A Pocket Guide for Outreach to Military Students

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges®

SINCE 1972

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges®
PURPOSE

The Pocket Guide for College Outreach to Military Students is a resource for colleges and universities to help shape their outreach to the military community and guide the development and implementation of quality education programs and support services for the military and veteran students at their institutions. It is designed to assist institutions in establishing effective relationships with the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and their education personnel.

The Pocket Guide provides specific guidance for college outreach to potential students and offers suggestions for supporting military students enrolled in the college. It also points to standards, regulations, and resources that apply to the delivery of education programs to military students and veterans.

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Today’s institutions of higher learning find it more challenging than ever before to identify, recruit, and serve military and veteran students. Colleges recognize that these students are valuable assets to the higher education community because of their leadership preparation, teamwork orientation, and determination to succeed. Colleges have also found that some of these students, particularly combat veterans, may require additional or specialized student support services in order to achieve their education goals. Access to Post-9/11 GI Bill and Tuition Assistance dollars has made military students an appealing market for college enrollment, and competition for them among postsecondary education institutions is intense.

While most postsecondary education institutions have followed established guidelines in their outreach to military and veteran students, others have not. Some of the questionable marketing practices employed by colleges may stem from a lack of knowledge about the military culture and the regulations that govern solicitation on military installations.
What kind of strategies should colleges develop to reach the military market? What defines “best practices” for this outreach effort? What regulations, policies, and procedures govern the marketing of education programs? What should colleges know?

**FOUNDATIONS FOR BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP**

There are four key aspects to developing an effective relationship with the military community:

- understanding the military culture and voluntary education;
- understanding what your college has to offer to military students in terms of academic programs, academic support, and student services;
- working within established protocols and following relevant rules and regulations; and
- maintaining a good reputation among military students and within the military community as a provider of quality education and supportive programs.
By offering a variety of dependable services and support programs that military students need to succeed, institutions that cultivate them create an opportunity to expand their outreach to the military community. Such support is also an effective retention tool. At the same time, institutions may strengthen valuable connections with their own administration, faculty, and staff.

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**MILITARY CULTURE**

**A Valuable Asset.** Military students and veterans are a valuable asset to any college community and exhibit many characteristics that contribute to degree completion. Typically, they are mature, goal-oriented, and clear about their career and education paths. They often have a disciplined work ethic and the funds to pay for school.

**Knowing the Military Culture.** Institutions will need to familiarize themselves with the military culture that affects their overall military student population. For many colleges, it will be important to understand the different components of the military market in your region and how to connect with them. Other colleges will need to understand the complex demands of the national military market. Know what rules apply when establishing connections with Service education staff and military students.
Developing Outreach and Services. Who are your military students? Who would you like them to be? Remember that one size does not fit all in terms of outreach, programs, and services for the military population. With these questions in mind, you can develop outreach strategies for that sector of the military market. Relevant programs and student services may be designed to support their education and transition needs.

Attracting the Military Student. What academic programs might draw military students to your college? Answering this question will help shape your outreach initiatives. Reflect on your institution’s strengths. Identify the features and services that you offer. Identify your primary military student market and the sources from which you will draw your students. Will they be active-duty? National Guard? Reservists? Veterans? Family members of servicemembers?

- Military Students: Active and Reserve Components. Active-duty members, National Guard and Reserves, veterans in the community, and family members are military subpopulations that include college-capable men and women. Colleges and universities have an opportunity to increase enrollments and improve retention by reaching into these military markets. Eligible servicemembers using TA and/or VA education benefits to pursue their education have the funds to stay in school and graduate.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than two million individuals serve in the Active and Reserve Components of the United States Armed Forces. Approximately half are using their VA education benefits to attend college. DoD estimates that about 278,000 individuals are using Tuition Assistance. Both of these estimates create a significant pool of potential students who may want to attend college.
• **Military Students: Veterans.** The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that up to 225,000 military members leave the Armed Forces each year, and approximately 70 percent will use 15-17 months of their GI Bill education benefits.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), since the Post-9/11 GI Bill took effect on August 1, 2009, billions of dollars in education benefits have been paid under that program alone to millions of veterans, dependents, spouses, and the institutions of higher education at which veterans enrolled. These numbers will continue to rise as more servicemembers and their family members become eligible for this benefit.

Other statistics from the VA’s National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics document veterans’ increasing participation in not only the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but also in all veterans education programs administered by the VA.

• **Military Students: Family Members.** Spouses and college-age military dependents comprise another subset of the military student population. Military spouses and family members often wish to attend college while the servicemember is serving in the Armed Services. They may qualify for grants, scholarships, or tuition discounts from various organizations and academic institutions. Others may be eligible for veterans education benefits that have been transferred to them. Resources to assist them in their search for funding may be found in the “Resources” section of this *Pocket Guide.*

**VOLUNTARY EDUCATION: MAKING INSTALLATION CONTACT**

**DoD Policy Guidance.**
The DoD provides overarching education policy guidance to the Military Services. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines execute that guidance within their own priorities, traditions, and budgets.

All of the Services define the installation commander or his/her designated representative as the main point-of-contact for education services.
The Education Center. On a military installation, the education center is the hub for voluntary education opportunities for servicemembers and their family members. Depending on the size of the installation, the education center may include office space, classrooms, computer centers, testing facilities, laboratories, and other features. Centers are staffed by professionally-qualified personnel whose mission is to coordinate voluntary education programs, provide education counseling, and ensure the appropriate use of Tuition Assistance funds for servicemembers assigned to that installation.

Finding an Education Center. A directory of education centers can be found on the Defense Activity for Non-traditional Education Support (DANTES) Web site at:

**The Education Adviser.** All voluntary education-related matters begin with the education center. The person who directs the education center is typically the military commander’s representative for voluntary education on the installation. He or she manages the education programs offered on the installation or supported by the education center. Depending on the Service and installation, the education adviser may be known by any one of the following titles: Education Services Specialist (ESS); Education Services Officer (ESO); Voluntary Education Director; Navy College Office Director; or Education and Training Section Chief.

**Step One: Contacting the Education Adviser.**
Contacting the education adviser, (the director of the education center) is the first step for a college wishing to explore opportunities to expand its presence on the installation. An appointment should be made through the education center.

**Step Two: Establishing a Relationship.** Establishing a relationship with the education adviser on any military installation is an important next step for the college. This encompasses common courtesies such as calling in advance for an appointment and understanding proper base access procedures.
Meeting a Need. The military education center adviser follows established protocols in determining how many and which colleges can directly meet the education needs for servicemembers served by the installation. The military education center may also have procedures for “visiting” colleges, colleges invited to education fairs, or institutions seeking access on an installation. The reality may be that a specific college, regardless of the quality of its education programs or its desire to expand its outreach, could find that there isn’t sufficient demand for its educational programs on the installation.

Rules Governing Outreach and Solicitation. Colleges must always remember that DoD and the Military Services have strict rules regarding the conduct of solicitation and business transactions on military installations, and that these rules also cover education. Colleges should conduct business with appropriate authorization for base access and educational activities. All education-related business should take place only in locations designated and authorized by the education adviser.

See the section for Regulations and Requirements for additional information pertaining to marketing activities on an installation.

DoD Instruction 1344.07, Personal Commercial Solicitation on DoD Installations, March 30, 2006

MILITARY VOLUNTARY EDUCATION: OUTREACH BEYOND THE INSTALLATION

Outreach to the National Guard and Reservists. Many servicemembers who serve within the Reserve component have the means and the time to pursue post-secondary education part time. Working through recruiters, education advisers associated with the Guard or Reserves, or staff at the local Armory or Reserve Center, colleges can position themselves to encourage these students to enroll in their programs. Colleges may request that their literature be displayed and seek opportunities to speak with servicemembers at the Armory or Reserve Centers.

Hosting a Visit. Hosting a special military recruiting event or other event (Veteran’s Day speaker, for example) on campus may help a college establish a relationship with the local military community. On-campus visits will help the military become familiar with the campus and gain a feel for the college, its degree offerings, its support for military students, and its special programs.

Outreach to Veterans. Money for college, along with patriotism and a desire to serve one’s country, is one of the most frequent responses to the question about why young men and women enlist in the Armed Forces. Many will have begun their education while on active duty; others will wait to pursue their education goals after they leave the Service.
Many will have GI Bill education benefits to help pay college expenses. Colleges should consider reaching out to this pool of potential students, to attract and retain them.

**Outreach to Spouses and Family Members.** Military spouses and family members frequently have education aspirations. Colleges may see additional advantages to including them in their outreach efforts. Some may have access to GI Bill education benefits transferred to them by their military sponsors; others may qualify for grants or scholarships designed to assist military spouses in reaching their education goals. Directing the military spouse to the Military Spouse Career Advancement Account program, the American Legion’s *Need a Lift* publication, or to resources published on the DANTES or National Military Family Association home pages could be incorporated into a college’s outreach strategy. (See “Resources” at the end of this *Pocket Guide.*)
Assessing the Need. How does your institution provide support to its students from enrollment through degree completion? What do your students need—before, during, and after a service is provided? Are there special programs for different cohorts of students? How can the college respond to the specialized needs of combat veterans, help students with financial issues by tailoring existing support, or add new services? These are questions that an institution should explore with help from current military students as the college assesses how it can effectively outreach to students within the military community.

Education Goals. Servicemembers use their education benefits for career enhancement and for successful completion of a credential, such as a high school diploma, certificate, college degree, or postgraduate degree. With the aid of a guidance counselor, servicemembers establish an educational goal—academic, technical, intellectual, personal, professional development—as part of a plan to enhance opportunities for leadership and career advancement in the military by acquiring new skills and knowledge.
Program Fit. Helping military or veteran students find the best academic choice to reach their chosen educational goals is an important contribution a college counselor can make as a representative of an institution reaching out to the military community. Academic counselors who are familiar with the military are well positioned to help military students understand their choices and assess the likelihood of success in completing a chosen program or degree.

Education Roadmaps. Students expect clear and honest communication from their institution’s academic counselors, and assessment of prior learning from the institution in its outreach to the military community. An educational plan detailing the courses and academic requirements for the educational credential provides a roadmap for success. An institution is expected to evaluate servicemembers’ sources of prior learning and apply transfer and evaluated credits for non-traditional learning that is applicable to their selected education plan, and consistent with the institution’s academic policies.

Finding Support Services. Helping students find answers about academic requirements, college procedures, financing, and other rules governing college attendance is part of any institution’s student services mission. Establishing clear and documented expectations for student support helps to create a positive relationship for both college and student.
Special programs and services for military students, for instance, a dedicated office, a specific contact, a “one-stop shop,” a military home page within the college’s Web site, a veterans support group, should be well publicized and easy for the military student to access.

**Assessing Outcomes.** Is the college providing the right support at the right time and in the right place? Are resources being used efficiently and effectively? Satisfaction surveys and follow-up communications to verify that stated actions have occurred can be key parts of a formal assessment of student services. Assessing outcomes with respect to those services targeted to military students should be a part of any ongoing assessment initiative. Engaging military students in the evaluation of these services will add a student perspective and will help ensure that the college is doing what it can to meet the needs of servicemembers attending the college.
Articulating Standards. Articulating standards for the delivery of academic and student support services for colleges serving military students is a key element of Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges’ (SOC) mission. Colleges may find SOC’s efforts in this area to be a useful guide in establishing their own outreach and support to the military community.

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC). SOC is a DoD contractor supporting government-sponsored education to servicemembers. The SOC contract is managed for the Department of Defense by Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES). SOC was established by civilian and military educators to help expand, strengthen, and coordinate voluntary college-level educational opportunities for servicemembers. SOC is founded on principles and criteria agreed upon collectively by the higher education and voluntary education community. SOC Principles embody institutional flexibility with thoughtful development of programs and procedures appropriate to the needs of servicemembers, yet recognize the necessity to protect and assure the quality of education. SOC Criteria create a framework for institutions
to translate SOC Principles into action, and stipulate that institutional policies and practices be fair, equitable, and effective in recognizing the special and often limiting conditions faced by military students.

**SOC Standards of Good Practice.** Over time, SOC developed its Standards of Good Practice in response to multiple concerns about aggressive marketing practices, hidden fees or other costs, ambiguous policies and procedures, and insufficient or incomplete student services assistance. Institutions serving the military affirm that their outreach efforts to servicemembers use advertising and recruiting practices that focus on the educational programs and services available, accurately depict requisite knowledge and skill sets needed to succeed in these educational programs, and list all costs and conditions required for admissions and enrollment. The SOC Standards of Good Practice are found in Attachment A of the SOC Principles and Criteria.

**SOC Military Student Bill of Rights.** The Military Student Bill of Rights illustrates ten basic “rights” that military students should have as they explore, enroll, and pursue degrees or certificates at colleges and universities.
College Responsibilities. Colleges must be aware of and conform their practices to regulations and requirements established by the federal government. Institutions are responsible for articulating their own policies in light of federal regulations and are responsible for the conduct of representatives, staff, and contractors working on their behalf. Some regulations cover all students; others pertain to the military student population specifically, and we have highlighted a few in this Pocket Guide.

Department of Education Addresses Misrepresentation. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has developed a regulation addressing misrepresentation in marketing education programs. The regulation defines misrepresentation as “any statement that has the likelihood or tendency to
deceive or confuse” and makes it clear that a school will be held responsible for any staff member, agent, or third-party organization with which the school has an agreement. Because many schools create marketing strategies focused on the military student, this regulation is one that should be thoroughly understood by colleges working with the military community. For additional information, visit:


Department of Education Addresses Distance Learning. The ED has addressed distance education providers and compliance with state authorization requirements. The regulation, as written, reminds institutions about the requirement to follow applicable state authorization regulations when offering distance or online education in order to administer federal financial aid to those students. The impact
of this regulation on colleges that provide education services to a mobile military through online courses is clear. Colleges should follow the development of compliance requirements carefully. Visit:


Department of Defense (DoD) Voluntary Education Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Requirement for All Institutions Using Tuition Assistance. The DoD has issued a requirement that all institutions of higher education providing education programs through the DoD Tuition Assistance (TA) Program for military students have a Voluntary Education Partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed and approved by DoD in order to receive TA funds. A DoD MOU may undergo revisions as circumstances and the education environment warrant.

The most current version of the MOU, Change 3 effective July 7, 2014, contains new policy, responsibilities, and procedures for the operation of voluntary education programs within DoD, including, but not limited to, Executive Order 13607 Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members, and the DoD Postsecondary Education Complaint System (PECS). Under the terms of the MOU, educational institutions contacting servicemembers for the purpose of encouraging them to enroll in education programs must adhere to the SOC Principles and Criteria.

Criteria have been included to strengthen existing procedures for access to military installations by institutions of higher learning. The MOU reinforces policies that apply to institutions, and ensures military student access to meaningful information about costs, financial aid, and quality of education to enable students to make an informed decision on college choice.
Further, it seeks to prevent abusive marketing practices and ensures quality academic support to military students and their families, and provides a process for servicemembers, spouses, and adult family members to register a student complaint with the DoD PECS. The MOU Web site has helpful answers to most commonly asked questions:

www.dodmou.com/

**DoD Postsecondary Education Complaint System (PECS).** Executive Order 13607, *Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses and Other Family Members* was created to protect students against abusive and deceptive recruiting/retention practices by institutions of higher learning, and to ensure they receive the information, support, and tools they need to make informed decisions about all aspects of their education. According to Section 4 of the Executive Order, “Service members, veterans, spouses, and other family members should have access to a strong enforcement system through which to file complaints when institutions fail to follow the Principles.”
PECS will track, manage, and process student complaints at one of three levels, depending on the user assigned to manage the grievance. Students using federal education benefits and programs will be able to register their complaint online. The system electronically records information about the educational institution, nature of the issue/complaint, and the complainant’s contact information. The agencies cited in the Executive Order (Departments of Defense, Education, Justice, Veterans Affairs, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau) will be responsible for tracking, managing, and providing a response to student complaints. Student complaints may be registered using the following online resources:

Department of Defense - Tuition Assistance or My Career Advancement Account (MyCAA) Recipients

http://www.militaryonesource.mil/voluntary-education/complaint

Department of Veterans Affairs - GI Bill Recipients

http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/feedback.asp

Department of Education - Federal Financial Aid Recipients
Email

compliancecomplaints@ed.gov

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau – Private Student Loan Recipients

http://www.consumerfinance.gov/complaint/
The Military and Personal Commercial Solicitation Activities. Personal commercial solicitation activities are defined as the conduct of any private business on a military installation. National Defense Title 32 C.R.F. Part 50 of Public Law No. 109–163 (2006) establishes policy and procedures for personal commercial solicitation on DoD installations. In a broad context, it includes personal contact consisting of activities such as meetings, meals, or telecommunications contact for the purpose of seeking private business or trade. With regard to education activities, this would be extended to incorporate distributing sales literature, providing information during informal or formal meetings at Reserve or Guard drill functions, and participation at education fairs. Service-specific regulations such as Army’s AR 210-7, “Personal Commercial Solicitation on Army Installations,” may further amplify or define the federal policy to protect servicemembers and family members from sales or marketing solicitations on base. The Department of Defense Instruction 1344.07, “Personal Commercial Solicitation on DoD Installations,” dated March 30, 2006, provides definitive guidance on commercial solicitation with respect to all DoD installations.

Commercial Sponsorships. According to the DoD Continuing Education Programs policy guidance “Any recruiting and/or marketing endeavors proposed to occur on a military base should be vetted not only with the education center official, but also with the base Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) representative.” Only MWR organizations can accept commercial sponsorships. The DoD Instruction 1015.10 related to Military Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) Programs defines commercial sponsorships as the act of providing assistance, funding, goods, equipment (including fixed assets), or services to a program or event by an individual, agency, association, company or corporation, or other entity (sponsor) for a specified (limited) period of time in return for public recognition or advertising promotions.


Use of DoD and Military Seals. Defense Department and Military Seals are protected by law from unauthorized use, which may include, but is not limited to commercial, marketing, advertising, or promotional use by any non-government entity.

The Military Services have provided alternative emblems for commercial purposes, and permission to use any of these emblems must be made to the respective Services. There is no such substitute for Department of Defense Seal.

To request the use of Service logos or seals, visit:

http://www.defense.gov/trademarks/

For Defense Department organizations requiring an electronic version of the Seal for official use only, visit:

http://www.defenselink.mil/multimedia/web_graphics/
REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Many of the following references and resources were cited earlier in the *Pocket Guide*; others are listed here as sources of information that may be of particular interest to institutions of higher education seeking to work with military students, veterans, and the military community.

GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS, GUIDELINES, AND POLICIES


Title 10, United States Code, Subtitle A, Part III, Chapter 101, Section 2007 *Payment of Tuition for Off-Duty Training or Education*.

http://www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode/browse.html


DoD Memorandum of Understanding

http://dodmou.com/
U.S. Department of Education—Implementation of Program Integrity Regulations


GOVERNMENT LINKS

DoD Link VolEd Home Page

http://www.militaryonesource.mil/voluntary-education

U.S. Department of Defense

http://www.defense.gov/

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

http://www.va.gov/

http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/

U.S. Department of Education—Federal Student Aid

http://studentaid.ed.gov

SERVICE-RELATED LINKS

Air Force Voluntary Education

https://www.my.af.mil/faf/FAF/fafHome.jsp

Army Continuing Education System

https://www.hrc.army.mil/TAGD/Army Continuing Education System ACES

GoArmyEd

https://www.goarmyed.com/login.aspx
Army National Guard
www.pec.ng.mil

Coast Guard Institute
http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cgi

Marine Corps Voluntary Education / Lifelong Learning
http://www.usmc-mccs.org/
> Select Marine and Family Programs from the menu bar

Navy College Program
https://www.navycollege.navy.mil/

Army Reserve Voluntary Education
https://www.hrc.army.mil/TAGD/
Army Reserve Voluntary Education Program

OTHER RESOURCES

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges
http://www.soc.aascu.org/

Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES)
http://www.dantes.doded.mil/

Financial Aid for Spouses of Servicemembers
> What You Need to Know About Student Loans
American Council on Education (ACE), Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services

http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Military-Guide-Online.aspx

Military Spouse Career Advancement Account

https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa/

National Military Family Association

http://www.militaryfamily.org/

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SOC is a DoD contractor supporting government-sponsored education to servicemembers. The SOC contract is managed for the Department of Defense by Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES).