

Career Counselor Training

Overview

Unemployment is a serious concern for newly graduated students, and members of the military community are no exception. Veterans and their spouses are entering the workforce after years apart for both military service and education. Colleges across the country employ career counselors to ease the transition from being a student to being employed. However, many of these counselors are unfamiliar with the culture of the military or its organization and structure, making them unaware of the potential these students possess. This information is vital in order to better aid the military community in the final phase of their higher education: getting out of school and into a career position.

The largest group benefiting from this training will be student veterans. While career counselors cannot guarantee every veteran a job, they can assist in making the veteran a better candidate by strengthening their unique experiences. Your community can provide the college's career counselor(s) with information they need to better serve a student veteran such as how to translate their military service, describe the level of authority or accountability they had while in service, and teach veterans to highlight military experiences that demonstrate their adaptability and resilience. This will set the student veteran apart to potential employers as superior applicants.

Career counselor training can also benefit students that are military spouses as frequent relocation is a theme of military life, a military spouse's resume will often include gaps in time, making them appear fragmented. A career counselor can encourage a military spouse to highlight skills and achievements on their resume. If they are the spouse of an active duty service member and are likely to relocate again, the career counselor can encourage them to consider employment opportunities that allow telecommuting.

There are three basic steps to training career counselors: 1) Conduct Needs and Baseline Assessments; 2) Provide Training to Translate Military Skills and Experience to Civilian Life; and 3) Feedback.

The goal of this promising practice is to ensure that career counselors are equipped to provide guidance and support for veterans and military spouses so that they secure and retain employment.

Is it being done already? Colleges across the country are noticing an expansion of their student veteran and military community population. Contact your local college's career counseling office in order to determine their level of comfort describing the experiences and training of military personnel and experiences of their spouses. Also contact the local Student Veterans of America chapters to inquire about whether the SVA chapter has taken time to advise the Career Counselors. If they have received training, or are themselves a member of the military community – fantastic. You can offer to help by utilizing the steps outlined in this practice to complement their program, or simply volunteer to aid their efforts. Additionally your community may have mobilized around employment and may be able to combine these efforts.

Step-By-Step Implementation

Step 1: Conduct Needs and Baseline Assessments

Reach out to the local college's career counselors office (may also be known as a career center or career services) and discover their familiarity with military life and culture. You can do this by phone, email or in person.

Once you have made contact and established your group's identity and goals, you will need to ask the following questions to understand the institution's level of knowledge for job placement of student veteran and their spouses.

- How familiar are your career counselors with the military community?
- Are you comfortable with military terms, organization and culture?
- How many student veterans and/or their spouses does your office service per semester?
- What do you feel you need to increase the number of well-placed student veterans?
- What tools, resources or community involvement would aid the career counselors in their mission for the military community?
- Are the counselors familiar with the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act and the tax credits it provides to employers who hire veterans?

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Communications Officer

Task: Reach out and establish relationships with the career counselors on campus; compose "elevator speech"

Attributes: Outgoing with experience with one or more colleges in the area; someone able to communicate verbally and in writing

Who: A college alumni, current or former career counselor, member of the local Chamber of Commerce, etc.

Hours: 10 per week

Step 2: Provide Training to Translate Military Skills and Experience to Civilian Life

The primary focus of a career counselor is to help individuals outline their career decisions, not securing work for every student. They assist students in exploring and evaluating their own education, training, work and volunteer history, interests, skills and personality traits. They may arrange for aptitude and achievement tests to help make career decisions. They also work with individuals to develop their job-search skills and assist students in locating and applying for jobs. Career counselors should encourage student veterans to quantify their achievements while in the service, the more specific data they can provide about their job performance the better.

Although most of the services provided by the career counselor (coaching on interviewing skills, for instance) do not need to change, there are several things that every career counselor should be aware of with regard to military community students:

- Websites that help the student veteran translate their military experience into language common to most employers. For instance, words and phrases that are common in the military may mean little or nothing to a civilian employer. Websites like Military.com or Crosswalk at <http://www.onetonline.org/crosswalk/> offer a list of positions and training that correspond to the skills of most military roles.
 - Trainings, such as the US Army Career Alumni Program (ACAP), would be very valuable for a career counselor to attend. The college's career counselor(s) can model training similar to this.
 - The VA has a feature on its website to help translate Military Occupational Skills (MOS) descriptions into civilian skills.
 - See *Other Resources* for links to these websites.
- Resumes for student veterans and their spouses should focus on **virtues and soft skills**, as well as any achievements they may have. The discipline and sense of mission inherent in military culture makes for a trainable and motivated potential employee, and the student veteran needs to highlight this and make the employer aware as it separates them from the average college graduate. These virtues include, but are not limited to:
 - Attention to detail
 - Ability to work in teams
 - Disciplined approach to work
 - Respect and integrity
 - Problem-solving skills
 - Ability to manage stressful situations and perform under pressure
 - Ready to accept a challenge
 - Leadership skill
 - Willingness to help others
- Many veterans will continue to hold federal security clearances after they separate from the military. This is an added value to companies that have government contracts.
- Tax credits are now available to employers who choose to hire veterans, and career counselors can highlight this to potential employers during career fairs, going so far as to even identify student veterans at the fair – provided they do not violate privacy rules. For information on identifying employers with a dedication to hiring veterans and their spouses, please see *Employment Promising Practice: Job Fairs for Military Community*.
- Veterans and their spouses may receive preference in government employment, at both the state and national level, so career counselors can be made aware of and be trained to use resources such as usajobs.gov.

Measures of Success

What worked? What did not? In this promising practice, feedback is the best way to measure your efforts. With the low number of career counselors typically available at universities, it is very likely that the best method of gathering evidence of your success will be personal interviews to the Career Counselor. You can even ask for immediate feedback from counselors and ask questions like: Do you feel better equipped to support a Veteran or military spouse? Are you going to make an effort to target outreach efforts to Veterans and military spouses?

Other Resources

- Student Veterans of America (SVA) provide military veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education and following graduation: <http://www.studentveterans.org/>
- The Army's ACAP program will give you some idea of the type of counseling already available to the military community: www.acap.army.mil
- Tubotap.org is a website devoted to aid the transition of members of the military community: www.tubotap.org
- The VA has a new "blue button" feature which aids veterans and service members translate their military careers into "civilian speak": <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/anonymous.portal?nfpb=true&nfls=false&pageLabel=downloadData>
- For more information about the federal government's policies on hiring veterans visit: <http://www.fedshirevets.gov/>
- For more information on providing additional support to military spouses, please visit:
 - The National Military Spouse Network: www.nationalmilitaryspousenetwork.org
 - The Department of Defense Military Spouse Employment Partnership: <http://www.military.com/spouse>
 - The Military Officers of America Association: www.moaa.org
 - The US Chamber of Commerce's Hire our Heroes campaign: www.uschamber.com