



# How to Help Military & Veteran Families

FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Many student service members and veterans hope to improve their lives and career options by pursuing post-secondary education opportunities.<sup>1</sup> They often come to college with extensive mastery-based training gained during military service, but may have difficulty receiving academic credit for it from post-secondary institutions. Veterans and service members may have had many years away from formal education; their academic skills may need refreshing; and in addition to the role of student, they may have to juggle several others, including those of spouse, parent and full- or part-time employee.

Additionally, the number of individuals using tuition assistance and GI Bill educational benefits is expected to increase substantially in coming years. This is due to a variety of factors, including general military force personnel reductions, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' promotion of GI Bill educational benefits, and the current domestic economic environment.<sup>2</sup> But a new program is being readied to meet these needs. Under the direction of President Obama, improvements in the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program will be fully implemented by the end of 2013. The changes are expected to enhance and strengthen education, employment counseling, and other resources for transitioning service members as well as raise awareness of available resources for veterans.<sup>3</sup>



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## Did you know?

- » More than 920,000 student service members and veterans received U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefits in fiscal year 2011.<sup>4</sup>
- » The most commonly-used U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefit program in 2011 was the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which offers an unprecedented level of education and on-the-job training benefits for those who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces after Sept. 10, 2001.<sup>4</sup>
- » In a 2010 study conducted by the American Council on Education, 70 percent of students at public two-year colleges and almost 34 percent of students at public four-year colleges reported that obtaining academic credit for military training was a moderate or major challenge.<sup>2</sup>
- » Almost 1 in 5 student combat veterans have at least one disability; for civilian students, the rate is 1 in 10.<sup>5</sup>
- » Many service members also experience invisible or hidden short-term and long-term health challenges, including anxiety, depression, chronic pain, post-traumatic stress disorder, or traumatic brain injury.<sup>6</sup>
- » In 2012, the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America conducted a survey of its members and found 81 percent of student veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan said they were very satisfied with their post-secondary instructors; nearly 75 percent said their institution is “veteran friendly.”<sup>7</sup>



## Practical Applications

### RECOGNIZE SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS' EXTENSIVE MASTERY-BASED TRAINING

- Use consistent and transparent credit-transfer policies, and follow the recommendations in the American Council on Education Military Guide.
- Campuses can join Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, which advocates for flexible policies that can help service members and veterans complete degrees.

### IMPLEMENT PROACTIVE AND CONSISTENT PRACTICES THAT RECOGNIZE THE REALITIES OF MILITARY SERVICE

- Create institution-level course withdrawal and completion policies to address coursework and tuition when student service members are deployed or activated. Some states have established laws that address these matters. Check to see that you are in compliance with them.

- Maintain connections with students who are deployed.
- Federal regulations require institutions to comply with readmission requirements for student service members and veterans whose enrollment was impacted by a military service obligation.<sup>8</sup> Establish administrative procedures to simplify re-enrollment for service members returning to campus following deployment.

### PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR STUDENT SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS WHO MAY HAVE MANY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- On school websites, create specific sections for student service members and veterans, giving essential information that provides specific names and contact information of staff who can supply additional information. Include links to the Post-9/11 GI Bill website and tuition assistance websites.
- Provide access to essential services, such as financial aid counselors, academic advisors and tutors, during evenings and weekends.

### WORK TOWARD INCREASED CAMPUS AWARENESS OF HIDDEN AND VISIBLE INJURIES

- Raise awareness among faculty, staff, disability and mental health office staff about the service-related physical and psychological injuries student service members and veterans can face, including sensory deficits, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.<sup>2</sup>
- Implement universal design principles to increase accessibility in the classroom, in residence halls and on campus.

## SUPPORT STUDENTS AS THEY MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM MILITARY LIFE TO ACADEMIC LIFE

- Become familiar with resources provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs which administers the many educational benefit programs that are available to veterans and service members. Help these students understand that they may qualify for one or more education benefit programs, and assist them as they seek ways to navigate the different rules and requirements of these programs.
- Provide professional development for faculty and staff on the attributes of student service members and veterans and the transition issues they face.
- Identify knowledgeable people and resources to guide student service members and veterans through administrative processes and remove obstacles.
- Encourage student service members and veterans to join or form a student veterans' organization to provide opportunities to connect and obtain support from other students who share similar experiences and challenges.
- Identify veteran staff and faculty members as mentors or advisors to incoming student service members and veterans.



## Additional Resources

Student service members and veterans have made major sacrifices to serve their country, and can be assets to the campus community. They are mature and focused and often have leadership experience. Post-secondary institutions have an opportunity to help student service members and veterans successfully meet their academic goals and make the transition to civilian life.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- » *American Council on Education, Supporting Student Veterans Military Guide*, [www.militaryguides.acenet.edu](http://www.militaryguides.acenet.edu)
- » *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)
- » *Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions*, [www.vetfriendlytoolkit.org](http://www.vetfriendlytoolkit.org)
- » *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)
- » *Americans with Disabilities Act: Know Your Rights, Returning Service Members with Disabilities*, [www.ada.gov/servicemembers\\_adainfo.html](http://www.ada.gov/servicemembers_adainfo.html)
- » *Association on Higher Education and Disability*, [www.ahead.org](http://www.ahead.org)
- » *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, National Center for PTSD*, [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)
- » *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Post-9/11 GI Bill and Other Programs*, [www.gibill.va.gov/benefits](http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits)

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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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1404 West State Street • West Lafayette, Ind. 47907-2092 • 765-496-3403

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United States Department of Agriculture  
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MILITARY FAMILY  
ASSOCIATION

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## SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT REVIEWERS

Margaret Baechtold, Director, Veterans Support Services – Indiana University

Cathy Boynton, Retired Teacher

Rene Campo, M.S., Faculty, Department of Business Management and Entrepreneurial Studies – Anne Arundel Community College

Lorraine Neuser, Air Force Family Programs, Retired

M. David Rudd, Ph.D., ABPP, Dean, College of Social & Behavioral Science, Professor of Psychology – University of Utah

## NATIONAL MILITARY FAMILY ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEER REVIEWERS

Christine Gallagher, Kelly Hruska, Christina Jumper, Tiffany O'Sheal, Katie Savant, Claire Lyn Saxon

## RESEARCH REFERENCES

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