

# **FROM SOLDIER TO SCHOLAR:**

## **REPORT OF THE COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS AD HOC COMMITTEE ON STRENGTHENING SERVICES TO VETERANS**

**APRIL 8, 2013**



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**Introduction**

The United States of America has been at war for the past decade, conducting Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq, and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) in Afghanistan. Nearly 2.4 million veterans have served in these two wars. Because the country has ended its military combat presence in Iraq, and is in the process of winding down the war in Afghanistan, large numbers of veterans have recently returned home, and many more will be returning home in the coming year. In light of these unprecedented events, the country faces a complex and compelling challenge: how best to reintegrate significant numbers of veterans who have served their country and are now expected to transition to civilian life.

This reality presents important opportunities to the City University of New York (CUNY) which has historically played a critical role in facilitating similar transitions for previous generations of returning soldiers. To understand the dimensions of this opportunity, and to ensure that CUNY is providing a supportive and welcoming environment for this generation of returning veterans, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein convened a Task Force on Veterans Affairs (formally called the Council of Presidents Ad Hoc Committee on Strengthening Services to Veterans) to assess the dimensions of the veteran population at CUNY, review policies designed to facilitate their transition from the military to an educational environment, and make recommendations to ensure that the University plays a constructive role in meeting this unique national challenge.

Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are in many ways quite similar to other generations who have fought on behalf of the nation. As in previous eras of military conflict, our veterans are typically young adults -- over half (54%) are 20-29 years old. Yet, in ways different from previous veteran cohorts, these individuals reflect new realities of the military engagements in which they have served. For example, about a third (34%) of OEF/OIF/OND veterans were deployed multiple times (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). Veterans returning from military service also face a host of emotional, financial, academic, and cultural obstacles. A recent study by the NY State Health Foundation (2011) found that 22% of New York state veterans have a probable mental health diagnosis based on symptoms reported over the past 30 days (depression or PTSD). The same study found that veterans have significantly worse physical functioning scores than similar individuals in the general population. A report issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) found that the unemployment rate for male Gulf War era veterans aged 18-24 was 29.1%, significantly higher than that of young male non-veterans at 17.6%.

For purposes of this report, one of the most important characteristics of veterans is their educational profile. As of 2010, only 26% of veterans age 25 or older had a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In the belief that higher education would be an appropriate benefit

in recognition of their service and to facilitate their upward mobility, Congress enacted the Post 9/11 GI Bill which provides improved veteran education benefits packages. As a result of this historic legislation, in part because of the substantial flow of returning veterans, colleges have nearly doubled their enrollment of student veterans since the Post 9/11 GI Bill was enacted in 2008 (ACE, 2011). More than 760,000 veterans have already enrolled in college under the Post 9/11 GI Bill (ACE, 2011), and these numbers are expected to climb. In unprecedented numbers, returning veterans as well as active military personnel are choosing to enroll in college to improve their skills, enhance their job prospects, and ease their transition from military to civilian life.

Recent articles (Wood, 2012; Boodman, 2011), however, have suggested that these student veterans are facing significant challenges in their college experiences. Rudd, Goulding, & Brian (2011) found in a national sample of student veterans that almost 35% of the sample experienced “severe anxiety,” 24% experienced “severe depression,” and almost 46% experienced significant symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. It is therefore paramount that colleges meet the needs of veterans in an organized and systemic way to ensure their smooth transition out of the military and into the classroom, and thereby support their ultimate graduation from college into the workforce.

CUNY is uniquely positioned to offer returning veterans an opportunity to enroll in higher education. As one of the nation’s largest public university systems, CUNY provides an excellent educational opportunity at an affordable price. Student veterans who are eligible for the Post 9/11 GI Bill at 100% and are residents of New York State can attend CUNY at no cost. In addition, they are provided a living stipend that is among the highest in the country. Students at all levels of college preparedness may benefit from enrollment at one of CUNY’s campuses. Furthermore, student veterans who are often older and certainly come with different experiences than the “typical” college student may feel more at home at CUNY given the number of non-traditional students who attend the University.

CUNY has already proven to be attractive to student veterans. According to University records, the total CUNY enrollment of veterans or military personnel was 2,778 in Fall 2012. These students were spread across the CUNY campuses, ranging from 2 students at the CUNY Graduate Center to 382 students at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (see Appendix 1 for a campus by campus breakdown). In recent years, the University has seen significant increases in the number of student veterans. According to the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA), the total number of student veterans enrolled across CUNY has risen from 825 in Fall 2008 to 2,778 in Fall 2012. A number of CUNY campuses have made special efforts to attract and support student veterans. For example, the College of Staten Island, Baruch College, Brooklyn College, Lehman College, Hostos Community College, Kingsborough Community College, Queensborough Community College, City College, Hunter, Bronx Community College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, and John Jay College of Criminal Justice have established veterans’ resource centers to provide service and support to student veterans. Both City College and John Jay College of Criminal Justice have been identified as “military friendly colleges” by G.I Jobs and Military Times Magazine. For these reasons, the number of veterans and military personnel applying to CUNY and studying at CUNY is only predicted to grow larger as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan draw down.

To address the needs of student veterans (including military personnel), examine our current practices, and develop recommendations to improve the experience of student veterans, CUNY Chancellor Goldstein announced the formation of the Task Force on Veterans Affairs. The Task Force was first chaired by College of Staten Island President Tomas Morales, and then by John Jay College of Criminal Justice President Jeremy Travis after President Morales left CUNY for another position. The Task Force members include:

Student Selena Copa, Brooklyn College

Wilfred Cotto, Director, CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs, replaced by Stephen Clark, Acting Director, CUNY Office of Veteran Affairs

President Russell Hotzler, NYC College of Technology

President Carole Berotte Joseph, Bronx Community College

Professor Karen Kaplowitz, John Jay College

Student Demond Mullins, CUNY Graduate Center

Senior University Dean Robert Ptachik

President Felix Matos Rodriguez, Hostos Community College

Vice Chancellor Frank Sanchez

Professor Roger Sherwood, Hunter College

President Mitchel Wallerstein, Baruch College

The Task Force also drew upon the expertise of the following special guests: From John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Vice President Thomas Stafford, Vice President Richard Saulnier, Chief of Staff, Rulisa Galloway- Perry, Director of Counseling Dr. Calvin Chin, Senior Director Dana Trimboli; and from CUNY, Christina Wade from OIR and Lisa Beatha, Office of the University Registrar.

The first meeting of the Task Force was held on December 21, 2011, and the Task Force met 6 more times after that to complete its work. After a thorough examination of current practices at CUNY, and a review of best practices nationally, the Task Force decided to focus its efforts on five areas of inquiry:

- 1) how the University can adopt best practices to create a welcoming and supportive environment for student veterans;
- 2) how the University should respond to decisions by the Veterans Administration regarding coverage for out-of-state tuition;

- 3) how the University defines and counts veterans;
- 4) how the University grants transfer credit for military experience; and
- 5) how the University can engage with the corporate sector to identify career opportunities for student veterans after they graduate.

The following report examines each of these topics, presents findings regarding areas needing improvement, and sets forth recommendations for consideration by the University. The overarching goal of the Task Force is to ensure that the policies and practices of CUNY provide that veterans and military personnel will be welcomed, and will succeed, at the City University of New York.

### **Topic I: Campus Services for Student Veterans – Best Practices**

With veterans flooding institutions of higher education, colleges have an increased obligation to support the professional and academic success of these students while helping them through the transition from military to civilian life. The Task Force recommends several best practices for implementation, some long term and some one time initiatives, with the overarching aim of providing a basic level of support to all veterans throughout CUNY. The recommendations were derived from best practices compiled by the American Council on Education and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

The recommendations below are categorized under 5 general headings:

- 1. Establish the Basics**
- 2. Foster Military Cultural Competency Campus-Wide**
- 3. Streamline the Student Veteran’s Introduction to the College**
- 4. Develop Services and Programming to Ensure a Successful Academic Journey**
- 5. Ensure the Veteran’s Continued Success Post-Graduation**

Many campuses within CUNY have been supporting veterans for some time. Accordingly, for some campuses, these recommendations will seem basic, while for others this is uncharted territory. Each campus should embrace and adapt them in a way that is appropriate for their local culture. Ideally, with these recommendations in place, any veteran on any CUNY campus should feel supported and welcomed.

- 1. Establish the Basics:** It is critical that, at a minimum, the following three recommendations be implemented to begin to address the basic needs of our student veteran populations.

- a. Facilitate the creation of student veteran groups**

The creation of an active student veteran group on campus may be the single most important first step in addressing the unique needs of this segment of the college community. Increasing student veteran networking opportunities can lead to advocacy, peer mentoring interaction, and connection to services. These groups also facilitate word of mouth support for veterans,

consistently identified as the single most effective recruiting method for this population. It is also important to include family members and civilians in this organization in order to "bridge the gap". These student veteran groups should be supported by college faculty or staff members to provide continuity, particularly at community colleges where student turnover is higher (ACE, 2011; Summerlot, J., Green, S., & Parker, D., 2009).

**Recommendations:** Student veterans should be encouraged by Office of Student Life/Student Activities to apply for a "Student Veterans of America Chapter" on campus. This coalition of student veterans groups guides the campus chapters as the "boots on the ground" that help veterans reintegrate into campus life and succeed academically. (<http://www.studentveterans.org>).

**b. Create a veteran-specific space**

The unique nature of the military experience, and the strong need for peer group support noted above, means that veteran-specific spaces are important centers of student success. It is vitally important that each CUNY campus establish a veteran specific space where veterans can gather and services can be coordinated. Ideally such a space would be a centralized location for certifying officials and student veteran organizations. An attached or nearby study area with computer access would provide opportunities for effective study, peer tutoring, and peer mentorship (American Council on Education [ACE], 2011; Dean & Provost, 2009).

**Recommendations:** The following criteria should be considered when finding space for veterans: space should be reasonably close to classrooms and administrative offices, commensurate with veteran population (i.e., 100 veterans on campus=a room to fit 12-15 individuals comfortably), and have sufficient seating, as well as computer and phone access.

**c. Create a single point of contact for veterans, or at the very least designate a vet-knowledgeable point person in relevant offices on campus**

Campuses should employ a one stop model for all information pertaining to veteran services, headed by a dedicated staff member (identified in this document as the Veterans Coordinator) who is located in the designated space noted in part B. This individual should be highly knowledgeable about a broad spectrum of veteran topics from counseling to financial aid, academic resources, and local/federal resources. Ideally, the Veterans Coordinator should maintain relationships with points of contact within each administrative office on campus to foster continuity and a collective knowledge base of issues affecting veterans. In addition, this person should maintain a clear and coherent website that mirrors much of this information (ACE, 2011).

**Recommendations:** Hire or designate a Veterans Coordinator to manage a dedicated space. A webpage should be established to provide detailed information pertinent to prospective and current student veterans.

**2. Foster Military Cultural Competency, Campus-Wide:** According to the American Council on Education publication, *From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members* (July 2012), raising faculty and staff sensitivity to the unique issues faced by military and student veterans and their family members is essential to their success.

a. **Implement top down support through the establishment of a campus task force**

Institutional commitment, particularly from the Office of the President, provides efficiency and effectiveness to policy implementation. One way to ensure policy implementation and the fostering of cultural competency would be through the creation of a campus-based Veterans Task Force. The Task Force should meet one or more times per term. It is critically important to include student veterans on the Task Force and not to simply rely on published materials to understand their needs (ACE, 2011). Faculty members elected by the faculty governance body are also essential members. The Task Force can be useful in enforcing veteran friendly practices and meetings can be used to review reports on student veteran data on an ongoing basis.

**Recommendations:** Establish a cross campus Veteran Task Force which is endorsed by the Office of the President.

b. **Conduct faculty and staff training**

One of the critical issues cited by many veterans and military personnel on college campuses is the stigma they sometimes experience in the college environment. To counteract this stigma, and to create heightened awareness of the issue faced by veterans and military personnel, segments of the campus community should be trained and educated. This training should cover military culture, personal opinions towards military action, specific needs of veterans related to family obligations and reasonable accommodation of disabilities/mental health concerns.

Faculty should be encouraged to open up lines of communication with student veterans both to facilitate better academic performance and also to work with students that have deployment/reserve responsibilities. These responsibilities can cause significant disruptions in the academic cycle of a semester. Faculty should also be aware of resources available on campus to student veterans and how to direct them there (ACE, 2011).

**Recommendations:** Develop a military cultural competence training for faculty and staff at the start of each academic year.

3. **Streamline the Student Veteran's Introduction to the College:** The 2012 report *From Soldier to Student II* also noted that assisting military and student veterans with their transition to the college environment is vital. Only 37 percent of postsecondary institutions with services for military students and veterans provide transition assistance. This number must improve if we want to successfully retain this population.

a. **Strengthen Recruitment Efforts**

Given the large number of veterans who are interested in securing a college education, and the generous benefits now available to them, it is important that CUNY recruiters create special outreach programs to attract these potential students. School recruiters can demonstrate their commitment to veterans at the outset by conducting outreach to prospective students in their respective environments: National Guard or Reserve units, base education offices, education and job fairs, and welcome-home events (ACE, 2011).

**Recommendations:** Recruiters should consider advertising in military trade publications and/or tabling at veteran-specific job and college fairs. Veteran specific recruitment materials should highlight resources, services, and special programs available on campuses.

**b. Tailor Orientation Events for Student Veterans**

The CUNY College should also consider creating a veteran-specific orientation. This can smooth the transition from service to school by acquainting the student with staff, faculty, and peers as well as granting access to information such as relevant campus policies and educational benefit stipulations. In addition, the recruitment offices should conduct phone call and email outreach to incoming classes in advance to engage with students, assess potential attendance, and provide orientation/contact information for those who are unable to be present. (American Council on Education [ACE], 2008).

**Recommendations:** Schedule special orientations and outreach efforts for veterans and military personnel just prior to the fall and spring semesters for incoming students.

**c. Compile a resource guide/handbook**

A handbook referencing local and national resources for veterans can be a useful, centralized tool, provided it is kept updated. It should be comprehensive and contain information such as housing options, G.I. Bill benefits, health and mental health services, tutoring, VA Work Study, financial aid, career services, and points of contact on campus (ACE, 2008).

**Recommendations:** Compile a veteran resource guide/handbook and disseminate widely in both digital and hard copy throughout campus points of contact.

**4. Develop Services and Programming to Ensure a Successful Academic Journey:** the goal of any of our Veteran support services is to implement programs that enable our students to gain the greatest benefit from their educational experience.

**a. Ease access to academic services**

Student veterans may require additional educational support. Student veterans have described lack of knowledge of these services as a major stumbling block to wider utilization (ACE, 2011). Campuses should therefore provide appropriate tutoring resources, as well as make their presence widely known.

**Recommendations:** Publicize academic resources on campus through the veteran point of contact on campus.

**b. Provide specialized student services**

Colleges should prominently display health and mental health services throughout the campus to improve utilization and help remove the stigma of seeking services. Particularly for mental health services, campuses should provide as wide an array of services, including psychological services (individual, group, etc.), in order to increase chances of utilization and successful treatment. Counseling providers should ensure adequate resources are available to female veterans, as their specific needs are often different than male service members (ACE, 2011).



Special attention should also be paid to the family members of service members on campus, inclusive of those receiving benefits and those who are not.

Finally, it is important to recognize that many returning service members may have experienced physical injuries or emotional trauma that will require special attention. Campus accessibility services offices can benefit from being connected to programs that focus on supporting injured service members, such as the Wounded Warrior Project. These offices can also obtain information on disability compensation benefits from the school's VA representative, especially regarding those disabilities common to Iraq and Afghanistan and including traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress (PTS), loss of limb(s), severe burns, deafness, vision difficulties, and learning disabilities.

**Recommendations:** Campus counseling and accessibility centers must be aware of the threat of stigmatization imposed by military culture on help-seeking behaviors and provide outreach accordingly—with discretion. In addition, they must be trained and ready to respond to the unique needs of some segments of the student veteran population.

#### c. **Design curricula for students with military experience**

A pedagogical approach to making meaning of one's military experience can be beneficial to a student veteran educationally and socially. Examples include classes that afford students an opportunity to write about their experiences in service or study military history and/or literature (ACE, 2011; ASHE Higher Education Report, 2011).

**Recommendations:** Campuses should gauge the scope of interest in potential course material (transitional help or military subject matter) via student surveys prior to designing courses. Campuses should consider offering one or two courses per semester that are designed primarily for veterans, but are also open to the general student population.

#### d. **Create additional avenues for Emergency Funding**

Student veterans often experience delays in the disbursement of their VA benefits. These delays can cause significant financial hardship and can interfere with progress in an academic semester. To respond to this situation, the University should create emergency loan programs to compensate for delays in VA benefit disbursement. For example, the University could create a book stipend or loan to tide student veterans over in the interim (as many schools already provide funds allocated for cost of living emergencies rather than books and school supplies). The University can also implement preventative loan programs to anticipate VA delays instead of reacting to them only after they occur (ACE, 2011; Moon, T. L., & Schma, G. A., 2011).

**Recommendations:** The University should establish emergency and contingency funds for student veterans awaiting delayed VA benefit payments.

#### e. **Collaborate with community agencies**

It is important for each college campus to cultivate relationships with local institutions serving veterans. There are tremendous resources in the New York City area devoted to helping veterans. Local VA representatives can make routine visits to campus veteran resource centers to disseminate information, enroll veterans for health benefits, and answer questions. Ideally,

this same representative will serve as a consistent point of contact and connection to the VA when the student is off campus.

**Recommendations:** VA representatives should be invited to visit campus several times during each semester (especially at orientations) to distribute information and answer questions.

5. **Ensure the Veteran's Continued Success Post-Graduation:** the goal is to help student veterans utilize our campuses as a platform for preparing for a careers and graduate study.

- a. **Advance awareness of the unique challenges faced by veterans seeking work**

Campus Career Services Center should facilitate the veteran's transition from school to the workforce by developing appropriate programming. For example, the Career Services Center should host workshops on translating military experience on resumes into civilian-speak or connecting veterans to local industry/corporate hiring representatives (Carr, 2010). In addition, mock interviews, specialized career counseling and collaboration with Accessibility Services for special cases would be helpful. Ideally, they would also identify student veterans on track to graduate to assess their readiness and plans to look for work.

**Recommendations:** Assign a point of contact at Career Services Centers to become knowledgeable about issues affecting job/career-seeking veterans today. The staff member should identify and develop industry/corporate relationships with military friendly employers to support and identify employment opportunities for our student veterans.

## **Topic II: Out-of-State Tuition Policy for Veterans**

During the course of the deliberations of the Task Force, a new issue arose that carries significant implications for the ability of the City University of New York to attract and retain student veterans. In 2011, the Veterans Administration issued a ruling to the effect that veterans would no longer be covered for non-resident tuition if they attended a public institution as an out-of-state student.

The Task Force recognized that this change in policy by the Veterans Administration made attendance at CUNY colleges financially unattractive for returning veterans who, at the time of their enlistment counted their state of residence as any state other than New York. Since nearly all of these veterans attend full-time they became responsible for almost \$8,000 in tuition charges not covered by the Veterans Administration. Under current University policy, the state of residence at the time the veteran enters service determines whether in-state tuition rates apply. If this policy is not modified, CUNY will be at a competitive disadvantage with other public universities that have enacted policies waiving out-of-state tuition rates for veterans. Through research conducted by the Task Force, it was determined that several states (including Ohio, Alaska, Colorado, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Kentucky) have waived out-of-state tuition for returning veterans.

Accordingly, to encourage veterans to apply to CUNY, and furthermore to encourage those who live out of New York State to bring their skills and talents to New York State, the Task Force recommends that the CUNY Board of Trustees adopt a one-year waiver policy. Under the proposed policy, the University would charge in-state tuition to all veterans for their first year as

CUNY students. If, however, after the first year of study at CUNY, veterans living out of state do not establish residency within New York State, the proposed policy would ensure that out-of-state tuition rates would apply. The Task Force believes that this new policy, which would result in some level of forgone tuition, would ultimately attract more veterans to CUNY whose tuition, covered by their VA benefits, would offset any short-term revenue losses. More importantly, this change in policy will underscore the University's desire to attract the best applicants to CUNY and to encourage returning veterans to consider CUNY – and a future in New York State -- as they weigh their college options.

**Recommendations:**

- a. Beginning with the fall 2013 semester all CUNY student veterans should be provided one full academic year to establish residency in the State of New York. During this period of time, the resident tuition rate will apply.
- b. Residency should continue to be verified according to current rules except that the one year waiting period will be waived. Veterans who meet the residency requirement at the end of the one year period will continue to be charged the resident rate.
- c. Veterans who fail to meet the residency requirements after one full academic year will be charged at the non-resident rate.

**Topic III: Definitional Issues**

**1. The need for a standard definition of “veteran” and “military personnel” to be used across CUNY.**

It became immediately clear to the Task Force that the University lacked a clear definition of “veteran” or “military personnel,” a necessary precondition for effective planning and service delivery. Defining student veterans and military personnel is important for three reasons. First, the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration utilize specific definitions of “veteran” to determine the level of benefits an individual may receive. Second, it is important that CUNY identify student veterans and military personnel in order to reach out to them and offer them appropriate services. Finally, understanding the true size of CUNY’s veteran and military personnel population and collecting accurate data will help guide planning and programmatic decisions.

In general parlance, the word “veterans” generally refers to individuals who have served in the armed forces but are not currently active. The Department of Education, however, defines “veterans” in the following way: “Veterans are those who were in active service (which includes basic training) and were released under a condition other than ‘dishonorable.’ This includes those who fraudulently entered the service as long as their entire period of service was not voided. There is no minimum amount of time the student has to have served to be a veteran, but it does have to be active service.”<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Education’s definition is important because this definition determines whether student veterans are entitled to educational benefits provided by the Veterans Administration. Indeed, each college within CUNY has a Veterans Certifying Official who is

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<sup>1</sup> 38 CFR section 3.12(a).

charged with reviewing the discharge documents that each veteran is issued upon completion of service. Veterans Certifying Officials are responsible for contacting the Veterans Administration to “certify” that the student veteran is indeed a veteran, using this definition, and is therefore entitled to benefits. We propose to use the Department of Education definition of “veteran” here at CUNY. This definition includes individuals who received “other than honorable” discharges.<sup>2</sup>

A decision to count as “veterans” all students who have served in the Armed Forces even if they received an “other than honorable discharge” would represent recognition of important realities among CUNY students. There are many reasons why a student who has served in the armed forces may have received an “other than honorable” discharge, and the Task Force believes these students should be counted as veterans, and as importantly, may benefit from the extra support provided to all veterans. Some of these individuals with other than honorable discharges may have had to leave the armed forces because of emotional difficulty or because of a family emergency, and some of these individuals may have been discharged under the former “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. A second term -- the phrase “military personnel” -- also requires more careful definition within CUNY. This phrase generally refers to individuals who are currently serving in the armed forces either through active duty or reserve. Students who are currently serving in the armed forces need the same kinds of outreach and support as student veterans. These students who are military personnel are often entitled to the same educational benefits as veterans, and need to be tracked and coded by the University to be certified as eligible to receive these benefits. By including “military personnel” among the students eligible for special support, CUNY will also assist these students in making the transition from military service to the classroom.

### **Recommendations:**

- a. “Veteran” and “military personnel” should be defined in the following ways for CUNY data collection:

*Veteran* –those who were in active military service (which includes basic training) and were released under a condition other than “dishonorable.”

*Military Personnel* – persons currently serving in the armed forces of the United States, whether on active duty or reserve or in the National Guard.

## **2. Data Tracking and Counting Student Veterans**

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to “other than honorable” discharges, individuals can also receive “dishonorable” discharges. The number of individuals who receive “dishonorable” discharges is quite small. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center (2012), out of 305,127 service members who were discharged in calendar year 2011, only 75 received “dishonorable” discharges. It is up to each campus’ discretion whether to admit or assist students who may have received “dishonorable” discharges.

How the University counts the number of student veterans also raises definitional concerns. Currently, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) counts the number of student veterans through the use of the official Show-registration enrollment file submitted by each college, for each term. On each campus, the appropriate officials – either Registrars or Veterans Certifying Officials -- code students as “veterans” or “military personnel” when these students get certified for VA benefits on campus. In June 2012, the office of the University Registrar issued a memo that clarified the official university list of codes to be used to classify veterans and military personnel (see Appendix 2). The Task Force finds it noteworthy that a student need not be certified for benefits through the VA in order to be coded as a veteran or military personnel. Specifically, there are codes that classify a student as a “veteran without benefits.” There are also codes that can be used when the student is a veteran but it is unclear whether he or she is entitled to benefits. Finally, there are also codes for students who are on reserve or on active duty in the National Guard. The Task Force examined this coding system and found that it met the Task Force recommendations (see above) for categorizing the different types of student veterans and military personnel.

The Task Force also found, however, that there is substantial need for improved compliance in utilizing the codes issued by the University Registrar. The wide disparity among campuses in their levels of compliance has a negative effect on the accuracy of the data. On some campuses, Veterans Certifying Officials do not have direct access to SIMS/CUNY FIRST, the student information systems currently in use within CUNY. The Task Force recommends that Veterans Certifying Officials across CUNY should all have access to SIMS/CUNY FIRST to ensure that the codes are consistent. The consequences of this shortcoming are profound: unless the coding system developed by the University Registrar is fully and consistently utilized across the entire University, CUNY will not be able to determine the number of student veterans and military personnel attending the University, or track the different levels of benefits and reserve or active duty status.

In addition to fully matriculated student veterans, there are also student veterans who may be students in Continuing Education programs. In July 2012, the Department of Veterans Affairs created the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), which offers up to 12 months of training assistance to unemployed veterans who are between the ages of 35 and 60 and who are not eligible for any other VA education program (e.g., the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Assistance). Participants must be enrolled in a VA approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school. The program must lead to an Associate Degree, Non-College Degree, or a Certificate, and train the Veteran for a high demand occupation. Currently, there are 57 students enrolled at Kingsborough Community College through VRAP, and the numbers are expected to grow. Currently, the OIRA does not include continuing education students in their counts of student veterans. Given the possibility of an increase in the usage of this program, the Task Force recommends that CUNY campuses make an effort to collect this data on their own.

**Recommendations:**

- a. Registrars and Veterans Certifying Officials should be reminded of the official list of university codes for veterans and military personnel. The University Registrar

should work together with the Business Process Owner of the CUNY First Veterans page to ensure consistency in use of the official list across the University. Special attention should be paid to the existing codes that are suitable for student veterans who do not elect to receive benefits or whom may be ineligible for benefits.

- b. Colleges across CUNY should standardize which campus official is responsible for maintaining student databases. All Veterans Certifying Officials should be granted access to SIMS/CUNY FIRST so that they can be the point people on campus to ensure that student veterans and military personnel are coded correctly.
- c. Each campus should make a concerted effort to code all student veterans and military personnel on campus, regardless of whether they meet the criteria to be certified as “veterans” who are entitled to VA benefits.
- d. CUNY campuses should be aware of student veterans who may enroll as continuing education students through VRAP and keep a separate count of these student veterans as they are not currently included in OIRA reports.

### **3. Utilizing Admission Data to Maximize Counts of Veterans and Military Personnel**

Under the current CUNY application procedures, students can self-identify as veterans or military personnel when they first apply to the University. On the CUNY application for admission, applicants are asked: “Have you ever served in any branch of the United States Armed Forces?” These data are highly valuable because they provide the largest estimate of our veteran and military personnel population, regardless of benefit eligibility. As the number of veterans applying to CUNY increases in the future, tracking these data will allow the University to determine whether CUNY is attractive to individuals returning from military service, to predict the level of services needed on campuses, and to gauge whether a CUNY educational opportunity is attractive to this category of prospective students.

Students can also apply to individual CUNY campuses directly through a paper-based “Direct Admit” application that is unique to each campus. Students may apply directly to individual CUNY campuses if they miss the deadline for the centralized application for admission. It is incumbent on each campus, however, to make sure that applicants are asked “Have you ever served in any branch of the United States Armed Forces?” on this application so that student veterans can be identified.

For these reasons, it is important for data from the admission files to be used to identify students as veterans or military personnel. Those students who self-identify as veterans or military personnel on their applications could be automatically coded within SIMS or CUNY First as “veteran – benefit unknown”. After these students become certified, the code could then be updated to reflect their benefit status. This seamless flow of information from the application file to the data files for enrolled students would generate a database of students eligible for supportive services, particularly benefits, on each campus.

#### **Recommendations:**

- a. CUNY campuses should make sure that their “Direct Admit” applications include the question “Have you ever served in any branch of the United States Armed Forces?”
- b. Enrollment management staff should use the admission data to identify student veterans and military personnel.
- c. Those students who self-identify as veterans or military personnel on their applications should be automatically coded by the Registrar as “veteran-benefit unknown” upon enrollment. This code can be updated once these students get certified for benefits through the Veterans Certifying Official on campus.

#### **4. Outreach to Student Veterans to Encourage them to Self-Identify**

Outreach is needed to encourage students who may not be eligible for benefits because of their discharge status or other reasons to identify themselves as veterans. Colleges should complete outreach campaigns to explicitly encourage students who may have served in the armed forces but were “other than honorably” discharged to come forward and identify themselves as veterans. This will require explicit messages because students who have been “other than honorably” discharged may not identify themselves as “veterans” because they are excluded from VA benefits. Yet these students may still benefit from specific college resources that are designated for veterans and military personnel.

On each campus, there are a number of different offices, beyond Financial Aid and the Registrar that can be employed in this outreach effort. These offices include Admissions, Bursar, Student Affairs, Counseling, SEEK, Academic Support/Tutorial Centers, Career Services, Childcare, and the Office of Student Access/Disability. Each office should encourage “other than honorably” discharged student veterans who may not have self-identified as “veterans” to do so. If these students do decide to self-identify, these offices can assist the student in connecting with the Registrar to update the students coding within SIMS or CUNY First.

#### **Recommendations:**

- a. CUNY colleges should encourage student veterans who may have been “other than honorably” discharged to self-identify as veterans. This can be done through advertisements in student publications, student radio stations, campus websites and other forms of campus media.
- b. “Other than honorably” discharged student veterans should be told to alert the registrar or the Veterans Certifying Official on campus of their status so they may be coded correctly in SIMS or CUNY First.
- c. Offices that may serve student veterans (e.g., Admissions, Bursar, Student Affairs, Counseling, SEEK, Academic Support/Tutorial Centers, Career Services, Childcare, and the Office of Student Access/Disability, etc.) should encourage “other than honorably” discharged student veterans who may not have self-identified as “veterans” to do so.

#### **Topic IV: Transfer Credits and Military Equivalencies**

##### **1. Update policy regarding transfer credits for military experience.**

Student veterans and military personnel come to college with extensive training through their experiences serving in the military. The American Council on Education (2011) recommends that colleges should recognize this experience and training from the military in evaluating transfer credit. This recommendation is reinforced by the Service Members Opportunity Colleges Consortium, a network of over 1,900 nationally accredited colleges and universities that provide educational opportunities for members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families. National best practices for educational institutions that are determined to be “military friendly” also suggest that student veterans and military personnel should be given transfer credit for their military experience as well as any coursework they completed while serving in the Armed Forces (Moon & Schma, 2011).

The Task Force embraced the rationale of these national guidelines and recommends that CUNY should award transfer credit for military experiences and courses. The Task Force believes this is an appropriate stance for CUNY not only because this would track national standards of best practice, but also because, as an academic institution, it is appropriate that CUNY recognizes the legitimacy of these educational experiences obtained in the military. Stated differently, the Task Force believes that students who wish to transfer credits for courses taken in the Armed Forces should be treated no differently than students who wish to transfer credits for courses taken at any other colleges and universities.

Currently, to determine the number of credits to be award for courses offered by the military and for military experience, CUNY colleges operate under a policy that was drafted in the 1950's. This policy is part of the Manual of General Policy (MGP; Article VII, Section 7.10), which consolidates the non-bylaw policy action items passed by the Board of Trustees. The policy that relates to credit for military experience is copied below, and includes the dates of the meetings of the CUNY Board of Trustees at which each policy was adopted:

*College credits may be allowed up to a maximum of eighteen in specific subject matter areas for the satisfactory completion of USAFI courses. Furthermore, efforts should be made to set up facilities in the colleges to test competence and allow credit therefore when requested by those students who have not had an opportunity to submit to the USAFI examinations. (BTM,1952,04-21,013,)*

*Credit for educational experiences in the armed forces may be evaluated in terms of the degree toward which the veteran is working, and may be awarded for courses offered in the curriculum of any accredited college as well as areas that might be considered part of a potential curriculum of an accredited college. (BTM,1952,04-21,013,)*

*The stated course requirements for the degree may be modified in the case of the veteran. Such adjustments should be made in consideration of the special justification in the individual case and without weakening the essential import of the degree or certification for which the veteran is a candidate. (BTM,1952,04-21,013,)*



*A maximum allowance of twelve credits for military experience may be granted the veteran who has been in the service for six months or more, and a maximum allowance of six credits for the veteran who has been in service for more than 90 days but less than six months. The granting of this credit shall not deprive the veteran of taking the total number of credits required for his or her degree. (BTM,1952,04-21,013.)*

*The acceptance of credit for both educational and military experience should be permissive with the veteran. (BTM,1952,04-21,013.)*

This policy is problematic in several respects. First, it sets a cap of 12 credits that can be transferred for military experience, regardless of a student's experience and training. No other category of transfer students to CUNY are subjected to such a cap. Furthermore, the policy describes how colleges should award credit for courses taken in the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI), which was disbanded in the 1970's and is no longer operating. For this reason alone, the policy needs to be updated. After careful consideration, the Task Force concluded that the City University Policy should be changed to reflect the recommendations from the American Council on Education (ACE) regarding the award of college credit for military experience.

The American Council on Education (ACE) has developed a Military Guide that delineates specific recommendations for how military experiences and training through both formal courses and on-the-job experiences can be translated to college courses. Education institutions around the country, including CUNY, have used the ACE Guide in granting credit to hundreds of thousands of service members. Many of the nation's colleges and universities use the formal course recommendations in awarding credit to veterans and active-duty service personnel. The recommendations have been widely accepted because formal military courses share certain key elements with traditional postsecondary education programs. They are formally approved and administered, are designed for the purpose of achieving learning outcomes, are conducted by qualified persons with specific subject-matter expertise, and are structured to provide for the reliable and valid assessment of student learning.

In addition to formal military courses, ACE also recognizes that learning can take place through self-instruction, on-the-job training, and work experience. To capture these experiences and translate them into college credit, ACE has implemented a program for the evaluation of learning represented by demonstrated proficiency in Army and Marine enlisted military occupational specialties (MOS's) and Navy and Coast Guard enlisted ratings and warrant officers.

ACE reports that "The evaluation process is founded on high quality standards of practice including a rigorous review and selection of subject-matter experts and academic faculty, a site visit to analyze the content, and an evaluator consensus in determining the learning outcomes and appropriate academic credit recommendations." Colleges and universities can use the ACE Guide recommendations to determine how credit should be awarded for military courses and for military experience.

The military issues transcripts to document the military courses a service member has completed. CUNY -- along with 2,300 colleges and universities across the country -- recognizes these ACE-endorsed transcripts as official documentation of military experiences and accurate records of applicable ACE credit recommendations.

Yet even if all CUNY colleges were to follow the ACE recommendations, the current CUNY policy limiting transfer credits for student veterans works to the disadvantage of some of those students. Many students' military transcripts reflect experiences that are worthy of more than 12 credits, but CUNY's current policy only allows for 12 of these credits to be transferred and recognized. This reality stands in stark contrast to the treatment afforded other transfer students. To follow a simple principle of equal treatment, we recommend that the University adopt a new policy.

To guide its specific recommendation, the Task Force took notice of relevant policies regarding the award of transfer credits. Currently, senior colleges within CUNY can accept up to 90 transfer credits from accredited colleges and for life experience. Community colleges within CUNY may accept a maximum of 30 transfer credits from accredited colleges and for life experience. Life experience credit can be granted for knowledge obtained through career experience, including volunteer work and professional training. There is a limit of 15 credits that can be awarded for life experience.

The Task Force took these limits into account when developing a recommendation for the maximum number of credits that should be awarded for military experience and courses. The 15 credit limit for life experience seemed too restrictive, given the unique training and experiences that the Armed Forces provides and the work of ACE in evaluating military experience and recommending course equivalences. Thus, the Task Force recommends that student veterans and military personnel in senior colleges be awarded up to 45 transfer credits for military experiences and courses. For community colleges, the Task Force recommends a maximum of 30 credits for student veterans and military personnel to comply with their 30-credit maximum limit for transfer credits.

#### **Recommendations:**

- a. CUNY should revise the University's military transfer credit policy to reflect the adoption of ACE guidelines. A proposed revision of this policy is attached (see Appendix 3). This policy would require approval by the Board of Trustees.
- b. Student veterans and military personnel should be granted up to 45 credits for military experience and formal military courses in senior colleges, and up to 30 credits in community colleges, subject to the requirements of their programs of study.

## **2. Course Equivalencies**

The Task Force also noted the need for a consistent process for determining the transfer credits to be awarded for military training and educational experiences. In the course of the Task Force deliberations, the CUNY Office of the University Registrar offered to put into place a mechanism by which requests for transfer credits are reviewed centrally by applying the recommendations of the ACE standards. Under this proposed new system, student veterans and military personnel who apply to CUNY would be encouraged to send their military transcripts to the CUNY University Applications Processing Center (UAPC) as part of their application package. The Director of Transfer Courses and Information would then review the transcripts following ACE guidelines, and will issue each college a recommendation for how the military transcript could translate into college credit.

Under this proposed new system, the Senior University Dean would then send to the Chief Academic Officer of each college a letter requesting that colleges review the recommendations issued by the CUNY Office of the University Registrar regarding transfer credits for military experience and course equivalencies. Each college within CUNY would then be responsible for determining how transfer credits are awarded to students, following the procedures applicable on each CUNY campus. The Task Force recognizes that the review process for awarding college transfer credit is always an individualized determination subject to the requirements of programs of study.

Under this new system, the recommendations issued from CUNY Central, based on the ACE recommended standards, will act as guides. They will be focused on translating specific ACE recommendations into specific courses at CUNY. Colleges will be encouraged to accept the recommendations. If, however, they do not accept the recommended transfer credits, the colleges will be asked to explain the reasoning behind their denial of credit for military experience and military courses. Individual colleges are free to award general elective credit based on ACE recommendations up to the limits suggested by the Task Force.

The Task Force does not recommend that each college follow any minimum credit recommendations. Instead, colleges will be requested to be transparent and internally consistent in assigning credits for basic training and other military experiences so that students will have clear information to help guide their decisions about where they will enroll. With this enhanced level of transparency, colleges will have a better sense what their CUNY counterpart institutions are doing and will therefore choose to offer credit in line with their peers. This will mean, in turn, that veterans and military personnel applying to CUNY will have a better sense of how their prior experience will be valued in terms of transfer credits.

**Recommendations:**

- a. Student veterans and military personnel who apply to CUNY should be encouraged to send their military transcripts to CUNY/UAPC for review.
- b. The Director of Transfer Courses and Information in CUNY Central should review military transcripts based on ACE guidelines and issue recommendations for course equivalencies to individual colleges.
- c. Individual colleges will then make their own decisions about awarding transfer credits and will submit explanations when they disagree with recommendations issued by CUNY Central.
- d. Colleges should be transparent and internally consistent about the number of credits they award for military courses and experience so that incoming students can make informed choices.
- e. The Office of the University Registrar should maintain a central repository of college decisions on credit awards, and make that repository available to student applicants.

**Topic V: Leveraging Corporate Opportunities**

The Task Force recognized that veterans and other military personnel who attend CUNY share a similar ambition with all CUNY students: their eyes are focused on a future beyond CUNY. Like

all CUNY students, they are concerned with being successful in the classroom, but are also concerned with the career opportunities and professional pathways that will be made possible by their CUNY education. Veterans, however, face a more complex world of career opportunities that they must navigate. On the one hand, their veteran status may provide benefits. As is detailed below, for example, many American businesses have established special employment programs that set aside a number of jobs in the corporation specifically for veterans. There are a number of major New York City corporations that have made very generous commitments in this regard. Yet, at the same time, veterans are experiencing very high rates of unemployment. As was noted early in this report, according to a report issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the unemployment rate for male Gulf War era veterans aged 18-24 was 29.1%, significantly higher than that of young male non-veterans at 17.6%. Clearly, there is a significant challenge presented to match the skills and abilities of returning veterans to the available job opportunities. Research is needed to better understand the obstacles faced by returning veterans, the special interventions required to overcome those obstacles, and in particular the role that an academic institution such as CUNY can play to assist the students, and their prospective employers to provide a smooth bridge between college and career. Finally, it should be noted that one area of potential employment for veterans that would draw upon some of their experience – working for military contractors – faces a very uncertain future. As was reported recently in the January 9, 2013 issue of Forbes magazine, the prospect of significant cuts in the federal budget in the coming years, with the Pentagon carrying a share of those cuts, means that the defense contractor sector of the economy will be shrinking at a time when more veterans with relevant skills are returning home and looking for work.

In thinking about the role that CUNY could play in addressing the significant challenges facing veterans who seek work after graduation, the Task Force took note of the leadership role being played by major corporate entities in New York City. Several examples are noteworthy and underscore the ambition of these corporate initiatives. A group called Veterans on Wall Street is dedicated to hiring veterans in the financial services industry. Goldman Sachs has created an eight-week internship program specifically for veterans, and has set aside full time jobs for those who successfully complete the program. A group of companies including Pepsi, Travelers and Xerox, among many others, have created the 10,000 Jobs Challenge in which they will hire 10,000 veterans before the end of 2013. Another group of companies in the health sector have created an initiative called Hero Health Hire, dedicated to helping disabled veterans find and retain meaningful employment. Most recently, Walmart received substantial national attention by announcing a goal of hiring 100,000 veterans across the country.

Although specific recommendations lay beyond the mandate of the Task Force, a clear recommendation emerged from the Task Force deliberations. The University should engage corporate employers who have made commitments to hiring veterans, determine their future employment needs at the level of specific skills and capabilities that are required, and work with these industry leaders to devise strategies that will link the student veterans at CUNY with the veteran employment programs at these businesses. Creating a credible pipeline for veterans from military service, to student, to professional will enhance CUNY's competitive appeal in the eyes of veterans who have not yet decided which university to attend, and it will create

incentives for current and future students to complete their studies, knowing that a good job lies ahead.

**Recommendations:** The City University of New York should develop a strategy to engage those businesses (and nonprofit organizations) that have committed to hiring veterans to design internship programs, recruitment opportunities, and career counseling services that will create smooth transitions between college and career for the student veterans who attend the University.

## Closing

The Task Force on Veterans Affairs has examined the policies and services of the City University of New York that are designed to meet the needs of CUNY students with prior or current military experience. The Task Force has concluded that CUNY can present a very attractive and highly competitive educational opportunity for the thousands of veterans who will be returning home in the coming years. To take advantage of this opportunity, however, CUNY should revise several of its current practices and policies. The definition of veteran and military personnel needs to be clarified and expanded. A system that recognizes the validity of educational experiences obtained while in the military, and transfers those credits to the University, should be adopted. A policy should be adopted that encourages applicants who might otherwise be subject to out-of-state tuition rates by allowing a one-year waiver. Campus practices should be re-examined and strengthened to create supportive and distinctive environments tailored to the unique needs of this student population. In sum, these recommendations are intended to assist veterans as they make their generation's transition from soldier to scholar to college graduate.

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