



THEC

**PRIORITIZING STUDENT
VETERANS IN TENNESSEE**



ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF STUDENT VETERANS



Support veterans transitioning into a career post-military and provide pathways to success for veterans seeking a degree or credential.



Connect skilled and credentialed veterans with jobs in high-demand fields.



Create consistent processes for admission, enrollment, and prior learning assessment for student veterans.



Recruit local policy champions and facilitate buy-in from campus faculty and staff to create change necessary to support student veterans.



Grow the educational attainment rate for veterans in Tennessee.



Develop a suite of statewide policies to demonstrate multi-level commitment to veteran education attainment and employment.

POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS

Veterans Education Transition Support (VETS) Act (Public Chapter 612)

- **In-state tuition for veterans** enrolling at public postsecondary education institutions using the Post-9/11 GI Bill or Montgomery GI Bill.
 - The VETS Act was one year ahead of federal policy that established the same rule.
- **Creation of the VETS Campus designation** program to recognize public (and eventually private) colleges and universities that demonstrate significant commitment to student veterans.
 - Twenty-one institutions in Tennessee have met the criteria to receive the VETS Campus designation.

Issues addressed:



2014

2015

2016

2017

POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS

2015 Update to the VETS Act

- Required the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) and University of Tennessee (UT) System to adopt or revise their **policies related to the assessment and awarding of academic credit for certain military education, training, or service.**
- **Updated in-state tuition to include dependents** pursuant to new federal requirements.

Issues addressed:



2014

2015

2016

2017

POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS

Veteran Reconnect Grant

- State funds awarded competitively **to campuses to offer robust services for student veterans.**
 - Campuses developed student veteran centers, hired veteran transition coordinators, developed standardized data systems for tracking/assisting student veterans, created professional development for faculty/staff, and assisted in transitioning student veterans into the workforce after graduation.
 - Three rounds of funding, to date, totaling over \$3 million to campuses to support student veterans.

Issues addressed:



2014

2015

2016

2017

POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS

2017 Update to the VETS Act

- Initiated development of **a public database listing course equivalencies sortable by military occupation specialty (MOS)** to allow veterans to see the college credit they will receive before enrolling at an institution.
- **Standardized credit awarded at the institution level.** Evaluation of military experience at the campus level increases faculty buy-in and strengthens the offer from each institution that credit awarded will apply to a specific credential.
- Focused on the **highest potential impact.** Priority is placed on evaluating those military experiences with the most potential to shorten the time to degree and lead to employment opportunities in high-demand occupations.

Issues addressed:



2014

2015

2016

2017

THE NUMBERS

Annually, approximately 10,500 Tennessee veterans enroll in higher education using federal veteran education benefits.

In just the past year of the Veteran Reconnect program, 540 current student veterans and 241 prospective student veterans have received direct services supported by grant activities.

The VETS Campus institutions educate over 8,000 veterans annually.

VETS Campuses as of May 2017



EARLY INDICATORS OF A CAMPUS CULTURE CHANGE

Since Tennessee began its policy focus on student veterans:

- Over **40 orientation sessions** offered for student veterans.
- **21 institutions have initiated annual surveys** to identify student veteran views, needs, issues, and suggestions.
- Over **15 separate grant-funded trainings for faculty and staff** on military culture and challenges facing returning veterans.
- **23 institutions revised policies** for granting academic credit to student veterans.
- **21 institutions facilitated mentoring and support programs** for student veterans.
- **Detailed PLA report** from THEC based on research and campus interviews that spurred 2017 legislation.

POLICY IN PRACTICE ON CAMPUSES

Middle Tennessee State University

- Developed wraparound services to support the campus’s “soldier scholars,” including tutoring, academic interventions, and data tracking.
- Veteran Reconnect grant provided funding to support the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center.
- Created a veteran transition manager position to support veterans as they move into higher education and post-military careers.
- Developed a series of recognitions for student veterans, including honors for veterans with a 4.0 GPA, special stole ceremony for graduating veterans, and an annual football game dedicated to student veterans.



POLICY IN PRACTICE ON CAMPUSES

Lipscomb University

- Provide annual training to faculty and staff on the campus to assist them in working with student veterans and understanding the needs of that student population.
- Created a campus-wide communications campaign aimed at reaching student veterans and educating all students on campus about services available to student veterans.
- Campus focus on creating awareness by ensuring that all students receive invitations to student veteran focused events.
- Special invitations for veterans on the faculty to attend the student veteran orientation.



THE TAKEAWAYS

State coordination (legislation) and local action (campus practices) lead to long-term shifts and change.

To achieve continuous program innovation and meet emerging student needs, continually evaluate and update policies at the state level.

Study and adapt best practices happening in pockets across the state. Statewide success is informed by local successes.



THANK YOU