

Office of Government and Public Affairs

January 7, 2013

Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Military Community and Family Policy  
State Liaison and Education Opportunities Division  
ATTN: Ms. Kerrie Tucker  
4800 Mark Center Drive, Suite 14E08  
Alexandria, VA 22350-2300

Re: Docket ID: DoD-2012-OS-0134; "Proposed Collection; Comment Request"

Dear Ms. Tucker:

On behalf of the higher education associations listed below, representing the nation's two- and four-year, public and private non-profit colleges, universities and research institutions, I write to provide comments in response to the Department of Defense's (DoD) Nov. 6, 2012, "Proposed Collection; Comment Request" and accompanying "Student Complaint Intake Form for Service Members and Their Families."

Our member institutions are strongly committed to providing service members and veterans with access to a quality postsecondary education. We support the goals of Executive Order 13607 establishing "Principles of Excellence" for educational institutions serving veterans and service members. Service members, veterans and their families deserve to have the information, support and protections they need to successfully pursue higher education. Many associations and institutions have developed initiatives and campus programs that are a testament to the higher education community's commitment to foster service member- and veteran-friendly campuses.

Section 4 of the Executive Order calls on DoD, the Department of Veterans Affairs and other federal agencies to develop a proposal to create a centralized complaint system for students receiving federal military and veterans educational benefits. We support the establishment of a complaint system that will swiftly and efficiently resolve any legitimate concerns a service member or veteran may raise regarding the deceptive or fraudulent practices of a specific institution. In an effort to enhance the protections afforded to service members and veterans through the complaint process, and to ensure the quality and utility of the information collected through the intake form, we offer the following comments for your consideration.

#### **I. Draft Complaint Process**

We share the goal of the creation of an effective and efficient complaint system. We support the concept of developing and unveiling the complaint system in multiple phases, which would enable DoD to adequately test the system's various components. As the process is unveiled in phases, we hope that DoD will do so in a manner that allows for the full consideration of suggestions and recommendations from the public.

To help prepare both students and institutions, we also suggest that DoD clearly articulate in advance:

January 7, 2013

(1) The types of complaints the system is intended to handle (specifically, those dealing with deceptive or fraudulent activity by an institution). It might be useful to provide such an explanation in the preface to the form itself.

(2) The process DoD will use to respond to complaints, which should include a means for an institution to respond to complaints lodged against it. We believe such a step will assist DoD in using its resources most efficiently and effectively. A number of concerns may be the result of a simple misunderstanding and the higher education community hopes that the Department will focus its attention on legitimate problems faced by service members and veterans.

## **II. Draft Complaint Form**

We understand that the design and creation of a complaint mechanism will most likely be an iterative process. As DoD works to build an efficient system, we ask that the Department consider the inclusion of appropriate questions on the complaint form.

### **1. Grades**

As currently drafted, Question #3 on the form would provide a venue for service members and veterans to express concerns about grades from their courses. As explained in the justification, the complaint system is intended as "a resource for students receiving military and veteran educational benefits to effectively submit complaints against institutions they feel have acted deceptively or fraudulently."

Individual disputes about grades do not fall into this category. We do not believe that it is the intent of the federal agencies to turn the federal government into arbiters of grades: such a move would be unprecedented and wholly inappropriate. Grading decisions should remain in the academic domain. We respectfully request that the question about grades be removed from the final version of the form.

If the intent of this question is something other than complaints about individual grades, we suggest that DoD develop language to reflect the exact nature of the concerns it is attempting to address.

### **2. "Student loans" and "financial allegation"**

In addition, we suggest that two other categories of issues in Question #3 be further clarified: "student loans" and "financial allegation." We support the inclusion of the descriptive comment areas on the form that would enable service members and veterans to fully describe the issues that need to be resolved. At the same time, we believe that it would be even more beneficial and would further expedite the process if the categories of "student loans" and "financial allegation" were further explained on the form. For example, it might be helpful to more narrowly define the parameters surrounding complaints regarding "student loans" and "financial allegation." What does "financial allegation" mean?

Again, we fully endorse the inclusion of descriptive comment boxes on the draft. However, we believe that the categories of "student loans" and "financial allegation" may warrant more detailed explanations in order to prevent frivolous complaints.

January 7, 2013

3. School Information

As currently drafted, Question #2 requires everyone filling out the complaint form to address every box. It is very possible that not everyone will have enough information to provide the necessary answers. We suggest the asterisk (\*) denoting mandatory information be moved to reflect that only the school name is mandatory.

4. "Federal Financial Aid"

"Federal Financial Aid" appears as one of the choices under Question #1 ("Education Benefits Used"). To provide greater levels of clarity to individuals who may not be as familiar with the non-military affiliated educational benefits, we suggest that you add the phrase, "Other Non-military," before "federal financial aid." The category of aid would now appear as "Other Non-military Federal Financial Aid."


5. Student Identifying Information

There is no asterisk (\*) denoting mandatory information on any of the student identification questions #6 through #9. It would seem that some of this information would be needed to assure the proper referral of the complaint.

**Conclusion**

We are committed to protecting service members, veterans and their family members as they pursue their educational goals. We stand ready to work with DoD to root out unscrupulous actors and ensure that service members and veterans receive the full value of the educational benefits they have earned through service to our nation. As the Department works to refine the complaint intake form and to finalize other aspects of the complaint system, we appreciate the continued consideration of our views. We look forward to working with DoD as the process moves forward in the coming months.

Sincerely,



Terry W. Hartle  
Senior Vice President, Government and Public Affairs  
American Council on Education

TWH/mjm

On behalf of:  
American Association of Community Colleges  
American Association of State Colleges and Universities  
American Council on Education  
Association of American Universities  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities  
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

Docket ID: DoD-2012-OS-0134; "Proposed Collection; Comment Request"  
Page 4  
January 7, 2013