

Operation College Promise (OCP)

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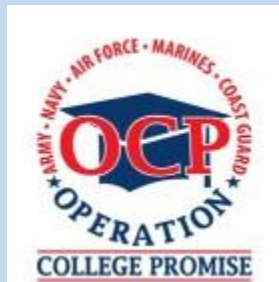
in collaboration with:

The Texas A&M University System (TAMUS)

Completing the Mission III: Assessing the Impact of the
COVID Pandemic on Student Veterans

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THE TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM



About Operation College Promise

Operation College Promise (OCP) is a national policy, research and education program founded in 2007, that supports the postsecondary advancement of our nation's servicemembers and veterans. Originally developed as a one-stop service hub for transitioning veterans, OCP endeavors to be an asset to both students and educators by supporting the establishment of effective and appropriate campus blueprints that are assets to student veterans: "To, Through, and Beyond Higher Education".

Major Initiatives:

- Developed first resource guide for service providers and student veterans in the Post-9/11 era: ***The OCP Field Guide***
- Published first research assessing student veterans' progress toward degree in the Post-9/11 era: ***Continuing the Mission I, II, III & IV***
- Administers the nation's only certificate program that supports colleges and universities in the development of effective student veteran-specific campus programming: ***The Certificate for Veterans' Service Providers (CVSP) training.***



OCP TRI-FOLD MISSION



Education

- Veterans
- Professionals

Policy

“Veterans Education Awareness Week”

Research

- “Completing the Mission I & II”



CERTIFICATE FOR VETERANS' SERVICE PROVIDERS (CVSP) PROGRAM

The signature professional training of Operation College Promise is designed specifically for higher educators supporting a military population on campus. The training prepares veterans' service providers with the essential tools and knowledge to assist veterans succeed in the transition to life. To date, about 800 professionals from over 40 states have been certified, representing over 200,000 student veterans and servicemembers. Programs have been presented 16 times in locations across the nation.

Program Content

Module 1 - Military 101: A Primer on Military Culture

Module 2 - What's New, What to Expect - An Update on the Post - 9/11 GI Bill

Module 3 - Serving My Country - A Student Veterans Panel

Module 4 - Cracking the Code of Military Credit and Experience Transfer

Module 5 - Invisible Injuries of Contemporary Warfare

Module 6 - Resources for Veterans in Transition

Module 7 - Promising Practices in Veteran Support Services - A National Perspective

Module 8 - What Now? The Next Mission - Employment!

Program concludes with team exercises, followed by a visit to a local military installation





About the Texas A&M University System – Office of Veteran Services

The Texas A&M University System is one of the largest systems of higher education in the nation. The System is a statewide network of 11 universities, a comprehensive health science center, and 8 state agencies. The TAMU System educates more than 151,000 students, of which nearly 4,100 are student veterans and an additional 6,700 are military-connected.

The Office of Veteran Services provides leadership, guidance, and coordination of services and support for military-connected students within the TAMU System.

The mission of the Office of Veteran Services is to enhance the collaboration and communication of the TAMU System campuses to facilitate veteran success by focusing on academic, financial, well being, and career support services in the institutions and agencies within the TAMU System.



Research Objectives:

To assess the overall impact of the COVID -19 pandemic on student veterans and higher education institutions **from January 1, 2020, to September 2020.**

Establish a preliminary data points to continue to establish a **longitudinal tracking capability** on the pandemics' long-term effects on this population (Second surveys to be distributed beginning in July 2021).

Maintain a continuum of OCP research tracking student veterans' progress in the Post-9/11 era.

Amend OCP training and programming to reflect emerging needs (temporarily or permanently) moving forward.

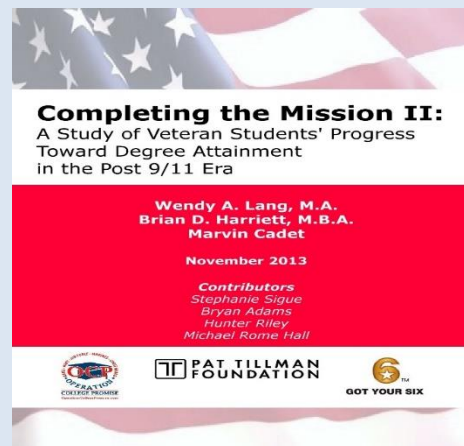
Previous OCP Research:

Completing the Mission I: A Study of Student Progress toward Degree Attainment in the Post-9/11 Era (2011)

Completing the Mission II: An Expanded Study of Student Progress toward Degree Attainment in the Post-9/11 Era (2013)

Completing the Mission III: Assessing the Impact of the COVID Pandemic on Student Veterans and Campus Services (2021)

Completing the Mission IV: A Continuum Analysis of the Impact of the COVID Pandemic on Student Veterans and Campus Services – **Now live.**





How Do We Know We Are Succeeding (Stockton University)?

- Stockton was one of the original universities to implement services that reflect the OCP **model** and **training** components
- Fall 2016 total number of veteran students enrolled at Stockton 647
- Graduating seniors 2014-2015 128
- Average GPA of graduating Veteran Students 3.37
- Veteran Student **retention** 2009 through 2015 school year 98.30%
- **Graduation** Rate of 97.6%



THE CTM III STUDY:

- Commenced in the summer of 2020 in collaboration with The Texas A&M University System. Open from **September 15, 2020 – November 13, 2020**
- The research consists of two surveys: one for personnel at **institutions** of higher learning (IHLs) and another for military-connected **students**
- **75 colleges and universities and 230 military-connected** students took part. Students both within and outside of the institutional pool participated.. Institutions were encouraged, but not required, to self-identify. Survey participation was voluntary and self-reported.
- Schools from the following states contributed: **Texas, New Jersey, Indiana, Arizona, Indiana, New York, North Carolina, Iowa, Colorado, Virginia, California, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Kentucky.**
- Students from the following states responded: **Texas, Indiana, North Carolina, Maryland, Washington State, and California**
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Dissemination Support:

- *Texas A&M University System Listserv*
- *Council on College Military Educators (CCME)*
- *Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst (JBMDL)*
- *New Jersey National Association of Student Veteran Providers (NJAVPA)*
- *Service to School (S2S)*
- *Michigan Association of State Colleges*
- *Veterans Education Success (VES)*
- *George W. Bush Institute*



Traditional Challenges for Student Veterans

Ancillary factors that have historically impacted student veteran include:

- General **acclimation** to a college or university setting as an older population, first generation learner and having been out of the education setting
- **Family** responsibilities
- **Employment and Financial commitments**
- **Trauma**-related challenges affecting learning
- Inability to attain appropriate **transfer of credit** and an appropriate degree plan
- Deployment and **re-acclimation** to campus

According to Student Veterans of American (SVA) survey in the Spring of 2020: “As of mid-March, one-third of survey respondents had lost jobs or were working less hours. More than 20 percent said they were concerned about buying groceries for their families and paying their mortgage or rent. Of those surveyed, 90% were concerned that COVID would negatively impact their education benefits.”



Student Veterans with Support Services:

- Have lower default rates
- Carry less overall debt
- Have higher retention rates/lower drop out rates
- Carry higher overall GPA's
- Are more likely to graduate
- Bring diversity and leadership to the campus environment and culture.



New and Emerging Challenges in the COVID-era

Variations in education delivery methods resulting from COVID (traditional, online, and hybrid) will generate obstacles that affected both institutions and students

- Reductions in **funding** and financial aid
- New and emerging **budget priorities** related to COVID
- Concern for the **safety** of campus-based education and social gathering
- Managing **COVID deployments** and related academic disruption
- The transition of in-person to **online learning** for staff
- Complications of moving to online for students
- General **technology** challenges
- A reduction in **interaction** and support

A Spring 2020 Mission Continues survey reported about 40% were being emotionally affected by isolation and depression.



Previous Responses of Student Veterans

STUDENT VETERAN SURVEY 2017

An online survey was conducted to gauge what veterans deemed most effective services on campus and which they would most prefer incorporated.

Top 5 services according to student veterans:

1. On-campus veterans' coordinator.
2. Student-operated veterans club association.
3. Evaluation and receipt of credit for training.
4. *In-state tuition for student veterans*
5. Veteran website/portal.

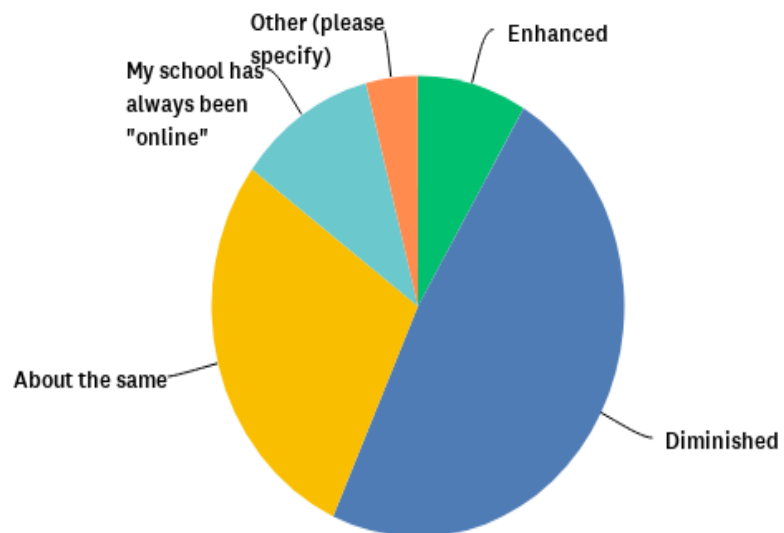
“Strong support from the Veteran Services Office helped keep me on track to Graduation,” Student Veteran.



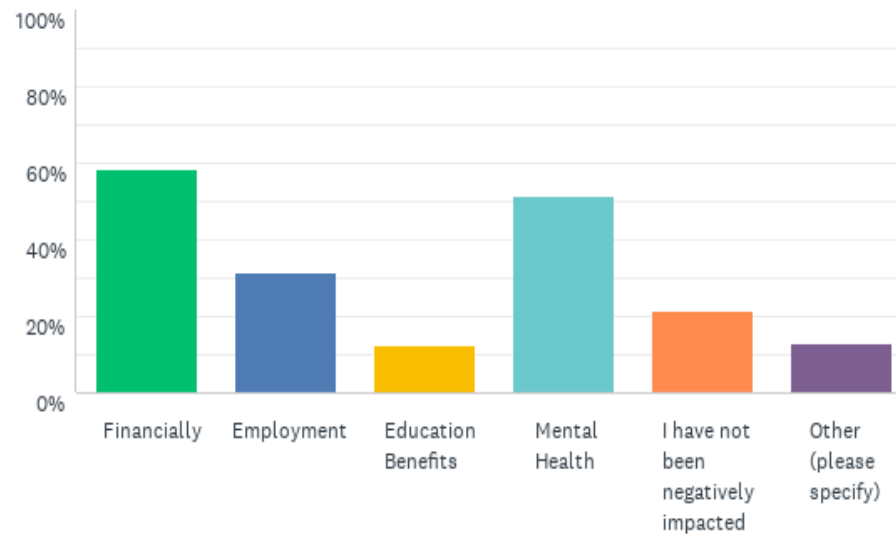
Responding Students Demographics

- 60% attending 4-year/12% attending 2-year /7% other
- 95% attending public/3% private/2% other
- 65% enrolled before COVID/23% resumed/17% started/5% changed schools/6% selected a new degree path
- Website/Dedicated Office/Veterans Coordinator/Transfer of Credit were the most highly ranked services
- Almost half reported a “Diminished Education Experience” during COVID with 27% reporting it was “About the Same” and a small number 8% reporting an improvement
- Most - (46%) preferred email correspondence during COVID/11% phone/47% in-person
- 26% responded that their schools response to COVID was “Great” 55% “Satisfactory”/15% “Unsatisfactory”

Q6 If your institution has moved from a traditional "on-campus" education to either a "hybrid" (part on-campus/part-online) or completely "online" has your education experience been



Q10 During the COVID pandemic, please indicate if you have been negatively impacted in the following ways (check all that apply)





Demographics of Responding Institutions

- 74% Public/24% Private/2% (*consistent with national average*)
- 60% Four-Year/36% Two -Year /4% Other (*slightly higher than traditional high school graduate*)
- 30% had more than 1,000 student veterans/30% between 0-250/Remaining 29% between 250-1,000
- **Between the start of the 2019 fall semester and end of 2020 spring semester, about 40% reported a decrease in military-connected students reported a decrease in this population. 26% reported an increase**
- At the beginning of the 2019 fall semester, about 50% offered entirely in-person, with remaining half reporting some type of hybrid delivery.
- **By the Spring Semester of 2020, only 2% were in-person and the remainder offering some type of hybrid model**



Exploring the Impact on Staffing, Budget, and Programs

Staffing:

Staff levels at 65% remained static, while 13% reported either an increase or decrease.

Budget:

About half of the respondents noted that their budget had not been affected while 30% revealed a decrease.

Programs:

Dedicated offices were reduced from 80% to 72% and websites or portals went from 84% to 80%, Lounges went from 66% to 48% and student organizations from 73% to 64%.

Summation:

This preliminary analysis illustrates an overall downward trend in support.



Finding 1

New funding priorities related to the pandemic threaten to jeopardize schools' capacity to provide the critical support services shown to optimize military-connected student success. With 30% already reporting budget cuts to military programming, some schools may be forced to further degrade these mission-critical offerings in the next academic year. Moving forward, campus advocates will need to increase advocacy to leadership and consider creative options for addressing the needs of military-connected students, including enhanced collaboration within and beyond their campuses.

*"Well before the pandemic, colleges and universities were already grappling with a growing financial crisis, brought on by years of shrinking state support, declining enrollment, and student concerns with skyrocketing tuition and debt. By one estimate, the pandemic has cost colleges at least \$120 billion [in] pandemic-related expenses and suppressed revenues from sports, housing, meal plans, and will likely impact ancillary support programming for all populations for the foreseeable future." Nierenberg, A. & Pasick, A. (2020). Colleges are Slashing Budgets. *The New York Times*.*

Because it's a newspaper article you're citing here, the month should also be given—e.g., (2020, May) or whatever. As it stands, the citation is also currently missing a hyperlink.



Finding 2

Nearly 40% of responses noted a reduction in communication between military-connected students and staff. This is troubling, as this interaction is often the linchpin to a successful transition and the persistence necessary to maximize education benefits. Historically, military students who "stop-out" are unlikely to return to campus. Further, these relationships are critical in linking students to ancillary services that can enhance academic progress. The impacts of the pandemic on university resources include continued interruptions of student-staff communication. IHLs must strive to develop alternative methods and solutions to overcome these obstacles.

“As a former student veteran and someone who worked in the veteran’s support office, I can attest to the intrinsic value of having strong veteran support services. For some, the trimming of these could have longstanding implications for transition and degree completion. We need to work together to assure that these vital programs continue.” Lauren DelRicci, Navy Veteran



Finding 3

As some students have enrolled in school under the Forever GI Bill to both pursue a degree and gain eligibility for the additional income provided by the benefit, respondents are revealing more significant needs for support as they navigate pandemic impacts on employment, finances, mental health, and access to education benefits. This reality coincides-with reductions in staff, funding, support, and communication that have already led to some students withdrawing. Schools need to be aware that these services are often a yardstick for success, and strive to find alternative methods of support while advocating to maintain existing programs. The ability to do so will be a critical factor for military-connected student success.



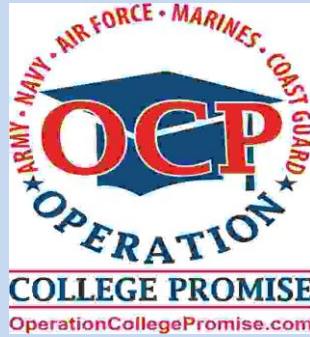
ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

For Military-Connected Students:

- **What factors contributed to you starting school or disenrolling?**
- **What has improved or worsened over the last 12 months?**
- **Were you deployed for COVID relief?**
- **Overall experience with online learning**
- **Factors for selecting an institution.**

From Institutions:

- **What will be the change in the student veteran population over the next several semesters?**
- **How has their academic progress changed?**
- **Have services/staffing cut during the pandemic been restored?**
- **Has overall campus support increased or decreased?**
- **What programs/services did you start during COVID that you will retain?**



Audience Participation

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Thank You!!

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**Scan the QR Code to Complete
the Survey:**



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