In the following report, Hanover Research explores best practices in the provision of veteran services on college campuses, with special attention paid to two topics—offering comprehensive counseling services and awarding academic credit for past military experiences.
# Table of Contents

**Introduction and Key Findings** ............................................................... 3  
- **Key Findings** .................................................................................. 3  
**Section I: Trends in Veteran Services on College Campuses and Exemplary Programs** .... 5  
- **ACE Report on Veteran Services** ......................................................... 5  
- **Comprehensive Veteran Support Programs at Community Colleges** ...................... 6  
  - Citrus College (Glendora, California) .................................................. 6  
  - Mount Wachusetts Community College (Gardner, Massachusetts) .................. 7  
**Section II: Counseling Services for Veteran Students** .............................. 9  
- **Counseling Needs of the Veteran Student Population** ............................... 9  
- **Recommendations for Improving College Counseling Services for Veterans** ........ 11  
**Section III: Offering Academic Credit for Military Experience** ..................... 15  
- **Prior Learning Assessment** ................................................................. 15  
- **ACE Guide** ..................................................................................... 16  
- **College Credit for Heroes** ................................................................. 20
INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

In order to assist Tarrant County College District (TCCD) as it works to improve veteran services, the following report reviews the literature for recommendations on effective counseling and advisement for veteran students. The report pays special attention to two topics of interest to TCCD—offering counseling services and awarding academic credit for past military experience. Prior to addressing these issues in-depth, the report highlights the general progress U.S. institutions have made in expanding and improving veteran services in recent years and profiles exemplary programs in place at two community colleges that have been recognized for their comprehensive veteran support programs.

KEY FINDINGS

- Recent research published by the American Council on Education (ACE) indicates that U.S. colleges offer more services to veteran students now than in previous years. This research supports the perception of college campuses adding and adjusting services to meet the needs of this growing population of students. Of specific interest in this report:
  - More than 80 percent of responding institutions with veteran student services offer counseling for combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and related issues.
  - Institutions with high and moderate veteran enrollment are more likely to offer veterans credit for prior experiences than other institutions. Credit is awarded most often for military training and occupational experience and nationally recognized testing programs.

- Several community colleges have established extensive programming to meet the needs of veteran students on campus. Such programs combine advising and financial aid, veteran benefit, career, and personal counseling with first-year experience courses, orientation sessions, and social networks established for veteran students. Mount Wachusetts Community College has partnered with a non-profit organization to offer tuition-free education to students who participate in a broader residential program designed for those with traumatic brain injury and other conditions that require more support than is given on a traditional college campus.

- The number of veterans returning to higher education who have disabilities has been estimated at 40 percent. A landmark study on the emotional adjust issues and psychological symptoms experienced by veteran students indicates that the “average” veteran student deals with moderate anxiety, moderately severe depression, and significant PTSD symptoms, as well as demonstrates noticeable suicide risk.

- Recommendations for college counseling programs striving to be better prepared to meet the needs of veteran students include the following:
• Training opportunities for clinical and counseling staff on PTSD symptoms and treatment methods (e.g., cognitive therapy, exposure therapy, group therapy, and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing)
• Training opportunities for clinical and counseling staff on early warning signs and suicide risk assessment for the veteran population
• Sensitivity training for college personnel on military culture and the challenges faced by veterans post-deployment
• Implementation of comprehensive screening programs, either embedded in orientation sessions or offered early in the transition process
• Partnerships with the Department of Veterans Affairs to deliver clinical services to veteran students

- Common strategies for evaluating past student learning and awarding course credit include: Individualized student portfolios, ACE evaluations of military training, institutional evaluations of non-collegiate programs, customized challenge exams, and standardized exams. Of particular note, the annually published ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services provides credit recommendations for military experiences, occupations, and coursework. In Texas, the College Credit for Heroes initiative has been designed to provide more support to veterans in Texas colleges by maximizing the college credits awarded for military experience. This program is currently operation in seven community colleges and college systems.
SECTION I: TRENDS IN VETERAN SERVICES ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES AND EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS

While past Hanover Research reports have discussed general trends in support for veterans on U.S. college campuses, this section of the report revisits research conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE) to provide an updated look at education support services for this unique population. This section further examines noteworthy support programs at two community colleges to provide TCCD with insight into the actions other community colleges have taken to ensure the wellbeing and success of veteran students.

ACE REPORT ON VETERAN SERVICES

In July 2012, ACE released a report entitled From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members. The report stands as an update to the organization’s 2009 report titled From Soldier to Student. In the three years since the release of the first report, ACE finds that “substantially more institutions now provide programs and services specifically designed for military service members and veterans.”\(^1\) The 2012 report, which draws on the survey responses of 690 student service administrators, finds that 84 percent of responding institutions with military and veteran student services offer counseling for combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and related issues. Furthermore, 95 percent offer counseling for depression and related issues, and 96 percent offer counseling to help students cope with stress and manage anxiety. Finally, 60 percent offer counseling assistance for students who have experienced “military sexual trauma or other psycho-social sexual violence issues.”\(^2\) Figure 1.1 depicts the percentage of institutions, by type, that have trained counseling staff to assist veteran students with PTSD, brain injuries, and other health issues.

A lower percentage of responding institutions have programs for veterans with physical

---

1 “Supporting Student Veterans.” American Council on Education. http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/From-Soldier-to-Student-II.aspx

disabilities (55 percent) and brain injuries (36 percent). It is important to note, however, that both of these services are now more common on college campuses than they were in 2009, when just 33 percent and 23 percent offered these services, respectively.³

Looking forward, 53 percent of survey respondents are planning to train counseling staff over the next five years, compared to 43 percent in 2009. Across the board, the 2012 survey yielded higher percentages of institutions planning to establish centers for veteran/military students (43 percent), increase their budget for veteran programming (57 percent), increase staffing (53 percent), and increase the number of programs and services available to veterans on campus (71 percent).⁴

In regard to evaluating prior experiences for academic credit, the ACE report finds that institutions with high and moderate veteran enrollment are more likely to offer veterans credit for prior experiences than other institutions. The report goes on to state that, among all institutions, credit is awarded most often for “military training and occupational experience and nationally recognized testing programs.”⁵ Institutions with a dedicated veterans services office evaluate credit awards for military occupational specialty (66 percent) and formal military training courses (86 percent) at a higher rate than institutions that lack a dedicated office (56 percent and 76 percent, respectively).⁶

Overall, the updated ACE research indicates that colleges provide more services to veterans now than they have in years past. The research supports the perception of college campuses adding and adjusting services to meet the needs of this growing population of students.

COMPREHENSIVE VETERAN SUPPORT PROGRAMS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

While the ACE report provides general information on the frequency of programs and services across all institution types, the practices of individual community colleges are examined here. The selected institutions—Citrus College in California, and Mount Wachusetts Community College in Massachusetts—offer comprehensive support programs combining counseling and advising with first-year courses and social networks for veterans.

CITRUS COLLEGE (GLENDORA, CALIFORNIA)

Featured in a video at the 2010 White House Summit on Community Colleges, Citrus College’s nationally-acclaimed Veterans Program features a three-credit transition course (Counseling 160: Strategies for College Success – Veterans’ Emphasis) for veteran and military students. The course focuses on facilitating a positive transition to civilian life, teaching interpersonal skills and techniques to manage “military stress, combat reaction

⁴ Ibid., p. 15.
⁵ Ibid., p. 29.
⁶ Ibid., p. 37.
stress, operational stress,” and PTSD. Beyond this flagship course, the College offers two additional courses considered to be “gateway” courses for veteran students—History 155: Vietnam War and History 222: World War II. Dr. Bruce O. Solheim, instructor of History 155 and History 222, noticed a growing interest in these courses on the part of veteran students and their ability to “help young veteran students begin to process their traumatic exposure experiences [and work toward] gaining insight, perspective, and healing.” Solheim formed the Citrus College Veterans Network in 2006, which would eventually lead to the creation of a more comprehensive veterans support program.

Today, the Citrus College Veterans Center provides a central hub at which veteran students meet to socialize, receive benefits information, and participate in workshops. The Veterans Center houses a mentoring program and a veteran-to-veteran academic tutoring program, as well as a support counseling program. A certified mental health counselor offers transitional counseling to veteran students and their families, as well as counseling for PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and military sexual assault. Citrus College also operates a Veterans Orientation, at which students receive information on GI benefits, financial aid, tutoring, and counseling services, as well as tour the Veterans Center and the broader campus. Finally, Citrus College hosts an annual appreciation event (“Saluting Our Veterans”), as well as offers a book fund for those who enroll in Counseling 160 and a social network (the “Student Veteran Network”) for students and their spouses, families, and supporters.

Mount Wachusett Community College, recipient of the 2013 Military Times “Best for Vets” Top College Award, has designed a “unique prototype residential treatment and education complex for veterans who suffer from traumatic injuries, and their families.” The College donated ten acres for the Northeast Veteran Training Rehabilitation Center (NVTRC), a residential center designed for veterans with PTSD, traumatic brain injury, and other psychological and physical injuries. Operated by Veteran Homestead, an independent non-profit organization, the NVTRC provides veterans and their families with individual residential units (duplex apartments), as well as access to a Therapy Center and the MWCC fitness facilities, assistance with child care, recreational opportunities, and free tuition and fees at MWCC. The program, then, provides veterans with a stable residential

---

   http://www.citruscollege.edu/stdntsrv/veterans/Pages/Coun160.aspx
8 “Courses and Services Offered for Veterans.” Citrus College.
   http://www.citruscollege.edu/stdntsrv/veterans/Pages/CoursesandServicesOfferedforVeterans.aspx
9 “Veterans Program at Citrus College.” Citrus College.
   http://www.citruscollege.edu/stdntsrv/veterans/Pages/default.aspx
10 Ibid.
11 Persky, K.R. “Veterans Education: Coming Home to the Community College Classroom.” National-Louis University.
12 “Northeast Veteran Training and Rehabilitation Center.” Veteran Homestead.
   http://www.veteranhomestead.org/facilities/nvtrc.html
environment coupled with counseling and educational opportunities clustered in a single location.\textsuperscript{13}

MWCC also operates the \textbf{Center of Excellence for Veteran Student Success}, established through a U.S. Department of Education grant, which provides personalized assistance to meet the financial, academic, social, and physical needs of veteran students. MWCC offers a \textbf{First Year Experience course} to assist veteran students with the transition to college, and a \textbf{veterans club} to facilitate social interaction and a sense of community.\textsuperscript{14} The Center of Excellence further offers counseling on veteran benefits, financial aid, and career decisions; transfer assistance; mentoring and peer tutoring; textbook and adaptive technology loan programs; withdrawals for deployment; and referrals to on-campus and off-campus service providers.\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{15} “Veteran Services.” Mount Wachusett Community College. http://mwcc.edu/veteran/
SECTION II: COUNSELING SERVICES FOR VETERAN STUDENTS

While ACE has examined institutional support services offered to veterans at college campuses across the nation, little research focuses explicitly on counseling support for veteran students at the community college level. Discussions of the perspectives of today’s veteran students, especially those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and their reentry into civilian life and education have largely been published in the media or in brief journal articles, but not examined in rigorous or detailed studies.16 The following pages examine the available literature on counseling services for veterans, focusing on mental health concerns for this population and appropriate training for college personnel.

COUNSELING NEEDS OF THE VETERAN STUDENT POPULATION

In an article in the Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, Paul Grossman emphasizes the importance of examining veteran disability services on college campuses, given the high number of veterans returning to higher education with disabilities—estimated to be as high as 40 percent. Disabilities and health concerns found in the veteran population include “post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, substance abuse, hearing and vision related injuries, substantial mobility limitations owing to brain and orthopedic injuries, as well as disfiguring burns and debilitating toxic exposure.”17 While many institutions employ personnel experienced in supporting students with learning disabilities, several of the disabilities common among veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan combat areas are less familiar on college campuses.

Insight into the “emotional adjustment, psychological symptoms, and suicide risk” of veteran students on the nation’s college campuses comes from a landmark study conducted by M. David Rudd and Jeffrey Goulding of the University of Utah and Craig J. Bryan of the University of Texas Health Science Center-San Antonio. The first of its kind, the national study focused not just on veterans, but on the veteran student population, with survey data gathered from 628 veteran students enrolled in postsecondary programs across the country. The mean age of the survey sample was 26 years, and more than half of respondents (58 percent) had combat exposure. Given the demographics of the group, 98 percent of those who had been deployed participated in either Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).18

Figure 2.1 displays the results of the survey, which integrated instruments specific to suicidal behavior, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and combat exposure in order to garner insight

---

http://www.huskyveterans.uconn.edu/docs/JPED_Veterans_with_Disabilities_vol22_No_12009.pdf#page=13 p. 4
into the psychological symptoms experienced by veteran students and their frequency. Based on the data, the “average” veteran student deals with moderate anxiety, moderately severe depression, and significant PTSD symptoms, as well as demonstrates “at least some noticeable suicide risk.” 19 As previously noted, 58 percent of the survey respondents had combat exposure, and nearly half (45.6 percent) had significant symptoms of PTSD. Furthermore, 34.6 percent experienced severe anxiety, and 23.7 percent experienced severe depression. The study produced alarming results in regard to suicidal thoughts and behaviors—46 percent of the veteran students surveyed reported suicidal thoughts and 7.7 percent had attempted suicide in the past. Seventeen students (3.8 percent of the survey population) anticipated that a suicide attempt would “likely” be in their future.

Figure 2.1: Psychological Symptoms and Experiences of Veteran Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMPTOM TYPE</th>
<th>TOTAL N</th>
<th>PERCENT OF TOTAL SAMPLE (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised (SBQR) Items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide ideation</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>46% (441)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideation with plan</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>20% (441)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought of suicide often/very often</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10.4% (441)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide attempt in past</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7.7% (441)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide attempt likely in the future</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.8% (441)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing severe anxiety (GAD7 &gt;15)*</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>34.6% (439)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant symptoms of PTSD (PCLM &gt;28)**</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>45.6% (425)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing severe depression (PHQ9 &gt;20)**</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>23.7% (434)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposed to combat</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>58% (420)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposed to moderate or higher (heavy) combat (CES &gt;17)****</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>44.6% (of those with combat exposure)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*GAD7 refers to the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7
**PCLM refers to PTSD Checklist (military version)
***PHQ9 refers to Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (depression)
****CES refers to Combat Exposure Scale

According to the authors, “these numbers are alarming, not only in comparison to the modal college or university student, but also in contrast to VA clinical populations.” 20 A recent Department of Defense report attributes the “escalating suicide rates to a host of factors including sharp increases in operational demands, repeated deployments, and insufficient quantity and quality of ‘dwell’ time (i.e., time at home between deployments), noting a natural fatigue (physical and emotional) and reduced resilience among active-duty soldiers.” 21 Available data indicate that PTSD and psychiatric disorders put veterans at higher risk for suicidal thoughts and attempts. 22 PTSD, then, is of particular concern given its connection with suicide risk and its prevalence among those returning from the conflicts in

---

19 Ibid., p. 358.
20 Ibid., p. 358.
21 Ibid., p. 354.
22 Ibid., p. 355.
Iraq and Afghanistan. The survey data confirmed this link, as 82 percent of respondents who had attempted suicide experienced significant PTSD symptoms.\textsuperscript{23}

Grossman’s research, based on interviews with ten OIF/OEF veterans enrolled in a community college, offers further observation of the types of challenges that veterans encounter and that might be addressed through campus counseling services. Beyond their struggles to cope with physical and psychological injuries, Grossman finds that students often face a difficult adjustment from a very disciplined military life to the lack of structure inherent in civilian life, and may further experience difficulties with personal relationships and social interactions post-deployment. Grossman also finds that PTSD symptoms are often accompanied by more widespread concerns, such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.\textsuperscript{24} Injuries and psychological stress aside, veterans are often simply overwhelmed by the transition to the college environment, a sentiment which might be aggravated by perceived differences with their traditional college peers.\textsuperscript{25}

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING COLLEGE COUNSELING SERVICES FOR VETERANS

Based on the preceding research studies and other examinations of the challenges faced by veteran students, several authors have put forth recommendations for colleges working to ensure the wellbeing of veteran students and foster academic success. As will be evident here, however, such recommendations have generally been broad in nature and focus overwhelmingly on staff training.

Based on his qualitative research, Grossman offers several recommendations echoed in the literature on the topic, including the establishment of centralized offices or centers for veteran services, the extension of social opportunities through veterans groups or clubs, and sensitivity training for students and faculty. Further, Grossman emphasizes the need to inform faculty members of the characteristics of the veteran population and the types of support that are most beneficial to veteran students on campus. He suggests that disability service providers and veterans can serve as facilitators at faculty in-service training programs.\textsuperscript{26} Grossman powerfully states that, while “foundational legal concepts, reaffirmed in the ADAAA, preserve the principle that no postsecondary institution needs to fundamentally alter its programs, curriculum, or lower its academic standards to accommodate individuals with disabilities,” this legal premise “should not relieve any institution from extending to veterans with disabilities a diligent process of rethinking what is or is not ‘fundamental.’”\textsuperscript{27}

Veterans who arrive on campus with disabilities likely to affect their academic progress will often require more intensive advising than a traditional college student who has previously been in the “disability pipeline” in education. Students in the latter category often have

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 358.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 45.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 6.
previously worked within an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and have “a
preconceived notion of ‘appropriate’ reasonable accommodations.” Comparatively, the
veteran student might be in denial of his or her disability or perceive accommodations as
tools for the “weak.” Accordingly, Grossman contends, “there is a strong likelihood that
veterans will present the need to locate affordable and qualified assessment resources for
previously undiagnosed cognitive disabilities in greater numbers.”

While Grossman notes that college counselors should play a pivotal role in helping
students navigate transitional issues as they readjust to civilian life and the college
environment, he offers little concrete information to assist colleges in the design or
improvement of counseling services. More solid recommendations in this arena hail from
Rudd, Goulding, and Bryan. They write that clinicians should be aware that PTSD symptoms
“moderate the relationship between depression and suicidality,” and a PTSD diagnosis may
slip through the cracks if “comorbid with significant depression, hopelessness, and
suicidality.” At the minimum, Rudd et al. emphasize that colleges must implement training
and supervision specific to these issues. Their recommendations span four domains:

- Overall Administration: Colleges must be attentive to the needs of veteran students,
  and should consider the establishment of a student veteran service center.
- Clinical Care: There is the potential for collaborative work with the Department of
  Veterans Affairs to deliver clinical services to veteran students.
- Screening: Colleges might consider broad-based screening, integrated into
  orientation programs or at least carried out early in the transition process.
- Education and Training: Counselors and clinicians must be trained in two critical
  areas:
  - Treatments demonstrated to be effective with combat-related PTSD, including
    cognitive processing therapy and prolonged exposure
  - Suicide risk assessment approaches unique to veterans with prominent PTSD
    symptoms

Other recommended topics for training include: “recognizing the unique
experiences and needs of student veterans, engaging student veterans, warning
signs (including PTSD, depression, substance abuse, and suicidality), understanding
the nature of clinical problems, and responding in a caring and effective manner that
facilitates the transition to clinical care if needed.”

---

28 Ibid., p. 7.
29 Ibid., p. 7.
30 Ibid., p. 48.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
The emphasis on training specific to PTSD is echoed by other authors. In a January 2010 article in *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, Lana Zinger and Andrea Cohen provide recommendations for colleges to meet the counseling needs of veterans. Specifically, the authors assert that “campus health and counseling officials should have knowledge regarding symptoms and treatment strategies for PTSD and have an extensive referral list for veterans.” The authors reference the PTSD symptoms identified in the 4th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), summarized at right.

In addition to knowledge of the symptoms of PTSD and other mental health issues that affect veterans, Zinger and Cohen suggest that counselors on college campuses should be familiar with the following therapeutic options:

- **Cognitive therapy:** In cognitive therapy, your therapist helps you understand and change how you think about your trauma and its aftermath. Your goal is to understand how certain thoughts about your trauma cause you stress and make your symptoms worse. With the help of your therapist, you will learn to replace these thoughts with more accurate and less distressing thoughts. You also learn ways to cope with feelings such as anger, guilt, and fear.

- **Exposure therapy:** In exposure therapy your goal is to have less fear about your memories. By talking about your trauma repeatedly with a therapist, you’ll learn to get control of your thoughts and feelings about the trauma. You may focus on memories that are less upsetting before talking about worse ones.

---

- **EMDR:** Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is a fairly new therapy for PTSD. While talking about your memories, you'll focus on distractions like eye movements, hand taps, and sounds. For example, your therapist will move his or her hand near your face, and you'll follow this movement with your eyes.

- **Group therapy:** In group therapy, you talk with a group of people who also have been through a trauma and who have PTSD. Sharing your story with others may help you feel more comfortable talking about your trauma. This can help you cope with your symptoms, memories, and other parts of your life. Group therapy helps you build relationships with others who understand what you've been through.35

In general, Rudd et al. stress that training opportunities should not only target clinical personnel who directly counsel students, but should expand across campus to all employees who work in student services and regularly interface with veterans.36 Training college personnel to interact with veterans in a manner that is sensitive to their past experiences and demonstrates awareness of military culture can help improve the on-campus experiences of these students. One author suggests five “common sense” tenets, encouraging college personnel to treat veteran students like all others on campus, to thank veterans for their service only if they are familiar on a personal level, to not expect certain political or ideological views to be embraced by all veterans, to not pose inquiries related to veterans’ combat experiences or roles, and to convey a general expectation for academic success.37

For training opportunities, colleges might turn to field experts or to organizations specializing in training college personnel on veteran health concerns. As an example of the latter, the Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP) offers in-depth training opportunities for civilian mental health providers, including the University Counseling Center Core Competency program. The program involves a one-day presentation made on campus to educate both clinical and non-clinical college personnel on the “social, cultural, clinical, and campus-specific concerns” of military service members and veterans. Training not only covers the experiences veterans have on campus, but also offers a primer on the deployment cycle and how it impacts students, as well as the challenges they face in readjustment to civilian life. Funded in part by the Department of Defense/Health Affairs and located in Bethesda, Maryland, the organization arms colleges with information on PTSD and other psychological health concerns for veterans post-deployment.38

---

35 Bullet points taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 49.
36 Rudd et al. Op, cit., p. 358.
SECTION III: OFFERING ACADEMIC CREDIT FOR MILITARY EXPERIENCE

Streamlining systems to award academic credit to veteran students for their past military experiences is identified as a significant priority in the literature on veteran student services. The following pages examine general strategies for prior learning assessment, as well as one resource more specific to the veteran population—the ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Service. To share with TCCD the efforts occurring within Texas to address this issue, this section further provides information on the College Credit for Heroes program.

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Research demonstrates the importance of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) in improving retention and completion rates. PLA is defined by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) as “the process by which many colleges evaluate for academic credit the college-level knowledge and skills an individual has gained outside of the classroom, including employment, military training/service, travel, hobbies, civic activities, and volunteer service.” As articulated by CAEL, the most common strategies for evaluating students’ prior learning experiences and awarding course credit include the following:

- Individualized student portfolios or Portfolio Assessments.
- Evaluation of corporate and military training by the American Council on Education (ACE). ACE publishes credit recommendations for formal instructional programs offered by non-collegiate agencies, or the ACE Guides.
- Program evaluations done by individual colleges of non-collegiate instructional programs that award credit for those who achieve recognized proficiencies, or the Evaluation of Local Training.
- Customized exams offered by some colleges to verify learning achievement; these may be current course final exams or other tests developed at the departmental level for assessing general disciplinary knowledge and skill, or Challenge Exams.
- Standardized exams such as:
  - Advanced Placement Examination Program, or AP Exams, offered by the College Board
  - College Level Examination Program, or CLEP Exams, also offered by the College Board
  - Excelsior College Exams (formerly, Regents College Exams or ACT/PEP Exams)
  - The DANTES Subject Standardized Tests, or DSST Exams, conducted by the Chauncey Group International, a division of Thomson Prometric

---


40 Ibid., p. 7.
By earning course credit or exemption from certain introductory courses based on previous work experiences, veterans are able to complete degree programs in a shorter period of time. Prior learning assessment, then, may be a significant pull for military students interested in applying their past work experiences toward their degree and shortening their time to graduation.

**ACE Guide**

The *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services*, published by ACE, provides credit recommendations for military experiences, occupations, and coursework. Mark Bauman and Denise Davidson, in an article examining the approaches that higher education institutions can take to meet the needs of veteran students, encourages institutions to use the ACE guide as a tool in determining the academic credit to award for military experience. In discussing the importance of this guide, the authors point to the connection between the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium and the ACE guide; the 1,900 college and university members of the SOC consortium use the guide to determine the academic credit awarded for military training and experience.

The ACE *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* is an online resource that:

- Presents ACE credit recommendations for formal courses and occupations offered by all branches of the military. All recommendations are based on ACE reviews conducted by college and university faculty members who are actively teaching in the areas they review. [Users] can search for courses and occupations using the ACE identification number, military course number or title, training location, dates completed, or subject and level. New courses and occupations are continually being evaluated by ACE, and these entries are added on a daily basis.

On the following page, we present screenshots of search options within the guide to demonstrate how the guide can be accessed and used online. As depicted in these figures, credit recommendations can be searched by military course (Figure 3.1) or occupation (Figure 3.2).

---


Figure 3.1: ACE Guide Search by Course

Source: American Council on Education

Figure 3.2: ACE Guide Search by Occupation

Source: American Council on Education

---

44 “Search Courses.” American Council on Education. http://www2.acenet.edu/militaryguide/CourseSearch.cfm
As demonstrated in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, through this guide, institutions can search by academic field to determine the military careers listed for credit recommendations. Additionally, institutions can search by military occupation title to determine recommended credits. To demonstrate examples of these searches and the results returned, we provide screenshots of the search process in Figures 3.3 and 3.4.

In one example, a search for Cannon Crewmember returns 11 possible occupations, highlighted in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3: Sample ACE Guide Occupation Search**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACE ID</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOS-138-002</td>
<td>05/01/1999</td>
<td>05/01/1999</td>
<td>Cannon Cannon Crewmember (5/01/99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOS-138-003</td>
<td>05/21/1999</td>
<td>05/21/1999</td>
<td>Cannon Cannon Crewmember (5/21/99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOS-138-004</td>
<td>05/26/1999</td>
<td>05/26/1999</td>
<td>Cannon Cannon Crewmember (5/26/99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOS-138-005</td>
<td>05/30/1999</td>
<td>05/30/1999</td>
<td>Cannon Cannon Crewmember (5/30/99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOS-138-006</td>
<td>06/01/1999</td>
<td>06/01/1999</td>
<td>Cannon Cannon Crewmember (6/01/99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOS-138-008</td>
<td>07/01/1999</td>
<td>07/01/1999</td>
<td>Cannon Cannon Crewmember (7/01/99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOS-138-010</td>
<td>08/01/1999</td>
<td>08/01/1999</td>
<td>Cannon Cannon Crewmember (8/01/99)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next step, selecting the occupation of Multiple Launch Rocket System Crewmember (5/99-5/09) returns the credit recommendations highlighted in Figure 3.4.

---

46 “Occupation Search Results,” American Council on Education. http://www2.acenet.edu/militaryguide/OccupationSearchResults.cfm
Figure 3.4 demonstrates several key pieces of information provided in the ACE guide. Each credit recommendation includes a description of the occupation and specific descriptions of four skill levels within the occupation. There are four credit recommendations based on the four skill levels described. While for this particular occupation, the first two skills levels suggest an individualized assessment of the student, specific credit recommendations are provided for Skill Levels 30 and 40.48

48 Ibid.
As demonstrated, there are several methods to search the guide based on the information provided by the student. To assist institutions with the process of using the ACE guide for credit recommendations, ACE conducts informative training workshops.  

**COLLEGE CREDIT FOR HEROES**

In Texas, the College Credit for Heroes initiative has been designed to provide more extensive support to veterans enrolled in Texas colleges by maximizing the level of college credit awarded for military experience. Created in 2010 through the **Texas Workforce Commission** (TWC), the goal of this program is to provide veterans with a productive college experience leading to positive employment outcomes. While the program initially focused on allied health careers, veterans pursuing other fields are now supported through the program. The program was initially designed to be offered in seven community colleges and college systems located in areas with high veteran populations:

- Alamo Colleges
- Central Texas College
- Houston Community College System
- Lee College
- Lone Star College System
- San Jacinto College
- Temple College

Each college individually works on the project, as well as participates in the Texas Inter-College Council on Veterans.

Additional funding for the expansion of the project was secured in September 2012, and the program focus now includes the following fields:

- Advanced technologies and manufacturing
- Aerospace and defense
- Biotechnology and life sciences, including health care
- Information and computer technology
- Petroleum refining and chemical products
- Energy

---


51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.
This program has identified the following barriers to awarding college credit to veteran students:

- **Military transcript evaluation varies dramatically from college to college.** Most colleges have no shortcuts or automated systems. Every transcript must be evaluated manually on an individual basis. Thus, veterans receive inconsistent awards of credit, and do not get maximum awards because the process is difficult. Evaluations are done by an assortment of college administrative offices. Evaluators may be housed in offices for veterans, registrars, student affairs, admissions, or others.

- **Many hours of military training that a veteran has earned may not easily translate into college credit.** Frequently, military training counts only toward electives credit, not core curriculum studies. The official arbiter of coursework, the American Council on Education (ACE), may recommend two credit hours where four credit hours are required for full credit.

- **The regional accreditation guidelines for Texas colleges and universities may limit some actions colleges have undertaken to benefit veterans and servicemembers.** Central Texas College (CTC) raised potential accreditation questions regarding the use of official CTC transcripts to award credit for military training and experience. Houston Community College will add an additional course to its five-credit hour surgical technology course in order to meet accreditation regulations.

- **Colleges are experiencing exponential growth in the number of veterans attending college.** The dramatic increase in veterans at Texas institutions is fueled by the number of servicemembers leaving the military and the generous benefits of the new Post-9/11 GI Bill. Yet, no central educational reporting or data collection is done. While colleges must certify a veteran’s enrollment with the VA, some veterans do not identify themselves as such to the college. Now the Apply Texas application, an electronic common state application for college admission, has a checkbox for veterans or servicemembers to indicate military status. The Texas State Auditor’s Office (State Auditor) report on veterans issued in 2010 was the first attempt to quantify, by institution, the number of veterans attending Texas institutions.

- **Colleges want innovations, and improvements are beginning.** Every college is seeking to find ways to address veterans’ academic, social, and health issues.

- **Not every Texas college is a Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges school.** Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) affiliation means that institutions agree to recognize and use the American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations for academic credit. Colleges are not bound by ACE recommendations; they may award as many or as few credit hours as they see fit.\(^53\)

As this program is relatively new, there is not an abundance of information on the results of the initiative. However, promising preliminary results have been reported; “for the first three months of operation, the average veteran or service-member requesting evaluations

---

\(^53\) Bullet points taken verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 13-14.
from the College Credit for Heroes website has earned 17 credit hours of electives, out of a total of 34 semester hours.”54

The following table highlights the initial outcomes of the program at each of the seven participating colleges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTITUTION</th>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Central Texas College            | ▪ Estimated average cost savings per student of $2,089 by awarding credit to a veteran or service member for military experience and training based on the first quarter of operations of CTC evaluations  
▪ Average of 34 semester credit hours evaluated for a veteran or service member in first quarter of operations  
▪ Half of the 34 credit hours count as workforce or academic classes, and the other half of the credit hours count as open electives or electives in a student’s area of study  
From April to October 2012:  
▪ 12,256 hits on website with nearly 7,650 unique visitors  
▪ 1,260 accounts established  
▪ 582 requests for evaluations of credit  
▪ 528 military courses evaluated  
▪ 340 military occupations evaluated                                                                                                                                   |
| Lone Star College System         | ▪ Convened the Texas Inter-College Council on Veterans for members to share information and collaborate on issues  
▪ Identified barriers, challenges, and gaps for veterans and servicemembers in receiving college credit  
▪ Identified best practices and models that can be replicated by other colleges and universities  
▪ Convened the Veterans Excellence Conference with 33 Texas colleges and universities in attendance  
▪ Executed memorandums of agreement with seven partner colleges                                                                                                                                                        |
| Lee College                      | ▪ Increased veterans’ enrollment at Lee College by 9 percent  
▪ Gave priority registration to veterans and servicemembers  
▪ Had 61 student veterans complete an IEP  
▪ Tutored for veterans and servicemembers to assist in class and degree completion  
▪ Developed an English Composition 1 course with a portfolio development component in order to award additional academic credit for military training and experience  
▪ Began development of a Manufacturing Skills Standards Certification (MSSC) program with a hands-on component                                                                                                                                                      |
| Houston Community College System | ▪ Estimated $3,109, or 82 percent, savings per student, by reducing the time required from 37 semester hours to five semester hours  
▪ Changed national rules to allow military-trained surgical technologists trained in unaccredited military programs to sit for certification exams  
▪ Enrolled eight participants in the five-semester hour accelerated National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA) CST Exam Preparation program  
▪ Enrolled 28 participants in the one-semester hour Professional Readiness course (includes those previously enrolled in the NBSTSA CST Exam Preparation program)  
▪ Expect 23 participants to take the NBSTSA CST Exam so they can practice as certified surgical technologists in Texas  
54 Ibid., p. 16.
### Outcomes

#### Alamo Colleges
- Estimated average cost savings per student of $2,451 to $4,697 in the selected nursing and allied health specialties
- Created a national model, usable by all Texas community colleges, for maximizing transfer credit awards for military allied health care training and experience
- Developed, refined, and planned pathways to accelerated AAS degree programs for qualified military allied health care professionals
- Broadened options open to graduates of the accelerated AAS degree in Health Information Technology with three Health Management Specialty tracks by exploring articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities

#### Temple College
- Estimated $2,060, or 77 percent, savings per student by reducing the time required from three semester hours to one semester hour for the Level 1 EMT Intermediate certification
- Estimated $2,000, or 38 percent, savings per student, by reducing the time required from five semester hours to three semester hours for the Level 2 Paramedic certification
- Potential 30 percent increase in earnings for certified EMS personnel
- Created standard curriculum, usable by all Texas community colleges, for accelerated EMS Level 1 and Level 2 certification
- Developed a competency testing model for ensuring medics and corpsmen are qualified in college-level academic health care courses
- Shared the streamlined curriculum with other Texas community colleges

#### San Jacinto College
- Convened the Allied Health Programs and Military Service Credit Comprehensive Analysis Project Summit
- Developed a comprehensive list of all allied health programs offered at Texas’ two-year educational institutions at the certificate and degree level
- Produced geographic maps of the analysis of allied health training gaps
- Developed a comprehensive database of relevant contacts at all Texas community colleges

*Source: Texas Workforce Commission*[^55]

---

The College Credit for Heroes program further produces significant savings for the state and federal governments by reducing the number of courses that veterans and active duty service members are required to complete. The initial “Lessons Learned” from the program are as follows:

- Entry into the civilian workforce is delayed when veterans are required to repeat coursework or training they had in the military.
- Our nation’s lack of consistent academic policies and procedures on the award of college credit for military training and experience presents unnecessary and costly barriers to degrees, licenses, and certificates that veterans need to enter the civilian workforce.
- TWC’s College Credit for Heroes program has been very cost-effective and will speed entry into the civilian workforce for veterans.
- Colleges can and will work together to find strategies that work for both the veterans and the institutions. Cooperation, rather than competition, is the remedy for finding solutions.
- Small- to medium-size colleges can design cost-effective ways to enhance veterans’ achievement. It is not all about having lots of resources.

[^55]: Taken verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 18-26.
State laws, as well as educational accreditation requirements, may pose limitations on the award of college credit for veterans and servicemembers.

Military education goals and colleges’ educational goals share common characteristics and content, and may be more similar than previously thought.

The inventory of nursing and allied health programs across the state points to directions for further reforms.

Nursing and allied health education can be streamlined for experienced veterans and servicemembers and still meet state and national licensing or certification guidelines.

The lack of statewide data or regular reporting on veterans or servicemembers attending Texas colleges diminishes the perception of the importance of veterans on college campuses.

Continued outreach to veterans, servicemembers, and colleges is key to encouraging other Texas institutions to adopt College Credit for Heroes best practices and to award credit for military training and experience.56

Additional information on the College Credit for Military Heroes program can be found on the program website (here) and the Texas Workforce Commission website (here).

---

56 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

Hanover Research is committed to providing a work product that meets or exceeds member expectations. In keeping with that goal, we would like to hear your opinions regarding our reports. Feedback is critically important and serves as the strongest mechanism by which we tailor our research to your organization. When you have had a chance to evaluate this report, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire.


CAVEAT

The publisher and authors have used their best efforts in preparing this brief. The publisher and authors make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this brief and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. There are no warranties which extend beyond the descriptions contained in this paragraph. No warranty may be created or extended by representatives of Hanover Research or its marketing materials. The accuracy and completeness of the information provided herein and the opinions stated herein are not guaranteed or warranted to produce any particular results, and the advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every member. Neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages. Moreover, Hanover Research is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. Members requiring such services are advised to consult an appropriate professional.