

## **2017 FINAL REPORT**

### **MD COLLEGE COLLABORATION FOR STUDENT VETERANS COMMISSION**

#### **PURPOSE.**

Senate Bill 606, passed by the 2016 Maryland General Assembly, establishes the Commission's purpose. It is to ensure the educational success of returning veterans, including their recruitment, successful transition into higher education and eventual graduation. The Commission accomplishes this by facilitating the sharing of best practices, and potential adjustment of policies and procedures, among the institutions of higher education and state agencies regarding academic programs and support services designed for returning veterans. Commissioners, representing institutions of higher education in the state, address the following issues: awareness of veteran reintegration challenges; communication and coordination of available veteran services at the institution, state and federal level – including financial aid and GI Bill support services, mental health services and the use of career and transition services, at the education institution, to facilitate post-educational employment.

**COMMISSIONERS.** The Commission consists of the following appointed members and guests.

- Chair: Benz Armstrong | Towson University (TU)
- Vice-Chair: Dan Barnhart | University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC)
- Secretary: Keith Hauk | University of Maryland University College (UMUC)
- MDVA Secretary Designee: Denise Nooe | Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs
- Appointed Commissioners:
  - Dr John Grabowski | Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC)
  - Christina Duncan | Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC)
  - Dr Tonya Mason | Montgomery College (MC)
  - Jeff Lesch | University of Baltimore (UB)
  - Matthew Fraling III | Coppin State University (CSU)
  - Barbara Ives | College of Southern Maryland (CSM)
  - Danielle Dabrowski | Frostburg State University (FSU)
  - Dr J. Michael Harpe | University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES)
  - Christian "Mac" Manning | Stevenson University (SU)
  - Elizabeth Atherton | McDaniel College (MDC)
  - Dr Westley Forsythe | Loyola University Maryland
  - Tina Bjarekull | Maryland independent Colleges & Universities Association (MICU)
- Guests:
  - Matt Power | Maryland independent Colleges & Universities Association (MICU)
  - Tracey Jamison | University System of Maryland (USM)
  - Jerry Isaac | Bowie State University

**QUARTERLY MEETING DATES AND LOCATIONS.** In accordance with the legislation establishing its existence, the Commission meets four times per year. Meetings locations rotate between the various institutions represented on the Commission.

1. January 27, 2017 | University of Maryland Baltimore County | Host: Dan Barnhart
2. April 19, 2017 | University System of Maryland Office | Host: Tracy Jamison
3. July 24, 2017 | UMUC Center at Dorsey Station | Host: Keith Hauk
4. October 30, 2017 | Stevenson University | Host: Christian Manning

#### **MINUTES AND SIGNIFICANT HIGHLIGHTS FROM COMMISSION MEETINGS.**

**January 27, 2017 | UMBC.** This was the first meeting of appointed commissioners to the MCCSVC. Commissioners made introductions, and shared information about their respective veteran centers. Prior to the meeting, the Commission Chair request that Commissioners come prepared to discuss the following topics.

- What are the demographics associated with the student veterans at your institution (e.g., overall numbers, graduate or undergraduate student, major program of pursuit, gender, age, ethnicity, type-of educational benefit(s) used, etc.) ?
- What do you see as the major issues or concerns facing student veterans at your institution?
- Based on those demographics, issues & concerns, what do you think are the significant needs of your institution's student veterans? How are you attempting to meet those needs, or, if you are unable to meet those needs, what are the factors that limit you in meeting them?
- What is it that you hope to achieve from participating in this commission? In the context of Section 9-954 of that legislation – which directs the Commission's deliberative responsibilities – what is it that you hope to achieve, for your institution and your student veterans, through participating in the Commission?

#### **AREAS OF DISCUSSION**

Each institution discussed their position and thoughts relative to the questions posed by the Commission's Chair. The Commission resolved to undertake an effort to monitor legislation at the state and federal level to watch for issues or changes potentially affecting student veterans. The Commission also discussed the VA's Principles of Excellence for serving student veterans (that are articulated based on Presidential Executive Order 13607, dated April 12, 2012). Commissioners agreed that the Principles provide a substantive framework for serving student veterans, but some Commissioners expressed concern regarding the cost associated with implementing selected programs associated with the Principles.

**April 19, 2017 | USM.** Prior to the session, the Commission Chair requested that Commissioners and attendees come to the meeting prepared to discuss the following topics and questions:

- Do institutions provide credit for military experience, and if so, what are their policies and practices for doing so?
- Certification process for VA educational benefits – through Registration office or Vets office – and how do institutions track veterans (when they apply, when they enroll, and persistence) and identify veterans in order to avoid late fees when the VA is delayed in certification of classes?
- Institutional policy on Maryland State National Guard tuition discount.
- Any interface with Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs?
- Do institutions engage dependents (spouse, children) of student veterans, and what support groups exist for dependents and spouses?
- Is there a policy put in place in the event Soldier Scholars are activated for military duty while enrolled in classes? What are your policies?
- Based on our previous meeting, who would like to maintain coverage with legislation on veteran affairs? Where would we like to go with this?

#### **AREAS OF DISCUSSION**

Individual institutions discussed these various issues relative to their school's policies, processes or practice. Most Community Colleges, Frostburg and UMUC (due to its mission as the state's open-enrollment institution focused on adult learners) award credit for military experience. Credit award is based on American Council on Education (ACE) guidelines, as well as awarding credit by examination that is available to military personnel and veterans such as CLEP (College Level Examination Program) and DSST (DANTES (Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support) Subject Standardized Tests). Other institutions are more limited in offering credit for military experience, beyond PE and military science. All schools have dedicated personnel supporting veteran certification, and supporting processes. However, all maintain different practices in where those personnel work based on the school's mission, demographics and size of the student veteran population; generally, the larger and more diverse the institution's veteran population, the more likely it is to maintain a dedicated veterans service office as well as offering various services to veteran dependents as well as veterans themselves. Of the schools represented at the meeting, five (UB, Stevenson, McDaniel, Loyola, Towson, UMBC and UMUC) maintain some ROTC program either at the institution or through some sort of cross-enrollment agreement with a partner institution. Regarding the MD National Guard tuition discount, schools were aware of the MHEC request to update the policy, and reviewed their institutions' current approach as well as plans, if any, to make revisions. Several institutions expressed concern that a "one size fits all" approach to the Guard tuition discount may not be an optimal approach given individual institution demographics and mission. Every institution maintains some form of protection for veteran students when VA payment is delayed, and, for

the institutions with large military student populations, maintain either formal policies or informal processes allowing drops due to military deployment or activation.

**July 24, 2017 | UMUC.** The Commission Chair invited Delegate Pat Young to attend the session, and offer his thoughts on the Commission and its work.

### **AREAS OF DISCUSSION**

- The MACC representative, Mr. Grabowski, discussed pending legislative issues, to include efforts to effectively end veterans' homelessness in Maryland. He offered ideas that authority to waive tuition rate for youth in Maryland, could be modified to address tuition rate for homeless veterans, with the goal of using education to address, and reduce, homelessness. The current definition uses around age-25, and pulls from the federal definition of homelessness; this would require modification to implement action.
- Forever GI Bill. Commissioners discussed the on-going status of U.S. Congress House Resolution (HR) 3218, dubbed the "Forever GI Bill." All were in favor of the bill's ending of the 15-year usage rule for post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. However, several Commissioners expressed concern about Forever GI Bill proposed changes to how the post-9/11 GI Bill housing allowance entitlement is calculated, and that provision's potential impact either on student veterans attending on-line or via on-line/on-site hybrid options.
- Current activity concerning the MHEC-proposed revisions to the Maryland State National Guard MOU, with individual institutions of higher learning, for offering reduced tuition rates to serving Maryland National Guardsmen. Commissioners discussed status of on-going efforts at their respective institutions.
- MHEC Veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts (VAIC) scholarship, which provides financial assistance to veterans that served in either conflict. The Commissioner from FSU expressed concern regarding possibly contradictory language concerning eligibility for veterans based on post-9/11 GI Bill status.
- The guest from Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation (AAWDC) raised to Commissioners the possibility of exploring the use of State workforce development funding to target programs for transitioning military. He offered to work details with any attending institutions that were interested in doing so.
- Commissioners also discussed consideration of the need for a revised *Maryland Campus Compact for Student Veterans* Memorandum of Understanding similar to the January 31, 2011 version.
- In preparation for the Commission's next meeting, the Commission Chair asked Commissioners to develop possible ideas – for discussion at that meeting – that could be recommended actions as part of the MCCSVC required annual report due at the end of the calendar year. The Chair also asked Commissioners to consider the need for a revised MOU along the lines of the 2011 MOU.

October 30, 2017 | Stevenson University.

### AREAS OF DISCUSSION

- Commissioners shared their plans and highlighted activities to commemorate Veterans Day on November 11, 2017. Most institutions, with planned events, were conducting them the week of November 6-10 since Veterans Day 2017 falls on a Saturday.
- The Commission Chair asked, in response to her request at the conclusion of the July meeting, for Commissioners to share their thoughts concerning issues for possible inclusion in the Commission's annual report.
- The Commission Vice-Chair discussed military training & education, and the award of transfer credit based on that training & education. He would like the Commission to explore how we could do more, especially within the existing framework of recommendations from the American Council on Education (ACE) guidelines concerning the evaluation of, and credit articulation for, military training & education. Commissioners from AACC and UMUC discussed, relative to the transfer of military training & education, the possibility of Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) degrees and the CCAF General Education Module (GEM) transferring to 4-year institutions for credit, similar to present transfer policies from a Maryland community college to a USM institution.
- Several Commissioners stated the importance of specialized support services tailored to student veterans' unique needs, including mental & behavioral health, childcare and mentoring programs. Commissioners having familiarity with the VA's VITAL (Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership) and VSOC (Vet Success on Campus) programs highlighted the use and efficacy of those programs.
- The Commission Chair then discussed the idea of a "one-stop" shop for student veterans on campus. Commissioners generally agree with the efficacy of such an approach, but several stated there would need to be considerable leeway for individual institutions to address the concept of a "one-stop shop" as they best see fit based on institutional mission, demographics and available resources. Several Commissioners posited that such a recommendation could be framed in the context of the VA's 8 Keys to Veterans Success as a commitment to streamline—as much as possible—the provision of various services for student veterans.
- The Commissioner from MDC stated that she would like to see some sort of centralized location, perhaps on-line, for all information pertaining/related to veteran and military-connected students and available service, programs, etc. The Commissioner from MC agreed that such an on-line repository would be helpful.
- The Commission discussed plans, and developed tentative time periods and locations, for conducting its calendar year 2018 meetings

## **RECOMMENDATIONS.**

The Commission strongly recommends that all institutions of higher education in the State of Maryland embrace and adopt the “8 Keys to Success: Supporting Veterans, Military and Military Families on Campus” articulated in Presidential Executive Order 13607 dated April 12, 2012.

These keys include the following:

1. Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.
2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.
3. Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.
4. Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space (even if limited in size).
5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.
6. Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention and degree completion.
7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.
8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans.

Throughout the first year of the Commission’s existence, the members have refined the purpose of the Commission. The Commission recommends these items be added to the purpose of this Commission:

1. Share upcoming events at local campuses.
2. Check in on—and follow—relevant legislation and trends (at both the state and federal levels) affecting military-affiliated students, (which includes service members, veterans or their dependents using transferred veterans’ educational benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill). As appropriate, based on specific legislation or trends, make recommendations to legislators /governing bodies concerning potential actions.
3. Update members on challenges and other relevant information concerning military-affiliated students.