

Informing Improved Recognition of Military Learning

Exploring the Experiences of Student Veterans in Postsecondary Education

U.S. military servicemembers undergo significant training and education during their military service, but many of them find it difficult to obtain academic credit for that learning once they enter postsecondary education. To better understand this experience, AIR conducted interviews and focus groups and administered a survey to student veterans who were enrolled or recently enrolled in undergraduate programs at postsecondary institutions in the United States. **Our research showed that, although there is considerable variation across institutions and programs, the credit most student veterans receive from postsecondary institutions for their military experience does not meet their expectations.**



Where do student veterans find information about institutions?

Although most student veterans reported being aware of opportunities for credit recognition for their military learning, many struggled to find information about it. **Most found information through military- and campus-based resources, as well as their own research.**



What role do opportunities for recognition of military learning play in student veterans' choice of institution?

Student veterans were more likely to first consider factors other than credit recognition in their decision about which institution to attend, but some reported that credit recognition opportunities were a factor in narrowing their choices. Other factors that influenced veterans' choice of institution included a reputation for high quality academics and specific degree or program offerings.



What are student veterans' experiences with the process of gaining recognition of their military-based learning?

Experiences with the process of obtaining credit for military learning varied at the individual and institution levels. Academic advisors and on-campus student veterans centers played an important role in the experience, often providing valuable guidance to student veterans.

"[My advisor] knows the ins and outs of the veteran paperwork and what we need to go through. She's really helpful. She knows a lot about the military."



Do student veterans attempt to get credit for their military-based learning?

More students attempted to get credit for their military training than for their military occupation. Findings differed significantly by race and gender, with female students and students of color being less likely than their male and white counterparts to attempt to get credit recognized.



What, if any, credit do student veterans receive for their military training? Does the amount of credit awarded meet expectations?

Both the amount of credit that student veterans received and the credits they expected to receive ranged widely among student veterans who attempted to obtain credit for their military learning and/or military occupations. For example, few received credit toward their major.

60%

students expected to receive more credits than they were awarded.



To what extent does recognition of military learning affect student veterans' experiences in postsecondary education, both academically and nonacademically?

While the majority of student veterans reported that credit recognition affected their academic experience and time to degree completion, **they had mixed opinions about whether recognition of military learning affected their nonacademic experience and sense of belonging**, often because the credit they received in part reflected differences between their military occupation and field of study. **Almost half of student veterans said that their experiences with credit recognition affected whether they would recommend their college to other veterans.**



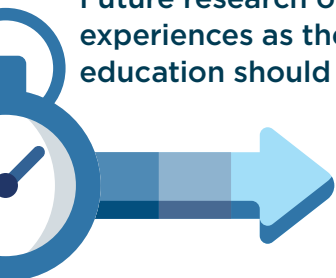
Supporting Recognition of Military Learning: Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Key findings from this study suggest that there is room for improvement in meeting military students' needs. In particular, institutions could benefit from better mapping and understanding military students' paths and goals, including the inconsistencies they experience when trying to gain recognition of their credits. **The following recommendations can inform institutions' efforts to address challenges facing student veterans:**

- Student veterans' paths and goals vary, affecting their experiences. Institutions and those supporting student veterans should not assume a one-size-fits-all path. And diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts should consider student veterans and take into account the important differences among them.
- Student veterans value institutions that demonstrate familiarity with the military. Institutions should educate nonveteran students, faculty, and staff—especially advisors and those involved with admissions—about inclusive practices related to student veterans and support on-campus student veterans' organizations.
- Student veterans are adult learners who bring intersecting identities and experiences to the table. Institutions should seek to understand and support adult student veterans in leveraging their strengths.

Looking Ahead

Future research on student veterans' experiences as they pursue postsecondary education should consider:



- Including the perspectives of student veterans who are not currently enrolled in postsecondary institutions and have not completed a degree; and those who are enrolled in 2-year postsecondary institutions.
- Exploring potential implications of COVID-19 and identifying promising teaching and learning practices that offer flexibility and might be scaled to support student veterans.