



Testimony for Informational Briefing on Plans to Improve Coverage and Outreach to Veterans on Colleges and Universities

House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

April 16, 2019

Chair Evans, Vice-Chairs Lewis and Meek, and members of the Committee. My name is Bob Small, and I am the Senior Policy Advisor for the Office of Student Access and Completion (OSAC) at the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the subject of improving coverage and outreach to veterans on colleges and universities.

Before beginning, I would like to provide a brief background of my experience in higher education and veteran services. Prior to being at the HECC, I was a Financial Aid Advisor and VA School Certifying Official at a community college in Colorado. Additionally, I was also the Veteran Resource Coordinator and Student Veteran Organization Advisor at the same college. More recently, I was a Veteran Service Officer and managed the Campus Veteran Resource grant at the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA). I have been at the HECC since August 2018, and one of my responsibilities is managing the Oregon National Guard State Tuition Assistance (ONGSTA) program. I am also a retired military member with 32 years of active and reserve service.

I would like to address the topic concerning the identification of Oregon veteran students in higher education. At the HECC, we have the capability to identify student veterans through information submitted by applicants on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and participants of the ONGSTA program. However, the FAFSA information is limited because students have to self-identify by a question, which asks if they are a veteran, or if the applicant provides financial information relating to veterans non-educational benefits such as VA disability compensation or pension benefits. Additionally, some FAFSA applicants do not enroll in college after submitting the application, which requires further verification at the school level to confirm the applicant's enrollment.

The best way to identify veteran students is at the college and university level. Most schools identify veteran students by those who are using their VA education benefits or federal and state military tuition assistance as well as veterans self-identifying on the schools admissions application. Again, there are some limitations with capturing the complete number of veteran students enrolled at Oregon colleges and universities. However, many of our community colleges and universities are using their Campus Veteran Resource Centers, associated staff members, and County Veteran Service Officers to engage the veteran student population, which substantially helps with identifying additional student veterans.

In regards to other states identifying student veterans, they face the same challenges and successes as we do in Oregon. At the state higher education agency level, the ability rests with self-identification and the use of VA and other federal and state military tuition assistance. Again, there is a high reliance on the

identification of veteran students at the college and university level. Like Oregon, many out of state college and universities are engaging the student veteran population through veteran campus resources and other off campus county and state veteran resources to engage and identify additional veteran students.

Some states have implemented legislative requirements for reporting veteran student information, which the purpose is to assist in providing support and resources to their veteran student population. An example of such legislation is our neighboring state of Nevada. The statute requires each Nevada publically funded college and university to report specific veteran student information to the Nevada System of Higher Education, which then submits an overall student veteran report to the Nevada legislature (NRS 396.507). This reporting ensures that the efforts to provide support and resources by colleges and universities successfully retain and graduate student veterans.

In comparison with other states, Oregon which does not require mandatory veteran student reporting, is in a positive position with identifying veteran students to be able to provide support and educational resources to this unique student population.

This concludes my testimony and thank you for your time today.

Bob Small
Senior Policy Advisor
Veteran and Military Programs
Office of Student Access and Completion
Higher Education Coordinating Commission