Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit  
14-16 April, 2016

Key Findings

Through a busy two days of panel presentations, collaboration, and brainstorming, the 2016 Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit yielded the identification of four key themes and recommendations in supporting service members and veterans access and succeed in higher education.

Theme 1: Military-Connected Individuals Need More Information

The need for high-touch and personalized advising was expressed by student veterans and other participants during the panel sessions. Attendees noted the importance of academic advisors and the need for informing military-connected individuals about choosing a higher education institution and major that will best meet the career goals of prospective students. Moreover, military-connected individuals need to have more information about topics such as accreditation and college credit recommendations for military service. Programs, such as the Transition Assistance Program (Transition GPS) and its Accessing Higher Education Track, have been helpful as service members transition out of the military. However, participants recommended that the program continue to evolve as changes in technology and workforce needs arise as well as be delivered earlier during the military life-cycle, and more frequently (i.e., a follow-up once service members are discharged).

While Transition GPS is one example of current efforts to better educate military-connected students, summit participants also identified the need for further collaborative work between educators, employers, military and veteran service organizations, and federal agencies to help prospective students make better informed decisions. Through collaborative work, key-stakeholders can ensure military-connected students have the right information available to choose an institution and degree program that will help them meet academic and career goals.

Theme 2: Higher Education Professionals Should Think Holistically About Support Programs

Summit attendees and panelists articulated the need for veteran program and office personnel to approach student veteran support holistically. Participants expressed the importance of teaching faculty, staff, graduate assistants, and other campus personnel about military culture and transition issues, as well as how VA/DoD education benefits are processed and available for military-connected individuals. In addition to working with campus-based offices (i.e., housing, career, disability, admissions, outreach, financial aid, counseling, etc.), college professionals should consider partnering with local businesses, employers, organizations, government, and military installations to harness resources and information necessary to prepare military-connected individuals to not only complete college, but to lead healthy livelihoods and successful careers after higher education. Moreover, institutional staff should engage with employers to help develop meaningful sets of courses and for veteran-specific hiring initiatives.
Theme 3: Military-Connected Individuals Should Own Their Success

Another broad theme that emerged from the Summit centered on having military-connected individuals educate themselves about future employers and better align their higher education and career goals.

Summit participants spoke about the need for veterans to highlight their professional and educational strengths in a way understandable by employers. Likewise, meeting attendees stressed the importance of understanding the workplace culture and future employers. College admissions and academic advisers are key individuals that can help military-connected students develop the skills and credentials necessary to make them employable. Service members and veterans, participants indicated, should think about the long-term needs of the labor market and how their interests and passions fit into those employer needs.

Theme 4: Peers and Social Networks Should be Leveraged

The final broad theme emerging from the Summit was centered on leveraging peer and social networks. Participants indicated that service members and veterans usually use “word of mouth” and military-connected peers to participate in campus activities and to learn about support services and programs. Using these strategies can be a powerful tool for military-connected individuals to leverage before, during, and after college. Further, attendees shared that having a great veteran-specific office/space can be used to effectively outreach to transitioning service members or transferring veterans. Providing excellent services and programs, and making sure they are well-known, can lead to greater participation and positive outcomes for this growing, yet misunderstood, military-connected population.