

## Career Counselor Training

### Overview

The success of the G.I. Bill has allowed an unprecedented number of veterans to attain higher education. Despite this amazing success, however, many veterans struggle with college, particularly if they are transitioning shortly after their military service. While universities throughout the country employ career counselors to ease the transition from being a student to being employed, the majority of these counselors are unfamiliar with the culture of the military or its organization and structure. Even more critically, many of these counselors lack a full understanding of the qualifications of veteran many students. Without this cultural expertise, career counselors are often ineffective.

Ensuring that career counselors understand and relate to military and veteran culture would greatly increase their ability to locate successful employment opportunities. Your community can provide the colleges' career counselor(s) with information they need to better serve a student veteran, such as how to translate their military service; how to describe the level of authority or accountability they had while in service; and how to 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.

Military spouses, too, often face a lack of cultural understanding on the part of career counselors. Military spouses' resumes often include gaps in time, making them appear fragmented. Career counselors can work with spouses to accentuate the 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 assist in the location of employment opportunities that suit the lifestyle demanded by military service.

The goal of this Community Solution 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.

There are two basic steps to Career Counselor Training: 1) Conduct Needs and Baseline Assessments, and 2) Provide Training to Translate Military Skills and Experience to Civilian Life.

### Is it being done already?

Colleges across the country are noticing an expansion of their student veteran and military community population. Contact career counseling offices in order to determine their level of comfort describing the experiences and training of military personnel and experiences of their spouses. It may also prove beneficial to contact local [Student Veterans of America \(SVA\)](#) chapters to inquire whether the SVA chapter has taken time to advise the career counselors. If they have already done so, your efforts may not be needed, or could be better directed elsewhere. You can offer to help by utilizing the steps outlined in this practice to complement their program, or simply volunteer to aid their 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 determine 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 Act \(VOW Act\)](#), the [VOW to Hire Heroes Act](#), and other legislation designed to support veteran employment?

### Volunteer Opportunities

**Title:** Communications Officer

**Task:** Reach out and establish relationships with the career counselors on campus; compose a brief speech outlining the purpose and method behind career counselor training.

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

**Who:** A college alumnus, 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

Career counselors 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 to 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 their employment opportunities will be.

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 are very helpful. Job descriptions and positions that are common in the military may mean little or nothing to a civilian employer. Websites like [Military.com](http://Military.com) or [O\\*Net Online](http://O*Net Online) offer a list of positions and training that correspond to the skills of most military roles.
  - Trainings, such as the [Army Career and Alumni Program \(ACAP\)](#), would be very valuable for a career counselor to attend. The program may provide a model for your career counselor training.
  - The VA provides a [Military Skills Translator](#), which translates Military Occupational Skills (MOS) into civilian terms.
- Veterans and military spouses often have a number of soft skills+desirable to employers. It may be useful to focus student veteran and spouse resumes on soft skills, as well as any achievements they may have received during service. The qualities instilled through military service, such as discipline, diligence, and responsibility, make for highly successful employees in nearly all fields. Highlighting these traits may differentiate veterans and military spouses from their civilian competition. A few of the qualities that should be emphasized are listed below:

- 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
- Security clearances are extremely marketable, and many veterans may have attained a high degree of clearance during their service. This is an added value to companies that have government contracts.
- 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 [USA Jobs](#).

## Measures of Success

Measuring the success of your Career Counselor Training is extremely important. The lessons learned from your successes and failures will help refine future efforts. Here are some ideas you may wish to use:

- **Counselors:** Present career counselors in the community with a survey asking them to evaluate the overall effectiveness of any Career Counselor Training they received. Here are a few questions you may wish to consider:
  - Can you describe your Career Counselor Training?
  - Do you feel better equipped to support veterans and military spouses with employment opportunities?
  - How would you describe your level of understanding regarding military culture before and after the training?
- **Veterans:** It may also be helpful to assess the level of satisfaction veterans have with their career counselors. If they are not satisfied, their responses may help develop additional training mechanisms for the future.
- **Track the Numbers:** At the most basic level, it can be valuable simply to measure how many counselors have received training. Counselors be willing to share broad, nonspecific information, such as number jobs found for veterans, the difference between pre-training and post-training opportunities secured, etc. This information may prove valuable in future press releases, communications with other counselors, and in any other communiqués dealing with Career Counselor Training.

## Additional Resources

- **Army Career and Alumni Program:** <https://www.acap.army.mil/>
  - The Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) delivering a world-class transition program for America's Army that ensures all eligible transitioners have the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to be competitive and successful in the global workforce. ACAP helps transitioners to make informed career decisions through benefits counseling and employment assistance.
- **Feds Hire Vets:** <http://www.fedshirevets.gov/>
  - Feds Hire Vets is the preeminent source for federal employment information for veterans, transitioning service members, their families, federal HR professionals, and hiring managers. The website provides consistent and accurate information and useful training and other resources in a way that will inform both the applicant and the hiring agency.
- **Military.com:** <http://www.military.com/>
  - Military.com's free membership connects servicemembers, military families and veterans to all the benefits of service - government benefits, scholarships, discounts, lifelong friends, mentors, great stories of military life or missions, and much more.
- **Military Officers Association of America:** <http://www.moaa.org/>
  - The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is the nation's largest and most influential association of military officers. It is an independent, nonprofit, politically nonpartisan organization. MOAA is a powerful force speaking for a strong national defense and representing the interests of military officers at every stage of their career.
- **National Military Spouse Network:** <http://nationalmilitaryspousenetwork.org/>
  - The National Military Spouse Network (NMSN) is the pre-eminent networking, mentoring and professional development organization committed to the education, empowerment and advancement of military spouses.
- **Student Veterans of America:** <http://www.studentveterans.org/>
  - SVA is a 501(c)(3) coalition of student veterans groups on college campuses across the globe. These member chapters are the "boots on the ground" that help veterans reintegrate into campus life and succeed academically. Each chapter must be an officially recognized student group by their university or college and provide a peer-to-peer network for veterans who are attending the school.
- **Transition Assistance Program:** <http://www.turbotap.org/>
  - The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is a Department of Defense (DoD) program designed to assist transitioning military personnel and family members leaving the service.