

Introduction

Background: One of the barriers faced by veterans returning to academia is transitioning from military culture to civilian and academic life. Challenges to traditional ideas of patriotism and altruism that some in American higher education promote, are sometimes difficult for veterans to overcome (McReynolds, 2014). The overall culture shock for returning veteran students can be difficult. Without concerted efforts by faculty and staff within higher education to assist, listen and offer counsel, veteran students are vulnerable to self-isolating behaviors that may result in the veteran withdrawing from class participation, and eventually leaving the institution.

Theoretical Foundation: Findings from several research studies have identified the importance of both environmental and social support related to academic persistence of veteran students. Vacchi (2012) has argued that the military culture of team work and camaraderie establishes a different context for veterans compared to other nontraditional students and thus, a unique subgroup of nontraditional students is emerging. It is posited that using previous military culture and training as a foundation, coupled with university provided targeted supports for veteran nursing students, that persistence toward graduation and successful career transition will be achieved.

Purpose: To describe University of Michigan-Flint's problem solving strategies used to achieve positive outcomes for Veterans who are enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. Strategies are focused on building healthy communities by strengthening the healthcare workforce through recruitment, successful nursing program matriculation, reducing barriers to program completion, licensure, and employment of veterans in the nursing workforce.

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Methodology

The Veterans Bachelor of Science in Nursing (VBSN) Program is addressing the challenges faced by veterans returning to academia through reduction of barriers that interfere with nursing education and career transition, as well as awarding of academic credit for prior military education and health-oriented training. The Michigan VBSN Program is open to honorably or generally discharged service members offering the opportunity for veterans to build on prior learning to obtain a BSN degree. Nursing as a career option for returning veterans will also help fill the expected growth of 500,000 professional nursing jobs over the next decade, while concurrently reducing veteran unemployment (BLS, 2015; Occupational Outlook, 2015).

The Michigan VBSN program utilizes structural and academic supports:

- Expedited admission for veterans and those returning from deployments
- Early assurance of entry into the nursing program
- Allowances for stop-outs/restarts for deployments
- An accelerated nursing program curriculum
- Nursing Core course tutoring (Pharmacology, Fundamentals, Medical-Surgical Nursing, Clinical practice/skill building, etc.)
- Writing assistance and guidance with an APA formatting specialist
- Professional transition counselling services and proactive academic monitoring/advising
- Assistance in finding housing, childcare services, financial resources, etc.

Results

1. Military training, college transcripts, and other challenge test certifications are evaluated for transfer and college credit by Undergraduate Admission and VBSN Academic Advisors.
2. Evaluations and granting of college credit are guided by American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations and Flint Nursing equivalency guidelines, to maximize credit for prior learning of veteran students.
3. To date, 14 veteran students have been admitted into the VBSN Program since Fall 2015.
4. Of the 40 students admitted each September into the accelerated program, 10 spots are designated for veteran students; additional veteran student applicants compete with non-veteran students in the selection process for remaining positions.
5. Student learning is assessed at multiple progression points throughout the program using Health Education Systems Incorporated (HESI) practice and validation assessments. The HESI exams are used to identify the students' level of nursing licensure exam readiness, needed remediation, and/or additional tutorial support indicated.
6. Veteran student cohort meetings are held regularly to reinforce social cohesiveness and to stress availability of support services. When additional support services are identified, VBSN staff seek solutions among collegiate, community, state and federal resources, then assist veteran students with access.



Selected References

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