

How Higher Education Is Serving Veterans

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Does higher education
address the needs of
military service members
and veterans?

Introduction

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs expanded the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly referred to as the GI Bill¹. This expansion, now referred to as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, provides veterans with active duty service after Sept. 10, 2001, with unprecedented education benefits that include a living allowance, money for books and the ability to transfer benefits to a dependent. This change, coupled with a higher number of veterans returning from service, spurred an increase in the enrollment of military service members, veterans and their dependents in postsecondary institutions throughout the U.S. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 99% of U.S. two- and four-year degree-granting colleges and universities enrolled military service members, veterans or their dependents in 2012, totaling approximately 844,500 enrollments at the undergraduate level and 109,500 enrollments at the graduate level.²

The growing number of military service members and veterans enrolling in colleges and universities has required that postsecondary institutions evolve to better serve these populations. Many colleges and universities have created offices, programs, courses and meeting spaces specifically designed for the military service member and veteran student population. Other institutions have adopted recruitment strategies tailored to attract military service members and veterans. Given the increased demand for higher education among the military service member and veteran population, it is imperative that higher education leaders carefully review these programs and policies and continue to monitor the services they provide their students.

¹ The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides 36 months of tuition equal to the cost of the most expensive public university in the state, plus a housing allowance and book stipend.

² Services and Support Programs for Military Service Members and Veterans at Postsecondary Institutions, 2012–13. (2014). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014017.pdf>.

This report explores long-term outcomes among the military service member and veteran college graduate population and provides insights into the value that college and university policies and federal programs offer these students. Considerable research has been dedicated to examining traditional outcome metrics among members of the military service and veteran population, including graduation and employment rates. This research, however, falls short in evaluating the comprehensive benefits of a college degree beyond these narrow outcome measures, and does not assess college and university performance from the perspectives of their graduates.

In 2014, Gallup and Purdue University developed a student-focused approach for evaluating college graduates' experiences at U.S. institutions of higher education. The result is the Gallup-Purdue Index, which assesses alumni perceptions of their undergraduate experiences and how those experiences relate to long-term outcomes, including well-being. The 2015 study included surveys of 3,722 college graduates with an undergraduate degree or higher who served in the military (including the National Guard or Reserve) either prior to, during or upon completion of their undergraduate program. The study sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do military service members and veterans compare with their peers in the critical long-term outcome of well-being?
2. How well do military service members and veterans feel their college understood the unique needs of the military service member and veteran student population?
3. To what extent do military service members and veterans feel the financial benefits provided allow them to obtain *good* degrees?

Measuring What Matters: Well-Being

Well-being is not only about being happy or wealthy, nor is it only synonymous with physical health. Rather, it is about the interaction and interdependency between many aspects of life such as finding fulfillment in daily work and interactions, having strong social relationships and access to the resources people need, feeling financially secure, being physically healthy and taking part in a true community.

Gallup and Healthways developed the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being 5 View to measure these important aspects. This survey, based on findings from the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index and years of joint research, asks 10 questions that gauge well-being in five elements:

Purpose Well-Being: Liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals

Social Well-Being: Having strong and supportive relationships and love in your life

Financial Well-Being: Effectively managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security

Community Well-Being: The sense of engagement you have with the areas where you live, liking where you live and feeling safe and having pride in your community

Gallup categorizes people's well-being in each of the elements as "thriving," "struggling" and "suffering," based on their responses. Those who are thriving are strong, consistent and progressing, while those who are struggling are moderate or inconsistent. Those who are suffering are at high risk.

Understanding how people think about and experience their lives is one of the first steps in determining the appropriate interventions that organizations, communities and the higher education system need to take to solve their biggest challenges. This research has the ability to provide colleges and universities with insight on how to improve the lives of current undergraduates in the key areas that are within their control. There is no one way to achieve high well-being, but through work and accountability, institutions can help provide their students with goals that are ultimately more fulfilling than income alone.

Military Service Members and Veterans Are More Likely to Thrive in Three of Five Elements

Military service members and veterans are more likely than all other college graduates to be thriving in three of the five elements of well-being: purpose, social and financial well-being. The greatest difference between military service members and veterans and all other college graduates exists in the area of financial well-being — 54% of military service member and veteran college graduates are thriving, compared with 43% of non-veteran graduates. High financial well-being is achieved through the careful management of one’s economic life. Those with higher financial well-being have less stress and increased financial security.

	Served in the Military	Did not Serve in the Military		Served in the Military	Did not Serve in the Military
Purpose Well-Being			Community Well-Being		
Thriving	60%	53%	Thriving	50%	46%
Struggling	32%	39%	Struggling	37%	40%
Suffering	8%	9%	Suffering	13%	13%
Social Well-Being			Physical Well-Being		
Thriving	56%	50%	Thriving	36%	34%
Struggling	34%	40%	Struggling	53%	56%
Suffering	10%	10%	Suffering	11%	10%
Financial Well-Being			Thriving by Number of Elements		
Thriving	54%	43%	None	16%	18%
Struggling	32%	37%	One	15%	20%
Suffering	14%	20%	Two	17%	18%
			Three	18%	18%
			Four	19%	16%
			Five	15%	11%

The higher level of economic security among military service members and veterans may be partly due to their low average level of student loan debt. Gallup has identified a negative relationship between student loan debt and the percent thriving in each of the five elements of well-being, meaning that those with lower levels of student loan debt are more likely to be thriving in each element. Although high student loan debt levels are linked to lower well-being for each of the five well-being elements, financial well-being is most affected. *On average, military service members and veterans borrowed less money in order to obtain their undergraduate degree; 65% of military service members and veterans borrowed no money, compared with 52% of those who have never served.*

Military service members and veteran graduates are also more likely than non-military graduates to be thriving in their purpose well-being, meaning that they like what they do each day and are motivated to achieve their goals. Sixty percent of these college graduates are thriving in their purpose well-being, compared with 53% of non-military college graduates.

Military service members and veterans are also slightly more likely than all other college graduates to be thriving in their social well-being (56% vs. 50%). Individuals with high social well-being have supportive relationships in their life, with strong emotional connections to individuals who they can rely upon during difficult times — an important factor for many military service members and veterans returning from service. The strong bonds between service members during and after service may help explain the higher social well-being among these graduates.

Veterans are on par with other college graduates in community well-being, with 50% of military service member and veterans thriving in this element, compared with 46% of all other college graduates. Community well-being is defined as liking where you live, feeling safe and having pride in your community. Although those with higher community well-being are more likely to enjoy where they live, to be considered “thriving” in this area, they also have to actively engage in their community.

Military service member and veteran college graduates are also about as likely as all other college graduates to be thriving in their physical well-being. Thirty-six percent of veterans are thriving in their physical well-being, similar to the 34% of all other college graduates.

Meeting the Needs of Military Service Members and Veterans

Military service members and veterans have unique needs, and many colleges and universities are devoting considerable resources to attempt to address those needs. Some universities have appointed dedicated staff in the areas of financial and health counseling, while others have designed courses to assist veterans in their transition into life as a college student or created dedicated spaces for military service members and veterans to meet and discuss common challenges. Understanding the diversity of these needs, and the extent to which specific programs help address them, is critical.

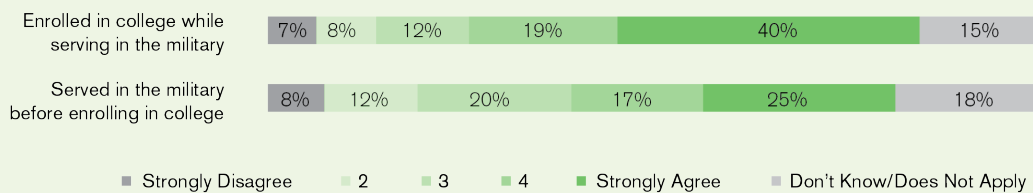
In an effort to assess how colleges and universities are performing in serving their military service member and veteran populations, Gallup asked military service members and veterans who had served prior to or during their undergraduate program the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that their college or university understood the unique needs of military service members and veterans.

Post-9/11 GI Bill Veterans More Positive About University Commitment to Veterans

Less than a third (30%) of all military service members and veterans strongly agree that their university understood the unique needs of the military service member and veteran student population. The percentage of military service members and veterans strongly agreeing with this statement differs slightly by generation of service. Veteran college graduates that used the more generous

Post-9/11 GI Bill³ benefits to obtain their undergraduate degree are more likely than military service members and veteran college graduates who used other types of military financial benefits to strongly agree with this statement (50% vs. 34%). Higher ratings among more recent graduates are positive indicators for postsecondary institutions and suggest that increased attention to the needs of military service members and veterans at college campuses nationally could positively affect the student experience.

UNIVERSITY NAME understood the unique needs of military service members and veterans.



Returning Veterans Less Likely to Feel Colleges and Universities Understood Their Needs

A far greater percentage of military service members and veterans who served while they were enrolled in their undergraduate program strongly agree that their colleges and universities understood the needs of the military service member and veteran population, compared with those who served before attending college. Forty percent of military service members and veterans who served while they completed their degrees strongly agree that their college or university understood the unique needs of military service member and veteran students, compared with only 25% of those who served prior to enrolling in their undergraduate program. These data suggest colleges and universities have more difficulty demonstrating a strong grasp of the issues that returning veterans face upon enrollment in postsecondary institutions.

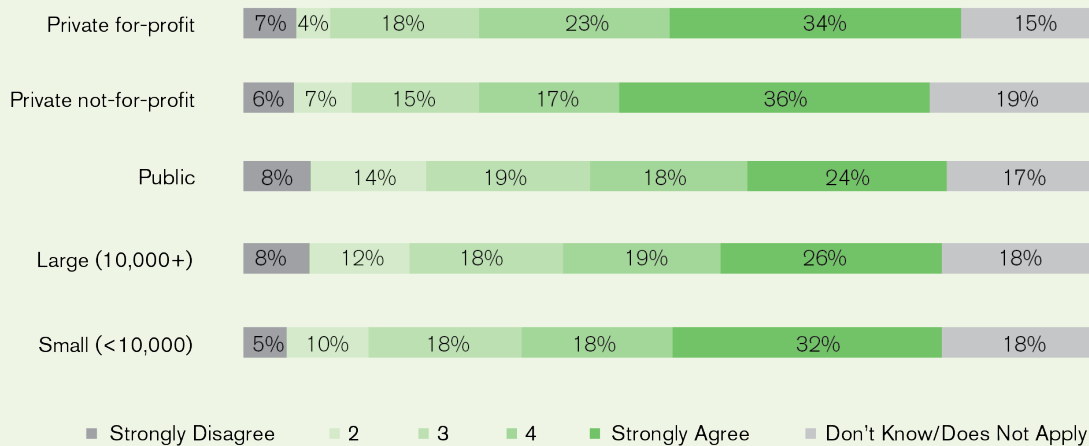
³ Military service members and veterans are eligible to use these benefits if they served at least 90 days after Sept. 10, 2001.

Private Colleges and Universities Lead in Understanding Military Service Members and Veterans

Private for-profit and private not-for-profit colleges and universities receive high marks from their graduates on understanding veterans' needs. More than one-third of private for-profit and private not-for-profit military service member and veteran graduates (34% and 36%, respectively) strongly agree that their college or university understood the unique needs of military service members and veterans, compared with 24% of public college military service member and veteran graduates who say the same.

The size of institutions might partly explain differences in responses from graduates of public and private for-profit and not-for-profit colleges and universities. Graduates who obtained their degrees from larger universities (with undergraduate enrollments of 10,000 or more) are less likely than graduates who obtained their degrees from smaller colleges or universities (with undergraduate enrollments of less than 10,000) to strongly agree that their university understood the unique needs of military service members and veterans like them.

UNIVERSITY NAME understood the unique needs of military service members and veterans.



The Financial Benefits of Serving

The education benefits the U.S. government provides through the GI Bill and other federal programs, including the Tuition Assistance⁴ and Yellow Ribbon⁵ programs, have long been recognized as a benefit for those who serve, and the military lists it as such in its outreach strategies.

Although the Post-9/11 GI Bill represents a significant expansion of military programs, some critics allege that these and other benefits provided to military service members and veterans are insufficient to obtain a good degree. The Post-9/11 GI Bill includes a tuition and fees cap, which replaced the previous state-by-state cap included in the prior GI Bill. In some cases, veterans can turn to supplemental programs (such as the Yellow Ribbon Program) to bridge the gap between the tuition and benefits provided by the GI Bill and the total cost of obtaining a degree; however, because it is optional for schools to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program, critics suggest that the current GI Bill is not enough for some veterans. Further, under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, veterans receive a living stipend based on the total number of credits they enroll in, and because veterans frequently take a lower course load due to other commitments, critics state that the stipend falls short in providing veterans with adequate resources to enroll in and complete a degree.

⁴ Tuition Assistance pays up to 100% of tuition or expenses (a maximum of \$250 per credit and \$4,500 per fiscal year) for service members.

⁵ This provision of the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows veterans to attend private colleges and universities for undergraduate or graduate studies that cost more than the state tuition cap included in the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Gallup asked military service member and veteran graduates the extent to which they agree or disagree that the benefits provided to military service members and veterans were sufficient to obtain a good degree.

Less than a third (28%) of all military service members and veterans strongly agree that the financial education benefits available to military service members and veterans are sufficient to obtain a good degree. This percentage increases to 55% among those who used Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to obtain their undergraduate degree, compared with only 35% of those who used other types of education benefits to obtain their degree.

Post-9/11 GI Bill

	All Military Service Members and Veterans	Post-9/11 GI Bill	Used Other Types of Financial Education Benefits	Don't Know/Not Applicable
Strongly Agree	28%	55%	35%	21%
4	21%	16%	24%	21%
3	14%	11%	15%	14%
2	9%	10%	13%	8%
Strongly Disagree	9%	6%	9%	9%
Don't Know/Does Not Apply	19%	2%	5%	28%

Final Thoughts

Although colleges and universities receive higher marks from military service member and veteran graduates who used Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, these data suggest there is room for improvement in the area of understanding the unique needs of military service members and veterans. There is tremendous diversity within the military service member and veteran population, and while both active military service members and veterans share some needs, they differ tremendously in others. For example, while both require financial counselors who understand the complexities of financial education benefits specific to this population, active military service members require scheduling and housing flexibility to accommodate their current service, whereas returning veterans sometimes require specialized health services.

These data indicate that colleges and universities are doing a superior job connecting with active military service members and are struggling to demonstrate a strong grasp of the challenges returning veterans face as college students. Colleges and universities will continue to benefit from further experimentation with programs and support services for this population, as it is important that military service member and veteran programs be tailored to accommodate the tremendously diverse needs of these students.

Study Methodology

Results for the Gallup-Purdue index are based on Web surveys conducted Dec. 16, 2014-June 29, 2015, with a random sample of 30,151 respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher, aged 18 and older, with Internet access, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

The Gallup-Purdue Index sample was recruited via the Gallup Daily tracking survey. The Gallup Daily tracking survey sample includes national adults with a minimum quota of 50% cellphone respondents and 50% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday. Gallup Daily tracking respondents with a college degree, who agreed to future contact, were invited to take the Gallup-Purdue Index survey online.

Gallup-Purdue Index interviews are conducted via the Web, in English only. Samples are weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. bachelor's degree or higher population.

All reported margins of sampling error for the Gallup-Purdue Index of all college graduates include the computed design effects for weighting. For results based on the total sample of 3,722 military service members and veterans, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

About Purdue University

Purdue University is a vast laboratory for discovery. The university is known not only for science, technology, engineering and math programs, but also for our imagination, ingenuity and innovation. It's a place where those who seek an education come to make their ideas real — especially when those transformative discoveries lead to scientific, technological, social or humanitarian impact.

Founded in 1869 in West Lafayette, Indiana, the university proudly serves its state, the nation and the world. Academically, Purdue's role as a major research institution is supported by top-ranking disciplines in pharmacy, business, engineering and agriculture. More than 39,000 students are enrolled here. All 50 states and 130 countries are represented.

About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60% by 2025. Lumina's outcomes-based approach focuses on helping design and build an accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system, while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025.

Lumina Foundation provided seed funds for the first Gallup-Purdue Index. Learn more at <http://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/galluppurdueindex-report-2014.pdf>.

About Healthways

Healthways is an independent, global well-being company that provides comprehensive improvement solutions to increase performance and lower healthcare costs in its client populations. Dedicated to creating a healthier world one person at a time, Healthways uses the science of well-being and behavior change to produce and measure well-being improvement for its customers. Healthways provides personalized support to individuals to optimize each participant's health and productivity and to reduce health-related costs, and also advises leaders on how to maximize well-being across an organization.

About Gallup-Healthways Partnership

In 2008, Gallup and Healthways initiated a 25-year partnership, merging decades of clinical research and development expertise, health leadership and behavioral economics research to track and understand the key factors that drive well-being. This partnership marked a transformation for American health by developing a national measure of well-being, the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. The Well-Being Index provided the first in-depth look into Americans' perceptions of their daily experiences and the choices that impact their well-being, and after 2 million surveys, we now have the world's largest data set on well-being.

In 2012, building upon the success of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, Gallup and Healthways announced the creation of a global joint venture between the two firms to develop the next generation of Gallup-Healthways well-being assessment tools. This collaboration has already produced the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being 5 to measure an individual's well-being and the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being 5 View to evaluate organization and workgroup well-being. Research is continuing to further advance the science of well-being on topics such as how an individual's sense of purpose, social relationships, financial security, connection to community and physical health can be leveraged for overall well-being improvement. Our scientific measurement helps organizations establish a baseline, benchmark their population, determine gaps, prioritize and implement interventions, and ultimately realize the full benefit of their investment in well-being. Measurement is a foundational step in the process of systematic and meaningful well-being improvement.

If you are a college or university leader who would like to learn more about Gallup's work with institutions of higher education, please contact education@gallup.com.

GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.202.715.3045

www.gallup.com