

Examining Access and Supports for Servicemembers and Veterans in Higher Education
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
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Witness Testimony
of
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The University of North Carolina system

Mr. Chairman and Members of Committee, thank you for inviting me to join you today. Thank you for your leadership.

The University of North Carolina system is comprised of sixteen university campuses. We have 220,000 students and approximately 55,000 faculty and staff across the state of North Carolina. Nearly 8,000¹ of our students use VA educational benefits to pay for some or all of their post-secondary education.

North Carolina is a big military state with 800,000 veterans, six major military installations with the third largest active military force in the country. This active-duty force is comprised of 120,000 personnel, 12,000 members of the National Guard and their nearly 145,000 spouses and children.

As the state's public university, we are working hard to enroll, educate and graduate as many academically prepared service members, veterans and family members as possible. Our motivation is simple and our actions are intentional: the success of student veterans and their families at UNC institutions is linked to the success of the University and our state's future.

In October 2010, the University of North Carolina system convened a working group known as "UNC SERVES (UNC Systemwide Evaluation and Recommendation for Veterans Education and Services), to evaluate and recommend specific action steps for improving how the University system and its individual institutions serve veterans and their families. The UNC SERVES working group issued its report in April 2011.

The University is making steady progress toward implementing UNC SERVES recommendations. Annually, we issue the "UNC SERVES Resource Guide" to highlight systemwide and campus progress with each of the action items. The UNC SERVES working group report and Resource Guides may be reviewed online at:

<http://www.northcarolina.edu/frc/uncserves/serves.html>

Centralized Information Sharing and One-Stop Shopping for Veterans

Veterans are not typical students. Student veterans come to us from a highly structured, bureaucratic environment of the military and are often uneasy with the loosely structured, bureaucratic environment of the University. University admissions and enrollment processes can

¹ UNC: Fall 2013 data.

be complex. This is especially true for veterans. One of our top priorities is to *centralize information sharing* using a technology-based platform to provide a virtual “one-stop-shop” for veterans. To access the University’s virtual one-stop-shop:

<http://www.uncserves.northcarolina.edu>

Another technology-based resource in development is the North Carolina Military Educational Positioning System or “NCMEPS.” This website provides military-affiliated students with important resources to explore North Carolina's higher education options: both public and private. To access NCMEPS:

<http://www.ncmileps.northcarolina.edu>

Data Collection and Reporting

The University has established systemwide, uniform data collection procedures to ensure that we can identify and track the academic progress of service members, veterans, spouses, and dependent family members.

UNC Institutions Align Academic Programs to Student Needs

UNC campuses have a legacy of working with military-affiliated students and the military installations in North Carolina. Representing all UNC institutions, the UNC system office has academic advisors at Fort Bragg, aboard Camp Lejeune and at Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City.

The University has specialized programs of interest to veterans and active duty military service members. Veterans are attracted to these programs because their military learning and experiences align with the academic program and prepare them for their desired career. And, many courses are structured to complement an adult student’s life. Many student veterans have family responsibilities, part-time or full-time employment and other obligations.

Closing

The education that the service member needs is mission critical because the most important weapon that he or she has is not an assault rifle - but their mind. And, when the service member makes the transition to veteran in civilian society we want that veteran to remain in North Carolina for the long term.

The University can and should be a natural place of transition for the veteran. They have earned their educational benefit.

The University of North Carolina system commits itself to partnering with the military because national security should be a priority for all us - not just for the *less than half of one percent of us* that serve in the armed forces. We can all do something to contribute. The faculty, staff and students of the University of North Carolina stand ready to do our part.

Thank you, Mister Chairman. This concludes my testimony.