

STATEMENT OF SHAWN STERRETT
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL VETERANS & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE
REGARDING SERVICES FOR VETERANS AT CUNY

November 15, 2016

Chairperson Ulrich, Chairperson Barron, members of the Veterans and Higher Education committee.

My name is Shawn Sterrett and I am currently a student at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY). I Served in the United States Marine Corps from 2006 to 2011. I deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom to the Al Anbar Province in 2009 and received multiple decorations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

However, upon coming home I was diagnosed with PTSD and other Service Connected Injuries by the US Department of Veterans Affairs. As I started treatment, I enrolled at LaGuardia Community College in March of 2014.

I want to tell you that since Mr. Stephen Clark and Mr. Daryl Griffin have arrived at LaGuardia, I have been the victim of harassment and a hostile environment at LaGuardia's Veterans Resource Center.

I have had Mr. Clark, who is the director of Veteran Services for student affairs verbally assault me and then turn around and immediately call the campus police to have me removed from the campus. I have been also been kicked out of the Veterans Resource Center (a supposed safe space) while being intimidated with no provocation.

There have been many altercations between myself, Mr. Clark and Mr. Griffin and the two items I stated were issues that were been brought to the attention of the administration at LaGCC and nothing was done to address it.

Mr. Clark used the "Senior" Academic Advisor Mr. Griffin to misinform and mislead veterans to the point where I have had to request that he did not handle my academic advisory sessions due to the fact he could not prove that he was competent in the position that Mr. Clark hired him for.

While I was hospitalized for PTSD related issues, it was Mr. Clark who harassed my brother to pass information to me that I needed to hurry up and "leave the hospital" in his words.

This type of harassment was not beneficial to my recovery. It was counter-productive to all I had worked for in my transition back into society. My experience at LaGuardia Community College has been prejudicial to my mental welfare which originally led to my hospitalization. In the past three semesters Mr. Clark has made my Collegiate experience a very negative one.

Recently my fellow veterans and I submitted a package of all our correspondence, along with my statement, to CUNY's Central Office after these atrocious acts were ignored by LaGuardia's President Gail Mellow, the Vice President for Student Affairs Michael Baston and her staff. This came after many attempts to mediate the issues Mr. Clark had utilized to harass and intimidate us.

We met with Interim Vice Chancellor Chris Rosa but there has been no resolution. Vice Chancellor Rosa's solution has been to push this issue back to LaGuardia, now saying that the President is open to this. Where was she for the three semesters while I was, and continue to be harassed? On Veterans Day, I was blocked from LaGuardia's Twitter account.

CUNY says its Veteran friendly but if this is how I've been treated, then I wonder about other student veterans and what they might be going through. I am angry at CUNY for allowing this to go on for so long. This has to stop and it needs to be addressed.

I'm asking both committees to hold another hearing to follow up on what actions CUNY and LaGuardia has taken to address Mr. Clark and Mr. Griffin and I would ask that the Council hold up any monies going to CUNY for veterans until they resolve these issues.

I thank you all for your time and I'm ready to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

TESTIMONY OF KEVIN CHIMILIO

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL VETERANS & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

RE: SERVICES FOR VETERANS AT CUNY

November 15, 2016

Chairmembers Barron and Ulrich, members of the Veterans and Higher Education committee. My name is Kevin Chimilio and I'm grateful to have the opportunity to address you all today about my experience at CUNY.

I served in the Marine Corps from July 2007 to July 2014. After I got out, instead of school I went to work on an oil rig drilling for natural gas and oil. However, I realized that if I wanted to get ahead in life and do better for my family, I needed to attend College.

So I moved back to NYC and attended LaGuardia Community College from March 2014 to June 2016. During my time at LaGuardia I became the Veterans Club President, where I served for three semesters.

During my time at LaGuardia, Mr. Clark became the Director of Veteran Services for Student Affairs. I personally had high hopes that he would make LaGuardia even better than it was for veterans.

Unfortunately, that is not what happened. During my time at LaGuardia, I witnessed Mr. Clark lie, double talk and harass myself and other veterans, while Mr. Griffin spied on us, followed us all over campus, and then reported back to Mr. Clark anything we said.

Mr. Clark's harassment towards me started almost immediately. A number of us were supposed to have an initial meeting with Vice President Baston (per his open door policy). Mr. Clark expressed his discontent, asked why and then said that the only way we could have a meeting with VP Baston is if he was present.

Then Mr. Clark decided to create a Battle Buddy center. When we asked to see the MOU, he refused and we had to once again meet with VP Baston, who gave us a copy of the MOU with no problem. Mr. Baston then promised that he would meet with us again the following semester to make sure things were getting better.

The following semester Mr. Clark became even more embolden. When the other student veterans and I saw what he and Mr. Griffin were doing, we once again asked for a meeting with Vice President Baston. It was then that VP Baston revoked his open door policy, refused to meet with us and told us to go back to Mr. Clark.

In our 42 page correspondence package to LaGuardia's administration, detailing the harassment and injustices, you will notice that Vice President Baston responds to only one email, after we asked for Mr. Clark to be removed from the Veterans Office. Instead of being the Vice President and leader he should have been, he chose to belittle, intimidate and berate me with false

narratives about my intentions of exposing the grievances of the student veterans that were being harassed.

As neither the President nor anyone at LaGuardia responded to us, we moved forward and addressed CUNY and Interim Vice Chancellor Rosa but there is still no resolution to this issue.

Incredibly Mr. Rosa's answer is to push it back to LaGuardia, to the very college who did not want to address this from the beginning. This is a travesty and unacceptable! President Mellow and Vice President Baston could have avoided all of this by working with us to address Mr. Clark's problems.

I am angry and disappointed at CUNY and LaGuardia for treating us like this for this long. We veterans share a bond and we help one another. The word has gone to the community out that LaGuardia is an unfriendly college for veterans and Mr. Clark only looks out for his interests and will harass you. They have no problem taking our federal dollars but they refused to do anything to make us feel safe, treating us like second class citizens. This has to stop!

CUNY says its Veteran friendly but if this is how I and others have been treated, then I wonder how many other student veterans might be going through the same thing. And to be clear, The Military Veteran Friendly designation doesn't really make it an institution that is "veteran friendly." We're all aware that it's merely a check-off list and a selling point for CUNY and the campuses.

Despite all the obstacles, harassment and lack of support from Mr. Clark, Mr. Griffin and LaGuardia's senior administration, I graduated from LaGuardia and am currently attending Lehman College pursuing Bachelors in psychology. At Lehman, I'm currently serving as the President of the "Lehman Veterans Association" where our problem is space, or lack thereof.

Lehman offers great services but the "broom closet" of an office/lounge is unaccommodating and uninviting to the number of student vets that attend the college. The excuse we continually hear is that there is no room, which is unacceptable.

In closing, the student veterans at LAGCC have corresponding email letters that go back a full calendar year. LAGCC administration did not make it a priority until they were made aware of this hearing. Mr. Clark has violated various policies with CUNY again and again and yet no one at LaGuardia has done anything to rectify the situation, which still continues to this day.

This must change and every CUNY institution must take complaints from veterans seriously and address in a timely manner. I'm (also) asking both committee's to hold another hearing next semester to follow up on what actions CUNY and LaGuardia has taken to address these issues.

So thank you once again for your time. I'm ready to answer any questions that you may have.



Testimony before the New York City Council Higher Education and Veterans Committees

Oversight – Veterans in the CUNY System

Statement of Jonathan Fermin-Robbins
Hunter College Student Veteran - Junior
November 15, 2016

Good Morning Chairpersons Barron and Ulrich, members of the committee, and honored guests. On behalf of the 200-plus student veterans at Hunter College I thank you very much for your continued commitment and support, and for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Before I proceed with the rest of my testimony I want to emphasize the following points:

- Veterans' services are greatly appreciated and are not taken for granted
- Hunter College sets the standard for veteran-friendly application/registration and academic support
- The PROVE program is world-class and is a concept that should be widely adopted
- Improvement is not only possible, but the answers already exist within the CUNY system
- Recommend the following considerations:
 - Examine how different schools excel at their respective veterans' services programs
 - Develop a standardized version of these services throughout all CUNY schools
 - Increase support of PROVE services enabling effective coupling with the Veterans Resource Centers and coordinators
 - Provide adequate funding to make the above possible

I served six years in the United States Army, spent the majority of my enlistment overseas, and served an additional five years as a senior government "GS" employee working for the Department of Defense. I started attending Hunter College in the Spring of 2015. The CUNY central office Veterans representative made my application process smooth and straight forward. This seamless transition continued throughout the registration process as a direct result of having an academic advisor who is also the head of the Student Veterans Services (SVS) at Hunter College. My personal experience transitioning to Hunter serves as a shining example of the great lengths this city and CUNY has and continues to go to in an effort to support veterans. After having attended Hunter College for one year, I was asked to serve as president of the Hunter College Student Veterans Club. It is the goal of my testimony today to bring to your attention three Hunter College student veterans experiences, submit for your consideration my thoughts on the progress made thus far, and propose a way forward.

Ashleigh's experience:

Ashleigh Robinson served seven years in the United States Air Force, separated in May, and started attending Hunter in the Fall of 2016. The difficulties she faced were not with admissions or registering for classes. Hunter has successfully made this a fairly easy and intuitive process. Ashleigh's greatest challenge was finding an affordable place to live within a reasonable proximity to Hunter College. Though there were numerous veterans' resources available to Ashleigh, she was unable to access them. Ashleigh's lack of access to these services is a direct result of what many veteran students experience upon their re-entry into civilian life – information overload. Having overcome the difficulties of finding

affordable housing Ashleigh continues to face challenges with making numerous VA clinic appointments, ensuring her VA disability claims processing, and keeping her focus on her studies. In Ashleigh's words, "I just wish there was a way to bridge the gap between the numerous veterans' services available and the veteran who is totally consumed with academic studies, commuting, VA appointments, and all the required paperwork. I feel that there is no central point of contact at Hunter with direct ties to the VA clinics to answer these questions and to be a champion on behalf of veteran students." Ashleigh also points out that there seems to be no standard among CUNY schools on how Veterans' services are implemented. She asked me, "Is there a benchmark or standard bearer among the CUNY schools? If so, where? And, are all the schools meeting this benchmark?"

Patrick's Experience:

Patrick served in the United States Air Force for eight years before applying to Hunter in the Fall of 2013. Like many other student veterans, he was drawn to Hunter because of its high academic standing and reputation as a top-notch school. Patrick's experience applying to Hunter was also seamless and this positive experience continued through to the registration process. The transfer of his wealth of experience and formal education in the Air Force, however, did not have the same seamless transition. Of the 92 credits earned while in the Air Force, Hunter College only accepted 11 of those and averaged his incoming GPA to a 2.6 due to the Air Force not assessing a grade per credit earned. Patrick says, "There are quite a few other veterans who avoid Hunter because of their policy regarding credits for military experience and training." Patrick also points out that while the PROVE interns are an invaluable resource in terms of their psychological and social benefit, their ability to provide sound advice in regards to VA regulations and services is severely limited due to their short time on campus (~~one semester~~). An unfortunate experience for Patrick resulted in the loss of thousands of dollars he could have potentially been afforded had he been given the proper information. Patrick also points out that for the first year and a half at Hunter he was, "...not in college mode. I was just trying to stay above water and couldn't use all of the services offered to my full advantage. I felt like I had to do all of the paperwork myself and was just trying to figure everything out. There is no local support to help me navigate the VA."

Megan's Experience

Megan served in the United States Air Force for 10 years and was medically retired in 2013. Megan says, "This is my first year at Hunter College. While getting here was not without its challenges, the majority of my administrative issues were resolved fairly quickly by college staff once the issues were raised. I feel that if an issue came up, I could go to Marty (the VA Certifying Official and Academic Advisor) to get it fixed. House-hunting wasn't much of a problem. I'm from NY originally and I stayed with family while I was apartment hunting. There were financial difficulties, (mainly I did not meet the salary requirements the building owners wanted as I'm unemployed). I was able to have family help by way of a guarantor. Some of the greater challenges I've faced since moving back have been about travel to my appointments and the availability of appointments. A number of the specialty clinics are only available once a week, often in the early morning. I'm often faced with the choice of having to be late for class, leave early or skip classes altogether to make appointments on time. I've also waited more than an hour to see some doctors, forcing me to skip class to keep the appointment. As for VA bureaucracy, there have been some issues. I keep learning about programs at the NY Harbor VA hospital (such as VITAL) that seem to have no representation at our school. Additionally, there is no information from the VA about receiving the disabled rate on MTA monthly passes. I talked with several VA offices when I first heard about it and

was bounced around to various other offices only to be told that no one actually knows how the system works. I'm currently paying more than \$110 on transportation every month.”

Way Forward

The experiences of Ashleigh, Patrick, and Megan clearly demonstrate the areas of the veteran’s services that are extremely successful while also illuminating others that are ripe for improvement. Ashleigh brought up a question that I believe holds the key towards the next phase of Veterans services within CUNY and the city as a whole. Her question was, “Is there a benchmark or standard bearer among the CUNY schools? If so, where? And, are all the schools meeting this benchmark?” As a Hunter College student I cannot provide an authoritative answer to this question given my limited perspective. However, I traveled to other colleges and observed other Veterans Resource Centers and can confidently say that there are benchmarks already in existence within the CUNY system. For example, Hunter College sets the benchmark for admissions, registration and academic assistance. BMCC is the leader when it comes to their Veterans Resource Center and its ability to facilitate veterans’ services and render assistance. From my perspective and from the questions I posed to school officials, the discrepancy between the various CUNY schools comes down to monetary resources. All CUNY schools would be able to achieve a unified level of success in all areas from admissions, registration, and academics to Veterans Resource Center services if allocated the proper funding. Hunter established its superior admissions, registration, and academic advising process for veterans because that is where Hunter put its limited monetary resources. BMCC excels at providing unparalleled Veterans Resource Center services because that is where BMCC put its limited monetary resources.

The next phase of veterans services, which would clearly establish New York City as the national standard bearer, is easily within reach. I respectfully submit to these committees, the City Council of New York City, and to the Mayor’s Office of New York City, the consideration of performing additional research and allocating additional funding that will affect a clear and readily achievable way to combine the proven concepts already in existence within the CUNY system, and therefore effectively bridge the gap between the plethora of services available and the student veteran who needs them.

-Jonathan Fermin-Robbins

**Testimony Before a Joint Hearing of the City Council's Committees on
Veterans Affairs & Higher Education
Christopher Rosa, Ph.D.
CUNY Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
November 15, 2016**

Good Afternoon Chair Ullrich, Chair Baron, and Honorable Members of the Veterans Affairs & Higher Education Committees.

I want to begin my testimony today by thanking you for your on-going support of The City University of New York and for your enduring commitment to our returning veterans. My name is Chris Rosa and I am currently CUNY's Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. Thank you also for the opportunity to appear before you on the topic of "Student-veterans at the City University of New York."

I'm honored to serve on this afternoon's panel with two of CUNY's most staunch advocates on behalf of the success and wellness of CUNY student-veterans –Wilfred Cotto, Student Life Specialist in Veterans Affairs at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, who proudly served in active duty for the U.S. Navy for 28 years, and Sade Thomas, a US Marine Corps veteran and graduate student at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Together, we will describe the depth of CUNY's commitment to student-veterans, as well as share some of the challenges we face meeting the unique needs of student-veterans to ensure their success.

CUNY is deeply committed to making our University a first-choice destination for veterans. As the nation's leading public urban university and because of our legacy of providing higher education opportunity for generations of those returning from military service, we believe it is our duty to open our doors wide to today's veterans. In addition, as CUNY seeks to attract New York's top students, it is in our INTEREST to be an attractive option for veterans. Veterans typically offer a profile that is highly desirable by colleges and universities. Most are mature, goal-oriented, mission-driven, experienced leaders who work tirelessly to achieve their objectives and look for ways to make meaningful contributions to their communities. They not only understand the concept of sacrifice for the greater good, THEY'VE LIVED IT! In short, veterans are exactly the kind of students and role models we welcome on our campuses.

CUNY proudly educates more than 3,000 student-veterans – an increase of more than 250 percent over the last eight years. While CUNY student-veterans are, on average, older than the general student population, like prior generations, our veterans are typically young adults -- over half are 20-29 years old. And in ways different from previous veteran cohorts, today's student-veterans reflect new realities of the military engagements in which they have served.

For example, a third (34%) of veterans deployed in Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, and New Dawn were deployed multiple times.

When it comes to college cost, CUNY is by far New York City's most affordable option for veterans. Student-veterans who are eligible for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, at 100 percent, and are residents of New York State, can attend CUNY at no cost. Furthermore, veterans who are not New York State residents are charged the same tuition rate as New York State residents for a period of 18 months from their first date of attendance. Finally, veterans are exempt from the CUNY admission application fee. Indeed, CUNY issues approximately 1,100 Veterans Undergraduate Application Fee Waivers, to veterans from all branches of the armed forces, including Reservists and National Guard members, which equates to almost \$80,000 in waivers per calendar year.

CUNY understands the transition from the military life to higher education, and has put in place a multitude of services to ease this transition. In 2013, CUNY issued the Report of the Council of Presidents Ad Hoc Committee on Strengthening Services to Veterans, "From Soldier to Scholar," to address the needs of student-veterans, to examine our practices, and develop recommendations to improve the experience of student-veterans at CUNY. This report, provided several recommendations that have guided the University to better support veterans - from recruitment and admission, through graduation and transition to employment. This strategic plan positions CUNY well to comply with President Obama's Executive Order and to implement the Principles of Excellence.

Our commitment begins with the proactive recruitment of military veterans. Our CUNY Welcome Center's Veterans Admissions Team is a group of talented admissions counselors who are dedicated to serving veteran applicants. The team responds to veteran inquiries and provides basic information about CUNY's programs and resources, the application process, and the process of using veterans' benefits. Veterans can visit the CUNY Welcome Center to receive assistance in submitting the online application. Then can also send their supporting documents to a member of the Veterans Admissions Team so that application processing can be expedited.

The Veterans Admissions Team sends Campus Veterans Coordinators lists of the veterans who were accepted to that particular college. The Coordinators use the information to proactively reach out to new student-veterans and facilitate their enrollment, including an informed review of veterans' Joint Service Transcripts to grant academic credit for military service.

The Veterans Admissions Team works closely with the CUNY ROTC program to assist with e-permits, information sessions and targeted recruitment. CUNY e-permit is a digital request which allows a student from one CUNY college to take a course at another CUNY college. Because the ROTC program is only offered at two of our Colleges (City College and York College), we help interested students from all other CUNY Colleges register via e-permit for ROTC at the campuses.

Once here, student-veterans have access to services and programming designed to provide a supportive environment and a successful academic experience. Some veterans returning from military service can face emotional, financial, academic, and cultural obstacles to college transition. To meet the unique needs of returning veterans, most of our campuses have full-time veterans services coordinators. These coordinators serve as a one-stop resource for student-veterans.

Most of our campuses have also established dedicated co-curricular space for student-veterans. One of the finest examples of this is the veterans club space at Queens College, which used an \$8,000 grant from the *Student-veterans of America* and the *Home Depot Foundation* to purchase lounge and kitchen furniture, a computer, appliances to create a welcoming space where Queens student-veterans can study, relax, connect with each other, as well as network with other student organizations.

In addition, many CUNY faculty and staff members receive military cultural competence training. Several of our colleges have cross-campus working veterans services teams, comprised of key offices that impact the student-veteran experience, including Academic Advisement, the Certifying Official, Disability Services, the Bursar, Financial Aid, Registrar, and the Counseling Center.

We are also fortunate to have PROJECT FOR RETURN AND OPPORTUNITY IN VETERANS EDUCATION (PROVE), currently on four CUNY campuses. PROVE assists student-veterans in their transition from military life to college/civilian life. Teams of student-veteran mentors, graduate social work interns and social work field instructors work with campus professionals to enrich existing services to veterans.

You will hear more about PROVE from Dr. Roger Sherwood, Associate Professor of Social Work and founder of PROVE, who will be testifying shortly.

Many Soldiers, Marines, Airmen, and Sailors joined the military before their 21st birthday, and for many, it's the only job they've ever held. While this training and experience are invaluable, it is not always intuitively translatable to civilian employment. In addition, many returning veterans face structural barriers to employment causing veterans to struggle in their transition to the civilian workforce. CUNY is committed to helping student-veterans successfully transition to the civilian workforce. Career readiness, internships, and post graduate employment for student-veterans are top priorities for our University. CUNY partners with both the public and private sectors to cultivate opportunities for our student-veterans. We organize student-veteran job fairs. Examples include the very recent CUNY 2016 Academic Awards and Resource Fair which provided many of CUNY's most outstanding student-veteran scholars the opportunity to network with more than 60 leading employers. In addition, we connect our student-veterans to valued organizational partners that, through mentoring programs and career counseling, help prepare student-veterans for the work of world. American Corporate Partners connects veterans to business leaders through mentorship and online career advice. Edge4VETS assists veterans with transitioning their military service into resiliency "tools" for

success. And Four Block assists veterans in bridging the gap from academics to career development.

CUNY faculty is keenly aware of the unique experiences of student-veterans. Recently, Hunter College received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to promote a better understanding of military service and provide support for student-veterans. This grant will fund public events and classroom opportunities for faculty and student-veterans to co-facilitate conversations about the lived experience of military service, and what it can teach us about moral development, ethics, and leadership.

In closing, I am very pleased to announce that, earlier this year, the City University of New York became the first university system in America to be named Military Friendly in recognition of its programs for veterans, members of the armed forces leaving military service, and their military spouses. The designation by Victory Media, the founder of the 13-year-old program, was given to 17 CUNY schools. We are proud of this system-wide "military-friendly" designation as an affirmation of our incremental progress towards cultivating and sustaining a University that truly embraces and empowers its students veterans.

Again, thank you for this opportunity.

**Testimony Presented by Wilfred Cotto, Coordinator of Veterans Services at the
Borough of Manhattan Community College, to Members of the
New York City Council at a Hearing On
“Joint Hearing with the New York City Council Committees on Higher Education
and Veterans”
Council Chambers, City Hall
November 15, 2016, 1 PM**

Good afternoon Chair Ullrich, Chair Baron, Honorable Members of the Veterans Affairs and Higher Education Committees,

My name is Wilfred Cotto. I am a retired Navy Veteran, currently serving as the Coordinator of Veterans Services at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).

Thank you for this opportunity to highlight some of our program efforts in support of our student veteran population.

There are currently 458 student veterans enrolled at BMCC, of which 160 are new students this semester. This accounts for fifteen percent of the University's total student veteran population, and the largest student veteran population amongst all CUNY community colleges.

BMCC has a full-service Veterans Resource Center which is staffed by one full-time Student Life Specialist, two part-time college assistants, two graduate social work interns and fifteen VA Work Study student veterans. There is also a full-time Licensed Clinical Social Worker assigned to the counseling center who specializes in veteran related issues.

The mission of the BMCC Veterans Resource Center is:

(To) Support military veterans, active duty and reserve personnel and their family members during their transition from military life to campus life by fostering a sense of community among student veterans, faculty and campus staff, and by working closely with community partners to ensure a successful transition beyond the college experience.

BMCC complies with guidelines mandated by 1) Executive Order 13607, which established “Principles of Excellence” 2) the VA's Eight Keys to Veterans Success, and 3) recommendations made by the CUNY Council of Presidents' Task Force Report on Veteran Services.

Based on these mandates and recommendations BMCC:

- Designated a single point-of-contact on campus for all veteran related matters;
- Created a veteran specific space where veterans can gather and services can be coordinated (Veterans Resource Center);

- Established a Veteran Support Team throughout the campus made-up of representatives from admissions, academic advisement, registrar, bursar, financial aid, counseling, disability services, career development and health services;
- We assist all prospective student veterans with the application and admissions process;
- We conduct veteran-specific orientation sessions;
- We offer academic advisement unique to the student veteran;
- We ensure that student veterans understand their GI Bill educational entitlements;
- We provide student veterans with financial advice to ensure they understand the total cost of an education program;
- We accommodate service members and reservists when absent due to military service obligations;
- And, we provide peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities through the PROVE program and our VA Work Study peer mentors.

In addition, our Organization for Student Veterans is one of the most active clubs on campus. The organization meets every Wednesday from 2 to 4 PM. Every week there are professional speakers scheduled to come-in to speak and discuss programs and services available to veterans throughout the local community; services such as, employment assistance, housing assistance, health and mental health care and legal assistance, to assist student veterans with that experience beyond campus. The organization sponsors a number of off-campus trips, events and activities throughout the semester, and collaborates with other campus clubs to help foster a sense of community and belonging for all student veterans on campus.

This is the third consecutive year BMCC has been designated as a top Military Friendly college by the Victory Media organization.

With your continued support, I am sure that BMCC will continue serving the needs of student veteran's transition from the military to college for many years to come.

On behalf of all student veterans at BMCC – Thank you!



Wilfred Cotto

**Veterans Services Coordinator/Club Advisor
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STATEMENT OF NOAH ALMONOR

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL VETERANS & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE REGARDING SERVICES FOR VETERANS AT CUNY

November 15, 2016

Chairperson Ulrich, Chairperson Barron, members of the Veterans and Higher Education committee.

My name is Noah Almonor and I'm a recent graduate from LaGuardia Community College. I currently attend City College and still serve in the National Guard.

I'm grateful to have the opportunity to address you all today about my experience at CUNY system as a combat veteran.

I served in Afghanistan from 2012-2013 in Kandahar Province where I saw the horrors of war. On May 7, 2013, I was on patrol on Highway 1 going towards Huta when my truck hit an IED. I lost consciousness for some minutes and was sent to the medic tent at FOB Azizullah. I received a Purple Heart for my injuries that day.

I returned to New York from active duty in January 2015 and decided to enroll in college. I chose LaGuardia Community College because of its Veterans Upward Bound Program. After the Upward Bound program, I enrolled at LaGuardia and had a lot of expectations.

Unfortunately, Mr. Steven Clark and Mr. Daryl Griffin had other intentions in mind. For three semesters, my hopes and expectations at LaGuardia were not met. I was a work-study student at the Veterans Resource Center with the intention of helping other veterans have a smooth transition from service to education and during my time at LaGuardia, I witnessed Mr. Clark lie and harass other veterans, including myself.

When I and other student veterans saw what Mr. Clark and Mr. Griffin were doing, we asked for a meeting with his boss, Vice President Michael Baston. VP Baston refused to meet with us and tried to send us back to Mr. Clark.

As you saw in the package of correspondence between us, LaGuardia and CUNY Central, Mr. Clark harassed and pressed me on my role of signing our "no confidence" letter. He continued to press and harass me. I finally told him why I signed the document and the harassment I witnessed to the Upward Bound Program people but he continued to lie and harass me. I left the office in anger.

I wrote a statement to Vice President Baston, which the President of the Veterans Club sent to him. The Vice President not only did not address my statement, as you saw in the correspondence, stated that he had no way of knowing who wrote the statement, implying that I was lying. I wrote a second e-mail with all my information and again reiterated what happened. I have still not received a response from VP Baston or anyone at LaGuardia regarding Mr. Clark and his harassment.

Mr. Clark has violated Title IX policies again and again and no one at LaGuardia or CUNY, including Mr. Rosa has done anything to rectify the situation.

We had addressed CUNY and Interim Vice Chancellor Rosa but there has been no resolution to the problem. Mr. Rosa's answer is to push it back to LaGuardia, to the very college who did not want to address this from the beginning.

I am disgusted at CUNY for treating veterans like this for this long. I have seen how empty the Veterans office is now and how veterans are leaving the college for its lack of friendliness and responsiveness. CUNY and LaGuardia will take our GI Bill money but then fails to resolve any issues almost as if they are treating us like second class citizens.

This must change and CUNY and must take complaints from any veterans at any college seriously and address in a timely manner. I'm asking both committee's to hold another hearing next semester to follow up on what actions CUNY and LaGuardia has taken to address these issues.

I once again thank you Councilmember Ulrich, Councilmember Barron and the committees for your time. I'm ready to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.



PROVE
PROJECT FOR RETURN
AND OPPORTUNITY IN
VETERANS EDUCATION

TESTIMONY OF LEORA SHUDOFSKY, LMSW
PROVE CO-DIRECTOR, SILBERMAN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL
WORK AT HUNTER COLLEGE, CUNY
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL HIGHER EDUCATION &
VETERANS COMMITTEE

“VETERANS IN THE CUNY SYSTEM”

NOVEMBER 15, 2016

Good afternoon members of the City Council Veterans' Committee and Higher Education Committee. Thank you for inviting me to testify today, my name is Leora Shudofsky. I am a social worker, proud graduate of Queens College and Hunter College School of Social Work (now Silberman) and I am currently the Co-Director of PROVE (Project for Return and Opportunity in Veterans Educations) at Silberman School of Social Work. I have been part of this initiative since 2008.

My Co-Director, Dr. Roger Sherwood, is a Vietnam-era veteran and has worked with the veteran community in New York City for over 30 years. Since 1986, he has been a clinical consultant to the Veterans Administration Hudson Valley Health Care System, Montrose Campus, where he counseled veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In 2007, in response to the record numbers of veterans returning home and enrolling in higher education, an initiative was launched from the CUNY offices of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. As a result of the initiative that year, Dr. Sherwood and University Dean of Enrollment Management, Robert Ptachik, a fellow veteran and long-time veteran advocate, established PROVE, whose mission is to enhance existing services to student veterans on select CUNY campuses and to support them in their transition from military service to college life and beyond. PROVE accomplishes this through an innovative service delivery model, utilizing graduate social work interns and experienced social work field instructors in conjunction with student veteran peer mentors working on host CUNY college campuses to assist student veterans in their transitions, academically, socially, and emotionally (see attached diagram). We are also gratified to add training the next generation of social workers to be culturally competent in serving those who serve to our mission.

PROVE started on two CUNY campuses, Hunter College and John Jay College, with 2 graduate social work interns placed at each and with a placement at the then nascent CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs (COVA) under the supervision of Wilfred Cotto, that offices first Director. PROVE started with a close collaboration with COVA which continues through today.

PROVE over the years has expanded to the CUNY community colleges, including BCC, BMCC, Hostos, LaGuardia and QCC. PROVE has been located at 7 CUNY campuses with a cohort of 14 graduate social work interns serving, on average, 1200+ unique student veterans each academic year since 2012. This year, due to serious financial constraints, we've had to take a step back and pare down to 4 campuses, from seven but our goal is to expand back to 7 campuses next year and we hope to be able to grow beyond those 7 campuses because we know the value of our model matches up with the needs of the student veterans at CUNY especially during this time of a waning of public interest and dollars in the Veterans sphere.

PROVE has been fortunate to have some consistent financial support from CUNY Central and from the individual campuses we serve and we have been able to raise funds from the Robin Hood Foundations (from 2012 through the present) and the Bob Woodruff Foundation (2014 – 2016) to help expand our program and service delivery but our support from Robin Hood will be ending in 2017 and our grant was not renewed from the Woodruff Foundation due to a change in their funding priorities and so we are at a crossroads in terms of where do we go over the next 10 years.

One of the most valuable pieces of our program is utilizing student veteran peer mentors (paid and volunteer) as well as our graduate social work veterans to help student veterans make critical social connections with other veterans on their campuses. Their shared experiences and

rekindling of a type of camaraderie that they may have had in the military and not since then is a powerful tool in helping the transition from military life to college life and beyond.

In shaping the project's service delivery model, PROVE recognized that many veterans hesitate seeking formalized mental health services. Veterans may also be wary of what motivates civilians to offer their help. On the other hand, we have observed that veterans tend to relax in the presence of other veterans, to more readily share their life experiences, and to be inspired to help fellow veterans. As a result, PROVE is co-located in campus student veteran resource centers. Sharing the space gives us a greater chance for success with fostering engagement with the student veterans, as well as for them to find the opportunity to connect socially in the company of their peers.

A trusting relationship builds the platform for PROVE to provide concrete services to student veterans that aid in their educational success—such as helping them navigate their educational benefits or offering academic support such as tutoring. Trust also allows us to offer emotional support and create linkages to other resources, when necessary. We refer student veterans to professionals (both on campus and in the community) with whom we have developed relationships over the years, and can personally recommend, whenever possible.

To that end, part of our work, to “enhance existing services on campus to student veterans”, relies on creating a synergy around the various departments on campus and the professionals who staff them, such as academic advising, counseling, accessibility/disability, registrar, and the Bursar's office. PROVE staff develops relationships with the staff in these offices, and “veteran-knowledgeable” points of contact who help streamline administrative processes to serve the student veterans' needs better and more efficiently.

In a fast-paced academic setting, we find that a strengths-based approach better serves the student veteran who is likely busy or overwhelmed, and can benefit from short-term, practical support such as coping skills development and stress reduction techniques.

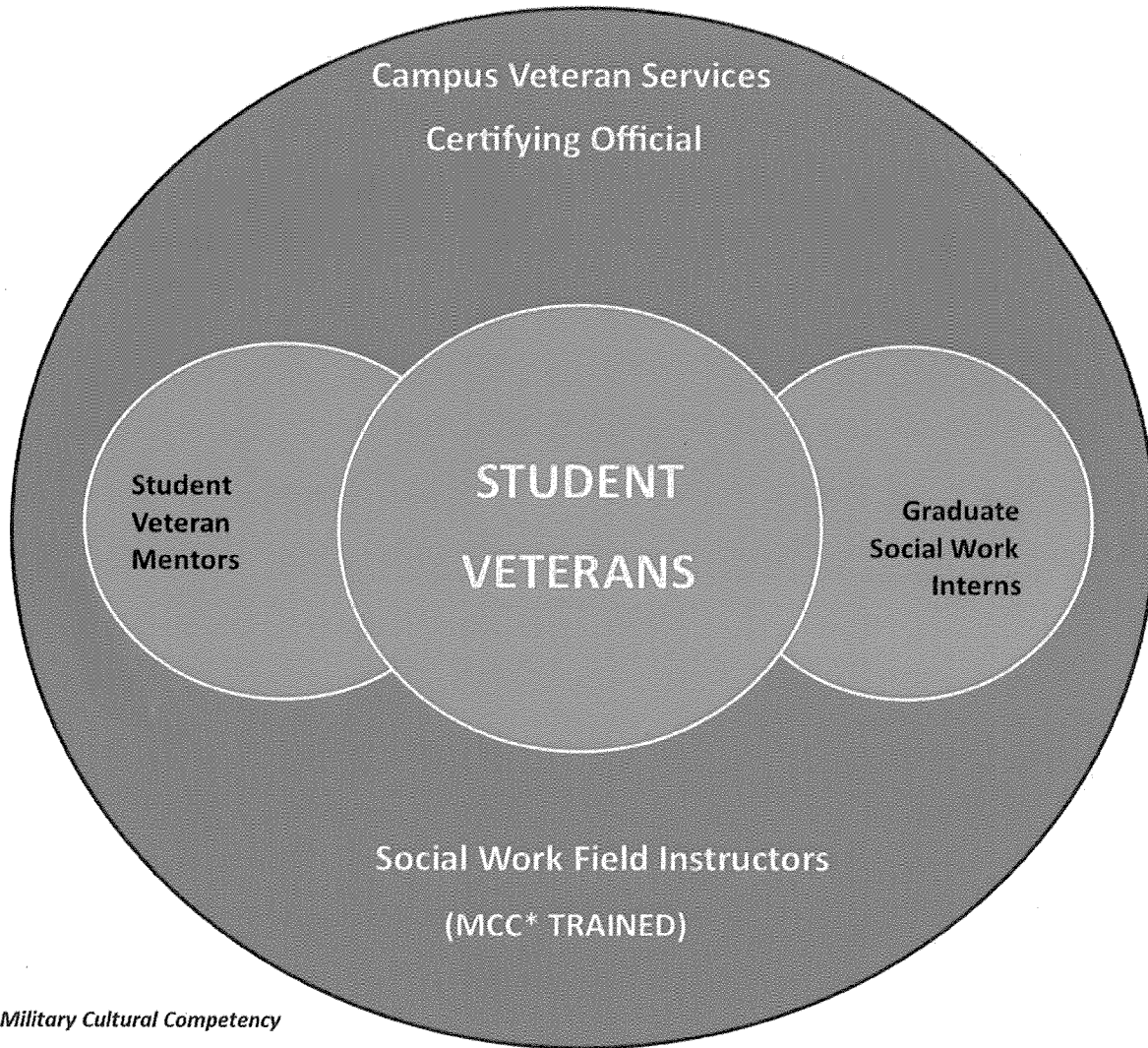
For student veterans with more extensive needs, PROVE ensures its staff is informed and poised to respond. We have mandatory, bi-weekly psycho-educational and military cultural competency trainings for our intern cohort and our social work field instructors.

As both the literature and anecdotal experiences shows, there is a continued stigma around seeking help and services for most veterans. One of the reasons that the PROVE model works is because it meets student veterans where they are, at the campus student veteran resource centers.

Our student veterans have thrived and found purpose in assisting fellow veterans (a foundation of the military culture) and thus have helped themselves in the process. Many of our graduate interns have gone on to work with veterans either in their second year internship and/or after graduation. Twenty percent of our graduate interns since 2007-2008 now work the VA, CUNY and other veteran service organizations.

As I mentioned before, the public interest and funding for organizations working with veterans is on a downward turn. We need to be creative in reshaping the future of veterans services at CUNY for the future. The fact that every CUNY campus has a staff person who is dedicated $\frac{3}{4}$ or fulltime to service student veterans is a tremendous achievement but we cannot rest on that achievement alone and we cannot afford as a community and an institution of higher learning to lessen our focus and our services. In peacetime, CUNY, as did many other academic institutions, allowed its services to veterans shrink to almost nothing because of the drop in identified student veterans on campus. In 2009, CUNY experienced a 233% jump in veteran

enrollment due in large part to the then new Post 9/11 GI Bill but also to the CUNY leadership – specifically COVA and the strong support from veterans within CUNY administration (such as Dean Ptachik). Although student veteran enrollment at CUNY may be at its peak right now (in the Post 9/11 era) we may be seeing a plateau over the next few years but not a diminshment and with this time and experience behind us, we have a better idea of what kind of services, beyond academic, student veterans need to be successful at all educational levels from an associates degree to a doctoral degree. I have been privileged over the last 8+ years to work with veterans who started at one of the CUNY community colleges and have successful completed Masters in Education, Social Work, Business, Nursing and more. I also know that some of these veterans look at their experiences on campus and the communities and resources that they found – that met THEIR needs as a unique population – invaluable in their success. Thank you again for your time.



**MCC = Military Cultural Competency*

**STATEMENT OF JOSEPH A. BELLO
NY METROVETS**

BEFORE

**THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
VETERANS & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

OVERSIGHT: VETERANS IN THE CUNY SYSTEM

CITY HALL

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

November 15, 2016

Chairpersons Ulrich, Barron, members of the Veterans and Higher Education committee.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today regarding services for veterans at CUNY. CUNY is the third-largest university system in the United States and has one of the most diverse student bodies in the United States, with students hailing from 208 countries.

Back in 2009, then Vice Chancellor Garrie Moore testified in front of the City Council that there were more than 1,700 veterans enrolled at CUNY. Today, when you add in those student veterans going to graduate school, there are more than 3,100. This would place CUNY in the top 10 for student veteran enrollment among the country's higher education institutions.

Over the past several years, there have been a number of directives that were designed to help veterans succeed in college. In 2012, President Obama signed an Executive Order 13607 which established principles of excellence for educational institutions serving service members, veterans, spouses and other family members.

This Executive Order called for federal agencies to work together to ensure that educational institutions effectively serve those who have served our nation. This brought together a wide range of stakeholders: government agencies; non-profit organizations, including foundations and veteran service organizations; and, importantly, veterans who had recently completed college degrees in a range of disciplines. From these meetings came the **8 Keys to Veterans Success**:

1. Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.
2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.
3. Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.
4. Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space for them (even if limited in size).
5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.
6. Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention, and degree completion.
7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.
8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans.

Then, in April 2013, a Task Force was convened by then CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein to address the needs of student veterans, examine CUNY's practices and develop recommendations to improve the experience of student veterans. From this came a report entitled "From Soldier to Scholar: Report of the Council of Presidents Ad Hoc Committee on Strengthening Services to Veterans."

In this report, the Task Force acknowledged that CUNY was uniquely positioned to offer returning veterans an opportunity to enroll in higher education and stated that the "number of veterans and military personnel applying to CUNY and studying at CUNY are predicted to grow

larger as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan draw down.” After reviewing current practices and best practices nationally, the **Task Force decided to focus its efforts on five areas:**

1. How the University can adopt best practices to create a welcoming and supportive environment for student veterans.
2. How the University should respond to decisions by the Veterans Administration regarding coverage of state tuition.
3. How the University defines and counts veterans.
4. How the University grants transfer credits for military experience.
5. How the University can engage with the corporate sector to identify career opportunities for student veterans after they graduate.

So what has happened in the three years since that report? As I often like to say, CUNY Central is like a kingdom. The Chancellor (the king) sends directives (polices) to the Princes and Princesses (Presidents) of his kingdom. These fiefdoms (Colleges) received said directives, acknowledge them and then look into the gray areas of them depending on how supportive of the directives they actually are.

One of the fundamental problems with instituting policy is you need personnel to carry it out. While the number of veterans attending CUNY has increased, the number of staff at CUNY’s Central office for veterans has decreased to one. This is unacceptable and hinders CUNY Central’s ability to “look in” on campuses to make sure they are carrying out their policies.

Because of this lack of personnel and enforcement, CUNY Colleges are a hog-podge of services for veterans, with some campuses doing well and others having the bare minimum – all based on each President’s regard towards veterans. For example, Mr. Cotto, the former University Director took his intuitional knowledge regarding CUNY and the Veterans model, went to BMCC, where, with a supportive administration, was able to create a campus that is thriving with over 400 veterans, whereas Baruch College, with a not so supportive administration, doesn’t even have a Coordinator/Director, a first item listed in CUNY’s Task Force Report.

As a result, there’s a disconnect between CUNY Central and the President’s of its campuses and it becomes difficult for the Central office to talk about all they are doing for veterans while veterans on the campuses are saying that they are not getting the support, services and resources they need to thrive and succeed. Without the personnel or the will to make sure those policies are carried out, to the veterans it is nothing more than talk.

Lastly, in regards to CUNY, I recognized that Interim Vice Chancellor Rosa has been in the VC position for only a few months now and is trying to get up to speed. I’ve known him for over a decade and I believe he wants to do the right thing.

However, he must understand that we are approaching critical mass and the more the word gets out about what CUNY is not doing, the more veterans will be inclined not to attend. The more veterans struggle on the campuses, who say they support but offer no resources, the higher there attrition rate will be and the more veterans will move towards those campuses that do.

I therefore urge CUNY Central to put additional resources into its office, hire personnel and start engaging the Colleges/President's as to why they are not carrying out the Task Force recommendations. If they cannot do this, I would recommend the State Legislature and the City Council hold up any monies it gives them for veteran services and we have a conversation with its Board of Trustees.

In regards to what has/is happening at LaGuardia, in full disclosure I worked at the LaGuardia Veterans Office for over 15 years under then director Samuel E. Farrell, II. I left in 2013 but continue to help the Veterans Upward Bound program where my wife (a Navy veteran herself) is the current director.

I personally believe Mr. Clark has had issues dealing with the student-veterans from the moment he started at LaGuardia. One minute, he could be cordial and in another he would be staring at you making you feel uncomfortable. In another he could be shaking your hand, and the next minute lying to your face. I have witnessed Mr. Clark and Mr. Griffin intimidate student veterans in the office. I've even had Mr. Clark confront me and give me an expletive when the student veterans suspected correctly that Mr. Griffin was spying on them.

As the situation started to get worse, and the student veterans started reaching out to the NYC Veterans Advisory Board, I became concerned regarding my role helping my wife with her program and the constant rumor I was hearing that this was nothing more than a power struggle between myself, my wife and Mr. Clark.

I sent a letter to VP Baston in June regarding this, which is attached to my testimony. However, the rumor did not stop and at an office meeting a few months ago, my wife came home upset stating that Mr. Clark had Mr. Griffin say that she was the mastermind behind all of his troubles with the students.

Needless to say, Mr. Clark has done so much damage that he and Mr. Griffin have almost destroyed in 3 semesters what Mr. Farrell worked for over 40 years to build at LaGuardia. However, I find myself deeply disappointed with President Mellow and Vice President Baston. I have met and worked with both of them over the years and they are honorable people. However, they could have defused this situation at any time the students were trying to engage them over the course of three semesters but for whatever reasons, choose not to.

Therefore, from the outside, this situation speaks of something more. Of anger, of pride going before the fall, of supporting an individual with no regards towards others in the office, their rights and the rights of the student veterans, who pay CUNY tuition. Sadly, LaGuardia now has a civilian-veteran divide problem and as a result, while CUNY's overall veteran numbers have increased, the Veteran numbers at LaGuardia have decreased.

If this situation is not resolved soon, the way the veteran's community works, LaGuardia will have few veterans left. The administration seemed to not understand the military ethos, about

looking out for ones brothers and sisters and they seems not to understand that they are dealing with adults, many in their early 30's and some with families.

As to what the student veterans will testify, as an advocate, I am concerned about what will happen if, because of these confrontations, one of these veterans, with a mental health issue commits suicide? Or assaults Mr. Clark or Mr. Griffin? Who will be liable/responsible for that? Think about that. Sometimes, like they say in Star Trek, the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one.

Thank you Councilmembers for your time. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Note: The VAB asked the Commissioner to investigate what is happening regarding Mr. Clark and the students at LaGuardia. However, in the Chancellor's letter to the NYC VAB he does not talk about any action (disciplinary or otherwise) regarding Mr. Clark or Mr. Griffin but instead told the board what LaGuardia is doing for veterans. Those are two different things. This was one of the reasons why we asked Commissioner Sutton to continue her investigation, which she is scheduled to deliver at our November 30, 2016 meeting.



Joe Bello <jbellovabnyc@gmail.com>

Military Veterans Situation at LaGuardia

Joe Bello <jbellovabnyc@gmail.com>

Fri, Jun 3, 2016 at 2:00 AM

To: mbaston@lagcc.cuny.edu

Cc: THaskinsVABNYC@gmail.com, JRowanVABNYC@gmail.com, gmellow@lagcc.cuny.edu, arcariop@lagcc.cuny.edu, "Lisa.Beatha@CUNY.edu" <Lisa.Beatha@cuny.edu>

Bcc: jmendoza@lagcc.cuny.edu, jrowan6990@hotmail.com, esrosario@lagcc.cuny.edu, bjoe7@hotmail.com

Mr. Michael A. Baston
Vice President
Division of Student Affairs
LaGuardia Community College

Vice President Baston:

As a member of the New York City Veterans Advisory Board (VAB), I'm writing to make you aware that yesterday the members of the board received an e-mail with an attached letter of "no confidence" from the student veterans leadership at LaGuardia Community College regarding Mr. Steven Clark, who works within your division.

When the board started receiving e-mails from the student veterans several weeks ago, I shared my history and role at LaGuardia (within the Veterans Office, on the Adult and Continuing Education side) with the board's chair, Mr. Todd Haskins. As you may be aware, I worked at LaGuardia for a number of years in ACE under Sam Farrell, who ran the Veterans Office and the Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) program.

In response to the prior e-mails we received and as the board's secretary, I was tasked with sending correspondence to Ms. Lisa Beatha, CUNY's University Director of Veterans Affairs on behalf of the board. The chair wanted to ascertain what has been going on and what action(s) CUNY's Central Office is taking to address this situation and how we could possibly work together to bring about a resolution.

During this time, I have had no conversations or communication with Mr. Clark regarding this matter; and any correspondence between the board and Ms. Beatha has been internal and addressed to the chair. However, as this situation has continued and the tension in the office grown, I have become increasingly uneasy regarding both my role as secretary to the board and my role at LaGuardia.

However, while I have carried out my responsibilities as the board secretary professionally regarding this matter, I have also become concerned that with this seemingly escalating situation, a negative narrative regarding my role could possibly be put forth. Therefore, after having read the student veterans "no confidence" letter regarding Mr. Clark, I wanted to reach out to make you aware of what has been happening and to let you know that after consideration, I will be recusing myself as a board member from this matter.

I will be asking the chair, along with the Queens board representative, Mr. John Rowan, who is also the National President of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) (both of whom are cc'd in this e-mail) to address any future conversations and/or e-mail correspondence between the board and CUNY, LaGuardia, the student-veterans or any other parties.

If you wish to discuss further, please let me know and I will make myself available to you. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

STATEMENT OF YONEIDY REYES

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL VETERANS & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

REGARDING SERVICES FOR VETERANS AT CUNY

November 15, 2016

Chairperson Ulrich, Chairperson Barron, members of the Veterans and Higher Education committee.

Good afternoon, my name is Yoneidy Reyes and I'm a veteran currently attending Baruch College. Today, I stand here before you like every other veteran in this room who wishes to address the adversity they are facing within their perspective schools. It is disheartening to see that our CUNY schools have failed us. They have failed to help with our transition by not giving us the proper guidance, inspiration, and tools to help us succeed.

Coming into Baruch, I was informed that veterans get preference in seeing an academic advisor. When I tried to utilize this service, I was only seen for five minutes, and I came out of there just as clueless as I went in. There after, I visited the academic advisor department several times and was unsuccessfully able to get the proper guidance I needed due to unresponsiveness or the over flowing of students in the office who are also waiting to be seen. Between e-mailing an advisor and trying to set up an appointment with the department, I quickly realized it was futile because they do not set appointments up and the advisors were not receptive to emails.

Now, this may seem as an insignificant issue, but I can assure you that it's quite the contrary. Academic advisement is like what the sun is to a plant, it provides direction and growth. Good advising can provide students opportunities to interact with a professional adviser, feel more connected to their institution, clarify course selection, and serve as an educational check-up. Furthermore, it can also help students complete their degree requirements in an efficient manner. The adviser can clarify degree requirements and make recommendations regarding specific classes. Academic advising plays a vital role in a student's success at school.

Most importantly thought, like all colleges at CUNY, we do not have a Veterans Coordinator at Baruch. We need a veteran's coordinator who is committed to recruiting, enrolling and retaining student veterans. We need a Coordinator who understands what we go through and who can work in collaboration with the various offices on campus, including student affairs, admissions, disability services, financial aid, register, and others to assist us in becoming acclimated to college life while obtaining not only our educational benefits but other available resources in New York City. This is the biggest failure at Baruch and as students; it isn't our job to do admin work.

Lastly, before I conclude my speech I also wanted to mention an important issue we also face at Baruch. As a student veteran who is also part of the Student Veteran Association Club, we are

receiving absolutely zero help setting up events or even getting the word out on the campus to attract more student-veterans. Currently, we are doing all the work by ourselves and we are the ones who are growing the space.

Thank you for hearing me today. I hope CUNY is listening as well.

STATEMENT OF TRENT COYLE

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL VETERANS & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

REGARDING SERVICES FOR VETERANS AT CUNY

November 15, 2016

Chairperson Ulrich, Chairperson Barron, members of the Veterans and Higher Education committee. Good afternoon. My name is Trent Coyle. I am a US Army veteran. I serve as the Executive Vice President of the Baruch Student Veterans Association.

I stand before you today to address two of the major issues that plague our organization as we attempt to perform our duties of serving the Baruch student veteran community. Most pressing is our need for a Veterans Coordinator, an asset that we have been in dire need of for some time. Second, and perhaps most distressing, is the rapidly decaying relationship between the Student Veterans themselves and much of Baruch staff and faculty.

Due to a lack of a dedicated coordinator for the Baruch SVA, we have become increasingly overwhelmed with directing our veterans to the proper resources available to them, fulfilling our duties as elected officers, and performing our requirements as students. At no point should those who have volunteered to continue serving the veteran community have to regularly decide whether to complete our daily academic responsibilities or assisting student veterans.

A dedicated veterans coordinator, an essential asset that President Wallerstein himself was made aware of in 2013, would eliminate this problem; yet despite our overtures, and the fact that we are the only CUNY school without such a position in place, he has continued to deny us this, or even meet with us to discuss this issue. This is absolutely unacceptable.

Lastly, the partnership between the veteran community within Baruch and the staff of Baruch College itself, to include including the Office of Student Life, Center for Academic Advisement, Dean of Students Office, the Vice President of Student Affairs Office and President Wallerstein's Office, has been increasingly tarnished.

Despite their rhetoric, very little has been done to provide the promised services to student veterans, and they have in fact become an active roadblock for us to accomplish this. It has become increasingly clear that we are being exploited in the intent of establishing Baruch as a veteran-friendly organization.

I ask for your collaboration in rectifying these pressing issues. Undoubtedly, with your cooperation, we can better uphold our sacred responsibility of caring for veterans that have already sacrificed so much for their community. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MELISSA SIEW

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL VETERANS & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

REGARDING SERVICES FOR VETERANS AT CUNY

November 15, 2016

Chairperson Ulrich, Chairperson Barron, members of the Veterans and Higher Education committee.

Good Afternoon, my name is Melissa Siew. I served in the United States Marine Corps from 2009 to 2015. I deployed twice and received multiple decorations for operations in Helmand Province in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

However, upon coming home I was diagnosed with PTSD, severe anxiety, and memory loss due to traumatic brain injury. I graduated from Bronx Community College (CUNY) in 2015 and am now attending Baruch College (CUNY) where I currently serve as President of the Student Veterans Association.

I am here today with my fellow student Veterans to address some of the issues we are currently having at Baruch. First and foremost, we do not have a Veterans Coordinator. Currently, every College within CUNY has either a Coordinator or a Director for Veterans Services except us. This is unacceptable.

We find ourselves overwhelmed with the responsibilities of ensuring that our veterans are provided with specific resources ranging from housing placement/dorms, professional career services, financial support, academic advisement and coordination amongst the various departments at Baruch College.

Back in April of 2013, the President of Baruch College, Mitchel Wallerstein was part of a Blue Ribbon Panel put together by then CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein regarding Best Practices for Campus Services for Student Veterans. One recommendation outlined is every campus should have a single point of contact, identified as the Veterans Coordinator.

As stated in the report, this individual should be highly knowledgeable about the broad spectrum of veteran topics, would maintain relationships with each administrative office on campus and foster continuity and a collective knowledge base of issues affecting veterans.

To date, the Vice President of Student Affairs has dismissed our requests for a Veterans Coordinator despite our proposals for funding. Furthermore, President Wallerstein has not agreed to a meeting with our student veterans to discuss our concerns about having a Veterans Coordinator.

Our next issue is the lack of space for veterans at the College. Student Veteran participation on campus has increased by 6x times since January 2016. The Veterans Resource Center is really only a lounge that is so small that only 10 people can fit comfortably.

We have constantly asked for a bigger space and have been told by the administration that they have nothing. As CUNY's blue ribbon report noted, the unique nature of the military experience, and the strong need for peer support means that veteran-specific spaces are important for a student veteran's success.

And because we don't have a bigger space, we have no location for Baruch to create a place for centralized services for veterans (Coordinator, certifying official and student veterans).

Lastly, Baruch College Campus Services, including the Office of Student Life, Center for Academic Advisement, Dean of Students Office, the Vice President of Student Affairs Office and President Wallerstein's Office does not provide supportive services for veterans.

Student Veteran participation at Baruch College is increasing at such a rapid pace that maintaining the appropriate resources for our student veterans has become increasingly difficult, which is negatively impacting the mental and physical health of the club leadership and ultimately becoming a hindrance on our academic performance.

Therefore, due to the lack of support for student veterans, Baruch College cannot state it is "Military Friendly." In the last 5 days leading up to this hearing, the school has suddenly utilized social media showing support for student veterans, showing the CUNY Chancellor honoring our veterans by making cards for us, showing a slideshow in honor of Veterans Day by utilizing pictures off our Facebook pages.

All this to claim they support us. This is unacceptable! We all want to succeed but Baruch needs to be a partner and more supportive. Right now, that's not happening!

I would like thank you all for your time and I'm ready to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

STUDENT VETERANS ASSOCIATION

**Reference Material's for
New York City Council on
Veterans and Committee on
Higher Education**

CITY COUNCIL HEARING NOVEMBER 15, 2016 1PM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURE ARTICLE.....PAGE 2-9
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: 8 KEY'S TO VETERAN SUCCESS PAGE 10
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....PAGE 11
FROM SOLDIER TO SCHOLAR PROGRAM SEPARATE DOCUMENT

Veterans and College

State and Community Roles in Supporting College Completion for Veterans

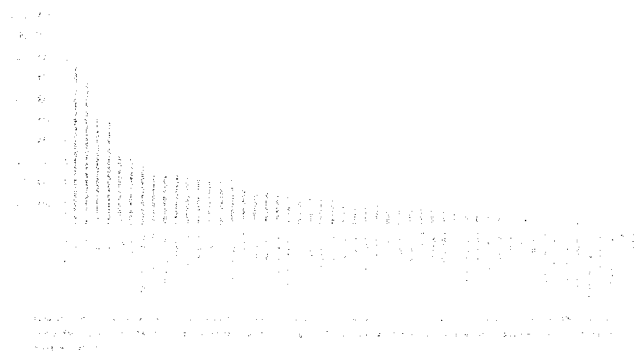
More than one million military veterans and their families are taking advantage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill to attend college. Passed in 2008, the updated federal veterans education law pays in-state tuition rates and fees to the institution attended by the veteran or dependent spouse or children and provides the student with a monthly stipend to pay for books, supplies and housing. The federal law has encouraged thousands of veterans to pursue higher education, and more are enrolled in postsecondary education than ever before.

But veterans still face challenges on campuses across the country. These challenges can range from a lack of camaraderie and understanding among other students and faculty, difficulty obtaining credit for military training and experiences, concerns about targeted recruiting by for-profit institutions, or state residency requirements. These obstacles can prevent veterans from returning to school or make it more difficult for them to finish their degree. Increasingly, however, policymakers and campuses are addressing these challenges to make the transition to campus life easier for returning veterans. For example, states are offering immediate access to in-state tuition rates and supporting programs to make veterans feel part of the campus community.

The Veteran Student Body

Between 2000 and 2012, more than 900,000 veterans and military service members received education benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (1). The largest influx of beneficiaries occurred between 2009 and 2010, when there was a 42 percent increase, due in part to the new Post 9/11 GI Bill taking effect. Although every state has veterans attending higher education institutions, 80 percent of the beneficiaries reside in just 23 states. Veteran undergraduates make up roughly 4 percent of the national student body, and although a relatively small percentage, the number is expected to increase as more service members return home from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Education Program Beneficiaries by Geography, FY 2012



(NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES, 2016)

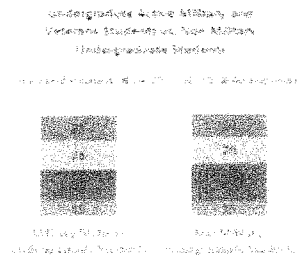
The majority of veterans on college campuses are "non-traditional" students. They are not entering straight from high school and are not dependent on their parents. Veterans are typically older than other students and have families. They will often attend multiple institutions while earning a degree, be enrolled part-time, or have mixed enrollment (i.e., fluctuate between full- and part-time enrollment). Roughly 85 percent of veterans and active duty service members enrolled in undergraduate programs are 24 years of age or older.¹³ Nearly half of veteran students have families, either a spouse (47 percent) and/or children (47 percent).¹⁴ Despite only making up 10 percent to 12 percent of military personnel, women make up 27 percent of veterans enrolled in post-secondary education.

Percentage Age Distribution of

www.ncsl.org/research/education/veterans-and-college.aspx#1

2016

Veterans and College



Sixty-two percent of veterans and military service members are the first in their family to attend college, compared to 46 percent of non-military students according to a survey by the American Council on Education (ACE). The types of institutions student veterans choose to attend do not differ greatly from that of traditional students. Two-year colleges have the greatest percentage of both student populations. But a greater percentage of veteran students enroll in bachelor degree programs compared to non-military students. And veteran students are more likely to enroll in distance learning courses, which are especially appealing to active duty service members who may have to report to duty at any time in the middle of a course.

(NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES, 2016)

Reimagining the Role of Higher Education
for the 21st Century
The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
November 2016



State Actions to Address Veteran Challenges

In-State Tuition

Although the Post 9-11 GI Bill has offered a strong incentive for returning veterans to attend college and gain degrees and credentials, veterans still face challenges. Life in the military can entail relocating often, moving from one state to another. These frequent moves make it harder for military service members and veterans to establish residency in one state and be eligible for in-state tuition rates at public institutions. Realizing the hardship on veterans, at least 32 states and college systems—Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming—have policies allowing veterans to waive the residency requirement and receive in-state tuition immediately upon enrollment.

The Post 9-11 GI Bill pays for in-state tuition and does not cover the difference for out-of-state tuition, which can be more than \$13,310 a year. Some veterans however, may be eligible for additional funds through the Yellow Ribbon program, which grants extra money to cover the difference between in- and out-of-state tuition, but not every veteran is eligible. The residency rule means the student must pay out-of-state tuition or wait to establish residency before they qualify for resident tuition rates. This could mean the difference between a veteran attending college or not, or cause her to take out additional loans to cover the difference.

Examples of legislation

Oregon: HB 2009 (2015)—The bill directs the state's public universities and community colleges to charge resident tuition rates and fees for veterans who are nonresidents. The student must provide proof of physical presence in the state within 12 months of enrolling in the institution.

Alabama: HB 409 (2015)—The bill allows veterans and their dependent spouse or child in-state tuition upon enrollment

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/veterans-and-college.aspx#1>

14/2016

Veterans and College

at a public university, it also provides residency status for veterans living within 50 miles of an Alabama institution who live out of state.

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at a public university. It also provides residency status for veterans living within 40 miles of an Alabama institution who live out of state.

Idaho: [S 1367 \(2014\)](#) and [H 334 \(2014\)](#)—The bills waive the 12-month residency requirement for veterans and their dependents at state institutions, provided they receive at least 50 percent support from the qualified veteran who has domicile in the state. The second bill extends the earlier provision to allow a qualified dependent to retain resident status if after enrolled the parent or guardian is transferred out of state on military orders.

Texas: [S 337 \(2009\)](#)—The bill waives the 12-month residency requirement for veterans and veterans' dependent spouse or children. It requires the veteran to submit a letter of intent to establish residence in the state of Texas.

Realizing that relocating is also tough on military children, 46 states have passed legislation to join the *Interstate Compact on Educational Cooperation for Military Children*, which eases transitions between public schools in different states by allowing children to quickly enroll in a new school, be placed in appropriate classes, and receive credit for courses to ensure on-time graduation.

Academic Credit for Military Experience

Veterans receive intensive training and experience while in the military and increasingly policymakers are encouraging institutions to allow veterans to apply those hours of experience and training towards degrees and credentials. Prior Learning Assessments, or PLA, can grant college credit for competencies and knowledge veterans acquire while serving in the military, which can reduce the time and cost of obtaining a degree or credential. The *Journal for Adult and Supplemental Learning (CAEL)* has found that a student with PLA credits is two and a half times more likely to graduate than a student who doesn't have PLA credits.¹⁴

The American Council on Education (ACE) has helped institutions reward veterans for their previous training and experience by compiling easily accessed recommendations and a career guide for every sector of the military. Currently, 28 states—Alabama, Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming—have passed legislation to recognize the skills and learning veterans acquired by counting it towards college credit.

Some states require the board of regents for every institution to adopt policies for applying military training or service towards academic credit, while other states require commissions or boards, such as the state's higher education commission or board of education, to set guidelines for institutions to adopt.

Examples of legislation

Alaska: [AS 366 \(2013\)](#)—Directs each board of a state public educational institution, community college or technical school to adopt a policy requiring institutions to award academic credits to veterans enrolled for courses as part of military training or service that meet the standards of the American Council on Education.

Missouri: [SB 106 \(2013\)](#)—Requires every public institution of postsecondary education in the state to award educational credits to a student who is also a veteran, for courses that are part of the student's military training or service. The bill also provides for health-related professional licensing and provides for renewal of licensing without dues or fees.

Minnesota: [HF 3684 \(2006\)](#)—Requires state colleges and universities to recognize courses and award educational credit for courses that were part of a veteran's military training or service if the courses meet the standards of the American Council on Education or equivalent standards for awarding academic credit.

Texas: [SB 1324 \(2011\)](#)—Establishes the College Credit for Heroes program to maximize academic and workforce education credits to veterans and military service members for military experience, education and training obtained during military service in order to expedite the entry of veterans and military service members into the workforce.

(NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES, 2016)

Texas: HB 1000 (2011) —Establishes the College Credit for Heroes program to maximize academic and workforce education credits to veterans and military service members for military experience, education and training obtained during military service in order to expedite the entry of veterans and military service members into the workforce.

Campus Services for Veterans

Transitioning from military life to campus life can be difficult for many veterans. They can find it challenging to readjust while balancing other responsibilities, coping with military-related injuries, or finding peers on campus.

States can help by providing services specifically for veterans on campuses, such as tailored orientation, resource centers and mentors and faculty who are sensitive to military culture. By taking steps to ease the transition for veteran students, both the student and the institution can benefit.

Examples of legislation

Arizona: HB 1000 (2011) —In order to be classified as a campus supportive of veterans on the state's higher education website, the institution must perform a campus survey of student veterans to identify their needs, issues and suggestions; create a campus steering committee on veteran students; offer sensitivity and awareness training on military and veterans' culture; provide peer mentoring and support for veteran students; and have a one-stop resource and study center on campus for student veterans, their families, and student family members of the armed forces who are currently deployed.

Oregon: HB 1000 (2011) —Creates the Campus Veterans' Service Officers Program, which directs the Department of Veterans' Affairs to appoint a sufficient number of veterans' service officers to ensure the provision of veterans' services at every community college and every institution in the State University System.

New Jersey: SB 1150 (2013) —Establishes the Troops to College Program in the Commission of Higher Education to assist the state's public higher education institutions in coordinating a comprehensive array of services to assist veterans in making the transition into the college classroom. This is to include assistance in applying for student financial aid; counseling resources; a campus veterans' assistance officer to provide information on the institution's benefits and programs for veterans.

Veterans at For-Profit Colleges

For-profit colleges have seen an enrollment increase of more than 200 percent over the last two decades, making it the fastest-growing sector in postsecondary education. Many students, including veterans, find for-profits appealing due to their flexible schedules, year-round enrollments, small class sizes and convenient locations. Another strong draw for-profit universities have is their ability to respond quickly to labor market needs by creating certificate or degree programs in growing fields such as computer science, business and health care. All of this can be especially attractive to the nontraditional student who may have home and work responsibilities and is seeking a credential that can better help them thrive in the labor market.

The rapid increase of enrollment numbers at for-profit institutions, however, has drawn attention and criticism from lawmakers in Washington, D.C., and in the states. Between 2010 and 2012, the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee, chaired by Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), conducted an in-depth review of for-profit colleges to better understand their growing enrollment numbers. One of the areas of the investigation was on how much federal student aid and Post 9/11 GI Bill funds were being directed to these schools and what the funds were being used

(NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES, 2016)

tor. Although the percentage of veteran students who enroll at for-profit institutions is the same or smaller than the percentage of non-military students who enroll at for-profits, eight of the top 10 recipients of Post-9/11 GI Bill funds are for-profit education companies.¹⁰ This discrepancy is due in part because for-profit institutions average higher tuition rates than in-state rates at public institutions. The HELP committee report also addressed concerns regarding some for-profit colleges' targeted recruiting practices of veteran students and the high student loan default.

Despite the criticism, for-profit institutions serve an important role in the post-secondary sector. According to a study from the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, compared to community colleges, for-profit colleges have greater success in retaining students from their first year to their second year and in attaining short-term degrees or certificates.¹¹ Additionally, they educate a larger percentage of adult, minority and underserved students.

Overall, the committee's high-profile hearings on for-profit colleges have illuminated the need for better student awareness, accountability and state oversight. Over the last couple years, state policymakers have sought ways to maintain accountability for for-profit colleges in their states. California, Maryland, Connecticut and Michigan have all enacted legislation to help support student success while protecting student and taxpayer investments.

Examples of legislation

California: SB 70 (2011) —Determines the eligibility for the state's Cal Grant financial aid program based on student loan default rates at each school. The bill also requires every postsecondary institution in the state to report annually on enrollment, persistence and graduation for all students.

Kentucky: RB 208 (2012)—Discontinues the previous Board of Proprietary Education and creates a new agency, the Kentucky Commission on Proprietary Education, which is not majority controlled by for-profit industry officials. The commission has authority over the student complaint process.

www.ncsl.org/research/education/veterans-and-college.aspx

2016

Veterans and College

Maryland: SB 665 (2011) —Prohibits deceptive recruiting practices, including banning incentives or bonuses for recruiters. It also created a student protection fund, financed by for-profit colleges.

Veteran Opportunities

Despite the challenges veterans have in transitioning from military life to campus life, some studies have found they are doing well once enrolled, perhaps even better than the traditional student. According to a study by the Pat Tillman Foundation—*Got Your 6—* and *Operation College Promise*, veteran students average 24.5 credits per year, which indicates they are on the trajectory to graduate in five years, or four years with transfer credits from prior learning or military experience. The study says that the average veteran student enters a postsecondary institution with 25 transfer credits, making them sophomores immediately upon entering.¹² The same study says that the persistence rate, the rate at which students return between their first and second year of college, is much higher than previously thought among veteran students. The study goes on to say that the high persistence rate could be due to the increased focus of state governments, higher education institutes and community partners who are working at easing the transition for veterans.

In addition to the focus policymakers and organizations have on easing the transition from military to school, some are also looking at easing the transition into careers. More professions are realizing how valuable veterans can be given their

(NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES, 2016)

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- [viii] United States Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Educator Program Benchmarking (Washington, DC, 2014).
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8 Keys to Veterans' Success Sites

The '8 Keys to Veterans' Success' are steps that postsecondary institutions can take to assist Veterans and Service members in transitioning to higher education, completing their college programs, and obtaining career-ready skills.

Postsecondary institutions listed on this site have voluntarily affirmed their support for the 8 Keys. However, a listing here is not a representation or assurance by the U.S. Department of Education that an institution has implemented the 8 Keys or how well it has implemented them, and it does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of these institutions or their policies or programs.

To help you determine whether a school meets your needs or interests, we recommend that you seek out additional information from the school or schools you are considering. You may also wish to seek additional information from current or former students, and other sources.

About the 8 Keys

- A voluntary initiative through the Departments of Education, Veterans Affairs, and Defense
- Highlights specific ways that colleges and universities can support veterans

The 8 Keys

1. Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.
2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.
3. Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.
4. Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space for them (even if limited in size).
5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.
6. Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention, and degree completion.
7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.
8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans.

Recent additions:

- New York University, New York, NY
- Penn State Shenango, Sharon, PA
- Vantage College
 - Vantage College, Austin, TX
 - Vantage College, El Paso East, El Paso, TX
 - Vantage College, El Paso Central, El Paso, TX
 - Vantage College, San Antonio North, San Antonio, TX
 - Vantage College, San Antonio South, San Antonio, TX

(UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2016)

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FURTHER SOLIDIFIES WHAT SHOULD DONE TO SUPPORT STUDENT VETERANS.

FROM SOLDIER TO SCHOLAR:

**REPORT OF THE
COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS AD HOC COMMITTEE
ON STRENGTHENING SERVICES
TO VETERANS**

APRIL 8, 2013



From Soldier to Scholar:
Report of the Council of Presidents Ad Hoc Committee
on Strengthening Services to Veterans

Introduction

The United States of America has been at war for the past decade, conducting Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq, and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) in Afghanistan. Nearly 2.4 million veterans have served in these two wars. Because the country has ended its military combat presence in Iraq, and is in the process of winding down the war in Afghanistan, large numbers of veterans have recently returned home, and many more will be returning home in the coming year. In light of these unprecedented events, the country faces a complex and compelling challenge: how best to reintegrate significant numbers of veterans who have served their country and are now expected to transition to civilian life.

This reality presents important opportunities to the City University of New York (CUNY) which has historically played a critical role in facilitating similar transitions for previous generations of returning soldiers. To understand the dimensions of this opportunity, and to ensure that CUNY is providing a supportive and welcoming environment for this generation of returning veterans, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein convened a Task Force on Veterans Affairs (formally called the Council of Presidents Ad Hoc Committee on Strengthening Services to Veterans) to assess the dimensions of the veteran population at CUNY, review policies designed to facilitate their transition from the military to an educational environment, and make recommendations to ensure that the University plays a constructive role in meeting this unique national challenge.

Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are in many ways quite similar to other generations who have fought on behalf of the nation. As in previous eras of military conflict, our veterans are typically young adults -- over half (54%) are 20-29 years old. Yet, in ways different from previous veteran cohorts, these individuals reflect new realities of the military engagements in which they have served. For example, about a third (34%) of OEF/OIF/OND veterans were deployed multiple times (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). Veterans returning from military service also face a host of emotional, financial, academic, and cultural obstacles. A recent study by the NY State Health Foundation (2011) found that 22% of New York state veterans have a probable mental health diagnosis based on symptoms reported over the past 30 days (depression or PTSD). The same study found that veterans have significantly worse physical functioning scores than similar individuals in the general population. A report issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) found that the unemployment rate for male Gulf War era veterans aged 18-24 was 29.1%, significantly higher than that of young male non-veterans at 17.6%.

For purposes of this report, one of the most important characteristics of veterans is their educational profile. As of 2010, only 26% of veterans age 25 or older had a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). In the belief that higher education would be an appropriate benefit

in recognition of their service and to facilitate their upward mobility, Congress enacted the Post 9/11 GI Bill which provides improved veteran education benefits packages. As a result of this historic legislation, in part because of the substantial flow of returning veterans, colleges have nearly doubled their enrollment of student veterans since the Post 9/11 GI Bill was enacted in 2008 (ACE, 2011). More than 760,000 veterans have already enrolled in college under the Post 9/11 GI Bill (ACE, 2011), and these numbers are expected to climb. In unprecedented numbers, returning veterans as well as active military personnel are choosing to enroll in college to improve their skills, enhance their job prospects, and ease their transition from military to civilian life.

Recent articles (Wood, 2012; Boodman, 2011), however, have suggested that these student veterans are facing significant challenges in their college experiences. Rudd, Goulding, & Brian (2011) found in a national sample of student veterans that almost 35% of the sample experienced “severe anxiety,” 24% experienced “severe depression,” and almost 46% experienced significant symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. It is therefore paramount that colleges meet the needs of veterans in an organized and systemic way to ensure their smooth transition out of the military and into the classroom, and thereby support their ultimate graduation from college into the workforce.

CUNY is uniquely positioned to offer returning veterans an opportunity to enroll in higher education. As one of the nation’s largest public university systems, CUNY provides an excellent educational opportunity at an affordable price. Student veterans who are eligible for the Post 9/11 GI Bill at 100% and are residents of New York State can attend CUNY at no cost. In addition, they are provided a living stipend that is among the highest in the country. Students at all levels of college preparedness may benefit from enrollment at one of CUNY’s campuses. Furthermore, student veterans who are often older and certainly come with different experiences than the “typical” college student may feel more at home at CUNY given the number of non-traditional students who attend the University.

CUNY has already proven to be attractive to student veterans. According to University records, the total CUNY enrollment of veterans or military personnel was 2,778 in Fall 2012. These students were spread across the CUNY campuses, ranging from 2 students at the CUNY Graduate Center to 382 students at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (see Appendix 1 for a campus by campus breakdown). In recent years, the University has seen significant increases in the number of student veterans. According to the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA), the total number of student veterans enrolled across CUNY has risen from 825 in Fall 2008 to 2,778 in Fall 2012. A number of CUNY campuses have made special efforts to attract and support student veterans. For example, the College of Staten Island, Baruch College, Brooklyn College, Lehman College, Hostos Community College, Kingsborough Community College, Queensborough Community College, City College, Hunter, Bronx Community College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, and John Jay College of Criminal Justice have established veterans’ resource centers to provide service and support to student veterans. Both City College and John Jay College of Criminal Justice have been identified as “military friendly colleges” by G.I Jobs and Military Times Magazine. For these reasons, the number of veterans and military personnel applying to CUNY and studying at CUNY is only predicted to grow larger as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan draw down.

To address the needs of student veterans (including military personnel), examine our current practices, and develop recommendations to improve the experience of student veterans, CUNY Chancellor Goldstein announced the formation of the Task Force on Veterans Affairs. The Task Force was first chaired by College of Staten Island President Tomas Morales, and then by John Jay College of Criminal Justice President Jeremy Travis after President Morales left CUNY for another position. The Task Force members include:

Student Selena Copa, Brooklyn College

Wilfred Cotto, Director, CUNY Office of Veterans Affairs, replaced by Stephen Clark, Acting Director, CUNY Office of Veteran Affairs

President Russell Hotzler, NYC College of Technology

President Carole Berotte Joseph, Bronx Community College

Professor Karen Kaplowitz, John Jay College

Student Demond Mullins, CUNY Graduate Center

Senior University Dean Robert Ptachik

President Felix Matos Rodriguez, Hostos Community College

Vice Chancellor Frank Sanchez

Professor Roger Sherwood, Hunter College

President Mitchel Wallerstein, Baruch College

The Task Force also drew upon the expertise of the following special guests: From John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Vice President Thomas Stafford, Vice President Richard Saulnier, Chief of Staff, Rulisa Galloway- Perry, Director of Counseling Dr. Calvin Chin, Senior Director Dana Trimboli; and from CUNY, Christina Wade from OIR and Lisa Beatha, Office of the University Registrar.

The first meeting of the Task Force was held on December 21, 2011, and the Task Force met 6 more times after that to complete its work. After a thorough examination of current practices at CUNY, and a review of best practices nationally, the Task Force decided to focus its efforts on five areas of inquiry:

- 1) how the University can adopt best practices to create a welcoming and supportive environment for student veterans;
- 2) how the University should respond to decisions by the Veterans Administration regarding coverage for out-of-state tuition;

- 3) how the University defines and counts veterans;
- 4) how the University grants transfer credit for military experience; and
- 5) how the University can engage with the corporate sector to identify career opportunities for student veterans after they graduate.

The following report examines each of these topics, presents findings regarding areas needing improvement, and sets forth recommendations for consideration by the University. The overarching goal of the Task Force is to ensure that the policies and practices of CUNY provide that veterans and military personnel will be welcomed, and will succeed, at the City University of New York.

Topic I: Campus Services for Student Veterans – Best Practices

With veterans flooding institutions of higher education, colleges have an increased obligation to support the professional and academic success of these students while helping them through the transition from military to civilian life. The Task Force recommends several best practices for implementation, some long term and some one time initiatives, with the overarching aim of providing a basic level of support to all veterans throughout CUNY. The recommendations were derived from best practices compiled by the American Council on Education and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

The recommendations below are categorized under 5 general headings:

- 1. Establish the Basics**
- 2. Foster Military Cultural Competency Campus-Wide**
- 3. Streamline the Student Veteran’s Introduction to the College**
- 4. Develop Services and Programming to Ensure a Successful Academic Journey**
- 5. Ensure the Veteran’s Continued Success Post-Graduation**

Many campuses within CUNY have been supporting veterans for some time. Accordingly, for some campuses, these recommendations will seem basic, while for others this is uncharted territory. Each campus should embrace and adapt them in a way that is appropriate for their local culture. Ideally, with these recommendations in place, any veteran on any CUNY campus should feel supported and welcomed.

- 1. Establish the Basics:** It is critical that, at a minimum, the following three recommendations be implemented to begin to address the basic needs of our student veteran populations.

- a. Facilitate the creation of student veteran groups**

The creation of an active student veteran group on campus may be the single most important first step in addressing the unique needs of this segment of the college community. Increasing student veteran networking opportunities can lead to advocacy, peer mentoring interaction, and connection to services. These groups also facilitate word of mouth support for veterans,

consistently identified as the single most effective recruiting method for this population. It is also important to include family members and civilians in this organization in order to "bridge the gap". These student veteran groups should be supported by college faculty or staff members to provide continuity, particularly at community colleges where student turnover is higher (ACE, 2011; Summerlot, J., Green, S., & Parker, D., 2009).

Recommendations: Student veterans should be encouraged by Office of Student Life/Student Activities to apply for a "Student Veterans of America Chapter" on campus. This coalition of student veterans groups guides the campus chapters as the "boots on the ground" that help veterans reintegrate into campus life and succeed academically. (<http://www.studentveterans.org>).

b. Create a veteran-specific space

The unique nature of the military experience, and the strong need for peer group support noted above, means that veteran-specific spaces are important centers of student success. It is vitally important that each CUNY campus establish a veteran specific space where veterans can gather and services can be coordinated. Ideally such a space would be a centralized location for certifying officials and student veteran organizations. An attached or nearby study area with computer access would provide opportunities for effective study, peer tutoring, and peer mentorship (American Council on Education [ACE], 2011; Dean & Provost, 2009).

Recommendations: The following criteria should be considered when finding space for veterans: space should be reasonably close to classrooms and administrative offices, commensurate with veteran population (i.e., 100 veterans on campus=a room to fit 12-15 individuals comfortably), and have sufficient seating, as well as computer and phone access.

c. Create a single point of contact for veterans, or at the very least designate a vet-knowledgeable point person in relevant offices on campus

Campuses should employ a one stop model for all information pertaining to veteran services, headed by a dedicated staff member (identified in this document as the Veterans Coordinator) who is located in the designated space noted in part B. This individual should be highly knowledgeable about a broad spectrum of veteran topics from counseling to financial aid, academic resources, and local/federal resources. Ideally, the Veterans Coordinator should maintain relationships with points of contact within each administrative office on campus to foster continuity and a collective knowledge base of issues affecting veterans. In addition, this person should maintain a clear and coherent website that mirrors much of this information (ACE, 2011).

Recommendations: Hire or designate a Veterans Coordinator to manage a dedicated space. A webpage should be established to provide detailed information pertinent to prospective and current student veterans.

2. Foster Military Cultural Competency, Campus-Wide: According to the American Council on Education publication, *From Soldier to Student II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members* (July 2012), raising faculty and staff sensitivity to the unique issues faced by military and student veterans and their family members is essential to their success.

a. **Implement top down support through the establishment of a campus task force**

Institutional commitment, particularly from the Office of the President, provides efficiency and effectiveness to policy implementation. One way to ensure policy implementation and the fostering of cultural competency would be through the creation of a campus-based Veterans Task Force. The Task Force should meet one or more times per term. It is critically important to include student veterans on the Task Force and not to simply rely on published materials to understand their needs (ACE, 2011). Faculty members elected by the faculty governance body are also essential members. The Task Force can be useful in enforcing veteran friendly practices and meetings can be used to review reports on student veteran data on an ongoing basis.

Recommendations: Establish a cross campus Veteran Task Force which is endorsed by the Office of the President.

b. **Conduct faculty and staff training**

One of the critical issues cited by many veterans and military personnel on college campuses is the stigma they sometimes experience in the college environment. To counteract this stigma, and to create heightened awareness of the issue faced by veterans and military personnel, segments of the campus community should be trained and educated. This training should cover military culture, personal opinions towards military action, specific needs of veterans related to family obligations and reasonable accommodation of disabilities/mental health concerns.

Faculty should be encouraged to open up lines of communication with student veterans both to facilitate better academic performance and also to work with students that have deployment/reserve responsibilities. These responsibilities can cause significant disruptions in the academic cycle of a semester. Faculty should also be aware of resources available on campus to student veterans and how to direct them there (ACE, 2011).

Recommendations: Develop a military cultural competence training for faculty and staff at the start of each academic year.

3. **Streamline the Student Veteran's Introduction to the College:** The 2012 report *From Soldier to Student II* also noted that assisting military and student veterans with their transition to the college environment is vital. Only 37 percent of postsecondary institutions with services for military students and veterans provide transition assistance. This number must improve if we want to successfully retain this population.

a. **Strengthen Recruitment Efforts**

Given the large number of veterans who are interested in securing a college education, and the generous benefits now available to them, it is important that CUNY recruiters create special outreach programs to attract these potential students. School recruiters can demonstrate their commitment to veterans at the outset by conducting outreach to prospective students in their respective environments: National Guard or Reserve units, base education offices, education and job fairs, and welcome-home events (ACE, 2011).

Recommendations: Recruiters should consider advertising in military trade publications and/or tabling at veteran-specific job and college fairs. Veteran specific recruitment materials should highlight resources, services, and special programs available on campuses.

b. Tailor Orientation Events for Student Veterans

The CUNY College should also consider creating a veteran-specific orientation. This can smooth the transition from service to school by acquainting the student with staff, faculty, and peers as well as granting access to information such as relevant campus policies and educational benefit stipulations. In addition, the recruitment offices should conduct phone call and email outreach to incoming classes in advance to engage with students, assess potential attendance, and provide orientation/contact information for those who are unable to be present. (American Council on Education [ACE], 2008).

Recommendations: Schedule special orientations and outreach efforts for veterans and military personnel just prior to the fall and spring semesters for incoming students.

c. Compile a resource guide/handbook

A handbook referencing local and national resources for veterans can be a useful, centralized tool, provided it is kept updated. It should be comprehensive and contain information such as housing options, G.I. Bill benefits, health and mental health services, tutoring, VA Work Study, financial aid, career services, and points of contact on campus (ACE, 2008).

Recommendations: Compile a veteran resource guide/handbook and disseminate widely in both digital and hard copy throughout campus points of contact.

4. Develop Services and Programming to Ensure a Successful Academic Journey: the goal of any of our Veteran support services is to implement programs that enable our students to gain the greatest benefit from their educational experience.

a. Ease access to academic services

Student veterans may require additional educational support. Student veterans have described lack of knowledge of these services as a major stumbling block to wider utilization (ACE, 2011). Campuses should therefore provide appropriate tutoring resources, as well as make their presence widely known.

Recommendations: Publicize academic resources on campus through the veteran point of contact on campus.

b. Provide specialized student services

Colleges should prominently display health and mental health services throughout the campus to improve utilization and help remove the stigma of seeking services. Particularly for mental health services, campuses should provide as wide an array of services, including psychological services (individual, group, etc.), in order to increase chances of utilization and successful treatment. Counseling providers should ensure adequate resources are available to female veterans, as their specific needs are often different than male service members (ACE, 2011).

Special attention should also be paid to the family members of service members on campus, inclusive of those receiving benefits and those who are not.

Finally, it is important to recognize that many returning service members may have experienced physical injuries or emotional trauma that will require special attention. Campus accessibility services offices can benefit from being connected to programs that focus on supporting injured service members, such as the Wounded Warrior Project. These offices can also obtain information on disability compensation benefits from the school's VA representative, especially regarding those disabilities common to Iraq and Afghanistan and including traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress (PTS), loss of limb(s), severe burns, deafness, vision difficulties, and learning disabilities.

Recommendations: Campus counseling and accessibility centers must be aware of the threat of stigmatization imposed by military culture on help-seeking behaviors and provide outreach accordingly—with discretion. In addition, they must be trained and ready to respond to the unique needs of some segments of the student veteran population.

c. **Design curricula for students with military experience**

A pedagogical approach to making meaning of one's military experience can be beneficial to a student veteran educationally and socially. Examples include classes that afford students an opportunity to write about their experiences in service or study military history and/or literature (ACE, 2011; ASHE Higher Education Report, 2011).

Recommendations: Campuses should gauge the scope of interest in potential course material (transitional help or military subject matter) via student surveys prior to designing courses. Campuses should consider offering one or two courses per semester that are designed primarily for veterans, but are also open to the general student population.

d. **Create additional avenues for Emergency Funding**

Student veterans often experience delays in the disbursement of their VA benefits. These delays can cause significant financial hardship and can interfere with progress in an academic semester. To respond to this situation, the University should create emergency loan programs to compensate for delays in VA benefit disbursement. For example, the University could create a book stipend or loan to tide student veterans over in the interim (as many schools already provide funds allocated for cost of living emergencies rather than books and school supplies). The University can also implement preventative loan programs to anticipate VA delays instead of reacting to them only after they occur (ACE, 2011; Moon, T. L., & Schma, G. A., 2011).

Recommendations: The University should establish emergency and contingency funds for student veterans awaiting delayed VA benefit payments.

e. **Collaborate with community agencies**

It is important for each college campus to cultivate relationships with local institutions serving veterans. There are tremendous resources in the New York City area devoted to helping veterans. Local VA representatives can make routine visits to campus veteran resource centers to disseminate information, enroll veterans for health benefits, and answer questions. Ideally,

this same representative will serve as a consistent point of contact and connection to the VA when the student is off campus.

Recommendations: VA representatives should be invited to visit campus several times during each semester (especially at orientations) to distribute information and answer questions.

5. **Ensure the Veteran's Continued Success Post-Graduation:** the goal is to help student veterans utilize our campuses as a platform for preparing for a careers and graduate study.

- a. **Advance awareness of the unique challenges faced by veterans seeking work**

Campus Career Services Center should facilitate the veteran's transition from school to the workforce by developing appropriate programming. For example, the Career Services Center should host workshops on translating military experience on resumes into civilian-speak or connecting veterans to local industry/corporate hiring representatives (Carr, 2010). In addition, mock interviews, specialized career counseling and collaboration with Accessibility Services for special cases would be helpful. Ideally, they would also identify student veterans on track to graduate to assess their readiness and plans to look for work.

Recommendations: Assign a point of contact at Career Services Centers to become knowledgeable about issues affecting job/career-seeking veterans today. The staff member should identify and develop industry/corporate relationships with military friendly employers to support and identify employment opportunities for our student veterans.

Topic II: Out-of-State Tuition Policy for Veterans

During the course of the deliberations of the Task Force, a new issue arose that carries significant implications for the ability of the City University of New York to attract and retain student veterans. In 2011, the Veterans Administration issued a ruling to the effect that veterans would no longer be covered for non-resident tuition if they attended a public institution as an out-of-state student.

The Task Force recognized that this change in policy by the Veterans Administration made attendance at CUNY colleges financially unattractive for returning veterans who, at the time of their enlistment counted their state of residence as any state other than New York. Since nearly all of these veterans attend full-time they became responsible for almost \$8,000 in tuition charges not covered by the Veterans Administration. Under current University policy, the state of residence at the time the veteran enters service determines whether in-state tuition rates apply. If this policy is not modified, CUNY will be at a competitive disadvantage with other public universities that have enacted policies waiving out-of-state tuition rates for veterans. Through research conducted by the Task Force, it was determined that several states (including Ohio, Alaska, Colorado, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Kentucky) have waived out-of-state tuition for returning veterans.

Accordingly, to encourage veterans to apply to CUNY, and furthermore to encourage those who live out of New York State to bring their skills and talents to New York State, the Task Force recommends that the CUNY Board of Trustees adopt a one-year waiver policy. Under the proposed policy, the University would charge in-state tuition to all veterans for their first year as

CUNY students. If, however, after the first year of study at CUNY, veterans living out of state do not establish residency within New York State, the proposed policy would ensure that out-of-state tuition rates would apply. The Task Force believes that this new policy, which would result in some level of forgone tuition, would ultimately attract more veterans to CUNY whose tuition, covered by their VA benefits, would offset any short-term revenue losses. More importantly, this change in policy will underscore the University's desire to attract the best applicants to CUNY and to encourage returning veterans to consider CUNY – and a future in New York State -- as they weigh their college options.

Recommendations:

- a. Beginning with the fall 2013 semester all CUNY student veterans should be provided one full academic year to establish residency in the State of New York. During this period of time, the resident tuition rate will apply.
- b. Residency should continue to be verified according to current rules except that the one year waiting period will be waived. Veterans who meet the residency requirement at the end of the one year period will continue to be charged the resident rate.
- c. Veterans who fail to meet the residency requirements after one full academic year will be charged at the non-resident rate.

Topic III: Definitional Issues

1. The need for a standard definition of “veteran” and “military personnel” to be used across CUNY.

It became immediately clear to the Task Force that the University lacked a clear definition of “veteran” or “military personnel,” a necessary precondition for effective planning and service delivery. Defining student veterans and military personnel is important for three reasons. First, the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration utilize specific definitions of “veteran” to determine the level of benefits an individual may receive. Second, it is important that CUNY identify student veterans and military personnel in order to reach out to them and offer them appropriate services. Finally, understanding the true size of CUNY’s veteran and military personnel population and collecting accurate data will help guide planning and programmatic decisions.

In general parlance, the word “veterans” generally refers to individuals who have served in the armed forces but are not currently active. The Department of Education, however, defines “veterans” in the following way: “Veterans are those who were in active service (which includes basic training) and were released under a condition other than ‘dishonorable.’ This includes those who fraudulently entered the service as long as their entire period of service was not voided. There is no minimum amount of time the student has to have served to be a veteran, but it does have to be active service.”¹

The Department of Education’s definition is important because this definition determines whether student veterans are entitled to educational benefits provided by the Veterans Administration. Indeed, each college within CUNY has a Veterans Certifying Official who is

¹ 38 CFR section 3.12(a).

charged with reviewing the discharge documents that each veteran is issued upon completion of service. Veterans Certifying Officials are responsible for contacting the Veterans Administration to “certify” that the student veteran is indeed a veteran, using this definition, and is therefore entitled to benefits. We propose to use the Department of Education definition of “veteran” here at CUNY. This definition includes individuals who received “other than honorable” discharges.²

A decision to count as “veterans” all students who have served in the Armed Forces even if they received an “other than honorable discharge” would represent recognition of important realities among CUNY students. There are many reasons why a student who has served in the armed forces may have received an “other than honorable” discharge, and the Task Force believes these students should be counted as veterans, and as importantly, may benefit from the extra support provided to all veterans. Some of these individuals with other than honorable discharges may have had to leave the armed forces because of emotional difficulty or because of a family emergency, and some of these individuals may have been discharged under the former “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. A second term -- the phrase “military personnel” -- also requires more careful definition within CUNY. This phrase generally refers to individuals who are currently serving in the armed forces either through active duty or reserve. Students who are currently serving in the armed forces need the same kinds of outreach and support as student veterans. These students who are military personnel are often entitled to the same educational benefits as veterans, and need to be tracked and coded by the University to be certified as eligible to receive these benefits. By including “military personnel” among the students eligible for special support, CUNY will also assist these students in making the transition from military service to the classroom.

Recommendations:

- a. “Veteran” and “military personnel” should be defined in the following ways for CUNY data collection:

Veteran –those who were in active military service (which includes basic training) and were released under a condition other than “dishonorable.”

Military Personnel – persons currently serving in the armed forces of the United States, whether on active duty or reserve or in the National Guard.

2. Data Tracking and Counting Student Veterans

² In addition to “other than honorable” discharges, individuals can also receive “dishonorable” discharges. The number of individuals who receive “dishonorable” discharges is quite small. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center (2012), out of 305,127 service members who were discharged in calendar year 2011, only 75 received “dishonorable” discharges. It is up to each campus’ discretion whether to admit or assist students who may have received “dishonorable” discharges.

How the University counts the number of student veterans also raises definitional concerns. Currently, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) counts the number of student veterans through the use of the official Show-registration enrollment file submitted by each college, for each term. On each campus, the appropriate officials – either Registrars or Veterans Certifying Officials -- code students as “veterans” or “military personnel” when these students get certified for VA benefits on campus. In June 2012, the office of the University Registrar issued a memo that clarified the official university list of codes to be used to classify veterans and military personnel (see Appendix 2). The Task Force finds it noteworthy that a student need not be certified for benefits through the VA in order to be coded as a veteran or military personnel. Specifically, there are codes that classify a student as a “veteran without benefits.” There are also codes that can be used when the student is a veteran but it is unclear whether he or she is entitled to benefits. Finally, there are also codes for students who are on reserve or on active duty in the National Guard. The Task Force examined this coding system and found that it met the Task Force recommendations (see above) for categorizing the different types of student veterans and military personnel.

The Task Force also found, however, that there is substantial need for improved compliance in utilizing the codes issued by the University Registrar. The wide disparity among campuses in their levels of compliance has a negative effect on the accuracy of the data. On some campuses, Veterans Certifying Officials do not have direct access to SIMS/CUNY FIRST, the student information systems currently in use within CUNY. The Task Force recommends that Veterans Certifying Officials across CUNY should all have access to SIMS/CUNY FIRST to ensure that the codes are consistent. The consequences of this shortcoming are profound: unless the coding system developed by the University Registrar is fully and consistently utilized across the entire University, CUNY will not be able to determine the number of student veterans and military personnel attending the University, or track the different levels of benefits and reserve or active duty status.

In addition to fully matriculated student veterans, there are also student veterans who may be students in Continuing Education programs. In July 2012, the Department of Veterans Affairs created the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), which offers up to 12 months of training assistance to unemployed veterans who are between the ages of 35 and 60 and who are not eligible for any other VA education program (e.g., the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Assistance). Participants must be enrolled in a VA approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school. The program must lead to an Associate Degree, Non-College Degree, or a Certificate, and train the Veteran for a high demand occupation. Currently, there are 57 students enrolled at Kingsborough Community College through VRAP, and the numbers are expected to grow. Currently, the OIRA does not include continuing education students in their counts of student veterans. Given the possibility of an increase in the usage of this program, the Task Force recommends that CUNY campuses make an effort to collect this data on their own.

Recommendations:

- a. Registrars and Veterans Certifying Officials should be reminded of the official list of university codes for veterans and military personnel. The University Registrar

should work together with the Business Process Owner of the CUNY First Veterans page to ensure consistency in use of the official list across the University. Special attention should be paid to the existing codes that are suitable for student veterans who do not elect to receive benefits or whom may be ineligible for benefits.

- b. Colleges across CUNY should standardize which campus official is responsible for maintaining student databases. All Veterans Certifying Officials should be granted access to SIMS/CUNY FIRST so that they can be the point people on campus to ensure that student veterans and military personnel are coded correctly.
- c. Each campus should make a concerted effort to code all student veterans and military personnel on campus, regardless of whether they meet the criteria to be certified as “veterans” who are entitled to VA benefits.
- d. CUNY campuses should be aware of student veterans who may enroll as continuing education students through VRAP and keep a separate count of these student veterans as they are not currently included in OIRA reports.

3. Utilizing Admission Data to Maximize Counts of Veterans and Military Personnel

Under the current CUNY application procedures, students can self-identify as veterans or military personnel when they first apply to the University. On the CUNY application for admission, applicants are asked: “Have you ever served in any branch of the United States Armed Forces?” These data are highly valuable because they provide the largest estimate of our veteran and military personnel population, regardless of benefit eligibility. As the number of veterans applying to CUNY increases in the future, tracking these data will allow the University to determine whether CUNY is attractive to individuals returning from military service, to predict the level of services needed on campuses, and to gauge whether a CUNY educational opportunity is attractive to this category of prospective students.

Students can also apply to individual CUNY campuses directly through a paper-based “Direct Admit” application that is unique to each campus. Students may apply directly to individual CUNY campuses if they miss the deadline for the centralized application for admission. It is incumbent on each campus, however, to make sure that applicants are asked “Have you ever served in any branch of the United States Armed Forces?” on this application so that student veterans can be identified.

For these reasons, it is important for data from the admission files to be used to identify students as veterans or military personnel. Those students who self-identify as veterans or military personnel on their applications could be automatically coded within SIMS or CUNY First as “veteran – benefit unknown”. After these students become certified, the code could then be updated to reflect their benefit status. This seamless flow of information from the application file to the data files for enrolled students would generate a database of students eligible for supportive services, particularly benefits, on each campus.

Recommendations:

- a. CUNY campuses should make sure that their “Direct Admit” applications include the question “Have you ever served in any branch of the United States Armed Forces?”
- b. Enrollment management staff should use the admission data to identify student veterans and military personnel.
- c. Those students who self-identify as veterans or military personnel on their applications should be automatically coded by the Registrar as “veteran-benefit unknown” upon enrollment. This code can be updated once these students get certified for benefits through the Veterans Certifying Official on campus.

4. Outreach to Student Veterans to Encourage them to Self-Identify

Outreach is needed to encourage students who may not be eligible for benefits because of their discharge status or other reasons to identify themselves as veterans. Colleges should complete outreach campaigns to explicitly encourage students who may have served in the armed forces but were “other than honorably” discharged to come forward and identify themselves as veterans. This will require explicit messages because students who have been “other than honorably” discharged may not identify themselves as “veterans” because they are excluded from VA benefits. Yet these students may still benefit from specific college resources that are designated for veterans and military personnel.

On each campus, there are a number of different offices, beyond Financial Aid and the Registrar that can be employed in this outreach effort. These offices include Admissions, Bursar, Student Affairs, Counseling, SEEK, Academic Support/Tutorial Centers, Career Services, Childcare, and the Office of Student Access/Disability. Each office should encourage “other than honorably” discharged student veterans who may not have self-identified as “veterans” to do so. If these students do decide to self-identify, these offices can assist the student in connecting with the Registrar to update the students coding within SIMS or CUNY First.

Recommendations:

- a. CUNY colleges should encourage student veterans who may have been “other than honorably” discharged to self-identify as veterans. This can be done through advertisements in student publications, student radio stations, campus websites and other forms of campus media.
- b. “Other than honorably” discharged student veterans should be told to alert the registrar or the Veterans Certifying Official on campus of their status so they may be coded correctly in SIMS or CUNY First.
- c. Offices that may serve student veterans (e.g., Admissions, Bursar, Student Affairs, Counseling, SEEK, Academic Support/Tutorial Centers, Career Services, Childcare, and the Office of Student Access/Disability, etc.) should encourage “other than honorably” discharged student veterans who may not have self-identified as “veterans” to do so.

Topic IV: Transfer Credits and Military Equivalencies

1. Update policy regarding transfer credits for military experience.

Student veterans and military personnel come to college with extensive training through their experiences serving in the military. The American Council on Education (2011) recommends that colleges should recognize this experience and training from the military in evaluating transfer credit. This recommendation is reinforced by the Service Members Opportunity Colleges Consortium, a network of over 1,900 nationally accredited colleges and universities that provide educational opportunities for members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families. National best practices for educational institutions that are determined to be “military friendly” also suggest that student veterans and military personnel should be given transfer credit for their military experience as well as any coursework they completed while serving in the Armed Forces (Moon & Schma, 2011).

The Task Force embraced the rationale of these national guidelines and recommends that CUNY should award transfer credit for military experiences and courses. The Task Force believes this is an appropriate stance for CUNY not only because this would track national standards of best practice, but also because, as an academic institution, it is appropriate that CUNY recognizes the legitimacy of these educational experiences obtained in the military. Stated differently, the Task Force believes that students who wish to transfer credits for courses taken in the Armed Forces should be treated no differently than students who wish to transfer credits for courses taken at any other colleges and universities.

Currently, to determine the number of credits to be award for courses offered by the military and for military experience, CUNY colleges operate under a policy that was drafted in the 1950's. This policy is part of the Manual of General Policy (MGP; Article VII, Section 7.10), which consolidates the non-bylaw policy action items passed by the Board of Trustees. The policy that relates to credit for military experience is copied below, and includes the dates of the meetings of the CUNY Board of Trustees at which each policy was adopted:

College credits may be allowed up to a maximum of eighteen in specific subject matter areas for the satisfactory completion of USAFI courses. Furthermore, efforts should be made to set up facilities in the colleges to test competence and allow credit therefore when requested by those students who have not had an opportunity to submit to the USAFI examinations. (BTM,1952,04-21,013,)

Credit for educational experiences in the armed forces may be evaluated in terms of the degree toward which the veteran is working, and may be awarded for courses offered in the curriculum of any accredited college as well as areas that might be considered part of a potential curriculum of an accredited college. (BTM,1952,04-21,013,)

The stated course requirements for the degree may be modified in the case of the veteran. Such adjustments should be made in consideration of the special justification in the individual case and without weakening the essential import of the degree or certification for which the veteran is a candidate. (BTM,1952,04-21,013,)

A maximum allowance of twelve credits for military experience may be granted the veteran who has been in the service for six months or more, and a maximum allowance of six credits for the veteran who has been in service for more than 90 days but less than six months. The granting of this credit shall not deprive the veteran of taking the total number of credits required for his or her degree. (BTM,1952,04-21,013.)

The acceptance of credit for both educational and military experience should be permissive with the veteran. (BTM,1952,04-21,013.)

This policy is problematic in several respects. First, it sets a cap of 12 credits that can be transferred for military experience, regardless of a student's experience and training. No other category of transfer students to CUNY are subjected to such a cap. Furthermore, the policy describes how colleges should award credit for courses taken in the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI), which was disbanded in the 1970's and is no longer operating. For this reason alone, the policy needs to be updated. After careful consideration, the Task Force concluded that the City University Policy should be changed to reflect the recommendations from the American Council on Education (ACE) regarding the award of college credit for military experience.

The American Council on Education (ACE) has developed a Military Guide that delineates specific recommendations for how military experiences and training through both formal courses and on-the-job experiences can be translated to college courses. Education institutions around the country, including CUNY, have used the ACE Guide in granting credit to hundreds of thousands of service members. Many of the nation's colleges and universities use the formal course recommendations in awarding credit to veterans and active-duty service personnel. The recommendations have been widely accepted because formal military courses share certain key elements with traditional postsecondary education programs. They are formally approved and administered, are designed for the purpose of achieving learning outcomes, are conducted by qualified persons with specific subject-matter expertise, and are structured to provide for the reliable and valid assessment of student learning.

In addition to formal military courses, ACE also recognizes that learning can take place through self-instruction, on-the-job training, and work experience. To capture these experiences and translate them into college credit, ACE has implemented a program for the evaluation of learning represented by demonstrated proficiency in Army and Marine enlisted military occupational specialties (MOS's) and Navy and Coast Guard enlisted ratings and warrant officers.

ACE reports that "The evaluation process is founded on high quality standards of practice including a rigorous review and selection of subject-matter experts and academic faculty, a site visit to analyze the content, and an evaluator consensus in determining the learning outcomes and appropriate academic credit recommendations." Colleges and universities can use the ACE Guide recommendations to determine how credit should be awarded for military courses and for military experience.

The military issues transcripts to document the military courses a service member has completed. CUNY -- along with 2,300 colleges and universities across the country -- recognizes these ACE-endorsed transcripts as official documentation of military experiences and accurate records of applicable ACE credit recommendations.

Yet even if all CUNY colleges were to follow the ACE recommendations, the current CUNY policy limiting transfer credits for student veterans works to the disadvantage of some of those students. Many students' military transcripts reflect experiences that are worthy of more than 12 credits, but CUNY's current policy only allows for 12 of these credits to be transferred and recognized. This reality stands in stark contrast to the treatment afforded other transfer students. To follow a simple principle of equal treatment, we recommend that the University adopt a new policy.

To guide its specific recommendation, the Task Force took notice of relevant policies regarding the award of transfer credits. Currently, senior colleges within CUNY can accept up to 90 transfer credits from accredited colleges and for life experience. Community colleges within CUNY may accept a maximum of 30 transfer credits from accredited colleges and for life experience. Life experience credit can be granted for knowledge obtained through career experience, including volunteer work and professional training. There is a limit of 15 credits that can be awarded for life experience.

The Task Force took these limits into account when developing a recommendation for the maximum number of credits that should be awarded for military experience and courses. The 15 credit limit for life experience seemed too restrictive, given the unique training and experiences that the Armed Forces provides and the work of ACE in evaluating military experience and recommending course equivalences. Thus, the Task Force recommends that student veterans and military personnel in senior colleges be awarded up to 45 transfer credits for military experiences and courses. For community colleges, the Task Force recommends a maximum of 30 credits for student veterans and military personnel to comply with their 30-credit maximum limit for transfer credits.

Recommendations:

- a. CUNY should revise the University's military transfer credit policy to reflect the adoption of ACE guidelines. A proposed revision of this policy is attached (see Appendix 3). This policy would require approval by the Board of Trustees.
- b. Student veterans and military personnel should be granted up to 45 credits for military experience and formal military courses in senior colleges, and up to 30 credits in community colleges, subject to the requirements of their programs of study.

2. Course Equivalencies

The Task Force also noted the need for a consistent process for determining the transfer credits to be awarded for military training and educational experiences. In the course of the Task Force deliberations, the CUNY Office of the University Registrar offered to put into place a mechanism by which requests for transfer credits are reviewed centrally by applying the recommendations of the ACE standards. Under this proposed new system, student veterans and military personnel who apply to CUNY would be encouraged to send their military transcripts to the CUNY University Applications Processing Center (UAPC) as part of their application package. The Director of Transfer Courses and Information would then review the transcripts following ACE guidelines, and will issue each college a recommendation for how the military transcript could translate into college credit.

Under this proposed new system, the Senior University Dean would then send to the Chief Academic Officer of each college a letter requesting that colleges review the recommendations issued by the CUNY Office of the University Registrar regarding transfer credits for military experience and course equivalencies. Each college within CUNY would then be responsible for determining how transfer credits are awarded to students, following the procedures applicable on each CUNY campus. The Task Force recognizes that the review process for awarding college transfer credit is always an individualized determination subject to the requirements of programs of study.

Under this new system, the recommendations issued from CUNY Central, based on the ACE recommended standards, will act as guides. They will be focused on translating specific ACE recommendations into specific courses at CUNY. Colleges will be encouraged to accept the recommendations. If, however, they do not accept the recommended transfer credits, the colleges will be asked to explain the reasoning behind their denial of credit for military experience and military courses. Individual colleges are free to award general elective credit based on ACE recommendations up to the limits suggested by the Task Force.

The Task Force does not recommend that each college follow any minimum credit recommendations. Instead, colleges will be requested to be transparent and internally consistent in assigning credits for basic training and other military experiences so that students will have clear information to help guide their decisions about where they will enroll. With this enhanced level of transparency, colleges will have a better sense what their CUNY counterpart institutions are doing and will therefore choose to offer credit in line with their peers. This will mean, in turn, that veterans and military personnel applying to CUNY will have a better sense of how their prior experience will be valued in terms of transfer credits.

Recommendations:

- a. Student veterans and military personnel who apply to CUNY should be encouraged to send their military transcripts to CUNY/UAPC for review.
- b. The Director of Transfer Courses and Information in CUNY Central should review military transcripts based on ACE guidelines and issue recommendations for course equivalencies to individual colleges.
- c. Individual colleges will then make their own decisions about awarding transfer credits and will submit explanations when they disagree with recommendations issued by CUNY Central.
- d. Colleges should be transparent and internally consistent about the number of credits they award for military courses and experience so that incoming students can make informed choices.
- e. The Office of the University Registrar should maintain a central repository of college decisions on credit awards, and make that repository available to student applicants.

Topic V: Leveraging Corporate Opportunities

The Task Force recognized that veterans and other military personnel who attend CUNY share a similar ambition with all CUNY students: their eyes are focused on a future beyond CUNY. Like

all CUNY students, they are concerned with being successful in the classroom, but are also concerned with the career opportunities and professional pathways that will be made possible by their CUNY education. Veterans, however, face a more complex world of career opportunities that they must navigate. On the one hand, their veteran status may provide benefits. As is detailed below, for example, many American businesses have established special employment programs that set aside a number of jobs in the corporation specifically for veterans. There are a number of major New York City corporations that have made very generous commitments in this regard. Yet, at the same time, veterans are experiencing very high rates of unemployment. As was noted early in this report, according to a report issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the unemployment rate for male Gulf War era veterans aged 18-24 was 29.1%, significantly higher than that of young male non-veterans at 17.6%. Clearly, there is a significant challenge presented to match the skills and abilities of returning veterans to the available job opportunities. Research is needed to better understand the obstacles faced by returning veterans, the special interventions required to overcome those obstacles, and in particular the role that an academic institution such as CUNY can play to assist the students, and their prospective employers to provide a smooth bridge between college and career. Finally, it should be noted that one area of potential employment for veterans that would draw upon some of their experience – working for military contractors – faces a very uncertain future. As was reported recently in the January 9, 2013 issue of Forbes magazine, the prospect of significant cuts in the federal budget in the coming years, with the Pentagon carrying a share of those cuts, means that the defense contractor sector of the economy will be shrinking at a time when more veterans with relevant skills are returning home and looking for work.

In thinking about the role that CUNY could play in addressing the significant challenges facing veterans who seek work after graduation, the Task Force took note of the leadership role being played by major corporate entities in New York City. Several examples are noteworthy and underscore the ambition of these corporate initiatives. A group called Veterans on Wall Street is dedicated to hiring veterans in the financial services industry. Goldman Sachs has created an eight-week internship program specifically for veterans, and has set aside full time jobs for those who successfully complete the program. A group of companies including Pepsi, Travelers and Xerox, among many others, have created the 10,000 Jobs Challenge in which they will hire 10,000 veterans before the end of 2013. Another group of companies in the health sector have created an initiative called Hero Health Hire, dedicated to helping disabled veterans find and retain meaningful employment. Most recently, Walmart received substantial national attention by announcing a goal of hiring 100,000 veterans across the country.

Although specific recommendations lay beyond the mandate of the Task Force, a clear recommendation emerged from the Task Force deliberations. The University should engage corporate employers who have made commitments to hiring veterans, determine their future employment needs at the level of specific skills and capabilities that are required, and work with these industry leaders to devise strategies that will link the student veterans at CUNY with the veteran employment programs at these businesses. Creating a credible pipeline for veterans from military service, to student, to professional will enhance CUNY's competitive appeal in the eyes of veterans who have not yet decided which university to attend, and it will create

incentives for current and future students to complete their studies, knowing that a good job lies ahead.

Recommendations: The City University of New York should develop a strategy to engage those businesses (and nonprofit organizations) that have committed to hiring veterans to design internship programs, recruitment opportunities, and career counseling services that will create smooth transitions between college and career for the student veterans who attend the University.

Closing

The Task Force on Veterans Affairs has examined the policies and services of the City University of New York that are designed to meet the needs of CUNY students with prior or current military experience. The Task Force has concluded that CUNY can present a very attractive and highly competitive educational opportunity for the thousands of veterans who will be returning home in the coming years. To take advantage of this opportunity, however, CUNY should revise several of its current practices and policies. The definition of veteran and military personnel needs to be clarified and expanded. A system that recognizes the validity of educational experiences obtained while in the military, and transfers those credits to the University, should be adopted. A policy should be adopted that encourages applicants who might otherwise be subject to out-of-state tuition rates by allowing a one-year waiver. Campus practices should be re-examined and strengthened to create supportive and distinctive environments tailored to the unique needs of this student population. In sum, these recommendations are intended to assist veterans as they make their generation's transition from soldier to scholar to college graduate.

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Juan M. Colon
US Marine Veteran
CUNY Veterans Hearing
November 15th, 2015

I'm glad I was able to listen to other Vets from other Colleges within CUNY before testifying because maybe the model at my school can be applied elsewhere. My experience at Queens College has been great so far: the Veterans Office has an outreach specialist the certifying official and a dedicated advisor in the same space and the staff is going above and beyond for us. Even though we have issues that are similar at other CUNY schools I'm deeply concerned with what's been happening at LaGuardia. I am an example of how necessary community colleges are to prepare students if they're not quite ready for senior colleges. I was a student there between 2014 & 2015. The support I received from Vicky and Joe Bello and David Danza at the Veterans Resource Center was crucial for getting my mind focused on the education path I put myself back on. It wasn't until I started doing work study and holding various positions in the Veterans Club before I realized how dysfunctional the relationship between CUNY and the leadership at LaGuardia was in regard to the needs of the student veterans. I did what I could with the rest of the club to make our experience at the school not only better for us but more importantly for the Veterans that come after us. At the fall of last year I transferred to Queens College, happy for the next chapter of my educational journey but sad about what couldn't be improved at LaGuardia. The atmosphere and services provided by these two colleges are so opposite in so many ways and that shouldn't be the case if they both fall under the same system. My fear is that current and future Veteran students might get so discouraged by the lack of support for their needs that they might drop out or not go back to school in the first place and I hope CUNY will take action, which is long overdue, as quickly as possible.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Juan M. Colon

Address: 185 Workman Ave. Apt 115, Brooklyn

I represent: Queens College

Address: 65-30 Kissena Blvd, Queens

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 11/16/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Patterson

Address: 880 Colgate Ave.

I represent: LaGuardia Community College

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOSEPH A. BELLO

Address: _____

I represent: NY METRO VETS.

Address: _____

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shawn Sterrett

Address: 307 East Tremont Avenue

I represent: Student Veterans at Laguardia C.C.

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Noah Almonor

Address: _____

I represent: LaGuardia Veterans

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ricky Malone

Address: _____

I represent: LAGCC - STUDENT VET

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 11/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kevin Chimilio

Address: _____

I represent: Lehman College LAGCE Student vet

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melissa Siew

Address: _____

I represent: BARUCH COLLEGE STUDENT VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Address: 55 LEXINGTON AVE

**THE COUNCIL
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Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TRENT COYLE

Address: ~~55~~ 55 LEXINGTON AVE

I represent: BARUCH STUDENT VETERANS ASSOC

Address: 55 LEXINGTON AVE

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yoneidy Reyes

Address: 55 Lexington Ave

I represent: Baruch Student veterans

Address: 55 Lexington Ave

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 11/15/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LEORA Shulofsky

Address: 2180 Third Ave NY 10035

I represent: HUNTER COLLEGE / PROVE PROGRAM

Address: 68th + Lexington NY 10065

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 11-15-16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jonathan Fermin-Robbins

Address: 109 Washington St. APT 3, NY, NY

I represent: Hunter College Student Veterans

Address: 695 Park Ave NY, NY

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THE COUNCIL *CUNY Panel 1 of 3*
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/15/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Rosa

Address: Interim Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs

I represent: CUNY

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL *CUNY Panel 2 of 3*
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/15/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Wilfred Cotto

Address: Coordinator of Veteran Services @ BMCC

I represent: BMCC

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL *CUNY Panel 3 of 3*
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/15/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vanessa Cordero, Student

Address: _____

I represent: John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Address: _____

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