

**ACE**<sup>®</sup> American  
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**CEAI** Center for  
Education  
Attainment &  
Innovation 

**ACE's 2015 Service  
Member and Veteran  
Academic Advising  
Summit Report**



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Academic Advising  
Summit Report**



We would like to thank Hanover Research for their help in the creation of this report. ([www.hanoverresearch.com](http://www.hanoverresearch.com))



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# Executive Summary

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On June 5–6, 2014, the American Council on Education (ACE) spearheaded the Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit. The goal of the summit was to provide a space for participants to communicate and collaborate, as well as to share promising practices for better supporting service members and veterans in their transition from military service to higher education and the workforce. Approximately 100 participants—including representatives from institutions of higher education, military and veteran service organizations, U.S. federal agencies, the U.S. Armed Forces, employers, and student veterans—gathered to identify existing and emerging issues related to the college admissions process for service members and veterans. The summit led to the creation of five themes and recommendations for improving service members and veterans’ enrollment in higher education institutions.

## Theme 1: Individualized, Flexible, and Relationship-Centered Support Services

The need for individual, flexible, and relationship-centered support services for service members and veterans emerged as a central theme from the summit. When considering the pursuit of a college education, prospective students need to consider multiple factors, including college affordability, career goals, needed education or training to attain those goals, institutions that provide that particular training or education, and the type of additional support they will need when entering higher education.

### Recommendations:

1. Increase one-on-one services.
2. Train advisors on military culture and language.
3. Offer peer-to-peer mentorship to offset limited available personnel.
4. Effectively use online advising tools to educate service members and veterans about the admissions process.

## Theme 2: Self-Advocacy of Service Members and Veterans

Participants noted the necessity of self-advocacy as a means for student empowerment, and many speakers focused on efforts to accomplish this. A common theme that emerged from summit discussions was the need not only for stakeholder organizations to advocate for service members and veterans, but also for service members and veterans to be empowered to advocate for themselves.

### Recommendations:

1. Educate service members and veterans about college admissions and higher education.
2. Develop peer networks while in the military and once discharged.
3. Facilitate increased connections between the military, higher education, and employers.

### **Theme 3: Cross-Stakeholder Communication and Information Consolidation**

The need for military branches, federal agencies, higher education institutions, and employers to communicate with one another in order to maintain efficient processes and work together toward common goals turned into a common theme during the summit. Veterans are likely to navigate many of these stakeholder groups at different stages of their careers.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop a consolidated information website for employment and education resources.
2. Work with key stakeholders.
3. Identify national and regional cohorts and share their efficacy.
4. Provide regular cross-stakeholder meetings at national and regional conferences.

### **Theme 4: Full-Spectrum (Military-to-Career) Navigation**

Across many of the summit's discussions, participants highlighted the need for full-spectrum navigation of students from military recruitment to civilian employment, particularly in the application of continued assistance after degree completion to promote successful employment. Veterans seeking higher education often note difficulties with choosing appropriate certificate or degree programs and navigating through the application process; these issues may hinder the likelihood of successfully moving from the military to college and the workforce.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop a centralized portal that includes information on higher education and labor market needs.
2. Colleges and universities should “educate to employ” by placing a greater focus on career readiness.
3. Organizations should strengthen how they track veterans and evaluate pre- and post-college outcomes.
4. Employers should strive to articulate and document the benefits of hiring veterans.

### **Theme 5: Capacity, Knowledge, and Awareness Building**

The final broad theme emerging from the summit centered on building capacity, knowledge, and awareness across stakeholder groups regarding the concerns central to service members and veterans' college education. Participants explored the ways in which their organizations could work together to deepen this knowledge base, engage their communities, and expand their capacity to serve this growing college-going population.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Provide training for professionals working with service members and veterans.
2. Create opportunities for dialogue between civilians and military-connected individuals.

## Future Work

Moving forward, ACE seeks to convene a second Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit in 2015. Working with participants from the first summit, along with other interested parties, ACE will frame an agenda around the five key themes derived from the first summit. The goal of the second summit will be to create working groups around each individual theme, with each group identifying collaborative practices between stakeholders for helping service members and veterans access and complete a higher education, and to develop an actionable plan to disseminate these promising practices more broadly.

# Introduction

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Between April 2007 and December 2014, the American Council on Education (ACE) had the opportunity to provide academic support to over 750 severely injured service members through its Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams (SIMV) program. SIMV provided support to service members during their recovery at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. Support services included tutoring and academic support services, mental health counseling, and connections to the ACE Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions (see Appendix). During the service members' recovery period, ACE introduced them to an SIMV academic advisor who was responsible for assisting them with developing individual educational plans based on their career goals. Service members' educational goals ranged from completion of high school equivalency to certificate and licensure programs and from two- and four-year degrees to postgraduate degrees.

Due to the success of the SIMV program, ACE began to examine the academic counseling process and engaged Hanover Research to gather qualitative and quantitative data through program participant surveys and interviews. The objective was to find emerging themes and promising practices that institutions can replicate throughout the country, effectively reaching a larger number of service members and veterans in need of academic advising support before their college enrollment.

## Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit

On June 5–6, 2014, ACE spearheaded the Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit. The goal of the summit was to provide a space for participants to communicate and collaborate, as well as a space to share promising practices for better supporting service members and veterans in their transition from military service to higher education and the workforce. Approximately 100 participants—including representatives from institutions of higher education, military and veteran service organizations, U.S. federal agencies, the U.S. Armed Forces, employers, and student veterans—gathered to identify existing and emerging issues related to the preenrollment advisement process for service members and veterans.

### Summit Agenda

#### Day One

- Panel 1: Voices of Student Veterans
- Panel 2: Perspectives from Federal Agencies
- Panel 3: Insights from Educators
- Panel 4: Views from Employers and the U.S. Department of Labor

#### Day Two

- Evaluating Key Themes from Day One
- Group Feedback on Key Themes
- Roundtable Discussion: Planning for Next Steps



## Summit Participants

### Panel 1: Voices of Student Veterans

Five student veterans discussed their views on institutional programs and services. Four of the summit panelists participated in ACE's SIMV program, and a fifth veteran discussed her experience during the college admissions and application process. Participating student veterans shared details surrounding their experience in the SIMV program, which provided individualized tutoring and academic support services, in addition to counseling during their transition out of the military and into higher education. These panelists shared that the SIMV program experience was helpful during their transition, reflecting findings from a survey of 95 SIMV participants conducted in February 2014. The fifth student veteran involved in the panel discussion did not participate in SIMV, but instead went through the admissions and application process with support from staff at the military education center where she was stationed.

#### Participants:

Five veteran students, four of whom participated in ACE's Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams program

### Panel 2: Perspectives from Federal Government Agencies

Summit participants from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Education (ED), and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) discussed current efforts to support the transition and higher education of service members and veterans, and provided insights into programs that are working and changes that are needed to improve those programmatic efforts.

#### Participants:

Representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the DoD Transition Assistance Program, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, and the Consumer and Financial Protection Bureau

DoD representatives highlighted recent changes to the Transition Assistance Program, now known as Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success). These modifications were designed to have transitioning service members become career ready and meet mandatory career readiness standards set by DoD. Ultimately, Transition GPS provides information to service members who are separating or retiring from active duty to support their transition to civilian life. The program consists of five-day workshops at military installations nationwide, where attendees learn about financial management; various VA benefits; resiliency; and employment tools, which include job searches, career decision making, current labor market conditions and needs, and interviewing techniques. Transitioning service members have the option of participating in two-day workshops focused on higher education, technical training, or entrepreneurship. Furthermore, DoD discussed a pilot program focused on allowing service members the opportunity to gain on-the-job training in civilian occupations through apprenticeships six months prior to exiting the military. The program provides an example of DoD's commitment to facilitate the transfer of military experience and training to relevant certification and licensures.

VA representatives discussed the GI Bill Comparison Tool (see Appendix), a website that

enables service members, veterans, and their families to calculate education benefits, examine approved postsecondary programs, and compare institutions across several college outcomes (i.e., graduation rates, loan default rates, and average borrowing). The GI Bill Comparison Tool also provides information on the number of GI Bill recipients, the presence of student veteran groups, and whether that institution has committed to the VA's "Principles of Excellence" or ED's "8 Keys to Success: Supporting Veterans, Military and Military Families on Campus."

Representatives from ED focused their discussion on the financial education tools they have created. ED offers a financial aid toolkit intended to educate professionals working with service members, veterans, and their families about financial aid opportunities. ED emphasized the importance of training college advisors to ensure that financial aid information is effectively communicated to service members and veterans. ED encouraged college personnel to direct military-connected individuals to their student aid website and to VA's GI Bill® website (see Appendix).

CFPB representatives discussed their Paying for College tool (see Appendix), which is designed to help students make informed choices when considering financial aid offers. Representatives talked about the importance of service members and veterans being able to make informed decisions when examining how to pay for college and to compare their options when choosing a college to attend. Notably, CFPB personnel highlighted the importance of understanding student loans and repayment options for service members and veterans who anticipate attending institutions that are not fully covered by their VA/DoD education benefits.

### **Panel 3: Insights from Educators**

During the educators' panel, representatives from higher education discussed their work to serve service members and veterans.

Student Veterans of America (SVA) discussed findings from the Million Records Project, noting that this foundational report provided the first glimpse into graduation rates among GI Bill users after 9/11 (see Appendix). The project tracked GI Bill users from 2002 to 2010 and provided information on types of degrees conferred, major fields while in college, and time to degree completion. Although these findings are promising, continued work is needed to investigate how programs and services for this growing population can lead to improved college outcomes (i.e., college access, persistence, and attainment). Moreover, staff from George Mason University (GMU) (VA), University of Maryland University College (UMUC), San Diego State University (SDSU), and ACE outlined their support programs and services for service members and veterans.

At GMU, the Military Alliance Program offers a faculty training program. The institutional program describes the needs of veterans and aids faculty in becoming advocates for veterans. Faculty can earn "shield stars" by participating in physical training and student veteran events. Meanwhile, SDSU boasts a comprehensive veterans' support center with full-time staff and an academic advisor who works with the Wounded Warrior Battalion

#### **Participants:**

Representatives from George Mason University (VA), Student Veterans of America, University of Maryland University College (UMUC), San Diego State University, and ACE

West from the local Marine Corps installation, Camp Pendleton.

Other efforts mentioned by education representatives included:

- Veteran-specific mandatory orientations prior to beginning college
- Transfer credit tools to allow students to move from community college into a four-year institution
- Outreach to service members at local military installations

#### **Panel 4: Views from Employers and the U.S. Department of Labor**

During this panel, employers spoke about programs and resources to strengthen the outreach, hiring, promotion, and overall support of veterans in their workforces.

USAA discussed a program it offers its employees: Vet4IT seeks to fill computer science positions by training veterans in partnership with Alamo Colleges (TX). The program pays for veterans through the education and internship periods and, after 22 weeks, allows them to enter the company at an entry-level salary.

Similarly, Northrup Grumman has a program to support the transition and development of workers through a cyber-apprenticeship program for veterans. Additionally, Northrup Grumman adopts a number of activities to support the outreach to and hiring of veterans. One example is the employment transition “boot camps” provided for veterans entering the organization, particularly among wounded warriors. Boot camps include courses on how to develop a career path within the company, translate military skills, adapt to the civilian culture, and improve their resume.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) offers the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service (VETS). The program includes employment workshops through Transition GPS and provides information and resources to help veterans protect their employment rights and find meaningful careers. The DOL remarked on its job centers, most of which include training opportunities and counselors for veterans.

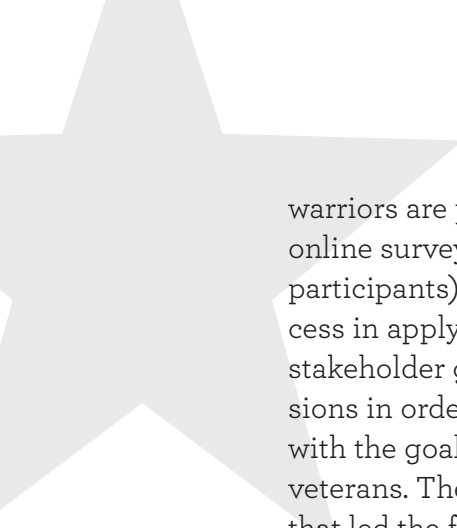
Through these panels and the subsequent in-depth discussions, summit participants collectively identified a list of key themes to better inform advising practices for those helping service members and veterans navigate the college application and acceptance process. These themes focused on helping service members and veterans make college-going decisions best suited for their educational and employment objectives—the ultimate goal being to build a stronger path from military service through higher education and into the civilian labor market. A list of the panel participants is provided in the appendix of this report.

### **Promising Practices**

To promote the future success of all service members and veterans looking for support as they navigate the college application and admissions process, a number of promising practices were formulated that stemmed from the SIMV program. A year-long survey effort of SIMV participants in 2014 led to a greater understanding of how these wounded


#### **Participants:**

Representatives from USAA, Northrop Grumman, Vantage Point Consulting, and the U.S. Department of Labor



warriors are perceiving and using program services. The data, collected through both an online survey (95 participants) in February 2014 and follow-up telephone interviews (22 participants) in March 2014 revealed 10 promising practices deemed essential to success in applying to and enrolling in higher education. In turn, summit members from all stakeholder groups addressed these 10 promising practices through roundtable discussions in order to further enhance these central practices identified by wounded warriors, with the goal of expanding this initiative to reach a larger group of service members and veterans. The 10 promising practices that emerged from SIMV-participant responses and that led the focused discussions during the summit were:

1. One-on-one academic advising
2. Individualized approach
3. Consolidated communication
4. Broad knowledge base
5. Early advising
6. Logistical support
7. Ancillary support
8. Advocacy
9. Partnerships/collaboration
10. Career goals and attainment



Five themes emerged from the summit discussion on the SIMV program's promising practices. These themes were narrowed down from several key points made during the panel, roundtable, and large-group discussions. Moreover, the following key themes were evaluated for congruence and likelihood of implementation and success. A discussion was held related to how emergent themes could be implemented and what metrics would be needed for efficacy evaluation.

## Emergent Themes

The resulting themes related to pre-enrollment advisement will form the basis of future collaborative work that ACE intends to lead, and will provide guidance for those actively involved in serving service members and veterans. The emergent themes include:

1. Individualized, flexible, and relationship-centered support services
2. Self-advocacy of service members and veterans
3. Cross-stakeholder communication and information consolidation
4. Full-spectrum (military-to-career) navigation
5. Capacity, knowledge, and awareness building

Given the unique and collaborative atmosphere of the summit, which allowed for the free flow of ideas across different cohorts, participants upheld and endorsed these emergent themes. The summit created the opportunity for ongoing networking and set the framework for future collaboration among key stakeholders. Most importantly, participants created consensus that all groups must work together to improve the postsecondary outcomes (i.e., college access, persistence, and completion) and employment success for service members and veterans, and that we must do so with a sense of urgency.

# Theme 1

## Individual, Flexible, and Relationship-Centered Services

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The need for individual, flexible, and relationship-centered support services for service members and veterans emerged as a central theme from the summit. When considering the pursuit of a college education, prospective students need to consider multiple factors, including college affordability, career goals, the necessary education to attain those goals, the institutions that provide that particular training or education, and the type of additional support they will need when entering higher education. To ensure postsecondary completion and improved college outcomes, the unique needs of service members and veterans are often best addressed through individualized support services. During the summit, significant discussion focused on the success of one-on-one counseling and the different ways this service is most useful for this growing college-going population. Options for providing additional support to students, aside from a designated counselor, and strategies for effectively communicating information on relevant resources for them were discussed.

### Key Insights

★ **One-on-one counseling is ideal.**

An integral part of the success for a student in the SIMV program came from the presence of a dedicated counselor who had a personal investment in the student. For many of the SIMV participants, the counselor was the reason they even considered a college education. The counselor took students directly to testing centers, personally drove students to colleges for interviews, and served as a strong advocate on their behalf. When working with students, the counselor discussed career goals, connected them with necessary tutoring services to help them prepare for placement exams, and assisted with program selection based on their specific needs. For example, one counselor found a more adult-oriented program for a student who did not want to sit in classes with students his daughter's age. The counselor served as a direct resource for each student and clarified information from various sources that were sometimes incorrect.

★ **The value of face-to-face engagement.**

In addition to having a dedicated counselor, service member and veteran students emphasized the value of face-to-face engagement as part of the counseling process. Most interactions with the SIMV counselor took place face-to-face more than once a week. One student panelist reported that the face-to-face interaction was essential in helping to understand academic, health-care, and financial resources.

★ **Well-informed and adaptive advisement practices.**

Students at the summit highlighted the need for advisors who understand the unique needs of service members and veterans, including their financial, academic, and health needs. Advisors who understand the distinctive and often complicated aspects of these essentials, and who effectively connect their advisees to programs that fit their needs, provide an invaluable service to these prospective students.



★ **Acceptance of credits from Joint Services Transcript (JST).**

Some of the students indicated that the acceptance and application of recommended credits for their military training and occupations was a significant factor in their ability to successfully accomplish their academic goals. The acceptance and application of the recommended credits on their JST to their degree requirements decreased their time to completion. As a result, this option helped them utilize their GI Bill benefits more efficiently and find gainful employment much sooner. Attendees discussed the necessity of standardizing and clearly communicating an institution's credit transfer policy. This includes not only college credit recommendations for military training and occupations through the JST, but other credit for prior learning and credit earned at other institutions.

## Recommendations



★ **Increase one-on-one services at colleges and universities.**

Most recommendations regarding individual services involved having a dedicated one-on-one counselor to help service members and veterans navigate the application and admissions process and wade through the many available resources. While this approach is not always feasible across all stakeholder organizations, summit participants believed there were elements of the one-on-one approach that could be incorporated into new and existing practices.

★ **Train college advisors on military culture and language.**

Due to the multiple areas an academic advisor needs to be aware of when counseling service members and veterans, appropriate training on military culture and language is imperative. Without a true understanding of the military lifestyle, as well as the various obstacles service members and veterans may face in the transition process, those providing support services might have difficulty effectively connecting with and supporting them. Many colleges and universities have established a faculty and staff training program on their campus. Other institutions have looked to external organizations, such as Operation College Promise, to provide more intensive trainings (see Appendix).

★ **Offer peer-to-peer mentorship to offset limited available student affairs personnel.**

While summit participants highlighted the significant benefit of one-on-one individualized counseling, they pointed out that the process can be labor intensive and not always feasible. Participants recommended peer-to-peer mentorship as a means to address this issue. By using VA work-study programs, students who serve as mentors to their peers may alleviate some of the workload of an academic advisor, provide employment for service members and veterans, match with a peer who can relate to the challenges faced in the transition from military into civilian culture, and share their experiences having already gone through the application and admissions process.

★ **Effectively use online advising tools to educate service members and veterans about the college admissions process.**

Summit participants suggested that the tools used by institutions in the application process should be simplified to encourage wider and consistent use. Many pointed to the potential for new online tools to aid in this process, particularly when it comes to reaching service members who cannot be there in person because they are deployed overseas or have other active duty commitments.

## Theme 2

### Self-Advocacy

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A second theme that emerged from the roundtable discussions centered on the idea of self-advocacy as central to service members and veterans' college enrollment. Military-affiliated individuals need to receive accurate and timely information on the college admissions process so that they can advocate for educational opportunities that best fit their career goals. An educational campaign, peer networks, and increased collaboration between stakeholders (i.e., federal agencies, higher education, and employers) are all recommendations designed to educate and empower service members and veterans in demystifying the college admissions process.

### Key Insights

★ **Identification of appropriate resources.**

Having access to clear, concise, and accurate admissions and application information is important to successfully advocate for oneself. During the summit, participants found that there are over 46,000 resources currently available for service members and veterans, ranging from using vocational rehabilitation to various GI Bill programs and scholarships. The existence of such a large amount of admissions resources for individuals makes the process difficult to understand and many service members and veterans have problems differentiating the trustworthy resources from the fraudulent, often either accepting false information or ignoring supportive resources altogether. Summit participants recommended creating an aggregate website that pulls together currently existing and reliable resources in a manner that would help make the information less overwhelming. Having trustworthy information in a single location could help equip service members and veterans make informed choices and effectively self-advocate.

★ **Early intervention while in the military.**

Learning about the various postsecondary opportunities available takes time. Many service members and veterans are first-time students who have not had the support that younger, more traditional students have. Summit participants highlighted the need to start educating service members about the postsecondary education process early in their military career. While there have been many enhancements to the Transition Assistance Program, transitioning service members who partake in the program receive a significant amount of information in a small amount of time. In the midst of focusing on personal issues, such as housing, financial security, and other competing responsibilities, college admissions and application information can be difficult to retain. Participants believed starting the admissions and application process earlier would authentically help service members and veterans have the knowledge necessary to make well-educated college-going decisions and to be able to effectively self-advocate.



★ **Making the jump from “veteran friendly” to “veteran ready.”**

Discussion centered on creating environments at postsecondary institutions and in the workplace where service members and veterans have their voices heard. As one employer suggested, this means understanding the difference between organizations that are veteran friendly and those that are veteran ready, and making changes that allow service members and veterans to have a strong voice in an organization’s process of becoming veteran ready. In other words, summit participants noted that having a large number of service members and veterans in their college or company does not signal that they are facilitating their success. Higher education institutions and employers need to be ready to provide the needed support services to service members and veterans so that they can meet their postsecondary and employment goals. Participants argued being friendly to veterans will not provide them a college education or employment. Active steps should be taken to inform them of opportunities to learn and grow professionally.

★ **Bridging the communication gap.**

Many participants pointed to gaps in the language spoken by service members and veterans, and their struggle to adapt to terminology common among institutions and employers. Not only should institutions and employers make efforts to familiarize themselves with conventional military language, but service members and veterans need to learn the language of higher education and the workforce. As one summit attendee put it, “If employers do not understand veterans, the results can be disappointing.” Finding ways to bridge this gap will help service members and veterans become more empowered to advocate for themselves.


## Recommendations

★ **Have an education campaign on college admissions and higher education.**

In order for service members and veterans to effectively self-advocate, they need insight on issues directly related to entering higher education. A collaborative campaign that includes key stakeholders (i.e., federal agencies, service organizations, higher education, and employers) actively involved in providing support to service members and veterans would be able to reach a large number of individuals and provide the necessary college admissions information, which few organizations could do on their own. This approach would better utilize constrained resources, disseminate accurate college enrollment information, and begin to change the narrative around how we provide college admissions information to service members and veterans.

★ **Develop peer networks while in the military and once discharged.**

Participants encouraged leveraging veterans through peer and alumni networks as a way for service members and veterans to receive personalized support in the absence of a counselor. For example, a nationwide directory of veterans’ advocates could help to create a positive feedback loop to ensure that service members and veterans continue to make informed decisions and gain the necessary knowledge to effectively self-advocate.



★ **Facilitate increased connections between the military, higher education, and employers.**

An environment that facilitates service member and veteran self-advocacy is one in which military representatives, college admissions personnel, and employers are connected in ways that ensure mutual understanding and cooperation. The ACE counselor in the SIMV program highlighted the importance of contacting education officers at military installations to provide college admissions information to service members before they leave the service. One of the service members present during the summit believed that working collaboratively with the military to learn about the admissions process while in the service would prove highly beneficial.

# Theme 3

## Cross-Stakeholder Communication and Information Consolidation

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A major theme arising from the summit was the need for military branches, federal agencies, higher education institutions, and employers to communicate with one another in order to maintain efficient processes and work together toward common goals. Veterans are likely to navigate many of these stakeholder groups at different stages of their careers. Participants explored actions to consolidate wide-ranging resources and ensure that veterans transfer seamlessly from one organization to the next.

### Key Insights

★ **Consolidating and centralizing institutional resources.**

Participants emphasized the need for centralized access to resources and support services. For example, a number of colleges and universities offer veteran-specific orientations to help service members and veterans understand their educational benefits and institutional support services. Providing academic counseling services and transfer advisors, as well as designating a specific space for veterans on campus, are examples of how institutions ensure that service members and veterans receive adequate information on available resources and college entrance pathways.

★ **Communicating available resources across stakeholder groups.**

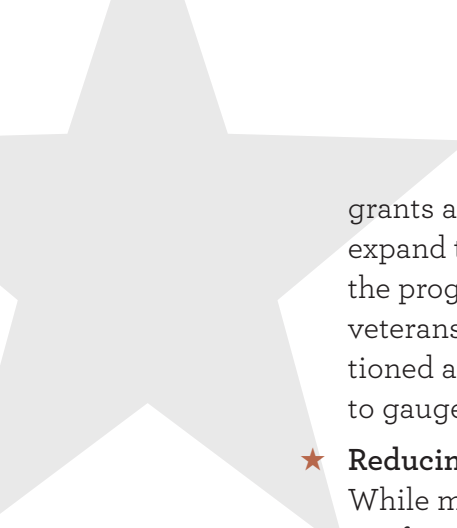
Participants mentioned the need for greater communication of available resources across stakeholder groups. The DoD indicated that use of online services and dissemination of information across different collaborative partners in pilot programs they are working on is showing promise for solving this information gap. Communication can involve outreach with military and veteran service organizations, such as the American Legion, SVA, and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).

★ **Clear communication of guidelines and requirements.**

In one roundtable discussion, participants described the most challenging aspects of the application process and potential solutions to simplify the process. Attendees identified the lack of clear and concise communication of information as one of several major challenges. Many service members and veterans have limited knowledge of where to begin when considering what college programs to enter. Many may not know the specifics in choosing a college or university, how to apply, what is required in the application process, and the varying qualifications for acceptance. These issues may be addressed with appropriate assistance from a knowledgeable counselor, as well as online tools for comparing programs and services.

★ **Connecting employers with institutions of higher education.**

Summit participants recognized a need to fill the gap between one's college education and employment by facilitating greater cross-stakeholder communication, building an understanding of local labor market needs, and finding suitable degrees for those jobs. Employers, including Northrup Grumman, discussed how connections with colleges and universities create avenues for veteran employment. In addition, the DOL's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training



grants are focused on supporting community colleges and other institutions as they expand their capacity to offer two-year (or shorter) training programs. The goal of the program is to ensure that adult learners, many of whom are service members and veterans, are given the training needed by today's employers. Participants mentioned an increased need for education services to connect with employers in order to gauge their workforce needs and to train or educate veterans in high-need fields.

★ **Reducing redundancies.**

While many attendees pointed out the need for consolidated information on applying for a postsecondary program, others pointed to a spate of redundant and disorganized resources that often deters service members and veterans from moving forward in the college enrollment process. Participants considered ways to reduce these redundancies and clarify pathways. For instance, a consolidated information portal for employment and education resources could help identify regional initiatives and their effectiveness in reducing redundancies. The goal would be to harness technology to share resources and best practices as they relate to meeting the labor market's needs with properly trained and skilled service members and veterans.




## Recommendations

★ **Develop a consolidated information portal for employment and education resources.**

While many online resources exist for service members and veterans to educate themselves on college benefits, certificate and degree options, and career opportunities, discussants proposed a need for a definitive portal to consolidate this information. A centralized online portal with approval and input from higher education institutions, employers, federal agencies, military and veteran service organizations, and the military was highly recommended as a solution.

★ **Work with key stakeholders.**



In recent years, federal agencies actively involved in the postsecondary education and transition process of service members and veterans have met on a regular basis to reduce redundancy of current efforts and ensure they share information on support services. In order to provide effective support, organizations need to first identify key stakeholders working on supporting this growing population. Participants agreed that, in an environment of scarce financial resources, identifying these points of contact and working together would help reduce redundancies.

★ **Identify national and regional cohorts and share their efficacy.**

Participants noted the importance of identifying key stakeholders on a national and localized level. While those actively involved from a national level provide a macro perspective for supporting service members and veterans, finding organizations that have systems and connections to individuals who can provide the direct support takes place on a localized level. As a result, stakeholders need to increase efforts to identify promising practices within regional cohorts and to share those efforts with a larger audience. Participants noted that those practices can be shared via social media, through a national online platform, and through regional meetings.

- ★ **Provide regular cross-stakeholder meetings at national and regional conferences.** Summit discussants suggested that one of the best ways to enhance cross-stakeholder communication is to hold regular meetings. This ensures that stakeholders share practices and that each organizational sector (i.e., postsecondary institutions, federal agencies, and employers) voices its needs, resources, and practices.

# Theme 4

## Full Spectrum (Military-to-Career) Navigation

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Across many of the summit's discussions, participants highlighted the need for advisors to be able to help individuals navigate the full spectrum of life between military recruitment and civilian employment, particularly in the application of continued assistance after degree completion to promote successful employment. Veterans seeking higher education often note difficulties in choosing appropriate certificate or degree programs and navigating through the application process, which may hinder the likelihood of successfully moving from the military to college and/or the workforce. Through roundtable discussions, participants were asked to consider how early advising is taking place in their organization, how outreach could be improved, and how programs can increase transparency to make the college admissions and application process more accessible for service members and veterans.

### Key Insights

★ **Early advising involves outreach.**

Participants noted needed improvements with respect to early admissions advising for service members seeking to enter college, as it is not a common practice in the military. Participants suggested enhancing partnerships between military recruiters and higher education institutions, education offices on military installations, and veterans' services as a way to address the gap in services. In general, outreach services are important for disseminating knowledge early in the college decision-making process. Peer networks may provide useful early advisement. Moreover, service members should know what skills and qualifications they will need upon exiting the military in order to avoid issues with reaching degree goals in a short amount of time. Implementation of skills training during military service may help service members obtain the necessary qualifications before separating from service.

★ **Clear identification of pathways is needed.**

Summit participants expressed a lack of information surrounding the pathways that service members and veterans should pursue when determining what education programs to enter. Counselors or advisors can help them set goals for career development and conduct personal assessments to find the most appropriate path. Setting clear career goals should be an integral part of support services provided to service members and veterans, and these goals should be informed by accurate and current information regarding labor market needs. The creation of partnerships between educational advisors or advocates, higher education, and the workforce can assist service members and veterans in earning degrees that are valued by the economy.

★ **On-the-job training helps employers hire more veterans.**

Employers pointed to the success of on-the-job training programs, many of which provide a method for companies to hire more veterans. For instance, USAA's Vet4IT program covers veterans' costs of attendance throughout the program, working in partnership with a local higher education institution. Aside from on-the-job training,

industries noted the need for transferability of military certifications to job credentials in order to enhance hiring.

## Recommendations

- ★ **Develop a centralized portal that includes information on higher education and labor market needs.**

Participants continually returned to the need for a more centralized and comprehensive benefit portal for service members and veterans. The portal would provide access to information on VA and DoD education benefits, college enrollment guidelines, and career opportunities.

- ★ **Colleges and universities should strive to “educate to employ” by placing a greater focus on career readiness.**


Although not necessarily a goal of colleges and universities, participants argued that employers should partner with institutions of higher education in order to provide on-the-job training through internships and college work-study programs. Partnerships between employers and institutions can help link students with employment after completion of their postsecondary certificate or degree. The standardization of licensing and credentialing for veterans to become employable is essential. Stakeholders commonly mentioned the need for standardization, which is largely a stated issue. Federal agencies emphasized the importance of leveraging education programs to promote career readiness. For example, the DoD and DOL are partnering to provide information on technical training courses for service members in the process of transitioning out of the military. Nonetheless, more work in this area is needed, and future collaborative work should seek to incorporate more partnerships with employers.

- ★ **Organizations should strengthen how they track veterans and evaluate pre- and post-college outcomes.**

Participants discussed limited financial resources and data available for tracking pre- and post-college outcomes of programs designed for service members and veterans. Therefore, institutions should strengthen their efforts to assess how their service members and veterans approach higher education, particularly as it relates to their outreaching and academic advising. One of the core issues most organizations face is accurately identifying their service member and veteran populations, without aggregating their data. As many scholars have researched, including veterans with other military-affiliated individuals (i.e., active duty, reserve, and National Guard) can lead to confounding issues that effectively bias assessment results. Another area of concern that arose from several conversations during the summit stemmed from the lack of available data collected and accessible by researchers. Without data on military college and employment experiences, we have yet to learn how service members and veterans access and succeed in higher education, and how they experience the workforce.

- ★ **Employers should strive to make the business case for hiring veterans.**

Employers noted that military service instills candidates with many unique compe-

The page features four large, light gray stars of varying sizes and orientations. One is in the top left, one in the middle left, one in the bottom left, and one in the bottom center. The text is positioned in the upper right area of the page.

tencies that make them ideal for many career paths, especially as effective leaders and managers. As a result, employers should increase their efforts in making a strong business case for hiring more veterans by acknowledging their unique qualities instilled during their military service—qualities that employers value and require.



# Theme 5

## Capacity, Knowledge, and Awareness Building

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The final broad theme emerging from the summit centered on building capacity, knowledge, and awareness across stakeholder groups regarding the concerns central to service members and veterans' college education. Participants explored the ways their organizations could work together to deepen this knowledge base, engage their communities, and expand their capacity to serve this growing college-going population.

### Key Insights

★ **Proactive engagement from the top down.**

Higher education institutions described working toward active engagement in providing programs and services for service members and veterans. This includes providing training for faculty and staff to increase understanding of service member and veteran needs. One example of this kind of proactive engagement is the effort to reach out directly to military installations to relay information to service members early in the transition phase. For example, a summit participant from GMU argued that the administration needs to be proactive in prioritizing funding for programs focused on reaching out to, admitting, and retaining service members during and once out of the military. While veterans' services initially received grant funding at GMU, the university recognized the benefit of these programs in supporting veterans and was able to secure continued internal funding as a result.

★ **Engaging and educating communities.**

Participants highlighted campuses that engage with service members at military installations to provide early information on college admissions. Institutions also incorporated efforts to reach community members supporting service members and veterans and created alumni support groups. These efforts continued despite noted difficulties building bonds with community members and the military.


★ **Fully evaluating program impacts.**

Many attendees pointed to the need for greater evaluation of current program outcomes as part of the goal to improve the knowledge base among stakeholders. The DoD, for example, indicated a desire to understand the impact of current education programs to inform future improvements. Various data-tracking initiatives are underway, but need to be expanded to understand how programs are preparing student veterans for employment. Additionally, colleges and universities have begun to ask whether and how veteran-specific programs and services directly or indirectly facilitate their college access and success. Institutional representatives noted the increase in support services; however, questions remain as to whether such offerings make a difference.




## Recommendations

- ★ **Provide training for professionals working with service members and veterans.** Participants discussed the need to provide training to professionals working with military and veteran services. Specifically, attendees suggested educating student affairs professionals on veterans' issues while thinking about how to make train-the-trainer initiatives scalable.
- ★ **Create opportunities for dialogue between civilians and military-connected individuals.**



Participants talked about the importance of creating opportunities on- and off-campus for interactive discussions between civilians and service members and veterans. These interactions should include college students, faculty, and staff and their service member and veteran peers. For instance, the University of California, Santa Cruz offers an event called Making the Circle Bigger, which brings together veterans and nonveteran students, faculty, and staff with the goal of fostering community and understanding of military-connected culture and issues. Off-campus, some participants noted The Telling Project (see Appendix) as a way to understand veterans' experiences through the arts. The Telling Project is one example of a program that uses creativity to help enhance dialogue among stakeholders, build awareness of veteran issues, and reduce stigmas held by both communities (i.e., civilians and veterans).



While face-to-face interaction was noted as a strong component of advising programs for many service members and veterans, others suggested that there is an opportunity to use social media tools to engage new services with different preferences. Participants noted a lack of understanding of military culture and customs among civilians. In contrast, participants noted the need for service members and veterans to learn how to conform their skill sets to the civilian culture in order to increase their chances of becoming employed. To bridge the gap in communication between the military and civilians, discussants suggested harnessing social media as a way to reduce misconceptions about both communities.

## Conclusion

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The goal of the Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit was to provide a space for participants to communicate and collaborate, as well as to share promising practices to better support service members and veterans in their transition from military service to higher education and the workforce. The summit led to the creation of five themes and recommendations for improving service members' and veterans' higher education enrollment, which were discussed in this report. Notably, participants pointed to key recommendations for enhancing college admissions information for transitioning service members and veterans.

Among the most important outcomes from the summit were the recognition of the significance of providing holistic and timely pre-college enrollment advising, and the need to include true costs associated with attending specific institutions as well as available college financial aid. Participants discussed several initiatives and programs that are helping address this goal, although more work is needed to ensure that service members and veterans have valuable and timely college admissions and funding information. There is a growing need for colleges and universities to have effective and informed college admissions advisors who understand available benefits and encourage military-connected individuals to continue in their pursuit of a college education. College admissions advisors can inform service members and veterans about how to best utilize their finite VA and DoD education benefits, and to find other financial aid resources that will help defray the costs associated with going to college.

When military-connected individuals complete their active duty service, many will look toward institutions of higher learning to provide them with the information and resources to gain a postsecondary certificate or degree. College admissions advisors can play a vital role in the college enrollment and choice prospects of transitioning service members and veterans by providing them with the information needed to make informed decisions. Summit participants agreed that the admissions process also needs to be a comprehensive approach where the needs of the workforce and of employers are also understood by academic advisors. In fact, summit participants understood that service members and veterans depend on college advisors to best explain financial aid and possible education options to pursue, given that many would like to focus on their new roles as college students. Given this likelihood, college admissions advisors serve as key institutional personnel that can have a profound impact on whether service members and veterans access, persist, and succeed in higher education.

# Appendix

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**ACE Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions™**

*[www.vetfriendlytoolkit.org](http://www.vetfriendlytoolkit.org)*

**Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Paying for College tool**

*<http://www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college/>*

**U.S. Department of Education (ED) Financial Aid Toolkit**

*<http://www.financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/outreach/target/military.jsp>*

**ED Student Aid for Military Families**

*<https://studentaid.ed.gov/types/grants-scholarships/military>*

**Operation College Promise**

*<http://www.operationpromiseforservicemembers.com/>*

**Student Veterans of America**

*<http://studentveterans.org/index.php/what-we-do/million-records-project>*

**The Telling Project**

*<http://thetellingproject.org>*

**U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Tuition Assistance (TA) DECIDE**

*<http://www.dodmou.com/TADECIDE/>*

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) GI Bill**

*<http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/>*

**VA GI Bill Comparison Tool**

*<http://department-of-veterans-affairs.github.io/gi-bill-comparison-tool/>*

## Special Guests and Hosts

<p><b>Panel #1:</b> Voices of Student Veterans</p>	<p><b>Lacy Evans</b>, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  <b>John J. (Joe) Houser</b>, Georgetown University (DC)  <b>Kenneth Lyon</b>, University of Mary Washington (VA)  <b>David Smith</b>, Georgetown University  <b>Nathan Toews</b>, Dickinson College (PA)</p>
<p><b>Panel #2:</b> Perspectives from Federal Agencies</p>	<p><b>Barrett Y. Bogue</b>, GI Bill Outreach Development Team Leader, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  <b>Wayne C. Boswell</b>, Director of Business Operations and Outreach, Transition to Veterans Program Office, Office of the Under Secretary of Personnel and Readiness, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)  <b>Patrick Campbell</b>, Policy Analyst, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau  <b>Frank C. DiGiovanni</b>, Director, Force Readiness and Training, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Readiness), DoD  <b>Fred Stennis</b>, Outreach Team Lead and Senior Advisor, Awareness and Outreach Group, Customer Experience Office, U.S. Department of Education</p>
<p><b>Panel #3:</b> Insights from Educators</p>	<p><b>Heather Bernard</b>, Academic Advisor, American Council on Education  <b>Jennifer Connors</b>, Director, Office of Military Services, George Mason University (VA)  <b>William Hubbard</b>, Vice President of External Affairs, Student Veterans of America  <b>Joan Putnam</b>, Director of The Joan and Art Barron Veterans Center, San Diego State University  <b>Christopher Tipton</b>, Director of Veterans Initiatives and Outreach, University of Maryland University College</p>
<p><b>Panel #4:</b> Views from Employers and the U.S. Department of Labor</p>	<p><b>Jeffrey D. Carpenter</b>, Vice President, Vantage Point Consulting, Inc.  <b>Timothy Green</b>, Director, Office of Strategic Outreach, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training Service, U.S. Department of Labor  <b>Duane Hardesty</b>, Outreach Ambassador, Operations IMPACT, Northrup Grumman  <b>Brian Parks</b>, IT Technical Director, USAA</p>





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