

# Research Brief

## Coming home:

### Student veterans' articulation of college re-enrollment

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#### Research Highlights:

- The Student Veteran Academic and Social Transition Model (SVASTM) illustrates how re-enrolling student veterans navigate academic and social transition in the college environment. The study's findings indicated that veterans experienced initial academic challenges but employed maturity, mission mentality, and perseverance to mitigate these challenges. Socially, veterans tended to congregate with other veterans and expressed difficulty in relating to non-veteran college peers. In terms of coping with transition, student veterans sought help from fellow veterans, including students, faculty, and administrators. They tended to under-utilize other forms of institutional support, such as tutoring, academic success centers, and student involvement opportunities.
- Student veteran invisibility was a key finding of this study and is explained by two factors. First, re-enrolling student veterans returned to school with a businesslike mentality, determined to finish their degrees. Accordingly, they attempted to blend in and pursue "the typical college experience." While their military experience was a fixture of their personalities, they did not want to be noticed as a special population. Secondly, many of the student veterans in this study re-enrolled alone; therefore, re-enrollment and college reintegration processes were experienced in relative isolation. Thus, it was sometimes difficult for student veterans to find fellow veterans for support. Additionally, the institution had difficulty tracking and pinpointing veterans because of the isolated re-enrollments.

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#### Abstract:

"This study described student veterans' navigation of college re-enrollment. Fifteen participants interviewed at one institution were less likely to seek academic support and more inclined to pursue social support in the form of associating with fellow veterans with whom they felt more comfortable. They downplayed or hid their veteran status from campus community members. Recommendations for acknowledging and supporting student veterans are discussed"

## Implications

### For Practice

The most important practical implication for institutions is to devise mechanisms which efficiently reintegrate student veterans, count them, and track their progress. This implication was previously noted by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) and this study affirmed the need for institutional tracking mechanisms. Identifying student veterans as they enter and re-enroll in college is crucial, as some veterans may not overtly identify as military veterans. Establishing systems that enable institutions to accurately count and track their veteran students is vital as it can help institutions assess the scope of their veteran population, identify the needs of this population, and install the appropriate support services to assist them. Additionally, because the re-enrollment process is often experienced in isolation, institutions should ensure that information and resources are easily accessible and readily available; if an institution cannot efficiently identify its veteran population, it will be difficult to muster the myriad collaborative support services that can aid this population. Institutional stakeholders will have to collaborate to create veteran identification and tracking mechanisms, and faculty and staff members who are themselves veterans can be vital in this process. These community members understand the veteran mindset, speak the lingo, and can become visible allies on campus to educate all community members, and appropriately and sensitively connect student veterans with each other.

### For Policy

Policy makers can create policies that provide resources and support for educational institutions focused on positive outcomes for student veterans. It is important that educational institutions providing support services do so without implementing processes that are too complex or intrusive for veterans, which is where policy makers can step in. While services for student veterans should be visible and accessible enough that they know where to turn for assistance on campus, support should also be confidential and discreet. Policy makers can also highlight the importance of having academic advisors on campus who are veterans or can work specifically to address the needs of student veterans. Finally, educational policy can focus on connecting educational institutions to nearby VA centers so that the support structures provided by the VA and educational institutions can complement each other in order to facilitate student veteran re-enrollment and acclimation.

### For Future Research

As this study was composed using only white male veteran students and snowball sampling, future researchers should obtain a random, diverse sample of veterans. This would allow researchers to gain additional context and insight into the experiences of various veteran students' college re-enrollment processes. The authors acknowledge a research bias stemming from their personal experiences with veteran friends and family, so additional research performed by individuals without such a bias is also recommended. As data from this study were only obtained at one institution, a larger sample from multiple locations would provide more varied and generalizable data. Further research should also compare veterans' experiences across institutions with strong military heritages and those without such a history, to determine whether or not this impacts the experiences and reenrollment processes of student veterans. Researchers should also aim to deepen their understanding of the world in which student veterans live, including terminology used by veterans, that will allow for more accurate interpretations of the data gathered. Finally, while there has been a proliferation of qualitative investigations of this population, future studies should look to quantitative and mixed methods procedures to increase the empiricism of this vein of research. The existing qualitative literature should supply researchers with ample questions to explore in more robust and generalizable manners.

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