

# Advancing Veteran Success IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Case Studies of Student Veteran Support Programs at San Diego State University, the University of Texas-Arlington, the University of South Florida, and Florida State College Jacksonville

Capt. Josh Keefe, USMC | Zach Huitink | Paige Donegan



## ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This project assessed the preliminary performance of programs supporting student veterans at four U.S. colleges and universities. Informed by prior research on the drivers of veteran success in higher education, the programs provided a mix of veteran-specific orientation and bridging activities, academic and employment-related services, and changes in university administration and the classroom experience to further support student veterans. The project found that the programs made a number of positive impacts on veteran academic performance, access to campus and community resources, and skills training and employment opportunities, but also experienced challenges with personnel turnover, sustainability, and integration with existing on-campus services and supports. Based on the programs' achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, the report provides a set of recommendations to guide future design, funding, and implementation of initiatives to promote veteran success in the college and university environment.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **CAPT. JOSH KEEFE**

Capt. Josh Keefe of the U.S. Marine Corps holds an M.P.A. from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and a J.D. from Syracuse University School of Law. While at Syracuse, he did a fellowship which concentrated his studies on national security law and policy and public administration in the federal sector. Actively involved in veterans advocacy, he co-founded the Syracuse Veterans Legal Clinic, which provides free civil legal assistance to veterans and service members. After graduating from Syracuse, Josh returned to active duty with the Marine Corps, where he currently serves as a judge advocate and remains active in veterans affairs.

### **ZACH HUITINK**

Zach Huitink is a research associate at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University, and a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Public Administration and International Affairs at Syracuse University's Maxwell School. He holds an M.P.P. from the James W. Martin School of Public Administration and Policy at the University of Kentucky, and a B.A. with a dual major in business administration and economics from Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he graduated magna cum laude with departmental honors. Prior to graduate school, Huitink worked as an analyst in the financial services industry, and previously served as an intern in the policy research group at the Council of State Governments and a volunteer with AmeriCorps VISTA. He maintains an active research agenda concerned with U.S. national security, defense policy, and veterans issues.

### **PAIGE DONEGAN**

Paige Donegan is a former research associate at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University. She holds an M.P.A. from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University and a B.A. in political science from the University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY), where she graduated summa cum laude with departmental honors. During her studies, she was heavily involved in the research for The Project on Violent Conflict, an academic research center based at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy located at the SUNY Albany. Following graduate school, Paige has been working as an analyst for Wittenberg Weiner Consulting, LLC., on various Department of Defense contracts.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In recognition of the sacrifices America's veterans, military members, and their families make in service to our nation, JPMorgan Chase (JPMC) is committed to supporting veterans and military families in the areas of employment, financial capability, and small business, and has also supported veterans higher education programs. Education is a critical path to achieving gainful employment and financial stability—factors that can have a significant impact on veteran and military family member reintegration to civilian life. To these ends, JPMC has dedicated resources to support higher education institutions and programs that improve educational outcomes for student veterans.

Using primary and secondary research conducted by Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), JPMC identified three focus areas that represent the greatest opportunities for higher education institutions to support success of student veterans: orientation and bridge programs,

student services, and programs affecting university administration and the student veteran classroom experience. To promote and improve veteran educational outcomes, JPMC provided seed money to four schools to develop new programs or expand existing programs that increased their programmatic capacity in accordance with its three primary focus areas.

This report provides an overview and assessment of initial performance of the student veteran programs at the four pilot schools—San Diego State University, the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of South Florida, and Florida State College at Jacksonville. The purpose of the evaluation is to gauge the initial impact of each school's program on veteran academic success on campus. Through an assessment of programmatic achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, the evaluation isolates best practices that can inform future veterans' services programming on college and university campuses.



Analysis of the four programs reveals a number of common best practices that can help to inform stakeholders interested in growing and improving student veteran programs nationwide. **Five broad recommendations drawn from the successes and lessons learned from the four pilot programs are as follows:**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- #1** Funders should focus support on programs that involve successful collaboration between higher education institutions and community partners, including partnerships with employers seeking to hire veterans.
- #2** Veterans program administrators seeking to add veteran-specific programming and services should also consider means to adapt or integrate existing campus programs or services in support of student veterans' initiatives.
- #3** Staffing choices are critical to the success of veterans programs. Program administrators should ensure they budget adequate time to find, hire, and train the right candidates to ensure program success.
- #4** Student veteran programs should develop and maintain sustainability plans to ensure successful programs can continue after grant funding is exhausted.
- #5** In funding new higher education student veteran programs, funders should consider establishing a two-year minimum funding cycle to allow programs adequate time to build and develop self-sustaining programs.

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p 315.443.0141  
f 315.443.0312  
e [vets@syr.edu](mailto:vets@syr.edu)  
w [vets.syr.edu](http://vets.syr.edu)



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