to them stands out.

They encounter administrative complexities around activities such as processing their certificate of eligibility, residency verifications, Kicker processing, previous credential accumulation, applicability of credentials to degrees, remaining benefit on transfers, and branch of service requests and inconsistencies.

These procedures individually all serve a purpose but could be greatly simplified while achieving the desired result, a timely, benefit-enabled enrollment of the veteran at the institution of their choice.

Our solution here would be twofold. First, employ electronic document ordering capability into the e-benefit portal, enabling a veteran to securely and privately send their benefit summary directly to their chosen institution's veterans' administrator and, second, in collaboration with ACE, the VA, and the DoD, allow the clearinghouse to be the repository of active-duty and veteran competencies, academic credits, and credential aggregation, enabling a one-stop data home to help facilitate efficient access to higher education and a job.

The next opportunity is supporting veterans' continuous enrollment towards their desired educational goals. Re-mobilizations and employment changes and family circumstances mean that a student veteran may take longer to graduate, making it harder for them to maintain momentum and focus on their goals.

We need further research like the MRP but expand it to determine which veteran support programs both qualitative and financial are working best to serve the needs of veterans today and which need to be improved or modified. Using the collaborative model of the MRP, such a project can be performed within one year.

Second, we need to transform the administrative support process to help both the veteran and the school quickly turn around critical information related to student progress tied to tuition assistance requests and timely aid disbursements.

Current pain points include repetitive end of semester completion status reports, interim add/drops, changing majors, determining entitlement balances, uploading of course catalogues, and constant reporting outside of normal cycles.

Leveraging our Title 4 experience, we can enable a significant improvement in reporting these requirements, thereby allowing school staff to spend more time serving students and allowing the veteran to be less focused on paperwork and more on class work and homework.

One available tool is our free open source application, Meteor, which provides a platform to aggregate student aid and debt both private and public. Meteor connected to the VA benefits' database could provide the veteran with an integrated view of all aid, debt, and benefits.

When it comes to improving veterans' success in pursuit of their educational goals, eliminating the administrative burdens that impede a timely benefit-enabled enrollment and data-informed support program and service provisioning that sync with chosen educational pathways would be a great start.

Thank you for this great invitation to comment, and I look forward to your questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF RICARDO D. TORRES APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Torres.

Mr. Ross, you are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF THOMAS W. ROSS

Mr. ROSS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to talk about defining and improving academic success for student veterans.

I am Tom Ross. I am president of the University of North Carolina System. We enroll more than 220,000 students on 16 university campuses and employ roughly 50,000 faculty and staff across the state. Approximately 8,000 of our current students use VA educational benefits to pay for some or all of their post secondary education.

I know that this subcommittee and Chairman Miller have a special interest in public institutions of higher education extending in-state tuition rates to certain veterans who may not qualify under current state law.

I want to be clear that the UNC System supports and has always supported extending in-state tuition to certain veterans and their families. We appreciate the leadership shown by Chairman Miller and this subcommittee on this issue.

While North Carolina is not currently among those states that offer this benefit, please know that we are aggressively with state legislators going to change this situation and we are optimistic that that will happen in our short session this year.

As the state's public university, we are working hard to enroll, educate, and graduate as many academically prepared servicemembers, veterans, and dependents as possible. Our motivation is simple. The success of student veterans and their families attending UNC institutions is vital to the success of the university and our state's future.

Since the Post-9/11 Bill became law in 2008, a series of new and sometimes confusing requirements and initiatives in support of student veterans have been introduced by the Congress, the President, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

UNC agrees with the spirit and intent behind each requirement or program. We hope, however, that federal agencies will continue to work together to greater coordinate the effort. We also ask to be included on the front end in any new federal initiatives as we believe we are well positioned to offer perspective and constructive feedback.

Because adequately serving student veterans requires leadership from the top, I have been working with our 16 university chancellors to implement the recommendations of UNC SERVES, a comprehensive report that offers specific action steps for improving UNC SERVES veterans and their families.

Our campuses have established military affairs committees and our system periodically convenes the UNC Military Affairs Council, a coordinating body, with representatives from every campus.

The UNC Board of Governors is equally engaged. In June of 2013, the board approved a military student success policy that will provide a comprehensive network of services for military affiliated students.

Under the policy, for example, any individual who has completed at least two years of cumulative active-duty service in the United

States Armed Forces will be considered a transfer student in the admission's process.

Last August, the board also established a special committee on military affairs with a particular focus on fostering success for university student veterans.

Further, UNC has implemented a uniform data collection procedure to ensure that we identify and track the academic progress of servicemembers, veterans, spouses, and other dependent family members.

Individual UNC campuses have a long history of working with military affiliated students and North Carolina's military installations and several have academic advisors located on post.

A number of campuses offer specialized programs of interest to veterans and active-duty military servicemembers with courses that are structured to accommodate student veterans' special needs.

One of our top priorities is centralizing information sharing and we used technology to create a virtual one-stop shop where veterans can find reliable and consistent information to answer their most common questions.

We believe that this one-stop shop approach works well for the university, for student veterans, and for the military, but the primary reason we have taken this approach is because we care deeply about the men and women in uniform as well as our veterans. We are committed to supporting student veterans because of North Carolina's longstanding pride in and support of the military.

The University of North Carolina can and should be a natural place of transition. They have earned the educational benefit and that benefit can be their ticket to a brighter future. It is our duty to make it happen.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my testimony, and I look forward to your questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF THOMAS W. ROSS APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you for your testimony.

Dr. Vito, you are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF DR. MELISSA VITO

Dr. VITO. Thank you.

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, Representative Kirkpatrick, and Members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to represent President Ann Weaver Hart today with testimony about what we are doing at the University of Arizona. Thank you.

I want to focus today on three primary areas, what the University of Arizona is doing to engage and support our student veterans and how this has evolved, how we measure success for our student veterans with graduating rates, satisfaction, and meeting their priority needs, and to explore further measures and make a few suggestions about what is still needed to be done to ensure that all student veterans across the United States are accomplishing their academic goals.

So first a few facts about the University of Arizona. We have over 40,000 students of which about over 1,300 are student veterans receiving GI benefits. They represent over three percent of our total population. Our reservist population is small with about 62 reservists.

Since 2009, our entering cohort of student veterans has doubled and we are continuing to see significant growth. Females account for about a third of our total student population and usage of our main campus vet center has increased 31 percent from fall of 2012 to 2013 with over 10,000 visits in one semester.

We did not know these numbers in 2008. And at that time, we embarked using our nationally recognized disability resource center as a vehicle to start to engage focused conversations around our returning disabled vets. We also held a national roundtable to try to bring the best minds to the table to talk about how to support our vets.

Six years later, we use a constellation of coordinated services to support our veterans and they include our vets' education and transition services center. We have one large facility in our student union. It is large in our center for student involvement and leadership and we have simply added one more center in our Arizona and health sciences area to support our vets in public health, nursing, and our other medical-related fields.

Our disability and resource center and adaptive athletics programs is a critical partner. The Southern Arizona VA Hospital, including providing on campus counseling and other support, other medical support critically supports our vets.

The SERV class, which I will talk a little bit about, focuses supportive campus, for credit classes for vets and is making a difference and our College of Law Clinic engages the University of Arizona law students to support other vets.

Our vet center is at the core of what we do. It is our physical environment that creates sort of a USO type environment for students to feel like they can meet other vets. The Student Veterans Association is a part of it and it is the anchor for our vets on campus.

That area has partnered with academic areas to create a video for faculty to help them better understand our vets. We work with admissions to make sure we are reaching out to our veterans from the moment that they apply or even think about becoming a University of Arizona student.

Career services has provided a particular focus with specific employers like USAA and GEICO and Enterprise who are focusing on hiring vets. And we are now working with academic partners and the community to develop a coordinated web of support for vets that they will be able to understand easily anywhere virtually and physically on campus.

Disability resource center has done a lot of research and we have learned a critical point about our vets, that they do not view themselves as disabled in the way that the rest of society does. They see themselves as needing to make adaptations to learn. And we are using this data to inform how we support our vets.

Southern Arizona VA health care I talked about. We have a lead psychologist, Dr. Marks, female counselors, nurse practitioners, and patient advocates who support our vets on campus and off.

Our SERV program, which was really developed by Dr. Marks and a colleague, is a focused for credit course and now becoming an array of courses that focuses on resiliency, leadership, is taught in cohorts, and so it builds on the comradery that vets need, helps them understand what is important to learning, including themselves, and how they integrate their experiences as military veterans into this environment. And it is making a difference. The students who complete the SERV program have retention rates of over 90 percent. So we are looking to try to expand that program.

As we look at measuring our success and growing our success, we know there is more to do. We survey regularly. We focus that to use that to meet our needs. And we are now adding a staff person in career services to make sure that our vets who leave the university and graduate in high numbers will be able to find jobs when they leave.

Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. MELISSA VITO APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you for your testimony, Dr. Vito.

And, again, thank the entire panel for your testimony.

I will now yield myself five minutes for questions.

The first question is for everyone on the panel. What are your thoughts on the VA comparison tool and why do you think its functions are valuable for veterans?

We will just start left to right if we can, Mr. Dakduk.

Mr. DAKDUK. Yes, Mr. Chairman. So I am a proponent of the VA comparison tool. I think it needs to be updated with certain information when it becomes available, including data on completion rates for military veterans specifically, and that needs to be included in there.

But by and large, I think it is a good system. I am glad it has been rolled out and I am supportive of it.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. Thank you.

And by the way, when each of you give your answers, if you would tell us what you think needs to be added or changed about the tool as well.

Mr. Hubbard.

Mr. HUBBARD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Similarly, we think the comparison tool is a fantastic opportunity for vets to see an aggregated view of information that otherwise would have been unavailable. It would have probably taken 20 Ph.D.s to pull all that information together otherwise. So have a single view of that is a huge, huge support to all student veterans.

As a first iteration, I think it is an excellent start. I think that there is fine tuning that could be done. Particularly there is parts of information that I think a lot of student veterans would like to see in that view, some of which would be supportive of their college search.

I think being able to reach out to particular universities to take the information that they are getting, that they are comparing

these schools and being able to reach out to vets on campus as another opportunity of informing themselves would be very important.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you.

Mr. Torres.

Mr. TORRES. Thank you.

We actually think that the tool is a breakthrough. It is a very important first step in the process. However, there are two areas that I think that we could really stand to improve.

First, it does not calculate an individual veteran's entitlement and track what part of the entitlement has been used. So it is an estimator, which is great, and it is informative. It really does not help the veteran shop easily for what school they need to be—how it would apply to different institutions that they are thinking about applying to.

The second limitation of the tool is that while it was designed to really limit the work burdens on schools, the graduation rates that are being used are really not relevant to what actually happens at the institutional level.

Over a third of students overall in the country transfer from one school to another and, therefore, the completion rates that are in the IPEDS numbers really do not bear any resemblance to what actually is happening on there.

I believe my colleagues to the left could probably comment on how they leverage information around transfers at their own institutions.

But I believe that is a second step in terms of trying to come up with a better way so that a veteran looking at their pathways, which is the other piece, right, because the completion rates include first-time, full-time students, which is not what the veteran is, right? They are older and you have to look at what are the odds of success for people who look like them and what is their odds and by types of institutions.

So I think further segmentation is required, but I think, again, it is a great start. But I think like everything else, I think we need to continue to improve where we are headed with the tool.

Mr. FLORES. Mr. Ross.

Mr. ROSS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me first say that I think transparency is incredibly important to all of our students and particularly to veterans. They deserve to get as much information as they can when they are making college decisions. And this tool, I think, is helpful in that regard.

I think Mr. Torres points out very importantly that the information that is in there needs to be accurate. And as I said in my testimony, under our new policies, if you have had two years in the military, you will come to us as a transfer student.

The military will be the transferring institution, that is the way we will count it, as a way to enable students a clear pathway into our institutions. If you do that, their data does not count because they are transfer students.

And so I think we have got to be sure the data is right. You know, we have a dashboard that we have recently put up that tracks all sorts of metrics and information on success, student suc-

cess, and we want to be sure what we put there is the most accurate information possible.

So, you know, I applaud the tool. I think it is a helpful step. It can be improved, and we are happy to work with you to do that.

Mr. FLORES. Dr. Vito.

Dr. VITO. Thank you.

In my 27 seconds, I would like to support the comments of Mr. Torres and Mr. Ross big time. I think it is a great first step and I think focusing on the data and the multiple pathways and then making it easy for vets to be able to compare different institutions apples to apples in ways that will be clear and easy.

I think that we sometimes forget how easy it is to do things like that in other settings, and we need to use that same model here. Thank you.

Mr. FLORES. Well, thank each of you for your testimony.

And I want to say that some of the recommendations we saw in your verbal and your written testimony were outstanding, and thank you for that.

Thank you for the participation in the Million Records project. That was also very helpful, provides great data.

I now recognize the ranking member, Mr. Takano, for five minutes for his questions.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ross, I want to congratulate the University of North Carolina and the intention to comply with the role of providing veterans with in-state tuition for the University of North Carolina.

Dr. Vito, is some effort going on in Arizona?

Dr. VITO. Yes. Actually, I was just writing a note to myself that we do virtually the same thing.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. Very good. Thank you.

Dr. VITO. You bet.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Dakduk, in line with the spirit of what has passed through our committee and the bill that we passed through the House to require that in-state tuition be offered to veterans in respective states at state universities, are your members lowering tuition for veterans and has your association urged that your members do that?

Mr. DAKDUK. Absolutely. I think you can look at our best practices guide that I am happy to share with you, Congressman Takano, and the rest of the Members of the subcommittee.

One of the things you will find at private sector institutions is how many of them buy into the Yellow Ribbon program and how many of them buy into the Yellow Ribbon program at the full unlimited rate for the unlimited number of student veterans that want to attend that.

Mr. TAKANO. But have they lowered tuition for veterans commensurate with what the public universities are doing?

Mr. DAKDUK. I am happy to point you to a number of our member institutions——

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. I would be interested——

Mr. DAKDUK [continuing]. Where veterans can go full time at virtually a zero rate unless they choose to pull out Title 4 funds.

Mr. TAKANO. Well, I have not heard that you said they are actually lowering the rate, but I would be interested in that informa-

tion. I am not convinced that the for profit sector is really serving our veterans.

Can you tell me the credits that veterans earn, are they generally transferable to regionally accredited schools?

Mr. DAKDUK. That is a systemic problem throughout all of higher education, the transferability of military credits and experience. And it is an issue that we have been looking at.

Mr. TAKANO. But the credits that veterans earn at your member schools which are generally nationally accredited, to my understanding, but my understanding is that these credits are not transferable to universities such as the University of North Carolina who are regionally accredited. Is that true?

Mr. DAKDUK. It depends. But I would also offer this. We might want to talk to the institutions on why they are not receiving those credits or accepting them. I think that is one of the big issues I have called for while I am here at APSCU and when I was at Student Veterans of America.

Mr. TAKANO. But we also have the question of why aren't your members seeking regional or obtaining regional accreditation; do we not?

Mr. DAKDUK. Well, it is different. It is different for different types of programs and different types of institutions. Remember nationally accredited and regional accreditation is recognized by the Department of Education and this Administration.

Mr. TAKANO. Well, that is another separate issue. But the fact remains that the credits are not fungible and many students will enroll in these programs and do not know that they cannot transfer the credits they earn at your member institutions to the state universities and university systems, correct?

Mr. DAKDUK. Our association and our member institutions are committed to consumer education and we want to make sure that we give this information to student veterans, student servicemembers, and their families to make sure they make the best choice when they choose an institution and understand transferability of military credits.

Mr. TAKANO. Well, thank you. Thank you.

Mr. Hubbard, to what extent did your research project look at the success of certificate and degree programs actually leading to employment?

Mr. HUBBARD. Thank you, Congressman Takano, for the question.

We did look at that very specifically. It was not differentiated from any of the other degrees. Our research looked at everything from certificates all the way up through Ph.D.s and everything in between.

Mr. TAKANO. We have introduced legislation to require schools to disaggregate and disseminate data on student veterans.

Do you think it would be helpful to VSOs like SVA, the VA, prospective students for this disaggregation and dissemination?

Mr. HUBBARD. Without question.

Mr. TAKANO. Great. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick, you are recognized for five minutes for questions.

Mrs. KIRKPATRICK. Thank you, Chairman, for having this important hearing.

Thank you, Ranking Member Takano.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for your testimony today and extend a special thanks to President Ann Hart Weaver at the University of Arizona and to you, Dr. Vito, for your testimony and the great work you are doing for our veterans.

I am extremely proud to say that my alma mater, the University of Arizona, has demonstrated a strong commitment to helping its student veterans achieve success. And I am particularly proud of the university's number one ranked disability resource center and the model it has developed for integrating disabled student veterans into the campus community.

I would also like to thank Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona where I live for submitting a statement for this hearing today. Northern Arizona University is nationally recognized as a leader in higher education services and support for its student veterans.

We know that a veteran's first year is the most critical for a successful transition from military to student life, and Northern Arizona University is leading the way by introducing an innovative transition program this fall that is tailored to the needs of its student veterans.

Great ideas come from Arizona and I believe this committee has already learned a great deal from our University of Arizona witness and from the Northern Arizona statement for the record.

I look forward to learning more about what University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University are doing and hoping we can use their best practices to ensure that our student veterans are equipped for success across the country.

And I do not have any questions. I thank you again for your great testimony, and I yield back.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Congresswoman Kirkpatrick.

Ms. Brownley, you are recognized for five minutes.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I wanted to just follow-up on Ranking Member Takano's questioning around the in-state tuition issue. And I heard several of you testify about certain veterans getting in-state tuition and I just wanted to get a further clarification on what that means exactly.

Mr. ROSS. We are in the process now of working with our legislature to determine exactly who would qualify and who would not. What we have asked them to consider is those veterans that have separated in our state and done so within a certain period of time.

Obviously there is a cost to the state for the differential, and so we are encouraging them to make this as broad as possible, understanding the fiscal cost of it and the effect on our budget.

But we think the return for the state in the long term makes this a good investment, and the reason we feel that way is we have every indication from employers that veterans that come out of our institutions make some of their best employees. They have great work ethics. They are disciplined. They come with a can-do atti-

tude. And so we believe that our employers will benefit from these individuals.

We have a history in North Carolina of being able to attract some of the best and brightest from around the country because we have some great educational institutions public and private, and many of them stay in our state, which helps increase our educational attainment, which we believe we are going to need to do to meet the workforce demands of the future.

So attracting veterans to our institutions, keeping them in our state is a good investment, we believe, for North Carolina. And so we are working with our legislature to iron out those particular details, but we believe they are very receptive to the idea of doing as much as they possibly can for as many veterans as possible.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Dr. Vito.

Dr. VITO. And in Arizona, we are similar actually to what Mr. Ross had stated. We do ask that our veterans demonstrate an Arizona driver's license, in-state lease, and some evidence of actually being in Arizona outside of service, but those vets are able to receive in-state tuition.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you.

Mr. Hubbard, in terms of your good work, I will say, and in terms of collecting information on the Million Records project, did you look at all or evaluate the VRAP program and, you know, to determine, to look at that to see if it is successful, how it is working at all?

Mr. HUBBARD. So for our first cut at the Million Records project, we did not. This research was to understand a baseline of how veterans are faring in higher education. It was just simply too difficult to capture all of that data and have an accurate clean methodology.

So that is something that we have looked at, including further study, and we have recommended to this committee previously to encourage further data. There has been a lot of great legislation that Representative Takano and also the chairman have put out there and we encourage more of that. I think in future studies, that will be something we will be looking at.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you.

And I have another minute here. I wanted to give a shout out to a university in my district, California State University at Channel Islands. They have a wonderful program for veterans and I think part of the success of the program is they have sort of a buddy system or kind of a peer-to-peer network, so veterans really partnering with other veterans to make sure that they are successful in school.

And, Dr. Vito, you talked about a coordinated web of support that you are building at your university. And I am just wondering, it seems as though at least anecdotally there are better outcomes. The retention rate is better when programs like this exist within an educational institution and was wondering if you could make a comment.

Dr. VITO. Absolutely true. Thank you for your question, Congresswoman.

What we find and that is our student vet center acts as that peer-to-peer place and vets do work with each other. They connect

with each other. We hire vets. It is staffed by vets who are there on student work study and supporting other vets.

Part of the power of our SERV program, and those are our courses for credit and actually we are developing a resiliency minor as an outgrowth of this, is that students go into those courses as part of a cohort to build comradery, to have each other, and to process that.

So we see the power of working together as critically important. In the military, that is such a part of the experience and then you come to a large campus and the sense of isolation and culture clash is so overwhelming that making sure that intentionally we create those opportunities is fundamental to the success of our vets.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you very much.

Dr. VITO. Thank you.

Ms. BROWNLEY. And, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. FLORES. Congresswoman Brownley, thank you.

And, Ms. Titus, you are recognized for five minutes for questions.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate what you are doing on your two campuses to support veterans. I would like to focus a little more specifically on the STEM fields. I hear often from businesses that we lack people in this country trained in the STEM fields, and I think that veterans are really in position to take up that slack because many of them have gotten training while in service in medical and technical fields.

But these degrees often require more money because of lab courses and things and often take longer because there are more requirements.

I have got a bill that I am working on that would set up kind of a bridge program for veterans that would help through the GI Bill make up in those two areas.

I wondered if you all would comment on it from the standpoint of institutions and maybe you from the standpoint of a student.

Mr. ROSS. Thank you. Yes, ma'am.

You know, I think that you are exactly right, that the STEM fields are one that we are all concerned about. And I would say just a couple things.

One is if you look at the data for our veteran students, it is more heavily weighted, frankly, to STEM fields, particularly in engineering because of some of their prior training and experience.

You know, I can tell you quickly one story about a young man who is graduating this week from Western Carolina University who entered NC State, spent two years, volunteered, became a medic, was deployed to Iraq, came back from Iraq as a medic, and entered Western Carolina because of their emergency medical program. He got there and got interested in biology and became a biology major and is graduating this spring, coming to Washington for a very highly selective post doc at the National Institute of Health.

So veterans can find their way and be incredibly successful in the STEM fields, but it does require some extra effort. And so anything the Congress can do to assist that, I think, would pay dividends for the country and for certainly the veterans.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Ms. VITO. Thank you, Congresswoman. It is a great question.

At the University of Arizona, we see our top three majors as pre business, actually applied science, and international service. And so science is our front and center and they are front and center at the University of Arizona.

I think that we have some specific programs that target student deficiencies around math to try to help students bridge in to be successful and the type of work that you have described that would acknowledge maybe a lengthened academic path without financial penalties could be really important to encouraging students getting into STEM.

I know the report that was done with the clearinghouse and Student Veterans Association also made a couple of recommendations about how we might grow veterans' participation in STEM. And so I think that we are fully supportive, but academic preparation to succeed in the STEM fields is really important and making sure that that is built in to whatever we do, I think, would be a critical component.

Ms. TITUS. Do you look at any equivalency between certain college credits and experience in the military so that you do not have to retake a course that you have already been doing in the field?

Ms. VITO. At University of Arizona, our branch campus University of Arizona South is able to accept fully all credit earned through the military. University of Arizona has a more deliberate analysis that is done about what transfers and what does not transfer.

And so I would acknowledge that it may not be a perfect process and your question raises a larger national discussion.

Mr. ROSS. It does, and we are certainly involved in that discussion and looking hard at prior learning and how it can be transferred to credit. I mean, if you have got somebody coming back from Iraq and they know how to speak Urdu, maybe we should be giving them credit for it.

But we have developed a program that we are near kicking off which we think is exciting that allows medics to enter into a physician's assistant program at our medical school. And we are excited that that will enable them to use their prior experiences and what they have learned in the military and move through that program more quickly.

So that is the kind of thing we need to think more about, and I think with encouragement, we certainly want to do that.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Mr. Hubbard.

Mr. HUBBARD. I think you make an excellence point, Congresswoman. As the Department of Defense invests billions of dollars in STEM fields, STEM related MOSes, technical fields that could be taken advantage of as they exit the military, that investment is completely lost, it evaporates as individuals exit the service and then go on to, say, another major that is unrelated.

Taking advantage of that investment and reinvesting it in the economy by encouraging individuals to go into the STEM fields is absolutely a top priority for Student Veterans of America.

I think as we look at this, we have seen across the board many students would pursue those degrees. They simply cannot afford to and that is a major problem for a lot of these student vets.

Ms. TITUS. Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Ms. Titus.

A couple of closing comments before we excuse the panel and move on to the next panel.

Mr. Ross, I was pleased to learn that your governor on Tuesday of this week has announced his support for in-state tuition in North Carolina and so we hope that you and the governor are successful with your General Assembly.

Also, there was some dialogue before about for profit schools and I would note that there is no lack of regulation of the education industry, and that is all the education, public, private, and for profit.

The VA, the Consumer Federal Protection Bureau, the Federal Trade Commission, U.S. Department of Education, State Attorneys General, State licensing agencies, State departments of education, State approving agencies, and accrediting associations all have a responsibility to monitor all sections of higher education.

If there is a systemic problem, which I do not believe there is, the only conclusion I can draw is that multiple government agencies at all levels have failed to monitor the education industry and enforce the statutes and regulations now in place.

With that, we will conclude the participation of this panel. Mr. Dakduk and Mr. Hubbard, thank you for your service, thank all of you for your support of our Nation's veterans, one of our most valuable resources, and thank you in particular for the innovative ideas that you shared with us today. You are now excused.

On our second panel, we welcome back a frequent flyer to this subcommittee. Mr. Curtis L. Coy is the deputy under secretary for Economic Opportunity at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Thank you for joining us again, Mr. Coy. You are now recognized for five minutes whenever you get settled in.

STATEMENT OF CURTIS L. COY

Mr. COY. Well, good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano, and other Members of the subcommittee.

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs' efforts to help veterans achieve success in their academic and educational endeavors.

VA is committed to ensuring that our Nation's veterans, servicemembers, reservists, and qualifying dependents receiving VA education benefits have access to high-quality educational opportunities that will enhance their ability to meet their academic and career objectives.

VA's VetSuccess on Campus program provides veteran students seamless access to VA benefits and services and supports their successful integration on college and university campuses.

In fiscal year 2013, we grew the program from 32 campuses to 94 with a total of 79 vocational rehabilitation counselors across the country.

I visited our VSOC site at Florida State University and Tallahassee Community College just last week. I was impressed with both administrations and particularly the president's direct involvement with respect to their veteran programs.

We are continuing our efforts to enhance support to veterans on campus across a wide range of benefits and services. VSOC coun-

selors also collaborate with VA medical centers and campus counseling centers to ensure that students are aware of mental health services and receive referrals as necessary to support their needs.

Recently we developed a pilot program with the Corporation of National and Community Service for AmeriCorps' volunteers at eight of our VSOC campuses.

Public Law 112–249 was enacted in January 2013. It enhances and complements the provisions of the executive order, requires VA to develop a comprehensive policy to improve outreach and transparency to veterans and servicemembers. We have made significant progress in implementing both the law and the executive order.

Some of those highlights include we have partnered with Department of Education, Defense, Consumer Protection Finance Bureau, Federal Trade Commission, Department of Justice, and the National Association of State Approving Agencies.

We submitted a report to Congress in April of 2013 as required by the law. Currently piloting an online assessment tool called CareerScope. We launched a GI Bill comparison tool in February to help veterans become informed post secondary education consumers. As of yesterday, over 106,000 unique visitors have used the tool and looked at 250,000 different schools.

We launched the GI feedback system which centralized online reporting for veterans, servicemembers, and reservists to report negative experiences with educational institutions. We launched that the end of January of this year. As of this past Monday, there have been over 18,000 who have visited the site, 4,500 have logged into the system, and 1,400 have submitted complaints or feedback.

In March, we began transmitting those complaints to FTC's consumer sentinel database where they are accessible by law enforcement agencies.

We have completed several other activities, for example, recently updating the school certifying official handbook, published student outcome measure definitions on education's college navigator, registered the GI Bill trademark, and began enforcing the legal terms of that trademark.

We also established an agreement with SVA to create the new education completion database for Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill programs.

VA also established agreement with the National Student Clearinghouse to match VA records and provide graduation and program completion.

In March, as you know, this year, SVA released their Million Records project report. The results of the study show that continued research on veteran graduation rates is imperative.

As of this summer, we will mark the fifth anniversary of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, an important milestone certainly, but we believe that the success of the program is more longitudinal.

Eligible veterans have 15 years to use their richly earned benefits. We hope to have some preliminary success outcomes late this summer or early fall. We have some already on persistence data.

VA has worked with key stakeholders to ensure veterans are utilizing their education benefits efficiently and effectively. We will continue our efforts to ensure that veterans are informed con-

sumers and schools meet their obligations in providing education and training to this Nation's next greatest generation.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano, and Members, we are rowing hard. This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or other Members of the subcommittee may have.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF CURTIS L. COY APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Mr. Coy, thank you for your testimony. Thank you for your service to our Nation's veterans.

And I will recognize myself for five minutes for questions.

Share with us what feedback you have received so far about CareerScope and when you are doing that, tell me about what students are saying about whether it is helpful in finding a school and then let's walk forward and tell me what your plans are for future functionality and tweaks and improvements and so forth.

Mr. COY. Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman. I just want to be clear. Are you talking the CareerScope tool or the comparison tool?

Mr. FLORES. CareerScope tool.

Mr. COY. The CareerScope tool. The CareerScope tool is an assessment device for students or for anybody to go in and use it. We have had about 10,000 people use it. It is also used by our Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment counselors across the country as well.

The feedback we have received so far has been good. It is a useful tool. It certainly does not solve all things, but it gives that individual a direction to head as they go forward in their school selection.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. And can you go into some of the funding issues that you ran into in the development of the CareerScope tool, the complaint system, and the comparison tool, all three of the systems that you talked about in your testimony.

Mr. COY. Just to understand, what issues we had with funding?

Mr. FLORES. Yes, sir.

Mr. COY. Well, these were all tools that were as a result of the Public Law, the President's executive order, and initiatives that we were doing within VA as well.

With respect to the complaint tool or feedback tool, we leverage what the Department of Defense did. We took their system. We modified with the contractor that developed their tool and we modified it for the VA. So it was a minimal expense, if you will, for that.

For the comparison tool, it was sort of an in-house effort and we strung that together with, my terms, duct tape and chicken wire and put it together. It is a fantastic success story. We took data from over 23 disparate sites and it is now at one place.

As far as the CareerScope tool, that is a commercial off-the-shelf item. What we did, our investment in that, was put it on the site, pay the licensing fees, and actually doing the market survey with respect to that.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. And by the way, thanks for your help with the Million Records project. Appreciate the VA's involvement with that.

Mr. COY. Yes, sir.

Mr. FLORES. How does the VA define success and what are the barriers that you think are still in place when it comes to veterans accessing a quality education and the assistance they need while pursuing their degrees?

Mr. COY. We are looking at a lot of different success factors as we go forward. Certainly defining success is a challenge as you might imagine.

You have heard testimony earlier here today as well as prior testimony that veterans are nontraditional students. And so what we find in nontraditional students is many of them start full time, then they go part time, then they stop and say when the kids get older, you know, I will go back to school. And so defining what that success is is hard.

We are doing a number of different things. We currently have seven measures that we hope to be rolling out in the next several months. One is retention rate. That measures the student attendance at the same institution over time.

There is persistence rate and what that does is it measures veteran students full time and part time across the board. And I have some preliminary numbers that are interesting.

We also are measuring the transfer rate. We are measuring graduation rates, certificate completion, the number of years to complete a degree or certificate, and the number of institutions veterans attend to complete their degree or certificate.

As you heard this morning, the current IPEDS graduation rate tool is over a six-year time frame, but it does not allow for any transfer in or out. So that is certainly a challenge because no matter what we do, it is going to want to be compared to one or another.

Interestingly as I go out and talk to many folks, I suggest to people that there were 16 million veterans who served in World War II. Eight million of them went to school on the GI Bill and, as we all know, that spawned the greatest generation.

But when you ask what the graduation rate was, how many certificate completions, and any of those kinds of things, there has never been any of that sort of information because it is hard. And so defining the success outcomes, we are going to put this on the table, the Million Records project, put a stick in the ground. We are also doing similar type things.

The other issue or concern that makes it a little bit hard is that schools input this data. So the data sometimes is only as good as the information that we get out.

Interestingly, though, is as we go forward with the comparison tool and we start publishing some of that data on there, what we will find is schools and institutions sort of center themselves.

For example, we went out before we launched the tool and we sent out all this information and said would you validate this, tell us. There were 400 schools within a week that said, no, we want to sign up for the Principles of Excellence as well. We did not know anything about it.

So publishing those things, I think, will be a great opportunity for schools to center themselves.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Coy.

And I am sorry to my colleagues for going over. I will give you all an extra minute and 15 seconds each if you would like it.

So I now recognize the ranking member, Mr. Takano, for six minutes and 15 seconds.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Coy, thank you to the VA for creating these online tools for our veterans.

With regard to the comparison tool, do you think that knowledge about default rates, student loan default rates would be relevant for a prospective student to be able to make a judgment about the potential for success at a particular institution?

Mr. COY. Yes, sir, I do, and it is on the comparison tool.

Mr. TAKANO. Oh, so the comparison tool does make clear to the veteran what percentage or just what the default rates are at a particular institution?

Mr. COY. Yes, sir, it does. But I just want to make sure that I clarify that. That is for the school itself. It is not veteran specific. So when we say the default rate is X, it is for all the school, not just veterans.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. Is there——

Mr. COY. It is not veteran specific.

Mr. TAKANO. Is there a possibility of being able to make that comparison possible in the future?

Mr. COY. Anything is possible, sir. The issue is that we get that loan default rate from the Department of Education and so we would essentially almost have to set up a whole new cohort for them to help us track that.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. Thank you for letting me know that.

Are prospective students able to figure out whether the institution is regionally or nationally accredited?

Mr. COY. That is not currently on the tool. However, comma, we do for each school that is looked up have a link to the Department of Education's college navigator. And if you were to click on that link and go into this huge pile of information that is on college navigator, you would be able to find that.

Mr. TAKANO. Do you think making it very user friendly for the student to be able—I mean, I think that is an important consumer information to make that user friendly. Is that a goal of yours to make it more clear and easy for the student to discern whether the institution that they are looking at is nationally or regionally accredited?

Mr. COY. The short answer is, yes, sir, I do. The longer answer, if I may, is the issue of whether it is regionally or nationally accredited, and I think I understand why, but to making sure that the veteran understands what that means.

Mr. TAKANO. Yes.

Mr. COY. That is the bigger issue. So rather than just tell somebody this is a regional or national accredited institution, giving them the perspective on what that means, that is a little bit of a bigger challenge.

Mr. TAKANO. But you view it as an important piece of consumer information that the student should understand?

Mr. COY. I would suggest, sir, that probably, and this is my opinion and the opinion that we found in a number of different in-

stances, and that is on the comparison tool, we list whether that school is a private university, a for profit university, or a public university. So it labels that and I think that in some way touches on the accreditation issue.

Mr. TAKANO. In some way, but many students may not understand which institutions are regionally or nationally accredited and what that might mean in terms of the fungibility of those credits.

Let's switch over to the complaint tool that you have. What are the most common complaints you have heard that you have received through the system so far?

Mr. COY. The top issues that we have—and if you were to look at the tool, there are buttons that you can push, and then you go into sort of a verbal explanation—the top three buttons that we have received back is financial issues, quality of education, and then there is a button for other and that comes in number three.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. How do you ensure that the system is not being flooded with false complaints?

Mr. COY. We do not other than we would know. And the reason we know is the goodness of the tool is that the front end of it is automated, in other words, that you can go in and—but the back end, meaning when somebody hits submit, every single one of those complaints is reviewed by our staff.

And the decision and determination is made that probably about half of the, quote, complaints are on benefits issues that VA controls. For example, my housing allowance check is late or why did it go from $10.00 to $20.00 or vice versa. And we typically resolve those issues up front.

The other issues that come in are sent directly to the school and the school has 90 days to complete and respond back to us. And so we have not seen, if you will, the system being flooded with false complaints. We have seen there have been some complaints that has driven to direct about 25 risk-based reviews of schools that we have gotten complaints on.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you.

My time has gone over. I yield back.

Mr. COY. Yes, sir.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

Ms. Brownley, you are recognized for questions.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. Coy.

You were talking in your testimony about the challenges of defining success and you talked about the seven measures, I think, that you are going to roll out.

So when is this rollout going to occur?

Mr. COY. We expect these measures to be available sometime in the academic year 2015 which begins in August of this year and ends 31 July of next year. So trying to give us as much wiggle room as possible, we said we are going to have these things out.

I am personally hoping that we will begin having some of the initial results late summer, early fall. We already have some of those results that are interesting, for example, persistence rates.

Ms. BROWNLEY. So in all of these areas, you will be collecting data and input across the board for all veterans who are enrolled in school?

Mr. COY. Yes, ma'am. And much of that data schools are reporting now and now it is a matter of getting the information and sort of making sure that we are reporting it accurately.

Ms. BROWNLEY. And in terms of the measurements, did you ever consider an additional measure which is to say did the veteran find employment and gainfully employed and if the veteran majored in let's say business administration, were they able to go and find a job in the field of their interest?

Mr. COY. Yes, ma'am, we have considered that. We are looking at that. We have included a question similar to that in our voice of the veteran survey. That is being mailed out to about 26,000 veterans as we speak. It is a survey that is being done by J.D. Power and we hope to have those results in the fall of this year as well.

Clearly a challenge, but we have talked with a few other government agencies in terms of being able to get that information with respect to employment and be able to do that. Most of the, if you will, education versus employment would initially come in terms of, if you will, dollars. In other words, I make $10.00 a year now and after your degree or your training or your certificate completion, how much do you make the following year, if you will.

Ms. BROWNLEY. And so these measurements and the collection of data then, you know, how will you utilize that as you get the results to sort of be hopefully in a model of continuous improvement and a model of always being focused on improving success?

Mr. COY. The challenge of this data is that you almost have to look at it by year and then you look at it by various aspects. So, for example, we have persistence data and we break it down into essentially three categories.

In other words, when you start in a certain year, how many started full time and then came back the next year full time, the next year full time, the next year full time. Then how many started part time, came back part time, came back part time. Then how many came back—started either way, full time, part time, and stayed going to school.

Then you have that by year. We started the Post-9/11 GI Bill in August of 2009. So now we are getting data for 2009, 2010, and then we have, if you will, the next year which is 2010 and their next four years.

And the challenge, as I stated in my oral statement, was we have to be looking at this over the course of 15 years because that is what a veteran has.

In addition to that persistence data, you can also begin slicing it as how many of them are going after a bachelor's degree, an associate's degree, a certificate, and so the list goes on.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you.

And I will yield back.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Ms. Brownley.

Ms. Titus, you are recognized for five minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Just following up on Ms. Brownley's comments, I appreciate that you all are doing this massive study and it is over a 20-year period. I understood it, but I hope we do not wait until the 20 years is up when you get all the data to come up with some suggestions and some improvements because that often tends to be the case.

Also, sometimes the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing and we have different programs and different departments or agencies who might be working on similar kinds of efforts.

I have a bill with Representative Cook to do a similar kind of study of the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service, so I know they have an effort too.

I wonder if you could talk about how you all coordinate or if you see any ability for us to use the results from the two studies to just provide a better, more effective way for our veterans to transition into the workplace.

Mr. COY. Thank you, Congresswoman. That is a great question.

And we work with our colleagues at Department of Labor, VETS often. In fact, I was over at the Labor building just last week, I believe, and I commented I should just get a badge because I am over there.

We started our collaboration, our significant collaboration or at least I did with the VRAP program. As you know, we partnered with the Department of Labor on that program. We work with the Department of Labor and the VETS program a lot.

When we start talking about our employment projects and programs that we are doing, as you know, we recently launched a new employment center on e-benefits, we worked with the Department of Labor across the board to develop that employment center.

We very much coexist with them. They have over 2,500 American job centers with well over 2,500 DVOPs and LVERs in those American job centers. We believe that that is a wonderful tool for veterans to be able to leverage and use when they start looking at their employment goals as well.

So there is really I do not think any project that we have undertaken in the last three years that has not involved our colleagues at the Department of Labor.

Ms. TITUS. Well, that is good to know. And I hope that we can move forward with the study of their program like the one that you are doing so we can be sure that it is operating most effectively. But Mr. Cook and I will be pursuing that and I hope you will help us with that.

Also, now, just a more specific question about Las Vegas which is the area I represent. There is a school there right next to the airport that provides technical training for students who are interested in working in the aviation field. This is part of chain of schools around the country.

But because of the rules you have, they have to be in existence for two years before anybody can qualify to receive veterans' benefits to help them pay to go to school there despite the fact that this company has schools operating in other places around.

Is there not any way to have some kind of flexibility when it comes to evaluating schools where students can get the GI Bill because their colleagues in another state where the school is operating are able to do that?

Mr. COY. The short answer is we would be happy to look at that, you know, on an individual basis. And I will take that back and we will get back to your staff.

Generally to be approved for GI Bill benefits, if you will, there are two key rules to be followed. One is the two-year rule. In other words, the school has to be in operation for at least two years.

Ms. TITUS. Yes.

Mr. COY. These are both in statute, by the way. They are not policy decisions by the VA.

And the other is the 85/15 rule which means that at least 15 percent of the students that are going to that course are nonveterans. Both of these statutes were developed so schools would not pop up for veterans only and abuse the GI Bill in some way, shape, or form——

Ms. TITUS. I appreciate that.

Mr. COY [continuing]. And so on and so forth.

Ms. TITUS. Yes.

Mr. COY. We will certainly look at your or that individual aviation school. Those approvals are handled by the State approving agencies, so there is sort of a twofer there. One is the statute that I just mentioned.

Ms. TITUS. Yes.

Mr. COY. The other piece is oftentimes there are state requirements as well which is why we have the State approving agencies in each state. But we will be happy to look at that, Congresswoman.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I appreciate your help.

Mr. COY. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. TITUS. I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Ms. Titus.

Thank you, Mr. Coy. You are now excused.

I thank everyone in the audience for your attendance today and for the frank discussion that we have had regarding educational opportunities for our veterans and how to improve success for our student veterans.

Finally, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have five legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to include any extraneous material in the record of today's hearing. Hearing no objection, so ordered.

If there is nothing further, this hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:25 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL DAKDUK

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the subcommittee, I am writing on behalf of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU), our member institutions, their faculty and the nearly four million students who attend private sector institutions. We are grateful for the invitation to offer our views on the importance of successful educational outcomes for our returning servicemembers and veterans, the VetSuccess program, and the implementation of the "Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012" (P.L. 112–249).

Since 2009, over one million veterans have used Post-9/11 GI benefits to pay for their educations. Private sector colleges and universities have educated more than 325,000. Private sector institutions continue to grow as the education choice for veterans because our schools offer focused academic delivery and flexible schedules, which veterans favor.

We understand the challenges that arise when our military men and women transition back to civilian life and enter into postsecondary education. Our military and veteran students are not the fresh-out-of-high school, first-time, full-time student living on campus and attending college thanks to the generosity of family. Our military and veteran students are like many of our new traditional students—working, with a spouse and children and paying for their education with money they have earned. Given the student profile of veterans enrolled in higher education today, many are not captured in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Database Systems (IPEDS), which is narrowed in scope in tracking first-time, full-time students. However, new partnerships and initiatives have been introduced to better understand the success of veterans in higher education.

Measuring Student Veteran Success

Most recently, Student Veterans of America (SVA) in partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the results of their Million Records Project. During my tenure at SVA as executive director, I was responsible for brokering this partnership leaving me with an appreciation for the details captured in the report and the gaps in research on student veteran outcomes. In regards to the Million Records Project, I found the following items of interest:

- The overall completion rate was approximately 52%, above nontraditional peers.
- Existing research on post-WWII and Vietnam veterans indicate that the vast majority of veterans complete their postsecondary programs; post-Vietnam-era veterans have GPA's greater than or equal to their peers.
- Recent research (2010) conducted by the VA showed that 63% of veterans self-reported as completing their postsecondary training. Over half of the post-9/11-era respondents said they completed as well.
- While the private nonprofits had the highest completion rates (64%), approximately 22% later completed at a public or proprietary institution.
- The completion rate for the private sector was approximately 45%.
- Private sector institutions had higher proportions of veterans completing degrees faster. [1]

Overall, the report suggests that student veterans are succeeding at levels comparable to, if not greater than, their peers. This refutes previous notions that student veterans drop out in high numbers.

Additionally, the Million Records Project provides the framework for future research and data collection efforts on military veterans pursuing postsecondary education. Moving forward, we expect that new data will be available for Congress and the public to analyze given the President's recent issuance of Executive Order 13607, or Principles of Excellence. Section 3(c) of the order states:

> *"The Secretaries of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Education shall develop a comprehensive strategy for developing service member and veteran student outcome measures that are comparable, to the maximum extent practicable, across Federal military and veterans educational benefit programs, including, but not limited to, the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Tuition Assistance Program. To the extent practicable, the student outcome measures should rely on existing administrative data to minimize the reporting burden on institutions participating in these benefit programs. The student outcome measures should permit comparisons across Federal educational programs and across institutions and types of institutions. The Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs, shall also collect from educational institutions, as part of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and other data collection systems, information on the amount of funding received pursuant to the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Tuition Assistance Program. The Secretary of Education shall make this information publicly available on the College Navigator Website."* [2]

We understand that the process for collecting outcomes data on student veterans is already underway. We suggest a concept similar to the Million Records Project be further explored as a compliment to the IPEDS system. Congress, though, should

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[1] Cate, C.A. (2014). Million Records Project: Research from Student Veterans of America. Student Veterans of America, Washington, DC.

[2] The White House Office of the Press Secretary. Executive Order—Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members, The White House, Washington D.C., accessed April 24, 2014, *http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/27/executive-order-establishing-principles-excellence-educational-instituti*

be keenly aware of the limitations of IPEDS in its current state. As of today, IPEDS does not disaggregate data based on military or veteran enrollment.

We have provided recommendations for tracking student outcomes in our proposal for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). Our proposal offers thoughts around five key areas: retention and progression rates; completion and return on investment; employment of graduates; earnings and/or salary gains; and graduate satisfaction. We believe the Common College Completion Metrics as proposed by the National Governor's Association Chair's Initiative provides a good foundation for advancing dialogue around student outcomes and success metrics.[3] Conceptually, this model may be applied to veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other Title 38 programs.

At a minimum, though, we should appreciate the unique life experiences of veterans and servicemembers. They differ drastically from the 18 year old, first-time, full-time college student. Current federal databases are lacking when it comes to tracking student veteran success. They should be updated, or new proposals should be explored, to fully capture the success of new learners that take a different and sometimes longer path to completion.

Vetsuccess on Campus

Since the initiative launched in 2009, the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program has expanded to 94 sites. While only one VSOC site is located at a private sector institution, ECPI University, it remains a valuable addition to their veteran support network.

ECPI University has 10 campuses throughout Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. In addition to their ground locations, ECPI University provides online courses and programs that are flexible for adult learners like veterans and servicemembers. ECPI University officially welcomed their new VSOC counselor to the Virginia Beach campus in October 2013.

According to university officials, since being assigned to ECPI University the VSOC counselor has averaged seeing over 100 veterans per month. She also manages a case load of roughly 40 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, or Chapter 31, veterans. Executive Director of Military Affairs at ECPI University and retired Navy Captain, Bob Larned, said the following regarding their VSOC counselor, "She has an open door policy and always works around her schedule as necessary to see someone. She has put the word out via the student veterans organization on campus that she will assist any veteran, not only those attending ECPI University."

I have long been a proponent of providing resources to veterans by meeting them where they are located. In the case of student veterans, placing counselors on campuses is a smart approach for connecting with many college-going veterans that may not visit VA centers.

In the event VSOC is expanded, it would be helpful to student veterans for VA to consider diversifying the scope and reach of VSOC sites by including more private sector institutions.

Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities Act of 2012 (P.L. 112–249)

In 2012, APSCU along with other higher education groups and veteran advocates sent a coalition letter to this committee calling for more consumer education and supports for student veterans. Congressman Gus Bilirakis quickly responded by sponsoring H.R. 4057, the "Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities Act of 2012" (P.L. 112–249). We remained supportive of the bill from its inception to eventual passage. Regarding the implementation of the law, we look forward to working with the Department of Veterans Affairs and other agencies to strengthen supports for servicemembers and veterans.

Finally, we want to work with you to ensure servicemembers and veterans are armed with the tools and resources to make an informed, thoughtful decision about which educational opportunities will best prepare them for the workforce. In short, we share your commitment to veteran success.

Thank you for allowing APSCU to provide our thoughts on important topics related to the military and veteran student community. We welcome the opportunity to work with this subcommittee and members of Congress to support student veterans and student servicemembers.

Executive Summary

On behalf of APSCU, our member institutions and the military and veteran students we serve we welcome the opportunity to provide our views on the importance

[3] Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities(APSCU), Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, accessed April 22, 2014 *http://www.career.org/policy-and-issues/federal-issues/hea/upload/HEA—Reauthorization—Proposal—032013.pdf*

of successful educational outcomes for our returning servicemembers and veterans, the VetSuccess program, and the implementation of the "Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012" (P.L. 112–249).

Measuring Student Veteran Success

- Measuring student veteran success is not fully reflected in current federal databases
- Recent and previous studies show that veterans perform at or above their peers
- New methods for tracking nontraditional students, like veterans, should be explored

VETSUCCESS ON CAMPUS (VSOC)

- he program provides important access to services and supports to veterans on campus
- VSOC is on 94 campuses; only one is located at a private sector institution
- Future program expansion should take into account the diversity of veteran enrollment

IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY OF EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES ACT OF 2012 (P.L. 112–249)

- APSCU was an early supporter of H.R. 4057, now P.L. 112–249
- APSCU remains supportive and looks forward to working with VA on implementation

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TESTIMONY OF

MR. WILLIAM HUBBARD

VICE PRESIDENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON THE TOPIC OF:

"DEFINING AND IMPROVING SUCCESS FOR STUDENT VETERANS"

MAY 8, 2014

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting Student Veterans of America (SVA) to submit our testimony on "Defining and Improving Success for Student Veterans." As the premier advocate for student veterans in higher education, it is our privilege to share our on-the-ground perspective with you today.

In 2008, veterans in colleges and universities across the nation came together to form SVA. Using a network of peer-to-peer relationships, and determined to achieve beyond expectations, these veterans built on years of hard-learned lessons of how to succeed in higher education after – or sometimes during – service in our military.

Last June, SVA testified on "The Value of Education for Veterans at Public, Private, and For-Profit Colleges and Universities". In that testimony, we noted the shortcomings of existing data on student veterans. Since then, SVA has completed the first phase of the *Million Records Project (MRP)*, the results of which we will detail at greater length below. This work is the most comprehensive research on student veterans in over 70 years, and was performed in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Student Clearinghouse.

We can now conclusively state, for the first time ever, that veterans of the Post-9/11 Generation are succeeding in higher education. How that success is defined is something that we at SVA are keen to share our perspective on.

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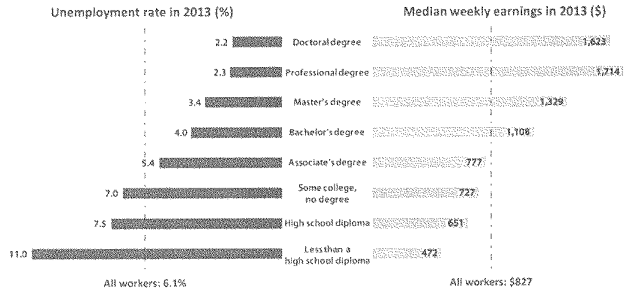
The Importance of Higher Education for Veterans

As quintessential nontraditional students, student veterans faces a myriad of challenges that most of our peers in the classroom do not. Fortunately, this generation of veterans has proven that they are well-equipped to succeed. Take, for example, Abby Kinch. Abby served as a Chinese linguist in the Air Force for more than two years before leaving to have her first child. Today, Abby attends classes part-time in pursuit of her PhD at Florida State University while caring for two children and working full-time to support her family. She is the perfect example of a student veteran who successfully keeps many balls in the air while attending school.

Abby, and millions of other student veterans like her, recognize the importance of achieving their academic goals in order to get ahead. Using data from the last fiscal year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics illustrated the importance of higher education, as seen in Figure 1. For those who achieved an associate's degree, unemployment dropped to 5.4% and for those with a bachelor's or greater, that drops even further to 4% and below.[1] Today, veterans are using their GI Bill to achieve higher levels of education to ultimately begin realizing their professional goals.

[1] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment", http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm (Access May 2, 2014)

Figure 1: Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor

SVA's MRP found that of those student veterans who first completed a certificate, 31.3% continued on to higher levels of education; of those who first earned a two-year degree, 35.8% continued on; and 20.8% of veterans who first earned a baccalaureate-level degree went on to earn another degree at a higher level.[2] Understanding this trend of veterans translating their GI Bill benefits into higher levels of education is critical to determining the impact of the GI Bill, as it shows that this important benefit opens the door for more education than just the initial degree attempted.

In addition to veterans achieving higher levels of education, SVA's internal research shows that more than one-third of veterans are first-generation students in their families. It is clear that as veterans achieve higher levels of education, their rates of unemployment drop drastically. The snowball effect of individuals earning degrees and being able to provide for their families is astounding. As productive members of our nation's economy, student veterans do not require social safety nets; they are contributing positively to society, creating what we term a "double-positive effect" in which they turn their GI Bill benefit into economic value for the nation.

In fiscal year 2014, the Department of Defense (DoD) budget request was approximately $526.6 billion dollars.[3] Of this half trillion dollar budget, training is noted as a top priority, which will likely continue to

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[2] Cate, C.A. (2014). *Million Records Project: Research from Student Veterans of America.* Student Veterans of America, Washington, DC.

[3] Department of Defense, "Defense Budget Priorities and Decisions for Fiscal year 2014", http://www.defense.gov/pubs/DefenseBudgetPrioritiesChoicesFiscalYear2014.pdf (Accessed May 2, 2014)

remain a focus for the coming decades. Unfortunately, the billions of dollars invested in training American servicemembers to be some of the most qualified and competent specialists in a variety of highly technical fields are often lost when they exit the service and re-enter civilian fields. Many service members opt to pursue degrees that can be completed in the timeframe that their GI Bill benefits will allow, sometimes disincentivizing pursuit of science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM), careers.

Each time these specialized fields lose servicemembers to different career options, the DoD's initial investment evaporates permanently. Making it possible for and incentivizing individuals to pursue degrees in STEM fields will allow our country to better retain and grow that investment. While current GI Bill benefits do not often cover the extra years it takes to complete these extended degrees, there may be opportunities to encourage these individuals to pursue those rigorous fields of study.

The "double-positive effect" along with a capture of the investments made in our veterans when they were in the service by the DoD will pay dividends to the American taxpayer for many years to come.

How We Define "Student Veteran Success"

SVA defines student veteran success as student veterans making well-informed educational decisions, achieving personal academic goals without incurring student loan debt, and securing gainful employment that propels them forward in their career aspirations.

A Focus on Outcomes

Typically, success in higher education is defined as, "graduating with a bachelor's degree after four years of college immediately following high school," and indeed we should note that that path is the primary path that the Department of Education tracks when determining graduation rates. For most veterans, however, their paths will be different than that traditional path. As nontraditional students, many are entering school with credits earned through their military experience or through other modes of education, many are working full-time, and others are also supporting their families. In light of these considerations, we feel that the focus is much better kept on *outcomes and not the pace of attainment.*

Additionally, there are different pieces to the puzzle that must be identified for the student veteran to fully achieve their goals. We refer to these as the "Three Pillars" that contribute to student veteran success, and we encourage this subcommittee and other researchers to focus on them individually as well as collectively:

- Pillar 1—Institutions: Institutional support for student veterans is an important aspect of maintaining a strong pipeline of successful veteran graduates. The ability of the college or university to efficiently process student veteran benefits, transfer credits, or assist in job placement, is of crucial importance to the success of veterans. Flaws at this level, as well as unwelcoming or distrustful academic or professional environments, continue to act as major barriers to the success of some student veterans.
- Pillar 2—Individuals: Establishing an environment for the student veteran to fluidly interact with the institution and the community is a determining factor in whether or not they will achieve their goals, as those who do not feel welcome may not persist in their studies.

- Pillar 3—Communities: An established network across various university offices, academic networks, and career services enables the student veteran to make the transition from the campus to a fulfilling career. This may start with the institution's outreach to potential employers, but is ultimately the responsibility of all of us to ensure that employers understand the strengths of veterans in the workplace.

As important as these factors are, special emphasis must be placed on the student debt issue. As veterans graduate across the country, we believe that their debt burden will ultimately be the single largest inhibiting factor to long-term success. There is a common misconception that veterans who go to school on the GI Bill have a "free ticket", but we know this is simply not true.

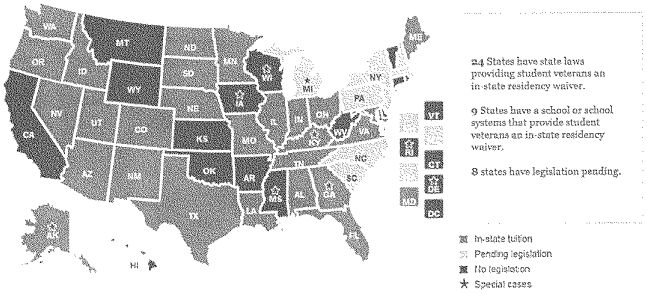
As an earned benefit, not only is it not free, it often does not cover the full cost of an education. As the MRP results indicate, some student veterans take longer to complete their degree, due to being nontraditional students. In such scenarios, student veterans likely take on additional loans to complete or risk withdrawing short of graduation. While many veterans may not have a clear understanding of how much their education benefits will impact their overall cost of attendance, others face abusive and misleading practices across sectors of education that can result in undue and unnecessary debt burdens.

We also remain concerned with some of the technical and career colleges that claim to offer credentials and certifications whose exams students are not able to sit for at the end of their course of study due to a lack of proper accreditation, leading to the loss of valuable benefits and years of study. We applaud the bipartisan efforts of the dozens of State Attorneys General working to curb this practice among the worst offenders, and would like to work with this subcommittee and the Congress to improve the laws preventing this despicable practice.

We would be remiss if we did not emphasize that many student veterans continue to be forced to pay out-of-state tuition costs, despite being "state-less" as a direct result of their military service. It is for this reason that the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and SVA continue to ardently fight for in-state tuition for all veterans at the state and federal levels. As shown in Figure 2, less than half of all states offer in-state tuition for veterans and we continue to press the importance of this issue as a top contributor to education debt.[4] We call on this subcommittee to continue to work both with the Congress as well as your home state governments to end this unnecessary and unjust punishment for the transient lifestyle our military is called to serve in.

Figure 2: The Fight for In-State Tuition for Veterans

[4] Student Veterans of America, "The Fight for In-State Tuition for Veterans", http://www.studentveterans.org/what-we-do/in-state-tuition.html (Access May 2, 2014)



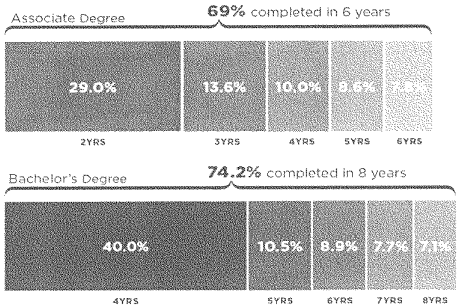
Note: The In-State Tuition Map is a collaborative effort with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, and Student Veterans of America (SVA).
Source: Student Veterans of America

Beyond the typical understanding of success in higher education, we also believe it is important to recognize that, due to the nature of Post-9/11 conflicts, traditional definitions of 'time to completion' forces a false narrative of poor completion rates upon student veterans. Many of these veterans faced multiple deployments that interrupted their academic efforts, or put their education on hold to complete a tour of service.

For those who successfully completed their academic goals, MRP data analysis found that in spite of the challenges they face, and potentially longer pathways to success, today's student veterans are completing their education. As Figure 3 below highlights, both at the two- and four-year degree level, the majority of those veterans who complete their degrees do so within two to three years, and four to six years, respectively, which is similar to the general population. However, when this timeframe is extended out by a few years, those completion rates increase significantly.[5] This story illustrates the persistence of student veterans as they continue to work toward graduation, even if it takes them longer than traditional students.

Figure 3: Student Veteran Time to Completion

[5] Cate, C.A. (2014). Million Records Project: Research from Student Veterans of America. Student Veterans of America, Washington, DC.



Source: *Million Records* Project, Student Veterans of America

Fostering Student Veteran Achievement

Prone to Excel

When the Three Pillars – institutions, individuals, and communities – are strong, student veteran achievement is high. These pillars set veterans up to succeed in an academic setting and after graduation. With programs like the Department of Veterans Affairs' 'VetSuccess On Campus' (VSOC), 'Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership' (VITAL), and institutional support from postsecondary institutions, veterans are operating in environments where they are prone to excel.

The VA's VSOC is intended to, "help Veterans, Servicemembers, and their qualified dependents succeed and thrive through a coordinated delivery of on-campus benefits assistance and counseling, leading to completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers."[6] As a program that operates in a similar capacity as the Transition Assistance Program as members exit the service, it is highly complementary to the transition process and we encourage its continued funding and expansion.

With a targeted expansion to a total of 94 schools, this program continues to show positive outcomes, and we have heard overwhelmingly positive feedback from our members at the campuses where it is in place. We should note that we feel the program is difficult to bring to a university if they have a need or interest due to the selective criteria of having large veteran populations of 800+ and a 25-mile proximity to VA medical centers. As such, some schools in rural areas or with smaller yet just as needy veteran populations may never be eligible for these services at the present requirements.

Similarly, VITAL is another valuable program that has received positive feedback from our members, though availability of services is also a constraining factor of the program's broader success. When these services are delivered in conjunction with the peer-to-peer support network of an SVA chapter, we have seen great success for our student veterans.

Communities of Success

Together with programs like VSOC and VITAL, the community around each student veteran is critical to their success. As noted previously, this community acts as a web of support to create an environment where veterans will succeed.

Through programs like SVA's "VetCenter Initiative," we have encouraged colleges and universities to recognize the importance of having a central location that allows this network to coalesce. Offered through a generous grant from The Home Depot Foundation, SVA selected 11 schools to receive funds to build their own "home on campus". Other schools are recognizing the unique role that this web plays in the achievement of student veterans and have created 'veteran liaison networks'. In these networks, schools like American University have established various points of contact in different offices to provide a holistic

[6] United States Department of Veterans Affairs, "Welcome to VetSuccess.VA.GOV", https://www.vetsuccess.va.gov/public/vetsuccess_on_campus.html (Access May 2, 2014).

support system to student veterans. These touch points exist from the financial aid office to the career center to the tutoring center.

Even colleges and universities with newer SVA chapters have quickly seen the impact that forming this network can have on their university. At Saint Leo University in Florida, SVA's 1,000th chapter, Chapter President Nick Lanier, an Army combat veteran of 13 years before his medical retirement, along with the support of their Chapter Advisor, Dr. Jose Coll, have quickly established a thriving community. Building on the university's support for its student veteran population, the chapter is acting as a necessary link to valuable university resources.

For many, this link to their community is so crucial due to the unique challenges veterans face when they go to school. As a final example, consider student veteran Brian Hall. He began taking courses at his local community college after high school, but decided the Air Force was his true calling. While serving as an operations resource manager, Brian completed an associate's degree at the Community College of the Air Force. When he eventually left active duty nine years later, he enrolled at Penn State-Mont Alto as a junior, but not all of his Air Force credits transferred. He had to retake some courses and it took him more than two years to complete his bachelor's degree. In total, Brian's time-to-completion, dating way back to when he first enrolled in community college, was nearly 14 years. With a strong network and a level of perseverance that is common among many veterans, Brian's story is one of success that is often overlooked in most research on college outcomes.

Million Records Project

While these stories of success provide an important on-the-ground perspective, anecdotes do not tell the whole story of how veterans are succeeding in higher education. With the MRP, we now have a baseline understanding of how veterans are faring in higher education, and we now know that the majority of student veterans are achieving their academic goals, attaining higher levels of education, and completing their programs of study.

Given this new data, we feel there is more work to be done, and it has become abundantly clear that there are now more questions than answers as we have begun to peel back the layers of the onion. Identifying what practices and programs on campuses are truly having an impact, and which are not, is an additional area of study that there is simply not enough data available to analyze at this time.

A Look Ahead

Million Records Project: Phase Two

As we reflect on the lessons we learned from the first round of MRP research, we are looking towards our next endeavor and our recently completed study will enable us to pursue follow-on research. Our next phase or "MRP Phase II" will seek to build and expand upon the findings of the initial Million Records Project by beginning to explore what institutional factors influence student veterans' persistence and degree attainment.

In collaboration with our partners at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Student Clearinghouse, and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, we plan to focus our next investigation on how specific school-level characteristics, policies, practices, and programs affect student veterans' persistence and degree attainment. The end goal of this research will be to inform institutions, policy-makers, and other stakeholders on what works.

Additional measures that are still needed to ensure student veterans are accomplishing their academic goals include the impact of student debt on student veteran's academic goals, military training and education, and individual characteristics among student veterans.

Making Informed Decisions

In addition to more data to support higher education and policy decisions, institutional- and individual-level information is necessary. There are other important resources in the space such as the National Student Clearinghouse's Meteor Program. This program seeks to deliver an integrated view of student debt and could be connected to the VA benefits database to provide the student veteran with a view of all financial aid, debt and benefits. As student veterans face issues of not being sure of what benefits they have left, what loans they have, and their personal debt, a dashboard like NSC's Meteor is a necessity.

Being able to access a full range of financial data is critical for institutions to be able to effectively counsel their students on their financial status, as well for the individual to have the highest level of consumer awareness. Through a greater degree of consumer awareness, student veterans will be able to make informed choices that are in-line with their personal career aspirations. VA's recently released college comparison tool is a great first step in offering some clarity in this regard, and we are very interested in working with VA to improve it based on feedback from our membership.

Our Final Thoughts

With the right tools and resources, SVA sees no limit to the achievement of student veterans in higher education and beyond. When empowered with environmental factors for success, the investment America has made in the GI Bill and its veterans becomes an even clearer asset to our economy. For student veterans, acting as leaders amongst our peers, balancing multiple competing priorities, and succeeding with limited resources are all natural challenges; indeed they are the very circumstances for which the DoD has so effectively trained them. Continued support for further research and discussion is necessary so student veterans like Abby Kinch, Nick Lanier, and Brian Hall—and the hundreds of thousands of others that are part of SVA—can continue to succeed in higher education

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We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and the subcommittee members for your time, attention, and devotion to the cause of veterans in higher education. As always, we welcome your feedback and questions, and we look forward to continuing to work with this subcommittee, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and the Congress to ensure the success of all generations of veterans through education.

STATEMENT PRESENTED BY RICARDO D. TORRES

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you on this important topic. We are honored by the opportunity to help inform this very timely discussion on Defining and Improving Success for Student Veterans. I am Ricardo Torres, President and CEO of the National Student Clearinghouse ("Clearinghouse"), a nonprofit organization serving the education community by facilitating the exchange and understanding of student enrollment, performance, and related information. We work with colleges and universities that collectively enroll 96% of all students in our nation's degree granting, Title IV Student Loan Program institutions. Through our partnerships with these institutions, we work to reduce administrative burdens on students and school administrators, allowing them to focus more on achieving successful educational outcomes.

We are proud to have supported the Veteran's Benefits Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Student Veterans of America and to have enabled the groundbreaking Million Records Project, which provided this committee with never before available information regarding the success of the programs you have funded to provide education opportunities for our veterans. Today, we would like to suggest some powerful possible ways we can further help you evaluate and facilitate veterans' education programs.

What is the National Student Clearinghouse?

The National Student Clearinghouse is the nation's trusted source for education verification and student educational outcomes research. More than 3,600 colleges and universities, including public and private, for-profit and nonprofit institutions, participate in the Clearinghouse. Participating institutions provide access to actual enrollment and degree information on each of their students to us. As a result, only the Clearinghouse can offer access to a nationwide coverage of enrollment and degree records—encompassing more than 144 million students and growing. Through our verification, data exchange and reporting services, the Clearinghouse saves higher education institutions nearly $500 million dollars annually. Most Clearinghouse services are provided to colleges and universities at little or no charge, including enhanced transcript and research services, enabling institutions to redistribute limited staff and budget resources to more important student service efforts. The Clearinghouse is a nonprofit that does not receive state or federal appropriations. Our data process is supported through the fees we collect from third-parties for services provided on behalf of our participating institutions.

Today, the Clearinghouse is also the leading provider of educational reporting, verification and research, on behalf of its participating institutions, to the nation's colleges and high schools, the student lending community, the Department of Education, state and other educational agencies, students and alumni, and thousands of employers and other organizations. All of the Clearinghouse's services are designed to facilitate an institution's compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, The Higher Education Act, and other applicable laws.

The Clearinghouse was founded over 20 years ago to cost effectively address Title IV program inefficiencies. Before the launch of the Clearinghouse in 1993, student lenders had no dependable way to determine if a borrower was still in school and eligible for a loan deferment. Institutions spent thousands of hours each year processing 20 million deferment forms. Students were often mistakenly placed into default status, jeopardizing their credit rating and artificially inflating the reported default rate on these federally guaranteed loans. The higher education community created the Clearinghouse to simplify and standardize student deferment reporting. Instead of submitting millions of individual deferment forms to hundreds of lenders, schools now transmit a single electronic report of all their enrolled students to the Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse matches each enrollment record to electronic lists of student loan recipients and, whenever a match occurs, forwards the relevant enrollment data to the appropriate lender. The success of our efforts to reduce higher education's student loan reporting burden is best evidenced by the fact that over 3,600 institutions have chosen to participate in the Clearinghouse. All of the nation's guarantee agencies, the Department of Education's Direct Loan Servicer, and most student loan servicers participate in the Clearinghouse as well. Think of us as a back office to the university's registrar, financial aid officer, and institutional researcher. The Clearinghouse is the largest electronic education data exchange ecosystem in the country, with over 1 billion secure and legally compliant transactions annually.

The public-private partnership approach used by the Clearinghouse can be a model for a better way to serve our veterans while reducing the burdens on both government and educational institutions. The Clearinghouse helps educational insti-

tutions improve efficiency, reduce costs and workload, and enhance the quality-of-service they provide to their students and alumni, lending institutions, employers, and other organizations. We provide our services as an agent to our participating institutions, supporting their administrative, student access, accountability, and analytical needs. Moreover, through our educational research services that access our unique national dataset of student enrollments and degree outcomes, the Clearinghouse also serves as a valuable source for longitudinal and other studies on educational progress.

Clearinghouse Research and the Million Records Project

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center ("Research Center") is the research arm of the National Student Clearinghouse. The Research Center works with higher education institutions, states, districts, high schools, and educational organizations to better inform practitioners and policymakers about student educational pathways. Through accurate longitudinal data outcomes reporting, the Research Center enables better education policy decisions leading to improved student outcomes. The unprecedented nationwide reach of our information resources takes education researchers beyond the limitations of institutional data to provide the most accurate picture of student outcomes ? even when students transfer among multiple institutions, in different states, and over long periods of time ? while still being respectful of student privacy.

Working in partnership with the Student Veterans of America and the Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA"), the Research Center participated in a groundbreaking research project that broadens perspectives and informs many of the pressing questions about the educational pathways and outcomes of student veterans. As part of the Million Records Project, we searched our unique dataset to help inform the nation about the return on our federal government's investment of the more than $20 billion spent to provide education benefits to veterans. Through this public-private partnership, for the first time, comprehensive national statistics on the postsecondary outcomes of veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom were made available, including degree completion, time-to-degree, and field of study preferences.

The Unique Enrollment Patterns of Veterans

One of the clear observations that emerged from the data that we provided to make this study possible is the highly non-traditional nature of veterans' educational pathways. Student veterans are more likely to transfer or change institutions, and take longer to complete a degree or certificate, than other students. This makes defining success and measuring success for these veterans a particular challenge. The current federal Department of Education metrics that define successful outcomes for students and institutions are based on a definition of "first-time full-time" students. This is the basis of the standard Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System ("IPEDS") institutional retention and graduation rate. It counts as a success only those students who have no previous higher education experience, enroll full time in a degree granting program, and graduate from the same institution where they started. Only three-quarters of degree-seeking students today begin by enrolling full time, and nearly one-quarter of those who complete a degree do so somewhere other than the institution where they started. So, using the standard definitions to measure the success of student veterans would be like computing baseball players' career statistics by only counting members of the starting lineup who never changed teams, and ignoring everyone else on the team's roster completely.

For student veterans, the rates of institutional mobility are particularly high. The data provided by the VA for the SVA's Million Records Project, matched to the Clearinghouse's unique enrollment database, show that recipients of the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post-9/11 benefits are much more likely than other students to enroll at more than one institution in pursuit of their degrees. The SVA report shows that these students are older, take longer to graduate, and more likely to stop out and change institutions due to external circumstances, like reserve mobilizations, job changes, or family status changes. They may also try to combine credits earned online while on active or reserve duty with on-campus courses in a new degree program after their service.

The Million Records Project clearly demonstrated that today's veterans are capable and determined when it comes to pursuing postsecondary educational goals. Using the Clearinghouse's unique ability to track and measure student outcomes across institutions, states and sectors, the Million Records Project has demonstrated that more than half of veterans benefit recipients since 2002 have completed degrees, in spite of the challenges and hurdles they faced. It is a great disservice to the hard work, dedication, and perseverance of our veterans to continue to define

and measure their postsecondary success using only the traditional yardstick designed for 18-year-old students who enroll full time at a single institution. It also creates undue hardships for student veterans when the simple act of transferring credits or changing institutions generates new administrative hurdles and burdensome, time-consuming requirements for obtaining and retaining the tuition benefits that were promised to them when they enlisted.

Meeting the Challenge of the Influx of Veterans Into Higher Education

Given the influx of veterans expected to enroll in higher education programs over the next few years, it is important that we have the ability to successfully meet veteran program demands in a way that responds to the varied needs of these nontraditional students. The Clearinghouse is offering suggestions regarding what can be done to help ensure veteran success in two areas: 1) facilitating entry to colleges and universities and 2) enabling continued enrollment sufficient to accomplish what the veteran set out to do.

The first opportunity to assist veterans is facilitating entry to colleges and universities. The newly released GI Bill College Comparison tool was an important breakthrough in providing information to veterans about their benefits in a school-specific manner. Unfortunately, the tool has two limitations for which we would like to offer solutions. First, the tool does not calculate an individual veteran's entitlement and track what part of that entitlement has been used. Veterans can only designate themselves as belonging to one of 10 categories based on their recollection of their number of post 9–11 months of active duty service. The tool is, as it describes itself, an estimator. Although this information is informative, it does not fully remove the barriers necessary for a veteran to easily shop for a school.

The second limitation of the tool is that it does not provide information on the graduation rates that is accurate or relevant to the unique enrollment patterns of veterans. In authorizing the creation of the tool, the Committee and the VA wisely chose measurements of graduation rates that would not place an additional reporting burden on institutions of higher education. It is clear that duplicative reporting burdens take institutional resources away from directly serving the needs of enrolled veterans. The graduation rate metric chosen was the IPEDS rate which, as we pointed out, is based on first-time full-time 18-year-old students, a population that has little relevance to the educational patterns of veteran adult learners. This metric also does not account for student mobility which, as the Million Records Project shows, is particularly high for veterans. In addition, a degree based graduation rate may be misleading or uninformative to a veteran who wishes to achieve a certificate or take a few specific courses for a workforce credential. The tool was an important step in the right direction, but can be misleading in helping veterans understand the probability of graduation at an institution for people like them.

The National Student Clearinghouse has solved the problem of providing accurate information while not increasing reporting burdens on institutions through its work with the education community on the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) and the Student Achievement Measure (SAM). By using our data that tracks students across institutions, not limited to first-time full-time enrollees, VSA and SAM schools can provide students with a graduation rate that is not subject to the first-time full-time IPEDS limitation. With the recent addition of veteran status as a data field for the information on individual students that schools supply to the Clearinghouse, we could easily calculate a graduation rate that is not restricted to the limitations of IPEDS and is also veteran-specific. This can enable great schools, like those in the University of North Carolina system, to claim full credit for the success of their support services in ensuring the successful program completion of their veterans.

Meeting Enrollment Challenges

In their ongoing dialogues with us, institutional administrators have reported recent improvements in their interactions with the Veteran's Administration. Even with the VA's hard work, there is still a significant lag time between the concept of a system improvement and its actual implementation. There is also great concern around the scalability of existing processes. Development of new technology can require a significant investment of federal dollars, institutional resources, and staff time. Given the large influx of members of our armed forces expected to join the ranks of veterans in the next few years, the problems of multiple aging systems will become even more acute.

Veterans and the schools serving them face a continuous stream of administrative complexities around activities, such as certificate of eligibility processing, residency verification, kicker processing, previous credential accumulation assessment, applicability of credentials to degrees, retaining benefit on transfers, and inconsistency

in branch of service requests. Registrars at institutions have pointed out some of the challenges to us:

- Schools and VA customer service representatives do not have access to the same data at the same time and, therefore, see inconsistent or incomplete information regarding benefits eligibility. This makes it extremely difficult to counsel individual veterans.
- The VA Once technology is a legacy system and is no longer being updated. Instead of transferring critical data through batch processing from their other systems, schools must manually enter data for each individual veteran.
- Some student veterans were given enhanced benefits upon enlistment. Determining the level of this "kicker" can further delay the ability to establish eligibility and result in additional challenges in maintaining enrollment for students.
- Residency and proof-of-residency requirements for veterans are determined on a state-by-state basis (in part because House Bill H.R. 357 has not yet been passed by the Senate), which adds to delays.
- Establishing the eligibility for Post 9–11 benefits, which includes checking character of discharge and the amount of credible service through the Department of Defense, results, can further delay the enrollment and registration of student veterans.
- Inconsistencies between the requirements for veterans' education benefits and those for Title IV cause challenges for institutions. A veteran who needs supplementary aid and wants to qualify for Title IV must register as degree seeking, even if he or she is seeking a credential that requires fewer courses.

As pointed out in the discussion regarding the complexity of education pathways taken by veterans, issues of transfer and transfer of credit pose a particular challenge for these mobile students. Department of Veterans Affairs has worked with the American Council on Education (ACE) to solve many of these challenges by providing recommended credits that can be awarded for military training and experience as well as resources to colleges and universities to assist in evaluating and accepting these credits and applying them toward degrees. Despite this work, schools report to us that challenges remain, including:

- Delays and difficulties in accessing information regarding postsecondary course work a veteran may have taken before military service to ensure transfer of these credits.
- No way to easily understand how acquired military credits translate into time to graduation.
- Delays and difficulties in determining remaining veterans' benefit entitlement when a veteran transfers. In mid semester, a veteran and his or her institution can often be surprised to learn that benefits are exhausted and the veteran faces a tuition bill.

Some of these challenges result from multiple programs with divergent requirements. The possibility of a new and additional GI Bill will simply add to complexity and the potential for confusion.

Individually, these procedures serve a purpose, but they could be greatly simplified to enable the enrollment of the veteran at the institution of his or her choice. One solution we recommend is two-fold: first, employ electronic document ordering capability in the eBenefits portal, enabling veterans to securely and privately send their benefits summary directly to the veteran's certification office of their chosen institution. Second, in collaboration with ACE, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense allow the Clearinghouse to be the repository of active duty and veteran competencies, academic credits, and credential aggregation providing a one-stop data shop for veterans to enable efficiency in enrolling in a postsecondary institution or applying for employment. Providing a way for a student veteran to authorize a secure eBenefit financial summary to be sent to an institution where they have applied would further facilitate the process.

Ensuring Successful Program Completion

One of the biggest barriers to completion we have heard from veterans and the institutions serving them is uncertainty and delays in tuition assistance requests and aid disbursement. Current remediable pain points include:

- Manual processes necessary for repetitive end-of-semester completion status reports, interim add/drop and major change processes, uploading of course catalogs, and constant reporting outside normal cycles; and
- Delays and uncertainty in determining entitlement balances.

Leveraging our Title IV experience, we can certainly enable a significant improvement in reporting these requirements, thereby allowing school staff to spend more

time serving student veterans and allowing the veteran to be less focused on paperwork and more focused on classwork and homework. The manual processes we noted are very reminiscent of the challenges in the Title IV loan program which we were created to solve.

One available tool is our open source application, Meteor, which provides an integrated view of student debt and could be connected to the VA benefits database to provide the veteran with an integrated view of all financial aid, debt, and benefits. This application could be leveraged to provide an integrated financial snapshot of all benefits and aid in order to help financial aid administrators counsel veterans. Meteor displays real-time summary and detail loan information on a borrower's student loans from the various data providers in the Meteor Network. Secure, online access is available to students, borrowers, and financial aid professionals through a Meteor access provider. Individuals can see their cumulative debt and can utilize unique tools, such as payment plan and income-based repayment calculators, helping them to avoid over borrowing. Financial aid professionals can compare the information submitted for an individual borrower by all sources on the Meteor master screen, allowing them to pinpoint issues at specific organizations in order to assist students with problem resolution. Adding a link to the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense benefit databases would give the student veteran up-to-the-minute information without reporting delays. This would allow a veteran to register for courses with confidence without the risk of learning midsemester that his or her benefits had been exhausted.

Measuring Success

Educational success for veterans can only be measured by the answer to one question: did the veterans achieve the goals they intended when they enrolled. For many, this is an associates, bachelors, or graduate degree. For others, it may be a certificate of skills or similar credential that gives them entry to the workforce. Whatever the goal, veterans also face challenges staying enrolled due to re-mobilizations, employment changes, and family circumstances. Student veterans take longer to graduate, and change institutions more often, than traditional students. This not only makes it harder for the students to maintain momentum and focus on their goals, it also makes it harder for colleges, universities, and policymakers to track their progress and measure their success. For example, traditional reporting metrics, such as degree completion within 150% of normal program time, are clearly inadequate for student veterans. According to the Million Records Project, only 43% of student veterans who successfully completed an associate's degree did so within three years, while nearly one-third (31%) took more than six years. We assume that this is due to extensive stopouts, transfers and re-enrollments, but we do not know enough of the details to address the challenges. Those who wish to serve veterans better, whether through campus support programs, college transfer policies or VA benefit policies, need better information in order to do so.

We need further research, like the Million Records Project, but with more details and greater focus, to determine which veteran support programs are working best to serve the needs of veterans today and which need to be improved or modified. We need to use longer tracking periods, with more term-by-term enrollment details, to fully capture the success of student veterans who stop-out and return to college, and to understand why not for those who do not return. And we need better information about the potential administrative and financial constraints that veterans face and their effect on student success to assess the effectiveness of veterans' education benefits programs. By combining the data of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Student Veterans of America, and the Clearinghouse in a manner similar to the collaborative model of the Million Records Project, additional breakthrough research could be accomplished within a year.

In particular, we propose a research project that would build upon the Million Records Project with more detailed data on individual enrollment patterns before, during, and after receiving VA benefits, with longer tracking periods to capture more of the range of successful degree pathways, and with additional data collected from colleges and universities on the types of support programs available to veterans at the specific institutions in which they enrolled. This would allow us to answer key questions like:

- How do the education success rates of student veterans compare to those of non-veterans of similar age, at similar institutions, and enrolled within similar time-frames?
- How do veterans' enrollment behaviors like stop-outs, transfers, and multiple-institution enrollments affect success rates?

- Where are focused interventions, such as reducing administrative burden, delivering more timely and accurate eligibility information, and streamlining benefit disbursement, likely to have the most impact?
- Which on-campus veterans support programs have the highest impact on success rates, both at the starting campus and at any subsequent institutions where a veteran transfers?

We firmly believe that student veterans should have a level administrative playing field with other students when it comes to attaining success in pursuit of their educational goals. One way to do this is to eliminate the extra hurdles that student veterans must overcome to certify their eligibility for benefits, access those benefits, and continue to receive those benefits. The second is to provide policymakers, institutions, and veterans with the research to enable them to assess what is working and what needs improvement. Providing these two types of support will increase the probability of success for all student veterans. Our veterans deserve our support to ensure that they can attain their education goals and successfully move into the workplace.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

CURRICULUM VITAE RELEVANT TO THE TESTIMONY OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE

Ricardo D. Torres, President and CEO

Mr. Torres joined the National Student Clearinghouse as its President and CEO in 2008. The Clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization founded in 1993, is the nation's trusted source for education verification and student educational outcomes research. Its participants include more than 3,600 U.S. colleges and universities. In the last year, the Clearinghouse processed over one billion digital transactions.

Prior to joining the Clearinghouse, Mr. Torres had a long and distinguished career in the private sector, both in the U.S. and abroad, including serving as COO at Best Practices, a nationally-recognized provider of emergency medicine and physician practice management, and COO of a division of Capital One (a financial services company). Mr. Torres has also held management positions in leading organizations such as PepsiCo and Philip Morris/Kraft Foods (now known as Altria Group). His diverse background includes financial and strategic planning, marketing and sales, general management, and executive leadership.

Mr. Torres is a board member of the John Tyler Community College Foundation, American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the National College Access Network (NCAN), and the Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools for Public Policy. He also serves on the Advisory Board of Cohesive Knowledge Solutions (a knowledge management company). He was a recipient of the Washington Business Journal's 2013 Minority Business Leader Award. Mr. Torres recently wrote an article, entitled "Barriers to Electronic Movement of Credentials," which was published on September 10, 2013, in the Stanford University's digital publication, Transcending the Maze. Mr. Torres holds an MBA in International Finance from Georgetown University and undergraduate degrees in both Marketing and Management from Manhattan College.

FEDERAL CONTRACTS RELEVANT TO THE TESTIMONY OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE

The National Student Clearinghouse has a contract with the U.S. Department of Education to process weekly changes to the higher education enrollment status of direct loan recipients for the purpose of servicing these loans. The current annual contract amount is $2,800,000.

2013 Memorandum of Agreement with the Veterans Benefits Administration for a) the transfer to and use of VA data by the National Student Clearinghouse for the purpose of a data match to support a postsecondary education completion database of Post-9/11 and Montgomery GI Bill beneficiaries, and b) providing these data services based upon funding provided by Student Veterans of America. There was no cost to the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Veterans Benefits Administration; however, the Student Veterans of America funded the research in the amount of $286,521.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THOMAS W. ROSS

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today about defining and improving academic success for student veterans.

I am Tom Ross, President of the University of North Carolina system. We enroll more than 220,000 students on 16 university campuses, and employ roughly 50,000 faculty and staff across the state. Approximately 8,000[1] of our current students use VA educational benefits to pay for some or all of their post-secondary education.

North Carolina is a big military state. We are home to 800,000 veterans. Our state has six major military installations with the third-largest active military force in the country, comprising 120,000 personnel, 12,000 members of the National Guard, and their nearly 145,000 spouses and children.

I know that this subcommittee and Chairman Miller have a special interest in public institutions of higher education extending in-state tuition rates to certain veterans who may not qualify under current state law. I want to be clear that the University of North Carolina supports—and has always supported—extending in-state tuition to certain veterans and their families. We appreciate the leadership shown by Chairman Miller and this subcommittee on this issue. While North Carolina is not currently one of the states that offers in-state tuition to certain veterans and their families, please know that we are working aggressively with members of the North Carolina General Assembly to enact legislation to change this situation in the short session that begins later this month, and we are optimistic we will be successful.

As the state's public University, we are committed to offering students access to high-quality, affordable educational programs. We are working hard to enroll, educate and graduate as many academically prepared service members, veterans and their dependents as possible. Our motivation is simple: the success of student veterans and their families attending UNC institutions is vital to the success of the University and our state's future.

Federal Oversight

After the Post 9/11 GI Bill became law in 2008, UNC institutions experienced a surge in applications for admission from military-affiliated students for the 2009–10 academic year. Programs such as the VA's Yellow Ribbon Program emerged. Military-affiliated students were often confused about how their Montgomery GI Bill and the new GI Bill worked together. In 2010, Congress made changes to the Post 9/11 GI Bill. In parallel, in March 2011 and again in December 2012, the Department of Defense (DoD) asked institutions participating in the "Voluntary Education Partnership" to sign new Memoranda of Agreement as a condition of permitting active-duty military to use Tuition Assistance funds to pay for their higher education on campus. The DoD continues to refine the agreement.

Concurrent with these changes and requirements, President Obama in April 2012 issued Executive Order 13607, "Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members." Subsequently, in May 2012, the Department of Veterans' Affairs asked institutions of higher education to commit to certain "Principles of Excellence" contained in the President's Executive Order by August 1, 2012. In August 2013, the Department of Education launched an effort to have campuses sign its "8 Keys to Success" pledge in support of student veterans.

To be clear, the University of North Carolina system agrees with the spirit of and intent behind each requirement or program. We hope that the federal agencies involved in these initiatives continue to work toward coordination of effort. We also ask to be included—on the front end—in any new federal initiatives, programs or requirements of higher education in support of veterans. UNC is proud of our self-imposed standards of excellence, and we believe we are well positioned to offer perspective and constructive feedback as future endeavors are contemplated. We have much to contribute to the national dialogue.

The UNC System Self-Imposes Strong Standards for Serving Veterans

In October 2010, the University of North Carolina system convened a working group of students, faculty, and administrators from across the 16 campuses to evaluate and recommend specific action steps for improving how the University and its individual institutions serve veterans and their families. Called UNC SERVES (UNC Systemwide Evaluation and Recommendation for Veterans Education and Services), this working group was presented with four questions:

- How are UNC campuses currently serving active service members, veterans and their families?

[1] UNC: Fall 2013 data.

- What are the accepted best practices for serving these students?
- What can the University reasonably do to improve access to, retention and graduation of active-duty and veteran students?
- What are metrics of success for the University in serving these students?

The UNC SERVES working group was charged with developing a comprehensive report to the President with recommendations for:

- Evaluation of current state of military and veteran affairs on UNC campuses;
- Institutional, systemwide, and state/federal statutory policy changes, regulations and/or guidelines to improve access, retention and the graduation of active service members, veterans and their families on UNC campuses;
- Institutional and systemwide best practices to improve access, retention and the graduation of active service members, veterans, and their families on UNC campuses; and
- Opportunities for institutional and systemwide improvement.

The working group also was asked to consider the following factors:

- Diversity of campuses, including size, capacity, and number of active service members, veterans, and their families;
- Constrained resources—Consider all options, but prioritize no-cost, low-cost recommendations;
- Return on investment; and
- Costs should accompany each recommendation, if possible.

The UNC SERVES working group issued its report to me in April 2011. The report included recommendations for improvement at both the system and individual campus levels. The Chancellors and I quickly embraced the recommendations, and our UNC (system) Faculty Assembly passed a resolution in support of UNC SERVES.

UNC System Progress With Self-Imposed Standards for Serving Student Veterans

The University is making great strides toward implementing these recommendations. As a follow-up to the initial UNC SERVES report, the University system office issues an annual "UNC SERVES Resource Guide" that summarizes campus and system progress toward each action item. The Resource Guide also offers examples of campus initiatives, such as North Carolina Central University's Veterans Law Clinic and Fayetteville State University's Veterans Business Outreach Center. Within the Resource Guide, we publish a "matrix" of campus-by-campus progress toward each UNC SERVES recommendation. The most recent matrix is attached to my testimony. The UNC SERVES report and Resource Guides also are found online at: *http://www.northcarolina.edu/frc/uncserves/serves.html*

Because serving student veterans appropriately requires leadership from the top, I am working with our 16 university Chancellors to aggressively implement UNC SERVES recommendations. To improve coordination of effort, our campuses have established Military Affairs Committees, and the UNC system periodically convenes the Military Affairs Council, a coordinating body with representatives from every campus.

The UNC Board of Governors is equally engaged. In June 2013, the Board approved a Military Student Success Policy that provides framework for a comprehensive network of services for military-affiliated students. In August 2013, the also Board established a Special Committee on Military Affairs, with a particular focus on fostering success for the University's student veterans. A copy of the Military Student Success Policy is submitted with my testimony.

In very short order, I will establish internal University regulations for implementing the requirements of the Board's policy and promoting the general welfare of service members, veterans, spouses, and dependent family members attending our constituent institutions. Under this new policy, any individual who has completed at least two years of cumulative active-duty service in the United States Armed Forces will be considered a transfer student in the admissions process. The service branch is the transfer institution of record, and the military transcript is the starting point for evaluating the veteran's military learning for academic credit.

Data Collection and Reporting

The University of North Carolina has implemented systemwide, uniform data collection procedures to ensure that we can identify and track the academic progress of service members, veterans, spouses, and other dependent family members. The University will evaluate and publicly report matriculation trends, including retention rates, graduation rates and length of time to degree. This information will also help us better understand preference trends among student veterans, including program choice and preferred delivery methods.

National efforts to gather and provide information on student veteran success are also important. If we wish to truly understand matriculation and graduation trends

of student veterans, the data used must be accurate. The Student Veterans of America (SVA) Million Records Project is a great step in the right direction. I am especially glad that the Million Records Project uses National Student Clearinghouse data for its analyses, as this is currently the most reliable database for tracking student persistence and outcomes. The University of North Carolina enjoys a great working relationship with the SVA, and we routinely provide our enrollment data to the National Student Clearinghouse.

UNC Institutions Aligning Academic Programs to Student Needs

Individual UNC campuses have a long history of working with military-affiliated students and North Carolina's military installations. Several of them—Fayetteville State University, University of North Carolina Wilmington, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and East Carolina University—have academic advisors located on post at Fort Bragg, aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, or at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. These campuses' geographic proximity, coupled with their regional focus, naturally align with serving these specific communities.

Representing all UNC institutions, the UNC system office has academic advisors at Fort Bragg, aboard Camp Lejeune, and at Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City. UNC system personnel also hold academic advising office hours at the Camp Lejeune Naval Hospital, where the academic advisor is available to all hospital personnel, Marines and sailors from the Wounded Warrior Battalion East, the Traumatic Brain Injury Clinic, and Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point.

UNC campuses offer specialized programs of interest to veterans and active-duty military service members. Veterans are attracted to these programs because their military learning and experiences align with the academic programs and help prepare them for their desired career. In addition, many courses are structured to accommodate an adult student's lifestyle. Many student veterans have family responsibilities, part-time or full-time employment, and other obligations. Examples of such academic programs include:

East Carolina University: Bachelor of Science, Industrial Distribution and Logistics

Fayetteville State University: Bachelor of Arts, Intelligence Studies

North Carolina A&T State University: Ph.D., Leadership Studies

North Carolina Central University: Bachelor of Science, Criminal Justice

North Carolina State University: Bachelor of Arts, Leadership in the Public Sector

North Carolina State University: Master of Geospatial Information Science and Technology

UNC—Chapel Hill: Master of Arts, Military History

UNC—Chapel Hill: Master of Business Administration (MBA@UNC)

UNC—Chapel Hill: Master of Public Administration (MPA@UNC)

UNC—Charlotte: Bachelor of Science, Neurodiagnostics and Sleep Science

UNC—Greensboro: Bachelor of Arts, Liberal Studies

UNC—Pembroke: Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Public and Non-Profit Administration

UNC—Wilmington: Master of Arts, Conflict Management and Resolution

Western Carolina University: Bachelor of Science, Emergency and Disaster Management

Winston-Salem State University: Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling

Centralized Information Sharing and One-Stop Shopping for Veterans

We understand that veterans are nontraditional students. Student veterans come to us from the highly structured, bureaucratic environment of the military and are often uneasy with the loosely structured, bureaucratic environment of the University. University admissions and enrollment processes for veterans can be complex, sometimes requiring visits to different departments across campus. One of our top priorities is centralizing information sharing, using a technology-based platform that provides a virtual "one-stop-shop" for veterans. This enables us to provide reliable and consistent information in response to the questions most commonly posed by veterans. In addition, as unique situations arise, veterans always have the name and contact information for specific campus-based staff who are readily available to ensure that their questions can be answered. All campuses are encouraged to go beyond a technology-based solution and provide a centralized physical location where veterans can access the resources they need. Many UNC institutions already have veteran's centers in place, and several others are working to establish them. To access the University's virtual one-stop-shop: *http://www.uncserves.northcarolina.edu*

Another technology-based resource now in development is the North Carolina Military Educational Positioning System, or "NCMEPS." This website provides military-affiliated students the resources they need to explore with greater ease North Carolina's higher education options—both public and private—the tools to success-

fully navigate the application, admission and enrollment process; and the knowledge to persist, graduate and pursue their career goals. To cite one example, the GI Bill module allows users to answer a series of questions about their personal circumstances to learn more about how to maximize their VA benefits. While the website was conceived by the UNC system, the goal is to help prospective students find, apply, and pay for the North Carolina college or university that is right for them. The website, which is live and available to student veterans now, will be fully functional by July 1, 2014. To access the NCMEPS: *http://www.ncmileps.northcarolina.edu*

Working With Community College Partners

The University of North Carolina system works closely with the North Carolina Community College System to create degree programs and transition pathways that are geared toward active-duty service members, veterans, and their families. A Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) between the two systems, revised and expanded in February, helps facilitate a smooth and seamless pathway for students transitioning from a community college to the University. This statewide agreement governs the transfer of certain academic credits among all North Carolina community colleges and North Carolina public universities.

In addition, some UNC institutions have separate articulation agreements with selected community colleges that are specific to certain majors and enable students to progress from an Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree to a bachelor's degree. Major study areas include Information Systems and Engineering Technology, both directly applicable to military education requirements. Specific examples include:

- Fayetteville State University, North Carolina State University, UNC Pembroke, and Western Carolina University have partnered with Fayetteville Technical Community College and the United States Army Special Operations Command, Special Warfare Center & School at Ft. Bragg to develop an Associate of General Education (A.G.E.) degree that awards credit for military learning with seamless transition to Bachelor degree programs in areas such as Intelligence Studies, Criminal Justice, and Interdisciplinary Studies (*http://www.soc.mil/swcs/education/*). This Associate's to Bachelor's degree pathway was created specifically for active-duty soldiers in the U.S. Army Special Operations Command.
- UNC Wilmington and Coastal Carolina Community College have partnered with the United States Marine Corps to offer undergraduate and graduate courses and the Associate, Bachelor's and Master's degrees on the community college campus and aboard Camp Lejeune for active-duty and veteran Marines and their spouses or dependents (*http://www.uncw.edu/onslow/*) and (*https://www.coastalcarolina.edu/military-partnerships/*).
- NCSU Engineering Online is a unique partnership between North Carolina State University and other North Carolina institutions to extend the offering of NC State's undergraduate engineering instruction throughout the state. Through Engineering Online, students can complete a site-based pre-engineering program at Craven Community College, Johnston Community College, UNC Asheville or UNC Wilmington, and later transfer to NC State to complete their Bachelor's degree in Engineering.

Closing

We believe that this "one-stop shop" approach works well for the University, for student veterans, and for the military. But the primary reason we have taken this approach is because we care deeply about the whole soldier. (I use to the term "soldier" to represent all of the men and women in uniform, including airmen, marines, guardsmen, and sailors, as well as our veterans.) We care about providing them with access to a high-quality, affordable education in support of their personal or professional goals. We care about the families that they leave behind when they deploy or return to upon separation from service. We care about the kit and equipment they carry down range.

Our efforts in this regard are not because a government agency requires us to do something. We are committed to supporting student veterans because of North Carolina's longstanding pride and support of the military. The service member who deploys may be our family member, friend or neighbor. The family that they leave behind may be our family. Higher education is crucial to the mission because the most important weapon that a service member carries is not an assault rifle, but rather his or her mind. They need to be able to adapt to changing environments, use critical thinking skills, learn a foreign language, employ negotiation skills, and apply conflict management lessons. Their kits and equipment must be the latest and greatest things because they need the ability to gather intelligence, execute a mis-

sion, and come home safely. And, when our service members make the transition from active duty to veterans in civilian society, we selfishly want them to remain in North Carolina for the long term. It is no secret that veterans make great employees, often start and grow successful small businesses, and make other economic and civic contributions, as well.

The University of North Carolina can and should be a natural place of transition for veterans. They have earned an educational benefit, and that benefit can be the ticket to a brighter future. It is our duty to help make it happen.

Our faculty report that they enjoy having veterans in their classes. I've attached to my testimony is a letter from a faculty member about her personal experience with service members in her classroom. As a group, student veterans attend classes regularly, take their assignments seriously, are attentive and provide a unique perspective in class discussions. All students benefit from their presence in the classroom.

Finally, the University of North Carolina system is committed to partnering with the military because national security should be a priority for all us—not just for the less than one-half of one percent of us who serve in the armed forces. We can all do something to contribute. The faculty, staff and students of the University of North Carolina stand ready to do our part.

Thank you, Mister Chairman. This concludes my testimony.

Defining and Improving Success for Student Veterans
US House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
May 8th, 2014 "Defining and Improving Success for Student Veterans"
Testimony

Dr. Melissa Vito
Senior Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management and
Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives and Student Success,
The University of Arizona

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, Representative Kirkpatrick, Member (s) of the Committee, My name is Dr. Melissa Vito and I am the Senior Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management and Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives and Student Success at The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona believes it is at the forefront of on-campus support for student veterans, and is honored to share our efforts with the Committee. I would like to thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Takano for your leadership on this critical issue, and especially to you, Congresswoman Kirkpatrick for the opportunity to address you today.

I want to focus today on three primary areas: 1) what The University of Arizona is doing to engage and support our student veterans and how this evolved on our campus, 2) how The University of Arizona measures success for student veterans through graduation rates, and 3) explore and suggest further measures still needed to be taken to ensure all student veterans across the United States are accomplishing their academic goals.

However, before we go further, I would like to talk briefly about why we do what we do. At The University of Arizona, we recognize and appreciate the commitment and sacrifices made by our men and women who serve and have served in the armed forces and are committed to making a college education a reality. We know that advances in technology and medicine have saved countless lives in the battlefield and we are thankful for that – but it also means that many veterans returned with physical and mental disabilities. We believe it is our responsibility to engage these and all student veterans and address the issues experienced during their time in service, and as you will see, that is a key element of the support system we have created at The University of Arizona. At the core of what we strive to accomplish, and how we define success, is to ensure our student veterans transition successfully, are retained, graduate, and obtain meaningful employment – and our data shows that we are doing this in ways that equal or exceed our non-veteran students.

First, some facts: The University of Arizona has 40,621 students of which 1,317 are student veterans or 3.2% of our overall population while The University of Arizona's current reservist population is 0.2% or 62 reservists. Since 2008, The University of

Arizona entering cohort of student veterans has doubled from 178 to 355 in 2013. Females account for about one third of our total student veteran population. Usage of our main campus VETS Center increased 31% from Fall 2012 to Fall 2013 to over 10,000 visits that semester.

Until 2008, we did not know these numbers. That year we embarked on an effort to bring the unique strengths of our nationally-recognized Disability Resource Center and Adaptive Athletics Program to bear on returning *disabled* student veterans. In the process, we discovered we did not know our student veteran population well enough - how many student veterans did we have and what services did they truly need? As a result, we initiated a survey and engaged our student veterans university-wide to tell us their true needs on campus. We followed up on this assessment in September 2009 when The University of Arizona Disabled Veterans Reintegration and Education Project brought together leaders from throughout the United States for a roundtable discussion to identify best practices developed to serve military veterans seeking higher education.

Six years later, we are proud of our efforts. Our program is built around five key assets:

- The Veterans Education and Transition Services (VETS) offices: one large facility on main campus and another, which we believe is unique, on our Arizona Health Sciences Campus;
- Disability Resources Center and Adaptive Athletics Program, including our Disabled Veterans Reintegration and Education project;
- Partnership with the Southern Arizona VA Hospital, including the provision of on-campus counseling and medical scheduling programs;
- The Supportive Education for Returning Veterans (SERV) program, co-developed between the Southern Arizona VA Hospital and The University of Arizona, which increases retention and graduation rates;
- The University of Arizona College of Law Veterans Clinic, which engages The University of Arizona law students in support of veterans involved with the Tucson Veterans Court process, providing legal assistance to veterans, often from law students who are veterans themselves.

VETS Center as the Core

At The University of Arizona, the core of our engagement with student veterans occurs through our two Veterans Education and Transition Services Centers, or VETS Centers. One VETS Center is located in the heart of campus in the USS Arizona Student Union Memorial Center and our second VETS Center is in on our Arizona Health Sciences Center. Staffing both VETS Centers is our Assistant Dean of Students for Military and Veterans Engagement and a staff of trained student veterans that have transitioned, are knowledgeable about The University of Arizona, and are utilizing VA educational benefits. The VETS Centers offer individualized service to improve the experience of all

veterans attending The University of Arizona. We provide a step-by-step "in-processing" or "on-boarding guidance" for student veterans who are applying or have been recently admitted to the institution. The VETS Centers foster a USO atmosphere allowing veterans to study, relax, and engage with other student veterans who have walked in their same boots.

The VETS Centers partner with numerous on and off campus agencies to provide critical services for student veterans in this endeavor. Examples of partnerships include:

- Collaboration with the Office of Instruction and Assessment in the creation of a video designed for faculty to better engage student veterans. The video was initially presented during Fall 2013 faculty training;
- Importantly for the purpose of this hearing, VETS also works closely with Career Services to ensure our student veterans have the resources to apply for jobs when graduating and are aware of current hiring opportunities. Some partner employers with Career Services have provided specific outreach to student veterans including USAA, GEICO, and Enterprise to name a few;
- The Office of Admissions partners with VETS to do outreach to applying and recently admitted student veterans providing information specific to VA educational benefits, the VETS Centers, our Student Veterans of America chapter, and our Supportive Education for Returning Veterans (SERV) program which is a three-course resiliency module which I will discuss later;
- The Veterans Service Office offers online certification for all students utilizing VA educational benefits to decrease the wait to receive benefits. The Department of Veterans Services conducts periodic compliance audits to ensure school certifying officials understand and are in compliance with VA educational requirements. The University of Arizona was audited last month and received notification that we are 100% compliant;
- Finally, as part of The University of Arizona's land grant mission, VETS and the College of Social and Behavioral Science's (SBS) Department of Government and Public Policy are in the process of partnering with the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona, the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, and the Arizona Coalition of Military Families. The VETS Center will host a project with the goal of engaging public and private sector organizations from the military, government, and community. The SBS Government and Public Policy Department will provide ongoing "network" training for the organizations at no charge. A project coordinator and non-University of Arizona staff will be housed in the VETS Center with the intent to create a collaborative environment among the organizations with a goal of providing more efficient services to our veterans in Southern Arizona. With the project being based in the VETS Center, The University of Arizona student veterans will benefit by having the most current access to veteran services throughout Southern Arizona.

The University of Arizona Disability Resource Center:

The University of Arizona Disability Resource Center or DRC is worth discussing more in detail. The DRC is a national model for disability services in higher education and a critical partner in helping to facilitate the successful transition of veterans to campus. The DRC procured a Congressionally-directed Department of Education grant in 2008 and since then has been a leader for disabled veterans in higher education, producing research-based best practices for use on college campuses.

In 2012, The University of Arizona's Department of Disability Studies in the College of Education, the DRC, and our Veterans Education and Transition Services area obtained a grant from the Paralyzed Veterans of America to design an adaptive athletics and college learning camp for veterans with spinal cord injury. Building upon the success of the project, we obtained another grant in 2014-2015 to replicate the college-learning component including the VETS Center and the Supportive Education for Returning Veterans (SERV) curriculum of which I will discuss later.

The DRC, through its research and engagements with disabled student veterans, has expanded our understanding that many veterans arrive on campus with a new injury or disability, and are often unfamiliar with the resources available to them. The University of Arizona's DRC works with veterans individually to determine appropriate accommodations and strategies to ensure an accessible university experience. Many frequent accommodations made are note-taking, providing extended time on exams, and electronic documents including e-texts.

Finally, with six competitive teams and an adaptive fitness center, the University of Arizona's Adaptive Athletics program is the most comprehensive in the nation, and which has allowed us to introduce over 100 disabled veterans to opportunities to for competition, health, and community through sport.

Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS):

The Southern Arizona VA Health Care System partners with the University of Arizona to provide numerous services to our student veterans including:

- A Lead Psychologist (Dr. Michael Marks) who provides individual counseling to student veterans in the VETS Center weekly;
- A female counselor who provides counseling specifically for our female student veterans in Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) weekly. We recognize our female student veterans have specific issues not identified by our male student veteran counterparts;
- A Nurse Practitioner who enrolls student veterans into the VA Health Care System in Campus Health Services (CHS) various times throughout the semester depending on request;

- The Transition Patient Advocate for OIF/OIE/OND meets with student veterans, and provides follow up to issues pertaining to VA health care, in the VETS Center various times throughout the semester.

Supportive Education for Returning Veterans:

The University of Arizona and the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) have jointly developed the Supporting Education for the Returning Veterans (SERV) program, and partner in its implementation. This cohort-based program consists of three core classes at the University of Arizona designed specifically for veterans to transition them from the military into higher education. The courses include:

- Resiliency and Human Potential
- Learn to Teach to Learn
- Leadership Principles and Practices

Additionally we have added the following:

- Transitional Resiliency, which combines the three courses above into one course with a focus on the Resiliency course.
- Resiliency Orientation (a one-day resiliency orientation course).

All courses satisfy graduation requirements and are for-credit. These classes embody a recovery model approach to increase student resiliency while increasing retention and graduation rates. Student veterans improve memory, strengthen their problem-solving skills, learn to succeed in academic settings, and build social networks for support. SERV has resulted in a retention rate of over 90 percent among participating student veterans.

The SERV program has been recognized by the VA's Office of Inspector General as a "best practice" and is one of the VA's "Strong Practices Project". It has been featured on "The American Veteran" and in conjunction with the VETS Center was featured in the Lumina Foundation magazine "Focus" in the Spring 2013 edition.

Most recently for the SERV program, VETS is partnering with University of Arizona's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) to create a thematic minor entitled "Professional Resiliency". This will be open to all University of Arizona students. Further, last month the University of Arizona hosted a "train the trainers" workshop conducted by SERV creators Dr. Michael Marks and Dr. Phil Callahan. Representatives from institutions in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado attended. *This is a program that we recommend be expanded to institutions nationwide.*

Other collaborations have added important elements to the University of Arizona's program:

Student Veterans of America (SVA):

The University of Arizona has a strong collaboration with the Student Veterans Association (SVA) national organization, as is evidenced with one current UA law student veteran Matt Randle who is on the Board of Directors of the SVA, as well as a strong relationship with our University of Arizona SVA chapter.

- On April 17, 2014 the University of Arizona Assistant Dean of Students for Military and Veterans Engagement met Student Veterans of America President and CEO D. Wayne Robinson at the Arizona Department of Veterans Services office in Phoenix with counterparts from Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University to discuss best practices and challenges in facilitating student success, not only on our respective campuses, but nationally.

- The SVA chapter at the University of Arizona works collaboratively with the University to reduce the sense of social isolation experienced by returning servicemen and women through outreach, engagement, community service, and networking functions. The SVA student leadership for academic year 2014-2015 will be meeting with VETS in early June 2014 for an on campus retreat. During this time the SVA and VETS will review the Annual Student Veteran Engagement Survey. The two will then collectively strategize, determine priorities, and plan the course of action for the academic year.

Additional Partnerships:

- The Southern Arizona Chapter of the American Red Cross, through a grant with AmeriCorps, supports five student veteran tutors in the VETS Center - tutoring other student veterans.

- VETS is developing a Bridge program with Pima Community College for student veterans attending PIMA who are intending to transfer to The University of Arizona. At the core of the bridge program will be the incorporation of our Supportive Education for Transition Services (SERV).

Measuring Success Rates

The University measures the success rate of all student veterans in the exact same way that we measure the success rates of our overall student population – by examining 4-year and 6-year graduation rates.

The appendix includes specific data and charts highlighting the graduation rates (4-year and 6-year) of student veterans as compared to all new freshmen. The University of

Arizona's student veterans consistently graduate at higher rates than the general student body (67.4% vs. 61.5%).

SERV has resulted in overall retention rates of over 90% for those student veterans not enrolled in SERV classes versus 70-80% retention for those who have not taken SERV classes.

Additionally, while we utilize graduation rates as the ultimate measure of academic success, we also regularly examine and analyze enrollment and retention figures as well as student profile statistics to inform our academic support programs. Finally, we include annual assessment of student veteran needs to continually guide our practices and support services. The 2012 survey respondents indicate services they most need The University of Arizona to provide are registration assistance (91%), registrar services/enrollment verification (88%), retention/degree completion assistance (87%), and conveniently located veterans support (86%).

We are expanding staff in Career Services to work specifically with veterans to ensure that they capture the full range of their experiences, education and skills that they bring to the job market and their careers. We have strategically located our VETS Center adjacent to out Career Services office to strengthen this relationship.

At The University of Arizona, President Ann Weaver Hart has committed through our 100% Student Engagement program that students will have an engagement experience (internship, research, study abroad, civic engagement) while enrolled to make sure that they will be career –ready when they graduate or are competitive for admission to graduate or professional schools. We are expanding staff in Career Services to work specifically with veterans to ensure that they capture the full range of their experiences, education, and skills that they bring to the job market.

There is Still Much to be Done

As we explore what measures still need to be taken to ensure our student veterans are accomplishing their academic goals, I ask you to consider that the first six months of transition are crucial, and it is exactly that transition our Supportive Education for Returning Veterans (SERV) program takes aim at addressing. *We believe the most effective steps for Institutions of Higher Education to take to increase their support for returning veterans on campus is to establish a student veterans center to bring them together, and also implement SERV course availability to enhance their prospects for academic success.* As a result, we ask that this committee be supportive of SERV and of additional SERV training across the country. Funding support is necessary to take SERV to the rest of the nation's colleges and universities and ultimately to reach more of America's student veterans – and The University of Arizona stands ready to help.

In closing, I would like to share an observation by Dr. Michael Marks, one of the co-developers of the SERV program, has observed that, *"While it is great that we, as a country, are willing to spend a million dollars a day to save a soldiers life, it will be an even better day when we will commit the same resources to give them back their lives."* We at The University of Arizona believe that we, as an institution, have demonstrated our commitment to not only "give them back their lives," but to assist in making them the leaders of tomorrow. We are asking this committee to support our efforts to make the academic dreams of all our nation's veterans to become a reality.

I would like to thank the Chairman, the ranking committee member, Congresswomen Kirkpatrick, and all of the members of this committee for allowing us to share what The University of Arizona has done to engage our student veterans.

Appendix

1. What percentage of The University of Arizona students are veterans?

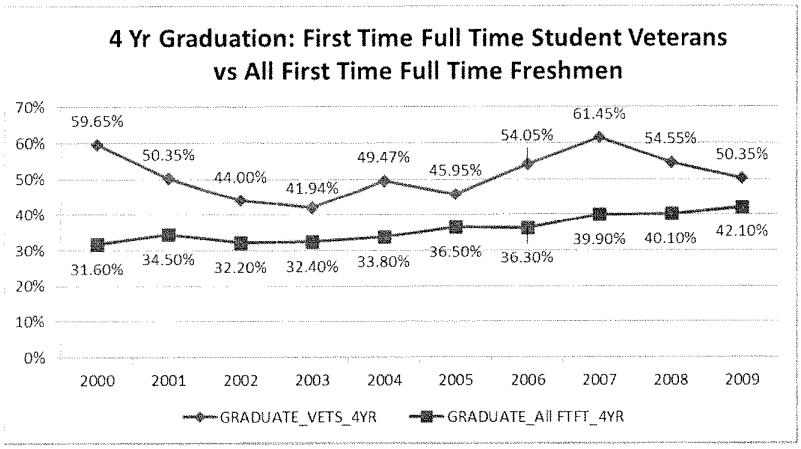
- As of Fall 2013, there were 1,317 student veterans* registered at The University of Arizona. That is 3.2% of the total student population of 40,621 total University of Arizona students.

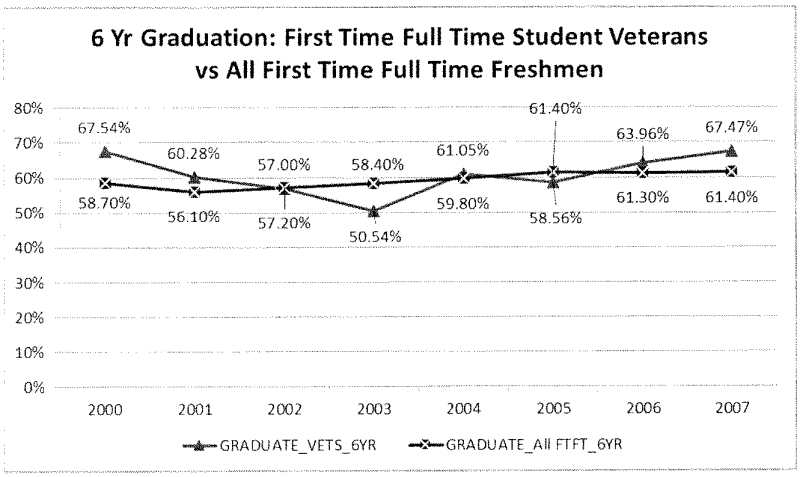
*Self-declared veterans on admission application OR received veterans education benefits.

2. Does The University of Arizona currently measure the success rates of student veterans who us the GI Bill?

The University measures the success rate of all student veterans in the exact same way that we measure the success rates of our overall student population – by examining 4-year and 6-year graduation rates.

The following three charts highlight the graduation rates (4-year and 6-year) of student veterans as compared to all new freshmen. ***The University of Arizona's student veterans consistently graduate at higher rates than the general student body.***





3. What percentage of The University of Arizona's student veterans are also reservists who can be deployed to a military engagement location?

- Of the 40,621 students registered at The University of Arizona in Fall 2013, 0.2% were Reservists (62 individuals).

4. Does The University of Arizona have a program in place to assist deployed veterans with continuing their field of study?

Currently, The University of Arizona employs its Military Leave of Absence (MLOA) policy whenever a student is deployed. This policy states:

> The University of Arizona supports students who are members of the United States armed forces. An undergraduate or graduate student who is a member of the U.S. Military (active duty, reservist, national guard) who is called or ordered to active duty may be granted a MLOA from the University for the period of active duty and up to one year after returning from active duty. Student with MLOA need not apply for readmission or pay readmission fees. MLOA allows those students to preregister for classes during their priority registration period prior to the term when they plan to return to campus.

The following testimonial of a University of Arizona student reservist exemplifies how the MLOA policy is effective:

> A reservist attending The University of Arizona was called to active duty in early November 2003 and subsequently had to physically leave campus two weeks prior to Thanksgiving. The University worked with the student's faculty to bring closure to the student reservist's semester. Four of the five professors awarded the student his current grade as of mid-November as the final grade for the semester. The fifth professor agreed to have the student take an "Incomplete" for the course and finish the final assignment over the course of the next year. Upon return home, the reservist was able to enroll for courses consistent with MLOA policy.

Additional Policies:

- Student veterans utilizing Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits are eligible to enroll for classes during priority registration with Honors students and athletes.
- The University of Arizona participates in the Yellow Ribbon Program.
- All veterans in the state of Arizona can qualify for in-state residency classification.

5. How has The University of Arizona VETS program helped student veterans adapt to a traditional classroom environment?

VETS Center as the Core

At The University of Arizona, the core of our engagement with student veterans occurs through our two Veterans Education and Transition Services Centers, or VETS Centers. One VETS Center is located in the heart of campus in the USS Arizona Student Union Memorial Center and our second VETS Center is in on our Arizona Health Sciences Center. Staffing both VETS Centers is our Assistant Dean of Students for Military and Veterans Engagement and a staff of trained student veterans that have transitioned, are knowledgeable about The University of Arizona, and are utilizing VA educational benefits. The VETS Centers offer individualized service to improve the experience of all veterans attending The University of Arizona. We provide a step-by-step "in-processing" or "on-boarding guidance" for student veterans who are applying or have been recently admitted to the institution. The VETS Centers foster a USO atmosphere allowing veterans to study, relax, and engage with other student veterans who have walked in their same boots.

The VETS Centers partner with numerous on and off campus agencies to provide critical services for student veterans in this endeavor. Examples of partnerships include:

- Collaboration with the Office of Instruction and Assessment in the creation of a video designed for faculty to better engage student veterans. The video was initially presented during Fall 2013 faculty training;

- Importantly for the purpose of this hearing, VETS also works closely with Career Services to ensure our student veterans have the resources to apply for jobs when graduating and are aware of current hiring opportunities. Some partner employers with Career Services have provided specific outreach to student veterans including USAA, GEICO, and Enterprise to name a few;
- The Office of Admissions partners with VETS to do outreach to applying and recently admitted student veterans providing information specific to VA educational benefits, the VETS Centers, our Student Veterans of America chapter, and our Supportive Education for Returning Veterans (SERV) program which is a three-course resiliency module which I will discuss later;
- The Veterans Service Office offers online certification for all students utilizing VA educational benefits to decrease the wait to receive benefits. The Department of Veterans Services conducts periodic compliance audits to ensure school certifying officials understand and are in compliance with VA educational requirements. The University of Arizona was audited last month and received notification that we are 100% compliant;
- Finally, as part of The University of Arizona's land grant mission, VETS and the College of Social and Behavioral Science's (SBS) Department of Government and Public Policy are in the process of partnering with the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona, the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, and the Arizona Coalition of Military Families. The VETS Center will host a project with the goal of engaging public and private sector organizations from the military, government, and community. The SBS Government and Public Policy Department will provide ongoing "network" training for the organizations at no charge. A project coordinator and non-University of Arizona staff will be housed in the VETS Center with the intent to create a collaborative environment among the organizations with a goal of providing more efficient services to our veterans in Southern Arizona. With the project being based in the VETS Center, The University of Arizona student veterans will benefit by having the most current access to veteran services throughout Southern Arizona.

The University of Arizona Disability Resource Center:

The University of Arizona Disability Resource Center or DRC is worth discussing more in detail. The DRC is a national model for disability services in higher education and a critical partner in helping to facilitate the successful transition of veterans to campus. The DRC procured a Congressionally-directed Department of Education grant in 2008 and since then has been a leader for disabled veterans in higher education, producing research-based best practices for use on college campuses.

In 2012, The University of Arizona's Department of Disability Studies in the College of Education, the DRC, and our Veterans Education and Transition Services area obtained a grant from the Paralyzed Veterans of America to design an adaptive athletics and college learning camp for veterans with spinal cord injury. Building upon the success of

the project, we obtained another grant in 2014-2015 to replicate the college-learning component including the VETS Center and the Supportive Education for Returning Veterans (SERV) curriculum of which I will discuss later.

The DRC, through its research and engagements with disabled student veterans, has expanded our understanding that many veterans arrive on campus with a new injury or disability, and are often unfamiliar with the resources available to them. The University of Arizona's DRC works with veterans individually to determine appropriate accommodations and strategies to ensure an accessible university experience. Many frequent accommodations made are note-taking, providing extended time on exams, and electronic documents including e-texts.

Finally, with six competitive teams and an adaptive fitness center, the University of Arizona's Adaptive Athletics program is the most comprehensive in the nation, and which has allowed us to introduce over 100 disabled veterans to opportunities to for competition, health, and community through sport.

Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS):

The Southern Arizona VA Health Care System partners with the University of Arizona to provide numerous services to our student veterans including:

- A Lead Psychologist (Dr. Michael Marks) who provides individual counseling to student veterans in the VETS Center weekly;
- A female counselor who provides counseling specifically for our female student veterans in Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) weekly. We recognize our female student veterans have specific issues not identified by our male student veteran counterparts;
- A Nurse Practitioner who enrolls student veterans into the VA Health Care System in Campus Health Services (CHS) various times throughout the semester depending on request;
- The Transition Patient Advocate for OIF/OIE/OND meets with student veterans, and provides follow up to issues pertaining to VA health care, in the VETS Center various times throughout the semester.

Supportive Education for Returning Veterans:

The University of Arizona and the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System (SAVAHCS) have jointly developed the Supporting Education for the Returning Veterans (SERV) program, and partner in its implementation. This cohort-based program consists of three core classes at the University of Arizona designed specifically for veterans to transition them from the military into higher education. The courses include:

- Resiliency and Human Potential

- Learn to Teach to Learn
- Leadership Principles and Practices

Additionally we have added the following:

- Transitional Resiliency, which combines the three courses above into one course with a focus on the Resiliency course.
- Resiliency Orientation (a one-day resiliency orientation course).

All courses satisfy graduation requirements and are for-credit. These classes embody a recovery model approach to increase student resiliency while increasing retention and graduation rates. Student veterans improve memory, strengthen their problem-solving skills, learn to succeed in academic settings, and build social networks for support. SERV has resulted in a retention rate of over 90 percent among participating student veterans.

The SERV program has been recognized by the VA's Office of Inspector General as a "best practice" and is one of the VA's "Strong Practices Project". It has been featured on "The American Veteran" and in conjunction with the VETS Center was featured in the Lumina Foundation magazine "Focus" in the Spring 2013 edition.

Most recently for the SERV program, VETS is partnering with University of Arizona's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) to create a thematic minor entitled "Professional Resiliency". This will be open to all University of Arizona students. Further, last month the University of Arizona hosted a "train the trainers" workshop conducted by SERV creators Dr. Michael Marks and Dr. Phil Callahan. Representatives from institutions in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado attended. *This is a program that we recommend be expanded to institutions nationwide.*

Other collaborations have added important elements to the University of Arizona's program:

Student Veterans of America (SVA):

The University of Arizona has a strong collaboration with the Student Veterans Association (SVA) national organization, as is evidenced with one current UA law student veteran Matt Randle who is on the Board of Directors of the SVA, as well as a strong relationship with our University of Arizona SVA chapter.

- On April 17, 2014 the University of Arizona Assistant Dean of Students for Military and Veterans Engagement met Student Veterans of America President and CEO D. Wayne Robinson at the Arizona Department of Veterans Services office in Phoenix with counterparts from Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University to discuss best practices and challenges in facilitating student success, not only on our respective campuses, but nationally.

- The SVA chapter at the University of Arizona works collaboratively with the University to reduce the sense of social isolation experienced by returning servicemen and women through outreach, engagement, community service, and networking functions. The SVA student leadership for academic year 2014-2015 will be meeting with VETS in early June 2014 for an on campus retreat. During this time the SVA and VETS will review the Annual Student Veteran Engagement Survey. The two will then collectively strategize, determine priorities, and plan the course of action for the academic year.

Additional Partnerships:

- The Southern Arizona Chapter of the American Red Cross, through a grant with AmeriCorps, supports five student veteran tutors in the VETS Center - tutoring other student veterans.

- VETS is developing a Bridge program with Pima Community College for student veterans attending PIMA who are intending to transfer to The University of Arizona. At the core of the bridge program will be the incorporation of our Supportive Education for Transition Services (SERV).

6. How has the University of Arizona collaborated with the Student Veterans of America on campus to help make sure their shared interest in facilitating student success in happening?

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF CURTIS L. COY

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Takano, and other Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today to discuss the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) efforts to help Veterans achieve success in their educational endeavors. I will discuss implementation of the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program, Public Law (P.L.) 112–249, and the "Million Records Project" undertaken through a partnership with the Student Veterans of America (SVA) and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC).

We are committed to ensuring that our Nation's Veterans, Servicemembers, Reservists, and qualifying dependents receiving VA education benefits have access to high-quality educational opportunities that will enhance their ability to meet their academic and career objectives. The expansion of the VSOC program, the outreach efforts enacted in accordance with P.L. 112–249, and the data being made available as a result of the Million Records initiative will help foster educational success and provide information on how Veterans are performing in their educational pursuits. My testimony today will highlight the achievements made through these efforts.

VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC)

Beginning in 2009, VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service has worked to implement and expand the VSOC program, deploying Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) to select school locations to help students succeed during their transition from active duty to the college environment. VR&E Service continues to enhance all aspects of the VSOC program to increase its effectiveness. In fiscal year (FY) 2012, VA had a total of 32 VSOC campus locations. In FY 2013, 62 additional VRCs were added to the VSOC program, which now includes 79 VRCs located at 94 institutions of higher learning (IHL).

The VSOC program and counselors, through education and career counseling (Title 38, Chapter 36) services, provide students seamless access to VA benefits and services and support their successful integration on college and university campuses.

We are continuing our efforts to enhance support to Veterans on campus across a wide range of benefits and services. At each school site, VSOC counselors are working with their university partners to establish a student mentoring program. The goal of the mentoring program is to assist students with the challenges and/or stressors of entering or returning to an academic environment. VSOC counselors also collaborate with VA Medical Centers and campus counseling centers to ensure that students are aware of available mental health services and receive referrals as necessary to support their needs.

In addition, the Corporation for National and Community Service has entered into an interagency agreement with VA to enhance supportive services for Veterans on campus. The VetSuccess AmeriCorps members are now supporting the VSOC counselor in conducting outreach events and coordinating on-campus activities and services based on student needs.

VR&E Service is developing a strategy to determine the way ahead to best align resources for the optimal VSOC coverage at school sites with significant Veteran populations. This initiative is considering current VSOC sites, schools with interest in hosting future VSOC counselors, the number of Veterans attending schools under VA education programs, and schools' proximity to both VA health care facilities and military installations.

Carrying Out P.L. 112–249

P.L. 112–249, enacted on January 10, 2013 which enhances and complements the provisions of Executive Order 13607, requires VA to develop a comprehensive policy to improve outreach and transparency to Veterans and Servicemembers through the provision of information on IHLs, and to deploy online tools to implement the policy. The law also requires VA to develop a centralized mechanism for tracking and publishing feedback from students and State Approving Agencies (SAA) regarding the quality of instruction at IHLs, their recruiting practices, and post-graduation employment placement. The law prohibits VA from approving any course offered by an educational institution that provides any commission, bonus, or other incentive payment based directly or indirectly on success in securing enrollments or financial aid. Finally, it requires VA to perform two market surveys related to academic readiness and commercially available, off-the-shelf, online comparison tools.

VA partnered with the Department of Education (ED), Department of Defense, Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Department of Justice (DOJ), and the National Association of State Approving Agencies to implement P.L. 112–249. As required by this law, VA submitted a report to Congress in April of 2013 that included a description of the comprehensive policy, VA's

plan to implement the policy, and the results of the market surveys conducted to determine the availability of commercial off-the-shelf online tools.

As a result of the required market surveys, VA began piloting an online assessment tool called CareerScope® that gives prospective students career recommendations based on interests and aptitudes, and also provides information on related courses and training programs. Since August 2013, nearly 10,000 individuals have started or completed the free assessment. VA conducted another market survey for an online tool that provides prospective students with a list of providers of postsecondary education and training opportunities based on specific criteria selected by the individual. We discovered that many online tools provide much of the required information; however, none of the Web sites provide all of the data required by law. As a result, VA built an online tool that aggregates information from existing Web sites to provide all of the required data.

The GI Bill® Comparison Tool, which launched on February 4, 2014 pursuant to the Executive Order and Public Law, helps Veterans become informed postsecondary education consumers. It displays median borrowing amounts, graduation rates, and loan-default rates by school, and it also indicates whether or not the school participates in the Yellow Ribbon Program or has agreed to adhere to the Principles of Excellence prescribed by Executive Order 13607. The tool allows beneficiaries to estimate the amount of funding they may receive under the Post-9/11 GI Bill®. The tool was recently featured by Dr. Jill Biden on NBC's Today Show while celebrating the three-year anniversary of the First Lady's and Dr. Biden's Joining Forces Initiative. As of April 11, 2014, there have been 133,970 unique visitors who have used the tool.

VA will continue exploring the development and refinement of the GI Bill® Comparison Tool. Some of the new features and functionalities we are considering include improving the school/employer search capability, incorporating the ability to compare multiple schools side-by-side, providing school-specific GI Bill benefit calculations, displaying feedback and/or complaints about a particular school, and displaying Veteran-specific outcome information, among many other features. These further enhancements would allow Veterans to compare schools across more dimensions and at a finer level of detail.

Pursuant to Executive Order 13607, VA developed and launched the GI Bill® Feedback System, a centralized online reporting system that allows Veterans, Servicemembers, Reservists, and eligible dependents to report negative experiences with educational institutions. Depending upon the nature of the complaint, VA may serve as an intermediary between the student and school to assist in the resolution of the complaint, or VA may launch a targeted risk-based review of the school. Complaints may also be reviewed by state and Federal law enforcement agencies, including DOJ. VA began accepting complaints through the GI Bill® Feedback System when it was launched on January 30, 2014. As of April 13, 2014, there have been 16,701 individuals who have viewed the Feedback System's information Web page, 3,671 individuals who logged into the system, and 1,269 submitted complaints. In March 2014, VA began transmitting the complaints to the centralized FTC Consumer Sentinel database, where they are accessible by law enforcement agencies.

VA has successfully completed several other activities needed to meet the requirements of Executive Order 13607 and P.L. 112–249 since January 2013. Specifically, VA updated the School Certifying Official handbook; published student outcome measure definitions on ED's College Navigator; registered the GI Bill® Trademark; and began enforcing legal terms of use of the trademark.

Million Records Initiative

VA established an agreement with SVA to create a new education completion database for Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill beneficiaries in order to study the outcomes of these VA education programs. VA also established an agreement with NSC to match VA's records and provide graduation and program completion information. The resulting data set contains information on Veteran beneficiaries enrolled in education programs from 2002 through 2013. NSC was an available source for tracking student completion rates at the individual level. After NSC matched the VA records, the de-identified results were released to SVA for analysis.

On March 24, 2014, SVA released the "Million Records Project" report, a study which provides a baseline on Veteran student success. Overall, SVA found that Veterans have an education completion rate of 52 percent, which is much higher than non-Veteran, non-traditional students who have a completion rate of 23 to 30 percent based on previous studies. Non-traditional students are defined as individuals who do not go into postsecondary education directly from high school; are financially independent; have dependents; are enrolled part-time; and are working full-time while attending school, among other criteria. These characteristics are shared by the

majority of our Veteran students. SVA also highlighted the fact that approximately 9 out of 10 Veterans initially earn degrees at the associate level or higher, with many Veterans going on to achieve higher levels of education. The results also indicated that a high percentage of Veterans are pursuing degrees in business, public service, health, science, and engineering.

The results of the study show that continued research on Veteran graduation rates is imperative. Prior to the "Million Records Project," accurate data on Veterans' academic outcomes has been nearly impossible to find, and the lack of data has caused confusion about Veteran success in the postsecondary education environment.

The current study provides one of the most widely scaled perspectives on Veterans' academic achievement and provides an important baseline. The success of the public-private partnership between VA, SVA, and NSC provides a clear path forward for future data-sharing and analysis. VA will continue working with them to expand and refine the research on Veterans' academic outcomes. Some of the future collaboration efforts being discussed include reviewing retention, persistence, and transfer rates, as well as adding data for subsequent academic years.

Conclusion

VA has worked with key stakeholders to ensure that Veterans are utilizing their education benefits efficiently and successfully. Through ongoing interagency cooperation and student outreach, VA will continue its efforts to ensure Veterans are informed consumers and schools meet their obligations in providing education and training to this Nation's "next greatest generation."

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or the other Members of the Subcommittee may have.

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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
KIM MCWATERS
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AND CEO
UNIVERSAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE, INC

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 8, 2014

Statement before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

May 8, 2014

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on defining and improving success for student veterans.

My name is Kim McWaters and I am the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Universal Technical Institute, Inc. (UTI). On behalf of the entire UTI team, I want to express our deep appreciation for this opportunity and commend the subcommittee for exploring this important topic.

Universal Technical Institute, Inc. (NYSE:UTI) is the leading provider of post-secondary education for students seeking careers as professional automotive, diesel, collision repair, motorcycle and marine technicians. Through our nationwide network of campuses, we provide specialized programs under the banner of several well-known brands, including Universal Technical Institute (UTI), Motorcycle Mechanics Institute and Marine Mechanics Institute (MMI) and NASCAR Technical Institute (NASCAR Tech). In the company's 49 year history, more than 170,000 students have received undergraduate degrees, diplomas and certificates from a UTI program. I have provided the subcommittee with company brochures that illustrate UTI's philosophy, our purpose and our programs, and more information can be found at www.uti.edu.

This subcommittee is dedicated to supporting America's veterans, who have given so much to our nation, in successfully transitioning to civilian life, finding meaningful opportunities to put their substantial skills to work, and building stable, successful post-military careers that allow them to take care of their families and contribute to their communities and the economy as whole. With the unemployment rate among veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan hovering above the national average at 6.8 percent, these are critically important goals.

UTI shares these goals, and we firmly believe that if we want to give returning veterans access to all the opportunities America has to offer, the skilled trades and strong, private vocational

education programs must be part of the solution.

While many sectors scramble to create jobs, those that rely on skilled trades are working to fill a widening gap between a growing number of available jobs and a shrinking pool of people trained to fill them. The Society of Manufacturing Engineers predicts that, as the manufacturing sector rebounds, and skilled trades people from the Baby Boom generation retire in droves, we could see a shortfall of skilled workers as early as 2015. In the transportation and automotive industry, which is helping to fuel America's economic recovery and return to growth, the need for skilled workers is critical. The U.S. Department of Labor projects there will be more than 1.2 million jobs in the collision, automotive, motorcycle and marine industries in the next five years, including 11,325 new entry-level jobs in 2014 alone.[1]

Plenty of industries and companies advertise jobs for veterans, but too often these are low-wage, low-skill positions that don't provide sufficient income to support a family, much less the opportunity to build a career. Our military veterans have tremendous skills and experience. They understand commitment, teamwork and what it means to serve. They are prepared for, and deserving of, a skills-focused job leading to a meaningful career.

For these veterans, the skilled trades offer jobs that pay well and that cannot be outsourced or off shored. With the right training, skilled trades people can create life-long careers in stable, growing industries with plenty of opportunities for advancement.

The transportation industry is an excellent example. A full-time minimum-wage employee earns just $15,080 annually. But in 2011, the median wage for automotive service technicians was $39,060, while diesel engine specialists earned a median wage of $43,660.[2] Fueled by the automotive industry's recovery and the retiring Baby Boomers, the demand for trained technicians continues to grow and, with that growth, we are seeing strong and steady increases in the wages our graduates earn, and in the career opportunities available to them.

To meet that growing demand, and to convert America's high-skills shortage into an abundance of high-skilled craftsmen, we need quality, private-sector vocational education.

UTI, and schools like us, offer hands-on, high-tech and industry-specific training that is simply not available in traditional academic settings. We provide important options for the kinds of people most likely to succeed in skilled trades: hands-on learners who thrive in focused vocational programs and have a keen interest in science, math engineering and technology. For many veterans, private vocational education is a natural fit. These programs, which can typically be completed in 10 to 22 months, get people in Agency (TIA/WAA) programs and veterans into the workforce quickly.

In addition, private-sector programs, when regulated properly and operated with integrity, often provide better graduation and job placement outcomes for students and a higher return on their educational investment than they can get from a public university or community college.

At Universal Technical Institute, more than 60 percent of students graduate[3], a rate significantly higher than that of two-year public colleges,[4] and among veterans, our graduation rate is more than 10 percent higher than the national average.[5] Four out of five of our graduates get jobs in the field for which they trained. Of those, approximately 20 percent are veterans of a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.[6]

At the heart of those strong student outcomes are UTI's job-driven educational and industry partnerships. These partnerships help us understand the transportation industry and customize our curriculum and educational experience to meet those needs. Our partners play a critical role in supporting our students. They help guide our programs, make capital investments in our facilities, give students the chance to work with the most current technology and offer them educational grants and scholarships. With industry expectations as a guide, our instructors teach students to work on today's sophisticated automotive technologies, to diagnose and solve problems, and to provide the level of service customers demand. When our students graduate, they are ready to go work.

That commitment to student success begins long before the first day of class, and we give military veterans specialized support.

Our Military Admissions representatives, 95 percent of whom are veterans themselves, surround veterans with the support they need to transition from military to civilian life and from a career

back in to school. We help veteran students navigate VA benefits and the financial aid process. At each of our campuses, we offer military-only orientation, classes on PTSD and civilian life readjustment, VA health and benefit fairs, mobile veterans' clubs and socials, VA student worker programs and job placement with military-friendly employers. All UTI graduates, including our veterans, are eligible for free career placement assistance and free continuing education, for life.

At UTI, we take seriously our obligation to give students the skills they need to become gainfully employed and to build successful, productive careers. We know other schools share our commitment, and we believe educational and industry partnerships are an essential element of this country's effort to close its widening skills gap and put Americans back to work.

But we are deeply concerned that various legislative and regulatory initiatives could prevent us from achieving these important goals.

We are concerned about a government system that prioritizes four-year degrees and largely ignores the skilled trades. A recent report by the Brookings Institution found that while the vast majority of the $4.3 billion the federal government spends every year on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education and training goes toward jobs that require at least a bachelor's degree, half of all STEM jobs do *not* require a four-year degree, and these jobs pay on average, $53,000 a year.

We absolutely should support technological innovation and students who are interested in pursuing advanced science and research. But we cannot forget that these same subjects are critical to fundamental industries that are the core drivers of our economy: manufacturing, healthcare, construction and transportation. STEM is not only for the privileged few. It's for everyone.

We are also concerned that some in Washington have chosen to discount the contributions of the entire private education sector due to missteps of a few. Certainly, we must address the problems, and UTI wholeheartedly supports policies that protect consumers and ensure the value of *all* educational programs. But by holding private-sector schools to rules and standards that do not apply to other educational institutions, policy makers are restricting valuable educational

opportunities for people who want to build successful, life-long careers in the skilled trades.

Recently, Congressman John Kline, Chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, held a field hearing in Arizona at which all three presidents of Arizona's three, public, four-year, and degree granting universities agreed with universally applying outcome standards to all higher education institutions. That's a standard we must adopt at the federal level.

The reality is that, until policy makers consider first-rate private-sector vocational schools as a viable and necessary part of our educational system and a valuable resource for our economy, we risk leaving behind the very people most in need of support, including our military veterans.

It is my sincere hope that the members of this subcommittee will become even more involved with technical training programs in your districts, that you will work to focus greater public attention on the need for more vocational programs targeted to employer needs, and most importantly, that you will support public policies that help *all* students get the education they need to achieve their goals.

Mr. Chairman, when we define "success for student veterans," technical training must not be relegated to second-class status. Our nation needs skilled workers. Our military veterans need, and deserve, every opportunity to create successful, life-long careers. And, we must work together to create these opportunities, and to preserve and protect the training programs that support the skilled trades and build strong futures for those who have served this great nation.

Again, I want to thank the Chairman and members of the subcommittee for allowing UTI to participate in this important hearing on behalf of our student veterans.

xxxxxxxx

Curriculum Vitae for Kim McWaters

Kimberly J. McWaters was appointed to Chairman of the Board in December 2013. She has served as UTI's Chief Executive Officer since October 2003 and as a director on UTI's Board from February 2005 through November 2013. Ms. McWaters served as UTI's President from 2000 to March 2011 and previously served on UTI's Board from 2002 to 2003. From 1984 to 2000, Ms. McWaters held several positions with UTI, including Vice President of Marketing and Vice President of Sales and Marketing. Ms. McWaters also serves as a director of Penske Automotive Group, Inc. (formerly United Auto Group, Inc.). Ms. McWaters received a BS in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix.

[1] BLS Unemployment Report - April 2014.pdf

[2] US Census Bureau 2011 Annual Survey of Manufactures, 11/8/12

[3] 2013 ACCSC annual report. Our consolidated student graduation rate in 2013 was approximately 62.7%.

[4] Knapp, L.G., Kelly-Reid, J.E., and Ginder, S.A. (2011). Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2012; Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2012; Graduation Rates, Selected Cohorts, 2004-09; and Employees in Postesecondary Institutions, Fall 2012 (NCES 2013-183). U. S. Department of Education. Washington, DC; National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 1/15/2014 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch (page 12; Table 4: Degree or certificate-seekers attending 2-year institutions and completing a degree or certification (cohort year 2008) graduation rate within 150% of normal program completion time).

[5] Student Veterans of America Million Records Project

[6] UTI student data. Approximately 11,400 of the 12,200 UTI graduates in 2012 were available for employment. At the time or reporting, approximately 9,600 of those available were employed within one year of their graduation dates, for a total of 85%.

[7] BLS Unemployment Report - April 2014.pdf

Statement for the Record

Reserve Officers Association of the United States

And

Reserve Enlisted Association

for the

House Committee on Veteran Affairs

Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

Veteran Education

May 8, 2014

"Serving Citizen Warriors through Advocacy and Education since 1922."™

Reserve Officers Association
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The Reserve Officers Association of the United States (ROA) is a professional association of commissioned, warrant and non-commissioned officers of our nation's seven uniformed services, and their spouses. ROA was founded in 1922 during the drawdown years following the end of World War I. It was formed as a permanent institution dedicated to National Defense, with a goal to teach America about the dangers of unpreparedness. When chartered by Congress in 1950, the act established the objective of ROA to: "... support and promote the development and execution of a military policy for the United States that will provide adequate National Security." The mission of ROA is to advocate strong Reserve Components and national security, and to support Reserve officers in their military and civilian lives.

The Association's 54,000 members include Reserve and Guard Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen, who frequently serve on Active Duty to meet critical needs of the uniformed services and their families. ROA's membership also includes officers from the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, who often are first responders during national disasters and help prepare for homeland security. ROA is represented in each state with 49 departments including departments in Latin America, the District of Columbia, Europe, the Far East, and Puerto Rico. Each department has several chapters throughout the state. ROA has more than 250 chapters worldwide.

ROA is a member of The Military Coalition, where it co-chairs the Guard and Reserve Committee. ROA is also a co-director of the National Military/Veterans Alliance. Overall, ROA works with 75 military, veterans, and family support organizations.

Elected President:	
Brigadier General Michael J. Silva, USAR (Ret.)	202-646-7706
Executive Director:	
Major General Andrew B. Davis, USMC (Ret.)	202-646-7705
Legislative Director, Health Care:	
CAPT Marshall Hanson, USNR (Ret.)	202-646-7713
Air Force Director:	
Colonel Bill Leake	202-646-7758
Army Director:	
Mr. "Bob" Feidler	202-646-7717
USNR, USMCR, USCGR, Retirement:	
CAPT Marshall Hanson, USNR (Ret.)	202-646-7713

The Reserve Enlisted Association (REA) is an advocate for the enlisted men and women of the United States Military Reserve Components in support of National Security and Homeland Defense, with emphasis on the readiness, training, and quality -of- life issues affecting their welfare and that of their families and survivors. REA is the only Joint Reserve association representing enlisted reservists – all ranks from all five branches of the military.

Executive Director:	
CMSgt Lani Burnett, USAF (Ret.)	202-646-7715

DISCLOSURE OF FEDERAL GRANTS OR CONTRACTS:
The Reserve Officers Association and Reserve Enlisted Association are member-supported organizations. Neither ROA nor REA have received grants, sub-grants, contracts, or subcontracts from the federal government in the past three years. All other activities and services of the associations are accomplished free of any direct federal funding.

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of our members, the Reserve Officers Association (ROA) and the Reserve Enlisted Association (REA) thank the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on Veteran Education. ROA and REA applaud the ongoing efforts by Congress to address issues facing veterans and service members, especially the recent gains in Veteran Education over the last few years through the instrument of the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

Just because one serves in the Reserve or Guard does not mean the individual is not a veteran. Reserve Force members are unique as they are the only veteran who when separated, continue to serve. Including the education program under Veteran Affairs jurisdiction continues to be a priority.

REQUESTED ACTION

ROA and REA urge Congress to continue its support of the Post 9/11 GI Bill enhancements and Tuition Assistance.

The Associations believe the following enhancements and improvements should be pursued in regards to the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits:

- **All GI Bill funding and administration belongs under the jurisdiction of the Senate and House committees on Veterans Affairs where veterans' education is a high priority.**
- **Adjust credit methods for those transferring from MGIB to the Post-9/11 GI Bill.**
- **Continue to improve oversight of colleges and associated loans given to student veterans.**
- **Accredit active duty experience and training toward completion of education programs.**
- **Improve educational support services for military, veterans and their families.**
- **Stipulate that Reserve Component personnel can use their educational benefits while mobilized.**
- **Transfer unused MGIB and Post-9/11 benefits for career service members to family members.**

DISCUSSION

The Post-9/11 GI Bill (also known as the GI Bill for the 21st Century) provides financial support for education and housing to veterans with at least 90 days of aggregate service on or after September 11, 2001. It is also a retention and recruiting tool that expands certain educational

benefits to service members, and their families. Despite many benefits provided, there are a few key legislative actions that are needed to better support the military member, veteran and family.

For those serving members who qualify for both the Montgomery GI bill (MGIB) and the Post 9/11 GI bill, the limit on total education is 36 months, yet the education dollar benefits are much lower under MGIB. The allowances paid to the MGIB for Selected Reserve is less than 12 percent of what is paid in the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Rather than losing months of education credit, serving members who used some MGIB should have education dollars adjusted instead.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill pays up to $ 1600 per month, a $1000 a year book stipend, plus a monthly living allowance up to $2750 in urban centers. A Post 9/11 reimbursement calculator can be found at: http://newgibill.org/calculator/

Active Duty MGIB enrollment costs a member $1200 that is paid over the first 12 months of active duty. An Active member can receive up to $1,648 per month to go to school, while a Reserve or Guard member has no enrollment costs but is paid only $362 per month as a full time student.

The incremental manner in which Chapters 30, 1606, and 1607 have evolved has led to inequities in educational benefits. Based on their service in overseas contingency operations, both at home and abroad, today's military reservists deserve enhancements to their eligibility under the MGIB for Selected Reserves as well as what is offered in the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

Program	USC	Current Monthly Rates			Length of Service
		Full	¾ time	½ time	
MGIB-Active	Title 38 Chapter 30	$1,648.00	$1236.00	$824.00	24-36 mos.
MGIB-SR REAP	Title 10 Chapter 1607	$1318.40	$988.80	$659.20	2 years + consecutive
MGIB-SR REAP	Title 10 Chapter 1607	$988.80	$741.60	$494.40	1 year + consecutive
MGIB-SR REAP	Title 10 Chapter1607	$659.20	$494.40	$329.60	90-364 days consecutive
MGIB –SR	Title 10 Chapter 1606	$362.00	$270.00	$179.00	6 year commitment

One Reservist, who questioned the MGIB-SR (Chptr 1606) payout, explained that full time rates barely pay for gas and parking for a full time student.

Also, Reserve and National Guard service members usually have 14 years to use their MGIB-SR benefits starting the first day they become eligible. This eligibility ends when Guard or Reserve members stop drilling with pay. If a demobilized Reservist stops drilling, he or she may switch from chapter 1607 benefits back to chapter 1606 benefits for a period equaling the length of deployment plus four months. Active Duty recipients have 10 years after separation to use their benefits.

Accreditation standards promote excellence in educational preparation while assuring the students' employers and other schools that graduates of accredited programs are educated in a core set of knowledge and skills. Yet, quality education can be achieved in a variety of ways; ROA and REA supports accreditation options that recognize the military education, training and experience of the individual student.

BACKGROUND:

Enacted in 1984, The Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB), also known as the Veteran's GI Bill of Rights, provides military education benefits to Active and Reserve duty service members of the U.S. military. The incremental manner in which Chapters 30, 1606, and 1607 have evolved has led to inequities in educational benefits.

The Montgomery GI Bill, codified in Title 38, Chapter 30, was designed to stimulate All-Volunteer Force recruitment and retention and to help veterans readjust to the civilian world on completion of their service. Language authorization for a Selected Reserve version of MGIB is in Title 10, Chapter 1606.

MGIB-SR began to erode as a benefit at parity just as the active forces began to be deployed more often, and thousands of National Guard and Reserve were recalled or mobilized to provide supplemental operational support. These G-R tours did not qualify for active MGIB.

Many veterans and military service organizations worked together to push for an updated, more encompassing GI Bill to meet contemporary costs, changes in force structure, and the rapid deployments and return of service members from Iraq and Afghanistan. Congress signed into law the Post-9/11 GI Bill in July 2008. The new bill covers the full cost of undergraduate education at any public institution of higher learning (degree-granting institutions) in the country and many private schools, and provides transfer of eligibility for benefits.

In January 2014, the VA and DoD announced a new online student complaint system where service members, veterans, and their families can report negative experiences at education institutions and training programs administering the Post-9/11 GI Bill, DoD Military Tuition Assistance, and other military-related education benefit programs.

A better informed customer makes for a better student. In February 2014, the Department of Veterans Affairs launched today an online GI Bill® Comparison Tool to make it easier for Veterans, Service members and dependents to calculate their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits and learn more about VA's approved colleges, universities and other education and training programs across the country.

CONCLUSION

Education improves a veteran's chance for employment, and many returning combat veterans seek a change in the life paths. Those Reserve and National Guard members, who may not have had the chance to support a contingency operation, still need an opportunity and the incentive to further their education. The Montgomery GI Bill for Selected Reservists is the tool to accomplish such.

ROA and REA restate our profound gratitude for the bipartisan success achieved by this committee by improving parity on pay, compensation and benefits between the Active and Reserve Components. The challenges being faced with proposed budget cuts and sequestration are going to make this committee's job that much more challenging.

ROA and REA look forward to working with the committee where we can present solutions to these challenges and other issues, and offers our support in anyway.

STATEMENT OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

DEFINING AND IMPROVING SUCCESS FOR STUDENT VETERANS

May 8th, 2014

THE AMERICAN LEGION WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 8, 2014

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of National Commander Dan Dellinger and the 2.4 million members of The American Legion, we thank you and your colleagues for the work you do in support of service members, veterans and their families. The American Legion commends you for holding this hearing on a program near and dear to its heart, one conceived and made real by Legionnaires in 1944.

The American Legion, through its Veterans Employment & Education Division, helps to ensure that U.S. veterans have the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. We are experts in programs involving veterans' education, small business, employment, veterans' preference, VA home loans, homeless veterans, training, licensing and certification, transition, USERRA, and other issues related to economics.

As a grassroots organization, The American Legion draws upon the strength of its membership to provide guidance on policies in the form of resolutions passed during annual national conventions or at meetings of the National Executive Committee. The will of the membership of the Legion is expressed through these resolutions, which support or oppose policy decisions on a wide range of issues including veterans, the children and youth of America, a strong national defense, and the principles of Americanism. The support and positions of The American Legion on any legislation is derived from the guidance of these resolutions and the founding documents of our organization.

Background

Societies have often rewarded their citizens for faithful military service since antiquity. Ancient Rome rewarded her military veterans with a plot of land, a cash payment and citizenship after 20 years of service. France offers citizenship to Foreign Legionnaires who successfully complete a three year enlistment. These benefits share something in common: they are earned, and they empower the recipient to better themselves.

After World War II The American Legion led an effort to develop a readjustment plan for World War II veterans and thereby ensure that American veterans were treated in a manner consistent with the best traditions of veteran benefits. Harry Colmery, a former National Commander of The American Legion, wrote a draft bill in January 1944 which provided crucial transition assistance for veterans returning home from World War II. It was soon introduced in Congress as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 – also known as the GI Bill of Rights — and was signed into law on June 22, 1944.

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The advent of the Post-9/11 GI Bill has restored an education benefit comparable to that provided by the original GI Bill, and as such, veterans are enrolling in higher education programs at high rates. Therefore, it is important that the success of these student-veterans be examined.

Student-Veteran Success

Joseph Cuseo, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Marymount College (California), has done extensive work in the area of defining and promoting student success. The American Legion strongly concurs with the definitions of and approaches to student success he lays out in an article entitled *Defining Student Success: The Critical First Step in Promoting It.*[1] In the article, Dr. Cuseo defines student success as "desirable student outcome". From there he lays out several indicators of student success:

- *Student retention*: Students remain in degree programs
- *Educational attainment*: Students complete degree programs
- *Academic achievement*: Students perform at satisfactory or superior levels in academic work
- *Student advancement*: Students advance to graduate degrees or gainful employment

Dr. Cuseo goes on to note that education, properly understood, requires more than mere job training or information transmission. A true education takes a holistic approach to individuals, and strives to provide an environment where in the whole person can develop. Dr. Cuseo enumerates six areas which a successful education will cultivate:

- *Intellectual Development*: developing skills for acquiring and communicating knowledge, learning how to learn, and how to think deeply.
- *Emotional Development*: developing skills for understanding, controlling, and expressing emotions.
- *Social Development*: enhancing the quality and depth of interpersonal relationships, leadership skills, and civic engagement.
- *Ethical Development*: formulating a clear value system that guides life choices and demonstrates personal character.
- *Physical Development*: acquiring and applying knowledge about the human body to prevent disease, maintain wellness, and promote peak performance.
- *Spiritual Development*: appreciating the search for personal meaning, the purpose of human existence, and questions that transcend the material or physical world.

[1] ESource for College Transitions, Vol. 4, Issue 5, May 2007 published by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina.

Too often modern discussions of education focus myopically on the employment aspect of education, thereby reducing education to mere job training. The American Legion believes that this is insufficient. While student veterans certainly should be able to attain employment upon graduation, The American Legion believes that this vision of education is impoverished. Holistic education promotes good citizenship amongst non-veterans, and promotes healthy transitions from military to civilian life amongst veterans.[2]

Ultimately, The American Legion believes that veteran student success should be defined in a similar manner as student success generally: veterans should graduate educational programs holistically developed as individuals, and prepared to continue the service to their country and community that they began in the military.

The GI Bill Today

The Post-9/11 GI Bill represents a substantial benefit for those who have served on active duty in the wake of 9/11. Like the original GI Bill, it represents a robust investment by the country into those who have served, and it represents a real opportunity for veterans to better themselves, should they choose to take advantage of its offerings. However, there remains work to be done.

A recent survey conducted by The American Legion of Legionnaires who either are themselves student-veterans, or who regularly deal with student-veterans indicates that veterans desire more counseling both in terms of how to use their benefits, as well as in terms of opportunities available to them, and how to best translate their military skills into student success.

The VA's VetSuccess On Campus (VSOC) is a program which places experienced VA councilors directly on college campuses. The program began as a pilot in 2009 at the University of South Florida, and by fiscal year 2013, had expanded to a total of 94 sites[3]. The American Legion believes strongly in VSOC program's ability to assist student-veterans in a holistic manner. Unfortunately, most who participated in our survey were unfamiliar with the VSOC program. Thus, The American Legion believes that the program should continue to be expanded and promoted as an important tool promoting student veteran success.

While there were few complaints about the certifying process, The American Legion believes that it is important to not become complacent in improving the process.

Another problem that The American Legion had found is that many veterans do not have a clear understanding of how much of their education benefits are used towards their education, how much of their benefit remains, and all face the challenge of navigating through a mine field of practices employed by institutions of higher learning that can result in inordinate debt. One area where student-veterans face undue burden is out-of-state tuition cost. Over the last couple of years, we have heard from countless veterans who, because of the nature of military service,

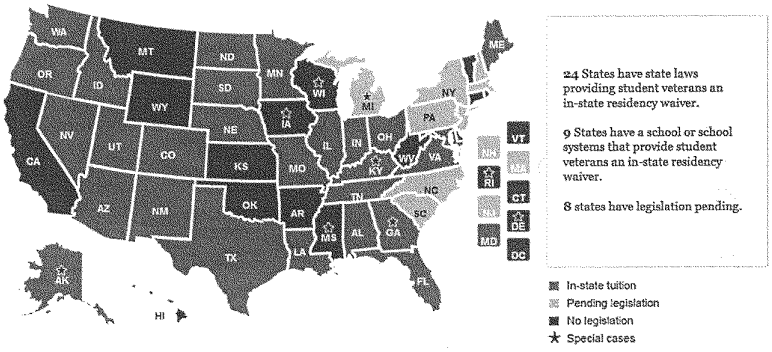
[2] Pragmatically speaking, Dr. Cuseo notes that studies show a higher rate of retention (the first indicator of student success) amongst students who are educated holistically.

[3] http://va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2475

often have a difficult time establishing residency for purposes of obtaining in-state tuition rates. Under current rules 40,000 student-veterans have to pay the difference between in-state tuition, which is covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and out-of-state tuition if they are attending school as a nonresident. Because of this, many of our student-veterans are unable to use their GI Bill benefits at an institution of higher education of their choice or are required to pay thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses in nonresidential tuition rates. Furthermore, public colleges and universities have significantly raised the costs of out-of-state tuition to offset decreasing revenues due to state budget cuts. Circumstances such as these pose significant challenges to using this important benefit.

For this reason, The American Legion, in collaboration with Veterans of Foreign Wars and Student Veterans of America, has led a state-by-state initiative to introduce, advocate for and support state legislation that would make all student-veterans eligible for in-state tuition at public colleges and universities, regardless of their residency status. Additionally, The American Legion is supporting current legislation which has passed the House and awaits action in the Senate which would tie school's eligibility to receive federal funds to their willingness to grant in-state tuition to student-veterans. As shown in Figure 2, less than half of states offer in-state tuition for vets and we continue to press the importance of this issue as a top contributor to education debt.[4]

Figure 2: The Fight for In-State Tuition for Veterans



Note: The In-State Tuition Map is a collaborative effort with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, and Student Veterans of America (SVA).
Source: Student Veterans of America

[4] Student Veterans of America, "The Fight for In-State Tuition for Veterans", http://www.studentveterans.org/what-we-do/in-state-tuition.html (Access May 3, 2014)

In addition to fighting for in-state tuition, The American Legion, in collaboration with Department of Defense, has led another state-by-state initiative to advocate for state legislation that would require public colleges, universities, and agencies to reassess and simplify the process for veterans to receive college credit for their military education or skills training when seeking occupational licenses. This initiative would establish a standard process to ensure student-veterans can apply their military education, experience, and prior learning – where applicable – towards college credit. This would also give student-veterans a better chance of obtaining a degree before their 36 months of GI Bill benefits runs out, and would allow for those individuals to make a quicker transition into the workforce

Overall, The American Legion applauds the strides that have been made toward protecting this benefit to our veterans, and ensuring that they are able to get the most out of it, and we thank the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing to examine what is working and what continues to need work.

For additional information regarding this testimony, please contact Mr. Shaun Rieley at The American Legion's Legislative Division, (202) 861-2700 or srieley@legion.org.

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STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

From Northern Arizona University

Northern Arizona University (NAU) is dedicated to providing a quality educational experience to the young men and women who have served our nation so honorably in the armed forces. Our veteran services are led by the NAU Office of Military and Veteran Affairs (OMVA), whose motto is, "Serving the Heroes Studying Among Us!"

NAU has received state and national recognition as a leader in higher education service and support to our student veterans and we appreciate the opportunity to share our experiences with the committee. NAU bases its service and support to our student veterans on national best practices. We are proud to be signatory to both the Principles of Excellence for Education, established in Executive Order 13607, and to the Department of Defense Voluntary Education Partnership Memorandum of Understanding. The Arizona Legislature established a separate process to incentivize attention to serving student veterans through the development of a process for postsecondary education institutions to be designated as Arizona Veterans Supportive Campuses, and we have proudly met that standard.

Research and experience has revealed that the first year experience is the most critical in the successful transition of any new student. Such is true for new student veterans from the military, compounded by the need to adjust to the academic rigor and other demands of a university setting. This fall NAU will introduce Veteran Educational Transition Success (VETS), a third generation transition program comprised of the following seven initiatives:

Orientation for New Student Veterans: All new student veterans and their loved ones are strongly encouraged to attend a new student veteran in-processing session just prior to fall classes. The session addresses VA benefits, on- and off-campus resources, academic resources, and the Student Veterans of America (SVA) club activities. In addition, volunteer professors will offer tutorials on college writing and communication, library navigation, and how to establish a personal finance plan.

Transition Checklist: As soon an incoming student veteran is identified, OMVA, through its one-stop Veteran Student Center (VSC), reaches out to the student with a welcome letter and the transition checklist that provides a detailed step-by-step guide that serves as the veteran's road map to a successful transition to NAU.

Math Prep: It may have been awhile since a new student veteran has taken a math class. NAU offers a free, online, six week Summer Bridge program, with or without coaching support, designed to help ease new student veterans back into math, reduce math anxiety, and/or to improve math placement scores.

Veteran's First-year Cohort Transition Seminar: All student veterans new to campus are strongly encouraged to enroll in the academically accredited and VA accepted 3-credit hour first year cohort transition seminar. The average student veteran at NAU is 28 years old, has 15–30 credit hours from military training and technically qualifies as a transfer student. Student veterans arrive with limited to no exposure to a college or university classroom or environment. Therefore, a transition course is offered to veterans taught by veterans, introducing the new students to the skills and resources required to succeed within a rigorous academic environment. The course is presented in a traditional classroom with an online component that allows students to explore potential career opportunities following graduation. The course's focus on degree determination and future career paths increases the individual commitment toward student success, retention and graduation.

College-Based (non-residency) Learning Community (CBLC): All students enrolled in the transition seminar also participate in the student veteran cohort CBLC. New student veterans arrive on campus with much anxiety about fitting into the campus culture. The CBLC is sponsored by the NAU chapter of the Student Veterans of America and supports the new student veteran in transition to NAU through social, informational and recreational activities alongside other student veterans on campus. Providing a community of fellow veterans they can relate to, trust, and connect with is key to a positive, engaging and successful experience.

Student Success Coaching Program (SSCP): The Student Success Coaching Program (SSCP) is designed to empower our new student veterans through a voluntary coaching relationship with an NAU employee or retiree who also is a veteran. Coaches are professionally trained volunteers who meet with new student veterans once a week to offer life-coaching tools and resources.

Veteran Peer Mentorship: In collaboration with the Transfer and Commuter Connections Center, we extend to new veterans the opportunity to work with a trained peer mentor who also is a student veteran. Experience and best practices have validated the personal contact of a peer mentor in aiding student veteran transition. The mentor and student often discuss topics that may arise up in a group session.

This program serves as an important early alert system to ensure all veterans receive personal, medical, academic, career and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.

These initiatives are a culmination of research and experience over the last four years during which we have incorporated national best practices, veteran feedback and collaboration with a myriad of on- and off-campus resources to develop a comprehensive student veteran transition program. Challenges remain to successfully serve our veteran population and we continuously strive to improve both our services and data collection in this area. One area in which federal assistance would be appreciated is the timely processing of financial aid for veteran students. Approximately one-half of our veteran students at NAU are married and have children. Supporting a family takes an additional toll on students struggling to meet financial obligations and the current process for awarding veterans federal financial aid averages 6–8 weeks.

Thank you for the opportunity to present information on this important student population. I hope I have demonstrated Northern Arizona University's dedication to providing comprehensive services necessary to help our veterans succeed as they move into their next career. We will continue our work to increase the number of veterans seeking and achieving a postsecondary education degree. If we can offer any additional information or clarification please feel free to contact LTC (ret) Andrew Griffin, Ed.D., Director of the Office of Military and Veteran Affairs at (928) 523–8555 or *Andrew.Griffin@nau.edu.*