



West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission
West Virginia Community and Technical College System



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October 4, 2013

The Honorable Jeffrey V. Kessler
President
West Virginia State Senate
Room 227M, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

The Honorable Tim Miley
Speaker
West Virginia House of Delegates
Room 228M, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Dear Mr. President and Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with West Virginia Code §18B-4-9, we are pleased to provide the following report regarding services and facilities for veteran students enrolled in West Virginia public colleges and universities. We appreciate the Legislature's on-going support of efforts to improve veterans' access to and success in higher education.

During the past year, the Office of Veterans Education and Training Programs (OVET) of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (Commission) and the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical Education (Council) has actively supported legislative intent to provide "veteran-friendly" services to student veterans throughout the state. The Commission is designated by the Governor as the "state approving agency" for West Virginia under Title 38, United States Code. As such, its primary mission is to review, approve and monitor education and training programs for federal veterans' benefits and to engage in outreach efforts to increase participation in the GI Bills. Expenses for doing this work are reimbursed by the federal government through a reimbursement contract administered by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Funds for the reimbursements are specified by the Congress in Title 38, rather than in VA's annual appropriation.

In addition to the federally-requested approval work, the OVET strives to improve the success rate of VA students in all of our institutions, both public and private. The Veterans Initiatives Task Force seeks to identify and address statewide concerns. The Task Force includes several college and university presidents, chief academic officers, veterans' coordinators, Commission staff, and a VA education employee. Through conference calls and face-to-face meetings, the Task Force generates questions and ideas that focus on increasing the rate of graduation for students in VA benefit programs.

Recent changes to Title 38 have severely restricted the States' authority to approve programs for VA benefits and to conduct oversight visits at all institutions. Our primary mission now, according to VA, is to perform VA compliance surveys, essentially financial audits of the federal VA entitlement program payments at our schools. VA determines which schools we may visit and we do not have the flexibility to review education outcomes and programs for all facilities in the State as we did in the past. The Commission authority to approve education programs for the GI Bill at public and non-profit private schools has been given instead to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

In this climate, we are forced to reduce the amount of direct support to our institutions. We have been able to provide four statewide workshops this year for campus staff members and we respond to numerous telephone and email questions from them as best we can. However, most schools do not now receive an annual visit to assist them with their veterans' programs.

The following table includes a description of the items listed in the law and related activities through August 2013.

W. VA. CODE	ACTIVITIES
(1) Establishing veteran-friendly community and technical college degree programs which recognize and award academic credit toward degrees for various types of technical and vocational military training and experience;	Community colleges already have numerous programs that match military experiences. MCTC now has special programs for recruiters, for new enlistees, and for NCOs, in partnership with military branches.
(2) Developing policies for each state institutions of higher education to grant academic credit for Armed Forces experiences	Individual policies exist at each institution. A statewide rule for the Commission and Council is being developed to clarify the issue and to provide guidance to institutions about granting credit for military training and experience.
(3) Developing programs to facilitate student veterans in sharing their unique knowledge and experience in the military through public school programs and local community organizations;	Concord University has done this but other institutions have been slow to implement. We continue to encourage such exchanges
(4) Establishing and sponsoring an organization for student veterans on campus and encouraging other veteran-friendly organizations;	More than half of schools now report having veterans' clubs on campus
(5) Appointing and training specific faculty within each degree program or major as liaisons and contacts for student veterans;	About 75% of schools reporting indicate they have academic advisors for veterans. Some are faculty, some are staff.
(6) Providing information about the Regents Bachelor of Arts Degree program to student veterans and potential student veterans;	All schools have and market the RBA. Several specifically target veterans.
(7) Coordinating existing disability services on campus with veteran disability services available from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, other federal and state agencies, and private resources;	VA Vocational Rehabilitation has working relationships with disabled student coordinators on all campuses, as well as with W. Va. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

In April 2013, the Legislature passed a measure that requires all state institutions to designate a staff member to serve as a "veterans advocate" on campus. To date, all but three institutions have named or employed a veterans' advocate. The Commission is planning a training symposium for veteran's advocates to bring them together for a day of learning and sharing of best practices.

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We have developed a cooperative agreement with the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance to provide training on GI Bill education benefits to WVDVA staff. We also have agreed to work together to improve outreach to veterans about their potential benefits.

In addition to his regular duties, Mr. Skip Gebhart, Administrator of the Office of Veterans Education and Training, continues to serve as Legislative Director for the National Association of State Approving Agencies for Veterans Education and Training (NASAA). In this role, he testifies before Congressional Committees and meets with Members of Congress and their staffs to educate them about issues in administering the GI Bills. He also has presented at several national and state meetings about veterans' education programs.

During the next year, focused efforts will continue to assure that each veteran student receives the services, support, and education necessary to graduate and succeed. Please feel free to contact Mr. Gebhart at 304-558-0263 or either of us if we can provide additional information regarding these initiatives.

Sincerely,

Paul L. Hill
Chancellor

James L. Skidmore
Chancellor

cc: The Honorable Robert Plymale
Chair, Senate Education Committee

The Honorable Mary Poling
Chair, House Education Committee