

# Advancing Veteran Success IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Case Highlights of Veteran-Friendly Programs at Professional Schools at Syracuse University

Nyasha Y. Boldon ■ Rosalinda V. Maury ■ Mirza Tihic



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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# BEST PRACTICES

The Graduate Management Admission Council® (GMAC®) is the association of leading graduate business schools around the world. GMAC meets the needs of business schools and students through a wide array of products, services, and programs and serves as a primary resource of research and information about quality graduate management education. With the GMAC grant, the Veteran Employment Through Modified Graduate Management Tracks (VET-MGMT) was identified and/or developed at Syracuse University. This report highlights each school's challenges and best practices with creating, recruiting, and sustaining veteran-friendly programs. As the case highlights indicate, there were many challenges to making and sustaining veteran-friendly programs. These challenges led to many opportunities to create best practices that benefit student veterans and the student body as a whole. The following are some of the more significant best practices:



## FINANCIAL AID

Several veterans were unwilling to enroll in programs that would require them to use their post-9/11 GI Bill. A best practice developed by L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science (ECS) was a financial incentive that reduces tuition by 20 percent to all veterans in need of financial assistance.



## ONLINE AND HYBRID COURSES

A majority of the schools mentioned efforts to offer online or hybrid courses. Offering online or hybrid courses that are comparable to the residential courses might better accommodate the needs of veterans who are interested in earning a graduate degree, but unable to relocate to Syracuse, New York.



## ACCEPTING OF CREDITS AND DEVELOPING RELEVANT COURSE CONTENT

Committing to making existing programs more veteran-friendly led some schools to research military credits. For example, the iSchool reviewed the ACE Military Guide and created a comprehensive list of military credits that are transferable toward iSchool degree offerings. Several schools have made strides to maximize the number of transferable credits. Further, some schools have created independent study courses that leverage and build upon veterans' experiences and skills gained in the military.



## OPEN DOOR POLICY

In supporting the needs of veterans, several schools had either an open door policy or a dedicated staff person. These efforts directly related to student veterans have provided them with increased support. Additionally, the experiences from the open door policy have led to the creation of the "Orange Door" program, a Syracuse University campus-wide initiative to create veteran-friendly spaces that enable faculty and staff to receive military and veteran competency training.





## INCLUSION

Several schools mentioned efforts to encourage inclusion for residential students and their online student body. Inclusion efforts were expansive, ranging from increased awareness of available academic resources to encouraging racial and ethnic diversity to combined group projects with online and residential students.



## COLLABORATION

Several schools have collaborated and plan to continue working together. Collaboration allows for schools to share best practices and knowledge. It also ensures an overall veteran-friendly experience, which can reduce some of the obstacles that student veterans might encounter.



## SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

A number of tactics have been employed to sustain veteran-friendly programs at the schools. Several schools keep in contact with alumni, soliciting feedback on their programs. Feedback from the veteran and military population enables Syracuse University to continually address the needs and challenges that active duty and student veterans might face.



## COMMUNICATION

Across all programs it was evident that there is a need to properly communicate what “veteran-friendly” means. In most cases it does not mean giving veterans special exception in terms of requirements of the program. Rather, veteran-friendly means fostering an institution-wide culture that embraces the veteran community and believes that veterans are fully capable of successfully earning a degree, while adding value to the institution as a whole.







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## INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes best practices within graduate education for veterans at Syracuse University that were identified and/or developed under the Veteran Employment Through Modified Graduate Management Tracks (VET-MGMT) effort. In 2013, when the VET-MGMT was launched, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) conducted a survey among veteran and military connected populations. The goal of the survey was to better understand the needs of veteran and military connected populations with regard to their preferences for graduate school education.

The IVMF surveyed veterans and members of military families during the first week of May 2013 to determine their interest in earning graduate degrees. The survey was distributed online to graduates of EBV/EBV-F, V-WISE, and Operation Endure & Grow programs. In total, 280 veterans and military family members took the survey, with women making up about 61 percent of the respondents overall. About 21 percent of respondents were military spouses. Of those surveyed, 13 percent had either a high school diploma or some college, 7 percent had an Associate's degree, 34 percent had a Bachelor's degree and 46 percent had indicated that they had a Master's degree or higher. Further, 72 percent of all survey participants indicated that they were interested in pursuing higher education. About 44 percent of these respondents indicated that they would prefer to pursue higher education on a full time basis, while 56 percent prefer part time. When asked about the potential format of their chosen coursework, the majority, 56 percent of those interested in higher education indicated that they prefer a hybrid program including a mix of online and campus courses, while 20 percent prefer completely on campus, and 24 percent prefer completely online.

During the first half of 2016 the IVMF, in collaboration with the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs (OVMA), conducted a data collection effort among VET-MGMT participants. The purpose of this effort was to highlight and gather best practices at Syracuse University as a result of VET-MGMT. The schools and programs that participated in the VET-MGMT efforts were interviewed and administered a survey [See Appendix A]. Ninety percent of the schools and programs that received an invitation to the survey participated in this research effort.

## CASE OVERVIEW

### Case Highlights

A project led by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University explores the process of becoming more veteran-friendly. Through interviews with representatives at David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics ("Falk"), L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science ("ECS"), Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs ("Maxwell"), School of Information Studies ("iSchool"), and Whitman School of Management ("Whitman"), the IVMF documents how these schools have addressed veterans' needs by offering accelerated and regular-track curricula, developed programs that are innovative, sustainable, and of interest to veterans; and launched specific certificate and degree programs that leverage military training experience and the strengths of the schools. While the stage of the development of veteran-friendly programs varies by school—some schools offered veteran-friendly graduate degree programs before this university wide initiative—the initial success of the professional schools suggests a promising future for veteran-friendly programs at Syracuse University.

The following case highlights provide an overview of the development and implementation of veteran-friendly programs at each school. A theme based analysis of each school's approach to developing and implementing veteran-friendly programs for graduate degrees revealed several best practices that could inform other institutions' efforts to develop and implement veteran-friendly programs at the graduate level.



# Whitman

SCHOOL of MANAGEMENT

## SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY



The Whitman School of Management is a leader in entrepreneurship and business education, and is ranked one of the best colleges for individuals interested in developing a startup. Whitman has been ranked #5 Best Business School for Veterans in 2016 by Military Times. Whitman offers undergraduate, MS, MBA, and PhD degree programs in business. As part of an initiative to increase access to graduate degrees for veterans, Whitman has been adapting their graduate degree programs to sustain them as veteran-friendly. Whitman had two major efforts in program adjustment: 1) adapt the MBA for Veterans, an accelerated MBA programs exclusively for veterans, and 2) redesign the online MBA to a hybrid format, and relaunch it as MBA@Syracuse.

### RECRUITMENT

To recruit interested veterans, Whitman conducted an advertising campaign to disseminate information about their MBA for Veterans in summer 2013. The advertising campaign resulted in an increased number of emails and phone calls, indicating a high interest in the program. However, the school did not see the expected enrollment numbers. The lower enrollment numbers in the MBA for Veterans might be partly due to the graduate degree programs not being free.

Though graduate programs are typically never free, there are financing options available besides the post-9/11 GI Bill. For example, Whitman offers financial assistance to those who qualify and participates in the VA's Yellow Ribbon Program, meaning that the school sets aside additional funds for student veterans.

Whitman also attributes the lower than expected enrollment numbers in the MBA for Veterans to many of the current

programs being residential, requiring veterans to relocate to Syracuse, New York. Considering this, it explains the preference of hybrid MBA, the MBA@Syracuse, among the veteran and military connected population.

### BEST PRACTICES IN MBA FOR VETERANS

Despite the low enrollment numbers in the MBA for Veterans, the veterans who enrolled in Whitman's veteran-friendly graduate degree programs were successful. Much of the success of the student veterans is attributed to Whitman having designated staff to assist student veterans and ensure they do not become overwhelmed. For example, one student veteran was pursuing two graduate degrees and had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Whitman staff worked with this student veteran to help prevent him from feeling overburdened. As a result, the student dropped one of the degree programs, but successfully completed the other.

Whitman was able to help their MBA for Veterans' student with this tough situation and decision because of its open door policy. The MBA for Veterans itself is housed within the Defense Comptrollership Program (DCP) at Whitman, where staff is familiar with the military and veteran culture and can effectively address the needs of student veterans. Student veterans are encouraged to speak with a Whitman staff member when they have an issue, including non-academic. This encourages a strong relationship between the student veterans and the staff, where together, the staff and the student can determine the best course of action for the student.

Another best practice exhibited by Whitman is the effort to ensure inclusiveness for the student veterans. While developing more veteran-friendly programs and working with

their student veterans, Whitman found that student veterans need to feel connected and made aware of resources. Recognizing this need, Whitman has taken strides to help students be aware of available academic resources, including mentoring and tutoring and providing adequate orientation sessions to student veterans.

Furthermore, considering that the MBA for Veterans focused on entrepreneurship, Whitman's Department of Entrepreneurship and Emerging Enterprises (EEE) was directly involved with DCP in creating and offering the program. Similar to DCP, the EEE ensured that there were dedicated staff members always available via the Falcone Center of Entrepreneurship at the Whitman School of Management to help student entrepreneurs and their startups. Whitman shared that this made student veterans feel welcomed, helped their progress, and ensured they were connected to appropriate resources to support their ventures. The EEE Department also provided educational support to help direct student veterans to engage in the academic programs and courses that would allow them to pursue their entrepreneurial goals. This included specific classes and directing independent studies that were most germane to their entrepreneurial objectives. The EEE program has been ranked #2 in the country for entrepreneurship and #1 in the country for veterans to study entrepreneurship by USA Today.

### **BEST PRACTICES IN MBA@SYRACUSE**

Contrary to the MBA for Veterans, the MBA@Syracuse experienced high enrollment numbers of veteran and military connected students. More than 25 percent of the MBA@Syracuse cohort were veteran and military connected students in July 2016. The MBA@Syracuse representative credits the success to a number of factors:

"The program can be completed almost entirely online, with the exception of the requirement for three one-credit, weekend conference style residencies. The students can choose those by location and theme, so it offers the flexibility that might be needed if one is still on active duty. Syracuse has a reputation for being military friendly and as a business school we were ranked #5 this year and #2 last year as Best for Vets by Military Times. We are AACSB accredited. The program can be completed in as little as two years, so many students can easily use their GI benefits within the allotted time frame. We are also a Yellow Ribbon matching program. At our larger domestic residencies, we have held receptions for military/veteran students to connect them to the Veterans Resource Center and the Office for Veteran and Military Affairs. This helps them to understand the resources that are available to them."



MBA@Syracuse's hybrid program is consistent with the 2013 IVMF's survey results showing that a majority of members of the veteran and military community prefer hybrid programs. Further, some teaching materials include examples from military situations that enable student veterans to make the connection and transfer skills from military to business world.

Another best practice identified previously is the military and veteran social events that are hosted by MBA@Syracuse in partnership with the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs (OVMA). These socials are solely for veteran and military students and take place during the residency. At the social events students get the opportunity to connect with each other, to meet and network with veteran resource providers across the campus, and to learn about all the resources and support available to them, such as Career Services, Veterans Legal Clinic, and the Veterans Resource Center.

## IMPACT OF VETERAN-FRIENDLY PROGRAMS ON OTHERS

For Whitman, the goal is that their students earn their degree. Whitman hopes their commitment to student success and student veterans positively impacts their entire student body; and results in increased awareness among active duty students on services available to them after they transition to veteran. For example, a Whitman representative shared that the “care... and attention” they provide to their student veteran serves as a “positive stimulus” that shows the active duty students that Whitman is there to help them now and will be there to help them if and when they return as veterans. Thus, the veteran-friendly climate created at Whitman serves as a “safety net.”

Further, a Whitman representative shared their observation of the value veterans create in the physical classroom: “Our impression is that having veterans in the classroom improved the overall educational experience of all students. Many of

the veterans were older and more mature. They thus provided additional stability and experience to the classroom. They were able to contribute an additional perspective about structure, dedication, leadership and living abroad.”

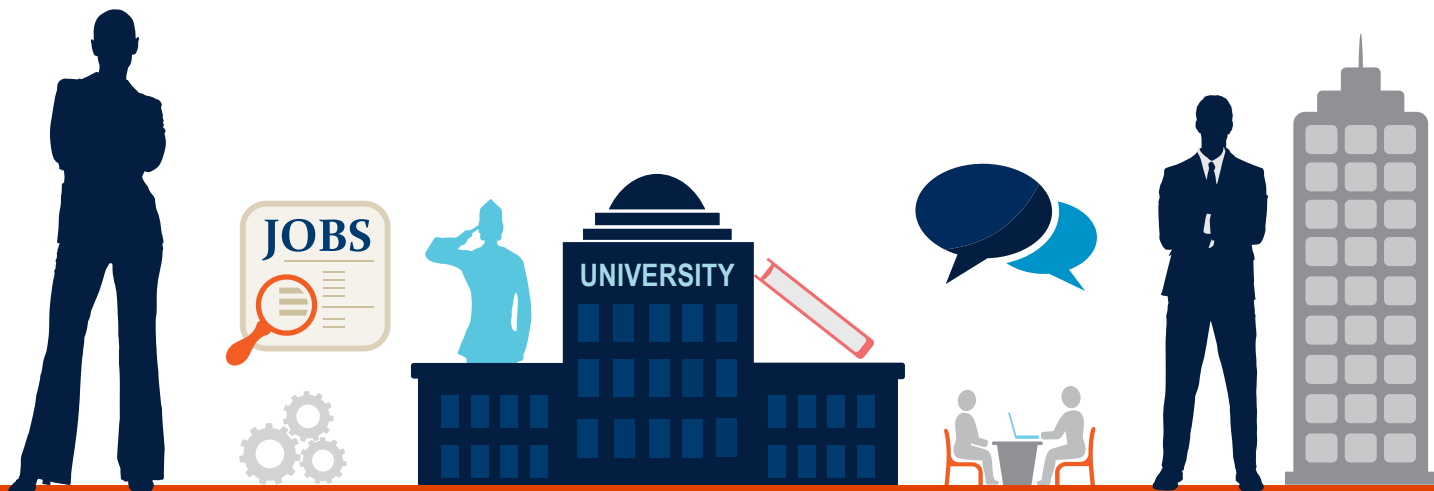
## FRAMEWORK

Whitman's commitment to student veterans is clear and strong, and reflects Syracuse University's Chancellor Kent Syverud's commitment to making Syracuse University “the best place for veterans.” Student veterans prefer hybrid education. This is likely due to the fact that they tend to be older and may have more family considerations than traditional residential students. Therefore, Whitman has been developing more veteran-friendly graduate programs leveraging the hybrid format of MBA@Syracuse.

In reflecting on the MBA program created for veterans, the Whitman representative shares that the program services and the “right attitude” are the core foundation of any framework for making veteran-friendly degrees.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Now that Whitman has created a framework for graduate degree programs that are also veteran-friendly, the school is focused on increasing enrollment numbers and continuous collaboration with veteran specific programs and organizations across the Syracuse University campus to include the IVMF, OVMA, VRC, Career Services, and others. In addition, the Whitman representatives shared that the programs are sustainable as result of the training and onboarding of people working there. They describe their staff as having the “right attitude” and being capable of offering inclusive assistance to all students regardless of their background that addresses their unique needs and challenges.











SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY



**Maxwell  
School**



The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs is the leader in public affairs for graduate schools, ranked #1 in 2016 by US News & World Report. Maxwell, an interdisciplinary school, conducts research and teaching in many fields, including international relations, social sciences, public policy, and public administration. Maxwell offers both professional and advanced degrees, along with housing several undergraduate majors. Maxwell is perhaps as diverse as its student body population. Thirty percent of its students are international and 15 percent identify as either African American or Latino/a. Maxwell has many graduate programs that allow for students to create their own academic pathway, including avenues to gain leadership experience. Given its many course offerings, Maxwell joined the initiative to continue their effort of making their graduate degree programs more veteran-friendly.



## RECRUITMENT

To recruit veterans interested in one of its graduate degree programs, the Executive Masters in Public Administration (EMPA), Maxwell increased their web presence. Maxwell participated in a webinar and circulated material on their veteran-friendly graduate program. Maxwell found that many veterans were interested in their program, but few wanted to relocate to Syracuse, NY for a residential degree. Maxwell then broadened its focus to show that many of their graduate degree programs could be conducted online. However, one of the biggest obstacles mentioned was the school not having a program that interested veterans at the time of recruitment. Retrospectively, Maxwell would have conducted more research on potential student veterans before beginning the recruitment phase. The additional research could have led to the school knowing ahead of time that many student veterans were more interested in an online degree program.

Using the experience of other schools on campus-including Whitman's-helped Maxwell to revise its current offerings to attract student veterans. Maxwell is looking forward to their student veteran population increasing and is eager to observe how their student body demographics change as more veterans enroll in their online/hybrid programs.

Creating more veteran-friendly programming has resulted in opportunities for collaboration across schools. Since student veterans are often interested in an interdisciplinary degree, Maxwell has had the opportunity to work with other schools at Syracuse University. The collaboration between school administrations allows for student veterans to learn skills and knowledge, and apply them. Further,

the collaboration has enabled student veterans to obtain a master's degree from Maxwell and a Certificate of Advanced Study from Maxwell or another school at Syracuse University.

## BEST PRACTICES

Best practices adopted by Maxwell include its focus on keeping the online students engaged and connected to the physical campus. To keep online students connected to the school, Maxwell plans to offer hybrid programs that include a residential component. Maxwell also plans to introduce additional online courses in 2017.

Some student veterans had concerns about adjusting to academia after being away for several years. A benefit for their student veterans is the academic advising Maxwell offers them. Maxwell has implemented a structure that involves several staff who are able to assist student veterans with their concerns. This also serves as an additional way for student veterans to learn about campus and school resources.

To help their students succeed, Maxwell makes sure their students are aware of available resources and are provided with the resources necessary to their academic success. In addition to the University Writing Center, which is open to all students, Maxwell hired a PhD student for twenty hours per week to assist their graduate students with quantitative courses, such as micro-economics. Several students have expressed that having a student to help them with the quantitative course makes them feel supported. Maxwell has found that offering this support has encouraged a culture among the students of helping one another.

Maxwell's commitment to diversity has also served as a best practice for student veterans. In addition to racial and ethnic diversity, people of all ages pursue graduate degrees at Maxwell. For example, Maxwell has executive programs along with the Masters in Public Administration (MPA). Students enrolled in the executive programs are often older than the students enrolled in the MPA program. The school thinks that the wide spectrum of ages and life stages of the Maxwell student body has led to student veterans quickly becoming comfortable and feeling like they belong.

Finally, one of the admission requirements for the Executive MPA is a minimum of seven years of professional work experience. To accommodate student veterans and military connected students, Maxwell has accepted military experience as professional work experience and enabled veterans and military connected applicants to be compatible with their peers.

## IMPACT OF VETERAN-FRIENDLY PROGRAMS ON OTHERS

The diversity of the student body at Maxwell significantly improves the experiences of others. For example, some of



the courses have traditional students, international students, and student veterans. These courses allow for a space where experiences and knowledge are shared.

Making graduate programs more veteran-friendly has also improved current offerings, with Maxwell reviewing its courses to ensure they work well for the diverse groups of students, and that the students are interested in the courses and succeed in their respective programs.

## SUSTAINABILITY

To sustain the veteran-friendly graduate degree program and reach interested veterans, Maxwell will continue soliciting feedback and recommendations from alumni. Maxwell keeps in contact with their alumni through their newsletter and seeks feedback about the program: what was done well and what could be improved upon or offered in the future. Feedback is gathered through a survey that is sent to alumni after they graduate. Before the students graduate, the program tries to meet with them to gather information on their experience at Maxwell.

A majority of the feedback received from alumni on the curriculum and additions to the program have indicated that student veterans really enjoy the program and benefit from it. Further, the adaptation of the graduate programs to more of a hybrid format has been consistent with the feedback received across campus, alumni, and potential students from the veteran and military community. Maxwell hopes word of mouth from student veterans will lead to more veterans enrolling in their veteran-friendly graduate degree programs.



## School of Information Studies **SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY**



A top ranked school in Library and Information Studies, the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University, often referred to as the iSchool, serves as a source for education and research in many fields related to the sharing and gathering of information, including technology, policy, systems, and services. The school offers an undergraduate degree and several masters degrees, Ph.D.s, and certificate programs. On their website, the iSchool proudly details the unique educational programming they offer to active duty and student veterans.

### **RECRUITMENT**

To develop veteran-friendly programs and attract veterans, the iSchool expanded their knowledge beyond the active duty and student veteran populations they typically recruit. To do so, the iSchool conducted comparative research on military occupations and their iSchool courses to determine which graduate degree programs would best fit particular military occupations and trainings.

Using funding possible through the GMAC grant, the iSchool employed students to search the American Council on Education's (ACE) Military Guide to identify course and credit recommendations based on military occupations and education. After a tough initial learning curve, the iSchool mapped the ACE course recommendations to specific course learning objectives.

The next steps to recruiting veterans to the veteran-friendly program for the iSchool are evaluating the military courses against iSchool courses to maximize the number of credits a veteran can transfer. The iSchool plans to seek approval to allow for credits above the maximum transfer credit limit to be transferred in for student veterans.

### **BEST PRACTICES**

The recruitment strategy employed by the iSchool involved extensive background work to understand the connection between military courses and iSchool courses. Using the lessons learned, iSchool plans to conduct periodic reviews of the ACE Military Guide and their courses. This will allow for the iSchool to continue offering the most relevant programs and course credit transfers to veterans.

A best practice developed to assist in organizing the process is a database. The iSchool plans to continue developing their database that combines the information from the ACE Military Guide with iSchool course outcomes. The iSchool can review and update this database as school and university curriculums change.

To extend their best practice to other schools, the iSchool has carefully documented the mapping process, including the comparison of the military curriculum with the school's





curriculum and the questions presented during the process. The iSchool views this documentation as a valuable template that can benefit other schools developing veteran-friendly programs.

Another best practice that proved helpful in making their programs more veteran-friendly was the iSchool's collaboration with other schools at Syracuse University. At the undergraduate level, University College was making strides to produce more veteran-friendly programs. The two schools shared challenges, lessons, and best practices, which assisted each school in their efforts to become more veteran-friendly.

However, their efforts to create paths for graduate education using the ACE Military Guide were limited. The iSchool found that the ACE Military Guide was geared more towards undergraduate education. After learning this, the iSchool representative shared how beneficial collaboration might be in the future, particularly if the graduate programs at Syracuse University worked together in their evaluation of the ACE Military Guide and school and university curriculum requirements.

## FRAMEWORK FOR OTHER PROGRAMS

The lessons learned by the iSchool serve as an important framework for future development and implementation of veteran-friendly programming. During the research and development process, the iSchool realized that the school itself and many others were not well versed on the ACE Military Guide. The iSchool would like to use the knowledge they have acquired and the framework they have developed to educate others on the ACE Military Guide.

Educating others on the application of the ACE Military Guide for graduate degree programs could lead to better services for veterans nationwide. To educate people who want to serve student veterans, but are not sure how, the iSchool would like to offer informational sessions to their staff and faculty and others who are interested in learning more about developing veteran-friendly programs using the ACE Military Guide. The framework built the last three years of the VET-MGMT program at the iSchool is encouraging a culture of sharing between schools.

This framework is important given the work that still needs to be done. During the project, the iSchool found that there are still many opportunities to make existing programs more veteran-friendly at the graduate level, noting that it takes time and dedication on the program level.

## IMPACT OF VETERAN-FRIENDLY PROGRAMS ON OTHERS

The effort to make graduate programs more veteran-friendly at the iSchool has had a positive impact on the entire iSchool. Both active duty students and veteran students have positively



impacted research, projects, instruction, and collaboration between faculty and students. Having active duty and veterans in the classrooms has greatly impacted the entire iSchool with the amount of real life experiences broadening across programs.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The framework and mapping developed by the iSchool has led to sustainable veteran-friendly programs at the iSchool and other schools at Syracuse University. The iSchool can use the mapping to develop the best graduate degree programs and pathways for both veterans and active duty.

The sustainability of the veteran-friendly programs is enhanced by the relationship the iSchool has developed with potential active duty students and student veterans. Several interactions between active duty service members and iSchool representatives on military bases indicated an interest in the iSchool and Syracuse University. In addition to being interested in many programs, active duty would inquire on pathways and options available to apply their military experience to an undergraduate or graduate degree at Syracuse University. The representatives did not always have clear answers for the students. With the development of the Military Mapping program, the iSchool has begun creating a clear pathway for interested active duty and veterans to transfer in their military course credits and earn an iSchool degree. Therefore, this initiative to make the programs at the iSchool more veteran-friendly is certain to bring in more active duty and veterans eager to earn a degree using their military experience.



## CASE HIGHLIGHT

David B. Falk College of Sport  
and Human Dynamics

### SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY **FALK** **COLLEGE** of Sport and Human Dynamics



David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics offers many professional degree programs in areas supporting the health and well-being of individuals and families. Falk participated in the initiative to make their graduate programs more veteran-friendly.

#### RECRUITMENT

To increase awareness of its course offerings, Falk conducted an email campaign. According to Falk's records, 7,500 veterans opened up the email and there were 860 unique visitors to the Falk website. Based on website activity, Falk is



pleased with the outcome of the email campaign. However, Falk is uncertain if the email campaign led to an increase in applications and enrollment in their programs.

Before beginning the initiative to make their graduate programs more veteran-friendly, Falk offered many programs that might have been of interest to veterans, including certificate programs, such as a therapy program in "trauma informed practice." However, these programs were residential, requiring veterans to relocate to Syracuse, NY. The residential certificate programs are typically short, consisting of 19-credits, thus are not a viable option for veterans who do not reside nearby.

Recognizing that veteran-friendly programs often require online delivery, certain departments within Falk were developing a curriculum for an online Doctorate of Public Health (Dr.P.H.) at the time of the interview. Offering an online Dr.P.H. would allow for Falk to expand their network of interested veterans. At the time of the interview, Falk was also developing undergraduate and graduate degrees in sports analytics.

In reviewing the current program offerings, Falk identified many programs that could be of interest to veterans, including counseling and sport management. However, the issue remained that the delivery of the courses was only available via a physical classroom.

#### BEST PRACTICES

Pursuing a graduate degree at Falk can be strenuous and have many challenges for an individual who has not been in an academic setting in a few years. Often, student veterans have many obligations and pressures, including bills





and family, which can impact the time and energy required to complete a degree. For example, besides classroom instruction and assignments, students in the Master of Social Work program are required to complete 18 hours of community field placement per week. Recognizing the significant commitments of some student veterans, a best practice for Falk is their effort to provide support to their students. They “do business as a small school, even though we’re not... the smallest school” at Syracuse University. Falk spreads out the support and services they offer their students to assist their success in the program, making an effort to build a solid community for their student veterans.

### **IMPACT OF VETERAN-FRIENDLY PROGRAMS ON OTHERS**

Pursuing advanced degrees can be difficult for some student veterans. Often student veterans have more life experiences and commitments than younger graduate students. Though these lived experiences and commitments can initially be a hurdle for student veterans, such as in acclimating to a school environment again, they greatly enhance the learning

environment of all Falk students.

Student veterans and other more experienced students can offer a unique perspective that many recent graduates have not yet experienced. In addition to the student veterans providing an enriched perspective, student Veterans can serve as “mentors, coaches, and role models” for other students.

### **SUSTAINABILITY**

To make their veteran-friendly programs sustainable, Falk plans to continue campaigning. Some of the efforts include the move toward more online degrees, which will provide additional flexibility for veteran and military connected students. Further, Syracuse University’s effort to increase the efficiency of the data collection process in which veterans self-identify will help the school to understand and meet the needs of their student veterans. The increased efforts will also allow the school to increase awareness of the resources Falk provides to its student veterans. Next steps include developing a more thorough process of locating veterans who are not self-identifying, and working with departments within Falk to identify incoming student veterans.



## CASE HIGHLIGHT

L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science



**SYRACUSE  
UNIVERSITY  
ENGINEERING  
& COMPUTER  
SCIENCE**



The L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science (ECS) offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in many fields. The research and teaching at ECS uses interdisciplinary approaches to address difficult problems, and encourages both undergraduate and graduate students to be involved in the school's research. According to their website, ECS has about 2,197 students enrolled, with approximately 812 of these students enrolled in masters or PhD programs.

### RECRUITMENT

To attract both active duty and veterans, ECS addressed course delivery. To allow for flexibility, ECS offers their online students the option of attending live lectures or watching it as a recording. ECS has found that this flexibility in course delivery greatly benefits all their students, especially their student veterans, who often have busy schedules or are traveling abroad. To better address the needs of the student body, ECS has contracted with 2U, an education technology company that partners with top colleges & universities, to bring their degree programs and credit-bearing courses online. ECS already has the platform built for online sessions, including live, face-to-face sessions, which has been leveraged in their online recruiting efforts.

### BEST PRACTICES

A best practice of ECS is the effort to offer their degree programs online. ECS offers the same curriculum and courses online for several majors. Online courses allow for flexibility in how students learn and participate. For example, online students are able to watch a recording of the lecture or join each class session live.

The quality of the online courses offered by ECS allows for student participation. The feedback from students that ECS receives is that many students have a desire to actively

participate in an online class. With 2U, ECS now requires a "live, face-to-face session" each week.

Another best practice for ECS is having one single point of contact. If a student veteran was having an issue, the student veteran could contact one individual and know that the individual would help address the issue, and point the student in the right direction if needed. A single point of contact also allows for the school to have a good grasp of student veteran issues and inform others of said issues.

Often, active duty students and student veterans have unique challenges, especially if deployed. Further describing the benefit of a single point of contact, the ECS representative shared a story of an active duty student who was set to deploy during the middle of the academic semester. An Air Force student stationed in New Mexico received orders to deploy after the financial drop deadline. The student received a bill that was sent to student debt and he was concerned. The point of contact worked with the bursar office and had the bill waived. The student knew who to go to with the problem, and the point of contact was able to see the problem through from beginning to solution.

The single point of contact also serves as a means to further educate faculty on some of the issues and demands active duty students and student veterans might experience, such as transitioning from service member to civilian. This education includes discussions that prepare faculty for a student veteran in their online or face-to-face class. This relationship with faculty has led to a very friendly and supportive environment for active duty and student veterans at ECS.

School funding has served as a great benefit for many active duty students and student veterans. Graduate students have a limited amount of tuition assistance they can receive each semester. To attract students to the program and assist them in funding the program, ECS offers a 20 percent reduction in tuition



to active duty students and student veterans without post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. Active duty students and student veterans at ECS have expressed that they have not seen this type of tuition discount at any other private school that is comparable to Syracuse University.

## FRAMEWORK

Despite the positive benefit for student veterans, the move to the online platform had some technical issues. ECS had problems with the technology used to capture and broadcast. For example, a student stationed in Italy had trouble viewing the videos due to a poor internet connection. As a result of the poor connection, the student requested to receive offline versions of the live sessions. At the time, ECS was not able to provide offline versions. Since then, ECS has a better understanding of what online students need and is making strides to accommodate their student veterans. For example, ECS has contracted with 2U to use an online platform that promotes more flexibility and stability, which will allow for better accommodations for online students.

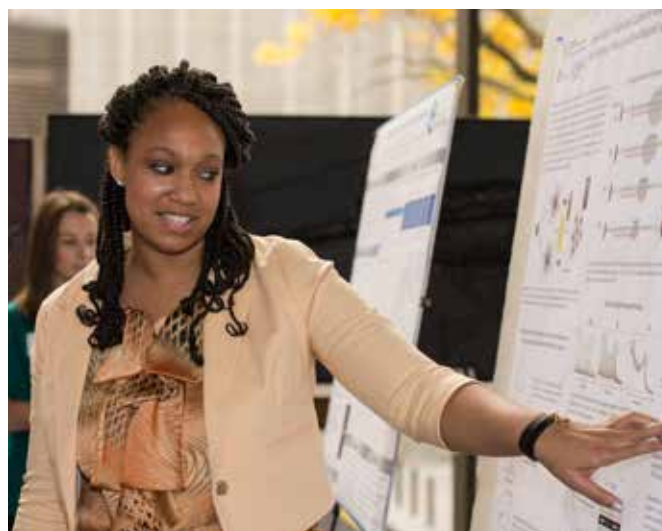
Another lesson that has helped in making the graduate program more veteran-friendly at ECS is the understanding that faculty need to be taught how to teach online courses. ECS has been developing training and technical assistance guidelines for faculty. The process has also shown that there are some important advancements needed in online classes; despite the introduction of new classes, the concept of online courses has not changed in more than a decade.

The framework built from the lessons learned has allowed for ECS to create and put online full programs much quicker. Additionally, at the time of the interview, ECS was working with 2U to better the current platform. The work put into developing solid online courses is allowing for ECS to transfer the design and development of previous courses to new courses more quickly and efficiently. Thus, veteran-friendliness is replicated across all new or adjusted classes and programs.

The process of making programs more veteran-friendly required learning more about veteran certification works at Syracuse University. For example, when ECS began offering the 20 percent discount on tuition, the school did not understand how to apply it. This has built a framework where the financial discount ECS offers to student veterans not using their post-9/11 GI Bill benefits can be processed smoothly.

## IMPACT OF VETERAN-FRIENDLY PROGRAMS ON OTHERS

ECS integrated its veteran-friendly programming for graduate students with its adult learning programs. The inclusion of student veterans and other adult learners at ECS has



enhanced the academic experience of non-veteran students. For example, at ECS, many student veterans and other adult learners take the online courses. To encourage sharing of experiences and knowledge between traditional graduate students, student veterans, and other adult learners, several ECS professors began assigning group projects that required the involvement of at least one online student. The professors and many students reported that the inclusion of student veterans and adult learners taking courses online greatly enhanced classroom learning.

In addition to the non-veteran students learning of different perspectives, the group projects accommodated the lives of student veterans. For example, a student veteran enrolled in the online course and stationed in Italy was able to record his portion of the group project. This allowed the student veteran to be actively involved in the group project despite time and physical location constraints.

## SUSTAINABILITY

A significant advantage to the veteran-friendliness within programs offered at ECS is that the curriculum is the same for online students as it is for residential students. This ensures that student veterans and adults in their career who are pursuing additional education online are receiving an education that is comparable to that of the residential students.

ECS plans to continue the efforts made to create more veteran-friendly programs at ECS, such as the tuition discount and online courses. ECS will also continue offering new programs that will attract student veterans, such as the new cyber security major for undergraduate students.

Next steps for ECS include becoming “veteran-ready” in addition to remaining “veteran-friendly”. Becoming veteran-ready for ECS entails developing a better protocol for applicants to learn what credits will transfer in an acceptable timeframe.

# BEST PRACTICES

As the case highlights indicate, there were many challenges to making and sustaining veteran-friendly programs. These challenges led to many opportunities to create best practices that benefit student veterans and the student body as a whole. The following are some of the more significant best practices:



## FINANCIAL AID

Though there was interest, several veterans were unwilling to enroll in programs that would require them to use their post-9/11 GI Bill. Given that the amount of financial aid offered to graduate students is capped, a best practice developed by L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science (ECS) was to offer a reduction of tuition by 20 percent. This financial incentive is offered to all veterans in need of financial assistance (veterans not using or who have exhausted their post-9/11 GI Bill). Other successful strategies to reduce the financial burden on student veterans included offering school specific financial assistance and Syracuse University's participation in the VA's Yellow Ribbon Program. Syracuse University's participation in the program is rather generous, with the University allowing unlimited Yellow Ribbon allocations. These financial incentives are likely to draw in student veterans to top higher education institutions, such as Syracuse University.



## ACCEPTING OF CREDITS AND DEVELOPING RELEVANT COURSE CONTENT

Committing to making existing programs more veteran-friendly led some schools to research military credits. For example, the iSchool reviewed the ACE Military Guide and created a comprehensive list of military credits that are transferable toward iSchool degree offerings. Several schools have made strides to maximize the number of transferable credits. Further, some schools have created independent study courses that leverage and build upon veterans' experiences and skills gained in the military.

## ONLINE AND HYBRID COURSES



Recognizing the evolving needs of student veterans, a majority of the schools mentioned efforts to offer online or hybrid courses. Offering online or hybrid courses that are comparable to the residential courses can often better accommodate the needs of veterans who are interested in earning a graduate degree, but unable to relocate to Syracuse, NY. The expansion of online and hybrid courses also led to improved technology and online learning platforms to accommodate active duty and student veterans stationed abroad.



## OPEN DOOR POLICY

In supporting the needs of veterans, several schools had either an open door policy or a dedicated individual. The open door policy and designated individual resulted in student veterans being able to discuss non-academic issues that might affect their academic studies, including mental health. These efforts to relate directly to student veterans have provided them with increased support. It also led to schools being aware of the needs of student veterans, such as the need for inclusion efforts. Additionally, the experiences from the open door policy have led to the creation of the "Orange Door" program, a Syracuse University campus-wide initiative to create veteran-friendly space that enables faculty and staff to receive military and veteran competency training.





## INCLUSION

Student veterans are often older than other graduate students and have had more life experiences. Several schools mentioned efforts to encourage inclusion for residential students and their online student body. Inclusion efforts included ensuring student veterans were aware of available academic resources, including mentorship and help with writing and quantitative analysis.

Another example of an inclusion effort is Maxwell's executive program and their commitment to racial and ethnic diversity. Encouraging diverse perspectives and learning, Maxwell's commitment to racial and ethnic diversity enhances the experience of student veterans. Maxwell also offers executive programs for adults in their career who are pursuing additional education. These executive programs often result in a broad age range of students at the school.

Inclusion efforts are also evident in the course offerings. Two schools mentioned efforts for inclusion in the classroom through either group projects or a requirement for a residential class session for online students. Schools that have implemented this best practice have found that it enhances the experience of both student veterans and nonveteran students.



## SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

A number of tactics have been employed to sustain veteran-friendly programs at the schools. Several schools keep in contact with alumni, soliciting feedback on their programs. Alumni are asked to share what they learned and how it has benefited them in their careers. Alumni are also provided the opportunity to offer feedback on aspects of the curriculum that could be improved or courses that would have been beneficial. Feedback from the veteran and military population enables Syracuse University to continually address the needs and challenges that active duty and student veterans might face.

Additionally, some schools hope that the contact with alumni can help recruit student veterans, with alumni veterans recommending the veteran-friendly graduate degree programs to prospective student veterans.



## COLLABORATION

Several schools have collaborated and plan to continue working together. The collaboration between schools has directly benefitted student veterans, providing student veterans the opportunity to take courses that are relevant to their interests across disciplines and schools. It also allows for schools to share best practices and knowledge, including understanding the ACE Military Guide. The solid collaboration between schools and departments ensures an overall veteran-friendly experience from the classroom to campus resources to financial aid offerings. This can reduce some of the obstacles that student veterans might encounter when obtaining multiple degrees from different disciplines i.e., Master's degree from the iSchool and a Certificate of Advance Study from Maxwell.



## COMMUNICATION

Across all programs it was evident that there is a need to properly communicate what "veteran-friendly" means. In most cases it does not mean giving veterans special exception in terms of requirements of the program. Rather, veteran-friendly means fostering an institution-wide culture that embraces the veteran community and believes that veterans are fully capable of successfully earning a degree, while adding value to the institution as a whole.







# Check List for Making Professional Degrees ‘Veteran-Friendly’

### **BECOMING “VETERAN-FRIENDLY”**

- ☐ Develop and offer military and veteran competency training to faculty and staff.
- ☐ Clearly communicate and define “veteran-friendly”.

### **FINANCIAL AID**

- ☐ If the school is a Yellow Ribbon participating school, offer unlimited Yellow Ribbon allocations.
- ☐ In addition to university financial aid, offer school specific financial aid such as tuition discounts.

### **DEGREE AND PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY**

- ☐ Create more flexibility in degree programs, i.e. make them hybrid (online + residency), and don’t tie students to strict time-frames.
- ☐ When counting years of professional experience for degree requirements, consider military experience.
- ☐ Leverage ACE Military Guide to provide more opportunities for veterans and military connected students to transfer credits from their Joint Services Transcript (JST), which entails all their training and education while in the military.

### **INCLUSION**

- ☐ Connect with all military and veteran resources across university campus(es), and educate veterans and military-connected students about these resources.
- ☐ Create and host military/veteran social events. Invite school leadership and military/veteran resource providers to these events.

### **CONNECTING WITH STUDENT VETERANS**

- ☐ Make information on veteran-friendly programs and resources easily accessible via school's website.
- ☐ Encourage students to self-identify during the admissions process so that student veterans can be effectively served.
- ☐ Have a single point of contact for student veterans within your program.
- ☐ Continuously collect feedback from the veteran and military population (potential students, current students, and alumni).





### Glossary

AACSB – The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business

ACE- American Council on Education

ECS- L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science

EEE – Department of Entrepreneurship and Emerging Enterprises at Whitman School of Management

IVMF – Institute for Veterans and Military Families

GMAC – Graduate Management Admissions Council

MBA – Masters of Business Administration

MPA – Masters of Public Administration

OVMA – Office of Veteran and Military Affairs

VET-MGMT – Veteran Employment Through Modified Graduate Management Tracks program

VRC – Veterans Resource Center







## APPENDIX A

Thank you very much for your participation in the survey. As part of VET-MGMT, we are required to collect data about your efforts and achievements within your school. The responses from this survey will be used to produce a report that can be disseminated to other schools looking to create veteran-friendly programs. Please take 20-30 minutes to answer the following survey questions. The survey will ask open-ended questions about successful practices, obstacles, and student veteran experiences. Please provide as much detail as possible. If there are any materials you think will help us in developing a more sound report, please e-mail those materials to Mirza Tihic at [mtihic@syr.edu](mailto:mtihic@syr.edu). For any questions, feel free to contact Mirza Tihic at [mtihic@syr.edu](mailto:mtihic@syr.edu).

1. What did you find worked? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How are you sustaining successful practices? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is transferable; best practices, tools, processes? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What did not work? How did you resolve any problems? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What lessons did you learn from this? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Are the timelines in the program viable? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What were the most common problems faced in creating veteran-friendly programs? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What were the most common problems faced by the student veterans? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Have veteran-friendly programs impacted other students' experience in the school or program, and overall? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Can any lessons be transferred to create a framework or model for helping other student populations? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How much did you need to change any previously existing programs to be veteran- friendly? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Has veteran level of experience been important in determining success? \_\_\_\_\_









## About The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)

The IVMF is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education, and policy issues impacting veterans and their families post-service. Through the focus on veterans programming, research and policy, employment and employer support, and community engagement, the Institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community, captures best practices, and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between the individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families.

### SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY OFFICE OF VETERAN AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

## About The Office of Veteran and Military Affairs (OVMA)

The Office of Veteran and Military Affairs (OVMA) serves as Syracuse University's single point of entry for all veteran and military related programs and initiatives. Committed to being the "Best Place for Veterans," OVMA assists university stakeholders to support and empower veteran, military connected, and military family member students and employees who are veterans at Syracuse University.



## About GMAC®

The Graduate Management Admission Council® (GMAC®) is the association of leading graduate business schools around the world. GMAC meets the needs of business schools and students through a wide array of products, services, and programs and serves as a primary resource of research and information about quality graduate management education. For more information about GMAC, please visit [www.gmac.com](http://www.gmac.com)

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