



VETERANS EDUCATION SUCCESS

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NEW REPORT: STUDENT VETS MORE RESILIENT, PERSISTENT IN PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

*However, stronger federal and institutional support would
help bolster their completion rates*

BOSTON -- A new report from [Veterans Education Success \(VES\)](#) released today reveals student veterans, despite numerous risk factors and challenges, demonstrate stronger rates of persistence and completion of higher education goals than non-veterans. Additionally, the report finds stronger support systems would further increase veterans' completion rates and help them realize the promise of their GI Bill education benefits. Read the [full report](#).

Walter Ochinko, VES' research director, will unveil these and other findings at a National Consumer Law Center [symposium](#) at Boston College Law School this morning entitled "Debt, Degrees, and Democracy: A Critical Look at the Value of College Completion."

The data was based on analyses of the Department of Education's longitudinal Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) which surveyed first-time students twice between 2011 and 2014. Some findings include:

- 20% of veterans who first enrolled in postsecondary education in 2011-2012 had left without a degree by 2014 compared to 40% of non-veterans
- 28% of veterans had earned a certificate or associate's degree compared to 23% of their non-veteran counterparts. Moreover, half were still enrolled three years after starting school while only about one-third of non-veterans were still pursuing a degree

"In our analyses, we found the BPS data likely overstates veterans' non-completion rates because many student vets stop out and then return to finish their degrees, so we consider the 2014 results as fluid," said Ochinko.

That uncertainty, he adds, is underscored by the fact that 40 percent of veterans who completed certificates or degrees in 2015-2016 began their postsecondary education in 2005 or earlier, compared to about 30 percent on non-veterans.

In addition, the demographics of veterans who left without a degree by 2014 are associated with risk factors often linked to non-completion. For examples, veterans who left higher education:

- Were more likely to be first in their family to go to college, lack a traditional high school diploma, be disabled, be single or married with dependents, and work full-time
- Exhibited five or more risk factors associated with non-completion compared to their peers who earned certificates or degrees, 21% vs. 4% respectively

“The multiple risk factors offer clues about the underlying causes of non-completion,” Ochinko said. “But while student veterans’ resiliency exceeds that of non-veterans, additional support, be it institutional or federal, would help alleviate some of their risk factors and bolster completion rates even further.”

VES’ report offers the following recommendations that, if instituted, would go a long way in helping student veterans meet their higher education goals:

- Veterans who are single parents might benefit from campus-based daycare options
- Veterans who enroll part-time may be doing so because of family obligations or the need to supplement their GI Bill benefits through employment. Such veterans might benefit from targeted institutional grants, participation in Education Department funded work-study programs, or help with daycare
- The high level of disability among veterans pursuing a postsecondary education suggests the need for an examination of the accessibility of VA and campus-based health services to GI Bill student veterans
- Programs fostering persistence and attainment must be broad in scope. Addressing only one of the risk factors may be insufficient, institutional support must be more comprehensive.

Finally, the report finds that efforts to ensure veterans are prepared for a rigorous degree programs should begin *before* they leave active duty and begin to use their GI Bill benefits.

As an example, Ochinko cites the Defense Department’s Transition Assistance Program which currently allows servicemembers to take classes that help them earn a promotion to a higher rank. “This program could be reimagined as a pipeline that helps prepare high school graduates to reap the benefits of their hard-earned GI Bills by focusing on post-service career goals and classes that will help them avoid using their benefits on remedial courses.”

[Veterans Education Success](http://www.VeteransEducationSuccess.org) is a veteran advocacy organization whose mission is to protect and defend the integrity and promise of the GI Bill and other federal education programs for veterans and servicemembers. The organization offers free legal services, advice, and college and career counseling to veterans, their survivors, and families, and helps veterans participate in their democracy by engaging Congressional representatives. VES also conducts non-partisan research on issues of concern to student veterans. More at www.VeteransEducationSuccess.org.

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