

Missouri's Student Veteran Center Guide



*Making Missouri's higher education
institutions military friendly*

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Background..... | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Behavioral Health Support | 4 |
| Educational Support..... | 6 |
| Employment Support..... | 8 |
| Social Support | 10 |
| Establishing a Student Veteran Center | 13 |
| Making your Institution Military Friendly | 17 |

Background

This Missouri-specific guide was developed to assist higher education institutions with meeting the needs of the rapidly-growing Student Veteran population, essentially to become a military-friendly institution.

Why should we focus on Missouri's Student Veterans?

- Nationally, Veterans using the Post 9/11 GI Bill increased 51% from FY10 to FY12.
- In FY11, Missouri had 23,867 education beneficiaries.
- Many Veterans deployed to war zones will experience adjustment issues; a small number will have chronic health or lifelong issues.
- U.S. DOL reported in FY12 that 10% of Veterans are unemployed.

Student Veterans come to colleges and universities with several strengths:

- Leadership
- Diversity
- Punctuality
- Outstanding work habits/ethics
- Tend to have more life experience

This guide we will show examples on how to provide support in four areas:

- Behavioral health support
- Education support
- Employment support
- Social support

Terms

Understand that when we use the term "Student Veteran" this includes: Service Members, military Veterans, and their families.

Acknowledgements

The lead for this guide was a partnership between the Missouri Behavioral Health Alliance, Missouri Department of Higher Education, and the Missouri Department of Mental Health-Division of Behavioral Health.

The workgroup:

- Columbia College
- University of Central Missouri
- University of Missouri-Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- Southeast Missouri State University
- State Fair Community College
- Webster University

Other agencies that assisted in the development of this guide include:

- American Legion-Missouri
- Missouri National Guard-Family Assistance Center
- Missouri Veterans Commission
- Missouri Chamber of Commerce
- Missouri Department of Economic Development-Division of Workforce Development

A very special recognition goes to the Student Veterans of America. Their work in establishing the *Veteran Center Handbook for Student Veterans* was the foundation for Missouri's guide.

Behavioral Health Support

The following are suggestions of ways your institution can provide behavioral health support to your Student Veterans.

Are faculty, staff, and administrators trained to identify student veterans at-risk? If not, promote training. Work to secure the support from upper-level administrators. Here are some examples of programs to help identify students in crisis:

- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** is a course designed to teach the general public how to recognize symptoms of mental health problems, how to offer and provide initial help, and how to guide a person toward appropriate treatments and other supportive help. For more information on this, visit Mental Health First Aid in Missouri at <http://mhfamissouri.org/>.
- **Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)**. *LivingWorks* offers a two-day workshop designed to help in preventing the immediate risk of suicide. For more information contact the Missouri Suicide Prevention Program at mspp@dmh.mo.gov.
Columbia College has developed a
- **Kognito's Veterans On Campus for Faculty & Staff** is an online, interactive training program that helps faculty and staff learn about the needs and experiences of Student Veterans, including (1) the unique value they bring to campus, (2) obstacles they may face in their pursuit of a college degree, (3) effective techniques for managing classroom discussions around topics that may be sensitive to Veterans, and (4) best practices for connecting Student Veterans exhibiting signs of psychological distress with support. Available on their website <http://www.kognito.com/products/voc/>.
- Faculty and Staff training. Schools should be encouraged to establish training programs that address the needs of their veteran students. This should include how to refer a student to resources such as counseling using both internal and external resources. An example of this is an online video that is part of the campus training program.
- Promote Military Culture competency training to your campus counselors. A list of online training for clinicians is available at the MO Department of Mental Health's Veterans webpage <http://dmh.mo.gov/veterans.htm>.

Have an established crisis intervention policy that includes:

- A direct line to a specific person in the campus counseling center that is trained or experienced with the unique needs of the military community. Identifying a counselor with prior service experience is a plus.

- Require faculty, staff, or administrator to physically escort the Student Veteran to care; do NOT give them directions and watch them walk away.
- If the institution does not have a crisis line, the MO Department of Mental Health has Access Crisis Intervention (ACI) line, which is staffed by mental health professionals who can respond to your crisis 24 hours per day and seven days per week. They will talk with you about your crisis and help you determine what further help is needed. For example, a telephone conversation to provide understanding and support, a face-to-face intervention, an appointment the next day with a mental health professional, or perhaps an alternative service that best meets your needs. They may give you other resources or services within your community to provide you with ongoing care, following your crisis. All calls are strictly confidential. For the nearest ACI hotline visit: <http://dmh.mo.gov/mentalillness/progs/acimap.htm>.

VA Behavioral Health Services

Ensure that Student Veteran Center staff and your counseling center know how to connect with the local VA Medical Center or Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). For locations of VA Facilities visit

<http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/state.asp?STATE=MO&dnum=ALL>.

A common barrier to treatment for Student Veterans is eligibility to VA health benefits. Often, younger Veterans do not feel it is necessary to enroll into the VA system since they are not ill. They should apply now, while they are still eligible and before they need services. Provide a computer workspace and promote applying for their VA health benefits.

http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/application_process.asp

Missouri Behavioral Health Services

If a student veteran needs behavioral health assistance but is unsure about what state assistance they are eligible for, contact the MO department of Mental Health at (573) 751-4942 or (800) 575-7480. The helpdesk will connect you to the nearest Administrative Agent that can assist the Student Veteran.

To connect Student Veterans with behavioral health professionals off campus, using their own insurance (i.e. TRICARE), the MO Department of Mental Health has a web-based interactive map: <http://dmh.mo.gov/veterans.htm>.

Educational Support

The following are suggestions of ways your institution can provide educational support to your Student Veterans.

Offer an orientation course for new student veterans. This will assist them with the transition from military to civilian life.

Offer credit for CLEP/DSST.

Offer ACE credit for military credit. Have the credit count toward satisfying transfer credit requirements for admissions, as well as degree requirements.

Have flexible, military friendly policies that cover:

- Transferring students due to Permanent Change of Station (PCS), Estimated Time of Separation (ETS) or Temporary Duty Assignment (TDY). This should include dependent family members.
- Military students removed from school due to PCS or deployments. Include a policy for when they return from a deployment to pick up where they left off.
- In-state tuition without residency requirements for Student Veterans and their dependents.
- (Example) College offers a delayed payment option for Student Veterans using VA CH33 benefits. Note: require that a payment plan (credit card preferred) be established, should the student default on the payment plan.

Provide some assistance with reducing fees. Below are some examples of this:

Note: Reducing fees for Student Veterans is a way to say "thank you" for their service. If you are considering reducing fees, look into having community supporters and partnerships cover the cost of the fee reduction, instead of the campus taking on the financial burden.

- (Example) Military Tuition Package applies to those who are using military tuition assistance or the G.I. Bill to fund their education. The tuition package applies to members of all five service branches of the military, including reservists, who are "benefit eligible" and seeking a degree. Benefits of the Military Tuition Package include:
 - Exemption from the per credit hour mandatory general student fee.
 - Exemption from the application for admission fee*.
 - Exemption from the new student fee.
 - Exemption from the parking permit fee.

Note: payment of the application fee will be required, but will be refunded to the student account following the application approval, enrollment, and eligibility verification process.

- Establish scholarships or grants internally.
 - (Example) College offers the first class free to military family members when they have enrolled for a full-time course schedule.
 - Offer some assistance with books costs.
- **Yellow Ribbon Program.** The Yellow Ribbon GI Education Enhancement Program (Yellow Ribbon Program) is a provision of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. This program allows institutions of higher learning (degree granting institutions) in the United States to voluntarily enter into an agreement with VA, to fund tuition expenses that exceed either the annual maximum cap for private institutions or the resident tuition and fees for a public institution. The institution can contribute up to 50% of those expenses and VA will match the same amount as the institution. For more information on this, school administrators should visit http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/yellow_ribbon/yellow_ribbon_info_schools.asp.
- **Missouri Returning Heroes Education Act Grants.** The Missouri Returning Heroes Education Act requires Missouri public postsecondary institutions to limit eligible combat veterans' tuition to \$50 per credit hour. Some restrictions apply. MO Department of Higher Education offers more information on this, visit <http://www.dhe.mo.gov/files/moretheroesact.pdf>.

Promote completing the FAFSA with your Student Veterans. They may feel that since they receive the GI Bill, they are not eligible for other financial assistance, but this is not always the case.

Look at ways to identify those Student Veterans at risk of dropping out, so you can assist them.

Establish a network to assist Student Veterans who are at risk of not completing their degree. An example of this is a Retention Alert Team. This is a network of people that are ready to provide academic, employment, financial, or other supports needed.

VA Campus Toolkit. The VA has a collection of helpful tips and resources for faculty, staff and administrators. <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveteran/index.asp>

Employment Support

The following are suggestions of ways and resources your institution can provide employment support to your Student Veterans.

Have an established network within the community to assist with employing Student Veterans. Also develop support for the family members of Student Veterans. Universities and colleges will have some form of liaison that already interacts with businesses in the surrounding area. Ensure you work with this liaison instead of going out on your own, as it may cause conflict with existing networks. For information on what local Missouri Chamber of Commerce is available in your area, visit <http://www.mochamber.com/mx/hm.asp?id=LocalChambers>.

Campus Career Day. Most campuses host Career Days. Add an hour to the career day that is for Student Veterans only and let the participating employers know that there will be time set aside for military veterans. Develop an information sheet for employers that promote the advantages to hiring military veterans. For some ideas on how to create this info sheet visit <https://www.hireheroesusa.org/hire-a-veteran/why-hire-a-veteran/> and <http://www.gijobs.com/why-hire-military.aspx>.

Hero 2 Hired (H2H). Works with Reserve Component Service Members. This organization provides Service Members with connections and finds job opportunities with military-friendly companies. H2H also offers career exploration tools, military-to-civilian skills translations, and education and training resources, as well as a mobile app. <https://h2h.jobs/#1>

Local Veterans Employment Representatives & Disabled Veteran Outreach Program. The MO Department of Economic Development-Division of Workforce Development has Veterans Services staff throughout the state who are dedicated to assisting Veterans with career transition and employment services. Visit <http://jobs.mo.gov/jobseeker/find-a-career-center>

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR). Missouri's ESGR representatives are available to assist, in ESGR-related matters that do not require intervention between an employer and Service Member. <http://www.esgr.mil/Contact/Local-State-Pages/Missouri.aspx>

National Guard Employment Network (NGEN). NGEN serves as a network for employment resources and facilitates communication between job seekers, service providers and employers to increase job and career match opportunities, which supports family and force readiness, resilience and retention. <http://www.nationalguard.com/tools/employment-network>.

G.I. Jobs. Offers assistance with job search engines, access to virtual job fairs, pay calculator to determine how much civilian pay a Veteran would need to maintain their current standard of living, tips on resume building, what to wear at interviews and more. <http://www.gijobs.com/default.aspx#>.

Veteran Affairs Work Study Positions. Students who are full-time or 3/4 -time may be eligible to “earn while you learn” with the VA work-study allowance. Students will earn an hourly wage and can arrange the number of hours they work. To see if your student veteran center is eligible for the VA work-study program, select this link: *Create a Veterans Office* (page 14)- *Veteran Affairs Work Study Positions*

Troops To Teachers. The Troops To Teachers (TTT) program seeks to place retiring military personnel and other eligible persons in second careers as public school teachers in elementary, secondary, career and technical, or special education schools. Aims of this program are to relieve teacher shortages, especially in math, science, special education and other high needs subject areas, while also assisting military personnel in making successful transitions to second careers in teaching. <http://troopstoteachers.net/>

Social Support

The following are suggestions of ways your institution can provide social support to your student veterans.

Clubs and Associations:

- **Student Veterans of America (SVA).** SVA is a 501(c)(3) coalition of Student Veterans groups on college campuses across the globe. These member chapters are the “boots on the ground” that help Veterans reintegrate into campus life and succeed academically. Each chapter is an officially-recognized student group by their university or college, and provides a peer-to-peer network for Veterans who are attending the school. Additionally, chapters coordinate campus activities, offer pre-professional networking, and generally provide a touchstone for Student Veterans in higher education. <http://studentveterans.org/>
- **National Association of Institutions for Military Education Services (NAIMES).** A member-driven organization that advocates for the military students and partners with the military education community, for the betterment of off-duty, voluntary education programs. <http://naimes.org/>
- **National Association of Veteran’s Program Administrators (NAVPA).** An organization of institutions and individuals who are involved or interested in the operation of Veteran's Affairs programs and/or the delivery of services to Veterans as school certifying officials across the country. <http://www.navpa.org/index.html>
- **Association of Veterans Education Certifying Officials (AVECO).** AVECO has the task of preparing and serving administrators and counselors of Veterans' education benefits in institutions of higher learning, as well as other public and private agencies and organizations, engaged in the support and/or administration of Veterans' education benefits. <http://aveco.org/index.html>
- **Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists (WAVES).** WAVES promote high, professional standards, policies, and ethical practices among members; serve the needs and interests of Veterans, faculties, and administrators in the members’ institutions; represent the mutual interests of the membership, on matters coming before the organization; provide a forum to facilitate the interchange of ideas, information, and more. <http://www.uswaves.org/>
- **Council of College and Military Educators (CCME).** CCME is an active proponent for the professional development of those serving in the military education community, by providing a forum for the exchange of information on educational programs, strategies, and innovation among its members and associated partners. <http://www.ccmeonline.org/>
- **Missouri Advisory Council on Military Education (MO-ACME).** Public and private academic institutions in Missouri along with industry that supports this sector are among the nation's leaders in this business. They work with

national organizations like the Council of College and Military Educators (CCME) to stay close with defense and military departments who set policies and administer programs. In Missouri, ACME is the collective voice of those providers to the State government and the military bases. <http://acme-mo.weebly.com/index.html>

- Establish a Veterans Club on campus. An example would be an American Legion Post which requires as little as 15 members. For more about the American Legion see *Veterans Service Organizations* below.
- Establish a Veterans Honors Society.

Networking events. Connect with your campus and community by hosting events. If appropriate, invite some key faculty members to your events. This will allow them to see what the Student Veteran Center is doing, and they can get to know the Student Veteran outside the classroom:

- Sponsor campus sporting events that are held on Veteran holidays. Some ways to accomplish this include scheduling the US Army Golden Knights to deliver the game ball; Color Guard to post the colors during the National Anthem; Offer raffles and provide handouts for the crowds.
- Leadership Speaker series. Some campuses have guest speakers that present on topics ranging from leadership, military service, community service, law, and more.
- Activities. Offer fun activities that are not only on campus but off campus as well. Some examples include Military Movie Night, paintball, trekking, and visiting historic military sites. May consider Veteran-only, family-oriented or even bring a friend events. Bringing family and friends can help raise awareness of the activities and services you offer Student Veterans.

Mentoring program for Veterans. Identify junior or senior peer mentors to assist freshman Student Veterans with the orientation to campus life.

Veterans Service Organizations. These are military Veteran organizations that offer direct services to military Veterans. Some organizations provide opportunities for community service projects. The following are examples of organizations in Missouri and their contact information:

- **American Legion.** The American Legion hosts job fairs; establish charters directly on campus; assist Veterans through projects like Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW), which turns financial donations into gifts that ease with recovery; support youth programs; provide or host family activities; Legion Riders raise money and awareness for Legion programs; Accredited American Legion service officers are specially trained to provide expert assistance, free of charge, to Veterans and their families. While the majority of a service officer's work involves application for VA disability benefits, these compassionate professionals also provide information, referrals, and resources on education, employment, business, death benefits, and

other important topics. To find the chapter in your community, and to learn more about the American Legion, visit their site at <http://www.legion.org/>.

- **Veterans of Foreign Wars.** The VFW has service officers who assist with filing VA Claims and education benefits. Troop support, like *Operation Uplink*, which is a calling program for deployed Service Members, and *Unmet Needs*, which assists with unexpected financial difficulties, are just a few of the programs the VFW offers to Service Member and Veterans. To find the chapter in your community, and to learn more about the Veterans of Foreign Wars, visit their site at <http://www.vfw.org/home/>

For a complete list of Veterans service organizations within Missouri, visit the Missouri Veterans Commission website <http://mvc.dps.mo.gov/mavo.asp>.

The Mission Continues. Through the Mission Continues, veterans serve their country in new ways by engaging in innovative and action-oriented programs. The Mission Continues' Fellowship harnesses Veterans' strengths, skills, and their compassion and empowers them to volunteer with non-profit organizations in their communities on a daily basis. The Mission Continues' Service Platoons, bring teams of Veterans who are working together with partners at the local level to build stronger communities and tackle pressing issues. <https://www.missioncontinues.org/>

Establishing a Student Veteran Center

1. Develop a Veterans Committee

Include major departments, academics, enrollment, faculty, financial aid, and student services. Here are some examples of who to invite: Admission Office, Financial Aid, Counseling Center, Human Resources, Student Health Center, ROTC, ADA Compliance Office and Department Representatives. Including a Student Veteran on the committee can help offer some insight in the work the committee is doing, but prepare the person beforehand about expectations or his/her specific role on the committee.

Identify the Student Veteran population (# and what resources are available). This can usually be done through Admissions or Student Financial Services.

Have the Committee look at making improvements to support the Student Veterans. When recommending any changes, be prepared to show the return on investment:

- Application fees
- Tuition rates
- Admin procedures
- Enrollment. On the enrollment form ask “Have you or a family member ever served in the military?” To help students self-identify, you may want to include an accompanying incentive such as “our college offers financial incentives for those who have served”.
- Registration. Make military Veterans a priority population during registration periods.
- Transfer of military credit. Institutions should have a trained, military transcript specialist review transcripts, during the admission process, to ensure the greatest majority of military credit can be transferred into the Student Veterans’ degree programs.
- Returning to Active-Duty status and deactivation from Active-Duty.

2. Support a Student Veterans Organization

Connect with all of the Student Veterans about establishing a Student Veteran organization. *If sending out a mass email, ensure you use the BCC line for the recipients.*

Host a meeting and assist the Student Veterans in setting up a Student Veteran organization.

Use Student Veterans as a conduit for information, peer mentoring, and support. Create events that educate them on behavioral health, education assistance, and develop job placement skills. The Student Veterans can also identify the needs of their peers and help promote the student veteran organization events.

3. Create a Veteran's Office

Veteran's Services Liaison/Coordinator. This will be your institution's single point of contact and coordinate for veteran services, provide referrals, create programming, and advocate for students with issues related to their military experiences, veteran benefits and student status. This would include but not limited to coordinating and addressing the needs of Service Members, Veterans and their families such as behavioral health, education, employment and social needs.

Veteran Benefit Certifying Official. Process applicable education certifying paperwork for Service Members, Veterans and their families such as VA educational benefits and state grants for Veterans.

Veteran Affairs Work Study Positions. Determine if your institution is eligible for a Department of Veterans Affairs work-study position for a Student Veteran. File for a work-study position using Form 22-8691 found at <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/22-8691.pdf>. For more information on applying for the VA Work-Study Allowance program http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/docs/pamphlets/work_study_program.pdf.

Student Veteran Volunteers. Utilize Student Veteran volunteers to facilitate the process of incorporating a Veterans office on your campus. These same volunteers can be assist with promoting activities and advocate for your programs and services.

Also consider a **Military Transcript Specialist.** Having trained staff that are specifically assigned to military transcripts are better equipped to translate and transfer military credit.

4. Set up a Physical Space

Establish office space. Ideally, this office space will be in a central site and in proximity to student support services.

Make the space look military friendly. Some ways to do this is to have pictures of the different military branches (do not exclude any), display the American flag, military memorabilia and information about resources for veterans (i.e. calendar with Veteran Service Organizations events).

Dedicate space for:

- Lounge
- Computer lab
- Desks/study area
- Meeting area

5. Develop Online and Print Resources

Build a Veteran website that consolidates resources. Your site should be a referral center with available resources within the school, external agencies, informational packages and benefit applications for student veterans. Here are some ideas of what to include on your website:

- Admissions
 - Applications
 - Course catalog
 - Degree offerings
 - Enrollment information
 - Registration information
- Career services
- Family assistance
 - TRICARE
 - Community support systems
- Financial aid
- Housing assistance
- Behavioral health assistance
 - Veteran crisis line
 - Campus counseling
 - VA Medical Center/Vet Center
- News and events related to the campus
- VA educational benefits
- Local Veteran Service Organizations
 - Student Veterans of America
 - American Legion
 - Veterans of Foreign Wars
 - Disabled American Veterans
 - Marine Corps League

Create and distribute print resources. With space at a minimum on campuses, a more efficient way to connect may be to create posters with QR codes.

6. Establish Partnerships

Establish relationships with agencies that support Veterans: Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion to name a few. For contact information see Veteran Service Organizations on page 10.

7. Educate Administration, Faculty, & Staff

Incorporate educational material on Student Veterans into routine training.

Ensure counselors have received training in the unique needs of the military community.

Ensure faculty can identify Veterans struggling with behavioral health issues.

Consider a “Veterans only” orientation service.

8. Converge all Resources in One Place

Create a formal Student Veterans Center and put it all together. Ideally, this center will:

- Be in a location that receives a lot of student traffic.
- Offer a place for the staff to work in without filling the entire space.
- Have private room(s) set aside for confidential counseling.
- Proudly display items that show you support the Student Veterans. Be sure to evenly promote all of the service branches.

9. Evaluate Organizational Success

Develop a plan to monitor and track your performance:

- # of applicants received
- # of students accepted
- # of students enrolled
- # of students assisted by the office (show the need of having your staff and Student Veterans Center)
- Retention rates
- Persistence rates
- Graduation rates

10. Adjust as needed

Making Your Institution Military Friendly

By making your institution military friendly you will attract and retain student veterans. Student Veterans traditionally have a higher rate of degree completion than the general student population. Many Student Veterans are eligible for VA tuition assistance and work which provides financial stability for the student. Bringing revenue into your institution and improving your rate of degree completion should fit within your college or university mission.

The American Council on Education (ACE) has developed a toolkit for veteran friendly intuitions. The online resource is designed to help institutions of higher education build effective programs for veteran students and share information. It highlights a variety of best practices including veterans-specific orientation offerings, on-campus veterans service centers, prospective student outreach efforts, faculty training, and counseling and psychological services for veteran students. It also includes video clips, profiles of student veterans' programs across the U.S., and a searchable database of tools and resources.

<https://vetfriendlytoolkit.acenet.edu/about/Pages/default.aspx>

Here are some additional ideas and examples of how to make your institution military friendly:

- (Example) ***We Served*** placards. Some faculty, staff and administrators have served in the military. To let students see this, develop a placard or sticker that states this person has served in the military and place it outside their office. The benefit of this is letting student veterans feel like they are not alone. This may also be a way for student veterans in crisis to seek assistance since they are more likely to ask for help from a fellow veteran.
- (Example) ***We Support Veterans*** posters. Colleges and Universities have developed veteran friendly posters that explain some of the services available to Student Veterans on campus. To save space, consider using ***QR Code*** on your posters.