Supporting Veterans at the Community College: a Review of the Literature

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As postsecondary institutions seek ways to attract military veterans as students, they ostensibly grapple with how to best support these men and women once they arrive on campus. Although there are dozens of financial, academic, and emotional support systems available through the government, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations, there is little evidence of the efficacy of any of the supports offered. Further, the prospect of devising broad-reaching, targeted supports for student veterans seems taxing, particularly as budgets are stretched thin. This article examines some large-scale and targeted institutional support systems that are being implemented in community colleges. A thorough exploration of the existing literature reveals that existing supports, while commendable, are either untested, unreasonable for widespread implementation, or are simply in need of modification to accommodate veteran students. With nearly 2 million men and women returning from active duty in the coming years, community colleges are poised to serve as an academic starting point for many of these service members. This article underscores the importance of identifying student veterans, understanding their academic and emotional needs, and offering appropriate and informed support systems.

For many community colleges, the prospect of devising broad-reaching, tailored, and effective support programs for military veterans is daunting, particularly as budgets are continually stretched thin. While some states and schools are implementing innovative programs for veterans, the effectiveness of those programs is unknown, as very little data have been collected on a large-scale, consistent basis. This lack of data may be attributed to logistical factors including the difficulty in studying community college students due to high instances of transience and part-time enrollment or, quite simply, due to the chal-

lenge in tracking veteran students whom, if they choose not to self-identify, may never be recognized as such (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Michelle, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Rumann, 2010). In any case, community colleges across the country are preparing for new veteran students and because most schools will serve varying numbers of veterans, a one-size-fits-all approach to veteran support is neither feasible nor pragmatic.

Our aim for this review was twofold: first, we sought to illustrate what is known about veteran supports in college along with existing community college student retention and support mechanisms. Second, we endeavored to link the needs of veteran students to new and prevailing interventions such that community colleges of all sizes and resources may identify one or more reasonable solutions for supporting veterans. This article will first review the backgrounds of community colleges and military veteran students. It will then describe existing large-scale (long-term, potentially high cost) services for student veterans and finally, explore smaller-scale, targeted interventions that can be implemented or modified to accommodate the unique needs of military veteran students. Although we were surprised to find little uniformity in veteran support programs, we call attention to the opportunity for community colleges to take the lead in supporting veterans on campus, offer recommendations, and provide a guiding framework for ways in which two-year institutions can make the most of their limited resources.

Background

As the United States continues to downsize its military presence in the Middle East, the emerging veteran population is one that looks quite different from previous generations. A recent report from the American Council on Education (ACE) found that the percentage of veterans under the age of 39 has risen from 13 to 73, the percentage of African American and Latino veterans has risen from 15% to 26%, and that by 2020, female veterans will comprise 10% of the overall veteran population with more than half of them having served in the post 9/11 conflicts (Radford, 2009). Further, it has been found that many military veterans joined the service for financial reasons and, therefore, these individuals may be of low socioeconomic status (SES) (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). These factors present important considerations for educational institutions that serve veteran students.

Community colleges are quickly becoming a preferred entry point for veterans entering or returning to college because of their low tuition rates, open enrollment policies, and flexible instructional methods (Rumann, 2010). Another feature of community colleges that is attractive to veterans is diversity, as the majority of students are characterized as "nontraditional" (Barnett, 2011; Rumann, Rivera & Hernandez, 2011). Radford (2009) found that 33% of military undergraduates were married with children, 15% were married with no children, 14% were single parents, and 35% were unmarried with no children. Considering 79% of first-year combat veterans and 97% of senior combat veterans are

over the age of 24 (Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods, & Lui, 2012), an environment that welcomes older students with busy lives is appealing and among the reasons why 43% of veterans who pursue postsecondary education choose community colleges as their starting point (Ryan, Carlstrom, Harris, & Hughey, 2011). However, many community colleges lack the institutional commitment and resources necessary to provide students with support services they need to be successful (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012).

The most common factors that put college students in high-risk categories are delayed entry, financial independence, full-time employment, part-time enrollment, dependents, single parenthood, and lack of a high school diploma or GED (Wheeler, 2012). Community college students exhibit particularly high rates of these factors with 24% of students having at least four factors as compared with only 4% of their 4-year college counterparts. Likewise, student veterans also exhibit high rates of these risk factors including, 70% part-time enrollment, nontraditional status, dependents, and single parenthood (Radford, 2009; Wheeler, 2012).

Veterans also deal with the adaptation from military culture to civilian culture. The process of successfully transitioning to civilian student life can be hindered by the drastic shift from a role where authority is unchallenged and job descriptions are clear and unwavering, to one where rules are loosely interpreted and followed, and college students are expected to act autonomously and be self-directed (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009; Haines, 2013; Brown & Gross, 2011; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Wheeler, 2012). This can create stress and uncertainty for veteran students who are unaccustomed to that type of environment.

Navigating the governmental and institutional bureaucracies can also be daunting. Education and health care benefits applications are complicated, sometimes requiring dozens of pages of paperwork, with wait times of more than 6 months to schedule an appointment and even longer to receive benefits (Rumann et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012;). Each of these factors is a significant stressor if experienced singularly. When veterans experience these issues on a concurrent basis, they often feel lost, overwhelmed, and dismayed if they are not provided with mechanisms of support that are informed by an understanding of the difficulties veterans face during assimilation (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Brown & Gross, 2011).

In addition to traversing the bureaucratic landscape of educational benefits, veterans confront potential barriers to academic success. The National Survey for Student Engagement found that in 2010, 60% of student veterans were first-generation (Wurster et al., 2012). First-generation college students face a myriad of challenges and are 50% more likely than their classmates to drop out after the first year. On average, first-generation college students lack study skills and academic preparedness, complete fewer credit hours, come from low-income households, are minorities, and are far less likely to engage in the college experience (Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003; Wurster et al., 2012). In

addition to these challenges, first-generation veteran students grapple with other issues such as physical injury, mental trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other social and familial issues associated with assimilating back into civilian life (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Church, 2009; Shackelford, 2009; Wurster et al., 2012).

Two common psychological service-related disabilities are PTSD and military sexual trauma (MST) (DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Strickley, 2009; www.va.gov). According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2013), PTSD occurs in about 11% to 30% of veterans of the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan while nearly 90% of returning veterans have endured traumatic experiences during deployment (www.mentalhealth.va.gov). According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, approximately 23% of women reported sexual assault while in the military (www.va.gov).

Other disabilities include the loss of a limb, vision and hearing impairment, and/or traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) causing dizziness, headaches, memory loss, and concentration problems (DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Church 2009; Strickley, 2009). Anticipating that some veteran enrollees may be coping with these issues, many colleges and universities are providing trained counselors, conducting professional development for faculty and staff, initiating collaborative interaction with community-based organizations, and directing funds toward veteran services and orientation (DiRamio & Spires, 2009; McBain et al., 2012; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Strickley, 2009; www.va.gov).

Considering the large influx of veteran students into the community college and their characteristics as a particularly vulnerable student population, there is a need to provide support mechanisms to help them succeed. Currently there are no overarching frameworks to guide decision-makers about the types of support mechanisms that should be offered based on their specific veteran population. As a step toward such a framework, the following sections will explore the variety of support mechanisms that are currently being offered as they are described in the literature.

Large-Scale Support Mechanisms

Statewide Initiatives. One approach to providing support for student veterans is at the state legislative level. Some state systems are coordinating broad-reaching efforts to assist postsecondary military and veteran students (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009). For example, the Minnesota State College and Universities (MnSCU) system, comprised of 31 institutions, 24 of which are two-year community colleges, offers military service members deployed overseas application fee waivers and a deferral policy for tuition, fees, and books, if state or federal benefit payments are delayed (Lokken et al., 2009; www.mnscu.edu).

Another example is California, in which all of the 112 institutions are required to have a veteran education benefits certifying official, and are encouraged to have a veteran resource center (www.cccco.edu). Further, there are state-

wide initiatives such as veteran job and resource fairs, a veteran web portal, and a systemwide email list (www.cccco.edu). California and Minnesota both offer fee waiver programs for dependents of disabled veterans. As a part of the program, dependents receive a waiver for all tuition and fees at any state school (www.calvet.ca.gov).

VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC). VSOC is a program sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that provides on-campus support in the form of certified counselors to assist veterans in navigating the VA benefits system and provide counseling services as needed. Counselors can also help veterans choose a career goal and assist them in selecting courses and programs that help them reach their goals. VSOC is part of a larger initiative known as VetSuccess whereby the VA provides resources to veterans such as résumé suggestions, military to civilian job translation tools, and job search abilities. There are also resources for employers to post jobs and search résumés.

The VSOC program is not open to all institutions. Schools must have a veteran population at or exceeding 800, have an existing relationship with the VA, have existing on-campus supports for veterans that are viewed as "strong," demonstrate campus leadership support, be willing and able to host a full-time VA employee, and be located within 25 miles of a VA regional office, VA medical center or community-based outpatient clinic, or Veterans Center. The VetSuccess on Campus program provides a unique approach to assisting military service members in their transition to a college or university. Since the program's inception, VSOC has expanded to 94 university and community college campuses throughout the U.S. (https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/vsoc).

Reduce Time to Completion. One way to assist veterans in their transition and matriculation is by recognizing the learning that took place during their service. For instance, Fayetteville Technical Community College in North Carolina can award graduates of the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School 48 academic credits toward the 65 hours needed to complete an associate in general education or an associate of applied science in emergency medicine (Lowe, 2011; www.soc.mil). Once a student earns the additional 17 credit hours to complete the associate's degree in general education, a student may transfer as a junior to a degree program at any North Carolina state institution (Lowe, 2011).

While this particular solution may not be feasible for all schools, the idea is one worth considering. Veterans often sense initial frustration with school because they feel like they are repeating coursework they had during their military training (Persky & Oliver, 2010). The American Council on Education (ACE) provides a guide for schools and businesses that matches military courses and tasks with courses and vocational duties (Brown & Gross, 2011; www.acenet.edu). For community colleges looking for ways to retain students during and after their first two semesters, streamlined credit for veterans may be one way to help those students gain a foothold quickly.

Another way to reduce time to completion is by offering shorter time-to-degree programs. One such initiative is the Texas College Credit for Heroes program through which statewide community colleges offer accelerated degree programs in certain career pathways. Launched in 2011, the program was designed to allow veterans attending community colleges to expedite their coursework toward certificates and degrees in order to enter the workforce more quickly (www.collegecreditforheroes.org, 2013). These programs serve as a way to save money and reduce the amount of time veterans need to complete an associate's degree. In most instances, degree attainment is reduced from 24 months to approximately 18 months (www.collegecreditforheroes.org, 2013). Accelerated programs may be appealing for a variety of student groups, particularly those interested in entering or getting back to the workforce as quickly as possible.

Administrative offices and classes at nearby military installations. Some colleges offer courses, programs, or support offices at military installations or bases domestically or abroad (McMurray, 2007; Rumann et al., 2011). Courses and support services offered on base allow students to access them when it meets their schedule. This strategy aids in school recruitment, supports veteran reintegration, and enhances veteran access to higher education (Ford et al., 2009; McMurray, 2007; Rumann, 2010; Sewall, 2010). Due to high enrollment numbers of military and veteran students, Tidewater Community College has a presence at over 10 military bases and installations throughout Virginia (www.tcc.edu). Services offered at each location vary but may include classes, placement testing, academic counseling, and assistance with enrollment registration (www.tcc.edu).

Given its population as the largest U.S. Army Base, Fort Bragg houses seven remote college and university offices on base which offer comprehensive student services including credit evaluation, enrollment and registration, and payment of tuition and fees (www.bragg.army.mil). Partnerships like the ones at Fort Bragg enable military service members to apply course credit toward a wide variety of degrees in a familiar setting that accommodates their schedule, and thus enables veterans to make a smoother and faster transition to higher education upon their departure from the military.

Servicemember Opportunity Colleges (SOC). Founded in 1972, SOC facilitates a membership consortium whereby member schools provide educational opportunities for military veterans and service members who relocate frequently and, therefore, have difficulty completing their degree. SOC describes their member consortium as having over 1,900 accredited community colleges and universities in the U.S. and Virgin Islands, offering active duty military members and veterans an opportunity to obtain an associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree. The organization operates in conjunction with all of the military branches, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the Department of Defense (www.soc.aascu.org). Institutions interested in joining the SOC consortium must meet four qualifying criteria which include a willingness to do the following: implement a reasonable transfer policy, reduce academic residency requirements, recognize American Council on Education

(ACE) guidelines for streamlining credit for military experience, and accept credit for at least one nationally recognized standardized test.

Targeted Interventions

According to a recent survey by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), nearly 80% of responding community colleges have implemented or are implementing targeted programs and services for active duty military members and veterans (McBain et al., 2012). However, there is wide disparity between community colleges in the types of services offered. Many of the more costly or time-consuming programs and benefits, for example, are offered primarily at institutions within close proximity to a military base (Cook & Kim, 2009; Sewall, 2010). The following sections will review current institutional support programs community colleges have implemented for veterans.

Veteran-Specific Course. New college students often struggle to learn how to navigate through college life and, "without assistance, many are unable to establish competent intellectual and social membership in the communities of the college. Many eventually leave" (Tinto, 1988, p. 447). Similar problems exist for community college students and vulnerable student groups in particular.

For-credit courses designed to introduce incoming students to community college life have been found to have a positive impact on persistence and completion rates (O'Gara et al., 2009). These courses go by many names including College Success, College 101, and Freshman Experience and specialize in acquainting students with college structure, teaching study skills and time management, and facilitating interaction with faculty and among students at a similar stage of their college career (Karp et al., 2012; O'Gara et al., 2009). Beyond improved academic performance and initial introductions, these courses serve as ongoing opportunities for students to mingle in peer groups, develop relationships with other students and faculty members, and cultivate lasting friendships (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; O'Gara et al., 2009).

Whiteman and colleagues (2013) found that for veteran students, social support and peer interaction were positive influences in terms of academics, physical health, and mental well-being, but the overall rate of emotional support was far lower for veterans than for their civilian counterparts. Often, military veterans struggle with the difficulty of cultivating on-campus relationships that resemble those they developed during service (Wheeler, 2012; Whiteman et al., 2013). Peer learning communities may serve as a mechanism for veterans that are transitioning from the close-knit network of their unit or base to develop relationships with other veterans on the college campus.

Student Veterans' Organizations (SVOs). SVOs are student-directed peer networks that facilitate on-campus veteran interaction, enabling them to express shared concerns and develop a support system with other veteran students and their families (Dunklin, 2012; Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009; Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). Student veteran organizations can serve a dual

function as an academic and emotional support system and a network for advocacy concerning veterans and academics (Summerlot et al., 2009).

Founded in 2008, Student Veterans of America (SVA) is a nonprofit organization that provides resources, support, and advocacy for SVOs on college campuses in the U.S. and abroad (www.studentveterans.org). Initiated and instituted by student veterans, SVA chapters have been developing steadily throughout the country, signaling that these organizations may be having an impact on the student veteran campus experience. From 2009 to 2012, the number of institutions offering services for veterans or military personnel in the form of student clubs or other organizations had more than doubled, rising from 32% to 68% in the 3-year period (McBain et al., 2012). These numbers indicate veteran students are proactively creating campus communities and support systems.

Orientation. The military has a distinct culture, one that is significantly different from civilian life. Students who have had combat experience, in particular, tend to have a distinct perspective and outlook, which may cause them to feel out of place and disconnected from their civilian counterparts (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Strickley, 2009; Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & MacDermid, 2013). Orientation and outreach efforts are preemptive strategies designed to foster a veteran-friendly environment and facilitate smooth, supported transitions by connecting new students to campus administrators and campus-based veteran services (Summerlot et al., 2009).

Many institutions are already implementing pre-semester communication strategies before new veteran students arrive on campus (Ericson, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Strickley, 2009). Outreach efforts include dedicated websites, newsletters, and blogs. These targeted communications allow new veteran students to begin their matriculation with knowledge of how to locate and utilize campus resources and enable them to establish rapport with the institution, staff, and other veteran students before classes begin (Ericson, 2011; Ford, Northrup, & Wiley, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Strickley, 2009).

The impact of new student orientation programs is well represented in the literature. Henriksen (1995) found that a vast majority of high-risk students in a California community college perceived community college orientation as helpful, particularly for addressing issues such as financial aid and the registration process, while those who did not participate believed the school was unhelpful and developed negative attitudes. In Chaves's (2006) analysis of high-impact factors affecting community college student persistence, on-campus involvement, faculty-to-student interaction, and the urgency to "preempt the sense of marginalization that many adult students experience during the early stages of college…" (p. 140) are of vital importance in ensuring success, particularly for the nontraditional adult student. Hollins (2009) found that students that participated in orientation programs in Virginia community colleges had higher GPA and retention rates than those who did not participate. In short, evidence suggests that orientation matters for community college students, and a tailored orientation

for military veterans may be pivotal for the new student veteran to feel connected and at ease.

Mentoring. To date, the majority of research concerning college mentoring programs has occurred on 4-year campuses (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Stromei (2000) posits that community college mentoring programs for minority and at-risk students assist mentees in easing into the academic environment and to benefit from the transfer of "tacit knowledge" from the mentor (p. 58). Thus, facilitating a mentor-mentee relationship where both parties share similar backgrounds enables the mentee to benefit from the skills and techniques the mentor developed during their experience. In a 2002 study, Pope (2002) concluded that community colleges would be much more effective by offering multidimensional and multifaceted mentoring programs that include various levels of guidance.

Communication with faculty plays a significant role in how veteran students acclimate to their campus surroundings (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). Faculty-to-student interaction has been found as the most influential factor in student's willingness to devote energy to the collegiate experience and engage more fully in academics (Astin, 1984). In fact, low levels of faculty-student interaction in community college have been identified as a possible factor in student retention and persistence issues (Chaves, 2006). Further, many community college students described their interaction with faculty as the most meaningful and influential of their on-campus interactions (Capps, 2012).

One recently introduced mentoring program is the Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE) program. PAVE is a peer-mentoring program designed to help new student veterans acclimate to the college environment. The volunteer-based program mandates that only veterans can volunteer as peer advisors and that they provide support on an ongoing basis for personal and academic matters. A collaborative effort between the Student Veterans Association and the University of Michigan Depression Center and Department of Psychiatry, PAVE is part of a Michigan-based initiative called Military Support Programs and Networks or M-SPAN. As of 2013, the program was offered at six universities, with only two of those located outside of Michigan. The program website indicates that PAVE will be offered more widely in 2014 though it is unclear how many schools can participate and if community colleges will be included (www.paveoncampus.org).

This uncertainty notwithstanding, community colleges can facilitate veteran mentorships on a small, informal scale by simply reaching out to new and seasoned veteran students to introduce them to one another, arranging social gatherings for student veterans, garnering faculty involvement, and connecting with community veteran organizations to foster partnerships and involvement with student veterans.

Faculty, Counselor, and Staff Professional Development. Advocates suggest that campuses conduct professional development training for faculty, staff, and counselors that incorporates a holistic view of veteran issues, utilizes the knowledge and experience of military veteran faculty and staff members, and

fosters a more inclusive campus community (DiRamio et al., 2008; McBain et al., 2012; Murphy, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010). Accordingly, faculty and staff can benefit from training and professional development to learn about veteran issues and recognize symptoms of mental disorders like PTSD through the use of seminars and classroom management training (Persky & Oliver, 2010).

As stated earlier, many recent military veterans may be dealing with physical, mental, or emotional challenges as a result of their time in service, though many may not yet experience symptoms or be inclined to report their symptoms (DiRamio & Ackerman, 2009; Whiteman et al., 2013). Additionally, research suggests that veterans may be less likely than a civilian to seek help for psychological or emotional distress (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Whiteman et al., 2013). There is, however, evidence that proactively reaching out to and appropriately counseling students with disabilities can be an effective intervention. In an investigation across three community college student groups, those with confirmed disabilities, those with probable disabilities, and students with no disabilities, students with confirmed and probable disabilities who received counseling services experienced an overall 7.6% higher retention rate than the general student population (Porter, 2011).

Disabilities among veterans are not new and have plagued veteran students over the years. In the post-Vietnam era, scholars recommended that institutions of higher education implement strategies whereby academic advisors and student counselors partake in professional development and continuing education activities aimed at working with veteran students (Earl, 1973). In terms of veteran students, some authors have recommended that the existing staff be aware of the personal obstacles of adjusting to civilian and college life, as well as the challenges associated with physical and psychological disabilities (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). There are some signs that these institutional resources are materializing. According to a recent survey, 68 percent of responding institutions indicated they had dedicated an office or department to serving veterans and their family members (Cook & Kim, 2009).

Veteran's resource center. Military veterans have had unique experiences and often reach out to other veterans because they are relatable and empathetic to their situation (Rumann, 2011). Some schools are creating veteran-only spaces for veterans to congregate, receive services, and socialize. Centers may offer dedicated staff, supply targeted resources for veterans, provide study and planning space, and serve as a supportive and safe environment where veterans can speak freely about their experiences and the challenges they have faced and are currently facing (Francis & Kraus, 2012; Mangan & Wright, 2009; Murphy, 2011; O'Herrin, 2011). Lee College in Baytown, Texas, for example, opened a veteran's center in 2011 and has since seen veteran student retention and completion rates increase by 10 percent while dropout rates have decreased by 55 percent (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Once again, we see that peer support may be a significant component to an on-campus veteran support program. For schools that cannot afford to build or

designate a large space, areas like the library, on-campus eateries, and meeting rooms in existing classroom or administrative buildings might be just enough space to give veterans a sense of privacy, safety, and acknowledgment.

Implications for Research and Practice

This article has described the variety of support structures for student veterans that are being offered around the U.S. In reviewing the literature on this topic, we were surprised to find no overarching frameworks to help administrators make decisions about appropriate support structures they can design for veterans. Even more surprising was the lack of empirical studies pertaining to the efficacy of existing institutional supports, especially studies focusing on veterans in community colleges.

One difficulty with assessing veteran support programs is that many community colleges do not track the veteran status of their students. Schools may need to identify and track their veteran students in order to collect ongoing data concerning program efficacy. There are several ways schools can accomplish this. An effective method to find and track veterans is to set up a dedicated web page where veterans can register to access helpful information including key school contacts, campus services, downloadable paperwork, and information about the GI Bill and other benefits. Other services and offers such as message boards and local business discounts can be included on the site, enabling veteran students to meet others and access resources that are beneficial to them as students and as civilian job-seekers. Through capturing veteran information via the website, colleges can track their progress through school, garner feedback about services and academics, and facilitate ongoing communication with veteran students.

GI Bill administrating staff members and academic advisors should encourage veterans to utilize dedicated websites, pass along the student veteran information to the administration, and/or provide veterans with printed materials encouraging them to self-identify in order to receive targeted services. Through professional development initiatives, these key staff members can be well-equipped to assist veterans in their military-to-college transition and aid the college in charting the progress of these students. Tactics notwithstanding, colleges can and should implement systemwide efforts to find their student veterans, ensure they receive appropriate assistance, track their progress, and apply interventions as needed to safeguard their chances of success. Just as other interventions for high-risk students have clear objectives and milestones, veteran programs should have measurable and attainable goals and outcomes. We cannot overstate the urgent need to assess the effectiveness of these programs to ensure that time and resources are being allocated productively and that military veteran students are indeed receiving appropriate and constructive support.

Table 1. Veterans Support Framework

Support Program	Available Institutional Resources		Contributing Factors: Resources and Reasons	Ideal for:
	Low/ Medium	High		
Vet Success on Campus (VSOC)		✓	VSOC is not open to all schools. Specific requirements must be met including serving a minimum of 800 veteran students and residing within 25 miles of a VA office, medical facility or VA center.	Schools near a military installation serving high numbers of veterans.
Reduce time to completion		✓	For some schools to accept credit for military service or offer accelerated degree programs, there may be special steps required through the state and/or accrediting body to implement such a program.	Schools that already offer accelerated degree programs and/or those experiencing high dropout rates among veterans.
Administrative offices and/ or classes at nearby military installations		✓	This option really only makes sense for schools near a military base. This strategy can help recruitment of military personnel to the school. But it is imperative that the school has the resources to support them once on campus.	Schools near a military installation and ideally, who also have streamlined credit programs for veterans.
Servicemember Opportunity College (SOC)		✓	Participating schools have to meet the requirements, some of which may require state support. This program also requires a dedicated on-campus person or office to coordinate and manage it.	Colleges with large numbers of veterans and the resources to hire/train personnel to manage and facilitate the program.

Veteran-specific courses	✓	✓	Most colleges already offer first-year class of some sort for new students. Workshops or online courses are valid alternatives if resources are tight.	Colleges with any number of veterans. If your college already offers courses such as "College 101," the program team should be able to adapt a course for veterans. Recruit a student veteran (or a few) to help out and offer input!
Student veterans' organizations (SVOs)	✓	✓	This organization can be formal or informal depending on resources and numbers of interested veterans. Try to find a designated space on campus for veterans for meetings and gatherings. A classroom or conference room will do.	Colleges that serve any number of veterans. Ideally, try to find a veteran student willing to lead the organization. This will take some pressure off college personnel to manage the program and enable veterans to facilitate their organization.
Mentoring	✓	✓	Matching student veterans with other veteran students or faculty/staff members is a low-cost way to provide targeted support to these vulnerable students.	Colleges that serve any number of veterans. Recruit second and third year veteran students first, then reach out to faculty and staff to help as well.
Faculty, Counselor, and Staff Professional Development	✓	✓	Most schools provide professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and counselors. Adding a module that addresses veterans needs is an easy, low-cost way to ensure that college personnel are veteran-knowledgeable.	Colleges with any number of veterans. Identify student veterans and/or military veteran community members who are willing to participate in professional development presentations and Q&A.
Veterans Resource Center	✓	✓	Veterans resource centers can stand alone or be part of students services or financial aid. Depending on how many veterans the school serves, one dedicated contact person can make a difference for veterans seeking answers and support.	Schools with any number of veterans, but those with small numbers may wish to combine veterans services with another department at the college to conserve resources.

Our College Has Veterans. Now What?

As we stated earlier, there is no existing framework to assist community college administrators in their decision-making regarding student veteran support. This paper sought to illuminate the most prevalent strategies for ensuring that veterans have a positive and productive campus experience, but many readers may still be scratching their heads and wondering where and how to start. Though we endeavor to the present the beginnings of a framework (see Table 1), our recommendation list is by no means exhaustive or without flaws.

In thinking about how to implement a veteran support initiative, administrators should first consider the number of veterans served by the institution, the availability of resources, and the principal goals associated with the program. Veteran populations vary by geography, ethnicity, and gender and may represent some military branches more than others. Community colleges near large military bases tend to have much higher student veteran populations than their counterparts that are far away from such sources of veteran students. Some bases tend to produce veterans with extensive combat experience, whereas veterans at other bases may have logistical support experience. The different types of veterans likely will benefit from different types of support; there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting veterans.

Institutions with large numbers of veterans and available resources should consider large-scale initiatives such as Servicemember Opportunity College (SOC) or reducing time to completion. These programs, which we have labeled "high resource" (HR), are wide reaching and require significant human and monetary resources to implement. Additionally, there may be the added step of petitioning state administrators for permissions, accreditation accommodations, and additional funding. In short, HR programs necessitate full-scale institutional support and intensive resource allocation, and are therefore best suited for schools that serve a large veteran population, operate near a military base, and/or have high veteran enrollment as a percent of the overall student population.

Schools with small veteran populations likely will not be able to justify the costs of a wide variety of support programs. However, they may be able to partner with other community colleges or 4-year schools in devising informed strategies to support veteran students throughout their collegiate career. By pooling resources with other institutions, community colleges can provide a greater variety of services to accommodate veterans with different needs. Similarly, community colleges may consider leveraging local industry partnerships to identify and offer support for the high-demand careers that may be appropriate for accelerated programs. A collective effort among multiple institutions and/or community-based industries may also allow for broad-reaching efficacy studies and hopefully lead to a cooperative, targeted framework for supporting veterans within a region or state. In short, pooled resources may mean that practitioners and scholars can work contemporaneously to implement, evaluate, and improve upon programs and strategies designed to improve the outcomes for military veteran students, all while ensuring that no veteran falls through the cracks.

Community colleges with lower and/or growing numbers of veterans can take a different approach from those with high veteran populations through implementing "low/medium resource" (LMR) initiatives. We loosely define these solutions as ones that require few, if any, additional human resources and little funding. LMR options can be additions to existing college programs, informal or student-driven programs, or those involving existing faculty and staff that are willing to expand their work to include veteran-specific services. This isn't to suggest that schools with already limited resources further tax their personnel, but rather fold veteran support into their existing mechanisms of support for other high-risk student groups. When appropriate, we suggest including student veterans in the planning, implementation, and sustainability phases. Through establishing an open and communicative relationship with veteran students, campus administrators can help ensure that programs aimed at helping them are informed, relevant, and scalable.

Concluding Thoughts

The good news in all of this is that community colleges are nimble and adaptive entities. As local industries evolve, economic conditions fluctuate, and demographics shift, community colleges adjust course and program offerings, adopt new technology for enhanced course delivery options, and experiment with new and innovative ways to attract and retain students. Over the past 20 years, enrollment in public 2-year schools has increased by 65 percent while credential completion has increased 127 percent (Mullin, 2011). While there is still a lot of work to be done, community colleges are doing something right in the face of a changing global economy and a highly competitive landscape with the onset of well-funded for-profit institutions. Therefore, the key to serving the incoming veteran student population is to get creative, adapt existing interventions to accommodate veteran students, reach out across the campus, the region, and the state for collaborative sharing of feedback and ideas, and most importantly, identify and track student veterans to ensure they are made aware of and provided with the services and supports they need to be successful.

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