Rutgers
Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services
Strategic Plan 2016
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Ann Treadaway, Director, Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services

May 6, 2016
The history of Rutgers students who have served in the military is a long and distinguished one. Since the beginning, our students have answered their nations’ call. Students of Queens College left their classes to fight for their country’s independence as the British landed on New Jersey’s shores. Graduates requested their diploma as they fought to keep the nation together during the Civil War. They outnumbered their civilian classmates after World War II utilizing the first GI Bill, and now, after the longest period of sustained warfare in American history, the number of Rutgers students who have served in the United States Armed Forces has more than doubled in the last five years.

As a new generation of veterans began to arrive on Rutgers campuses, President Richard McCormick formed the Committee on Veterans’ Services and charged its members with the task of providing recommendations to improve services to the student veteran population. The committee published their report January 20, 2009 offering fourteen recommendations one of which was to establish an office to serve this growing population.

There are monuments, plaques and memorials scattered across our campuses that demonstrate the university’s recognition of the service and sacrifice of its student veterans. It is the purpose of Rutgers’ nationally recognized programs and services1, however, that these students come to know that their service is appreciated.

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1 Since 2013, Military Times Best for Vets: Colleges survey has ranked Rutgers University in the top ten 4 year colleges in the United States.
Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services
Founded 2010

Our Vision
The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services at Rutgers University is dedicated to ensuring a smooth transition and supportive environment for our students who have served in the United States Armed Forces, and their families, throughout their college careers.

Our Mission
The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services (OVMPS) at Rutgers University is dedicated to ensuring a smooth transition and supportive environment for our students who have served in the United States Armed Forces, and their families, throughout their college careers. OVMPS collaborates with departments across the Rutgers University system to guarantee our student veterans and military service members are able to take full advantage of the broad range of intellectual and cultural activities offered on our campuses. Additionally, we design programs to assist our students to succeed in their academic pursuits at the undergraduate and graduate level, and to ultimately find employment after graduation. Finally, the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services encourages student veterans to enrich the Rutgers community with their experiences, perspectives and skills, and contribute to its overall diversity. Veterans House and OVMPS are honored to give back to those who have given so much.

Profile of our Post 9/11 Student Veteran
Post 9/11 veteran is the term applied to those who have served on active duty in the United States Armed Forces since September 10, 2001. To understand who this population is on our college campus, we must understand the basics about their service. For the purposes of this report, the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services uses the term Post 9/11 student veteran more broadly to include students who have served in any component of the Armed Forces.

There are five branches of the United States Armed Forces, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and three components one can serve in, active duty, reserve, and National Guard. The average age of a Post 9/11 student veteran across multiple studies is approximately 33 years of age. A service member can operate in one of three capacities within the military: support, combat support, or combat. To be eligible to receive the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, created by the Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008, a student veteran must have served for more than 90 days of active duty since September 11, 2001.

Since the implementation of the legislation, colleges continued to see a significant increase in college enrollment by eligible veterans and their dependents. According to the Department of Veteran Affairs, the Post 9/11 generation of veterans currently makes up one half of 1% of the veteran population and is expected to increase by 36% by 2019. They are more likely than veterans of previous generations to have service-connected disabilities, use food stamps, and live under the poverty level. Despite the higher propensity of service connected disabilities, they were less likely than veterans of previous generations to be enrolled in the Department of Veteran Affairs Health Care system. The Post 9/11 veteran is also more likely to be a first generation college student, a minority and have a disability when compared to their non-veteran college counterparts. Post 9/11 combat veterans, specifically those who deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), are more likely than their non-veteran counterparts to use tobacco products, alcohol, and to engage in unsafe behavior such as carrying a weapon or driving intoxicated.

Student veterans are as diverse a population as the traditional student population and their experiences in the service can range widely. What is notable among student veterans is that in comparison to their traditional college age counterparts, they exhibit a higher level of maturity, cultivated by the magnitude of their experiences and the responsibility imparted upon them during that service. Similar to other adults returning to college, they are also more likely to have additional responsibilities outside of school such as family and work. Despite these similarities, student veterans find themselves in-between the traditional college-aged students and adults returning to college because of the nature of their experiences.

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS’ SERVICES (2009)**

As this new generation of veterans began to arrive on Rutgers campuses, a Committee on Veterans’ Services was formed by President Richard McCormick to address their needs and provide recommendations to improve services. The committee published their report on January 20, 2009 offering fourteen recommendations. At the time of the report, the student veteran and military population across Rutgers University was approximately 659 students.

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5 Profile of Post-9/11 Veterans, 2012.


Since the passage of the Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008, students utilizing a GI Bill at Rutgers University has increased by 125%. Colleges and universities across America have attempted to address this growing population through various services; however, there has been no substantial assessment measuring the effectiveness of current programs and services provided to student veterans, including at Rutgers. Studies that have been conducted at various colleges and universities to date have failed to examine all the factors that contribute to the challenges faced by student veterans, subsequently offering recommendations of services that cannot be validated. It is time to revisit the Report of the Committee on Veterans’ Services, assess our progress and reevaluate the services Rutgers University provides our student veterans and their families.

**Committee on Veterans’ Services Recommendations: Where Are We Now?**

1. **The appropriate campus administrator (i.e. Chancellor, Executive Vice President) should appoint a person or establish an office with specific responsibility for working with veterans on each campus.**

The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services is located in Veterans House on the Rutgers - New Brunswick campus and serves the student veteran and military population university wide. The staff is comprised of four full time staff members, Director, Assistant Director, Service Coordinator, Program Coordinator, and one part-time Assistant Program Coordinator. The Camden campus has a Campus Director for Veteran Services along with work study student support. Both campuses have office space dedicated to serving the student veteran population. The Newark campus currently has one staff member with a part time duty of Interim Coordinator for Veteran Affairs. A full time position will be created and filled by Fall 2016.

Each campus has a student veteran lounge/study space designated for student use.

Staff to student veteran/military/dependent ratios for the Fall 2014/Spring 2015 academic year were the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>1:201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>1:254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>0.5:307</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Each campus should have an orientation program for veterans designed to help them with the transition to the university.**

The New Brunswick campus offers breakout sessions for veterans and dependents at its orientation programs. The Camden campus offers a specific student veteran orientation. Newark has a veteran specific luncheon after the transfer orientation.

3. **Each campus should have a website that identifies services and programs available for veterans on the campus, and this website should be linked to a university-wide website for veterans.**

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9 Data set provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning April, 2016.
The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services operates the main webpage for student veterans which redirects veterans to Camden’s and Newark’s veterans’ page respectively as necessary. During the Summer of 2016 OVMPS’s focus will shift to include a more prominent role for social media.

4. Personnel responsible for campus-based veterans’ affairs should work with appropriate mental health and disability services professionals on their campus to establish clinical services appropriate to the needs of veterans who may have special needs including post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, and sexual assault.

Veterans House in New Brunswick offers student veterans and their family member’s in-house services with staff from Counseling, ADAP and Psychiatric Services and the Office of Disability Services.

In addition to in-house services, strong networks outside the campus have been established with organizations such as the Department of Veteran Affairs to provide additional support and resources for student veterans’ university wide.

Rutgers is also one of 94 VetSuccess on Campus sites which provides student veterans with direct access to a VA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) supported by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

5. Personnel responsible for campus-based veterans’ affairs should identify student affairs professionals on their campus who assist students in forming student organizations and those individuals should provide assistance to veterans to help them form veteran student organizations where sufficient interest among veterans in forming such an organization exists.

&

6. Personnel responsible for campus-based veterans’ affairs should identify a student affairs professional on their campus who can assist veteran student organizations in applying for student activities funds through procedures established on each campus.

There are active Student Veteran Organizations on each Rutgers campus:

New Brunswick RUServes
Camden Student Veteran Club
Newark Rutgers Student Veteran Organization

Each club is a chapter of Student Veterans of America (SVA) a 501(c)(3), a collation of student veteran groups on college campuses nationwide.

7. Personnel responsible for campus-based veterans’ affairs should identify faculty, staff, and alumni with prior military service who would be willing to serve as mentors for veterans as they transition into the university, and establish a mentoring program for veterans if sufficient interest exists.

Attempts to connect student veterans with faculty, staff and alumni who have also served in the United States Armed Forces have been unsuccessful to date. Beginning in Summer 2016, OVMPS will initiate outreach to faculty and staff across Rutgers University utilizing the web-to-all emails to encourage those
who have served in the United States Armed Forces to self-identify. OVMPS will maintain this list and work to include these individuals in future programming initiatives.

8. The appropriate campus administrator, as identified by the Chancellor or Executive Vice President, should review and evaluate the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) programs and determine if academic programs should be engaged with SOC and at what level.

Due to Executive Order 13607, “Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members,” the SOC Consortium was phased out in January 2015.

9. The Office of Admissions should develop an outreach program to encourage New Jersey National Guard veterans, active duty military, and other military veterans to apply for admission to Rutgers University campuses.

No such program currently exists; however, the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services has begun to collaborate with the Joint Force Headquarters, New Jersey Army National Guard Education Services Officer, in order to identify opportunities for OVMPS to outreach to New Jersey National Guard veterans.\(^\text{10}\)

10. The appropriate campus administrator (i.e. Chancellor, Executive Vice President) should establish a Veteran Affairs Committee on each campus to help implement the above recommendations and to serve in an advisory capacity to the administrator charged with the responsibility for veterans’ affairs on their campus.

Camden is currently the only campus to have a campus specific Veteran Affairs Committee. Newark is working towards improving its services to student veterans and military and hopes to have a committee soon after a staff member is hired. As the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services functions as a university support office, the University-wide committee had been considered as meeting recommendation 10. It is the recommendation of the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services that a campus-specific community be created.

11. The President should appoint a University-wide committee to serve in an advisory capacity to him/her on veterans’ affairs and this committee should meet at least once each regular semester.

The Committee was last convened in the Spring of 2015. Following an assessment of the population, it is recommended that committee membership be revisited and that the committee be reconvened.

12. Personnel responsible for campus-based veterans’ affairs should facilitate a peer support network among veterans on their campus.

No such program currently exists. Rutgers University was admitted along with 30 other institutions nationwide to participate in the Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE) program beginning Fall 2016.

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\(^{10}\) OVMPS staff currently reaches a portion of this population in its participation in Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Events which are held throughout New Jersey for National Guard Units returning from deployment overseas.
13. Personnel responsible for campus-based veterans’ affairs should assist with the establishment of a veterans’ learning community and/or veterans’ special life-style housing if sufficient student interest and faculty/staff support exist for these programs.

No such program currently exists. The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services has begun discussions with interested departments in creating veteran/military specific sections. The Department of Veteran Affairs requires courses with students utilizing the Post 9/11 GI Bill be a ratio of 85:15.11

14. Certification of veterans’ status should remain a function of the Registrar’s Office and should not be assigned to the person appointed on each campus to work with veterans’ issues.

The Certifying Official is housed in the office of the Registrar on each campus.

THE FUTURE OF VETERAN SERVICES AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

“As one Rutgers, all of our campuses and units share common values, features, resources, and administrative and other centralized services. As distinct entities, however, the campuses and RBHS each have differentiated missions and future visions that emanate from this unified core.”

~Our moment: A Strategic Plan for The New Rutgers

The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services’ goals align overwhelmingly with the priorities and foundational elements proposed in the University’s Strategic Plan of 2014. The following utilizes the current status of veteran services across the university in order to identify the path forward.

ENVISION TOMORROWS UNIVERSITY

ASSESSMENT

In the first year following the passage of the Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008, more commonly referred to as the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, the Department of Veteran Affairs reported a 42% increase in the utilization of education benefits available through the Veteran Benefits Administration.12 Studies that have been conducted at colleges and universities nationwide have failed to examine all the factors that contribute to the challenges faced by student veterans and few assess current practices. The lack of specifics leads to a generalized understanding of the student veteran population and does not provide a true reflection of their diversity.

In order to deliver top notch programing and services that are tailored to the needs of our student veteran population, the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services will be conducting an assessment of the population. Current coding discrepancies exist which have made it difficult to

11 No more than 85% of the class can be students utilizing a GI Bill.
12 Education Program Beneficiaries, 2014.
render an accurate accounting of this population. Presently, there are seven separate codes that identify a military affiliation.

The student veteran population on a college campus is often believed to be 10% larger than data would suggest. When considering the inconsistencies in coding, it seems feasible that Rutgers’ student population might be even greater than the numbers indicate.

Fig. 1 Current Codes Used to Identify Students with Military Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title (Data ID)</th>
<th>Options related to Vets</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VET BENEFIT CODE (A1150)</td>
<td>33, 31, 35, 06, 30, 99</td>
<td>A code indicating the student’s status with respect to veteran’s federal educational benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3D -Effective June 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUIT_REMISSION_UNEMPL_IND (21430)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N.J. National Guard (valid 05/01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OOS TUIT EXEMPT IND (21653)</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Veteran - exempt from paying out of state tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTRACT_MIL_NG_CD (21615)</td>
<td>A, B, C, G</td>
<td>A code indicating the ROTC program an ROTC Contract &quot;Scholarship&quot; student is registered for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILITARY TUITION ASSISTANCE (TA) Code</td>
<td>A, B, C</td>
<td>Used for tracking students receiving tuition assistance from a specific branch of service under the Department of Defense (captured by student accounting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILITARY ACTION CODE (A1295)</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, X</td>
<td>A code indicating whether a student has ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, military Reserves, or National Guard. Active duty does not include training for the Reserves, National Guard, or ROTC, but DOES include activation, for example, for the Persian Gulf War, or the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VETERAN IND (A1155)</td>
<td>Y, N</td>
<td>An indication of whether or not the student is a veteran.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both the Military Action Code and the Veteran Indicator (Fig 1) are self-selected by the student during the application process. There are at least six separate applications for Rutgers University, all of which ask applicants a variation of the following questions:

Q 1: Are you a veteran of the United States military?
   - Yes
   - No

Q 2: Do you plan to apply for educational benefits under the GI Bill for you or a family member?
   - Yes
   - No

Q 3: Have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, military Reserves, or National Guard? (Active duty does not include training for the Reserves, National Guard, or ROTC, but DOES include activation, for example, for the Persian Gulf War, or the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.)
   - No. I have never served in the U.S. Armed Forces, military Reserves, National Guard, or ROTC.
   - No. I am/was a member of the Reserves, National Guard, or ROTC, but I have never served on active duty.
   - Yes. I am a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces (e.g. Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy).
   - Yes. I am an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces (e.g. Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy).

NOTE: Students who are eligible can use a combination of education benefits in some instances which is reflected in this chart. Data above reflects current coding.
*Students whose education benefits ran prior to a semester completion are included in this number.
**Only students receiving an ROTC Scholarship are included in this number. All other ROTC cadets are not coded.
Yes. I am/was a member of the Reserves or National Guard who served active duty (e.g. Persian Gulf War, Afghanistan, Iraq).

These questions create a number of holes in which Rutgers loses its ability to identify students affiliated with the military. The definition of Veteran can differ depending on who is applying it and whether or not a servicemember feels as if that definition applies to them. For example, in a 2010 report, the Department of Labor found women were less likely to identify as a veteran or utilize services despite meeting the federal definition standard. With the end of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the number of students serving in the Reserve or National Guard who will meet the criteria of Active Duty required in the above question will begin to drop off.

The remainder of the codes are applied by the Office of the Registrar and the Office of Student Accounts, Billing and Cashiering. Students utilizing a GI Bill through the Department of Veteran Affairs are coded after providing the campus certifying official with a copy of their Certificate of Eligibility or their Notice of Basic Eligibility. There are two GI Bill’s that eligible dependents may utilize; Chapter 35, the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) Program and Chapter 33, the Post 9/11 GI Bill. The Veteran Benefit Code (Fig 2) does not allow the university to distinguish between the servicemember and their dependent when using Chapter 33. On February 9, 2015, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would dramatically cut GI Bill benefits for dependents utilizing the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Currently, Rutgers is unable to identify the students this legislation will impact. If students are not utilizing an education benefit earned through service and did not self-identify as a veteran, they are not coded. This can affect a number of our students impacting our ability to accurately assess and report on the population. It can also impede in our ability to provide appropriate services.

In keeping with the University’s priorities, the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services is working with Admissions, Registrar, and Student Accounts to ensure that each and every student affiliated with the United States Armed Forces is counted. This begins with asking a more inclusive question on our applications for admission into Rutgers:

Q 1: Have you ever served, or are you currently serving, in the United States Armed Forces?
  - Yes
  - No

Q 2: In what branch of the United States Armed Forces did you serve?
  - Army
  - Navy
  - Marine Corp
  - Air Force
  - Coast Guard

Q 3: In what component did you serve?
  - Active Duty
  - Reserve
  - National Guard
Education Benefits can be determined through the answers to the above questions as well as the students submission of the appropriate documentation needed to be certified for benefits.

Through combined efforts with the Office of the Registrar and Army, Navy, and Air Force Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), OVMPS will work to have all cadets coded, regardless of scholarship use. These students will be commissioning into the United States Armed Forces. The failure to track this population, and all military-affiliated students, impacts Rutgers in a number of ways. For instance, efforts for establishing a special connection for alumni are problematic.

The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services is dedicated to assisting all students who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. These proposed changes to Rutgers’ applications’ and expansion of coding will allow the university to capture student data previously unidentified. A more accurate picture of our student veterans will also provide OVMPS with the ability to assess the population, create tailored programs, and deliver more effective services. As a leading research university with a long and committed history to those who have served, Rutgers is positioned to lead the way in best practices in higher education for veteran services.13

**Transform the Student Experience**

For a student who has served, leaving the highly structured and regimented environment of the military for a more flexible and free environment of a college campus is challenging. This type of transition can be disruptive and have a significant impact on student veterans’ ability to adjust. Following World War II, the Homecoming Theory considered that it was not only the service member who experienced change through separation but their family and friends as well: “thus each will be in some ways unknown and unfamiliar to the other upon return.”14 This separation and alienation of the returning veterans is the focus of the theory, gaining insights into the veterans’ transition as well as to inform possible support services to aid the veteran in their readjustment. This concern of a veteran feeling detached or disconnected from not only their family and friends but also those they will encounter on a college campus, is incredibly relevant in understanding their transition.

The very characteristics that might suggest that the student veteran population would be successful on a college campus, such as their maturity, self-discipline, and professionalism, are also likely to isolate them.15 This social isolation varies depending on their exposure to combat. Service members who functioned in only support roles were less likely to report an inability to connect with their peers

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13 A new code to identify dependents utilizing Chapter 33, Post 9/11 GI Bill will be implemented in June 2016. With current Federal legislation proposed that would cut the Monthly Housing Allowance for dependents utilizing the Post 9/11 GI Bill, this information will assist the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services in identifying exactly which students these cuts will impact. Also, this will place OVMPS will be in a better position to advocate for these students by providing elected officials information specific to their constituency.


and/or faculty. Combat exposure was also indicative of risky behavior including drug and alcohol use, increased chances of suffering from post-traumatic stress or other combat related injuries, homelessness, and suicidal ideation. For this reason, the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services aims to take a holistic approach to programming.

**Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE)**

Student veterans and military servicemembers face unique challenges transitioning home. Research demonstrates that veterans transition into the college environment more successfully when connected to other veterans. Students who have served in the United States Armed Forces reported that a lack of social support or understanding posed significant challenges for them upon their return. The Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE) program provides a stable support network for students who have shared military experience that non-veteran students are unable to relate to. PAVE is a peer support program, created at the University of Michigan that connects incoming students who have served in the military to student veterans already enrolled. Beginning in the Fall of 2016, Rutgers University will be one of thirty institutions to join the PAVE program. Currently the program is at twelve campuses including four big ten schools: University of Maryland, University of Michigan, Purdue University, and Indiana University.

**RU Dog Tags – Veteran Service Dog Program**

In 2010 the Department of Veteran Affairs reported that an average of 22 veterans commit suicide each day. Those who have served in the United States Armed Forces are 50% more likely to kill themselves than those who have not served. “A study analyzing data from the National Comorbidity Survey, a nationally representative sample, showed that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) alone out of six anxiety diagnoses was significantly associated with suicidal ideation or attempts.” Despite these figures, both of which are cited by the VA, service dogs are only provided to veterans who have a qualifying physical disability. The VA’s position is that there is not yet enough clinical information which supports a correlation between service animals and successful treatment of PTSD. Current studies, such as Pairing Assistance-Dogs With Soldiers (PAWS) conducted by Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research, have found what was previously only supported by anecdotal evidence: service dogs can be effective in alleviating the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in veterans.

Merlin’s Kids, a non-profit organization which provides individually trained service dogs, is currently affiliated with the Companion Animal Club at Rutgers-New Brunswick. The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services is looking to expand on this relationship and partner with Merlin’s Kids to provide service dogs to veterans who would benefit and are diagnosed with PTSD or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). With the support of Friends & Neighbors in Action, a non-profit organization, the

18 Ruman & Hamrick, 2010; Osborne, 2014.
OVMPS, in collaboration with Rutgers Office of Disability Services and Counseling, ADAP and Psychiatric Services, will be launching a veteran service dog program in the Fall 2016.

**INCLUSIVE, DIVERSE, AND COHESIVE CULTURE**

**RUTGERS MILITARY CULTURAL COMPETENCY**

In studies conducted at colleges and universities nationwide, student veterans have reported feeling as if non-veteran college students and faculty did not appreciate, understand, relate to, or respect their service. In interviews conducted regarding these feelings, student veterans emphasized their interactions with professors as particularly problematic. In their accounts, they described feeling offended or angered by what they perceived as the professors’ condemnation of the military. In some cases it was in relation to the professors’ espousing their personal political views or making statements that illustrated a lack of understanding, and/or assumption, in regards to how the military functions.\(^{20}\) For example, faculty at the University of Nevada reported that they rarely shared their views on the U.S. military; however, they did not believe that they should have to be careful not to. In “Veteran ally: Practical strategies for closing the military-civilian gap on campus,” Dr. Nicholas J. Osborne, Interim Director at the Center for Wounded Veterans in Higher Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign suggested that staff, faculty and administrators need to evaluate their biases and misconceptions regarding military service and student veterans in order to meet the needs of this population.\(^{21}\)

These studies demonstrate that there needs to be a greater understanding in regards to the student veteran population by faculty and staff. Rutgers currently has a contract with Kognito to utilize their *Veterans On Campus* online training with access expiring August 2016.\(^{22}\) To date, 561 faculty and administrators have gone through the training. This avatar based training highlights a number of the topics addressed above however, provides only a generalized understanding of the student veteran population. The training is stagnant, not allowing for participants to engage outside of the script with questions and portrays servicemembers who were deployed. The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services will develop Military Cultural Competency training unique to Rutgers University. Faculty and staff should be strongly encouraged to participate in this training in order to be made aware of issues that affect student veterans.

The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and service will also work with various corporations and industries interested in employing our student veterans and military to ensure that their Human Resource Departments are also military culturally competent. Rutgers Military Cultural Competency training will provide the Rutgers community and our partners with a general overview of the military so that professionals can more easily communicate with all student veterans and military.

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\(^{20}\) Hitt, et al., 2015; DiRamio, et al., 2008; Elliott, et al., 2011.


\(^{22}\) OVMPS enlisted the assistance of ten student veterans to complete Kognito’s *Veterans On Campus* online avatar training. Feedback provided by them was similar to OVMPS own conclusions regarding the program. These concerns were raised in a meeting with Kognito staff on May 24, 2016. Kognito will not be making any revisions to their *Veterans On Campus* training until 2018 the earliest. It is the recommendation of OVMPS that the contract not be renewed.
For the fourth year in a row, Rutgers University has been ranked in the top ten by *Military Times Best for Vets: Colleges* amongst four year institutions nationally. The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services has its sights set on being number one, and to do so, OVMPS has compared its programs and services to those institutions currently ranked higher. Institutions that ranked higher than Rutgers, including the University of Nebraska, which ranked number one, had the following:

- More college credit awarded for military service.
- The VA Certifying Official is in house.
- Staff to student ratio is low.
- More online options for student servicemembers.
- Out of State Tuition Waiver without condition for veterans.
- Degree programs designed to appeal to student veteran experience and interest.

Education Benefits such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill and New Jersey’s National Guard Tuition Waiver has placed a college education within reach of our servicemembers and their families. The Department of Veteran Affairs is predicting a 36% increase in the veteran population by 2019. One driving force behind this increase is the Reduction in Force that the Department of Defense announced in 2015. The Army alone announced its plans to reduce the size of its force by approximately 40,000 by 2018.23 These men and women will find themselves displaced from the military and in need of new skills and training to succeed. Rutgers has the opportunity to appeal to more veterans and servicemembers exiting the military.

In a survey conducted by Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families in 2014, of over 8500 men and women post-service, 53% identified education benefits as the main reason for having joined the service. 92% indicated that education would play a large role in the success of their transition to civilian life.24 Despite these indications, less than half of those eligible, and by some reports as few as 28%, utilize their GI Bill.25 Those surveyed listed a number of obstacles that prevented them from pursuing a higher education.

A new wave of student veterans and military will be looking for a new path forward at our nation’s colleges and universities. Rutgers Division of Continuing Studies and the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services will work together to expand programs approved by the Department of Veteran Affairs providing more options and opportunities for these servicemembers to transition home. The expansion of Rutgers online degree programs offers those individuals currently serving on active

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23 The Department of Defense announced in 2015 that it would be making cuts within each branch of service. The Army, the largest branch of service announced reducing the force by 45,000 by 2018.
25 A number of surveys conducted regarding the utilization of the GI Bill have conducted with a range of 28-52% of those servicemembers surveyed reporting they had not used the benefit. Survey conducted by *The Washington Post*, Department of Veteran Affairs, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, etc.
duty the opportunity to begin their college careers at Rutgers before they leave the service. There is room for Rutgers to grow.

**Effective and Efficient Infrastructure and Staff Restructuring**

In order to effectively serve the growing population of military affiliated students, Rutgers University must provide the direct support these students require. The American Council on Education’s 2012 report “From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members” highlighted the importance of providing dedicated space, staff, and centralized services for student servicemembers. Surveys of student veterans and military conducted at various campuses nationwide have echoed the ACE’s recommendations, and these institutions that have heard these calls rank the highest nationally.

Fig. 3

**VETERAN/MILITARY/DEPENDENT POPULATION RUTGERS UNIVERSITY**

NOTE: Data based on current coding.
The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services located at Rutgers’ flagship in New Brunswick is responsible for, and dedicated to, ensuring services are provided to the student veteran and military population at Rutgers University. OVMPS is committed to supporting veteran services at every campus and therefore proposes the following structural changes:

- The first recommendation of the Committee on Veteran Services in 2009 promotes that “the appropriate campus administrator (i.e. Chancellor, Executive Vice President) should appoint a person or establish an office with specific responsibility for working with veterans on each campus.” Currently Rutgers-Camden is the only campus to have staff designated specifically to serve the campus’ veteran population. Rutgers-Newark projects that a full time staff member will be in place by Fall 2016. The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services currently serves both the University and Rutgers-New Brunswick. OVMPS proposes the position of Director of OVMPS be re-designated to Executive Director and that Newark follow Camden’s lead and designate a Director of Veteran Services as originally recommended in 2009 by the Committee on Veteran Services.

- Staff designated as School Certifying Official located at the New Brunswick campus should be relocated to OVMPS. At the time President McCormick’s Committee on Veterans’ Services provided their recommendations, the military population on each campus was significantly smaller. Since the Fall of 2008, the Veteran/Military/Dependent population at Rutgers has more than doubled and approximately 61% utilize benefits through the Department of Veteran Affairs (Fig. 2). The student veteran and military population on Rutgers – New Brunswick alone is 846 military affiliated students, 187 more than Rutgers University had in 2009 on all its campuses.
combined. The Post 9/11 GI Bill, which the majority of our students utilize, has gone through numerous revisions since it passed in 2008. As a VetSuccess location, Rutgers-New Brunswick has a VA employee housed in Veterans House. Placing the School Certifying Official in the same location will provide immediate and direct access to the Department of Veteran Affairs, alleviating delays in benefit receipt or enrollment. Also six of the Big Ten universities house the school certifying official in their veteran service office. With MyVetCert, all essential records for certification are now accessible from any campus location, so the position does not have to be embedded in the Registrar's office as it had when initially created.

- Despite the increase in the student veteran and military population, the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services staff structure has remained unchanged with the exception of an hourly position being converted into part-time professional position. As the number of students and the demands on the office grow, the ability to manage daily office operations impedes efforts to serve students directly. The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services would become more efficient and effective in our role with the addition of an administrative assistant to manage office functions and allow professional staff to focus on student needs.

**CONCLUSION**

It is difficult to address the effectiveness of the recommendations put forth in the Committee on Veterans' Services 2009 report without a current assessment of the student veteran and military population. A lot has changed in the ensuing six years and Rutgers has made great strides in providing students who have served in the United States Armed Forces, and their families, outstanding support and service. What we do know is that the Department of Defense announced major cuts across all the branches of the service and the Department of Veteran Affairs predicts that the veteran population will increase by 36% by 2019. We are also acutely aware that our military is still engaged in operations overseas and servicemembers will be returning home requiring support. The Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services' mission is to do more than simply welcome these men and women home, but to create a campus environment and programs that ensure their academic and personal success.

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26 Rutgers has created MyVetCert, Veteran Request for Enrollment Certification, for student veterans and military are to upload documents and request certification for their educational benefits.

27 An Administrative Assistant Position in the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services was created and posted on May 23, 2016. The job posting closed June 3, 2016 and interviews are presently underway to fill the position.
Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services

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