

The American Council on Education (ACE), represents 1800 institutions and associations from across every sector of higher education, including public and private, two-year and four-year colleges and universities, on a broad range of issues including student aid, regulatory and legal issues, international education, and research funding. Since our founding in 1918 as an emergency council to ensure the U.S. had a ready supply of technically trained military personnel in World War One, ACE has been actively involved in meeting the postsecondary education needs of America's service members and veterans.

Today, ACE annually evaluates hundreds of military courses and occupations. In addition to publishing the results of these evaluations in the *Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services*, ACE collaborates with the Department of Defense (DOD) to detail this work on transcripts for members of the Army, Army National Guard, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The registries for these transcripts, operated by the Department of Defense, hold the records of more than 6 million service members and veterans.

Credit for military training has been a steady conversation for some time, recently accelerated by the increase of student veterans in higher education following the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008. ACE has continued our role in assisting the more than 500,000 and veterans in higher education through contributing to discussions on implementation of this valuable financial aid benefit, and responding to the calls from institutions of higher education to assist in developing promising practices to serve these students through their academic career. It has been clear since this influx of student veterans that institutions of higher education strongly desire to support this population to every extent possible but guidance was needed in determining what the best practices were.

To address these needs, In 2010, ACE hosted a 72-hour online discussion that drew nearly 3,000 service members, veterans, staff, faculty and administrators from around the country. Acceptance of military credit was widely discussed over the three days; key insights from those discussions can be found in ACE's Veteran Success Jam Executive Summary.

In addition to discussing military credit recommendations, the discussions brought to light additional opportunities for institutions of higher education to assist service members and veterans. Orientations, academic preparation, career services, disability services and mental health services were all highlighted. Most importantly, the terms "military-friendly" and "veteran-friendly" became clear points of

discussion as students and prospective students asked what they should expect of an institution that advertised itself as being veteran-friendly, while institutions asked what they needed to do to become more veteran-friendly.

Through nearly five years of work in the area of supporting student veterans, ACE has learned that the definition of veteran-friendly is as diverse as our colleges and universities and the military and veteran populations who take their courses. What works for one student may not work for another and what works at one institution may not be effective for another. It is vital that an institution ensure any program they design fits their academic environment, campus culture and student veteran needs. Further, ACE has found there are multiple solutions to the various challenges facing veterans and service members in higher education, allowing a broad spectrum of services and supports to be provided in different ways so a student veteran can find a program that best fits their individual needs.

To assist institutions of higher education in developing these programs, ACE recently launched an online Toolkit for veteran friendly institutions. Located at [www.vetfriendlyToolkit.org](http://www.vetfriendlyToolkit.org), this resource provides users with an overview of more than thirty areas an institution might create or enhance policies and programs to serve their military and veteran populations. In addition, institutions can create profiles and share their own success stories and resources for others to use in their ongoing work. This collaborative learning environment underscores the diversity of higher education and demonstrates that there is no single successful approach for supporting service members and veterans, but that institutions can develop methods that vary greatly and fit their, and their student body's needs.

Since launching in March, the Toolkit has received more than 63,000 page views; 392 institutions have created profiles and more than 150 resources have been shared. ACE is working on adding discussion boards and other functionality to the Toolkit to increase the collaboration amongst peers working to best serve student veterans. It is important to note the Toolkit does not certify any institution as being veteran friendly but provides institutions with a guide they might use to determine what will work for them.

ACE's work has also demonstrated the importance of ensuring service members and veterans make the best choices in higher education so they will succeed in reaching their educational attainment goals. Unlike traditional students, veterans often do not have resources such as high school guidance

counselors to assist them in their education decisions. The Toolkit can also be used by veterans to explore what services may be available and determine what their needs will be, so they can research schools to find the best fit for their needs.

As you can see, ACE has decades of experience in supporting military and veteran students as well as the institutions that serve them. Another role we hold is in making the process of using military transcripts easier for institutions that are considering awarding credit for military experiences. ACE stands strongly behind our credit recommendations but feel it would be a mistake to compel institutions to award credit for these experiences – in large part because these are highly individualized determinations requiring careful mapping between the specific military training received, and the degree and program requirements of a particular institution. As a membership organization, we are committed to the principle that institutions must be the ultimate arbiter of the award of credit for prior learning experiences.

The ACE Military Evaluations Program provides institutions with resources to assist in understanding military educational experiences in terms of civilian academic credit. This is done by evaluating formal courses, publishing descriptions and academic credit recommendations, and supporting transcript and registry services. ACE began evaluating military courses in 1945; last year, more than 400,000 transcripts were processed through the Army/ACE Registry Transcript Service (AARTS) and the Sailor/Marine ACE Registry Transcript (SMART) service.

Course evaluations are conducted through a Department of Defense contract at school houses and learning centers on military installations. Classroom courses 45 academic hours or more in length, and up to 12 months in length, are eligible for review; all programs of instruction are submitted to ACE through a central training authority from each service branch. ACE also reviews some distance learning courses that require students show photo identification at a proctored and controlled environment for assessment and testing.

The commitment to academic integrity begins with evaluators, all faculty members of colleges and universities chosen for their training, experience, and knowledge of curricula and instructional methods. ACE conducts a formal selection process with a content review committee to identify the appropriate evaluators for the team. These teams are diversified according to discipline expertise and relevant experience at two- and four-year institutions.

The faculty evaluators review and validate course materials, such as instructor manuals, student materials and assessments, syllabi, texts and presentation materials, to determine the **content, scope, and rigor** of the course and how the course aligns with post-secondary curricula. To arrive at their recommendations, team members consider a number of relevant factors, including:

- Course content;
- Learning outcomes;
- Level of difficulty;
- Depth and breadth of material;
- Evaluation methods; and
- Applicability to postsecondary programs.

Each course is reviewed by at least three evaluators who must reach a one hundred percent consensus on credit recommendations and formal documentation. Team members are asked to analyze the alignment of credit recommendations and validate the learning outcomes according to accepted educational hierarchies. Credit recommendations are made at four basic levels: vocational, lower division, upper division, and graduate. Faculty evaluators exercise professional judgment and consider only those competencies and learning objectives that can be equated to postsecondary curricula.

Once credit recommendations have been agreed upon, ACE reviews and compiles the supporting documentation and recommendations in a database the Department of Defense accesses to create the transcripts service members and veterans provide to institutions.

In the 2011 fiscal year, ACE conducted 36 installation visits evaluating more than 460 military courses and occupations. These evaluations leveraged the expertise of 109 academic faculty members from 100 diverse academic institutions.

Currently, there are 28 faculty evaluators from Pennsylvania institutions of higher education who serve as evaluators for ACE. these faculty members come from disciplines such as business, history, sociology, nursing, math, environmental science, landscape architecture, English, sports and fitness, music, human resources aviation, IT, criminal justice, psychology, foreign language, engineering and more. Evaluators come from the Pennsylvania State University system, University of Pittsburgh, Central

Pennsylvania College, Temple University, Shippensburg University, and additional community colleges, public and private institutions.

For more than 65 years, this has been a voluntary system helping countless service members and veterans attain their higher education goals. Today, Decisions surrounding what credit awarded based on ACE recommendations are at the purview of the individual institution, and in some cases departments within the institution. These decisions are complex, individualized and resource-intensive.

For example, as a former Army medic beginning undergraduate studies in communications at penn state, I submitted my AARTS transcript to the registrar for review and consideration for transfer credit. The registrar determined the recommendations on my transcript included 20 academic credit hours in a variety of disciplines that aligned with the content, scope and rigor of Penn State courses, the College of Communications then determined these courses could be applied to fill specific general education requirements in my degree plan. For example, I was awarded four credit hours in anatomy and physiology, without classroom lab time, to fill four of my nine required natural science credits. Additional credits were in emergency medical technician training, physical and health education and first aid.

It is clear Penn State values recognition of military training and they have an effective process in place to ensure they award credit to their military and veteran students. I need to point out that not **ALL** of the credit recommendations on my AARTS transcript were included in the credits I received, as they may not have fit Penn State's course content or my degree plan. Still, the award of 20 credit hours significantly helped me during my time in Happy Valley; I completed my degree and a minor in two and a half years, leaving me remaining GI Bill benefits I now use towards graduate work. It also gave me upper division class status after only my second semester, allowing me to register for courses ahead of my peers. I never found I could not get in to a class. That said, advancing to upper division status rapidly moved me in to higher tuition classification and, had i been awarded any more credits, it also could have had an adverse effect on my financial aid package.

You can see by this example how individualized, detailed, measured, and deliberate decisions to award credit must be. More importantly, you can see that institutions of higher education are already using the credit recommendations. What I appreciate about my alma mater is that they took the time to carefully

review my recommendations and ensure my individual circumstances and needs were taken into account. Had another former Army medic submitted their transcript for review but chosen to study nursing. Because of requirements in her degree program and the content, scope and rigor of Penn State's nursing courses, they may not be awarded the same credit recommendations as I. Further, as military course curriculum often changes, a medic who went through training in a different year may have different credit recommendations, warranting yet another individual mapping of recommendations to courses and degree plans.

Mandating acceptance and award of credit for all military credit recommendations falls outside the intent of the recommendations and ACE's Military guide. If our recommendations were to become mandatory, we fear that it could result in unintended harmful consequences for veterans. Thus, there is the need for a nimble process reviewing ACE credit recommendations and awarding transfer credit. Keeping this voluntary allows institutions to engage in the highly individualized process necessary to properly consider military experiences and ensure that they align with the schools particular degree and program curricula requirements.

To assist institutions in developing that process, ACE provides an online guide and print publication that detail the review process, explain how to read a military transcript, and provide elaboration on what competencies and outcomes determined recommendations. ACE also facilitates workshops, presentations, webinars to more than 500 campus practitioners each year, focusing on the rigor of the assessment process and providing a hands-on orientation to evaluating military and ACE transcripts. It takes an extensive amount of time to do this kind of mapping.

The American Council on Education remains committed to ensuring service members and veterans have every opportunity to access and succeed in higher education and to providing resources to institutions of higher education that support this goal. To be successful in these efforts, it is vital that institutions maintain their individuality and develop successful programs that match their mission. ACE performs careful evaluations, makes valuable recommendations, and provides considerable guidance, but ultimately, it is up to the institution to decide what credit to award and how it is applied to a student's program. We must keep in mind that the institutions are awarding the degrees and certificates service members and veterans are attaining; they need to be allowed the freedom to make the academic

judgments about whether recommendations are comparable in terms of the content, scope, and rigor of their programs.

Thank you for your time, I am happy to take any questions you have.