Student Veterans on Campus: Academic Success via the Libraries

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Overview

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The New Greatest Generation

A visionary gift from Steven and Alexandra Cohen brings much-needed mental health services to veterans.

by C. L. Max Nikias  Summer 2016

Millions of Americans have served in the U.S. military and returned to civilian life since our nation was attacked on 9/11. Many more will join them in the years ahead. By 2019, America's post-WWII veterans population will exceed three million people.

Our nation owes an enormous debt to these new veterans. Indeed, they have earned recognition as America's "New Greatest Generation." And our universities need to support them to the fullest extent possible, including through the Yellow Ribbon Program, which removes financial barriers that often stand in the way.

The challenges our newest veterans face as they transition to civilian life are not unprecedented. Over 70 years ago, an earlier generation of military veterans came home from war and underwent a similar transition. Indeed, that generation's veterans helped our nation develop the world's leading economy — and earned recognition in America's "Greatest Generation."

A key element of that generation's successful transition to civilian pursuits was the opportunity to attend college with tuition funded by the 1944 G.I. Bill. That legislation made higher education possible for millions of Americans who had served in World War II.

The new G.I. Bill now provides the same opportunity for our newest veterans, though where tuition exceeds the national maximum amount provided by the G.I. Bill, as is the case with most private universities, additional funding, both from the government and through financial aid from universities is needed — and that is exactly what the Yellow Ribbon Program helps to facilitate.

The Yellow Ribbon Program was established by the Post-WWII Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 to allow private universities in the United States to partner with the Veterans Administration (VA) in funding tuition and other expenses not covered by the new G.I. Bill for qualified veterans. Funding comes from both the participating university and the VA, which matches what the university provides.

The Yellow Ribbon Program ensures that student veterans with the right qualifications can afford to attend even the most elite private universities in America. And given that 23 of our nation's top 25 research universities are private, this is a very important program.

Unfortunately, however, only a handful of the 25 top private universities are taking full advantage of the program and ensuring that the total cost of undergraduate tuition is covered. The others either limit their funding or put a cap on the number of available slots for veteran undergraduates.

The University of Southern California (USC) is now one of the top private research universities that will ensure full undergraduate tuition funding and offer unlimited slots for academically qualified veterans. Through May 15, all US universities have the opportunity to likewise revise their Yellow Ribbon commitments with the VA for the 2016-2017 school year. We encourage the remaining 15 institutions, as well as other private universities and colleges, to join us. We all need to ensure that those who volunteered to serve our nation in a time of war have the necessary academic qualifications and a pathway to an education from the best schools America has to offer.

USC is proud to have one of the largest student veteran populations of any private research university in America. Today, USC enrolls nearly 900 veterans or active duty service members and military dependents. Nearly 300 of them are Yellow Ribbon Program recipients. And 57 came to USC as community college transfers, taking advantage of a critical pathway for high-achieving veterans who benefit from the opportunity to demonstrate their academic excellence at a community college after...
Surge of Student Veterans

- The 2008 Post-9/11 GI Bill
- Scale-down of military operations
- 1+ million veterans/family members
- $42+ billion spent
- 96% post secondary institutions
- 4% of national study body
Student Veterans

- Ages: 24 - 40
- Male: 73%
- First generation: 62%
- Married/have children: 47%
- Mature, self-directed, sense of responsibility, teamwork, disciplined, global perspectives
- Transitioning and integrating
- Physical and mental health issues
Research Questions

• What types of services and resources are presently offered?

• What are the perceived values and benefits of such services by librarians and student veterans?
Research Design

• Mixed-methods
• Survey of academic libraries
• Website content analysis
• Interview of USC student veterans
Library Survey

- Subject: 172 four-year institution libraries
- IRB approved
- Instrument: 14 questions
- Subject: Dean or director of the libraries
- Period: 2/2 – 29/2016
- Invitation + 2 reminders
- 58 response
Library Survey

I. Participants

![Bar chart showing participants by job title.]

- **Library Dean / Director**: 10
- **Librarian**: 8
- **Department Head / Director**: 7
- **Associate / Assistant Dean or Director**: 7
- **Coordinator**: 2
- **Manager**: 1
- **No answer**: 1
I. Services provided

Library Services Offered to Student Veterans (n=36)

- Liaison: 21
- Orientation: 14
- LibGuides: 13
- None: 12
- Exhibits: 8
- Workshops: 8
- PILOTS: 6
- Collection: 6
- Email: 5
- Social Media: 4
- Other: 3
- Space: 2

University of Southern California
I. Driving Forces

### Advocates of Services for Student Veterans

- **Librarians**: 13
- **Other**: 11
- **Library Dean/Director**: 6
- **Library staff**: 5
- **Student veterans**: 2
II. Collaboration with Other Groups

▪ On campus – 15
  ▪ Student veteran offices
  ▪ Veteran student organizations
  ▪ Learning resource center
  ▪ Counseling Services
  ▪ Career Services
  ▪ Student Services
  ▪ Office of Undergraduate Retention
  ▪ Student advisors
II. Collaboration with Other Groups

▪ Off campus – 2
  ▪ Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities
  ▪ Local public libraries, Wounded Warrior Project
III. Organizational Support

▪ Training – 6
  ▪ Disability training
  ▪ Green Zone training

▪ Liaison – 21
  ▪ Reference librarian (3), instruction librarian (3), outreach librarian (2), undergraduate librarian, department head, director

▪ Funding – 2
IV. Program Assessment

- No systematic assessment
- Success
  - Number of participants
  - Red, white, and blue tassels
  - Ranking
IV. Program Assessment

▪ Benefits
  ▪ Contributing to their academic success
  ▪ Fulfilling their unique needs
  ▪ Offering welcoming, inclusive environment
  ▪ Providing spaces
  ▪ Rewarding experience
  ▪ Enhancing university community and classroom environment
IV. Program Assessment

▪ Challenges
  ▪ Self-identification
  ▪ Unsure their needs
  ▪ Many commitments
  ▪ Reserved, not asking questions
  ▪ Building trust
  ▪ Academic issues
Web Content Analysis

Libraries with libguide designed to help Veterans

- 13/172 (7.6%) offered a veteran specific Libguides
- 9 public, 4 Private
- Veterans averaged 2.2% of student body (2014)
- 7 Were ranked on the Military Times’ “Best for Vets: Colleges 2016”
Web Content Analysis

11 Institutions with libguides for veterans

• Texas A&M (#23)
• Bowling Green State University (#25)
• Niagara University (#45)
• University of Southern California (#69)
• University of Illinois- Urbana-Champaign (#71)
• University of South Carolina- Aiken (#80)
• SUNY- Plattsburgh (#91)
• Northwestern Michigan College (Unranked)
• University of Pennsylvania (Unranked)
• University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill (Unranked)
• Wright State University (Unranked)
Interview USC Student Veterans

Veteran-Led Focus Group:

• 9 Undergraduate Student Veterans
  – Utilize Veteran Resource Center
  – 7 majors in 3 Fields: Business, Biological Sciences, Engineering
  – 50% commuters
    • On-campus time management
  – 2:1 First generation college students
    • Learning how to navigate academia
  – All transferred students
    • No library orientation
  – Recorded and transcribed
Focus Group Themes

1. Value library services
   - Libguides, course reserve sites, ILL
   - Usage varies by major

2. Non-traditional students
   - Managing on-campus time essential
   - Study spaces are prime real estate
   - Other commitments

3. Disconnect
   - Unaware library services
Interview USC Student Veterans

Recommendations

1. Recognize the unique needs of student veterans
   - more mature, focused, and task oriented
2. Educate library personnel on working with veterans
3. Reach out to student veterans
   - Dedicated liaison / POC
   - Provide an orientation for student veterans
4. Team up with other campus organizations
   - Veteran’s centers
5. Offer more study spaces with longer opening hours
Serving Those Who Have Served

• Evolving services
• Campus initiative
• Limited resources
• Lack of assessment
• Collaboration is the key
• Positive experiences
• Increasing awareness