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■ A Pilot Study of Factors Affecting Student Veterans' College Choice

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ABSTRACT:

"This study considered the factors that student veterans considered when choosing where to attend higher education. This is a report of results from a survey implemented in a nationwide pilot study. Respondents (N = 111) gave greater weight in college choice to items generally associated with college satisfaction, such as cost, program availability, and supports, over "military friendly"-type marketing. These findings are important to those practitioners and institutions serving student veterans, as there are great time and financial costs that result from ineffective approaches to recruiting and retaining students."

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

- This study explores the factors that student veterans identified as being the most important when choosing a higher educational institution.
- This nationwide pilot study included an original survey, 111 participant student veterans, and focused on three broad categories of motivating factors: (1) timing of college choice decisions (e.g., when did student choose their institution), (2) information regarding the institutions (e.g., university marketing campaigns), and (3) the opportunities available to student veterans (e.g., military-related scholarships).
- The researchers found that student veterans participating in the survey identified availability of desired academic programs as the most important factor in their college choice decisions while institutions being marketed as "Best for Vets" was less important in college choice decisions.

Implications

FOR PRACTICE

Like other students, student veterans heavily consider availability of desired academic programs, cost/affordability, institutional responsiveness to inquiries, and the availability of military tuition scholarships. Higher education institutions may see a greater return on investment from shifting resources from "Military Friendly" marketing strategies to investing in opportunities that the institution can offer. Universities competing for student veteran talent may be incentivized to raise the quality of both their academic programs and veterans' services.

FOR POLICY

Policymakers should advocate for more transparent and standardized reporting on program quality, graduate outcomes, and veteran success metrics. Federal or state governments should consider establishing metrics to track the academic success, graduation rates, and post-graduation employment outcomes of student veterans to ensure they are receiving the support they need. These metrics should be made publicly available to veterans to support their college choice decision making.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should seek to replicate these findings using a larger sample of student veterans that is more reflective of the undergraduate student veteran population. A larger sample will allow for more reliable estimations and greater statistical power in identifying any relevant sub-group differences. The authors identified choice differences in students who attended classes online compared to those who did not. As the availability of online and hybrid options continues to expand, further research into the motivations underpinning in-person, online, or hybrid learning may help provide the context needed for understanding student veteran college choice decisions.

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