

March 19, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Regents

FROM: David L. Buhler

SUBJECT: Report on Services for Veterans

Issue

Institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) currently enroll over 3400 students who receive educational benefits through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. A number of other current and former military personnel also attend USHE institutions.

The attached report was prepared at the suggestion of a Regent who inquired about challenges veterans experience as they transition into institutions of higher education and how institutions might ease this transition. Awarding credit for prior learning was a topic of particular interest.

Background

Institutions in the Utah System of Higher Education are committed to serving veterans and helping them succeed in achieving their post-secondary educational goals. Assisting veterans is an important element in support of the Regents' goal to have 66% of Utah adults possess a college certificate or degree by the year 2020. Additionally, specialized service to veterans provides recognition for the sacrifices and contributions they have made to society. The attached report provides a description of the services USHE institutions provide to veterans. Highlights of the report include:

1. All institutions employ full-time staff assigned to work with veterans and to assist veterans in obtaining and receiving college support services including benefits available to them through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Each institution has provided evidence of services offered including strengths, examples of student success, and opportunities for improvement. Given the multiple assignments that employees often fulfill, at two of the USHE institutions full-time staff personnel who assist veterans are assigned duties beyond their service to veterans.
2. Six institutions have offices dedicated to serving veterans with four of these institutions having veterans centers that provide expanded services. While the services provided by these four veterans centers vary among the four institutions, examples of veterans center services include peer support, dedicated gathering space for networking (available at the University of Utah and Salt Lake Community College), linkage to community support systems, employment assistance,

transition assistance from service to academic life, etc. The institutions with dedicated expanded service centers estimated that over 3300 individuals utilized center services during the last academic year.

3. All institutions have processes to receive and assess recommendations for college credit from the American Council on Education (ACE) and other artifacts that document learning that has occurred from military service and training. It should be noted that the number of credits recommended by institutional advisors to be awarded to any given veteran may vary depending on factors such as institutional mission, types of degrees an institution awards, differences in program focus, financial aid implications, credit hour threshold before out-of-state tuition applies, and other issues that could negatively impact students. It is understood that institutions comply with Utah legislation relative to awarding credit for prior military service and training.

#### Policy Issues

Recent state legislation necessitates modification of Regent policies, specifically R461 and R470 that focus on admissions and transfer credit issues for veterans, respectively. Staff members at the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education are in the process of editing these policies. These revised policies will be available for Board of Regent review and action in the near future.

#### Commissioner's Recommendation

This is an information item only. No formal action is required by the Board.

---

David L. Buhler  
Commissioner of Higher Education

DLB/BKC  
Attachment

**Report to the Utah State Board of Regents  
Services for Veterans  
March, 2014**

**Overview**

This report was prepared at the suggestion of a Board of Regent member who inquired about challenges veterans experience as they transition into institutions of higher education and how institutions might ease this transition. Awarding credit for prior learning was a topic of particular interest.

Institutions in the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) are committed to serving veterans and helping them succeed in achieving their post-secondary educational goals. Assisting veterans is an important element in support of the Regent's goal to have 66% of Utah's adult workforce possess a college certificate or degree by the year 2020. Each USHE institution has staff assigned to assist veterans in their transition to a post-secondary program of study and to support veterans in receiving benefits that are available to them. These staff members provide assistance through a variety of support services such as:

- Review and awarding of credit for prior learning to include learning that has occurred from previous military service and training that is applicable to a veteran's chosen field of study
- Certification of United States Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefits
- Enrollment in post-secondary programs
- Completion of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs educational application
- Referral and contact information for community veterans support services
- Deferment of tuition until veteran educational funds are available
- Assistance with application for financial aid and helping to resolve financial aid issues
- Coordination with academic officials for program enrollment, entry requirements, etc.
- Advocating for veterans with campus entities and personnel
- Coordination with non-academic support services to assist veterans in college persistence

Seven of the eight USHE Institutions are members of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges, a national consortium of approximately 1900 members who are dedicated to helping veterans complete college. The University of Utah is not currently a member but has reported they are considering membership. Member institutions commit to the following SOC criteria:

1. **Reasonable Transfer of Credit:** Avoid excessive loss of previously earned credit and avoid course work duplication
2. **Reduced Academic Residency:** Limit residency requirements to no more than 25% of the total credits required for a degree and do not require a final year or semester in residence (may require 30% for undergraduate degrees offered 100% online)
3. **Credit for Military Training and Experience:** Recognize and use *ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services* in evaluating and awarding academic credit for military training and experience



4. **Credit for Nationally Recognized Testing Programs:** Award credit for successful completion of at least one nationally recognized testing program such as College Level Examination Program (CLEP), DSST Examinations, Excelsior College Examinations (ECE)

This report provides detail on the following items:

- Number of veterans served at USHE institutions
- Status on progress from legislation enacted in 2013 that impacts veterans services at USHE institutions
- Board of Regents policy review
- Services that USHE institutions provide veterans as taken from institutional feedback from a recent survey

#### **Veterans Served**

The following table shows the number of veterans enrolled in USHE institutions who were receiving educational benefits from the United State Department of Veterans Affairs as of February, 2014. This information is taken from the most current report provided by the Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs.

**Number of Veterans Enrolled at Utah System of Higher Education Institutions Receiving Veterans Administration Benefits**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Veterans</b>
University of Utah	734
Salt Lake Community College	672
Weber State University	557
Utah Valley University	556
Southern Utah University	371
Utah State University	331
Dixie State University	184
Snow College	37
Total	3442

It should be noted that the actual number of veterans enrolled at USHE institutions may be different than the numbers reported above. For example, some veterans do not declare their veteran status and not all veterans use financial benefits that are available to them.

## **Services Provided**

Staff members at the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) reviewed veterans services provided by USHE institutions. Through this review, it was evident that all USHE institutions provide needed support services for veterans but that services vary by institution. While broader services are typically provided by institutions with higher numbers of enrolled veterans, the services identified in the Overview section of this report (above) represent typical services available to veterans in the USHE system.

Veterans services provided by USHE institutions can be classified into three categories: 1) Veterans Support Staff; 2) Dedicated Veterans Support Office; and 3) Veterans Center with Expanded Services. The following chart shows these three categories by institution.

**USHE Institution Veterans Service Categories**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Veterans Support Staff</b>	<b>Dedicated Veterans Support Office</b>	<b>Veterans Center with Expanded Services</b>
University of Utah	X	X	X
Utah State University	X	X	X
Weber State University	X	X	X
Salt Lake Community College	X	X	X
Utah Valley University	X	X	
Dixie State University	X	X	
Southern Utah University	X		
Snow College	X		

All eight USHE institutions have staff assigned to assist veterans. Six institutions have dedicated veterans support offices with four of these institutions having centers that provide expanded services. While the services provided by these four veterans centers vary among the four institutions, examples of veterans center services include peer support, dedicated gathering space for networking (available at the University of Utah and Salt Lake Community College), linkage to community support systems, employment assistance, transition assistance from service to academic life, etc. The institutions with dedicated expanded service centers estimated that over 3300 individuals utilized center services during the last academic year.

Regardless of whether or not an institution has a veterans center, all USHE institutions provide specialized services that are available to all students, including veterans. Examples of such specialized services include tutoring labs, career and employment assistance, health centers, computer labs, disability resources, etc.

## **2013 Legislative Session Report**

During the 2013 legislative session, two bills were passed that impact services to veterans at USHE institutions. There were Senate Bill 126 and House Bill 254.

Senate Bill 126 modified Utah Code 71-8-1 through 71-8-8. This legislation required USHE institutions to:

1. Assign a full-time employee as a veterans' services specialist (at smaller institutions, this full-time employee may have other responsibilities besides service to veterans)

2. Post on institutions' websites:
  - a. All services available to veterans
  - b. A link to the Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs

As of Fall Semester, 2013, all USHE institutions have complied with this legislation.

House Bill 254 enacted Utah Code 53B-16-107. This legislation required:

1. The Board of Regents to designate a "postsecondary accreditation agency or association" from which institutions would receive recommendations to award credit for previous military service and training.
2. USHE institutions to award credit based on recommendations from the agency designated by the Board of Regents if:
  - a. Requested by the student, and
  - b. The student met with an advisor
3. The Board of Regents to report annually the number of credits awarded under this legislation to the Education Interim Committee and the Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs

On July 19, 2013 the Board of Regents designated the American Council on Education (ACE) as the agency from which USHE institutions would receive credit recommendations for previous military service and training.

Appropriate personnel at all USHE institutions are aware of the requirements of this legislation. This includes chief academic and student services officers and those who assist veterans with admissions, transfer, and academic advising issues. All institutions will transcript ACE recommendations in accordance with legislative requirements. In response to this legislation, ACE issued a statement that included the following guiding language:

To ensure that a student gains needed academic skills and knowledge, institutions have to carefully gauge how much credit should be extended and how that credit fits into a particular degree program. . . recommendations to award credit for military experience is a highly individualized and technical process. Institutions need flexibility to ensure that the credit they award is appropriate to the program of study and in the best interests of the veteran or military student.

Consistent with this guidance, credit recommended by an academic advisor may vary from institution to institution due to differences in institutional missions, types of degrees an institution awards, differences in program focus, etc. Additionally, consideration is given to financial aid implications, credit hour threshold before out-of-state tuition applies, and other issues that could negatively impact students. A student who persists and requests more credit be awarded beyond what is recommended by an advisor may receive that additional credit pursuant to Utah Code 53B-16-107.

The 2013/14 academic year is the first full year of implementation. All institutions are preparing to report the numbers of credits awarded under this legislation following the end of the current fiscal year.



## **Policy Review**

In reviewing requirements set forth in the 2013 legislation discussed above and matching these requirements with current Board of Regents policy it is apparent that changes to two policies are needed, specifically, R461 and R470. These policies deal with admissions and credit issues, respectively. Staff members at the OCHE are currently reviewing these policies and are also reviewing 2014 legislation to see how additional legislation may impact need for policy modification.

## **Institutional Service to Veterans**

A survey examining services for veterans was recently administered through the institutional chief student services officers by OCHE staff. Institutional respondents indicated the following strengths, opportunities for improvement, and examples of student success:

### **Dixie State University**

#### **Strengths**

- Continuity and experience of staff
- Full-time veterans coordinator who is a veteran
- Personalized attention given to veterans

#### **Opportunities for Improvement**

- Dedicated space for a veterans center

#### **Student Success**

- A female African-American single parent veteran came to campus feeling perplexed and out of her element. She was hired through the veterans work study program to work in the Dixie State University (DSU) registrar's office. She completed a bachelor's degree and is now employed full-time as a social science technician helping veterans.
- Another veteran came to DSU with difficulty adapting to college life. He struggled academically. With support from the veterans coordinator, he earned an associate's degree and is now employed full-time with the Federal Bureau of Land Management. He is now interested in returning to DSU to earn a bachelor's degree.

### **Salt Lake Community College**

#### **Strengths**

- Through support of the veterans center, SLCC has seen an increase of veterans completing programs from 34 veterans who graduated during FY08, the first year the center was open, to 169 veterans who graduated during FY13
- Committed support staff who get to know veterans and reach out to them
- Veteran volunteers who help other veterans
- Administrative support for veterans services with cooperation of key student service departments
- Quick review of in-coming transcripts to assist veterans in getting credits recorded on SLCC transcripts

- Linkage of disability resource advisor to the veterans center has more than doubled the number of veterans using disability resources for which they qualify
- Linkage to several veteran community support organizations on-campus as well as off-campus
- Provide events and workshops for veterans
- Implementation of the Veterans Affairs work study program

#### Opportunities for Improvement

- Academic advisor to support veterans in retention and completion
- Additional staff and space to provide deeper and broader veterans support services

#### Student Success

- A disabled male veteran transferred to Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) from California and was hired through the Veterans Affairs work study program to provide financial resources that allowed him to remain in school. He completed a degree at SLCC and transferred to the University of Utah while continuing his employment at SLCC. He completed a degree at the University of Utah and is now employed full-time in a public relations position.

### **Snow College**

#### Strengths

- Provide personal assistance to veterans
- Student success advisors assist veterans with benefits, registration, tuition assistance, and other service needs
- Access to the institution's counseling and wellness center

#### Opportunities for Improvement

- Process to identify veterans when they apply for admission
- Establish a veterans club for networking and peer association

#### Student Success

- A male veteran enrolled at Snow College but was under-prepared for college-level work. Through support of a mentoring faculty member, the student has made academic progress, raising his grades from low Cs to Bs as he continues his studies.

### **Southern Utah University**

#### Strengths

- Knowledgeable enrollment services staff
- Location close to military establishments
- Institutional mission that is attractive to veterans' needs



#### Opportunities for Improvement

- Improved coordination and integration of veterans assistance with non-veterans administration funds that are available to support military personnel

#### Student Success

- Two severely injured veterans overcame odds and through the assistance of Southern Utah University support personnel are now finding success. One has graduated and is employed as a teacher in northern Utah. The other is a current student and is working as a teaching assistant helping with a number of undergraduate courses.

### **University of Utah**

#### Strengths

- Large and active veterans center that serves as a one-stop-shop for veterans
- Growing veteran student population that is increasingly becoming engaged in veterans issues
- Strong community support network for veterans
- Responsive administration

#### Opportunities for Improvement

- Training program for faculty and staff to better understand veterans' issues
- Integration of veterans' issues into overall university planning
- Recruiting program to enroll more veterans at the university
- Improve system to measure success of veterans at the university and integrate system with retention and graduation efforts

#### Student Success

- A male veteran with a traumatic brain injury refused accommodations because he did not want to be classified as disabled. Through the help of personnel at the veterans support center he was able to receive the help he needed to overcome serious academic challenges, remain enrolled in his program, and improve his performance. He is continuing his studies and doing well.

### **Utah State University**

#### Strengths

- Veterans resource office that serves as a one-stop shop for veterans
- Support from Utah State University (USU) administration and student services entities
- Signatory of the Department of Defense Voluntary Education Partnership Memorandum of Understanding and the Presidential Executive Order 13607, Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members

#### Opportunities for Improvement

- Strengthen outreach programs to identify veteran-specific needs
- Space for veterans to congregate and receive support from peers

#### Student Success

- A female military service member enrolled Fall Semester, 2010 at USU with 14 transfer credits. Due to multiple deployments, her education was interrupted for three full semesters. She persevered, taking on-line courses during one deployment and completing other courses when she was in Utah. Through dedication and persistence, she is on track to complete a bachelor's degree by the end of Spring Semester, 2014. She currently has a 3.53 grade point average.

### **Utah Valley University**

#### Strengths

- Linkage of veterans services staff with graduation, transfer, and advising services staff
- Linkage with community groups that support veterans
- Military service volunteers available in career center to assist veterans with employment goals

#### Opportunities for Improvement

- Space for a veterans service center

#### Student Success

- A single mother of two attends college full-time and participates in the ROTC program. She always portrays a pleasant disposition. She pursues her studies with a positive attitude and strives for excellence. She has made the Dean's list several times and is on track to finish her degree Fall Semester, 2014.
- A disabled veteran enrolled at UVU several years ago to pursue a four-year college degree. He has performed exceptionally well in his courses, is currently taking a full-time course load, and is considering taking honors courses. Following graduation, he plans to pursue a master's degree. He is motivated to work hard now and to do everything that is necessary to ensure acceptance into a master's program.

### **Weber State University**

#### Strengths

- Three staff employees and eight work study students proficiently process veteran education entitlements
- A successful Veteran's Upward Bound program, the only competitively funded program in the state, helps veterans prepare for and succeed in college

- An active campus-wide committee called Military Outreach and Veterans Education (MOVE) focuses on veteran student issues and success. The group has been successful in developing communication materials targeted towards veterans, in advancing changes in policies, procedures and practices to better serve veterans, and in recognizing veterans at the university.
- A veteran senator serving in student government represents and advocates for the needs of veteran students
- The Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program, a collaboration with the Veterans Administration, provides additional counseling and support for veteran students

#### Opportunities for Improvement

- Administration is pursuing a larger facility for accommodating veterans and researching an automated system of record keeping to replace hard-copy files

#### Student Success

- A young female veteran completed a clinical lab science major, became employed in a well-paying job and purchased a home. Another female veteran started school, struggled with math, and went through a difficult divorce. Despite these challenges and doubting that she could complete college, she persevered and completed a degree in social work. Another female went through a divorce, continued her education, finished her degree, and was commissioned as an Army officer.

#### **Consideration for Next Steps**

Consider developing a Regents' veterans statement that identifies key best practices which all USHE institutions would agree to follow. Develop this statement in collaboration with USHE institutional student services and academic affairs personnel.