

MILITARY-AFFILIATED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUNY INSTITUTIONS

2020



The State University
of New York



STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT NEW PALTZ



Office of Veteran & Military Services

> EXECUTIVE SUMMARY <

In 2018, the Office of Veteran & Military Services (OVMS) and the Institute for Disaster Mental Health (IDMH) at SUNY New Paltz, with the support of the New York State Health Foundation, undertook a project to support the health and wellness needs of SUNY's military-affiliated students (MAS) by offering training to health and wellness professionals system-wide. A component of that project involved a needs assessment that included:

- A survey, focus groups, and individual interviews with MAS
- A survey of campus health and wellness professionals
- A focus group with military and veteran services representatives

Key results from this needs assessment included MAS' perception that they are often stereotyped by faculty, staff and other peers, and that they experience significant barriers to using campus services, including being unaware of available services and believing that services are for civilian students and wouldn't be helpful for them.

Results from the survey of campus professionals indicated that campus services varied across the SUNY institutions and that many offices do not screen students for military affiliation when they arrive to seek services. This results in a perception that campus offices do not receive any MAS seeking services, and/or that the responsibility to seek services lies solely on MAS.

These lessons learned were incorporated into the resulting training curriculum which was offered eight times over six months with a total of 198 attendees from 28 SUNY campuses as well as 39 other institutions across New York State. Participants included professionals from campus counseling centers, health centers, disability services and career services, as well as military and veteran services representatives. The learning objectives for the training specified that participants would:

- Understand military culture, how it differs from the culture of higher education, and the impact of these two different cultures on MAS
- Understand MAS' perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses and their needs on campus

- Understand MAS' help-seeking attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes, including barriers and access points
- Consider how they can use this information to build engagement and outreach strategies with MAS

While this initial program succeeded in increasing military cultural competence among participants, the scope of that training could not sufficiently address the academic and institutional stressors that have a significant impact on MAS. Inconsistent policies and practices around military leave of absence, grace periods when VA benefits were delayed, advising that didn't meet VA guidelines, and other campus administrative practices have a large impact on MAS' overall well-being, their feelings about their academic experience, and their overall success.

Overwhelmingly, needs assessment data from MAS highlighted the importance of the role of military and veteran services representatives as key to their success. Military and veteran services representatives serve as culturally competent sources of support, information, referrals, advising, and advocacy, and they are the preferred points of contact for MAS. However, the varying roles, functions, and resources of the military and veteran services representatives across SUNY campuses, and therefore the services and support available to MAS, vary significantly. Therefore, in 2018, New Paltz's OVMS and IDMH were awarded a grant from the SUNY Impact Foundation to develop and conduct a system-wide conference titled

"Best and Shared Practices for Supporting Military-Affiliated Students." The conference had two primary objectives:

1. To bring together military and veteran services representatives from all 64 SUNY campuses to allow them to share ideas and best practices for supporting the needs of MAS
2. To bring together administrators from each campus who are responsible for MAS enrollment, to promote their engagement with military and veteran services representatives, and to help advance military culturally competent institutional policies and practices

This conference, held Nov. 5 and 6, 2019 at SUNY System Administration, was attended by 89 participants representing 52 SUNY campuses. Twenty-one of these attendees were Vice Presidents and other upper-level administrators, and the remaining 68 were military and veteran services representatives and/or certifying officials.

An extension of that grant period allowed for the development of this Military-Affiliated Policy Recommendations for SUNY Institutions report, which will summarize data collected over the past two years on the current status of MAS on SUNY campuses, and propose a set of recommendations for implementing best practices to support their overall success system-wide.

This document outlines:

- Major goals and recommendations that encompass the needs and concerns of MAS and the professionals working to support them
- Selected data, both national and SUNY-specific, that describes the current status of MAS, documents current needs, and points to potential solutions
- Policy and practice recommendations for SUNY System and individual institutions
- Resources and other supporting material

We hope this document provides guidance to institutions that are working to strengthen programs that are already robust, those that are just beginning to think about the needs of this diverse group of students, and everyone in between.

With gratitude, we acknowledge those who have supported this work:

- State University of New York Trustee Ambassador Carl Spielvogel and the SUNY Impact Foundation
- The NYS Health Foundation and their Veterans Health Officer, Derek Coy
- Dr. John Graham and Diana Pasterchick of SUNY System
- President Donald Christian and our colleagues at SUNY New Paltz

Thank you to the military and veteran services representatives across SUNY who have joined us in focus groups, answered our surveys, and were available for follow-up questions.

A special thank you to the MAS who have informed our understanding of their strengths, needs, and challenges over the past several years and who have allowed use of their own words to advocate for those who will come after them.

Sincerely,

**Jason Gilliland, M.A., Director,
New Paltz Office of Veteran & Military Services**

**Amy Nitza, Ph.D., Director,
Institute for Disaster Mental Health**

Rebecca Rodriguez, M.S., Program and Operations Manager, Institute for Disaster Mental Health

Kelsey Valencia, M.A., Military and Veteran Program Assistant, Institute for Disaster Mental Health



“

I THINK SOMETHING THAT'S CHALLENGING BEING A STUDENT, PART OF A STUDENT COMMUNITY, IS DECIDING WHEN TO IDENTIFY AS MILITARY AND WHEN NOT TO IDENTIFY AS MILITARY, AND TRYING TO JUDGE IS THAT PERSON GOING TO JUDGE ME NEGATIVELY OR POSITIVELY BASED ON HOW I IDENTIFY MYSELF. AND THAT'S WITH OTHER STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND EVERYBODY REALLY, BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO GET A VALUE JUDGMENT”

MAJOR GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING THE SUCCESS OF MILITARY-AFFILIATED STUDENTS

- 1 **Establish** system-wide and campus-wide commitments to MAS.
- 2 **Increase** MAS enrollment and create a welcoming environment.
- 3 **Facilitate** the transition from military to academic life and reduce barriers to fulfilling military and academic responsibilities.
- 4 **Support** MAS' academic success by providing services that target their unique educational needs.
- 5 **Support** holistic development of MAS by addressing their unique needs and creating a military-inclusive campus culture.
- 6 **Promote** MAS retention and graduation and support their transition from the military to the civilian workforce.
- 7 **Appoint** a full-time Military and Veteran Services Representative who serves as the point of contact for all MAS from admissions through graduation and who supports the development of a one-stop shop model for MAS services.
- 8 **Collect** data to understand the MAS population, identify important trends, and employ strategies that are data-driven.
- 9 **Offer** financial advising to MAS to ensure that they understand the different types of benefits, their eligibility for those benefits, and the best ways to maximize them.
- 10 **Develop** networking opportunities for military-affiliated alumni to promote ongoing connections to the institution.

MILITARY-AFFILIATED STUDENTS

"Military-affiliated students" (MAS) is a global term for a diverse student population. This term includes students who are currently serving in an active duty, national guard or reserve capacity, veterans (those who have served) and dependents (a child or spouse, regardless of age, of someone who is serving or has served in the military). Their military experiences may be defined by a number of variables, including:

Type of Service: The experiences and challenges of a student veteran and a student dependent, for example, will be very different.

Demographics: MAS of color, women and LGBTQ+ populations will have their own experiences and challenges.

Rank: This is an important designation in the military community, and may influence how students interact with authority figures and each other.

Occupation: The job a service member was assigned will influence their experience.

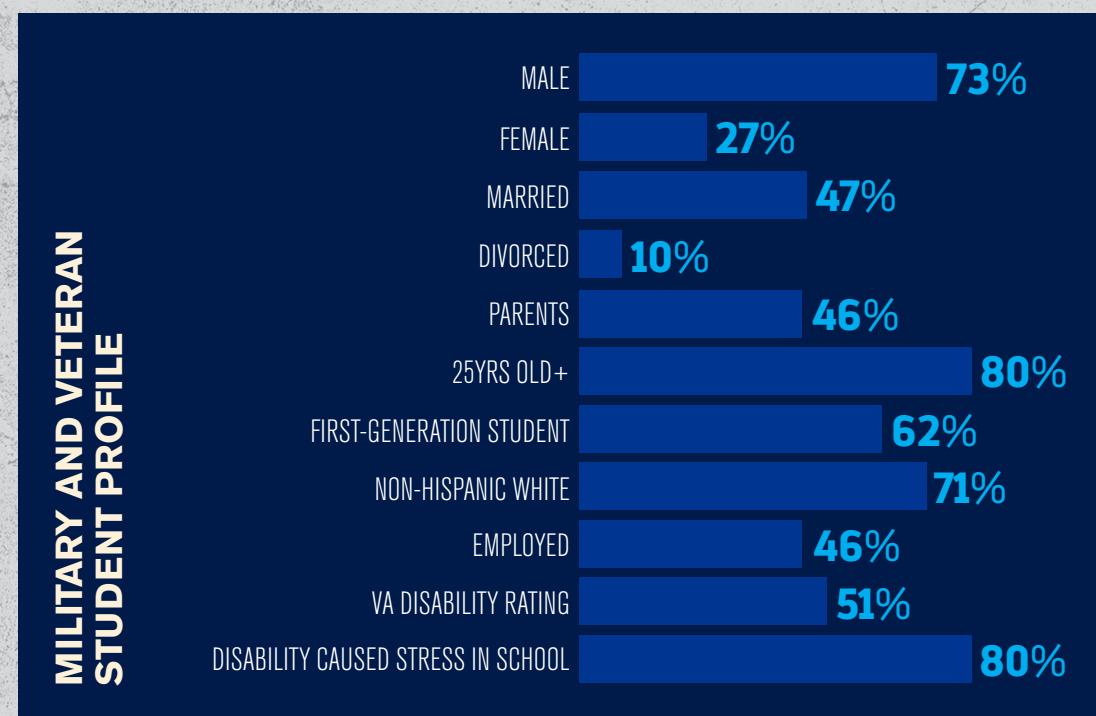
Types of Deployments: Not all service members have been deployed and not all deployments are to conflict zones.

THE NATIONAL PROFILE

Not only do MAS differ from each other, they also differ from civilian students. They are more likely to be 25 years of age or older, first-generation, work full or part time, have a VA disability rating, be married, and have children (Cate, Lyon, Schmeling, & Bogue, 2017; see Graph 1). Therefore, MAS are more likely to spend their time caring for their family, working to support their families and themselves, and managing other stressors, including those related to healthcare needs.

“

YOU HAVE TO BE MORE AWARE, DEFINITELY MORE MATURE, AND BE ABLE TO HANDLE MORE IN TERMS OF SCHOOL...HAVING TO JUGGLE MULTIPLE THINGS LIKE WORK, SCHOOL, ARMY, STILL HAVE PERSONAL TIME FOR MYSELF, IT CAN BE A LOT SOMETIMES.”



Graph 1

MAS face unique challenges on campus that can negatively affect their academic success and preparation for the civilian workforce. According to the American Council on Education (ACE; 2012), the most frequent challenges among student veterans/service members are retention and degree completion, finances (including military and educational benefits), social acculturation, and health care (see Graph 2).

As illustrated in Graph 3 below, student veterans and service members also experience college differently than civilian students. They perceive there to be less social and academic support on campus and report having fewer supportive relationships with other students (Kim & Cole, 2013).

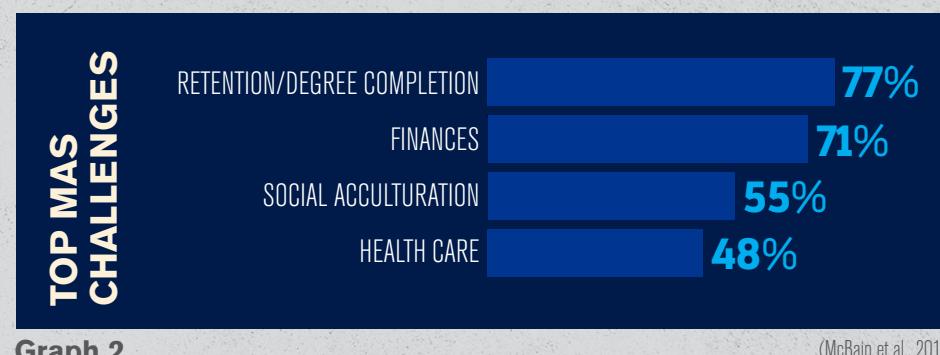
The response of colleges and universities to the needs of MAS varies widely among institutions. According to ACE's 2012 national survey, 71% of responding institutions had a dedicated office for military and veteran services, and institutions with dedicated offices were more likely to provide targeted services. When targeted services are offered, MAS do utilize them and consider them

valuable; the most highly utilized services are those involving Department of Veteran Affairs educational benefits and financial aid counseling, campus events, employment assistance, and academic advising. However, the ACE (2012) survey also found that regardless of the existence of a military and veterans services program, many institutions lacked services in important areas, such as providing an expedited re-enrollment process, a veteran-specific orientation or breakout session, support groups or mentoring programs, and academic support and advising. These services are essential to building an inclusive and supportive campus climate and promoting the academic success of MAS.

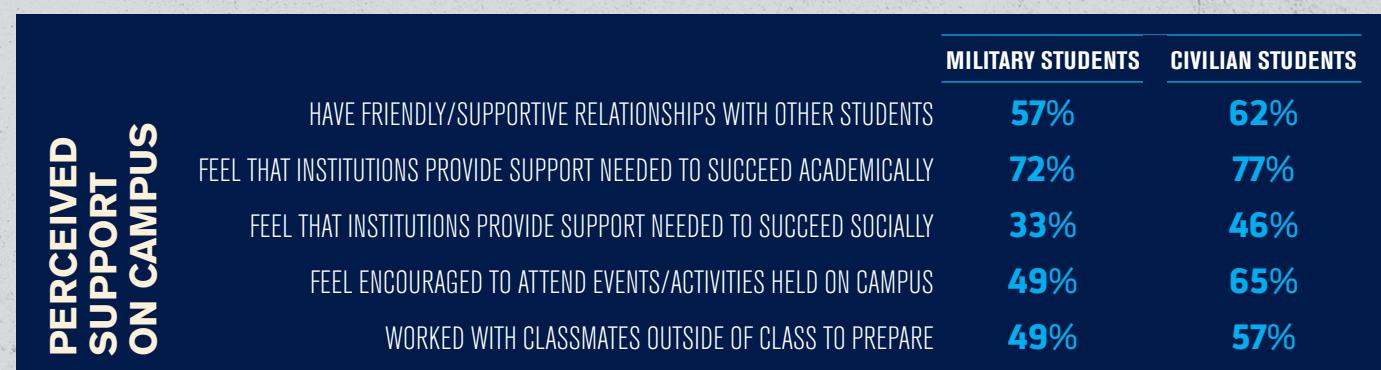
Institutions face their own set of challenges in effectively supporting MAS. Nationally, the most common challenges faced by colleges and universities and their military and veteran services representatives revolved around funding, staffing, and training, as well as identifying and tracking MAS, and faculty and staff sensitivity to the needs of this population (McBain et al., 2012).

“

A LOT OF RELUCTANCE IN MAKING FRIENDS IN COLLEGE COMES BACK TO THE POPULATION BEING DIFFERENT.”



Graph 2



Graph 3

MILITARY-AFFILIATED STUDENTS AT SUNY

Surveys and focus groups of SUNY MAS (Gilliland, Nitza and Rodriguez, 2018; Gilliland, Nitza, Valencia and Rodriguez, 2019) have demonstrated that overall, MAS experience a general lack of understanding from their campus communities about their experiences. MAS report that many campus professionals do not understand the stressors and experiences they have been exposed to. Similar to the national profile, SUNY MAS describe having unique challenges on campus compared to their civilian peers. These challenges include the following:

TRANSITIONAL CHALLENGES

- Military and academic culture are incongruent
- Students who have ongoing military service obligations are navigating this shift multiple times
- Apprehension about “jumping the chain of command” leaves students reluctant to seek additional support
- Many are first-generation students

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

- Military service-related gaps in education
- Affected by contextual factors such as the classroom environment
- Concentration, writing, studying, test-taking and other academic skills
- Lack of structure, time management and balancing additional responsibilities
- Failure to receive credits for military, prior learning or college-level exams

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

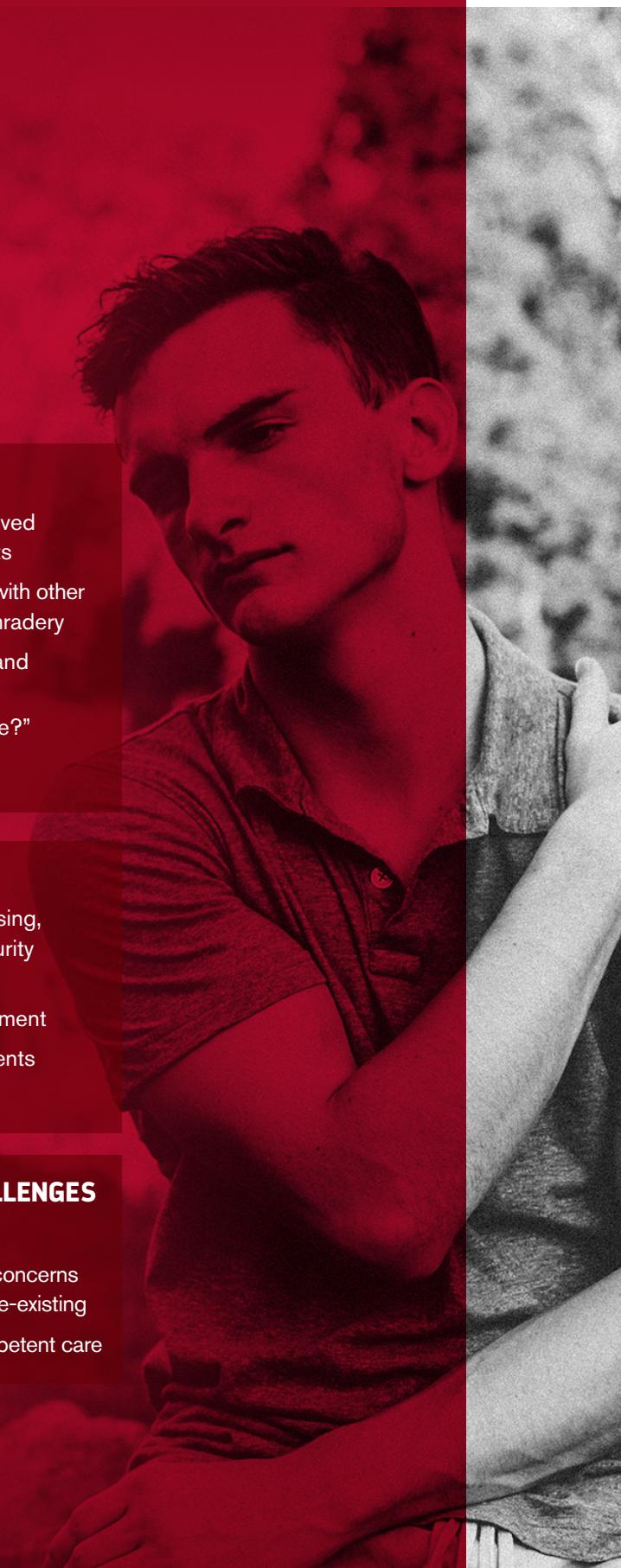
- Difficulty relating to, and perceived difference from, civilian students
- Trouble finding and connecting with other military students to rebuild comradery
- Stigma, negative stereotypes, and inappropriate questions:
 - “Have you ever killed anyone?”
 - “All veterans are broken.”

FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

- Concerns include poverty, housing, homelessness, and food insecurity
- Understanding benefits and receiving proper benefit advisement
- Dealing with delayed VA payments or student/school debt

HEALTH & WELLNESS CHALLENGES

- Visible and invisible disabilities
- Other health and mental health concerns that are service-connected or pre-existing
- Access to military culturally competent care



CAMPUS SERVICES

SUNY MAS report numerous concerns about using campus resources (See Graph 4). They experience confusion about what services are available and how to access them. They also question the degree to which such services can meet their unique needs; they perceive services as being designed for civilian students, and are doubtful that service providers understand the complexity of their problems. They experience stigma (including self-stigma) for needing help, reducing the likelihood that they will seek it. One very clear finding is that MAS utilize their campus military and veteran services representative more than any other campus service. When a campus has a military and veteran services representative, MAS will seek their guidance and input first and foremost and rely on them for referrals to other services.

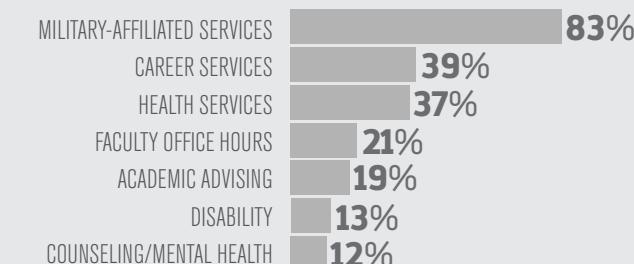
“

I HAVE A HARD TIME TALKING WITH STUDENTS THAT AREN'T VETERANS OR MILITARY ASSOCIATED. I JUST FEEL LIKE I CAN'T RELATE AS MUCH, AND SO THAT MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR ME TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM.”

SUNY MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICES REPRESENTATIVES

Services for MAS vary widely across SUNY campuses. Some campuses have only a School Certifying Official (SCO), a person responsible for submitting student data to the VA for billing. These SCOs are often in other full-time roles and are responsible for other aspects of student billing, registration and/or financial aid, and have no other involvement with MAS. Other campuses have a robust military and veteran services office, with a full-time military and veteran services representative who coordinates all aspects of MAS services from admission through graduation. However, there is little uniformity in the title for this position, the campus division to which they report, the services they offer, and the resources and support available to them (See Graph 5).

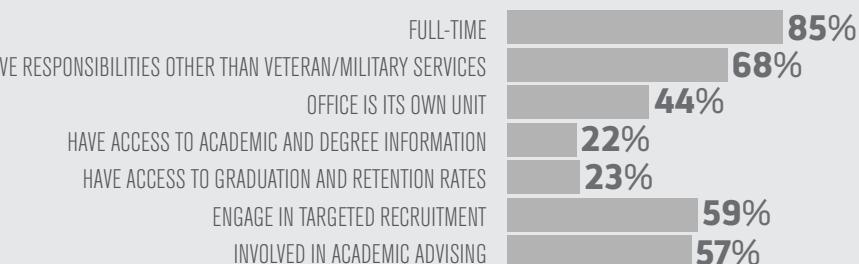
SUNY SERVICES USED



Graph 4

(Gilliland, Nitza and Rodriguez, 2018)

SUNY MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES



Graph 5

(Gilliland, Nitza and Rodriguez, 2018)



A SURVEY OF SUNY MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICES REPRESENTATIVES (GILLILAND, NITZA, VALENCIA AND RODRIGUEZ, 2019) FOUND THAT A MAJORITY (68%) HAVE ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES WHICH LIMIT THE AMOUNT OF TIME AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT MAS.

Pictured above: Jason Gilliland, M.A., Director, Office of Veteran & Military Services, SUNY New Paltz, and a student

Dual responsibilities and lack of adequate staffing make it difficult to establish programs and services. Those that have developed strong military and veteran programs note that constant outreach and building relationships with students is essential to supporting them.

For campuses with a designated military and veteran services representative, one of the primary challenges is identifying and tracking MAS. Many institutions only include students who are utilizing military benefits for their education in their count of MAS, potentially leaving a large number unidentified and without services. Relatedly, many military and veteran services representatives do not have access to academic and degree information or graduation and retention rates of their students.



This makes it challenging to develop a complete picture of these students and their needs. Additional challenges identified by SUNY Military and Veteran Services Representatives are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

CHALLENGES WITHIN THEIR OFFICE AND/OR ROLE

Running an understaffed office	Inability to register MAS
Excluded from policy development	Lack of off-campus partnerships
Difficulty tracking and engaging MAS	Operating without adequate authority
Lack of involvement in academic advising	Limited institutional support

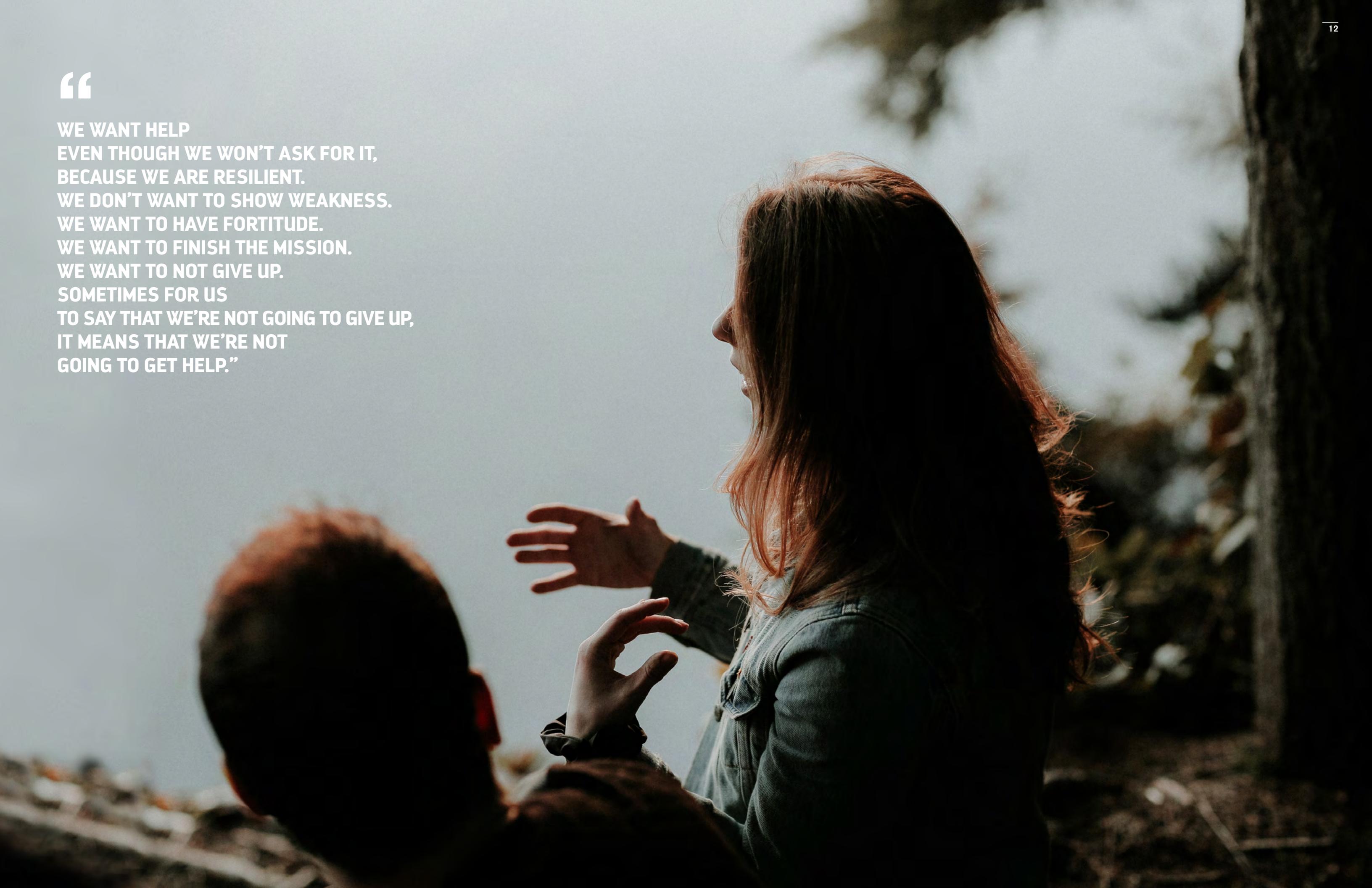
CHALLENGES RELATED TO INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Lack of priority registration	Inadequate acceptance of prior credit - including military, life experience and transfer credits
Insufficient intake questions	Failure to accommodate for late VA payments
Non-compliance with the DoD MOU	Inadequate military LOA and other attendance issues
Non-compliance with the Principles of Excellence	Lack of student services geared towards MAS
Informal military transcript review process	Lack of coordination among System and all campuses
Lack of support for instituting a separate orientation	Lack of collaboration among departments
Lack of recruitment strategies targeted to potential MAS students	Insufficient number of SCOs

(Gilliland, Nitza and Rodriguez, 2018)

“

WE WANT HELP
EVEN THOUGH WE WON'T ASK FOR IT,
BECAUSE WE ARE RESILIENT.
WE DON'T WANT TO SHOW WEAKNESS.
WE WANT TO HAVE FORTITUDE.
WE WANT TO FINISH THE MISSION.
WE WANT TO NOT GIVE UP.
SOMETIMES FOR US
TO SAY THAT WE'RE NOT GOING TO GIVE UP,
IT MEANS THAT WE'RE NOT
GOING TO GET HELP.”



BEST AND SHARED PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING MILITARY-AFFILIATED STUDENTS

A SUNY CONFERENCE / MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICES REPRESENTATIVES AND ADMINISTRATORS

With the support of the SUNY Impact Foundation and SUNY Trustee Ambassador Carl Spielvogel, the Office of Veteran & Military Services (OVMS) and the Institute for Disaster Mental Health (IDMH) at SUNY New Paltz hosted the “Best and Shared Practices for Supporting Military-Affiliated Students” conference on Nov. 5 and 6, 2019. The goal of this System-wide gathering was to provide military and veteran services professionals and university administrators with opportunities for professional development and collaboration. The conference was attended by 89 participants representing 52 SUNY campuses. Twenty-one of these attendees were Vice Presidents and other upper-level administrators, and the remaining 68 were military and veteran services representatives and/or SCOs.

In the planning of this event, OVMS and IDMH conducted a system-wide survey of military and veteran service representatives, hosted three focus groups with a total of 23 staff from 22 institutions, and conducted individual interviews to determine training priorities and needs. One consistent finding was the need to include upper-level administrators in the conference, with workshops tailored to them, in order to help advance the MAS-related policies and practices of institutions.

The conference agenda included the following presentations, workshops and events:

Valuing the Strengths and Addressing the Challenges of Military-Affiliated Students

Veteran Initiatives at SUNY: Current Status and Future Directions

The Value of an Active Military-Affiliated Student Program on Campus

Expanding Capacity: Utilizing the VA Work Study Program

Panel Discussion of Campus Veteran Programs

SUNY Student Veteran Panel Administrator Bootcamp: Federal Policies and Compliance

Working with Educational Benefits for Military-Affiliated Students

The “Ins-and-Outs” of the ACE Military Evaluations Review Process

Best Practices for Engaging with Student Veterans

Military Culture

Military Transcripts, Tools and Resources

Collaborating to Promote the Wellness and Resilience of Military-Affiliated Students

Mapping and Leveraging Military Credit Recommendations

Working Lunch / Best and Shared Practices: Collaborative Discussion and Next Steps

Networking Reception



> A CASE STUDY <

In the Spring 2017, Dietrich Orris (U.S. Army, Retired) was attending SUNY Dutchess Community College with the goal of transferring to SUNY New Paltz in the fall of that same year. However, his GPA from more than 20 years prior while attending SUNY Ulster, when coupled with his current cumulative GPA from SUNY Dutchess, did not meet the SUNY New Paltz's transfer student GPA of 2.75. When Orris was denied admission to New Paltz, he reached out to their Office of Veteran & Military Services (OVMS) to see if there was any assistance that could be provided to appeal the decision.

During the initial contact between Orris and OVMS, Orris explained that the grades he earned from SUNY Ulster were from more than 20 years prior, at a time where he was not ready for college. As a result of doing poorly at his first attempt at college, he decided to enlist in the United States Army where he spent the next 20 years. Upon retiring, Orris wanted to enroll in college with the goal of becoming a teacher. He applied to SUNY Dutchess where he worked hard on his academics, and after a few semesters had earned his associates degree, and maintained a grade point average of over 3.5.

Armed with this information, OVMS reached out to Dr. Laura Dull in the Department of Teaching and Learning, where Orris was applying. After hearing the overview of Orris' situation, Dr. Dull enthusiastically assisted with Orris appealing the Admissions decision. The appeal packet included letters of recommendation from professors at SUNY Dutchess, a writing sample and a personal statement.

Below is an excerpt from Orris' personal statement:

I am a nontraditional student as I am currently forty years old and retired after a twenty year career in the U.S. Army and Army Reserve. During the course of my career I participated in numerous overseas missions which included two combat deployments to Iraq where I sustained injuries rendering me a disabled veteran. Presently, I am employed full time in the New York State Police and have ten years on the job....I am married with two small children, my daughter is three years old and my son is twenty months old, and have managed to balance family with employment, volunteering, extramural activities, and my studies. Given these circumstances I have achieved a cumulative GPA of 3.45 and, during this course, made the President's List. I continue to commit to succeeding in this current semester and I am on track to graduate in May 2017. There is no disputing that my academic past leaves much to be desired. Numbers do not lie and they are representative of the type of student I was sixteen years ago, but not now.



A letter of recommendation from one of Orris's professors at SUNY Dutchess indicated there was little doubt that Orris would be successful at SUNY New Paltz:

I had the pleasure of teaching Dietrich Orris in my Education in American Society course last semester (Fall 2016). Dietrich is an extremely motivated student that comes to class prepared and ready to contribute. He interacted respectfully and productively with classmates during our many collaborative learning activities. Dietrich also consistently performed in the top 5% of students on individual exams. He often stayed after class and came to class early to discuss material and concepts from the course. Dietrich is driven by the kind of intellectual curiosity that is so refreshing to see in a student. While he earned high marks on graded assignments, he seemed to genuinely enjoy learning for the sake of learning. This characteristic in particular allowed Dietrich to stand out within a classroom full of many high performing students.

Upon submitting Orris's appeal packet to Dr. Dull, she confidently responded by accepting the appeal and requesting Orris to be admitted into SUNY New Paltz:

I was delighted to read your application materials. Your essay was the best I have ever read, and so powerful and important in these times. I am writing to Office of Admissions to please admit you into the Secondary Social Studies program. Your current grades and stellar recommendations indicate that you will do well here.

Two years later, in the spring of 2019, Orris graduated SUNY New Paltz with a Bachelor in Arts in Adolescence Education: Social Studies with a cumulative grade point average of 3.55, and has applied to graduate school. Additionally, during his tenure at SUNY New Paltz, Orris was inducted into two prestigious honor societies: Kappa Delta Pi (for education) and Phi Alpha Theta (for historians).

Pictured above: (top) Dietrich at SUNY New Paltz's Memorial Day Ceremony, shaking President Christian's hand. (below) Dietrich Orris when he was in the US Army.

GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUNY SYSTEM AND CAMPUSES

THE ROLE OF SUNY LEADERSHIP

CAMPUS LEADERSHIP / SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

Establish a system-wide commitment to military-affiliated students and set a standard of best practices through:

- Ensuring that all campuses have a full-time military and veteran services position that is resourced effectively
- Providing training and auditing compliance with relevant policies and guidelines such as the Principles of Excellence and DoD MOU
- Expanding communication and collaboration among campuses regarding services for MAS and tools for military and veteran services staff
- Updating processes for tracking student data
- Offering regular training opportunities including:
 - An annual conference for military and veteran services staff
 - Professional development for faculty and staff

Establish campus-wide commitment to military-affiliated students and a supportive campus climate through:

- Implementing campus-wide policies that support MAS
- Making voluntary commitments to student success programs such as:
 - 8 Keys of Veteran Success
 - Military-Friendly® School Designation
 - Military Times: Best for Vets
 - Military Advanced Education and Transition
 - U.S. News: Best Colleges for Veterans

- Developing national and statewide partnerships with military and veteran-serving agencies
- Maintaining an active SUNY military advisory council
- Implementing a robust set of policies to support MAS including those for:
 - Admission requirements
 - Transfer between campuses
 - Military leave of absence
 - Re-admissions
 - Tuition and fees
 - Drop/add and withdrawal
 - Military credits
 - Other credits for exams and experience

- Establishing, supporting and resourcing a full-time military and veteran services position
- Identifying a designated space for MAS on campus
- Creating a military advisory council ensuring the campus fully utilizes the VA Work Study Program to:
 - Expand workforce capacity
 - Add military-student jobs
- Promoting the adoption of the recommendations throughout this document

RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS

► **GOAL** Increase MAS enrollment and create a welcoming environment.

- Develop an active and targeted strategy for recruiting military students
 - Include military-specific branding on materials
 - Provide training for admissions representatives on the details of:
 - The university's military and veteran services
 - Military culture
 - Military application and enrollment policies and procedures
 - Evaluating military transcripts
 - Clarify the definition of military-affiliated students
 - Establish clear processes and expand eligibility requirements for the SUNY application fee waiver for MAS
 - Develop a set of flexible admissions standards and practices based on ACE best practices which would more accurately reflect applicants' readiness for higher education
- These could include:
- An expedited admissions process
 - Flexible admissions deadlines
 - Flexible readmission/re-enrollment options
 - Waiver of SAT/ACT requirements
 - A policy to maximize the number of military credits accepted and ensure the appropriate application of those credits
 - Credit for CLEP, DSST, and other military exams
- Assure that relevant campus policies and campus and community resources are easily accessible on institutional media
- Ensure compliance with the DoD MOU and Principles of Excellence by providing degree plan and cost of attendance information to students before enrollment

REGISTRATION AND ORIENTATION

► **GOAL** Facilitate the transition from military to academic life and reduce barriers to fulfilling military and academic responsibilities.

- Offer priority registration to MAS to ensure that students:
 - Are placed in courses that allow for continuity of their VA educational benefits
 - Receive their VA benefits in a timely fashion
 - Can create a schedule that takes into account their military service obligations and VA healthcare appointments
 - Develop a plan for accurate and effective MAS academic advising that:
 - Provides students with clear degree requirements and an evaluated educational plan to ensure compliance with federal guidelines and continuity of benefits
 - Addresses their unique needs and schedules
 - Clearly articulates the transfer credits that have been awarded
- Provide a high-quality MAS orientation that includes either:
 - A break-out session during College orientation
 - A separate MAS orientation
 - Review and update institutional policies for enrollment and attendance:
 - Develop a Military Leave of Absence Policy that is detailed enough to cover all situations that may interrupt a student's academic program
 - Review and publish drop/add, withdrawal, and attendance policies to ensure that military students are held harmless and that students and faculty are aware of the proper course of action for different situations (drill, deployment, etc.)

SAMPLE DEFINITION OF MILITARY-AFFILIATED STUDENTS

U.S. Veteran is a person who has served in the U.S. Armed Forces as Active Duty, Reserve, or National Guard and who was discharged or released under conditions other than *dishonorable*.

U.S. Military Service member is a person who is currently serving in any of the following military components: Active Duty, Reserve or National Guard.

Dependent of a U.S. Military Service member or Veteran is defined as either spouse or child (including step and adopted children regardless of age) of a veteran and/or service member.

Note: The Department of Veteran Affairs defines "Veteran" according to eligibility requirements for services.

PURPOSE OF ORIENTATION

Promote opportunities for military-affiliated students to begin the transition to student life by:

- | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Meeting and interacting with the military and veteran services representative | Meeting and interacting with each other | Meeting and interacting with civilian students | Reviewing the GI Bill and other educational benefits | Learning about available campus programs and services |
|---|---|--|--|---|

Recruitment and Admissions

Registration and Orientation

The Academic Experience

Student Life

Career Development, Retention and Graduation

Recruitment and Admissions

Registration and Orientation

The Academic Experience

Student Life

Career Development, Retention and Graduation

THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

► GOAL Support MAS' academic success by providing services that target their unique educational needs.

- Institute a mandatory syllabus statement
- Offer flexible course schedules (e.g., evening, online, weekend, hybrid, one day a week) to accommodate the additional responsibilities and time demands of military-affiliated students
- Promote faculty awareness of military student culture and the creation of a classroom atmosphere that is inclusive of their viewpoints
- Provide specific academic services to support the transition from military to academic life. Such services may include:
 - MAS-specific tutoring sessions, study groups and courses
 - Transition courses/workshops to strengthen academic skills (e.g., writing, time management, study skills)
- Ensure that military and veteran services representatives track students' academic information (GPA, degree program, academic status, etc.) in order to identify needs and provide early interventions
- Train disability services staff on common service-connected disabilities and the impact of these disabilities on academic performance
- Offer disability services that include:
 - Outreach to MAS
 - VA service-connected disability language on all literature, forms, and electronic media
 - Addressing barriers and stigmas that prevent MAS from seeking services

STUDENT LIFE

► GOAL Support holistic development of MAS by addressing their unique needs and creating a military-inclusive campus culture.

- Demonstrate a campus-wide understanding of, and appreciation for, MAS through training in military cultural competence, utilizing indicators of competence (i.e., "Green Zones" locations identified as safe and military culturally competent)
- Provide opportunities for students to connect with each other, their civilian peers, and the campus community by:
 - Establishing a lounge where MAS can connect with each other
 - Delivering regular and diverse programming
- Develop mentoring opportunities for and among MAS
- Honor the service of MAS through days of recognition and other ceremonies or events
- Offer health and wellness services that meet the unique needs of MAS, including:
 - Updated military history questions on intake forms
 - Staff training in all units on military culture
 - Military-specific services such as support groups
 - Outreach strategies to MAS to demonstrate an understanding of military culture and reduce the stigma associated with help-seeking
 - Connections with outside organizations who specialize in military services for consultation and referrals

SAMPLE SYLLABUS STATEMENT

SUNY New Paltz's Office of Veteran & Military Services (OVMS) is committed to serving the needs of veterans, service members and their dependents (dependent is defined as a spouse or child of a service member or veteran regardless of age) during their transition from military life to student life. Students who need assistance while attending the College can contact OVMS by calling, emailing, or stopping by the office.

SAMPLE MILITARY HISTORY QUESTIONS FOR INTAKE FORMS

What branch of service did you join?	What is/was your rank at the time of separation from service?	Have you deployed? Where? How many times?	Have you ever used the VA for services?	For more questions see Military Counseling Training
What is/was your career field?				

“

**IT WASN'T JUST LIKE I WAS A STUDENT FALLING BEHIND
BECAUSE I WASN'T GOOD AT THAT SUBJECT, IT WAS
BECAUSE I DIDN'T HAVE THE TIME AS A STUDENT BECAUSE
I WAS BUSY BEING A SOLDIER AT THAT TIME AS WELL.”**



“

**I GET THE FEELING IT'S BENEFICIAL TO TALK...
MAYBE THE COUNSELING CENTERS COULD HAVE A
VETERAN SPECIFIC GROUP, WHERE YOU GO, AND IT'S
JUST FOR VETERANS AND ACTIVE MILITARY TO GO AND
TALK ABOUT WHAT DO THEY FEEL LIKE THEY NEED...”**



CAREER DEVELOPMENT, RETENTION AND GRADUATION

- **GOAL** Promote MAS retention and graduation, and support their transition from the military to the civilian workforce.

- Develop targeted career services for MAS, which include:
 - Incorporating best practices for translating military skills and jobs to civilian language on resumes
 - Organizing career fairs and promoting networking opportunities with Military Friendly® Employers
 - Offering workshops on military-specific career resources (e.g., LinkedIn, federal resume building, SVA)
- Utilizing community resources, such as LVERs, VA Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment, Department of Labor
- Assisting students with job searches and internship placements
- Track retention and graduation rates for MAS to determine program effectiveness
- Offer recognition at graduation, such as stoles, cords, announcements, or pins

SAMPLE RESUME TRANSLATIONS

MILITARY

Led 12-person combat infantry team through 4 successful missions

Briefed the company on tactical strategy

Served as platoon sergeant for Alpha battery

CIVILIAN

Managed 12-person team in a fast-paced environment while meeting all organizational goals

Conducted team meetings on business strategies to increase the company profits

Supervised 35 team members within the organization and successfully trained them on organizational tasks

Source: <https://empireresume.com/translate-military-skills-to-civilian-terms>

“

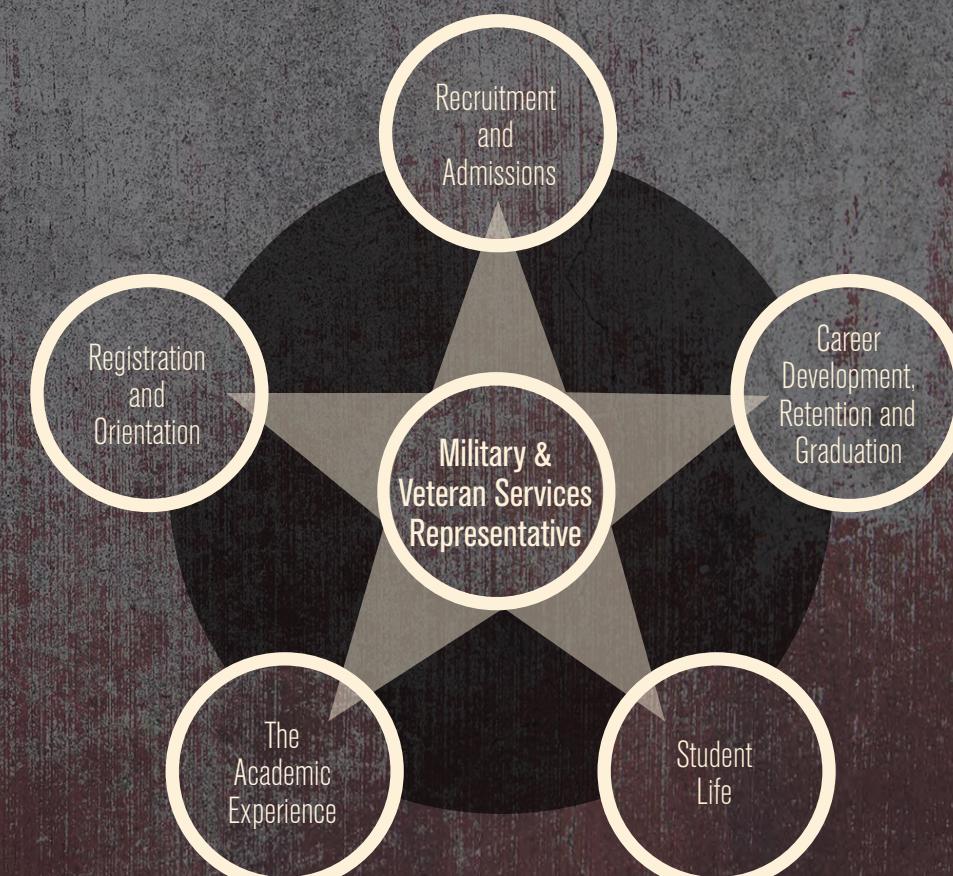
I KNOW WHEN I TRANSFER, THE FIRST THING I AM GOING TO LOOK FOR IS HOW GOOD THEIR [MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICES] REP IS...BEFORE I'M EVEN GOING TO LOOK AT MAJORS OR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BECAUSE THERE IS NO WAY I CAN DO WHAT THEY DO .”



THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY AND VETERAN SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE

- **GOAL** To have a full-time Military and Veteran Services Representative on each campus who serves as the point of contact for all MAS from admissions through graduation and who supports the development of a one-stop shop model for MAS services.

- Develop and implement a strategy to actively recruit MAS
- Provide personalized outreach upon application of all MAS
- Conduct regular check-ins with students throughout the semester focusing on:
 - Assisting in the transition from military life to college life
 - Promoting academic success
 - Building community
- Conduct needs assessments to understand experiences, engagement, values and priorities of MAS
- Review and recommend both unit and institutional level policies and procedures for MAS
- Promote a military and veteran friendly campus culture
- Collaborate with other offices (Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid, Academic Services, Career Resource Center, Student Life, Health and Wellness Services, etc.) to ensure that the unique needs of MAS are addressed effectively
- Coordinate student activities and events to provide regular and diverse programming
- Utilize the VA Work Study Program creatively across campus
- Facilitate military cultural competence training for faculty, staff and students
- Build strong relationships with internal and external stakeholders and community partners who serve veterans
- Engage in (or establish) a regional consortium on veteran and military-affiliated education



THE ROLE OF SUPPORTING UNITS

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

► **GOAL** Collect data to understand the MAS population, identify important trends, and employ strategies that are data-driven.

- Foster a collaborative relationship between IT and the military and veteran services program to improve identification, tracking and reporting:
 - Undergraduate and Graduate admissions
 - Orientation registration
 - Academic standing
 - Leaves of Absence and Military Leaves of Absence
 - Enrollment
 - Student registration
 - Graduation applications
 - Alumni and donors
- Include key data points:
 - Student ID
 - Full name

- Contact information; e-mail, phone and physical address
- Demographics; age, gender, ethnicity and marital status
- Student type (e.g., continuing undergraduate, continuing graduate, transfer student, etc.)
- Degree level of study
- Major and minors
- Class standing
- Term admitted
- Term graduated
- Military affiliation (e.g., active duty, national guard, reserve, veteran, spouse, child)
- State and/or county residency status
- Commuter status

FINANCIAL AID/BURSAR

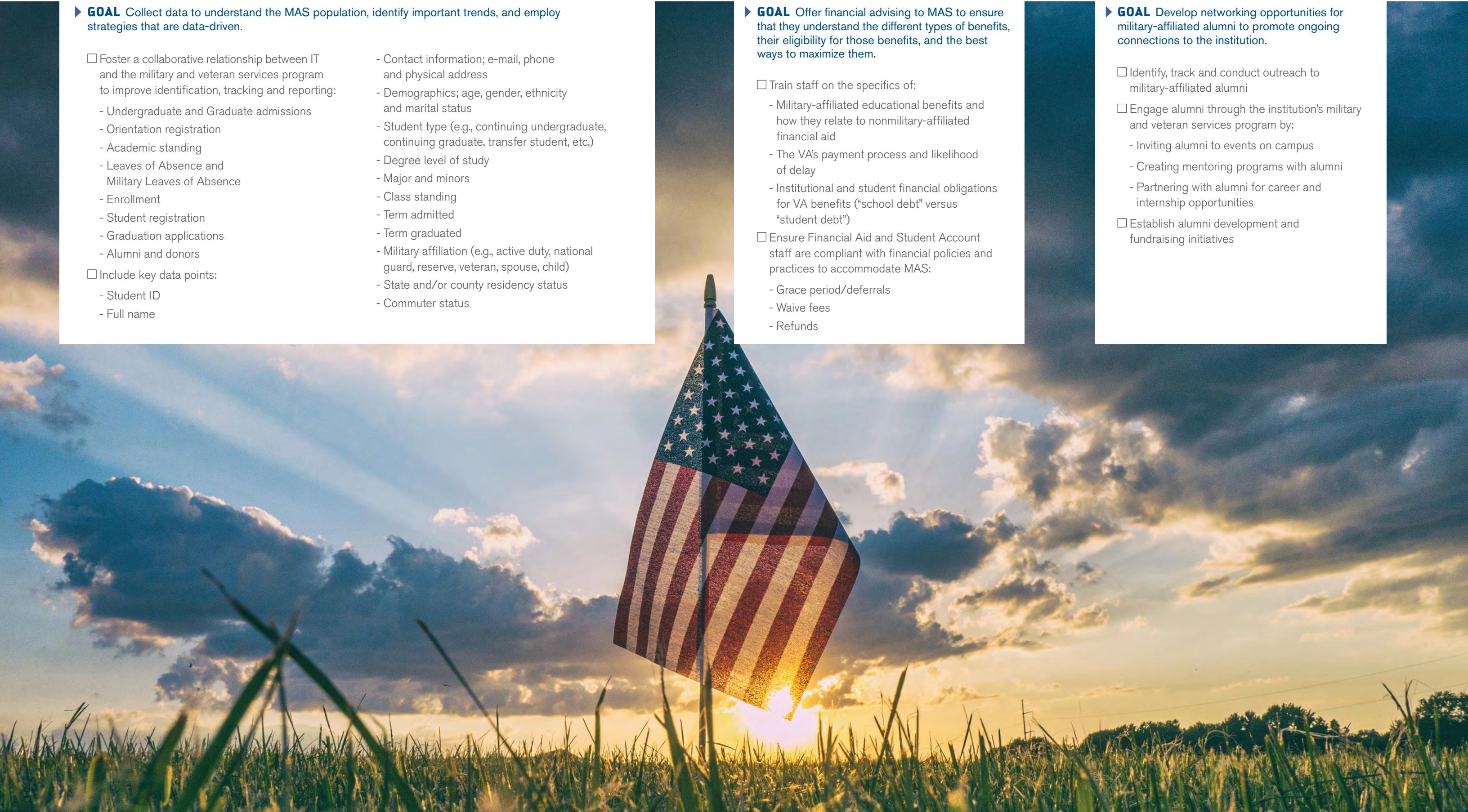
► **GOAL** Offer financial advising to MAS to ensure that they understand the different types of benefits, their eligibility for those benefits, and the best ways to maximize them.

- Train staff on the specifics of:
 - Military-affiliated educational benefits and how they relate to nonmilitary-affiliated financial aid
 - The VA's payment process and likelihood of delay
 - Institutional and student financial obligations for VA benefits ("school debt" versus "student debt")
- Ensure Financial Aid and Student Account staff are compliant with financial policies and practices to accommodate MAS:
 - Grace period/deferrals
 - Waive fees
 - Refunds

ALUMNI RELATIONS

► **GOAL** Develop networking opportunities for military-affiliated alumni to promote ongoing connections to the institution.

- Identify, track and conduct outreach to military-affiliated alumni
- Engage alumni through the institution's military and veteran services program by:
 - Inviting alumni to events on campus
 - Creating mentoring programs with alumni
 - Partnering with alumni for career and internship opportunities
- Establish alumni development and fundraising initiatives



STRATEGIC RESOURCES

The following organizations have resources, guides and other materials that may be helpful to institutions as they strengthen military-affiliated programs and move towards the goals listed in this document.

American Council on Education (ACE)

ACE is a membership organization that motivates the higher education community to develop and implement effective and promising policies and practices. ACE provides professional learning opportunities through conferences, summits, forums, and more. Important research has been conducted to raise awareness on the needs and challenges faced by MAS on campus.

The Military Guide is a prominent resource with information and summaries on all military courses and occupations, presenting corresponding credit recommendations. *Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions* serves as an online resource for higher education institutions to develop a successful program for military-affiliated students highlighting relevant practices. www.acenet.edu/Pages/default.aspx

Center for Deployment Psychology

The CDP provides trainings and clinical skill resources for military and civilian behavioral health professionals. Webinars, Workshops and eLearning Courses are available for professionals on various topics such as cognitive processing therapy, prolonged exposure therapy, military culture, mindfulness, resilience, post-traumatic growth, evidence-based psychotherapy treatments and additional topics specifically designed and tailored for military connected personnel. Health professionals can receive certificates for their training and access consultation services.

www.deploymentpsych.org

Student Veterans of American (SVA)

The SVA is an organization, led by veterans, devoted to supporting and assisting student veteran organizations on campuses. The SVA holds summits, national conferences, leadership institutes, and chapter leader academies for students. Research conducted by the SVA shapes what is known about MAS.

The LinkedIn Partnership to help students establish and build professional networking and career opportunities. VMock platform allows military-affiliated students to enhance their resumes 24/7 online. Students are guided to effectively present their military occupations, duties, and skills. VFW-SVA partnership has created a Legislative Fellowship program offering the opportunity for 10 VFW student members to participate with other veterans advocates on Capitol Hill. www.studentveterans.org

United States Department of Education

8 Keys of Veteran Success is a voluntary commitment made by institutions to demonstrate how they are or how they plan to assist and support military-affiliated students. Readmission Requirements for service-members are laid out in detail by the Department of Education with additional information for institutions and students.

Veterans Upward Bound Program assists service-members in acquiring the necessary skills to be accepted and to succeed in higher education, where students can be mentored, counseled, and tutored. Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success is a program that supports postsecondary education institutions by awarding grants to establish these centers in order to provide a single point of contact for students that creates a military and veteran services program on campus.

www.ed.gov

ADVOCACY AND SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations offer high-level advocacy, and offer specific services that military and veteran representatives may call on for individual student support.

American Legion

The American Legion is a nonprofit nationwide organization with posts located throughout New York devoted to helping and uniting military-affiliated individuals. The benefits, education, and career centers are available to assist with applying and navigating benefits and prepare for employment.

www.legion.org

Disabled American Veterans

DAV offers advocacy, claims assistance and other resources for disabled veterans.

www.dav.org

National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators (NAVPA)

NAVPA is a membership organization comprised of military and veteran student representatives across the country. In addition to advocacy and legislative work, NAVPA hosts an annual conference, highlighting new and upcoming topics in the military and veteran student communities.

www.navpa.org



THIS IS THE FIRST TIME
I'VE CONTRIBUTED MONEY TO NEW PALTZ
SINCE GRADUATING IN 1968.
I'VE ALWAYS FELT THE COLLEGE DID
NOTHING FOR VETERANS OR THE MILITARY
SINCE KICKING MARINE RECRUITERS
OFF CAMPUS FOLLOWING THE
APRIL 1968 PROTEST...
THIS PAST ISSUE OF THE
NEW PALTZ MAGAZINE WAS THE FIRST
RECOGNITION, OF ANY SIGNIFICANCE,
OF THE MILITARY THAT I CAN REMEMBER...
I AM PLEASED YOU HAVE FINALLY
MADE AN EFFORT BY RECOGNIZING
OUR NEWEST VETERANS AND WILL
HAPPILY CONTRIBUTE ON
AN ANNUAL BASIS.



NYS Division of Veterans' Services

The NYS Division of Veterans' Services (DVS) helps New York veterans and their families receive the benefits that they are entitled to and eligible for. Offices are placed throughout the state with experienced advisors to provide direct provision and instruction.

www.veterans.ny.gov

United States Department of Veterans Affairs

The VA is the primary source of services and means for military affiliated personnel nationally. Through the VA, individuals can access health care, disability compensation and assistance, service-member and family member benefits, housing assistance, vocational rehabilitation services, career and employment assistance, education benefits and training, disability services, important records, life insurance, and more. In addition, the VA's websites also links to other important federal and regional resources.

www.va.gov

Veterans of Foreign Wars

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) provides access to representatives to help navigate and apply for VA Claims and Separation Benefits. The VFW offers Student Veteran Support through scholarships and benefits assistance. VFW Mental Wellness Campaign serves to address and change the stigma around mental health.

www.vfw.org

REGIONAL, COUNTY AND LOCAL RESOURCES

Promote SUNY's regional connections and partnerships by exploring local military and veteran organizations, non-profits and resources. Well-connected military and veteran student programs enhance not only the resources available to students, but provide richer involvement to the community.



GLOSSARY

- ACE:** American Council on Education
ACT: American College Testing
CLEP: College Level Examination Program
DSST: DANTES Subject Standardized Tests
DoD MOU: Department of Defense Memorandum of Understanding
LOA: Leave of Absence
LVERs: Local Veterans Employment Representative
MAS: Military-Affiliated Students
SAT: Scholastic Aptitude Test
SVA: Student Veterans of America
USMC: United States Marine Corps
VA: Department of Veteran Affairs
VFW: Veterans of Foreign Wars

REFERENCES

- Cate, C.A., Lyon, J.S., Schmeling, J., & Bogue, B.Y. (2017). National Veteran Education Success Tracker: A Report on the Academic Success of Student Veterans Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Student Veterans of America, Washington, D.C.
- Kim, Y. M., & Cole, J. S. (2013). Student veterans/service members' engagement in college and university life and education. Washington, DC: American Council on Education (ACE) & National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
- Gilliland, J., Nitzza, A., & Rodriguez, R. (2018) [Unpublished raw data on SUNY Military-Affiliated Students]. State University of New York at New Paltz.
- Gilliland, J., Nitzza, A., Valencia, K., & Rodriguez, R. (2019) [Unpublished raw data on the Status of SUNY Military and Veteran Service Representatives]. State University of New York at New Paltz.
- McBain, L., Kim, Y. M., Cook, B. J., & Snead, K. M. (2012). From soldier to student II: Assessing campus programs for veterans and service members. Washington, DC: American Council on Education. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/From-Soldier-to-Student-II-Assessing-Campus-Programs.pdf>

