

From: Sarah Elsasser [<mailto:sarah.elsasser@pcc.edu>]
Sent: Monday, May 04, 2015 7:51 AM
To: Ross Cheyenne
Subject: Portland Community College testimony on HB 2645

To Cheyenne Ross;

I am an employee of Portland Community College (PCC), and have been a member of our district-wide Veteran's Task Force, a working group which was convened several years ago to research and implement processes and services that would support the academic success of our veteran students. Our task force has identified implementing priority registration for veteran students as one of our top three priorities. Last fall I chaired a work group which was tasked with researching current practices at other colleges and universities and with making a recommendation to the school. In March we submitted our recommendation to the task force that priority registration be adopted for our veteran students and for family members of veterans who are using educational benefits. PCC is in the implementation phase of offering priority registration for our veteran students and family members. I've attached a portion of our report, in which we offer what we consider to be compelling reasons to give this benefit to our students. I hope it will be useful as the Senate considers HB 2645.

Sincerely,

Sarah Elsasser
Sylvania ROOTS Program Advisor
Portland Community College
sarah.elsasser@pcc.edu
[971-722-8193](tel:971-722-8193)

Veteran's Priority Registration workgroup Recommendations

Submitted to the Portland Community College District Veteran's Task Force

March 3, 2015

Compelling reasons why veterans need priority registration:

- Most student veterans receive an educational benefit that pays tuition and provides a living stipend equal to 36 months of full time enrollment in school. This benefit must be used within either 10 or 15 calendar years of the discharge date from military service, varying by benefit chapter. Students use this benefit for a total of 12 terms, or four academic years at three terms per year. To be on track to finish a bachelor's degree without running out of benefits, students must complete an associate's degree in six terms, or two years.
- Data collected in the Million Records Project of the Student Veterans of America indicates that only 29% of student veterans earn their associate's degree in 2 years. The implication in this data is that the remaining 71% of student veterans would be unlikely to complete a bachelor's degree before exhausting their educational benefits.
- Therefore, in order to complete a degree before exhausting educational benefits, student veterans must select classes that apply directly to their chosen degree. VA regulations require that students receiving educational benefits must only take classes which directly apply to their declared degree; VA benefited students are not free to choose widely from elective courses if courses they need are full. Additionally, many student veterans attempt to register into classes which fulfill more than one requirement to maximize their benefit. Often, these classes fill quickly because other student veterans are following the same strategy.
- PCC's student veterans have identified difficulty registering into required classes as a barrier which directly affects persistence and degree completion. If students are not able to get into the classes they need to be full time students, their tuition benefit and living stipend is pro-rated. For example, if a full-time student is not able to register into one necessary 3 credit class their stipend is reduced by 25%. Since many student veterans have families, a diminished living stipend often means that that student must leave school to work and support a family. When students leave school and enter the workforce, economic pressures make it more difficult to return to school.