

**Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs  
Assembly Committee on Higher Education**

Joint Oversight Hearing  
Student Veterans in California's Public Colleges and Universities  
February 28, 2012

Background Information

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In the decade since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, more than 2.3 million military personnel have been deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan or both. Of that total, 1,353,627 have since left the military. With drawdown and withdrawal nearly complete from Iraq, and an expected withdraw from Afghanistan over the next 2-5 years, servicemembers are returning home in significant numbers. In California, an approximate 30,000 troops annually are leaving service and returning home.

Servicemembers making the transition to civilian life are doing so in the midst of a struggling economy with a competitive job market and high unemployment rates. Veterans are finding that postsecondary education and training is necessary to obtain high-wage/high-placement employment. Fortunately, the Veterans Educational Assistance Act (Post-9/11 GI Bill), approved by the United States Congress in June 2008, provides significant financial support to veterans and servicemembers wanting to pursue a college education.

This hearing is designed to examine state and federal programs that provide assistance to returning veterans seeking access to public postsecondary education. Through information provided by the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CDVA), the public higher education segments, recognized national policy experts, and veteran students, this hearing will highlight current veteran benefits and programs and identify best practices for potential replication in the state's public college and university systems.

***Challenges Facing Returning Veterans***

California is currently home to approximately two million veterans, more than any other state, and almost nine percent of the nation's veterans:

<i>Number of California veterans</i>	<i>1,972,000</i>
<i>Number of veterans leaving service and returning to California annually</i>	<i>Approximately 30,000</i>
<i>California homeless veterans</i>	<i>19,532- Approximately 26% of the entire U.S. Veteran Homeless Population</i>
<i>Number of California veterans using GI Bill education benefits</i>	<i>46,897</i>
<i>Number of California participants in USDVA's vocational rehabilitation</i>	<i>6,837</i>
<i>USDVA expenditures in California</i>	<i>\$8.2 billion</i>

Veterans are re-entering the civilian world during difficult economic times, including high unemployment rates (reaching 10.1% in October 2009) that have been slow to improve. Unemployment rates for veterans are even higher. According to the United States Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the unemployment rate for veterans who served in the military at any time since September 2001--a group referred to as Gulf War-era II veterans--was 11.5% in 2010. Young male veterans (those ages 18 to 24) who served during Gulf War era II had an unemployment rate of 21.9% in 2010.

This month, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta explained details for downsizing the military in order to meet budget reduction goals. The Army is likely to take the largest proposed cut of all the services, with a proposed cut to the active Army of 72,000 soldiers. The Marine Corps would be cut by about 20,000. Manpower levels in the Air Force and Navy would not change but weapon systems and fleet size may. The Navy's fleet, already its smallest since before World War I, would shrink to about 250 ships from 285. The Air Force would lose six fighter squadrons and 130 transport aircrafts. The proposal also calls for two new rounds of base closings, slower increases in military pay after 2014, higher health care fees for retirees and a commission to study changes in military retirement.

In summary, during these austere economic times, we are likely to see even more veterans re-entering civilian life, many of whom may be leaving the service altogether due to military downsizing. Many of these veterans will seek to use their veteran education benefits for postsecondary education and training at California's public institutions.

### ***Federal Veterans Education Benefits***

Federal veteran education benefits have attracted millions to military service and have led many returning servicemembers to pursue postsecondary education and training. The newest benefit, the Post-9/11 GI Bill, offers the most generous financial aid ever available to servicemembers.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill, which took effect August 1, 2009, updated educational benefits to better reflect the cost of attending a university or college. Servicemembers and veterans who have served at least three months of active duty since September 11, 2001, are eligible to receive financial assistance for tuition and fees, a housing allowance, and a stipend for books and supplies. Private education and graduate programs may be covered at schools participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program. Benefits can also be transferred to family members. Benefits were expanded to include on-the-job training (OJT), technical, and non-college degree programs.

Specifically, the Post-9/11 GI Bill will pay eligible individuals:

- Full tuition and fees for all public school in-state students. For those attending private or foreign schools tuition and fees are capped at \$17,500 per academic year.
- A calculated monthly housing allowance based on the cost of housing in the region where the student is enrolled.
- An annual stipend for books and supplies of \$1,000 paid proportionately based on enrollment.

- Benefits are provided for up to 36 months of education and generally payable for 15 years following release from active duty.

The “Yellow Ribbon Program” allows certain institutes, like private colleges, to enter into agreements with US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) to pay established education costs not covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill. USDVA will match each additional dollar funded by the school up to the full cost of the program. Only individuals entitled to the 100% benefit rate may use this benefit.

The Montgomery GI Bill—Active Duty is provided to military personnel while on active duty after serving 24 months or more, or after separation. The program requires a \$1,200 buy-in, deducted from military pay, and includes a \$600 buy-up option to enhance the benefit.

The Montgomery GI Bill—Selected Reserve is for current members of the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Coast Guard Reserve, Army National Guard and Air National Guard who signed a six-year obligation to serve after June 30, 1985 or if an officer, six years in addition to the original obligation.

Dependent Educational Assistance provides education and training opportunities to eligible dependents of certain veterans. Benefits are authorized for dependents and survivors of veterans who (1) are 100% permanently and totally disabled from service-connected disabilities or injuries, or (2) who have died from a service-connected cause, were a prisoner-of-war or were missing in action. The program offers up to 45 months of education benefits. These benefits may be used for degree and certificate programs, apprenticeship, and on-the-job training. Remedial, deficiency, and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances.

The Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) was established in 2005 to provide education benefits to members of the reserve components called or ordered to active duty in a time of war or national emergency, as declared by the president or Congress. Eligibility is determined by the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. REAP benefits may not be received concurrently with any other GI Bill education benefit. The benefit amount is based on a percentage of the Montgomery GI Bill benefit for a three-year enlistment or longer.

### ***National Resources for Student Veteran Services***

The American Council on Education (ACE) is the only higher education organization that represents presidents and chancellors of all types of U.S. accredited, degree-granting institutions: community colleges and four-year institutions, private and public universities, and nonprofit and for-profit colleges. Since 1945, ACE has provided a collaborative link between the U. S. Department of Defense (DoD) and higher education through the review of military training and experiences for the award of equivalent college credits for members of the Armed Forces. Registrars, admissions officers, academic advisors, career counselors, and DoD Voluntary Education professionals have a basis for recognizing military educational experiences in terms of civilian academic credit through the Military Guide Online (also called the ACE Guide). ACE

provides guidance to service members, civilians, military education centers, and colleges and universities interpreting military transcripts and documents.

<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/index.htm>

The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Consortium was created in 1972 to provide educational opportunities to servicemembers who, because they frequently moved from place to place, had trouble completing college degrees. SOC institutions provide educational opportunities to servicemembers to facilitate degree attainment such as (1) reasonable transfer of credit to avoid excessive loss of previously earned credit and course work duplication and (2) credit for military training and experience, including use of the ACE Guide in evaluating and awarding academic credit for military training and experience. SOC functions in cooperation with 15 higher education associations, DoD, and Active and Reserve Components of the Military Services to expand and improve voluntary postsecondary education opportunities for servicemembers worldwide. SOC is funded by DoD through a contract with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

46 California Community Colleges are SOC members, as are 22 California State University campuses. <http://www.soc.aascu.org>

### ***Overview of California Public Higher Education***

California's system of public higher education includes three “segments”: the University of California, the California State University, and California Community Colleges. The state’s Master Plan for Higher Education, originally adopted in 1960, ascribes distinct missions to each of the segments and expresses a set of general policies for higher education in the state:

California Community Colleges (CCC) is comprised of 72 community college districts and 112 individual colleges, with a combined enrollment of over 2.9 million students annually. CCC has three primary functions: workforce training, basic skills instruction, and to prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions. CCC is required to accept all applicants who are high school graduates, as well as any other adults who can benefit from attendance; however, budget cuts resulting in reduced course offerings have severely limited CCC's ability to serve students. Each CCC district is managed by the locally-elected Board of Trustees. Statewide coordination for CCC districts resides with the 17-member CCC Board of Governors (appointed by the Governor) and the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). Former State Senator Jack Scott currently serves as CCC Chancellor, he was appointed by the CCC Board of Governors in 2008.

CCCs serve the majority of veteran students in California, as most veterans are ineligible for direct admission to the University of California and California State University systems. According to the CCCCCO, in 2009-2010 academic year, 36,896 veterans utilized education benefits at a CCC, a 40.8% growth since 2008-09. While the level of support for veterans varies throughout the CCC system, the number of veteran students attending has led the CCCCCO and many individual districts to look to expand support services for this growing population. CCC-specific benefits to veterans include:

- The Board of Governor's Fee Waiver (BOGW) is available at all CCCs to California residents who meet specific income eligibility requirements. The program waives the

\$26-per-unit enrollment fee at CCCs and reduces the semester parking fee and the health fee for qualifying students.

- The CCCCCO has also (1) organized a regional representation structure and hosts regular meetings to identify student veteran needs and share innovative ideas across the system, (2) established a systemwide email list to communicate strategies relating to veterans services to the 112 campuses, and (3) redesigned its veterans' web page to better support colleges.
- It is difficult to ascertain to what extent prior learning experiences receive academic credit at CCC, since the determinations are made at each campus. It appears that the application of prior learning credit is uneven. However, in addition to the 50 CCCs that are members of the SOC Consortium, the CCC Academic Senate recently passed a resolution urging the application of credit for educational experiences during military service toward the associate degree—including the fulfillment of general education, major coursework, and other degree requirements—in accordance with the recommendations listed in the ACE Guide.
- The CCCCCO is engaged in several projects to expand services to veterans, including the Veterans Resource Center Project which supports centers on campuses where student veterans can interact with one another and obtain information and services, the Zellerbach Family Foundation Project grant (\$75,000) to establish a pilot project to train faculty and staff about the mental health needs of veterans, the Troops to College Program to increase opportunities for active servicemembers and veterans in postsecondary education, the VetsConnect Pilot Program concept paper to solicit federal support for enhanced veterans services, and the Annual Job Resource Fairs to inform veterans of employment opportunities and career technical education and workforce training opportunities.
- All CCC campuses have a veterans education benefits certifying official, often located in the financial aid office. This individual helps with the technical process of certifying eligibility for benefits in accordance with USDVA requirements.
- Several CCC campuses have established particularly innovative and/or comprehensive services, including Butte College's Office of Veterans Services, which offers numerous services to help veterans and their dependents, Saddleback College's Veterans Education and Transition Services program, which focuses services such as counseling and healthcare to aid veterans in a smooth transition from orientation to graduation, and Sierra College's Veteran Students Alliance, a partnership project that provides a center for employment, benefit information, and cohort counseling services.

California State University (CSU) is comprised of 23 campuses with approximately 433,000 students and 44,000 faculty and staff. CSU's primary responsibility is to offer undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree. CSU also has limited authority to offer doctoral degrees in education, physical therapy and nursing practice. Admission guidelines established by the Master Plan call for CSU to accept applicants from the top one-third (33.3%) of public high school graduates, as well as all qualified CCC transfer students. The 25-member Board of Trustees is responsible for statewide oversight of CSU, and the Chancellor serves as the chief executive officer of the CSU. Since 1998, Charles B. Reed has

served as CSU chancellor. Each CSU campus has a chief executive officer; these campus presidents act as the primary liaisons between their campus, the local community, and the CSU systemwide office.

CSU enrolled 11,577 student veterans (including 6,250 active duty and 5,327 dependents) in the Fall of 2010, representing 2.8% of the CSU student body. CSU reports the average veteran student load at 12.7 units and the average GPA as 3.05.

- California State University Admission policy guarantees admission to a total of 115 military personnel each year, based on recommendations by officers in the service branch of the applicant.
- In the Spring of 2011 the CSU Student Veteran Research Project reviewed the 23 campuses veteran services offerings and released several recommendations aimed at increasing access and success among veteran students. The recommendations included employing at least one full-time point person on a campus to coordinate veterans' services, identifying key data points and tracking data to evaluate success, strategies, and policies, and providing student leadership opportunities and designated multipurpose space for veteran students.
- The CSU has undertaken efforts to provide prior learning credit for military coursework and experience through use of the ACE Guide; however, it appears that not all campuses treat experience and skills earned through the military in the same manner.

University of California (UC) is comprised of 10 campuses serving over 222,000 students, with 170,000 faculty and staff. UC's primary responsibility is to provide undergraduate and graduate instruction in the liberal arts, sciences and professions. UC also has exclusive jurisdiction over instruction of law and graduate instruction in the professions of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. Admission guidelines established by the Master Plan call for UC to accept applicants from the top one-eighth (12.5%) of public high school graduates and all qualified community college transfer students. UC is governed by a 26-member Board of Regents, which appoints the UC president and the principal officers. Mark G. Yudof was appointed UC President in 2008. Each UC campus has a campus chancellor, who reports to the UC president. The California Constitution (Section 9 of Article IX) provides significant autonomy to the Regents, establishing that UC is subject to legislative control only to the degree necessary to ensure the security of its funds and compliance with the terms of its endowments.

UC reported serving 949 veteran students in the 2010-11 academic year who were receiving veteran GI benefits, of those 752 were undergraduate students and 197 were graduate students.

- All UC campuses provide veteran students with priority registration and provide bridge loans or fee deferrals when GI Bill benefit checks don't arrive on time, and all UC campuses have at least one veteran students group. While UC does not have a separate admissions process for veterans like CSU, UC does count military status in the comprehensive application review process.

- The UC Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), which oversees the admission of undergraduate students, has recently approved awarding lower division transfer credit for military service courses for which an equivalent course exists at any UC campus.
- Individual campus have and continue to develop programs and practices such as special orientations, priority campus housing, and mental health counseling services for veterans students.

### ***California Veteran Education Benefits***

The USDVA is the primary provider of benefits to veteran students; however, there are several California-specific benefits offered at the state's public higher education institutions:

Priority Enrollment: Veterans and current military students receive priority for registration if they received an honorable discharge, a general discharge, or other than honorable discharge, for any academic term attended at UC, CSU, and CCC during active duty and within four years of leaving active duty.

College Tuition Fee Waivers For Veterans' Dependents provides eligible veterans' dependents a waiver of mandatory systemwide tuition and fees at any CCC, CSU or UC campus if a dependent of a service-connected deceased or disabled veteran. Students must meet California residency requirements.

Non-Resident College Fee Waiver provides eligible veterans a waiver of non-resident fees at all CCC, CSU or UC campuses for the length of time necessary to become a California resident for tuition purposes (a one-year period commencing immediately after discharge).

### ***Recent Legislation Related to Veteran Students***

#### 2011-2012 Legislative Session

AB 372 (Roger Hernández) California community colleges: matriculation services. This bill would have required the CCC, as part of the matriculation process, to assess prior college-level learning gained by servicemembers through non-college credit means. Status: Held under submission, Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 649 (Harkey) Public postsecondary education: veteran's enrollment. This bill would have extended the period of time for priority class registration enrollment, from two years to five years, to members or former members of the Armed Services and required that any member or former member of the Armed Services be a California resident. Status: Held without recommendation, Senate Education Committee.

SB 813 (Committee on Veterans Affairs) Public postsecondary education: veterans' enrollment. This bill extends priority registration enrollment for veterans at the CSU and CCC from two to five years. Status: Chapter 375, Statutes of 2011

### 2009-2010 Legislative Session

AB 38 (Salas) Postsecondary education: resident classification: veterans.

This bill would have required that veterans who become students at one of the state's public higher education institutions within one year after moving to California to be immediately eligible for in-state fees, provided that these veterans are also eligible for receiving federal education assistance benefits.

Status: Held under submission, Assembly Appropriations Committee - Died

AB 1569 (Committee on Veterans Affairs) Veterans: National Guard: California Interagency Council on Veteran Services and Programs.

This bill would have classified military members stationed in California and their immediate families as California residents for the purposes of public higher education tuition and fees.

Status: Without further action, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee - Died

AB 1703 (Knight) State Nursing Assumption Program of Loans for Education: veterans' homes.

This bill would have increased the maximum loan assumption payment for registered nurses participating in the State Nursing Assumption Program of Loans for Education – Nurses in State Facilities who become employed full-time in a state-operated veteran's home from \$20,000 for four-years of service to \$40,000.

Status: Held under submission, Senate Appropriations Committee - Died

SB 1382 (Committee on Veterans Affairs) Student financial aid: Cal Grant Program.

This bill deletes the provision of law requiring, for all new Cal Grant awards, the California Student Aid Commission reduce “calculated financial need” by a veterans’ education benefit.

Status: Chapter 113, Statutes of 2010

### 2008 Legislative Summary

AB 767 (Walters) Student financial aid: veterans and dependents.

This bill would have provided a waiver of resident tuition, regardless of income level or need, at the UC, CSU and CCC for students who have no remaining months of educational benefits under the federal Montgomery GI Bill for California residents who were on active duty, enlisted while a California resident, and were honorably discharged from the Armed Forces and California residents who are or have been on active duty as a member of the California National Guard, the State Military Reserve, or the Naval Militia.

Status: Senate Education Committee - Died

SB 1680 (Wyland) Student financial aid: Military and Veterans Office.

This bill allows the CCC and CSU, and encourages the UC, to coordinate services for students who are veterans or members of the military by designating Military and Veterans Offices to provide specified services.

Status: Chapter 123, Statutes of 2008