To the Vice President of Student Affairs:

As of August 1, 2009 the new Post-9/11 GI Bill that was signed into law in July of 2008 went into effect. A new generation of war veterans will be attending higher education in numbers almost comparable to that of the original GI bill of the 1940s and we need to be prepared for their arrival. I have provided some relevant background information of previous trends that is essential for you to be aware of and how to we should handle the influx, as well as information regarding the importance of this topic to Student Affairs work.

The GI Bill of the 1940s included “generous college benefits, stipends, subsidized mortgages, business loans and job training and placement.” (Humes) For the colleges and universities that would accept them, veterans were able to attend for free usually having all tuition, books, housing and living expenses covered. Academically, many college and university presidents around did not support encouraging so many veterans to attend their institutions. They were concerned that the university system would be devalued by allowing individuals who were potentially under qualified to matriculate. The increase in enrollment as a result of the GI Bill is actually what aided the shift of higher education from an elite-only to a mass-access system; “Before the war, about 10 percent of Americans attended college. After that figure rose to about 50 percent.” (Humes) “Ultimately 2.2 million veterans ….obtained higher education, many of them becoming the first members of their families to receive a college diploma.” (Humes) This next generation of war veterans could possibly assist in the movement from a mass-access to a universal-access system of Education.

There were many difficulties for college campuses with the surge in enrollment. A lack of physical housing space was a major issue as well as the transition for veterans back into a civilian lifestyle. New students could be found creating huts and surplus barracks on campus lawns, one college used a Coast Guard boat to set up a dormitory, while another college converted a military hospital into apartments. (Humes) The return of veterans from war directly into civilian life was a cultural shock for many causing veterans’ greater adjustment difficulties. During that time the prevalent anti-war climate also presented readjustment issues for returning veterans.  Many student-veterans felt isolated from those around them and society in general.

This influx of students-veterans is a discussion that must be brought to the forefront; this new generation will be entering Higher Education in mass amounts and it is the University’s responsibility to ensure the success of the students while maintaining the quality of the institution. It is important that this new generation is acknowledged in the work of Student Affairs because it is our responsibility to promote student learning, development, and growth, and to provide services and programs that facilitate student achievement. A successful integration is possible only if adequate services are available to provide for these student-veterans’ needs mentally, physically, and emotionally. Counseling services, residence halls, services already available, and recreational programs all need to prepare for the incoming numbers.

Counseling services should be available to assist them with their reintroduction into the civilian world and also into their transition to an institution of higher-learning. Other options than the traditional patient-counselor relationship should be explored, and alternatives such as peer-lead facilitation groups are believed to serve as a successful medium. Dialoguing with others who have made the transition into a college lifestyle would prove to be very beneficial for those in need of guidance or a model. Physical accommodations on college campuses specifically in residence halls need to be made, and/or guidance in mapping the Off Campus Life department so that they are able to find alternative methods of housing. Services that are already offered by our university through the office of veterans programs, as well as other basic resources such as health services and food services will also need to ready themselves for the additional load. And finally, we need to provide for veterans need for recreational activities, maybe a separate bracket during intramural sports would be an option.

As you can see there are many ways for us to assist this new incoming generation of Students. And based on historical trends, with the help of a positive university support system, these student-veterans can and will be successful. I hope this has proven informational and that we can begin our efforts to ensure our new students’ success.

Respectfully,

Priscilla Moreno

Humes, E. McCain Says No to GI Bill for Veterans. The U.S. Times

(<http://www.ustimes.us/mccain_says_no_to_gi_bill_for_veterans.htm>)

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The Pennsylvania State University, Office of Veterans Programs. (2005) Retrieved October 4, 2009. <http://www.equity.psu.edu/veterans/index.asp>