



# How to Help Military & Veteran Families

FOR FACULTY MEMBERS AT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

From 2011 to 2012, veterans comprised roughly 4 percent of the total undergraduate population of colleges and universities in the United States. Since then, those numbers have rapidly increased. Research currently estimates that close to five million Post-9/11 service members will separate from the military by 2020, and a large portion of them are expected to enter higher education institutions using VA educational benefits, such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill.<sup>1</sup>

Instructors and professors are a critical component of a college's or university's effectiveness for military-affiliated students. While staff and administrators are also essential, it is the faculty that, on a daily basis, foster an environment conducive to student retention and continued advancement. Military-affiliated students add tremendous value to the classroom by offering global experience, leadership skills, discipline, focus and ability to work under pressure.

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## Did you know?

- » A majority (52 percent) of student veterans questioned by the National Survey of Student Engagement earned a postsecondary degree or certificate, despite the challenges they may face.<sup>2</sup>
- » More than 30 percent of non-combat veterans and almost 80 percent of combat veterans were 24 or older when they enter higher education institutions,<sup>3</sup> and 62 percent of military undergraduates have a spouse, a child or both.<sup>4</sup>
- » Student service members and veterans were more likely (70 percent) than nonveteran/civilian students (65 percent) to spend at least 10 hours per week preparing for class.<sup>5</sup>
- » Military-affiliated students were more likely to be enrolled in distance education than the general population.<sup>3</sup>
- » More than 60 percent of student service members and veterans said they have a positive relationship with faculty members. Similarly, almost half of military-affiliated students said they feel supported by and have a sense of belonging with administrative personnel, versus 36 percent of non-veteran/civilian students.<sup>6</sup>
- » Military-affiliated students were less likely than civilian students to work with faculty on activities other than their assigned coursework, or collaborate with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments.<sup>6</sup>

# Practical Applications

- Research indicates that a high percentage of student veterans are pursuing degrees in business, public service, health, science and engineering. If you teach these subjects, you are probably working with military-affiliated students already.<sup>2</sup>
- Learn about military culture. The Center for Deployment Psychology offers a free online training course on military culture, which also includes a section on terminology and acronyms. You can also visit the Department of Defense website for an online dictionary of military terms to better understand these students.
- It is not uncommon for student service members to face a deployment during the academic year. This may require the student to miss class or even withdraw from the institution. By understanding these students' military responsibilities, you are potentially better equipped to assist them with following the proper university process.<sup>7</sup>
- Military-affiliated students often enter college after years of service with a large gap in their educational attainment. Some will find that they may need remedial or tutorial work before becoming fully immersed in their coursework. It is important for faculty to point military-affiliated students towards learning support services that are focused on closing the gap between their current academic skills and the ones required to succeed in college.



## Additional Resources

Some promising research and best practices have emerged for supporting the unique needs of military-affiliated students. Like other non-traditional students, veterans and student service members often have gaps between their participation in formal education programs. They are also juggling various life demands, and might have serious financial concerns. However, these students show great success regardless of their geographic mobility and other disruptions of their academic pursuits. With the proper support, these students are capable of and prepared for success. Below is a list of resources to help faculty at colleges and universities better serve military-affiliated students.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- » *Active Duty Armed Forces Tuition Assistance Programs*, [studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/grants-scholarships/military](http://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/grants-scholarships/military)
- » *American Council on Education, Supporting Student Veterans*
  - › *College Credit for Military Service, Transcripts for Military Personnel*, [www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Transcripts-for-Military-Personnel.aspx](http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Transcripts-for-Military-Personnel.aspx)
  - › *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus*, [www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/From-Soldier-to-Student-II.aspx](http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/From-Soldier-to-Student-II.aspx)
  - › *Military Guide*, [www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Online.aspx](http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Online.aspx)
  - › *Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions*, [vetfriendlytoolkit.acenet.edu](http://vetfriendlytoolkit.acenet.edu)
- » *The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, Military-Related Publications*, [www.cael.org/vets-publication](http://www.cael.org/vets-publication)

- » *Council of College and Military Educators*, [www.ccmeonline.org](http://www.ccmeonline.org)
- » *The Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support*, [www.dantes.doded.mil](http://www.dantes.doded.mil)
- » *Department of Defense Postsecondary Education Complaint System*, <https://afaems.langley.af.mil/pecs/DoDPECS.aspx>
- » *Military Family Research Institute, Frequently Asked Questions about the Military and Student Service Members and Veterans*, [www.mfri.purdue.edu/FAQstudentveterans](http://www.mfri.purdue.edu/FAQstudentveterans)
- » *Military Family Research Institute, The Landscape in Higher Education Series*, [www.mfri.purdue.edu/landscape](http://www.mfri.purdue.edu/landscape)
- » *Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges*, [www.soc.aascu.org](http://www.soc.aascu.org)
- » *Student Veterans of America*, [www.studentveterans.org](http://www.studentveterans.org)
- » *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*
  - › *VA Campus Toolkit*, [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveteran](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveteran)
  - › *Post-9/11 GI Bill and Other Programs*, [www.gibill.va.gov/benefits](http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits)
  - › *Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance*, [www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/other\\_programs/dea.html](http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/other_programs/dea.html)

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## About MFRI

The goal of the Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University is to create meaningful relationships that bring organizations together in support of military families. Working with researchers and practitioners from both the military and civilian communities, MFRI strives to develop outreach and research programs grounded in scientific evidence.



## About the *How to Help* Series

The *How to Help* series equips communities to better serve service members, veterans and their families. The series offers effective, evidence-based guidance on how best to help military and veteran families given the unique challenges they face. Each *How to Help* addresses a different segment of that community, such as extended family, friends and neighbors; teachers; early childhood educators; faith-based groups; and professional service providers. We hope that by increasing understanding of the unique stresses, obstacles and opportunities that often accompany military service; we can strengthen communities by building their capacity to better support the military families within them.

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- 7 Bucci, D., & Shannon, A. (2012). *Reaching for the stars: Helping student veterans achieve new heights in higher education*. Retrieved from the NACADA Clearinghouse Resource Web Site: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-veteran-students.aspx>



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