

Advancing Veteran Success IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Case Highlights of Veteran-Friendly Programs at Professional Schools at Syracuse University

Nyasha Y. Boldon ■ Rosalinda V. Maury ■ Mirza Tihic



BEST PRACTICES

The Graduate Management Admission Council® (GMAC®) is the association of leading graduate business schools around the world. GMAC meets the needs of business schools and students through a wide array of products, services, and programs and serves as a primary resource of research and information about quality graduate management education. With the GMAC grant, the Veteran Employment Through Modified Graduate Management Tracks (VET-MGMT) was identified and/or developed at Syracuse University. This report highlights each school's challenges and best practices with creating, recruiting, and sustaining veteran-friendly programs. As the case highlights indicate, there were many challenges to making and sustaining veteran-friendly programs. These challenges led to many opportunities to create best practices that benefit student veterans and the student body as a whole. The following are some of the more significant best practices:



FINANCIAL AID

Though there was interest, several veterans were unwilling to enroll in programs that would require them to use their post-9/11 GI Bill. Given that the amount of financial aid offered to graduate students is capped, a best practice developed by L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science (ECS) was to offer a reduction of tuition by 20 percent. This financial incentive is offered to all veterans in need of financial assistance (veterans not using or who have exhausted their post-9/11 GI Bill). Other successful strategies to reduce the financial burden on student veterans included offering school specific financial assistance and Syracuse University's participation in the VA's Yellow Ribbon Program. Syracuse University's participation in the program is rather generous, with the University allowing unlimited Yellow Ribbon allocations. These financial incentives are likely to draw in student veterans to top higher education institutions, such as Syracuse University.



ACCEPTING OF CREDITS AND DEVELOPING RELEVANT COURSE CONTENT

Committing to making existing programs more veteran-friendly led some schools to research military credits. For example, the iSchool reviewed the ACE Military Guide and created a comprehensive list of military credits that are transferable toward iSchool degree offerings. Several schools have made strides to maximize the number of transferable credits. Further, some schools have created independent study courses that leverage and build upon veterans' experiences and skills gained in the military.

ONLINE AND HYBRID COURSES



Recognizing the evolving needs of student veterans, a majority of the schools mentioned efforts to offer online or hybrid courses. Offering online or hybrid courses that are comparable to the residential courses can often better accommodate the needs of veterans who are interested in earning a graduate degree, but unable to relocate to Syracuse, NY. The expansion of online and hybrid courses also led to improved technology and online learning platforms to accommodate active duty and student veterans stationed abroad.



OPEN DOOR POLICY

In supporting the needs of veterans, several schools had either an open door policy or a dedicated individual. The open door policy and designated individual resulted in student veterans being able to discuss non-academic issues that might affect their academic studies, including mental health. These efforts to relate directly to student veterans have provided them with increased support. It also led to schools being aware of the needs of student veterans, such as the need for inclusion efforts. Additionally, the experiences from the open door policy have led to the creation of the "Orange Door" program, a Syracuse University campus-wide initiative to create veteran-friendly space that enables faculty and staff to receive military and veteran competency training.





INCLUSION

Student veterans are often older than other graduate students and have had more life experiences. Several schools mentioned efforts to encourage inclusion for residential students and their online student body. Inclusion efforts included ensuring student veterans were aware of available academic resources, including mentorship and help with writing and quantitative analysis.

Another example of an inclusion effort is Maxwell's executive program and their commitment to racial and ethnic diversity. Encouraging diverse perspectives and learning, Maxwell's commitment to racial and ethnic diversity enhances the experience of student veterans. Maxwell also offers executive programs for adults in their career who are pursuing additional education. These executive programs often result in a broad age range of students at the school.

Inclusion efforts are also evident in the course offerings. Two schools mentioned efforts for inclusion in the classroom through either group projects or a requirement for a residential class session for online students. Schools that have implemented this best practice have found that it enhances the experience of both student veterans and nonveteran students.



SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

A number of tactics have been employed to sustain veteran-friendly programs at the schools. Several schools keep in contact with alumni, soliciting feedback on their programs. Alumni are asked to share what they learned and how it has benefited them in their careers. Alumni are also provided the opportunity to offer feedback on aspects of the curriculum that could be improved or courses that would have been beneficial. Feedback from the veteran and military population enables Syracuse University to continually address the needs and challenges that active duty and student veterans might face.

Additionally, some schools hope that the contact with alumni can help recruit student veterans, with alumni veterans recommending the veteran-friendly graduate degree programs to prospective student veterans.



COLLABORATION

Several schools have collaborated and plan to continue working together. The collaboration between schools has directly benefitted student veterans, providing student veterans the opportunity to take courses that are relevant to their interests across disciplines and schools. It also allows for schools to share best practices and knowledge, including understanding the ACE Military Guide. The solid collaboration between schools and departments ensures an overall veteran-friendly experience from the classroom to campus resources to financial aid offerings. This can reduce some of the obstacles that student veterans might encounter when obtaining multiple degrees from different disciplines i.e., Master's degree from the iSchool and a Certificate of Advance Study from Maxwell.



COMMUNICATION

Across all programs it was evident that there is a need to properly communicate what "veteran-friendly" means. In most cases it does not mean giving veterans special exception in terms of requirements of the program. Rather, veteran-friendly means fostering an institution-wide culture that embraces the veteran community and believes that veterans are fully capable of successfully earning a degree, while adding value to the institution as a whole.



STAY IN TOUCH



p 315.443.0141
f 315.443.0312
e vets@syr.edu
w vets.syr.edu



[f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [+](#)
IVMFSyracuseU



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