

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Maine's  
Public  
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UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

9 January 2017

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Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

128th Maine Legislature

100 State House Station

Augusta, Maine 04333

The University of Maine

University of Maine  
at Augusta

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

University of Maine  
at Farmington

University of Maine  
at Fort Kent

University of Maine  
at Machias

University of Maine  
at Presque Isle

University of  
Southern Maine

In accordance with Public Law 2015, Chapter 465 (127<sup>th</sup> Maine Legislature), "An Act to Improve the Delivery of Services and Benefits to Maine's Veterans and Provide Tuition Assistance to Members of the Maine National Guard," the University of Maine System is providing this letter and the attached report and set of recommendations in response to this legislation. As you know, this law requires the University of Maine System (UMS) and the Maine Community College System (MCCS), in consultation with the Bureau of Maine Veterans' Services, to "identify potential inefficiencies and propose improvements to veterans' services" by January 15<sup>th</sup> through a review of the following:

- Identification of the needs of student-veterans and potential student-veterans attempting to achieve a postsecondary education to degree completion;
- Identification of existing services specifically for student-veterans and other services available to student-veterans on each campus;
- Assessment of the effectiveness in meeting the needs identified;
- Determination of services not currently offered that would meet the needs identified;
- Propose services or solutions that fulfill the needs, based upon best practices in postsecondary educational institutions within the State and nationwide.

The Veterans' Services Coordinators and School Certifying Officials of the campuses of the University of Maine System (UMS), led by the UMS Chief Student

Affairs Officer, and supplemented by insight provided by organizations such as the Bureau of Maine Veterans' Services and the Maine State Approving Agency for Veterans Education, welcomed the opportunity of this legislation to review the current status of service provided to our student-veterans and to explore ways we could collaborate with each other in order to provide enhanced services and supports where appropriate.

We have made significant progress in recent years to better serve and support our student-veterans and, by extension, their families, and we share the commitment to always explore and develop better ways to provide that service. The attached report will provide an overview of the current status, a review of each campus' approach to best serving its student-veteran population, and will detail a set of recommendations developed by our System leadership in partnership with our dedicated campus veterans' service and support leaders and students – these recommendations are designed to further strengthen collaboration across our campuses and with external partners who provide critical services to veterans and families across the State.

If you should have any questions or concerns related to the attached report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James H. Page". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "P" at the end.

James H. Page  
Chancellor

**Report to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs and  
the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs**

**Response to Public Law 2015, Chapter 465, HP1100/LD 1612**

**“An Act to Improve the Delivery of Services and Benefits to Maine’s Veterans and  
Provide Tuition Assistance to Members of the Maine National Guard”**

**Specific to**

**Part E, Section E-1 “Identify potential inefficiencies and propose improvements to  
veterans’ services”**

**Submitted by: The University of Maine System**

**January 15, 2017**

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**Overview of the Legislation:**

Public Law Chapter 465, Part E<sup>1</sup> requires the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, in consultation with the Department of Defense, Veteran and Emergency Management, Bureau of Maine Veterans' Services to "identify potential inefficiencies and propose improvements to veterans' services" through the following review:

1. Identify the needs of student-veterans and potential student-veterans attempting to achieve a postsecondary education to degree completion, including but not limited to their ability to gain admission to the University of Maine System or the Maine Community College System, successfully meet the requirements of a course of study, successfully transition to civilian life in a supportive educational environment, obtain available federal veterans' benefits and successfully meet personal and financial obligations;

2. Identify existing services specifically for student-veterans and other services available to student-veterans on each campus that meet the needs identified in subsection 1;

3. Assess the effectiveness in meeting the needs identified in subsection 1 of existing services specifically for student-veterans and other services available to student-veterans on each campus;

4. Determine what services are not currently being offered that, if offered, would meet the needs identified in subsection 1; and

5. Propose services and solutions that fulfill the needs identified in subsection 1 on each campus or across campuses that are based upon best practices in postsecondary educational institutions within the State and nationwide.

**Reporting:**

By January 15, 2017, the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System shall each submit a report of its findings and proposals under section 1 to the joint standing committees of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs and veterans and legal affairs.

**Brief Overview of the Report**

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/display\\_ps.asp?id=1612&PID=1456&snum=127](http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/display_ps.asp?id=1612&PID=1456&snum=127)



The University of Maine System and its seven campuses are committed to serving those who have served us all. Understanding that some veterans have challenges as they integrate into civilian and campus life, we strive to ensure that faculty, staff and fellow students understand the unique needs of veterans and that we provide critical services and supports including assistance accessing veterans' educational benefits and other financial aid, and providing academic credit for previous military training and experience. Advising, mentoring and connecting veterans to the campus, internal and external supports and services including counseling, and to each other are key in helping veterans transition from soldier to student and ultimately, ensuring their success.

We have made significant progress in recent years to better serve and support our student veterans and, by extension, their families, and we share the commitment to always explore and develop better ways to serve them. This report will provide an overview of the current status of that support and service. It will also detail the recommendations System leadership in partnership with our campus veterans' service and support leaders and students have developed to further strengthen collaboration across our campuses and with external partners that provide critical service to veterans and their families across the state. While over 125 students receive Military Tuition Assistance each year at UMS institutions (many of these numbers are captured within the GI Bill data), the focus area for the purpose of this report is those veterans transitioning away from military services to university life.

### **What Do Student Veterans Need?**

*"One of the biggest challenges facing veterans today is transitioning from military life to civilian life and campus veterans' services address the issue head on. The dedicated people of the UMaine VETS center have been instrumental in helping me in my college career and I can't imagine how hard college would have been without*

As we know, the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill has been considered one of the most significant enhancements for active-duty and veteran students since the passage of the original GI Bill in 1944. The Post-9/11 GI Bill offers eligible service members generous support for educational expenses, including support for housing and support that can be conveyed upon a dependent.

Between 2009 and 2015, in Maine alone, the numbers of Post 9/11 GI Bill recipients has risen from 1,534 to 2,434 (a 58% increase)<sup>2</sup>. Our seven campuses collectively certify over 1000 students each year.

We have seen many reports over recent years of the many challenges veterans and active-duty military face, especially as they reintegrate into the civilian world. Unemployment, struggles with PTSD and brain-injury related traumas, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, violent crime and others are reported. As the numbers of these student-veterans on our campuses increase, it is imperative that we provide the services and support that can help them be

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<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Veterans Affairs, Education Data by State, 2015

successful. These students frequently have needs that are quite different from those of other students, including but not limited to the need for:

- a designated office with which to work for certification of their benefits, interface with financial aid and which can act as a “one stop shop” as they enter or reenter higher education,
- a place or opportunity to connect with other veterans; this can take the form of a Veterans’ Center or even a Veterans’ club or student organization;
- separate programming that may include a special orientation, workshops and support groups around issues such as PTSD, easy-to-access services including counseling and connections to external resources;
- and the ability to gain credit for the learning associated with their past military training and experience.

Student-veterans are from all branches of the military, range in age, ethnicity and gender, have varied educational goals and many are likely to have families. They depend on their benefits to meet their financial obligations and support their families and so it is critical that, first and foremost, campuses provide sufficient support for the timely processing of, and troubleshooting if there are issues connected to, their benefits. Within this, also understanding how financial aid and other services (such as disability services or Vocational Rehab) intersect with their veterans’ benefits is part of the expectation they bring. As these students enter or re-enter higher education, they typically have concerns around appropriately choosing a major, managing their time (since time was managed for them within their military experience), asking for help (tutoring, counseling (mental health or other) or other support such as dealing with math or testing anxiety or accommodation needs associated with any disability) and relating within the academic environment (with their professor, classmates). Advising, mentoring and connecting veterans to the institution, to external supports and services, and to each other are key in helping them adjust to campus life and in ultimately ensuring their success. Ensuring that faculty and staff understand the unique needs of veterans is one part of easing their transition out of the military and into campus and civilian life and so providing “green zone” or other training becomes critical. Following the model of a “warm handoff” (ensuring that the student has the necessary resource information and contact information, and when possible, paving the way through introductions) between offices and between organizations becomes especially important for student veterans.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, several organizations have been studying current practice in best serving student-veterans. Within the American Council on Education (ACE) publication, *“From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members,”* it was found that the institutions that were most effective in meeting the needs of military/veteran students did

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<sup>3</sup> Ege, C and Spaulding, L. Green Zone Employee Awareness Training. 2016



the following: 1) include the importance of serving military/veterans within strategic plans, 2) offer programs and services for veterans, 3) recognize prior military experience through prior learning assessment (PLA) programs; 4) assist them with finding appropriate counseling services; 5) providing financial accommodations for students called to active duty; and 6) assisting veterans with their education benefits. It also identified areas in which improvement is needed including assisting students in their transition to the college environment, providing professional development for faculty and staff on the transitional needs and unique issues of military students and developing a streamlined re-enrollment process for active-duty military students returning from deployment.<sup>4</sup>

An additional analysis focused on classroom achievement, "*Completing the Mission II: A Study of Veteran Students' Progress Toward Degree Attainment in the Post-9/11 Era*," looked at student veteran progress toward degree attainment in the Post-9/11 GI Bill era. The study, which tracked 741 student veterans at 23 colleges and universities, found that, during the 2011-12 academic year, the veterans stayed enrolled, posted solid grade-point averages and completed nearly all of the credits they pursued. Additionally, every college reported having an on-campus veteran coordinator and a student-run veterans club or association. More than 80 percent give credit for military training and have a website or web portal for veterans.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, having these kinds of supports in place form a part of the underpinning in helping student veterans ultimately succeed.

Under an executive order from President Obama (entitled "Principles of Excellence"), institutions have the obligation to "provide meaningful information to service members, veterans, spouses and other family members about the financial cost and quality of educational institutions to assist those prospective students in making choices about how to use their educational benefits; prevent abusive and deceptive recruitment practices...; and ensure that educational institutions provide high quality academic and student support services to active-duty members, reservists, members of the National Guard, veterans and military families."<sup>6</sup>

All of the studies convey similar messages as to best practice and the executive order further reinforces the need for high quality academic and support services. It is clear that the most important components of any campus-based program for supporting our service members and veterans must include an identified School Certifying Official (SCO) on campus and, for campuses with sufficient veteran populations, a process everything as quickly as possible. The official would stay in contact with veterans and remind them to get their VA

<sup>4</sup> McBain, et al. "From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members." Sponsored by Aetna, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> LaFollette, et al. "Completing the Mission II: A Study of Veteran Students' Progress Toward Degree Attainment in the Post 9/11 Era." Sponsored by the Pat Tillman Foundation and Operation College for Heroes, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Executive order – establishing principles of excellence for educational institutions serving service members, veterans, spouses and other family members (April 27, 2012)

Veterans Services Coordinator, a forum or venue for gathering with other veterans, access to and support in finding a range of benefits including counseling, and the ability to gain credit for the learning that occurred while in the military. The responsibilities of the SCO include: 1) being well versed in complicated VA rules and Maine state law as it pertains to veterans; 2) having a good understanding of financial aid due to the intersection of benefits and other forms of aid; 3) verifying course selection; 4) monitoring changes in student status including determining last day of attendance if a student drops or withdraws; 5) determining the correct amount to invoice the VA, track all VA payments, and determine dollar amounts to be refunded to the VA/student; 6) complying with the "Principles of Excellence," and 6) serving as the referral point for other services and support, especially if the campus does not have another individual or office designated as such.

As you will see within the section "Current Practice within the Institutions of the University of Maine System," many of our campuses, especially those serving the largest majority of veterans and active military, employ many if not all of these best practices. All of our campuses comply with the "Principles of Excellence" and have entered into the associated Memorandum of Understanding as a part of this. Four of our campuses (University of Maine (UM), University of Maine at Augusta (UMA), University of Southern Maine (USM) and University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK)) are designated as "Military Friendly Schools." Additionally, many of our individual campuses have received special recognition related to their veterans' service, supports and student engagement from national organizations.

### **Data About Our Veteran Population**

As one can see from the data below, based on Fall 2016, our largest veteran-serving institutions, in terms of veterans receiving benefits, are USM, UMA and UM in that order, with our other campuses each serving 22 or fewer veterans. When we include dependents receiving benefits, UM is serving a larger number of dependents than the other campuses, and our smallest campuses (UMM, UMPI and UMFK) each have 20 or fewer veterans and dependents combined. The majority (94%) of both veterans and dependents are enrolled in undergraduate degree programs.

### **Veterans and Dependents of Veterans receiving GI Bill Chapter Benefits in Fall 2016**

VA Chapter	Institutions							Chptr Total
	UM	UMA	UMF	UMFK	UMM	UMPI	USM	
GI Bill - Select Reserve	48	12	4	2	-	1	7	74
Reserve Ed Assistance	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
GI Bill - Active Duty	3	4	1	-	-	-	2	10
Voc Rehab	9	70	6	2	3	4	62	156
Post 9/11	82	95	11	11	9	10	143	361
Yellow Ribbon	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Post 9/11 Dependent	68	14	15	2	6	2	25	132
Survivors & Dependents	88	59	23	16	9	18	50	263
<b>Institution Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>999</b>

**Total Veterans**

<b>Receiving VA Chapter Benefits in Fall 2016</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>604</b>
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**Total Receiving**

<b>Dependent Benefits (May Include Veterans)</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>395</b>
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**Veterans and Dependents Receiving Benefits in Fall 2016 by Degree Level<sup>7</sup>**

Chapter Type	Student Level	Institutions							Total
		UM	UMA	UMF	UMFK	UMM	UMPI	USM	
Veterans	Undergrad - Degree/Cert	126	180	22	16	10	14	185	553
	Non-Deg Undergrad	10	1	-	-	2	1	11	25
	Graduate - Degree/Cert	8	-	-	-	-	-	14	22
	Non-Deg Graduate	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4
<b>Veterans Total</b>		<b>144</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>604</b>
Dependents	Undergrad - Degree/Cert	151	72	36	18	14	20	71	382
	Non-Deg Undergraduate	-	1	1	-	1	-	0	3
	Graduate - Degree/Cert	5	-	1	-	-	-	4	10
<b>Dependents Total</b>		<b>156</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>395</b>
<b>Institution Total</b>		<b>300</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>999</b>

Since 2013, we have seen a slight decline in the number of veterans receiving benefits but a corresponding increase in dependents. We anticipate that, as the veterans populations ages

<sup>7</sup> UMS Student Information System, MaineStreet, November 2016



(and assuming no additional conflicts that would increase benefit recipients), we will see more veterans dependents attending our institutions as opposed to veterans (since veterans receiving Post-9/11 benefits can assign those benefits to their spouse or children).

As a component of recommendations within this report, we will be reviewing data specific to veterans annually – this will include demographic, retention/persistence and completion data.

### **Current Practice and Existing Services within the Institutions of the University of Maine System**

All campuses have an identified School Certifying Official (SCO) with whom veterans work to ensure all of the appropriate paperwork is completed so that they can receive their benefits. This individual also provides a critical interface with admissions, financial aid and other support offices on campus. In addition, our larger campuses with significant veteran populations (UM, USM and UMA) have a Veterans Service Coordinator (who may also have certifying official responsibility) who coordinates a broad range of programs related to veterans on their campuses and have an office for Veterans Services; more information about these specific campuses and initiatives is provided below within “Best Practices.”

UM, USM and UMA, our largest veteran-serving institutions, have expanded their recruitment and veteran support activity to include outreach to organizations within the state serving the military (including Career Centers and regional veteran outreach programs), attendance at recruitment fairs specifically focused on veterans, expansion of websites and publications to include veterans, etc. The smaller campuses, serving far smaller veteran populations, rely on external support services such as Career Centers and Veterans Centers to supplement what is available on campus but these campuses do report that access to these organizations can be uneven due to their location in the state. All campuses award prior learning credit for all applicable learning that occurs while in the military, including basic training, and follow the ACE guidelines for the awarding of this credit.

All campuses have individuals from regional or state veterans service organization offices come to campus during the course of the semester to meet with students and provide support and advice – however, this can be uneven depending upon the region of the state. Every campus, even those with staff members dedicated to serving veteran students as only a portion of their position (half-time or less), relies heavily on the coordination and collaboration between departments on campus which provide academic advising, tutoring, counseling, administrative service and student development activities and supports. All campuses waive the application fee for student-veterans receiving benefits.

All have special programming that occurs in honor of Veterans Day (special events, presentations, luncheons, etc.) and in honor of graduating veterans. In the case of counseling

support, campuses also work with local counseling organizations to ensure that students can access additional support should they need it. On the smaller campuses where resources are limited, special attention is paid to student veterans' needs as programs and services are developed, and to ensuring that students have access to community based resources.

All campuses have processes in place to assist students who are called up for active duty so that the details related to enrollment (registration, financial aid, grading, etc.) can be dealt with easily; and all have processes in place to help the student transition back into the institution when they return. All report having an emergency loan program in place that a veteran can access when issues occur which impact their benefits for education.

Within our Board of Trustees, our current Student Trustee is a student-veteran, and his predecessor served within the Air National Guard.

A complete detail of existing services and supports can be found within the appendix.

### **Best Practice within the University of Maine System**

While all campuses report an expansion in their efforts to better serve veterans and active military students in recent years, the following reflects efforts of special note that we consider best practice within our System and which are reflective of the national best practice mentioned elsewhere in this report. It is important to note that these campuses have relatively large veteran populations and full-time staff working in this area:

#### **University of Maine**

- ✓ Have a Veterans Coordinator who is also the School-Certifying Official
- ✓ Have a Veterans Advisory Committee – ROTC, Admissions, Financial Aid, Faculty, etc.
- ✓ Offer free parking for veterans
- ✓ Fallen Veterans –have a mural wall with the names of fallen veterans in the Memorial Union, have an outside memorial as well
- ✓ Veterans Center (Veterans Education & Transitions Services – VETS) on campus – 1<sup>st</sup> floor Memorial Union
  - Veterans Center is the central clearinghouse for all things veteran (and coordinates with Admissions, Financial Aid, Bursar)
  - Six federal work-study students works in the office
- ✓ Communication is sent to entire campus with list of resources for veterans – distributed every fall
- ✓ Many veterans are in the explorations program (this assists in completion of degree)
- ✓ Bangor Vets Center as a resource

*The UM Veterans Center is important because it gives me a sense of belonging. It's a safe place where I can ask questions, get to know other veterans, and get the help I need or they can point me in the right direction."*  
–Jessi Parent, UM Political Science Major



- ✓ Provide space for events (“embrace a vet,” “healing waters”)
- ✓ Try to create a warm and welcoming environment
- ✓ Provide “Airman’s Attic” – books, calculators, etc.
- ✓ Develop campus awareness – First year day of service includes those related to veterans
- ✓ Advising (by faculty) is available at the Veterans Center
- ✓ Commencement – celebrate at the Nontraditional and Veterans Breakfast – coin and cord
- ✓ Designated as a “Military Friendly School” with the gold designation

### **University of Maine at Augusta**

- ✓ Have been named: 2017 Military Friendly School for the 7th year in a row, named a 2017 Military Times Best for Vets Colleges for the 5th year in a row, and a 2017 Military Advanced Education & Transition Top School for the 3rd year in a row
- ✓ UMA was also named a 2016 Best Online Bachelor’s Programs for Veterans by U.S. News & World Report earlier this year
- ✓ Have a full time Veterans Coordinator and a School Certifying Official (in Registrar’s Office)
- ✓ Have a Veterans Advisory Committee
- ✓ Inquiries come into the Veterans Services Office (Military and Veterans Services) and are then triaged to the right place
- ✓ Have a Veterans Lounge
- ✓ Offer a Veterans orientation – one-on-one sessions
- ✓ Offer a Peer mentor orientation – also have federal work study veterans working with this – Academic program focus
- ✓ Conduct a Calling program (similar to USM) to work with students pre- and post-enrollment – work with faculty (live and online)
- ✓ Partner with TRIO and with disability services (wrap around services)
- ✓ The following were described as part of a coordinated care network:
  - Counselor (UMA) and Lewiston Vets Center come to campus on Fridays
  - Togus – Vocational Rehab comes to campus
  - Career Center – good partnership
  - Rural Veterans Coordinating Project (DOL) - Veterans who separated after August 2012 – flex fund to support small emergencies (car, etc.) – come to campus – similar to TANF
  - Veterans Inc.
  - Easter Seals
- ✓ Participate in the national Student Veterans Association
- ✓ Hold a Veterans Graduation ceremony, cord at graduation
- ✓ Surveys of veterans conducted annually
- ✓ Provide Training: Green Zone, classroom to combat, Military 101

- ✓ Have a Website presence and are on Facebook

### University of Southern Maine

- ✓ Designated as a “Military Friendly School” with the gold designation
- ✓ Ranked as one of the top 25 military friendly 4-year public institutions in the country last year
- ✓ Ranked as military friendly by Military Advanced Education and Transition
- ✓ USM has been selected as one of six schools across the nation to compete in the National Business Plan Competition -- a great opportunity for our students to shine and for USM to be known as a national competitor when it comes to serving our veterans
- ✓ Veterans Services Coordinator is one of the three finalists for Chapter Advisor of the Year
- ✓ Full time Veterans Services Coordinator who is also the School Certifying Official
- ✓ Have a designated space for veterans on each campus (Portland, Gorham, Lewiston-Auburn)
- ✓ Inquiries come to the Veterans Services office – provides guidance for admissions (has a contact in admissions who keeps eyes open for applications and intervenes to assist)
  - Veterans Services office is co-located near the “one stop” enrollment services center
- ✓ Have a Veterans Advisory Committee
- ✓ Hold a veterans orientation - introduces the student to Counseling, PLA, the Learning Center
- ✓ Have a dedicated website – contains faculty profiles, community resources
- ✓ Offer a peer advising program (beginning Fall 2016) – partner current veteran student with new
- ✓ Conduct a calling program to check in on veterans during the semester – at 3 week point, midterm point, 2 weeks before finals
- ✓ Community collaborations – Portland Vets Center (monthly women’s events, includes childcare), Sanford Vets Center
  - Vets Center – counselor comes to campus
- ✓ have a National Honor Society chapter specific to veterans (Salute National Honor Society)
- ✓ Creation of a 3-credit “ethical inquiry” transition course for veterans and service members
- ✓ Sponsored the Husky Run Memorial 10K – scholarship funding for veterans
- ✓ Attend monthly Portland area school certifying official meetings (USM, SMCC, etc.) – share best practices
- ✓ Work with the Career Center – comes to campus and is a veteran
- ✓ Have a Veterans Resource Center – host guests in Portland, Gorham and LAC

*...rt and commitment of  
Lorrie Spaulding and USM Veterans’  
Services, I don’t know that I would have  
earned my degree. I’m now pursuing my  
Master’s and proud to be an alumnus of  
USM.” -Camden Ege, USM 16’*

- ✓ Hold a Veterans Graduation Celebration – this year, special speaker was Senator Susan Collins
- ✓ New students have a 90 minutes “on boarding” advising session
- ✓ Offer Green Zone training and have delivered this to other institutions within and outside the state
- ✓ Participate in PAVE (Peer Advisors for Veterans Education)
- ✓ Have developed a Virtual Veterans Resource Center
- ✓ Conducted a climate survey at the beginning and end of each semester
- ✓ The student group, Husky Veterans, was selected to receive a \$1,500 chapter grant from Student Veterans of America
- ✓ Working on affordable housing for veterans

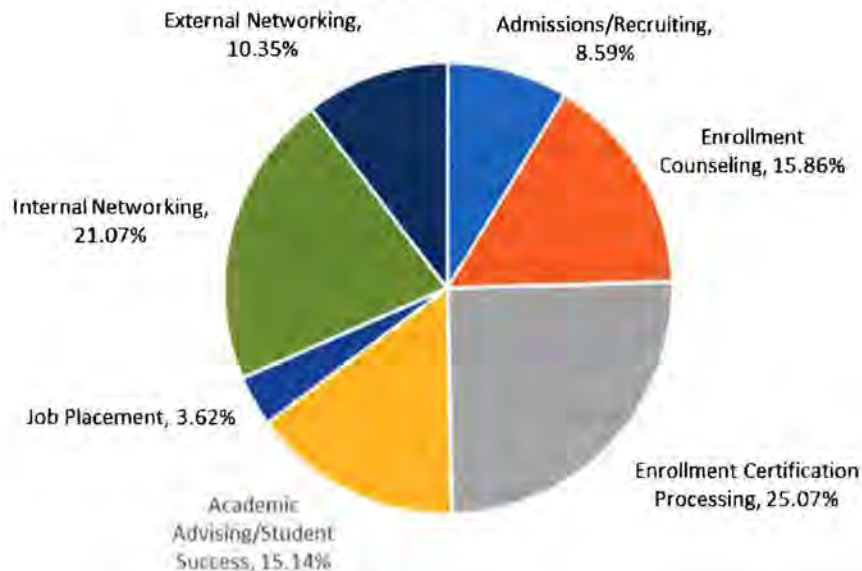
### **Challenges in Serving our Veterans**

There still are factors which impact both what we can provide on our campuses and the ultimate success of our veteran students. The most significant challenges identified by our campuses include:

- **Resources on Campus:** As mentioned, all of our campuses have a School Certifying Official (SCO). The responsibilities of this individual include: 1) being well versed in complicated VA rules and Maine state law as it pertains to veterans; 2) having a good understanding of financial aid due to the intersection of benefits and other forms of aid; 3) verifying course selection; 4) monitoring changes in student status including determining last day of attendance if a student drops or withdraws; 5) determining the correct amount to invoice the VA, track all VA payments, and determine dollar amounts to be refunded to the VA/student; 6) complying with the “Principles of Excellence,” and 6) serving as the referral point for other services and support, especially if the campus does not have another individual or office designated as such. These are professional positions with professional responsibilities but are not in all cases resourced as such.

A survey of our Veterans’ Services Coordinators and School Certifying Officials identified the following breakdown of time spent per function within their specific department:

Percentage of Hours by Function



Due to resource constraints on our campuses, the individuals serving in these roles have a myriad of other responsibilities which impact their ability to provide additional services and support beyond what is required as a School Certifying Official. As illustrated within the chart, those activities most important to assisting the student with enrollment – enrollment certification processing, enrollment counseling and academic advising/student success – are the central components of this work. Internal networking (e.g., connecting students to other resources within the institution, training other offices, etc.) is the other major portion of the job. Even on the campuses with a Veterans Center or Office and a Veterans Coordinator identified to work with veterans, these individuals may serve as both the Coordinator and the School Certifying Official. We are fortunate to have good people serving our veterans in these roles and they are very effective in the service and support they provide but the resource is very thin on many campuses. Careful thought will continue to be given to how to address these resource limitations, including optimizing the ability of other service and support offices on the campus to address the needs of student-veterans and exploring opportunities for collaboration and shared services and support across campuses.

- **External Resources Available within Communities-** As we conducted our review of the availability of service and support both internal and external to our campuses, it became clear that veterans in larger communities within the state (Bangor, Augusta, Portland) have far better access than do veterans in our smaller, mostly northern and downeast communities. While some services expand to Caribou, it is difficult for veterans to travel



to them, and many of these service providers do not regularly visit our northern campuses. Exploring how to make these services more accessible and available across the state, and how to best partner with them at our institutions will be an important part of our shared work going forward.

- **Complicated and Intersecting Benefits:** The various benefit programs alone are confusing and can interrelate (especially in the case of Post-9/11 benefits). Layering over these programs are the various waiver programs iterated in legislation which add further complication.
- **Ability of Post-9/11 Veterans to Transfer Their Benefits to a Dependent (including Spouse)** – When the veteran is accessing the benefit, that veteran brings along a commitment and focus to their pursuit of education which positively impacts their ultimate success. While the ability to transfer the benefit is a wonderful component, the dependents who receive this many times do not carry the same commitment and focus which may result in more academic difficulty and stop out/drop out behavior. This results in very different demands being placed on an already stressed system providing veterans' service and support, especially if the veterans' dependent relies on accessing services through the School Certifying Official or Veterans Coordinator.

## **Recommendations**

While we are confident that the current level of support and service meets the needs of the population we currently serve, we have identified a wide ranging set of recommendations specific to our System which will be explored over the next year and developed into an action plan for the next one to two years. Some are specific to what we can do internally; others are specific to partnerships which could evolve across the state as all of us who work with veterans develop strategies around how to best improve the delivery of services and benefits to Maine's veterans coming out of this bill.

## **Data and Research**

1. Regularly report key enrollment data specific to veterans to each campus – enrollment by benefit category (headcount, credit hours, FTE), GPA, retention/persistence and graduation, county of residence, etc.
2. Determine ways to encourage veterans who may not be receiving benefits to self-identify and include this category within all data reports.
3. Regularly survey current students (expectation and satisfaction) and graduates (employment outcomes) and examine services and supports as a result
4. Working with other partners, conduct a community assessment to determine what resources are available to veterans within the different regions/counties of the state – there are many formal agencies which have responsibility but also several which are community-based which can provide invaluable support to the veteran community.



5. Working with other partners and with statewide data, determine where there may be service gaps and where more comprehensive services are needed.

### **Staffing and Support**

1. Using our staffing data from this study as the base, examining national best practice for levels of service and working with the administration at the campuses, determine the best approach to ensuring sufficient staff time for the provision of veterans services and certifications which is comparable to the population served. Explore the use of the veterans' work study program as a way to expand service provision or, where appropriate, the addition of an AmeriCorps volunteer to develop programming.
2. Implement monthly/quarterly meetings of Veterans Coordinators and School Certifying Officials to ensure the sharing of best practice and to develop more opportunities for the sharing of programs and activities.
3. Review current practice and process for certifying officials to ensure that all opportunities for automation and streamlined review are being optimized.
4. Review current funding for veterans-specific programming and, if necessary, formulate budget request for FY 19.

### **Training and Professional Development**

1. Develop additional training for School Certifying Officials beyond the annual SCO training provided by the Maine State Approving Agency for Veterans Education Programs. This training could include holding "mini" sessions in partnership with VA Educational Liaison Representative for Maine and New Hampshire Tim Daigle to go over key elements that can be problematic from a certification perspective and can create confusion for the student or institution.
2. Create easy reference guides for things like GI Bill situations which can be out of the norm.
3. Deliver "Green Zone" or "Military 101" training to those campuses' faculty and staff which currently do not have this – this could be done in person or via the UMS video conferencing system, and can be delivered by one of the campuses with a training program in place. Develop a "train the trainer" model for these campuses so that, in the long term, they develop the capacity to train.
4. Implement an annual Veterans Summit and series of best practices workshops related to key service areas such as Disability Services, Counseling, Vocational Rehabilitation, Veterans' Centers, New Ventures Maine, etc. with the goal of both providing professional development related to best practice but also of exploring partnerships which can further support students.
5. Explore further partnerships with non-UMS higher education institutions within the regions in which our campuses sit.

### **Space**

1. On those campuses where dedicated space for veterans does not exist, explore the reasonableness of identifying such space and where appropriate, designate.

## **Marketing and Recruitment**

### Website

1. Create a central resource/website similar to maine.gov/veterans. This site would provide links and information to campus information and contact information for Veteran Coordinators and School Certifying Officials, would include System policies related to student veterans and active military personnel, links to community partners, government agencies and scholarship opportunities, and would provide a calendar of statewide activities available to veterans.
2. Ensure that each campus has an easily accessible web site linked to each UMS institution's home page. This site would include information related to resources and benefits, a checklist for students using the GI-Bill (each chapter), a resource list of faculty and staff, news and calendar of events specific to that campus, services offered by the campus along with contact information, links to community partners, government agencies and scholarships; each campus would link to the central site referenced within the first recommendation.

### Admissions

3. Create a 1-page "cheat sheet" for admissions counselors which includes information specific veterans (application fee waived, System policies related to special tuition programs for veterans (GI Bill, National Guard, Dependents, etc.), Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rate for each school, etc.
4. Working with UMS admissions offices, create a flyer or website information for prospective students – this could include how to apply for benefits, key contacts at the institution, student group contact information, etc.
5. As a part of the Veterans Summit and best practices workshops mentioned above, include training for admissions counselors specific to the basics of the GI Bill, top majors for veterans, campus and community resources and programs for veterans.
6. Find opportunities at key events "on boarding" new veteran students to have information tables or make presentations designed to help transition them to campus life.

### Mentoring

7. Identify faculty and staff on campuses who are veterans, invite to participate in a mentoring program and develop associated webpage and yearly mentoring session.
8. Working with Advancement on each campus, identify corporate partners or members of campus Board of Visitors who are veterans and develop opportunities for yearly sessions.

### External Outreach

9. Regularly/yearly invite the Maine Bureau of Veterans Services, DVOP, Vocational Rehab, and other key veterans' service organizations to come to each campus to share information about their organization. Explore other opportunities for collaboration.
10. If not already doing so, attend the monthly meetings of the Maine Military &

Community Network (this could be the SCO or a student veteran or a willing volunteer), share upcoming events and network to expand the resource list for students. If no group exists in a given area, explore creating such a group with Maine Military & Community Network leadership.

11. Host groups on campus which provide service, support and activities for veterans (ex. Easter Seals, Veterans Inc., Team Red/White/Blue, Maine Career Centers, etc.)

### **Services and Support**

1. Working with local partners, determine what services and supports can be provided externally and which need to be located on campus.
2. Ensure that campus based services utilized by veterans are appropriately trained in how best to work with veterans and that the needs of veteran students are included within any consideration of service provision.
3. Create opportunities for mentorship of veteran students (see marketing and outreach section above)
4. Where this doesn't exist, explore the creation of student veterans groups on campus; encourage leadership of such groups to be a part of Student Veterans of America.
5. Share calendar of events across the System and explore more opportunities for collaborative offering of events.
6. Explore concept of priority registration for veterans to ensure timely completion of their degree and ensure that veterans can fully access their benefits.
7. Determine best approach to enable veterans who may have substantial experiential learning to document same and maximize their use of prior learning credit
8. Working collaboratively with the UMS University Colleges (Brunswick, Rockland, East Millinocket, Rumford/Mexico, etc.), explore opportunities to expand service delivery to veterans who may be attending at the UC centers.
9. Working collaboratively with New Ventures Maine, determine additional supports and workshops offered by NVM that would be of assistance to veterans (e.g., financial literacy, developing a business Plan, entrepreneur training, tax assistance, etc.).

### **External Services/Supports**

1. Each campus will identify the state and federal resources available off campus within their region.
2. Each campus will identify the local veteran resources within their region.
3. Convene a meeting with all local stakeholders to share information and explore opportunities for collaboration.
4. Develop local resource guides for veteran services and support which would include easy linkages to the Maine Bureau of Veterans Services and other organizations.

### **In closing**

Maine currently has over 125,000 military service members within its population (10 percent of our total population) and more are entering higher education due to the expansion of benefits

for Post-9/11 veterans. Approximately 27 percent of Maine's veteran population served in the Gulf War era, and 7 percent are aged between 20 and 34; 47% are over the age of 65.<sup>8</sup> Approximately 2,434 veterans in Maine are receiving post-911 GI benefits. Our campuses have over 1,000 students identified as receiving some form of GI bill benefits. Helping these students come back into higher education and achieve the academic credentials that will translate into future success is critical for both their futures and that of the state of Maine. Given this, it is important to understand the range of services and supports available on our campuses for this group of students, to discuss the special issues and concerns that may impact their success, and to learn more about the "best practice" services and support available at our campuses that mirror "best practice" across the country. This report is intended to provide a starting point for learning more about this important population and the role we play in ensuring their ultimate success, and in laying the foundation for continuing to provide a range of service and support which can enable that success.

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<sup>8</sup> Chokshi, N. What Each State's Veteran Population Looks Like. Washington Post, November 11, 2014.

## Appendix

Current services/supports at UMS campuses.....	p. 19
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## **Current Status of Veterans Service/Support across the UMS:**

### **University of Maine**

- ✓ Have a Veterans Coordinator who is also the School Certifying Official
- ✓ Have a Veterans Advisory Committee – ROTC, Admissions, Financial Aid, Faculty, etc.
- ✓ Offer free parking for veterans
- ✓ Fallen Vets –have a mural wall with the names of fallen veterans in the Memorial Union, have an outside memorial as well
- ✓ Veterans Center on campus (Veterans Education & Transitions Services – VETS) – 1<sup>st</sup> floor Memorial Union
  - Veterans Center is the central clearinghouse for all things veteran (and coordinates with Admissions, Financial Aid, Bursar)
  - Six federal work-study students works in the office
- ✓ Communication is sent to entire campus with list of resources for veterans – distributed every fall
- ✓ Many veterans are in the explorations program (this assists in completion of degree)
- ✓ Bangor Vets Center as a resource
- ✓ Provide space for events (“embrace a vet,” “healing waters”)
- ✓ Try to create a warm and welcoming environment
- ✓ Provide “Airman’s Attic” – books, calculators, etc.
- ✓ Develop campus awareness – First year day of service includes those related to veterans
- ✓ Advising (by faculty) is available at the Veterans Center
- ✓ Commencement – celebrate at the Nontraditional and Veterans Breakfast – coin and cord
- ✓ Designated as a “Military Friendly School” with the gold designation

### **University of Maine at Augusta**

- ✓ Have been named: 2017 Military Friendly School for the 7th year in a row, named a 2017 Military Times Best for Vets Colleges for the 5th year in a row, and a 2017 Military Advanced Education & Transition Top School for the 3rd year in a row
- ✓ UMA was also named a 2016 Best Online Bachelor’s Programs for Veterans by U.S. News & World Report earlier this year
- ✓ Have a full time Veterans Coordinator and a School Certifying Official (in Registrar’s Office)
- ✓ Have a Veterans Advisory Committee

- ✓ Inquiries come into the Veterans Office (Military and Veterans Services) and are then triaged to the right place
- ✓ Have a Veterans Lounge
- ✓ Offer a Veterans orientation – one-on-one sessions
- ✓ Offer a Peer mentor orientation – also have federal work study veterans working with this – Academic program focus
- ✓ Conduct a Calling program (similar to USM) to work with students pre- and post-enrollment – work with faculty (live and online)
- ✓ Partner with TRIO and with disability services (wrap around services)
- ✓ The following were described as part of a coordinated care network:
  - Counselor (UMA) and Lewiston Vets Center come to campus on Fridays
  - Togus – Vocational Rehab comes to campus
  - Career Center – good partnership
  - Rural Veterans Coordinating Project (DOL) - Veterans who separated after August 2012 – flex fund to support small emergencies (car, etc.) – come to campus – similar to TANF
  - Veterans Inc.
  - Easter Seals
- ✓ Participate in the national Student Veterans Association
- ✓ Hold a Veterans Graduation ceremony, cord at graduation
- ✓ Surveys of veterans conducted annually
- ✓ Provide Training: Green Zone, classroom to combat, Military 101
- ✓ Have a Website presence and are on Facebook

#### **University of Maine at Farmington**

- ✓ Have a School Certifying Official who tracks the students and keeps track of progress
- ✓ Services are provided in the Merrill Center (which is a one stop service center)
- ✓ Inquiries come in through admissions (then the SCO works to certify the veteran for benefits)
- ✓ Information about veterans services is available on the Merrill Center website
- ✓ The SCO is known as the veteran “go to” person on campus – she then connects the veteran to whatever service is needed
- ✓ Services are offered to all
- ✓ Work with the CareerCenter in the community (but is not veteran specific)
- ✓ Franklin County is an underserved area for veterans services

#### **University of Maine at Fort Kent**

- ✓ Have a School Certifying Official
- ✓ Off-campus support group exists (not coordinated by campus)
- ✓ Financial aid manages veterans dependents

- ✓ Ch. 33 and Vet Dependent are the major categories
- ✓ Vets typically choose professional programs (nursing, CJ, etc.)
- ✓ VA Clinic offers a small range of service
- ✓ No student group (not enough faculty to provide faculty advisor for this)
- ✓ No dedicated veterans service staff
- ✓ Serve all students
- ✓ No veteran specific website (although admissions may have some mention)

#### **University of Maine at Machias**

- ✓ Have a School Certifying Official and a special services office (career services, disability services, etc.) which helps support
- ✓ Provide services for all students
- ✓ Career services (also provides clothing for interviews), Veterans Day celebrations (with student life)
- ✓ Are exploring this providing space and student activities funding for veterans
- ✓ Major categories are Ch. 35 or Ch. 33 Dependents – very different services needed
- ✓ Community partnerships are limited – Career Center, special events (offered by other veterans), American Legion
- ✓ Do a calling program to all students to provide early intervention, check ins
- ✓ Some language in the Academic Affairs website
- ✓ Held a Veterans Resource Fair and Luncheon Fall 2016 – many regional external agencies participated
- ✓ Have hired a counselor who has experience with PTSD
- ✓ Working with Family Futures Downeast – planning stage for veterans cohort

#### **University of Maine at Presque Isle**

- ✓ Designated a “military friendly” school 2014-2016
- ✓ #31 in the Best Colleges for Veterans among Regional Colleges in the North in US News and World Report’s Best Colleges (Sept 2015)
- ✓ Have a School Certifying Official (who has many other responsibilities so small percentage of time is devoted to veterans)
- ✓ Inquiries come in via calls, admission referrals (admissions includes mention of veterans and certifying official during the tour), website (on the admissions website), advisors
- ✓ Services apply to all students, none veteran specific
- ✓ There is a CareerCenter in the community but there is very little contact with it
- ✓ Caribou Vets Center
- ✓ Houlton Center – has a mobile veterans center and a veterans space
- ✓ Contracted counseling services are available
- ✓ Have an established Veterans’ Club
- ✓ Commencement – recognized veterans with cords (sent email to all eligible graduates to identify) and identifies the student as a veteran (and their service branch)

## University of Southern Maine

- ✓ Designated as a “Military Friendly School” with the gold designation
- ✓ Ranked as one of the top 25 military friendly 4-year public institutions in the country last year
- ✓ Ranked as military friendly by Military Advanced Education and Transition
- ✓ USM has been selected as one of six schools across the nation to compete in the National Business Plan Competition -- a great opportunity for our students to shine and for USM to be known as a national competitor when it comes to serving our veterans
- ✓ Veterans Services Coordinator is one of the three finalists for Chapter Advisor of the Year
- ✓ Full time Veterans Services Coordinator who is also the School Certifying Official
- ✓ Have a designated space for veterans on each campus (Portland, Gorham, Lewiston-Auburn)
- ✓ Inquiries come to the Veterans Services office – provides guidance for admissions (has a contact in admissions who keeps eyes open for applications and intervenes to assist)
  - Veterans Services office is co-located near the “one stop” enrollment services center
- ✓ Have a Veterans Advisory Committee
- ✓ Hold a veterans orientation - introduces the student to Counseling, PLA, the Learning Center
- ✓ Have a dedicated website – contains faculty profiles, community resources
- ✓ Offer a peer advising program (beginning Fall 2016) – partner current veteran student with new
- ✓ Conduct a calling program to check in on veterans during the semester – at 3 week point, midterm point, 2 weeks before finals
- ✓ Community collaborations – Portland Vets Center (monthly women’s events, includes childcare), Sanford Vets Center
  - Vets Center – counselor comes to campus
- ✓ have a National Honor Society chapter specific to veterans (Salute National Honor Society)
- ✓ Creation of a 3-credit “ethical inquiry” transition course for veterans and service members
- ✓ Sponsored the Husky Run Memorial 10K – scholarship funding for veterans
- ✓ Attend monthly Portland area school certifying official meetings (USM, SMCC, etc.) – share best practices
- ✓ Work with the Career Center – comes to campus and is a veteran
- ✓ Have a Veterans Resource Center – host guests in Portland, Gorham and LAC
- ✓ Hold a Veterans Graduation Celebration – this year, special speaker was Senator Susan Collins
- ✓ New students have a 90 minutes “on boarding” advising session

- ✓ Offer Green Zone training and have delivered this to other institutions within and outside the state
- ✓ Participate in PAVE (Peer Advisors for Veterans Education)
- ✓ Have developed a Virtual Veterans Resource Center
- ✓ Conducted a climate survey at the beginning and end of each semester
- ✓ The student group, Husky Veterans, was selected to receive a \$1,500 chapter grant from Student Veterans of America
- ✓ Working on affordable housing for veterans

### **University College**

The University of Maine System has eight University College centers located in communities including Houlton, East Millinocket, Rockland, Brunswick, Ellsworth, Saco, Rumford/Mexico and Norway/South Paris. In addition to what is provided at the campus level, the following are examples of additional services and supports that exist at the University Colleges:

- ✓ Houlton Higher Education Center – hosts an annual career/job fair for veterans and their families; collaborates with the local movie theatre to offer a movie and discussion related to veterans/the military; participate in the Maine Military & Community Network meetings; participates in the “Point in Time” homeless survey to identify homeless individuals; have completed Green Zone and Military 101 Training
- ✓ Saco Center – Attend Maine Military & Community Network meetings; have information tables specific to veterans; work with UMA to ensure any veterans attending the Saco Center are connected to campus; have had Green Zone training; work with local National Guard; working with the Rural Veterans Coordination Project to ensure veterans know of the additional benefits
- ✓ Rockland Center – Veterans services in the mid-coast area are scarce but recently an individual has been hired by the VA for the mid-coast area; host the annual Mobile Vet Van; received Military 101 training
- ✓ Bath/Brunswick Center – Annual veterans resource fair (working with UMA) which includes visit from the Mobile Vet Center (out of Lewiston); co-sponsored a screening of a documentary followed by panel discussion; Mid-coast Veterans Council is located across from the Brunswick Center and are a key contact; work closely with the Southern Midcoast Career Center



### **External Services and Supports – Bangor-Lewiston-Augusta-Portland**

- This region offers a range of service but north of Bangor the services become more dispersed – geography becomes the challenge
- Working with community partners is key in being able to offer the most integrated services possible
- Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services – have developed a new website which is user friendly – joint service transcript help, funeral assistance, etc.
- VA Center in Togus – can do direct referrals – health benefit assistance (VA insurance covers our health insurance requirement) including hospital administration (have a large mental health operation)
- Vet Centers – have counselors who visit campus a day each week – are not located in every county (Caribou, Bangor, Lewiston, Portland, Sanford) – Caribou goes to the Houlton Center, have a mobile vet center which visits different campuses over the course of the year (do not visit UMFK currently and the distance is too far for many veterans to travel), used to do a “fall tour” across the state (including visiting the UC Centers; part benefits, part education and discussion of educational opportunities)
- Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) – not just for mental health but also regular health issues – several locations throughout Maine (Caribou, Calais, Portland, Saco, Bangor, Rumford)
- Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) – housed at Togus (the two sides of Togus do not seem to talk to each other [benefits and hospital]) – VA is trying to start addressing this due to the recent issues around health care (is keynote at Maine Military & Community Network meeting)
- Maine Military & Community Network - there are regional groups for this but need to extend to northern Maine (Aroostook County MMCN – trying to move their meetings around to accommodate more people)  
<http://www.cvent.com/events/me-346-500-sixth-annual-conference-of-the-maine-military-community-network/event-summary-9ba4390354e74eb2a9105344c2ebba02.aspx>
- Vocational Rehab – Ch 31 – come to campus to meet with students, do not visit northern campuses or UMF
- CareerCenters – seem to be a good resource across the state (have resources that actually do visit); Rural Veterans Coordinating Pilot (RVCP) Grant (DOL): flexible fund for small emergencies, eligibility criteria (separated on or after August 26, 2012), do visit campuses
- University College

- New Ventures Maine – workshops, small business plans – UMA (and UMPI to a limited extent) seems to be the only campus that directly connects
- Easter Seals – “Veterans Count” – new director of Military and Veterans Services – look for opportunities to partner – only work with post 9/11 veterans
- Veterans Inc. – Massachusetts company that has moved to Maine (located in Lewiston) – serving homeless veterans (typically 40-55 years of age), financial literacy, transitional housing
- Legal services – Pine Tree Legal, some legal support on campus (UM)
- Student Veterans of America – national organization which provides a range of conferences and workshops for student-veterans and student-veteran leaders