

Unlocking Potential: Strategies for Recruiting and Supporting Veterans on the Path to Success in College

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Abstract

Higher education in the United States is currently grappling with two significant challenges that threaten its sustainability: the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a decline in enrollments, and the 2023 Supreme Court decision to prohibit affirmative action in college admissions. This essay explores how these challenges affect student success and diversity, equity, and inclusion principles, emphasizing the urgent need for innovative recruitment of underrepresented student groups. Veterans, specifically those with some college credit but no credential (VSCNC), represent a promising yet overlooked demographic within traditional recruitment strategies. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, over 40 million adults in the United States belong to the “some college, no credential” group. Notably, 76% of post-9/11 veterans have some college credit but lack a bachelor’s degree (Hill et al., 2019). This essay emphasizes the necessity of developing tailored strategies to support VSCNC, a group that has been historically underrepresented in higher education despite their significant educational resources, skills, and abilities to perform well and succeed in college. By addressing barriers and leveraging veterans’ diverse perspectives, institutions can improve recruitment and academic success, fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Keywords: postsecondary education, veterans, military, student recruitment, retention, graduation, higher education policy, completion, underserved students, student success, DEI

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Affirmative action policies, designed to address historical and systemic inequalities, have been a subject of debate and legal scrutiny for decades. The 2023 Supreme Court decision to prohibit affirmative action in college admissions is expected to significantly impact efforts by colleges and universities to create diverse and inclusive learning environments. This decision not only raises concerns about the potential erosion of diversity but also complicates the broader challenges faced by higher education institutions. A report from the National Student Clearinghouse shows a 0.5% decline in college enrollments since spring 2022, following a 3.1% decrease from spring 2021 to spring 2022 (Causey et al., 2023). These enrollment declines, coupled with the Supreme Court ruling, pose a severe threat to the financial stability of institutions, exacerbated by economic uncertainty, a shrinking college-age population, and concerns about the return on investment for students.

Broader trends and challenges are increasing pressure on higher education institutions, with recent changes in the FAFSA process adding new complexities to college enrollment. The new FAFSA form for the 2023–2024 academic year has had significant implications, as delays in its release and processing have hindered students' ability to make timely decisions about college affordability (Knott & Knox, 2024). These delays have led to students receiving financial aid packages later than usual, causing some to postpone or forgo their college plans, especially among low-income families. This uncertainty impacts enrollment numbers and financial aid distribution, straining colleges and disproportionately affecting marginalized groups.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI hereafter) initiatives are crucial for fostering inclusive environments in higher education (Harper & Associates, 2024). However, the 2023 Supreme Court decision requires a reassessment of DEI strategies to effectively support diverse communities. Despite debates about the role of DEI policies, extensive research supports their importance in addressing racial inequities and enhancing educational quality (Chiou et al., 2022; Greenhow et al., 2020; Harper & Associates, 2024; Taylor & Cantwell, 2019). DEI programming helps students gain critical thinking and leadership skills by providing diverse perspectives and promoting meaningful interactions which is essential for transformative learning experiences (Greenhow et al., 2020; Harper & Associates, 2024; Naphan & Elliott, 2015).

To promote DEI effectively, postsecondary institutions must implement innovative recruitment practices that actively engage and support underrepresented groups (Greenhow et al., 2020). Recognizing veterans as an underrepresented group within this framework underscores the critical need for inclusive policies and practices that address their unique experiences and challenges in higher education (Brown & Gross, 2011; Chiou et al., 2022; Hammond, 2017). By acknowledging the distinctive perspectives and contributions of veterans, institutions can develop targeted initiatives that not only support their academic and personal success but also enrich the broader learning community.

This essay focuses on strategies for recruiting and supporting veterans with some college credit but no credential (VSCNC), a demographic often overlooked in traditional higher education recruitment efforts (DiRamio, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Notably, the post-9/11 veteran population, which numbered 4.2 million in the United States as of 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020), represents the youngest and most educated segment of the veteran community. However, 76% of this cohort has earned some college credit but lacks a bachelor's degree (Hill et al., 2019), underscoring the need for targeted support to facilitate their educational attainment and address the gaps exacerbated by recent challenges. By focusing on these veterans, institutions can play a pivotal role in closing educational gaps and advancing DEI goals.

Inclusive Recruitment Strategies for Military Veterans in Higher Education

Military veterans bring invaluable and diverse perspectives to academia, including leadership, resilience, and a broad understanding of international and cultural dynamics, thereby enriching learning communities with their unique experiences (Davis & Minnis, 2017; DiRamio, 2017). Post-9/11 veterans face unique challenges as they transition from military service to civilian life and higher education. Therefore, targeted recruitment initiatives are crucial to reengage these veterans in postsecondary education, enabling them to attain formal credentials (Albright & Schwanke, 2021).

It is imperative that institutions recognize military veterans as an underrepresented group within the DEI framework, allowing higher education institutions to develop more effective strategies to support their success (Lim et al., 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that the veteran community is remarkably diverse, encompassing individuals from various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and LGBTQ+ backgrounds. Many veterans belong to underrepresented groups, yet their experiences and perspectives are often marginalized in discussions about diversity and inclusion (Lim et al., 2018). For example, veterans of color may face unique challenges, such as navigating racism within the military or experiencing disparities in accessing support services upon their return to civilian life (Cancio, 2018; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

A report from the U.S. Department of Education (2016) emphasizes that a shift toward inclusive strategies focusing on DEI is essential to support underrepresented groups, including military veterans, rather than merely focusing on increasing enrollment numbers. As DEI becomes increasingly important in higher education admissions, institutions must design strategies that cater to the diverse educational journeys of this often overlooked demographic, fostering an environment conducive to degree completion. Embracing diversity among prospective students enriches the vibrancy and inclusiveness of campus culture, thereby nurturing overall success in academic program completion for the institution (Lawrence, 2023). Today's students, encompassing the "some college, no credential" (SCNC) demographic, merit a well-supported pathway

to obtain a valuable degree. The successful completion of degrees not only enhances the prospects of the individuals earning them but also improves the civilian workforce and society at large (Brown & Gross, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

Postsecondary institutions also invest substantially in marketing and recruitment. According to a report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2023), student recruitment extends beyond a mere tool for enrollment managers; it is a costly, methodically planned science designed to attract and engage prospective students throughout the college admissions process. Hence, recruitment strategies leverage marketing and economic principles to strategically shape the composition of incoming classes, ensuring that institutions meet their enrollment goals and maintain diversity (Bussey et al., 2021). These efforts can be costly, with public institutions spending a median of \$536 to recruit each undergraduate student. Collectively, universities invest an average of about \$600,000 annually on vendors for enrollment management, which encompasses recruitment costs (Dancy et al., 2023). To optimize these investments, institutions should identify students with the financial capacity and determination to complete academic programs. This essay highlights the importance of adopting comprehensive and customized strategies to attract VSCNC students and facilitate their successful completion of college credentials. Inclusive admissions practices and focused recruitment strategies honor veterans' military service by providing academic programs and support services that foster a sense of belonging on campus.

Literature Review

Postsecondary institutions have traditionally relied on standard recruitment practices such as campus tours, college fairs, admissions presentations, direct mail campaigns, high school visits, outreach by alumni and current students, personalized contact from admissions counselors, information sessions and open houses, scholarship and financial aid workshops, and social media to attract students (Albright & Schwanke, 2021; Bussey et al., 2021; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022). While these methods are effective for traditional-age students still in high school, who typically rely on such practices for their college selection process, they fall short in reaching military veterans. A thorough examination of existing literature reveals notable gaps in these traditional practices when it comes to engaging veterans, indicating a need for more targeted strategies to effectively reach this group (Sullivan et al., 2024). The focus has often been on attracting students rather than ensuring their long-term success. This oversight is particularly evident for underrepresented student groups, whose unique experiences and needs are frequently overlooked in standard recruitment and support strategies (Sullivan et al., 2024).

Veterans, in particular, face distinct challenges that traditional practices fail to address adequately (Beauchamp & Lopez, 2020; LeMire, 2015). For example, the lack of recognition for military training and experience in the form of academic credit can hinder their educational progress (Kelley et al., 2023). Additionally, transitioning from

a structured military environment to a more flexible academic setting can be difficult without proper guidance and support. To address these gaps, it is imperative to shift perspectives and adopt comprehensive approaches that prioritize both enrollment numbers and student success throughout their academic journey. This shift is especially critical for recruiting military veterans, who bring unique experiences and perspectives to academia but often face specific challenges in completing their education (Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022).

Targeted Recruitment Strategies

According to the literature, several targeted recruitment strategies can effectively reach and support veterans. First, institutions should establish clear policies for translating military training and experience into academic credit. This approach not only validates veterans' prior learning but also accelerates their educational progress (Kelley et al., 2023). Tailored information sessions and outreach programs that address the unique needs and questions of veterans can make them feel more understood and welcomed. These sessions can provide detailed information on financial aid, academic credit for military experience, and support services available to veterans (Albright & Schwanke, 2021).

Additionally, establishing veteran resource centers on campus can provide a central location for veterans to access support services, connect with other veterans, and receive guidance on navigating the academic environment. These centers can offer academic advising, career counseling, mental health services specifically designed for veterans, and resources for familial obligations such as family housing and childcare (Bussey et al., 2021). Offering flexible scheduling options and online programs can accommodate veterans' unique needs, especially those balancing education with work or family responsibilities (Zoli et al., 2015). Online programs can also provide the structure and flexibility that veterans are accustomed to from their military service (Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022).

Moreover, collaborating with organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Student Veterans of America, and local military bases can enhance recruitment efforts. These partnerships can help institutions reach veterans directly and provide them with reliable information and support (LeMire, 2015). By implementing these strategies, higher education institutions can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for military veterans, ensuring their unique perspectives and experiences are recognized and valued throughout their academic journey.

This essay will provide specific strategies for effectively recruiting and supporting military veterans. These include tailored recruitment practices, veteran-specific support services, and the integration of DEI principles. By focusing on these strategies, post-secondary institutions can enhance their ability to attract, support, and retain veterans, ultimately improving their academic success and enriching the campus community.

Recruiting Well-Resourced Students

In an effort to enhance their institutional reputation, many postsecondary institutions allocate substantial resources to attract students from affluent backgrounds, those residing out-of-state or internationally, individuals of predominantly Caucasian ethnicity, and those who appear to possess significant financial resources (Taylor & Cantwell, 2019). However, this recruitment approach often falls short of achieving DEI and enrollment goals. Moreover, this method compromises diversity in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and veterans' status, ultimately resulting in a reduction of overall diversity within the institution's student body (Taylor & Cantwell, 2019). Veterans, however, represent a well-resourced student population with diverse backgrounds, offering a rich array of experiences and perspectives that can enhance the academic environment. Veterans encompass a broad demographic spectrum, including individuals from various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and LGBTQ+ backgrounds (Lim et al., 2018). By targeting veterans in recruitment strategies, institutions can simultaneously attract well-resourced students while also enhancing their diversity profile.

Recruiting “Some College, No Credential” Students

Recruitment of SCNC students typically involves strategies similar to those employed to reach nontraditional students, such as utilizing social media and digital platforms, forming employer partnerships, and establishing dual agreement programs with community colleges (Chang et al., 2015; Charness & Holley, 2004; Olson et al., 2010; Rumann et al., 2011). This demographic includes adult learners, veterans, employed professionals seeking career advancement, and those resuming education after a break (Bellare et al., 2023). The goal is to provide flexible and accessible pathways to degree completion (Rosenbaum et al., 2017; Rumann et al., 2011).

To support SCNC students, institutions offer options like community college credit transfers and tailored academic programs. These include accelerated degree programs that allow students to complete their degrees faster by taking condensed courses or more credits per term. Additionally, flexible scheduling options, such as evening, weekend, and online classes, accommodate working adults and those with family responsibilities (Choitz & Prince, 2008; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2024). Additionally, collaborative dual agreement programs with community colleges facilitate seamless transitions from associate to bachelor's degree programs, offering financial incentives such as scholarships to reduce educational costs (Bullington et al., 2024; Marekova et al., 2010).

Recruiting nontraditional students, including veterans, involves extensive outreach and marketing efforts to identify and engage potential candidates (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). To foster a sense of belonging among veterans, colleges can implement initiatives such as mentorship programs specifically tailored to address their unique experiences and needs (Choitz & Prince, 2008). Programs that create veteran-friendly environments, provide dedicated support services, and highlight veteran success stories can

significantly enhance veterans' sense of inclusion and community during the recruitment process (Elliott et al., 2011; Kirchner, 2015). However, traditional recruitment efforts often fall short in fostering a genuine connection to the college environment. Research indicates that programs incorporating peer support networks and inclusive campus events are more effective in building a sense of community among nontraditional students (Elliott et al., 2011; Jones, 2017; Kirchner, 2015). It is crucial to address these students' specific challenges and concerns, as a lack of personalized engagement can result in hesitancy to enroll or reenroll in academic programs (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

DEI Considerations in Recruiting

Postsecondary institutions typically address DEI in student recruitment efforts through holistic processes that consider not only academic achievements but also a candidate's unique experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives (Harper, 2020; Lawrence, 2023). This approach helps ensure that the student body reflects a wide range of identities and cultural perspectives, contributing to a richer learning environment (Chiou et al., 2022; Naphan & Elliott, 2015). To reinforce a culture of inclusion on campus, postsecondary institutions have begun to offer support services and resources tailored to the needs of diverse student populations (Cumming et al., 2023; Lange & Lee, 2024). These initiatives include mentorship programs, cultural organizations, and initiatives that promote cross-cultural understanding (Cumming et al., 2023).

Holistic admission processes, which consider the whole applicant rather than just academic metrics, have been widely adopted to support this inclusive approach (Bastedo, 2021). Studies have shown that holistic review practices can positively affect the admission of low-socioeconomic students and reduce academic undermatching among high-achieving minority students (Bastedo et al., 2018; Black et al., 2015). Furthermore, specialized programs have been developed to support the unique needs of military veterans, ensuring they have access to necessary resources and opportunities in higher education (Bellaire et al., 2022). For example, the University of Michigan's Veteran and Military Services Program provides dedicated advising, mental health services, and a tailored orientation program specifically for veterans (University of Michigan, n.d.). Similarly, Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families offers entrepreneurship training, professional networking opportunities, and transition assistance to help veterans integrate into civilian careers (Syracuse University, n.d.). Additionally, Yale University's Eli Whitney Students Program provides flexible admission policies and tailored academic support for nontraditional students, including veterans, allowing them to pursue their education at a pace that suits their unique circumstances (Yale University, n.d.).

Characteristics of VSCNC Students

The U.S. military prioritizes the professional development of its personnel by offering top-notch education and training programs (Henderson, 2024). Additionally, military service provides lucrative educational benefits aimed at supporting veterans' academic

ambitions beyond their military careers, setting the stage for successful post-military endeavors (Henderson, 2024). However, a notable gap persists within the U.S. veteran community. Research indicates a disparity between the education and training received in the military and the recognition, respect, and application of these credentials in postsecondary education for student veterans (Hill et al., 2019). Moreover, U.S. military veterans remain an underrepresented group on college campuses nationwide (Hill et al., 2019).

According to Hill et al. (2019), only 10% of veterans using GI Bill benefits enroll in highly selective institutions—those with graduation rates above 70%—while about 33% attend for-profit institutions. Military veterans face unique challenges in higher education, often requiring tailored support services to address their specific needs. These challenges include difficulties with credit transfers, balancing academic responsibilities with family and work commitments, and adjusting to the civilian academic environment (Barry et al., 2014; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Falkey, 2016; Radford et al., 2016).

Recognizing veterans as an underrepresented group within the DEI framework highlights the importance of inclusive policies and practices (Brown & Gross, 2011; Chiou et al., 2022; Hammond, 2017). To foster an inclusive academic environment, it is essential to acknowledge the distinct experiences of military veterans and integrate DEI strategies that address their needs, from admissions to graduation. VSCNC exhibit traits that align with those of exemplary students: disciplined, hardworking, and mission driven (Falkey, 2016; Hammond, 2017). In the face of declining college enrollments, integrating VSCNC students into the campus community can be a potential remedy.

Student veterans bring unique characteristics to campus life that align with the qualities of traditional-age students. Through rigorous training and active-duty service, they acquire skills such as effective time management, meticulous attention to detail, and a strong work ethic, all of which enhance their academic performance and make them outstanding college students (Elliott et al., 2011; Kirchner, 2015). These abilities not only contribute to their academic excellence but also distinguish them as exceptional college students (Barry et al., 2014; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Furthermore, the qualifications required for active military service establish a high standard, serving as a quality benchmark for subsequent civilian engagement, including college education and roles in civil services like firefighting and policing (Brown & Gross, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

Recruiting veterans as students can significantly enhance the academic environment of postsecondary education, challenging the misconception that they lack the necessary skills for success in higher education (Semer & Harmening, 2015). This stereotype—that veterans are ill-prepared or less capable academically—stems from a broader, inaccurate perception of their readiness and potential (Cate et al., 2017; Gonzalez & Elliott, 2016; Hunter-Johnson, 2018; McCaslin et al., 2014; Vacchi & Berger, 2014; Young & Phillips, 2019). Contrary to this misconception, research

indicates that such biases are both prevalent and problematic (Cate et al., 2017; Semer & Harmening, 2015). Veterans are often unfairly viewed through a lens of deficit, despite strong evidence of their academic qualifications and potential (Cate et al., 2017; Gonzalez & Elliott, 2016; Semer & Harmening, 2015). For instance, 99% of student veterans have completed high school or an equivalent, exceeding the national average of approximately 75% (Cate et al., 2017).

Additionally, the motivation behind their enlistment often centers on educational advancement, with three quarters of veterans joining the military specifically to leverage GI Bill benefits for their education (Cate et al., 2017; Garrity, 2017; Hill et al., 2019). Studies have demonstrated that these biases can significantly impact veterans' experiences in higher education (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Motl et al., 2022; Vogt et al., 2018). For example, DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) found that stereotypes about veterans being less academically prepared can hinder their integration into academic environments, affecting their overall success and satisfaction. Similarly, research by Motl et al. (2022) highlights that misconceptions about veterans' abilities can lead to inadequate support services, further exacerbating the challenges they face. In line with this, addressing these biases is crucial for developing effective recruitment and support strategies that recognize the strengths and contributions of veteran students, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Once enrolled in college, student veterans consistently demonstrate academic excellence. Their average GPA of 3.34 outshines that of their traditional student counterparts, who typically maintain a GPA of 2.94 (Cate et al., 2017). This stark contrast in academic performance challenges the unfounded belief that military service implies a lack of preparation for higher education (Jones, 2017; Zoli et al., 2015). Furthermore, the success outcomes of student veterans are noteworthy, boasting a 72% success rate in higher education (Cate et al., 2017). Not only do they achieve academic milestones, but they also graduate at higher rates than their civilian peers (Barry et al., 2014; Cate et al., 2017; Vacchi, 2012). These statistics underscore the valuable contributions and resilience of student veterans in academic settings. By actively recruiting and supporting these individuals, colleges can enrich their campuses with a diverse and accomplished student body, challenging stereotypes and fostering an inclusive environment that recognizes the unique strengths and experiences that veterans bring to the table.

In summary, the literature highlights the importance of DEI in higher education, particularly the need for institutions to implement strategies that actively engage underrepresented groups such as veterans. The unique challenges faced by veterans in higher education, coupled with their significant contributions, emphasize the need for tailored supports. While existing studies have explored various aspects of veterans' experiences in academia, there remains a gap in addressing the specific needs of VSCNC.

Strategies for Effective Recruitment and Support

This essay added to the existing literature by examining targeted strategies for recruiting and supporting VSCNC. By providing actionable insights, this analysis aims to help institutions enhance their DEI initiatives and better serve this often-overlooked group. Veterans bring valuable attributes from their military experience, such as discipline, dedication, and collaboration (Henderson, 2024). These qualities, honed through rigorous training and operational duties, significantly contribute to their academic success. Research shows that veterans are more likely to complete an academic credential compared to their non-veteran peers, due to these strengths (Blakeley & Higgs, 2014; Davis & Minnis, 2017). Additionally, the resilience developed during military service equips veterans with the ability to effectively manage college challenges (Haynie, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2015). This resilience, coupled with strong problem-solving skills and adaptability, not only helps veterans navigate academic pressures but also positions them as valuable contributors to classroom discussions and group projects (Student Veterans of America, 2017).

Incorporating student veterans into campus communities infuses classrooms with fresh perspectives and innovative approaches (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Many veterans have held leadership roles in the military, translating into strong leadership skills, teamwork, and a commitment to collective success in academic environments (Henderson, 2024; Livingston et al., 2011; Mujica, 2013). By recruiting and integrating student veterans, postsecondary institutions can leverage these unique skills to address campus challenges and create a more inclusive environment. This diversity not only enriches campus culture but also enhances the learning experience for all students (Henderson, 2024; Mujica, 2013).

VSCNC students are particularly advantageous for postsecondary institutions due to the GI Bill benefits. This bill covers tuition, fees, and books for eligible veterans, alleviating the financial burden of higher education. It also provides housing allowances, ensuring veterans can secure suitable living arrangements while attending school, and a stipend for living expenses to cover essentials such as food and transportation (Cancio, 2018; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). This comprehensive financial support offers stability for veterans and ensures institutions receive consistent funding, which helps maintain student enrollment and completion rates (Kirchner et al., 2014).

Supporting Student Veterans Financially

Financial support plays a vital role in the academic success of veterans, directly impacting their ability to successfully transition from military service to postsecondary education. The GI Bill is instrumental in facilitating access to education, improving veterans' overall wellbeing and stability during this transition (Bhattarai et al., 2023; Kirchner et al., 2014). Notably, it has been effective in reducing attrition rates among this student

group, with data from the Department of Veterans Affairs showing a dropout rate of approximately 16% for student veterans, compared to 40% for traditional-age college students (Borsari et al., 2017; Kwakye & Deane, 2022).

Despite the substantial benefits of the GI Bill, it often falls short of covering the full financial needs of student veterans, presenting significant challenges. Colleges need to be mindful of these financial gaps to better support veterans before they enroll. Costs such as tuition beyond GI Bill coverage, housing, and textbooks remain significant hurdles (Borsari et al., 2017; Kirchner et al., 2014; Morgan et al., 2021). Navigating the complexities of the financial aid system only adds to these difficulties (Bullington et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024). As a result, a nationally representative survey by The Pew Charitable Trusts found that 6 in 10 U.S. military veterans have taken out student loans to address these unmet needs, particularly for living expenses such as housing and childcare (Bhattarai et al., 2023; Morgan et al., 2021). This reliance on loans persists despite the robust Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, which cover full tuition and fees at public universities and partial costs at private institutions, as well as stipends for books and housing.

To address the financial gaps left by the GI Bill, the Department of Veterans Affairs established the Yellow Ribbon Program, which, along with application and enrollment fee waivers, plays a key role in removing financial barriers and ensuring educational opportunities for veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). To further support veterans and enhance their transition to higher education, colleges should consider offering scholarships or additional institutional aid. This aid can help stretch GI Bill benefits to cover educational expenses more effectively, allowing veterans to manage costs without resorting to loans. By meeting their financial needs, institutions not only alleviate immediate financial pressures but also enable veterans to preserve their GI Bill benefits for future use, such as for graduate programs or transferring benefits to dependents (Bhattarai et al., 2023). This approach ultimately provides veterans with greater financial flexibility and supports their ability to balance educational and personal commitments while attending the institution.

Fostering Support Services

Addressing the diverse needs of VSCNC presents a unique opportunity for postsecondary institutions to implement targeted outreach programs. These initiatives should focus on reconnecting with these individuals by providing personalized support services and creating an environment conducive to their seamless return to academia. Institutions can adapt to the unique circumstances of these students by incorporating flexible course schedules, online learning options, and a streamlined credit transfer process. Recognizing and valuing prior academic accomplishments, including credits earned during military service, can significantly motivate veterans to persist and complete their degrees.

Utilizing resources offered by the American Council on Education (ACE) can facilitate the transfer of military course credits, thereby easing the credit transfer process and reducing the credits required to fulfill academic degree program requirements. For example, Syracuse University effectively demonstrates this practice by utilizing the ACE credit evaluation process to award academic credit for veterans' military service. By leveraging Joint Service Transcripts (JST) and Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) records, Syracuse University ensures that veterans receive appropriate recognition for their prior military experience (Syracuse University, n.d.). Family housing options on or near campus can also be crucial for veterans with spouses and children, facilitating a healthy academic and family life balance. Syracuse University, Ohio State University, and Yale University, for example, offer year-round rental of two-bedroom apartments specifically reserved for student veterans with families, addressing their unique challenges (Ohio State University, n.d.; Syracuse University, n.d.; Yale University, n.d.).

Research highlights the significance of these accommodations, as detailed by Brown and Gross (2011), who outline best practices for managing veteran and military student services and emphasize the crucial role of family support initiatives in higher education settings. Additionally, Kirchner (2015) explores strategies for supporting student veterans' transitions to college, emphasizing the positive impact of family-friendly policies. Moreover, on-campus childcare facilities or partnerships with nearby providers can demonstrate institutional respect for veterans' family commitments and facilitate their active participation in academic and campus life (Kirchner, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). By implementing these supportive measures and setting positive examples like Syracuse University, Yale University and Ohio State University's family housing programs, institutions can create an inclusive environment that honors veterans' service and supports their academic success.

Additionally, several other institutions are leading the way in providing comprehensive support to veterans, addressing their diverse needs through a range of tailored services. The University of Arizona's Office of Veteran and Military Services excels in offering personalized academic advising, career counseling, and veterans affairs benefits assistance (University of Arizona, n.d.). The University of Arizona enhances flexibility for veterans by providing evening and weekend courses, as well as online programs.

Similarly, the University of Southern California and the Pennsylvania State University are noteworthy for their exceptional support through their Veterans Resource Centers (Pennsylvania State University, n.d.; University of Southern California, n.d.). These centers not only connect veterans with strong alumni networks but also provide veterans career resources. Both institutions offer flexible learning options such as evening and weekend courses and online classes, which contributes to ensuring that veterans can balance their educational pursuits with professional and familial responsibilities, signifying a commitment to meeting the diverse needs of their veteran students. Overall, these institutions exemplify best practices in supporting military-connected

students, demonstrating a strong commitment to leveraging their unique experiences and skills.

Crafting Effective Recruitment Strategies for Veterans with Some College Experience

Developing effective recruitment strategies for VSCNC requires a comprehensive and strategic approach tailored to their unique challenges. The initial steps involve identifying the obstacles veterans face and providing targeted support services to lay the groundwork for a truly veteran-friendly campus (Borsari et al., 2017; Haynie, 2016; Kirchner et al., 2014; Shapiro et al., 2015). Tailoring outreach strategies to veterans' specific needs and preferences enhances visibility and engagement (LeMire, 2015). Utilizing veteran-focused platforms such as job fairs, online forums, and social media groups is crucial for establishing connections (Sullivan et al., 2024). Colleges can effectively recruit veterans by leveraging dedicated veterans services offices, promoting financial support through programs like the Yellow Ribbon Program and institutional aid, implementing military transition programs, engaging in targeted outreach through military and veteran organizations, hosting veteran-specific admissions events, facilitating alumni and peer mentoring, providing customized support services, forming partnerships with military organizations, and recognizing military experience in the admissions process. Building on these strategies, it is essential to provide clear and concise messaging across all communication channels, including website content, promotional materials, and outreach efforts. Highlighting the institution's commitment to supporting veterans and recognizing their skills and experiences is crucial in bridging the awareness gap and engaging this important demographic (Soares & Simões, 2015).

A pivotal component of effective recruitment is creating a dedicated veteran's section on the college website. This section should include a comprehensive FAQ that addresses veterans' concerns, as the college website often serves as the primary source of information for prospective students (Constantinides & Stagno, 2012; Saichaie & Morphew, 2014; Soares & Simões, 2015). Veterans tend to seek out detailed information to support their college decision-making process, and a well-resourced website that answers their questions and addresses their needs increases the likelihood of them considering an application; conversely, websites that do not cater to these needs are quickly dismissed (Ford, 2011; Soares & Simões, 2015). Establishing a veteran-friendly campus also involves setting up a dedicated veterans' admissions office staffed with knowledgeable personnel who can provide personalized support during the application process (Molina & Ang, 2017).

Institutions should ensure prompt and effective communication through email, telephone, and social media, as veterans expect quick responses similar to their military experiences (Ford, 2011; Lederer et al., 2015; Molina & Ang, 2017). For example, the University of Southern California, the University of Virginia, and the University

of Texas at Austin, to name a few, all have dedicated contact personnel or offices specifically for veterans, providing tailored support and timely assistance throughout the college application process. Additionally, collaborating with veteran organizations such as the American Legion, Student Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars enhances outreach and community engagement. Active participation in veterans' events and sponsorship of outreach sessions underscores the institution's commitment to supporting veterans (Cancio, 2018).

Strategic alliances with non-profits like Service to School, Warrior-Scholar Project, and Posse Project are effective in reaching and supporting potential veteran applicants. Leveraging digital platforms popular among veterans, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and military forums (e.g., DefenceTalk, World Military, and Defense Forum), for targeted advertising helps highlight support services, financial aid opportunities, and the benefits of completing a degree (Lim et al., 2019). Connecting with military bases and veterans support centers through information booths at community events and sponsoring outreach sessions are also essential strategies for effective engagement. Hosting both in-person and virtual information sessions exclusively for veterans, featuring academic advisors and successful student veteran alumni, further enhances outreach (Bellaire et al., 2022). These sessions provide personalized guidance and showcase the institution's commitment to veterans' academic and career goals (Brown & Gross, 2011).

In summary, by implementing these strategies and acknowledging veterans' unique needs, colleges can effectively attract and retain prospective VSCNC. This approach fosters a supportive and inclusive campus environment, bridging the gap between recruitment and retention, and ultimately enhancing the educational experiences of military veterans.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges confronting higher education, such as declining enrollments and the 2023 Supreme Court decision prohibiting affirmative action in college admissions, underscore the necessity of a focused commitment to DEI. As institutions recover from COVID-19-related enrollment declines, addressing these issues becomes crucial in maintaining access to quality postsecondary education. Encouraging the enrollment of military veterans not only acknowledges their service but also taps into a diverse talent pool with the financial means to navigate the costs associated with higher education. Recruiting and supporting veterans, particularly those with some college experience but no credential, benefits both the institution and the veterans' community. Recognizing and addressing veterans' strengths and challenges allows postsecondary institutions to counteract declining enrollment, positively impact the workforce, and enhance educational and societal outcomes.

Recognizing military veterans as an underrepresented group within the DEI framework enables higher education institutions to develop targeted strategies that address their specific challenges. Veterans often face unique financial constraints, family responsibilities, and credit transfer inequities, which can impede their educational success. To support this student population effectively, institutions should implement inclusive recruitment practices and provide comprehensive support services. This includes offering financial assistance tailored to veterans' needs and addressing logistical issues such as family housing and childcare needs for veterans who must balance academic pursuits with family responsibilities. Additionally, institutions should streamline the credit transfer and evaluation processes and establish clear guidelines for awarding credits based on military experience.

Furthermore, personalized academic advising and veteran-friendly admissions policies further enhance veterans' academic success. Flexible class schedules and priority registration accommodate veterans' unique needs, allowing them to balance their educational commitments with other responsibilities. By adopting these practices, higher education institutions create an environment where veterans feel empowered to complete their degrees and transition successfully into postmilitary careers. Such measures not only enhance veterans' educational experiences but also enrich campus communities with their diverse perspectives and skills.

Engaging in outreach efforts, forming partnerships with veteran support organizations, establishing veteran resource centers, and fostering a supportive campus culture are vital steps for demonstrating to VSCNC students that they are welcomed and valued. Cultivating a culture focused on DEI by recognizing and embracing veterans' contributions is essential across all types of postsecondary institutions, including two- and four-year colleges. Institutions with a history of providing educational opportunities to veterans play a key role in addressing income inequality and promoting economic growth. By integrating DEI principles into institutional policies and practices and viewing veterans through this lens, institutions can better address the systemic barriers hindering their academic success, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students.

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