

# Veteran Marketing Research

November 2012



In this report, Hanover Research presents key demographic information on the veteran population in the United States in order to guide marketing efforts. We also study several rankings of top institutions and examine the characteristics of institutions with high military and veteran student enrollment. Finally, we present an overview of associations and social media groups that focus on veterans.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

## Introduction

In this report, Hanover Research presents key demographic information on the veteran population in the United States. In order to assist our members in its efforts to attract and serve veterans interested in pursuing higher education opportunities, the report offers a breakdown of the veteran population by age, location, education level, employment, and other characteristics. The report further studies programs and services associated with veteran student enrollment, top higher education institutions selected by U.S. veterans, and membership associations and social media groups related to veteran education.

## Key Findings

- Of the 21.8 million veterans in the United States, nearly 15 percent fall into the age range of 60 to 64 years, the group with the highest number of veterans. However, among those who participated in the Gulf War (service from 1990 to the present), the majority are 30 to 44 years old.
- The veteran population is overwhelmingly male. Only approximately 6.8 percent of veterans are female, though that figure climbs to 9.6 percent when only those within the age range of 18 to 64 years are considered.
- California, Texas, and Florida are the states with the highest numbers of veteran residents. Should marketing efforts be targeted at specific geographies, these three states would be promising areas for student recruitment given their large veteran populations.
- Veterans are more likely than the average American to have earned a high school diploma, but *less* likely to have completed a college degree. A higher percentage of veterans (about 36 percent) have earned an associate's degree or college credits without a college degree compared to non-veterans (28 percent), suggesting a need for degree completion programs.
- Veterans have a median income of \$35,367, which is greater than the median income of non-veterans (\$24,521), as well as the median income of the total U.S. population (\$25,605). Veterans are likely to pursue employment opportunities with companies that contract with the military or federal government. Three popular employment sectors include aerospace, weapons and security, and government agencies.
- Of the 20 institutions with the greatest numbers of *active-duty service members* enrolled, for-profit institutions comprise the largest group (40 percent). Public institutions and private non-profit institutions each comprise 30 percent of the list. One-quarter of the top 20 institutions offer *only* online degrees, while several others heavily market online degrees alongside more traditional options.

- A list of the top ten institutional recipients of Post-9/11 GI Bill dollars reveals a market dominated by for-profit institutions, which make up 80 percent of the list. The Apollo Group, which owns the University of Phoenix, tops the list. The only two non-profit institutions on the list hail from the public sector—the University of Maryland System and the University of Texas System.
- While the available data do not differentiate between traditional (on-campus) programs and non-traditional (online or distance learning) programs, it is likely that veterans gravitate toward for-profit institutions for the convenient and flexible degree paths that they offer. Despite the controversy over high veteran enrollments at for-profit institutions, it is clear that large, for-profit universities offering online and convenient degree options are major competitors when it comes to attracting veteran students.
- Success stories of veteran students and word of mouth recommendations may lead to heightened awareness of an institution's value for veterans and subsequent enrollments. Several institutions, however, especially in the for-profit sector, recruit veterans more directly. Marketing strategies include advertisements in military-related publications such as *Army Times* or *G.I. Jobs*, exhibits at job fairs that cater to veterans, and sponsored events for organizations such as AMVETS.
- It is not uncommon to see military veterans turn to social media to publish their thoughts on military service and politics, with Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ being popular routes to interact with others. In 2011, the Veterans Affairs Department released a social media policy to encourage VA employees to interact with veterans and the public through various social media avenues. While exact statistics on social media usage by veterans are not available, the VA's adoption of social media as a major channel by which to communicate with veterans hints at the extent to which veterans use networks such as Facebook and Twitter.

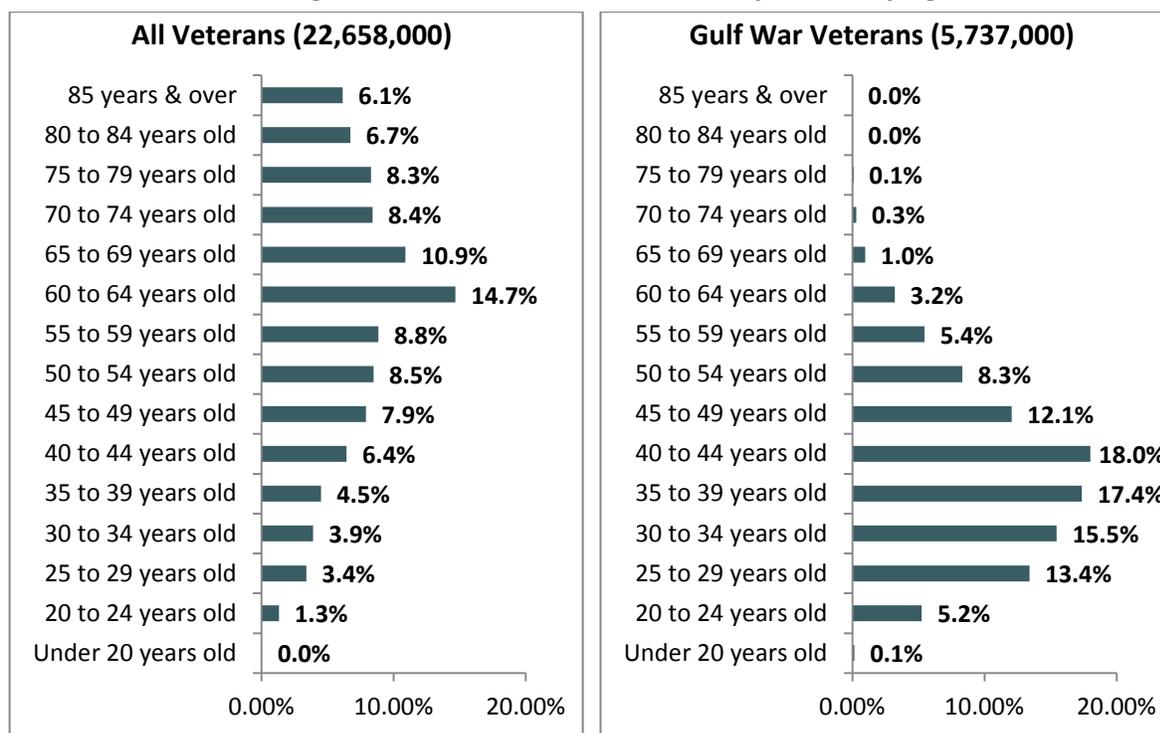
## SECTION I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

According to data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey, there are **21.8 million veterans** in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on national data, this section seeks to address two key questions—*who* are America's veterans and *where* are they found. The data presented here provide a breakdown of the veteran population by gender, age, race and ethnicity, location, education level, employment, and income.

### Age

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 *Statistical Abstract of the United States* publishes the number of veterans by age group (see Figure 1.1).<sup>2</sup> The data, which stem from 2010 surveys, show that nearly 15 percent of veterans fall into the age range of 60 to 64 years, the group with the highest number of veterans. These veterans participated in wars during the Vietnam era. **Among those who participated in the Gulf War (service from 1990 to the present), the majority are 30 to 44 years old.** This group contains approximately 2.9 million veterans.

Figure 1.1: Breakdown of Veteran Population by Age



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

<sup>1</sup> "A Snapshot of Our Nation's Veterans." U.S. Census Bureau. [www.census.gov/how/infographics/veterans.html](http://www.census.gov/how/infographics/veterans.html)

<sup>2</sup> "Veterans Living by Period of Service, Age, and Sex: 2010." U.S. Census Bureau. [www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/national\\_security\\_veterans\\_affairs/veterans.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/national_security_veterans_affairs/veterans.html)

Additional insight into the age of U.S. veterans comes from the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, which reports that the median age of male veterans (61 years) is significantly higher than the median age of male non-veterans (47 years), female veterans (41 years), and female non-veterans (46 years).<sup>3</sup>

## Location

According to data provided by the Department of Veteran Affairs, **the highest numbers of veterans live in California (9 percent), Texas (8 percent), and Florida (7 percent).**<sup>4</sup> Figure 1.2 lists the 20 states with the highest numbers of veterans alongside the 20 states with the highest numbers of Veteran Affairs Education Program Beneficiaries. In the latter category, the three states with the greatest numbers of VA beneficiaries mirror those with the highest general veteran populations (California, Texas, and Florida). From that point forward, however, the lists begin to differ. Several states have high numbers of veterans, but relatively low numbers of VA beneficiaries. For example, 4 percent of veterans live in Ohio, but only 2 percent of VA education beneficiaries live in Ohio. These results should be interpreted with caution, however, as the Department of Veteran Affairs notes that state statistics may include individuals who used their education benefits in more than one state.

**Figure 1.2: Top 20 States by Veteran Population and VA Education Program Beneficiaries**

State	Number of Veterans	% of Total	State	Number of Beneficiaries	% of Total
California	1,865,342	9%	California	88,420	10%
Texas	1,670,929	8%	Texas	76,878	8%
Florida	1,583,715	7%	Florida	68,133	8%
Pennsylvania	903,349	4%	Virginia	51,474	6%
New York	877,841	4%	Arizona	49,841	6%
Ohio	844,404	4%	Georgia	34,815	4%
Virginia	823,056	4%	Illinois	32,949	4%
Georgia	771,639	4%	North Carolina	28,642	3%
North Carolina	754,249	3%	New York	25,768	3%
Illinois	742,532	3%	Pennsylvania	24,888	3%
Michigan	665,261	3%	Colorado	24,794	3%
Washington	620,283	3%	Missouri	23,867	3%
Arizona	545,304	3%	Alabama	22,551	2%
Missouri	487,425	2%	Maryland	22,402	2%
Tennessee	482,099	2%	Ohio	22,279	2%
Indiana	472,392	2%	Washington	21,854	2%
Maryland	459,918	2%	Iowa	17,721	2%
Colorado	413,914	2%	Minnesota	16,574	2%
New Jersey	404,441	2%	Tennessee	16,404	2%
South Carolina	400,720	2%	South Carolina	15,341	2%

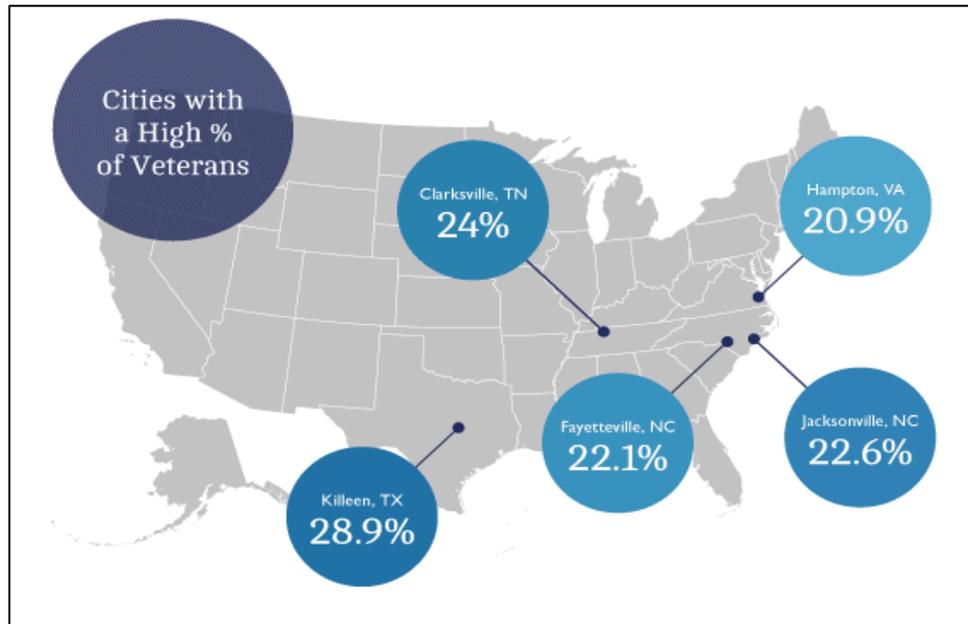
Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

<sup>3</sup> "Educational Attainment of Veterans: 2000 to 2009." National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. January 2011, pp. 8. [http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/education\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/education_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "Department of Veterans Affairs Education Program Beneficiaries by Geography: FY2000 to FY2011." U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. [www.va.gov/vetdata/Utilization.asp](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Utilization.asp)

The U.S. Census Bureau further draws attention to several U.S. cities with high percentages of veterans. As illustrated in the following map (Figure 1.3), **Killeen, Texas** (almost 29 percent) and **Clarksville, Tennessee** (24 percent) boast the largest percentages of veterans.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1.3: Cities with High Percentages of Veterans**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## Education

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that approximately 92 percent of veterans who are 25 years and older have at least a high school diploma, compared to 86 percent of the total population. On the other hand, about 26 percent of veterans have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to almost 29 percent of the total population.<sup>6</sup> In other words, **a veteran is more likely than the average American to have earned a high school diploma, but less likely to have completed a college degree.** However, according to a report published by the Department of Veterans Affairs, a higher percentage of women veterans (30 percent) had completed a bachelor's or advanced degree compared with non-veterans (25 percent).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "A Snapshot of Our Nation's Veterans." Op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> 2011 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. U.S. Census Bureau.  
[http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_11\\_1YR\\_S2101&prodType=table](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_1YR_S2101&prodType=table)

<sup>7</sup> "America's Women Veterans." Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. November 23, 2011, p. 11. [www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Final\\_Womens\\_Report\\_3\\_2\\_12\\_v\\_7.pdf](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Final_Womens_Report_3_2_12_v_7.pdf)

**Figure 1.4: Education of Veterans Aged 25 years and Older**

Level of Education	Total (205,848,189)	Veterans (21,128,562)	Non-Veterans (184,719,627)
Less than high school graduate	14.1%	7.6%	14.9%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	28.4%	29.7%	28.3%
Some college or associate’s degree	28.9%	36.3%	28.1%
Bachelor’s degree or higher	28.5%	26.3%	28.8%

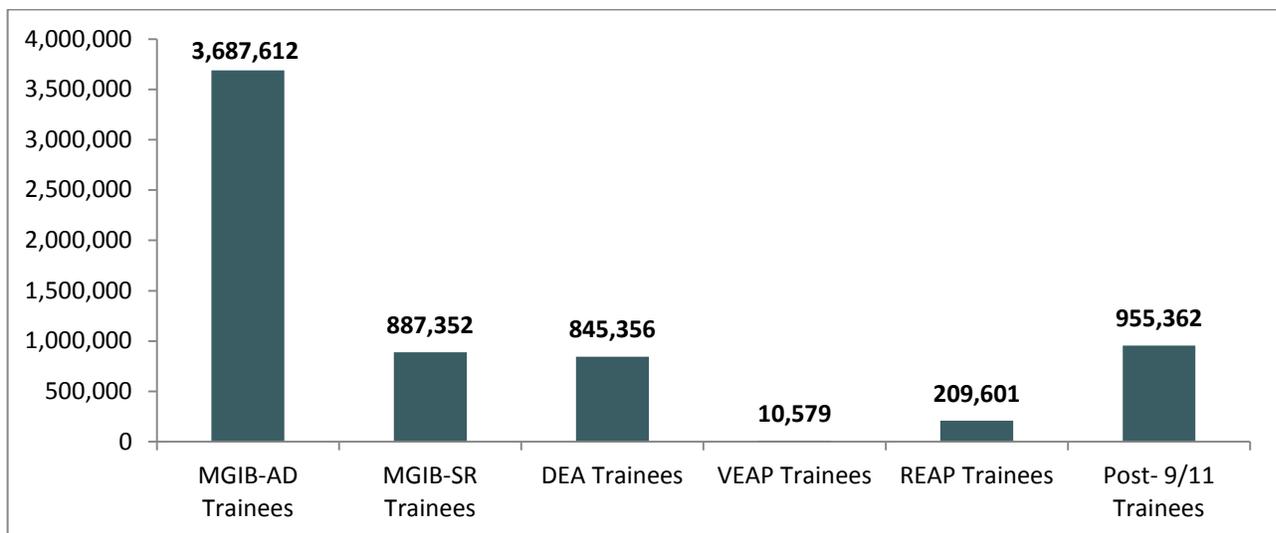
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Furthermore, as illustrated in Figure 1.4, a higher percentage of veterans (about 36 percent) have earned an associate’s degree or college credits without a college degree compared to non-veterans (28 percent). Moreover, the Department of Veteran Affairs reports that the same trend holds true for women veterans—about 47 percent of women veterans reported some college as their highest level of education compared with 32 percent of non-veteran women.<sup>8</sup>

*VA Education Program Beneficiaries*

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs reports estimates of Education Program Beneficiaries (referred to here as “VA Beneficiaries”) by program. The data, summed from FY 2000 to FY 2011, are displayed graphically in Figure 1.5, which shows the breakdown of the number of beneficiaries in each group.<sup>9</sup> A description of each program is provided on the following page.

**Figure 1.5: VA Education Program Beneficiaries from FY 2000 - FY 2011 by Program**



Source: U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> “Department of Veterans Affairs Education Program Beneficiaries: FY2000 to FY2011.” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Utilization.asp>

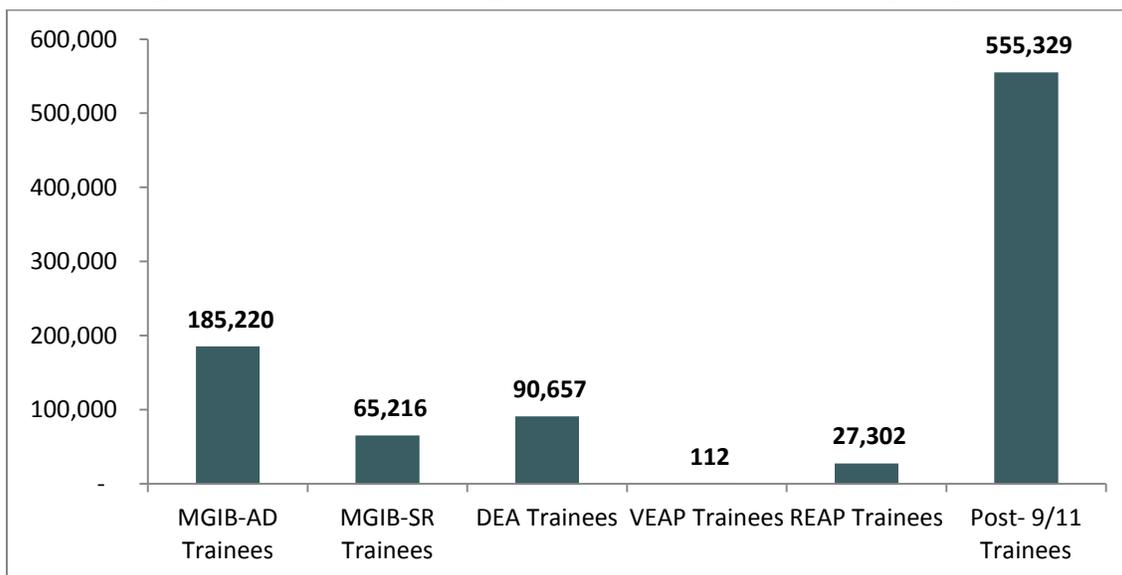
The programs covered in Figure 1.5 are further described below:

- **MGIB-AD Trainees** – This group consists of veterans who received benefits from the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty Educational Assistance Program (MGIB-AD), which provides educational assistance to persons who served on active duty in the Armed Forces.
- **MGIB-SR Trainees** – The Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve Educational Assistance Program provides educational assistance to members of the Selected Reserve or the Ready Reserve of any of the reserve components of the Armed Forces.
- **DEA Trainees** – The Survivors’ and Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA) is a monetary educational benefit payable to eligible dependents and survivors of veterans.
- **VEAP Trainees** – The Veterans Educational Assistance Program is a contributory educational assistance program for Post-Vietnam Era Veterans.
- **REAP Trainees** – The Reserve Educational Assistance Program provides educational assistance to members of the Guard and Reserves who serve on active duty in support of a contingency operation under federal authority on or after September 11, 2001.
- **Post 9/11 Trainees** – The Post-9/11 GI Bill is an educational assistance program, effective August 1, 2009, which provides financial support for education and housing to individuals with at least 90 days of aggregate service on or after September 11, 2001, or individuals discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days.

As Figure 1.5 illustrates, MGIB-AD trainees were the largest group of beneficiaries during the 10-year period. This group accounted for significantly more beneficiaries than any of the other groups. Of the others, three programs—the Post-9/11, MGIB-SR, and DEA programs—accounted for roughly similar numbers of education beneficiaries, while VEAP and REAP accounted for much smaller populations.

Data for the year 2011, specifically, rather than the entire 10-year period, portray a somewhat different picture, with the majority of veterans receiving educational assistance through the Post-9/11 program (see Figure 1.6). The MGIB-AD group consisted of about one-third of the beneficiaries in the Post-9/11 group. Other groups also accounted for far fewer beneficiaries than the Post 9/11 group.

**Figure 1.6: VA Education Program Beneficiaries in FY 2011 by Program**

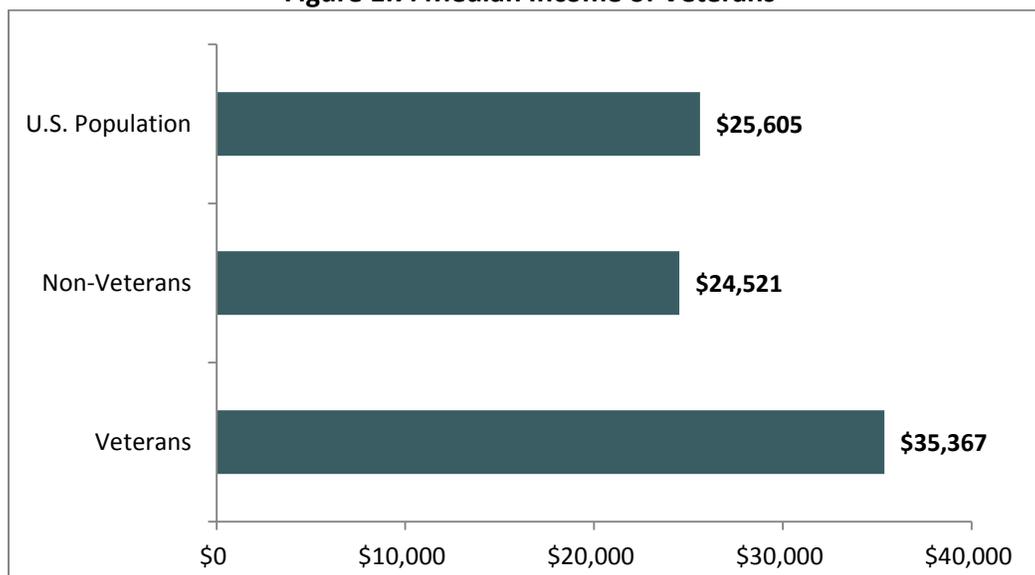


Source: U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

### INCOME AND OCCUPATION

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 American Community Survey, veterans have a **median income of \$35,367**, which is greater than the median income of non-veterans (\$24,521), as well as the median income of the total U.S. population (\$25,605).<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 1.7: Median Income of Veterans**



Source: U.S. Census

<sup>10</sup> “A Snapshot of Our Nation’s Veterans.” Op. cit.

### *Unemployment Rate*

According to the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly sample survey of about 60,000 households conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, **the unemployment rate of veterans in 2011 was 8.3 percent.**<sup>11</sup> The survey also reveals that young male veterans (18 to 24 years of age) who served during Gulf War era II were more likely to be jobless than male non-veterans in the same age group. The 2011 unemployment rate for this particular veteran population was 29.1 percent, compared to just 17.6 percent for their non-veteran counterparts. The survey provides further insight for several groups of veterans:

Among all veterans, those with a service-connected disability had an unemployment rate of 8.5 percent in August 2011, about the same as the rate for veterans with no disability (7.9 percent). One in three employed veterans with a service-connected disability worked in the public sector in August 2011, compared with about 1 in 5 veterans with no disability. Gulf War-era II veterans who were current or past members of the Reserve or National Guard had an unemployment rate of 9.1 percent in August 2011, little different than the rate for those veterans who had not been members (11.0 percent). Gulf War-era II veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, or both had an unemployment rate of 11.6 percent in August 2011.

### *Top Employers*

The online salary database PayScale.com has researched the types of employment routes commonly taken by U.S. veterans. Unsurprisingly, the research has shown that **veterans are likely to pursue employment opportunities with companies that contract with the military or federal government**, as these types of positions allow them to capitalize on one of their key skills—knowledge of how to work effectively with the military and government. Based on its data, Payscale.com has come up with a list of common employers of military veterans. Figure 1.8 presents a sample of these companies, along with likely job titles and the average annual salary associated with each. The salaries listed are for full-time workers with 5-8 years of experience and include bonuses and commissions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Employment Situation of Veterans." U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.  
<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Quigg, B. "Top Employers of Veterans." PayScale. [www.blogs.payscale.com/content/2011/05/top-employers-of-veterans.html](http://www.blogs.payscale.com/content/2011/05/top-employers-of-veterans.html)

**Figure 1.8: Common Employers and Job Titles for Military Veterans**

Job Field and Employers	Sample Job Title	Average Annual Salary
<b>Aerospace:</b> Boeing Company; Lockheed Martin Corporation	Aerospace Engineer	\$86,300
	Aerospace Engineer and Operations Technician	\$43,600
	Project Engineer, Aviation	\$85,700
<b>Weapons and Security:</b> Science Applications International Corporation; Booz, Allen, and Hamilton	Support Technician, IT	\$39,000
	Electronics Technician	\$42,800
	Human Resources Generalist	\$49,400
<b>Government Agencies:</b> U.S. Government Department of Defense; U.S. Department of Homeland Security	Network Security Engineer	\$70,500
	FBI Agent	\$71,000
	Project Manager	\$64,800

Source: PayScale

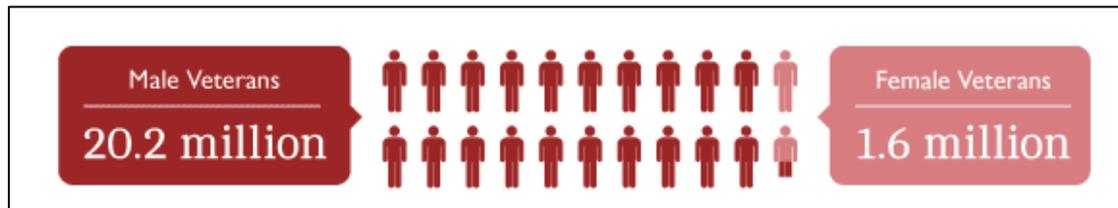
Other top employers mentioned by Payscale (and not listed previously in Figure 1.8) include:

- Allied Barton Security Services Inc.
- Raytheon Company
- Northrop Grumman Corporation
- L-3 Communications
- BAE Systems, Inc.
- Computer Sciences Corporation
- CACI International, Inc.
- Department of Veteran’s Affairs
- Securitas Security Services USA, Inc.
- Deloitte Consulting LLP
- Exelon Corporation
- General Dynamics Corporation
- General Electric Company (GE)
- Stryker Corporation

## Gender, Race and Ethnicity, and Other Characteristics

While age, location, educational attainment level, and occupational path are all critical characteristics to examine within the context of attracting veterans to postsecondary education programs, it is also important to examine more basic demographic characteristics. Accordingly, the data presented here provide a breakdown of U.S. veterans by gender and race and ethnicity. Figure 1.9 presents an infographic published by the U.S. Census Bureau, which shows that the overwhelming majority of veterans are male. **Only approximately 1.6 million veterans are female.**<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1.9: Gender of U.S. Veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

More detailed data published by the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that, in 2009, of 21,854,374 veterans, only 1,479,817 (6.8 percent) were female.<sup>14</sup> However, **the percentage of female veterans increases to 9.6 percent when only those within the age range of 18 to 64 years are considered.** Within this population subset, in 2009, 1,226,808 veterans were female and 11,615,529 veterans were male.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 1.10 on the following page presents the breakdown of U.S. veterans by race and ethnicity in 2009. **The majority of veterans (18,536,634 or 84.8 percent) identified as white, with black or African American being the second most popular category, selected by 2,296,781 veterans (10.5 percent).** All other racial categories each comprised less than 1.6 percent of the veteran population. **Regardless of the racial category selected, 1,129,904 veterans (5.2 percent) identified as being of Hispanic or Latino origin.**<sup>16</sup>

A survey analysis conducted for the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2010 provides additional information on the veteran population. For instance, the report notes that three-quarters of U.S. veterans (75.5 percent) own their own homes. Furthermore, most veterans (69.7 percent) are married, but most also do *not* have dependent children (69.2 percent).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "A Snapshot of Our Nation's Veterans." Op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> "Veterans by Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Origin: 2009." U.S. Census Bureau.

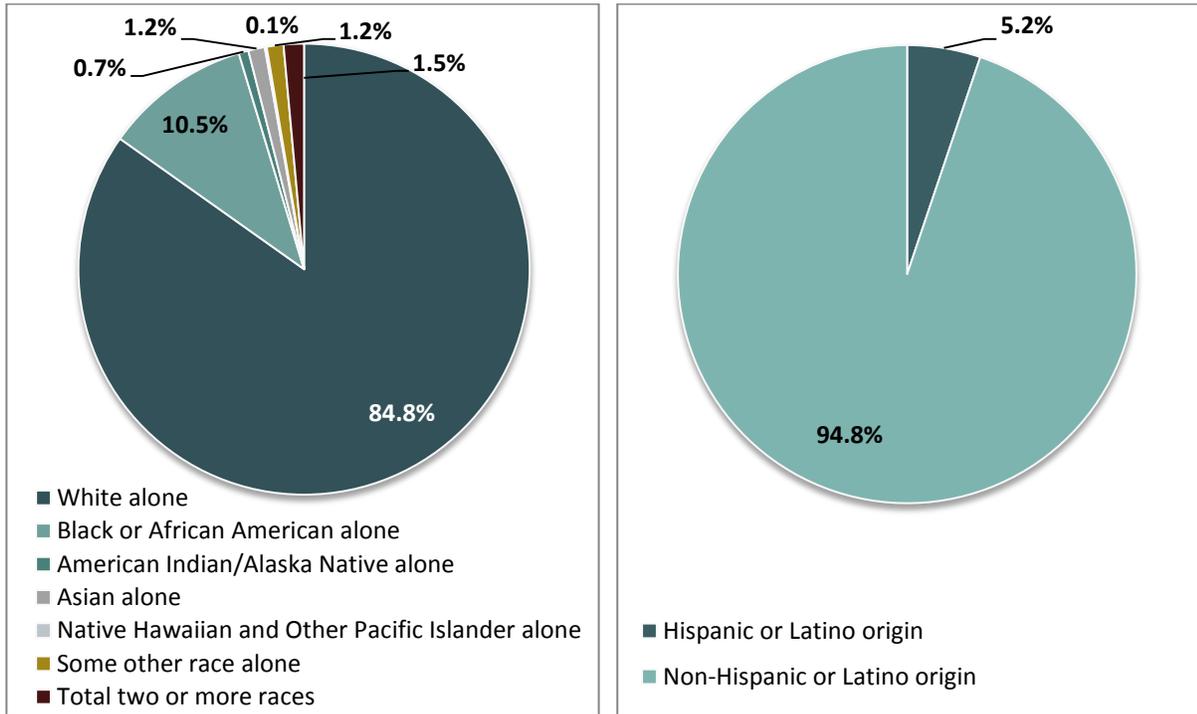
[http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/national\\_security\\_veterans\\_affairs/veterans.html](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/national_security_veterans_affairs/veterans.html)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "National Survey of Veterans, Active Duty Service Members, Demobilized National Guard and Reserve Members, Family Members, and Surviving Spouses." October 18, 2010. Department of Veterans Affairs, p. 53.  
<http://www.va.gov/SURVIVORS/docs/NVSSurveyFinalWeightedReport.pdf>

**Figure 1.10: Race and Ethnicity of U.S. Veterans**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## SECTION II: RECRUITING VETERANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Building on the previous section’s introduction to the U.S. veteran population, this section delves deeper into an analysis of veterans’ educational preferences and search strategies. A 2012 report authored by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), with contributions from NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) and the National Association of Veteran’s Program Administrators (NAVPA)—*From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members*—provides insight into key programs and services for military veterans. A review of this report opens this section, offering insight into the types of institutional services that should help bolster an institution’s attractiveness to veteran students.<sup>18</sup> Following this review, this section examines the higher education institutions that enroll the greatest number of veterans, using lists of top colleges and universities to draw conclusions about veterans’ preferences for course delivery and considering the controversy over for-profit institutions’ aggressive recruiting of military veterans.<sup>19,20</sup> Finally, this section considers the search strategies that lead students to the websites of top providers of educational opportunities for veterans, as well as the membership associations that veterans belong to and the types of social media they use.

### Programs and Services to Support Veteran Students

The 2012 survey presented in the *From Soldier to Student II* report aimed to capture a “national snapshot of the programs, services, and policies that colleges and universities [put] in place to serve veterans and military personnel, with particular attention paid to how these initiatives have changed since 2009. The survey report, based on results gathered from 690 higher education institutions, examines the availability of specialized programs and services by veteran enrollment, with the responding institutions categorized into three groups:

- **Low Veteran Enrollment (LVE)** – military/veteran population less than or equal to 1 percent of total enrollment (average of 64 military/veteran students in 2012)
- **Moderate Veteran Enrollment (MVE)** – military/veteran population of 1 percent to 3 percent of total enrollment (average of 204 military/veteran students in 2012)
- **High Veteran Enrollment (HVE)** – military/veteran population greater than 3 percent of total enrollment (average of 997 military/veteran students in 2012)

<sup>18</sup> Cook, B., Kim, Y., McBain, L., Snead, K. 2012. “From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members.” P. 31. [http://www.naspa.org/Soldier-to-Student\\_2.pdf](http://www.naspa.org/Soldier-to-Student_2.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> “Most Popular Colleges.” *Military Times EDGE*. [www.militarytimesedge.com/projects/most-popular-colleges/2011/index.php](http://www.militarytimesedge.com/projects/most-popular-colleges/2011/index.php)

<sup>20</sup> “Best for Vets: Colleges 2011.” *Military Times EDGE*. [www.militarytimesedge.com/projects/best-for-veterans/best-colleges-for-veterans/2011](http://www.militarytimesedge.com/projects/best-for-veterans/best-colleges-for-veterans/2011)

The report highlights the prevalence of programs offered *specifically* for veterans and military students in the following categories:

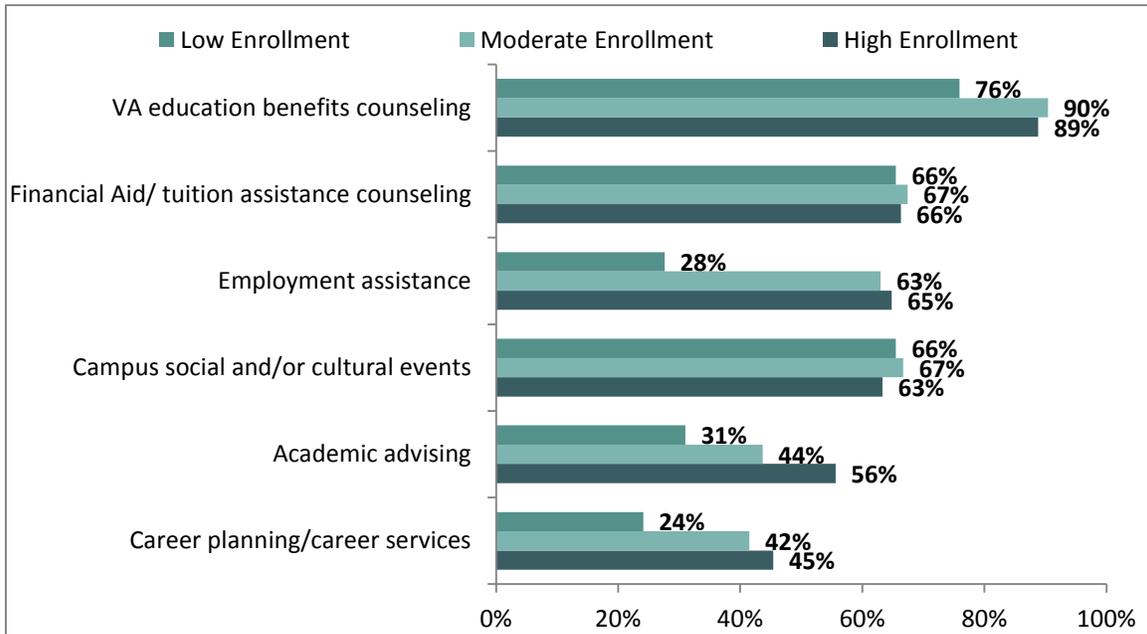
- **VA Education Benefits Counseling:** VA Education Benefits Counseling seems to be an important characteristic at HVE and MVE institutions (offered at 88.9 percent and 90.4 percent, respectively). Comparatively, 75.9 percent of LVE institutions offer this type of counseling service.
- **Financial Aid/Tuition Assistance Counseling:** Financial aid or tuition assistance counseling seems to be an equally important characteristic at all institutions. A similar percentage of institutions (about 67 percent) across all three enrollment categories offer this type of counseling specifically for veteran and military students.
- **Employment Assistance:** A large discrepancy appears in the percentage of institutions offering employment assistance for veteran and military students by enrollment level. Approximately 63 percent to 65 percent of MVE and HVE institutions offer this type of service for veteran and military students, compared to just 27.6 percent of LVE institutions.
- **Campus Social and/or Cultural Events:** The proportion of institutions offering campus social or cultural events specifically for veteran and military students is roughly equivalent across the enrollment groups—63.3 percent of HVE institutions, 66.7 percent of MVE institutions, and 65.5 percent of LVE institutions.
- **Academic Advising:** The percentage of institutions offering academic advising tailored for veteran and military students increases with the number of such students on campus. This type of service is reported by 55.6 percent of HVE institutions, 43.7 percent of MVE institutions, and 31.0 percent of LVE institutions.
- **Career Planning/Career Services:** A roughly equivalent percentage of students at HVE and MVE institutions offer career services specifically for veteran and military students—45.4 percent and 41.5 percent, respectively. However, far fewer LVE institutions (24.1 percent) offer such services.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 2.1 on the following page displays these results.

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<sup>21</sup> Cook et al. Op. cit. P. 31.

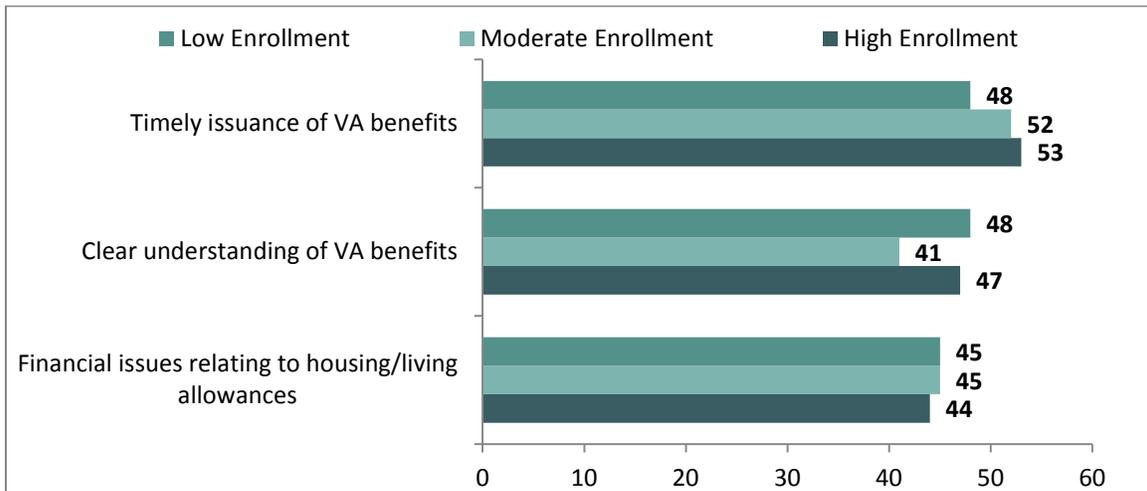
**Figure 2.1: Percentage of Institutions Offering Various Campus Services by Veteran and Military Student Enrollment**



Source: *From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members*

The top “stressors” for veteran and military students, as perceived by the surveyed institutions, lend further insight into the types of supports needed by this subpopulation of students. As demonstrated in Figure 2.2, the top three issues perceived by institutions to affect their veteran and military students are the “timely issuance of VA benefits,” “clear understanding of VA benefits,” and “financial issues relating to housing/living allowances.”<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 2.2: Top Three Stressors Institutions Perceive to be affecting their Military/Veteran Students, by Enrollment**



Source: Cook, B., Kim, Y., McBain, L., Snead

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## Selection of Institutions

### *Most Popular Choices for Active-Duty Service Members*

A list of the most popular institutions among active-duty service members is published by *Military Times EDGE*. Drawing on “tuition assistance data on students, course enrollments and funds” furnished by the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Army National Guard, and Coast Guard, the list highlights the institutions that served the greatest number of tuition assistance recipients in FY 2010. Figure 2.3 examines the top 20 institutions on the list provided by *Military Times EDGE*. Notably, these are the institutions most often selected by active-duty service members, rather than veterans.

**Figure 2.3: Top 20 Institutions for Active-Duty Service Members Using Tuition Assistance in Fiscal Year 2010**

College/University System*	Status	Highest Degree	Students	TA Funds
<b>American Public University System (American Military University)</b>	For profit	Master’s	44,625	\$91,257,194
<b>University System of Maryland (University of Maryland University College)</b>	Public	Doctoral	31,106	\$45,113,279
<b>Central Texas College</b>	Public	Associate	26,613	\$30,343,537
<b>University of Phoenix</b>	For profit	Doctoral	17,209	\$36,943,791
<b>Ashford University</b>	For profit	Master’s	13,207	\$29,646,911
<b>Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University</b>	Nonprofit	Doctoral	12,626	\$22,653,203
<b>Trident University International</b>	For profit	Doctoral	12,189	\$33,391,634
<b>Park University</b>	Nonprofit	Master’s	10,685	\$14,489,870
<b>Columbia Southern University</b>	For profit	Doctoral	9,298	\$17,537,785
<b>Grantham University</b>	For profit	Master’s	7,621	\$18,677,270
<b>California Community College System (Coastline Community College)</b>	Public	Associate	6,440	\$5,525,012
<b>Columbia College</b>	Nonprofit	Master’s	5,559	\$9,207,800
<b>Troy University</b>	Public	Doctoral	5,365	\$10,834,044
<b>Excelsior College</b>	Nonprofit	Master’s	5,136	\$8,859,010
<b>Washington State Community and Technical Colleges (Pierce College)</b>	Public	Bachelor’s	4,962	\$6,522,675
<b>Liberty University</b>	Nonprofit	Doctoral	4,592	\$10,633,371
<b>Saint Leo University</b>	Nonprofit	Master’s	4,550	\$7,986,243
<b>Kaplan Higher Education</b>	For profit	Juris Doctor	4,295	\$9,250,326
<b>Thomas Edison State College</b>	Public	Master’s	4,002	\$6,642,425
<b>DeVry University</b>	For profit	Master’s	3,768	\$9,226,848

Source: *Military Times EDGE*

\*College/university systems are grouped together. Individual institutions within a system that would make the top 50 if counted separately are in parentheses.

**Of the 20 institutions with the greatest numbers of active-duty service members enrolled, for-profit institutions comprise the largest group (40 percent).** Public institutions and private non-profit institutions each comprise 30 percent of the list.

At the top of the list is the American Public University System, which offers only online degrees. The institution's place at the top of the list suggests that online degree options are particularly popular among active-duty military personnel. Several other institutions that only offer online degrees are featured on the list, including Ashford University, Trident International University, Columbia Southern University, and Grantham University. In all, then, **25 percent of the top 20 institutions offer only online degrees**, while several others (e.g., University of Phoenix, Park University, Kaplan Higher Education) heavily market online degrees alongside more traditional options.

### *Most Popular Choices for Veterans*

While information on the number of veterans enrolled at individual higher education institutions is not gathered by national agencies such as the National Center for Education Statistics, data on the top ten recipients of Post-9/11 GI Bill dollars has been made available by way of a U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) investigation. Led by Iowa Senator Tom Harkin, a HELP Committee investigation was conducted in order to learn more about how for-profit colleges secure and use federal funds. The HELP Committee used data provided by the Department of Veteran Affairs to determine the top ten institutional recipients of Post-9/11 GI Bill dollars over two academic years—2009-2010 and 2010-2011. The results revealed a market dominated by for-profit institutions, which make up 80 percent of the list. The Apollo Group, which owns the University of Phoenix, tops the list. The only two non-profit institutions on the list hail from the public sector—the University of Maryland System and the University of Texas System (see Figure 2.4).<sup>23</sup>

The results of Senator Harkin's investigation into where Post-9/11 GI Bill dollars have been concentrated in recent years suggest that for-profit institutions attract large numbers of military veterans. While the data do not differentiate between traditional (on-campus) programs and non-traditional (online or distance learning) programs, **it is likely that veterans gravitate toward for-profit institutions for the convenient and flexible degree paths that they offer.**

While the data suggest a preference among veterans for online education, the trend toward high veteran enrollments at for-profit institutions has sparked controversy in education and political circles. Accusations have surfaced that for-profit institutions have begun to recruit veteran students as a way to bypass a 1992 law that caps the proportion of revenue for-profit institutions can collect from federal student aid sources. GI Bill dollars, which count as "nongovernment revenue," provide a loophole by which for-profit institutions can exceed the 90 percent ceiling imposed by the law.<sup>24</sup> In a 2010 report on the topic, the executive director of Veterans of Modern Warfare, a group of more than 5,000 post-1990 veterans,

<sup>23</sup> "Senator Harkin's Findings Regarding Veterans and For-Profit Colleges." United States Senate. <http://www.harkin.senate.gov/documents/pdf/4f9ac62292704.pdf>

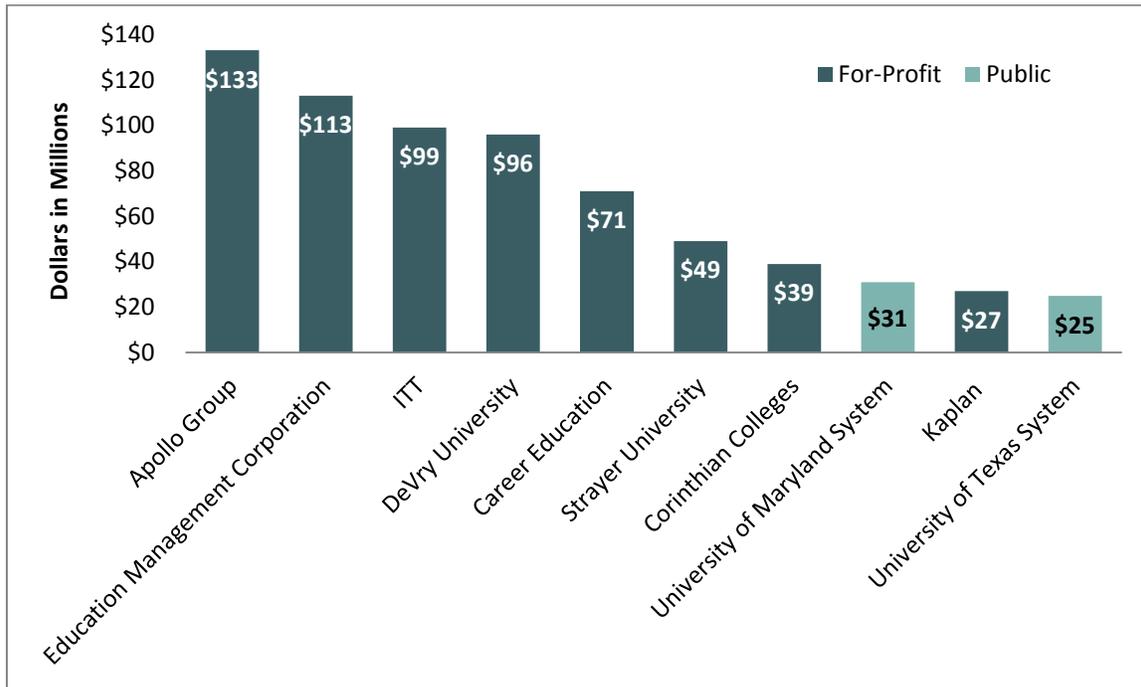
<sup>24</sup> Golden, D. "Online Colleges Target Veterans." 2010. *BloombergBusinessWeek*. [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10\\_46/b4203026910225.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/10_46/b4203026910225.htm)

commented, “These [for-profit] schools are after the monetary gain of a healthy benefits package, not necessarily what’s in the best interest of students.”<sup>25</sup>

Other complaints focus on the less-than-impressive success rates of students at for-profit institutions. For instance, at Kaplan University, which appeared on both the *Military Times EDGE* list of the most popular institutions for active-duty military personnel and the HELP Committee’s list of the most popular institutions for veterans, only 30 percent of students enrolled in two-year programs and 33 percent of students enrolled in four-year programs successfully complete their studies.<sup>26</sup> This concern is highlighted in Senator Harkin’s HELP Committee report, which notes that the withdrawal rates among bachelor’s degree students at the eight for-profit institutions included on the top ten list of Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients ranged from 34.1 percent to 68.2 percent.<sup>27</sup>

**Despite the controversy over high veteran enrollments at for-profit institutions, it is clear that large, for-profit universities offering online and convenient degree options are major competitors when it comes to attracting veteran students.** Regardless of how these institutions’ marketing and recruitment strategies are perceived, they continue to be among the most popular higher education options for military veterans.

**Figure 2.4: Top Ten Recipients of Post-9/11 GI Bill Benefits, 2010-2011**



Source: Senate HELP Committee  
 Note: Does not include Yellow Ribbon program.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>27</sup> “Senator Harkin’s Findings ...” Op. cit.

*HIGHLY-RANKED OPTIONS FOR VETERAN STUDENTS*

*Military Times EDGE* provides a ranking of the best colleges and universities for veterans. Drawing on a survey of more than 500 student veterans to better understand what services are most important to this population, *Military Times EDGE* then analyzed the services offered by higher education institutions, alongside important characteristics such as accreditation, the existence of a central veterans office, and a knowledgeable staff to help students deal with challenges and issues as they pursue their studies. The analysis ultimately resulted in a list of the best higher education institutions for veterans, broken down into three categories: four-year institutions, online and non-traditional institutions, and two-year institutions. Figure 2.5 highlights the top ten institutions in each category. The full lists, along with basic information on the relevant characteristics of each named institution, are accessible [online](#).

**Figure 2.5: Top Ten Institutions for Veterans by Category**

Four-Year Institutions	Online & Non-Traditional	Two-Year Institutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Concord University (WV)</li> <li>•Eastern Kentucky University</li> <li>•Rutgers, State University of New Jersey</li> <li>•California University of Pennsylvania</li> <li>•University of South Florida</li> <li>•Arizona State University</li> <li>•University of Kentucky</li> <li>•South Dakota School of Mines and Technology</li> <li>•University of Nebraska at Omaha</li> <li>•D'Youville College (NY)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•ECPI University</li> <li>•Liberty University</li> <li>•Columbia College</li> <li>•Felician College</li> <li>•Excelsior College</li> <li>•Keiser University</li> <li>•Troy University</li> <li>•Post University</li> <li>•Florida National College</li> <li>•University of Phoenix</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Western Nebraska Community College</li> <li>•Mountwest Community and Technical College (WV)</li> <li>•Fayetteville Technical Community College (NC)</li> <li>•Tidewater Community College (VA)</li> <li>•Olympic College (WA)</li> <li>•Monroe Community College (NY)</li> <li>•Western Technical College (WI)</li> <li>•SUNY North Country Community College</li> <li>•Salt Lake Community College (UT)</li> <li>•Montgomery College (MD)</li> </ul>

Source: *Military Times EDGE*

*Veteran Education Search Strategies*

An analysis on website statistics from [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com) shows that **popular searches** that lead students to top institutions such as American Military University, University of Maryland University College, Central Texas College, University of Phoenix, and Ashford University include keywords such as **“online education”** and **“online courses.”** One of the keywords identified is “GoArmyEd” which is a “virtual gateway for eligible Active Duty, National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers to request Tuition Assistance (TA) online, anytime, anywhere for classroom and distance learning. It allows Soldiers to manage their

education records including college classes, testing, on-duty classes and Army Education Counselor support.”<sup>28</sup>

While web analytics provide insight into how veterans might search online for appropriate education options, an article in *Military Times EDGE* stresses the role of word of mouth.<sup>29</sup> According to Mike Betz, general manager for military student initiatives at Education Corporation of America—the parent company of Virginia College, Ecotech Institute, and the Golf Academy of America, among others—veterans “rely heavily on each other for advice when it comes to choosing a college, meaning schools that perform well are rewarded with more students while bad actors eventually see their enrollments fall.”<sup>30</sup>

While the success stories of veteran students and word of mouth recommendations may lead to heightened awareness of an institution’s value for veterans and subsequent enrollments, several institutions, especially in the for-profit sector, recruit veterans more directly. Marketing strategies include advertisements in military-related publications such as *Army Times* or *G.I. Jobs*, exhibits at job fairs that cater to veterans, and sponsored events for organizations such as AMVETS.<sup>31</sup>

## Association Memberships and Social Media Usage

### *Veterans Associations*

A sample of popular membership associations for veterans follows. A more complete list is published [online](#) by Old Dominion University.

- **Iraq Afghanistan Veterans of America:** IAVA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving the lives of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families. The association boasts more than 200,000 members nationwide (including veterans and supporters) and hosts hundreds of events that enable veterans to connect with each other. The association also helps veterans gain access to customized health care, education, and employment services and provides a “veterans only” online social network called Community of Veterans.<sup>32</sup>
- **Student Veterans of America:** SVA aims to provide resources, support, and advocacy to military veterans to help them succeed in higher education and careers. The group offers peer-to-peer college campus networks for veterans designed to coordinate campus activities and provide pre-professional networking. The association’s Facebook page has 4,186 “likes.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> GoArmyEd. <https://www.goarmyed.com/login.aspx>

<sup>29</sup> Altman, G. “Best skills schools for vets.” *Military Times EDGE*. September 13, 2012.

<http://www.militarytimesedge.com/education/college-news/edge-best-for-vets-career-technical-091712/>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Golden. Op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. <http://iava.org/>

<sup>33</sup> Student Veterans of America. <http://www.studentveterans.org/>

- **American Veterans:** AMVETS is a service organization dedicated to fellowship, community service, and veteran wellbeing. AMVETS serves as an advocate for veterans in the public policy arena, offers a network of trained national service officers to assist veterans with compensation claims, provides educational assistance for ROTC students and veterans, and operates a charitable outreach program for hospitalized veterans, among other activities and initiatives.<sup>34</sup>

### *Social Media*

Veterans actively participate in social media. One article notes that **it is not uncommon to see military veterans turn to social media to publish their thoughts on military service and politics, with Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ being popular routes to interact with others.** Social network sites such as Facebook, as well as personal blogs, are relatively easy-to-learn routes for older veterans to interact with others and are commonplace for younger, tech-savvy veterans.<sup>35</sup> In 2011, the Veterans Affairs Department released a social media policy to encourage VA employees to interact with veterans and the public through various social media avenues such as Facebook and Twitter. The VA first embraced social media in 2009 and now operates “more than 100 Facebook pages, more than 50 Twitter feeds, two blogs, a YouTube channel, and a Flickr page.”<sup>36</sup> While exact statistics on social media usage by veterans are not available, the VA’s adoption of social media as a major channel by which to communicate with veterans hints at the extent to which veterans use networks such as Facebook and Twitter. A sample of organizations that use social media to engage veterans follows.

- **Veterans United Network:**<sup>37</sup> Veterans United Network provides news on issues related to the military on Facebook. According to its Facebook page, the group has over 600,000 subscribers and almost 690,000 “likes.” The network is sponsored by Veterans United Home Loans, which provides information and support for procuring home loans.<sup>38</sup>
- **Make the Connection:**<sup>39</sup> Make the Connection is a public awareness campaign by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that provides personal testimonials and resources to help veterans discover ways to improve their lives. The group encourages veterans and their families to “make the connection”—with information and resources, with the strength and resilience of veterans like themselves, with other people, and with available sources of support, including mental health treatments. Its Facebook page has 100,000 members.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> AMVETS. <http://www.amvets.org/>

<sup>35</sup> Newman, L. “Engaging Veterans Online.” 2012. *Social Media Today*. <http://socialmediatoday.com/levi-newman/688606/engaging-veterans-online>

<sup>36</sup> Brewin, B. “Veterans Affairs Promotes Social-Media Use With New Policy.” 2011. *National Journal*. <http://socialmediatoday.com/levi-newman/688606/engaging-veterans-online>

<sup>37</sup> Veterans United Network. [www.facebook.com/veteransunitednetwork?ref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/veteransunitednetwork?ref=ts)

<sup>38</sup> Veterans United Home Loans. [www.veteransunited.com/about](http://www.veteransunited.com/about)

<sup>39</sup> Make the Connection. [www.maketheconnection.net](http://www.maketheconnection.net)

<sup>40</sup> Make the Connection. [www.facebook.com/VeteransMTC/info](http://www.facebook.com/VeteransMTC/info)

- **The Call of Duty Endowment:**<sup>41</sup> This endowment aims to create a national campaign that will assist organizations that provide former service members with job placement, training, and educational services. On March 11, 2011, the endowment announced \$500,000 in grants for organizations such as Student Veterans of America to train, educate, and place returning service members and wounded warriors back in the workforce. The endowment's Facebook page has 270,660 "likes" and 775 members who are "talking about this."

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<sup>41</sup> Call of Duty Endowment. [www.callofdutyendowment.org](http://www.callofdutyendowment.org)

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