

Tech Snacks: Veterans Services

Since 2002 the United States has been actively engaged in combat operations around the globe, requiring a large increase in the number of Military members required for daily operations. Because of this, the number of veterans, drilling guard/reserve members, and active duty military personnel attending college has increased as well.

The Department of Veteran Affairs states that “Besides the Veterans Benefit Coordinator (usually located in the Registrar's Office), faculty members are the most consistent point of contact for student veterans.” This being the case it is important to equip faculty with a toolkit of information to allow them to assist these students.

With 11% of Montana's population being veterans, we cannot afford to not understand these individuals.

Veteran Situations

Different types of veterans may face different obstacles while attending college. These situations are important to keep in mind when working with and advising student veterans.

Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve — Some student veterans may be Active Duty, National Guardsmen, or Reservists, and they may still be participating in drill on the weekend or have the potential to deploy. Drill involves a commitment of a weekend every month, as well as two weeks at some point during the year. This can intensify if a service member is scheduled to deploy.

Post Traditional Veterans — Many student veterans (particularly of "nontraditional age") are managing multiple full-time roles: parent, spouse, employee, and student.

Veterans with Medical and/or Mental Health Needs — Being in combat, or even serving in the military regardless of combat exposure, can have lasting effects on veterans. While many of these changes are positive, like discipline, initiative, and leadership skills, there can also be some struggles with adjusting to civilian life. For many, this adjustment will resolve with time, but some student veterans may need additional assistance.

Advising Veterans

When advising a student veteran, keep the following issues in mind:

Has their military training been evaluated for college credits?

Veterans often come with military instruction and experience that can transfer as university credits. The Veteran Certifying Officer initiates this transfer work for General Education coursework. Program faculty evaluate program-specific transfer work (often with the help of the VCO).

If they plan on using VA services have they checked in with the Veteran Certifying Official?

Different VA benefit chapters have different requirements that the Veteran Certifying Officer will be familiar with, such as minimum course load requirements, and course restrictions.

Dropping with a W — Often, we encourage struggling students to withdraw from courses. But if a student veteran using veteran benefits to pay for coursework withdraws from a course, they have to pay the VA for tuition and fees. If they fail the class, they do not have to pay the VA back and can retake the course.

Overall credit load — Dropping below 12 credits in a semester could affect the amount of benefits the student receives. Many student veterans need to be enrolled in at least one face-to-face credit to maintain their housing benefit.

Summer courses — The VA benefits are distributed by month rather than number of credits. If a student veteran wants to take summer courses, they should consider enrolling full time to maximize their benefits.

Evaluating Military Transcripts

The American Council on Education (ACE)

ACE is the entity that evaluates military training (other than Air Force, which has its own college) and suggests what college credits should be awarded for such training.

A Joint Service Transcript (JST) is a record of all the student veteran's education, training, and experience earned while serving in the military. ACE generally breaks this training into specific credit recommendations for each formal training module and for their relevant military experience.

ACE Engage

ACE Engage has a Micro Course with great information for both faculty and staff who work with student veterans in advising contexts but also in general.

Considerations for Student Veterans

Scheduling homework — Consider allowing more flexibility with assignment due dates. Veterans who use VA services will often have appointments that require extensive travel throughout the semester. Missing an appointment can mean having to wait months to reschedule, or could even negatively affect their benefits. Due to the high demand and wait times for VA services, appointments are often made long before semester schedules are out and can unintentionally interfere with academic deadlines. Accommodating VA appointments could include allowing late work without penalty, and structuring the course to allow work to be completed ahead of time.

Syllabus statement — Feel free to use the following suggested “Veterans Statement” in your syllabi:

Veterans, Drilling Guard/Reserve Members, and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to the instructor.

The MSU-Northern Office of Veteran Services is committed to serving all the needs of our veterans and assisting them during their transition from military life to that of a student. If you are a student veteran or veteran dependent and need any assistance with your transition, please contact Joshua Gomez, the coordinator of Veteran Services at MSU-Northern.

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Required vs. recommended course materials — Some VA programs will cover the cost of course materials for student veterans if the materials are listed as “required” in the syllabus. “Recommended” materials have to be covered by the student. To get approval for recommended supplies a veteran may ask for a letter stating that if they do not have these supplies the student would be at an academic disadvantage compared to students that do have the recommended supplies.

Resources for Student Veterans

VA Tutoring — If a verteran is having issues with a class and tutors are not available, the VA can be requested to provide tutoring for that veteran in place of an MSUN tutor.

Veterans Learning Center — The Veterans Center Is located in Cowan Hall Room 321 and is a lounge and study area with lab computers and other services.

Other veteran resources — VA clinic/mental health; Vetran Crisis Line; Montana National Guard Family Programs; Elks Club veteran giving tree and other services