



**Veterans at Penn State:
A profile of undergraduate and graduate students
and limitations of Penn State’s data related to these students**

Executive Summary

The Post-9/11 GI Bill offers veterans “the most comprehensive education benefits since the original 1944 Bill” and expectations for its payoff are high. As a result, there is a growing push for colleges to better document veteran populations and their outcomes. As a first step in this process, this report provides a profile of the veteran population at Penn State. For technical reasons explained in the report, it is difficult to get precise counts of veterans enrolled at Penn State. But the best available data suggests that in Fall 2012, there were approximately 3,223 veterans enrolled at Penn State, comprising 3.9% of the total degree-seeking population of 83,086 students. Veterans represent 3.5% of undergraduate and 6.1% of graduate enrollments; the large majority of Penn State’s veteran students are enrolled in undergraduate programs. The largest “campus” of enrollment for Penn State veterans is, by far, the World Campus, where veterans make up about 17 percent of the student body. Among our degree-seeking veterans, 77 percent of undergraduates and 53 percent of graduate students received GI benefits. Veteran students were predominantly male, were typically 6 to 8 years older than their non-veteran peers, and were more than twice as likely as non-veterans to be enrolled part-time. Nearly one-third were enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts. As undergraduates, veterans from out-of-state attended Penn State at a slightly higher rate than did non-veterans, although at the graduate level there was little difference. While veterans had slightly lower academic preparation than non-veterans, as measured by SAT score, they appear to have overcome this obstacle to achieve college-level grade-point-averages very similar to their peers.

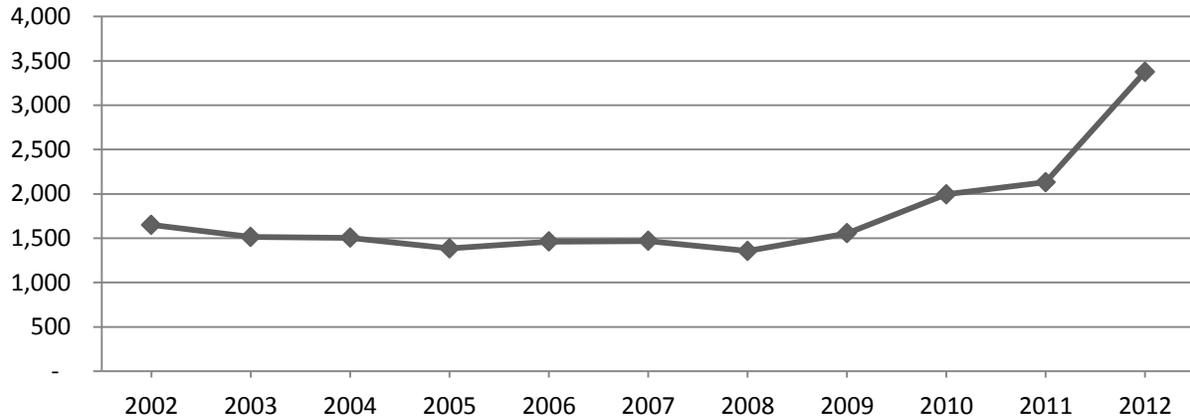
Introduction

With the implementation of the Post-9/11 Veterans’ Assistance Act of 2008 (more commonly known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill), higher education received a substantial influx of veteran students. Under this bill, military service members and veterans are eligible for full payment of tuition and fees at in-state public schools (or up to \$18,077 annually for private or foreign institution attendance), a housing allowance, and a stipend for books and supplies (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). At Penn State, 2008 marked the beginning of a significant upward trend in the enrollment of veteran students, with enrollments more than doubling between that year and 2012 (Figure 1; see pg. 3 to learn how this population was identified).

More than 817,000 veterans have used the Post-9/11 GI Bill to enroll in college courses and training programs (Sander, 2013) and by the end of the program’s 15-year implementation, it is projected to have cost taxpayers upwards of \$90 billion (Sander, 2012). The magnitude of these numbers has led many to raise questions about the status and success of veterans in higher education. While debate continues over the appropriate metrics for success in this area, the need for more information about this population of students is clear. This report seeks to take the first step in this process at Penn State.

Figure 1

Veterans Enrollment at Penn State



Veterans at Penn State and the Obstacles to Studying Them

Identifying veteran students at Penn State, unfortunately, is not a simple proposition. In fact, simply defining who is a veteran and who is not is more complex than it might appear. The definition can vary depending on the audience and context (e.g., the definition of veteran for federal student aid is not the same as it is for the Department of Veterans Affairs). As an institution, Penn State adheres to the Department of Education’s definition.

A veteran is a former member of the Armed Forces of the United States (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard) who served on active duty and was discharged under conditions which were other than dishonorable. There is no minimum number of days a student must have served on active duty to be considered a veteran. However, periods of active duty for training, pursuant to an enlistment in the National Guard or Reserves, do not qualify a student as a veteran. Thus former or current members of the National Guard or Reserves are not considered to be veterans unless they had prior or subsequent service with an active component of the Armed Forces. (Reservists called to active duty by Executive Order qualify as veterans.) (Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity, 2011)

However, in order to qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, veterans must have served at least 90 days of active duty, after September 10, 2001, or have been honorably discharged from active duty for a service-connected disability after serving 30 continuous days following September 10, 2001 (Veterans Benefits Administration, 2012). Under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, children of members of the Armed Forces who died in the line of duty may be eligible for benefits and, in some cases members of the uniformed services may transfer unused benefits to a spouse or dependent. To further complicate matters, public perception of who is a veteran is less precise, and identification of veterans based on self-reported data can be misleading.

At Penn State it is not currently possible to identify veterans with the precision of the Department of Education’s or the GI Bill’s definition. Penn State’s Data Warehouse holds two fields that can potentially be used to identify veterans, but both have limitations. The first field indicates whether a student is a

veteran of active military service (as opposed to Reserve or National Guard service) for federal student aid purposes. This field cannot be used to identify veterans with precision because it is self-reported by students and unverified. A second field related to veterans indicates the type of educational benefits a student veteran receives, if any. There are two limitations to this field. First, it does not capture some veteran students who do not seek benefits. If one is only interested in the status of veterans who are taking advantage of their GI Bill education benefits, then this is not problematic. While most discussions around veterans in higher education do not make this specification, their context supports the assumption that benefit-users are the real population of interest. The other limitation to this field is that it flags students who are receiving the educational benefit as dependents of veterans, but who are not veterans themselves. These data limitations are not unique to Penn State. Our peer institutions face similar difficulties because historically the focus and reporting requirements of the Department of Veterans Affairs has been on benefits, rather than on veteran students in general (Brian Clark, personal communication, February 28, 2013).

Given these limitations, and based on the recommendation of Brian Clark, Director of Veterans Programs at Penn State, this study identified veterans based on benefits status as outlined in Table 1. Using this matrix to identify the population of veterans at Penn State is not ideal because it captures a small number of students who are utilizing veterans benefits, but who are not veterans, and it may miss veterans who are not using or not eligible for GI Bill education benefits. However, it is the best approximation we can make at this time. In order to study the veteran population at Penn State and its associated subpopulations (e.g., veterans with and without benefits) Penn State would have to collect, verify, and make available more detailed information on students' veteran status. Given the current focus on veteran student outcomes and our national interest in providing a quality education to these students, this would be a worthwhile and meaningful endeavor. In the meantime, however, we are able to capture the majority of this population using the definitions outlined in Table 1 and to present a profile of these students that will inform our policies and practices and stimulate discussion around this special population of students.

Profile of Veteran Students

This profile is modeled, in part, after the US Department of Education report, *Military Service Members and Veterans: A Profile of Those Enrolled in Undergraduate and Graduate Education in 2007-08* (Radford, 2011). Where appropriate, national data is provided from that report in order to give a sense of the national picture in comparison to that at Penn State. It is important to note that the data in that report is: 1) five years old, 2) focused on military students (veterans and military service members on active duty or in the reserves), and 3) often limited to students classified as financially independent. In contrast, the Penn State data presented herein is current, focused on veterans receiving educational benefits, and includes all students regardless of financial dependence status. These comparisons are subsequently "ball park" comparisons that should be interpreted with caution.

In the fall of 2012, Penn State officially enrolled 83,086¹ degree-seeking students: 71,452 undergraduates and 11,634 graduate students². Overall, 3,223 of these students were veterans,

¹ These numbers are drawn from the ofcl_enroll table of the Data Warehouse. They include students at University Park, the Commonwealth Campuses, Penn State Hershey, and the Dickinson School of Law, but do not include students enrolled in the Penn College of Technology. They do not match those reported in the Penn State Factbook because 1) they are limited to degree-seeking students and 2) because World Campus enrollments in

according to the definition used in these analyses. While a larger number of veterans were in undergraduate programs, their proportional representation was higher in graduate programs (Table 2). Among undergraduates, 3.5 percent of Penn State students were veterans and 76.6 percent of those received GI Bill benefits. Among graduate students, 6.1 percent were veterans and 53.0 percent of those received GI Bill benefits. At the national level, a slightly higher proportion of undergraduates and a slightly lower proportion of the graduate body were military students (4.2 and 4.1 percent respectively) and among those students, smaller proportion received GI benefits (37.7 and 20.5 percent).

Table 1. Matrix used to identify veterans and recipients of veterans’ benefits for this study.

Categorization ^a	Defined as Vet	# of Students in Fall 2012	Flagged as using Vet Benefits
Section 901 – Educational Assistance Test Program benefits	√	1	√
Section 903 – Educational Assistance Pilot Program	√	0	√
Chapter 1606 - Reservists G.I. Bill ^b		172	
Chapter 1607 - Reserve Educational Assistant Program	√	10	√
Chapter 30 –Montgomery GI Bill	√	156	√
Chapter 31 – Vocational Rehabilitation	√	79	√
Chapter 32 – Post-Vietnam Veterans’ Education Assistance Program	√	1	√
Chapter 33 – Post-9/11 GI Bill (can transfer to dependents)	√	2,157	√
Chapter 34 – 2012-13 Montgomery GI Bill	√	0	√
Chapter 35 – Survivor’s Benefits		169	
Military Service default, veteran without benefits	√	899	
Veteran – Benefits expired	√	31	
Veteran – Not eligible for benefits	√	32	
Not a veteran		2	
Reservist – Not eligible for benefits	√	3	
Reservist – Benefits expired	√	0	

^a Based on the veteran_chapter_code field in the uf_student_bio table of the Data Warehouse.

^b A small number of people using these benefits are veterans, but most are not (Brian Clark, personal communication, February 6, 2013).

the Factbook are based on three semesters of data (spring, summer, and fall) rather than a single semester, as is the case in this report. For more information about World Campus enrollments, contact Janet Dillon, University Outreach, at jam11@psu.edu or (14) 863-3249.

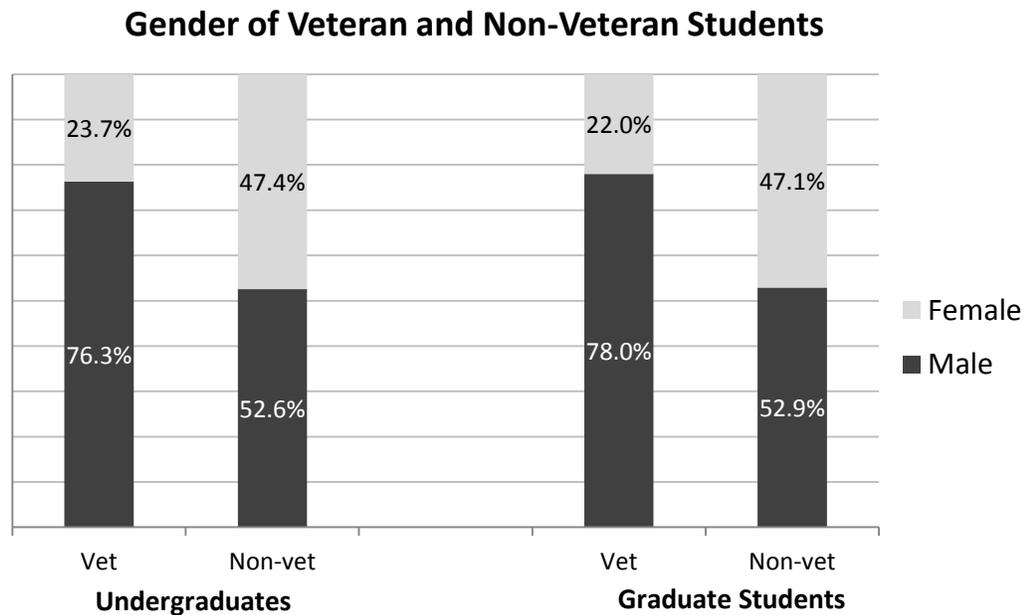
² Except where otherwise noted, the tables and figures in this report only include degree-seeking students (including provisional students).

Table 2. Breakdown of Fall 2012 degree-seeking students by enrollment level, veteran status, and benefit status.

	Undergraduates		Graduate students	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All	71,452	100.0%	11,634	100.0%
Veterans	2,519	3.5%	704	6.1%
Nonveterans	68,933	96.5%	10,930	93.9%
Veterans				
Received GI Bill benefits	1,930	76.6%	373	53.0%
Did not receive benefits	589	23.4%	331	47.0%

While gender is relatively balanced at Penn State, more than three-quarters of veteran students were men (Figure 2). This finding is similar to that found nationally, where 73 percent of military undergraduates and 65 percent of military graduate students were men.

Figure 2



By race, veteran students were more likely to be Hispanic or multi-racial than non-veteran students at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Overall, Penn State veteran students were less racially diverse than military students nationally, where 60 percent of undergraduates and graduate students were White, as compared to 79 percent and 80 percent, respectively at Penn State (Table 3). The population of veteran students at Penn State less diverse than that of the U.S. Military, where 31 percent of women and 16 percent of men are Black and 13 percent of women and 12 percent of men are Hispanic (Statista, 2010). Among Penn State veterans, 9 percent of women and 5 percent of men are Black and 11 percent of women and 7 percent of men are Hispanic (Table 4).

Table 3. Percentage distribution of veterans and non-veterans by level and race/ethnicity.

	Undergraduate		Graduate	
	Vet	Non-vet	Vet	Non-vet
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%
Asian	2.0%	5.5%	1.9%	6.5%
Black	5.9%	7.2%	6.7%	6.1%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Hispanic	8.4%	6.0%	7.0%	4.5%
Multi-racial	4.1%	2.3%	3.7%	1.8%
White	79.1%	78.9%	80.4%	80.7%

Table 4. Percentage distribution of veterans and non-veterans by gender and race/ethnicity.

	Women		Men	
	Vet	Non-vet	Vet	Non-vet
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%
Asian	2.2%	4.9%	2.0%	6.1%
Black	8.7%	8.6%	5.3%	5.6%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Hispanic	10.5%	6.5%	7.4%	5.2%
Multi-racial	7.1%	2.5%	0.2%	2.0%
White	71.0%	77.2%	82.0%	80.8%

Not surprisingly, veterans were typically older than non-veteran students. The mean age of undergraduate veterans was 29 and of non-veterans was 21. At the graduate level, the mean age of veterans was 35 and of non-veterans was 29. At Penn State 12 percent of veterans and 3 percent of non-veteran undergraduates were 40 or older (Figure 3). Similarly, 25 percent of veterans compared to 10 percent of non-veteran graduate students were 40 or older. In general though, Penn State veteran students were younger than military students nationally. In the national profile, 25 percent of military undergraduates and 40 percent of military graduate students were 40 or older.

The majority of Penn State’s veteran students, including non-degree students, are enrolled in baccalaureate programs (63 percent); 11 percent are enrolled in associate’s degree programs, 21 percent are enrolled in graduate programs, less than one percent are enrolled in first-professional programs, and five percent are enrolled in nondegree programs (Figure 4). Among non-veteran students, the distributions by degree program type were similar, although they were proportionately more likely to be enrolled in baccalaureate programs and less likely to be in associate’s and graduate programs. Despite the availability of educational benefits, veterans are more likely than non-veteran students to attend Penn State part-time (Figure 5).

Figure 3

Age of Veteran and Non-Veteran Students

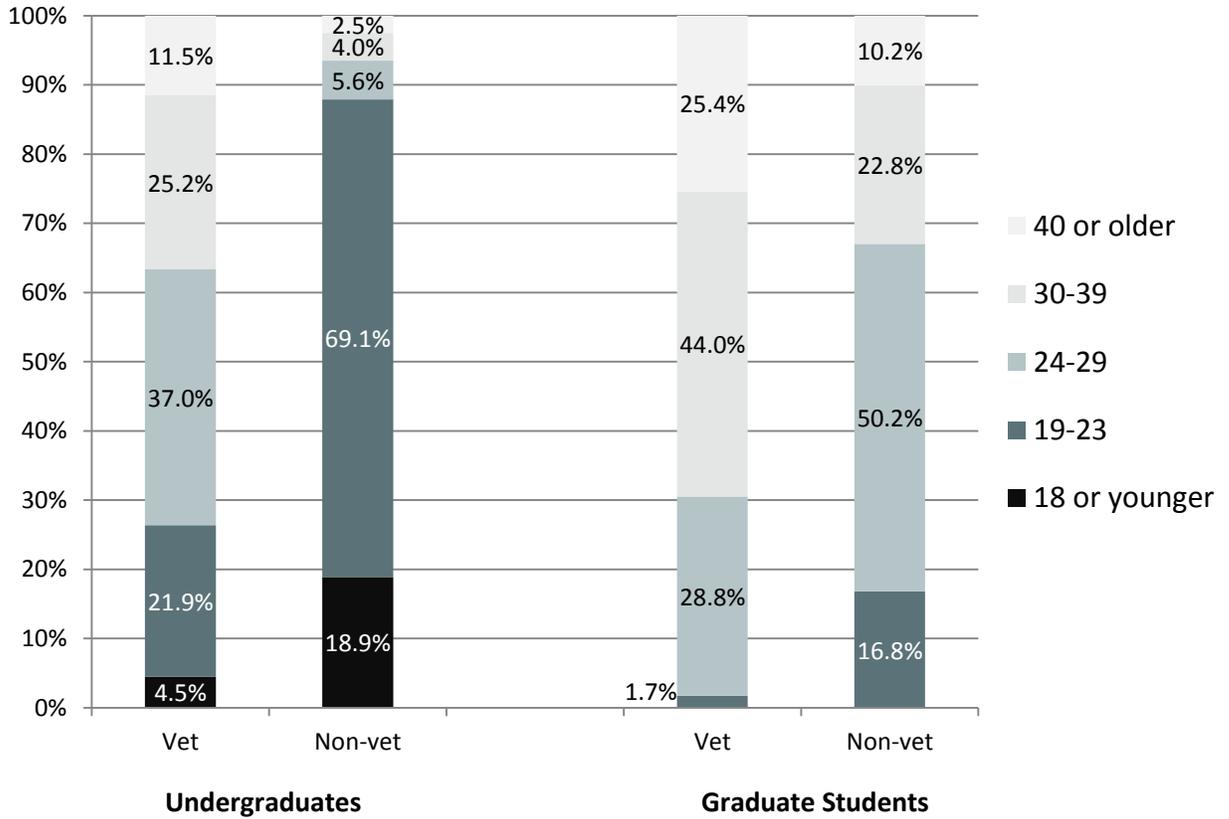


Figure 4

Degree Program Type for Veterans and Non-Veteran Students

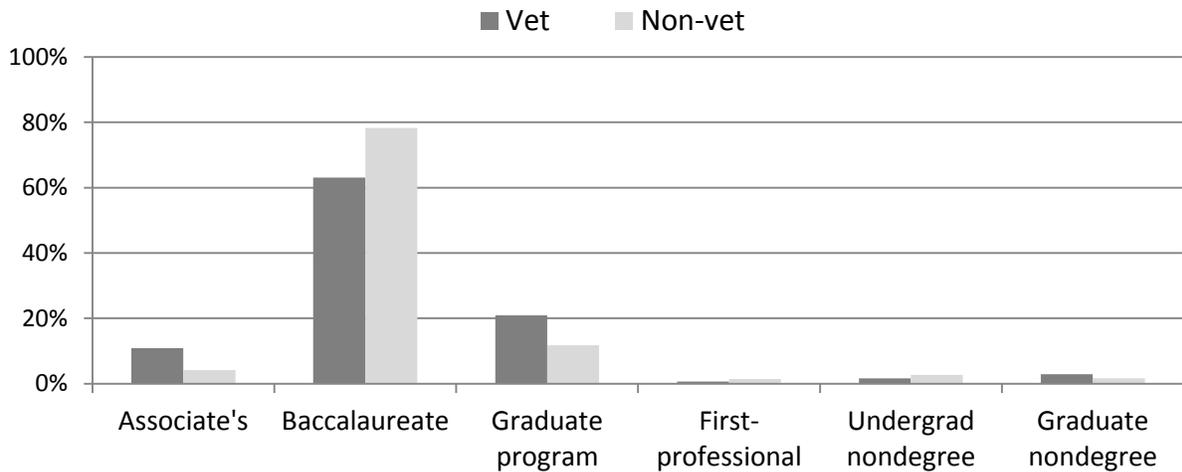
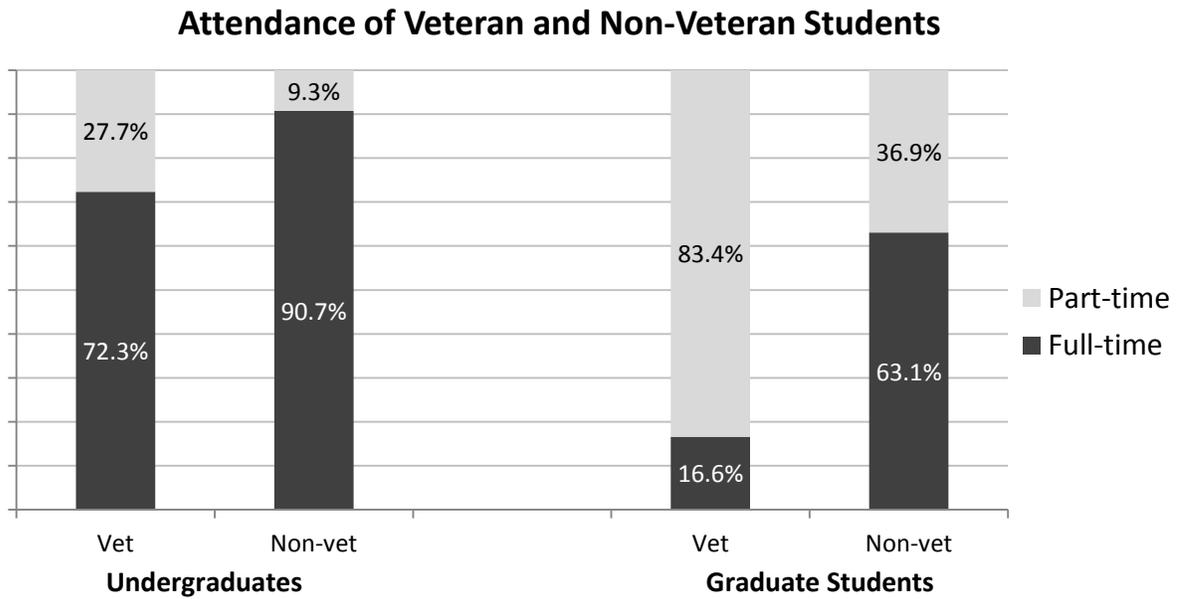
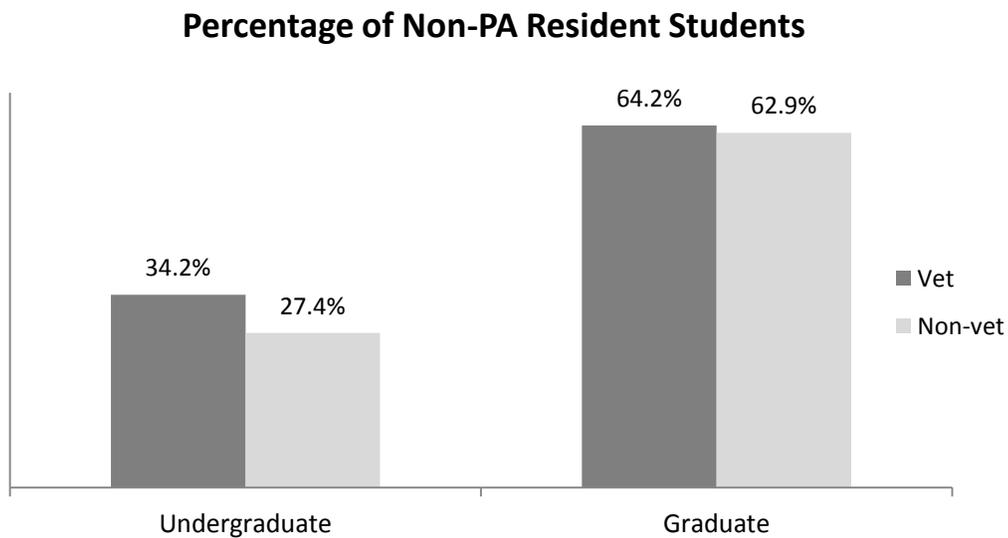


Figure 5



As a state-related institution, the enrollment of Pennsylvania residents is partially subsidized by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For this reason, the ratio of in- to out-of-state students is of perennial interest. Penn State’s veteran undergraduates are more often out-of-state students than are non-veteran undergraduates (28 percent compared to nine percent), while the proportion at the graduate level is comparable for veterans and non-veterans (63 and 64 percent, respectively; Figure 6).

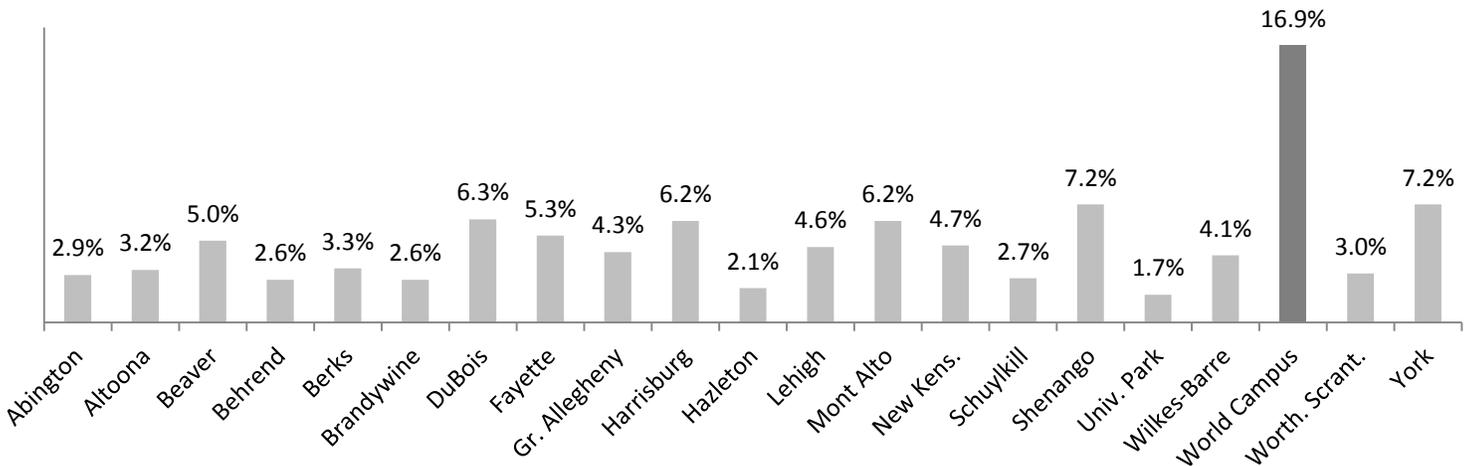
Figure 6



Penn State’s World Campus has the largest proportion of veteran students at Penn State, followed by Shenango, York, DuBois, Mont Alto, and Harrisburg (Figure 7). Veterans were proportionately least common at University Park.

Figure 7

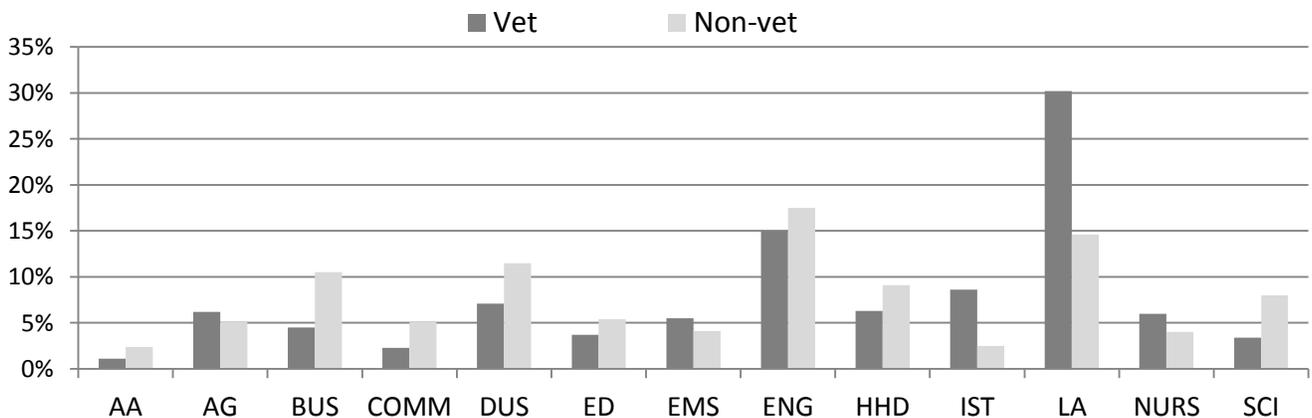
Percentage of Students who are Veterans by Campus



The College of Liberal Arts enrolls nearly one third (30 percent) of all degree-seeking veteran students at Penn State (Figure 8). Veteran students enroll in greater proportions than non-veteran students in the colleges of Agricultural Sciences, Earth and Mineral Sciences, Information Sciences and Technology, and Liberal Arts, and the School of Nursing. They enroll in smaller proportions than non-veteran students in the colleges of Arts and Architecture, Business, Communications, Education, Engineering, Health and Human Development, and Science, and in the Division of Undergraduate Studies. Nationally, the most popular fields for military students are business (19%), health care (11%), and general studies (10%).

Figure 8

College of Enrollment for All Veterans and Non-Veteran Students



Academic preparation for college, as measured by SAT scores, for veterans and non-veteran students at Penn State was similar, with veterans having slightly lower SAT Math scores and slightly higher SAT verbal scores than non-veterans (Table 5). However, at Penn State veterans and non-veteran students had very similar grade-point-averages. Despite there being a slightly higher proportion of “honors-qualified” students (based on cumulative GPA for Gateway Admissions into the Schreyer Honors College³) in the population of veterans than there is among non-veterans, non-veterans have lower representation in the Schreyer Honors College and in Commonwealth Campus honors programs, suggesting that additional efforts might be needed to encourage veteran students to take advantage of the benefits associated with honors program participation.

Table 5. Academic preparation and achievement of veterans and non-veterans.

Mean undergraduate SAT score	Vet	Non-vet
Math	536	553
Verbal	531	523
Mean grade-point-average		
Undergraduate	3.12	3.11
Graduate	3.68	3.74
Honors or honors-qualified undergraduates^a		
Schreyer Honors College	0.6%	2.7%
Campus Honors	0.9%	1.9%
3.7 GPA or higher	18.7%	16.5%

Summary

This data is from the fall of 2012 and profiles approximately 3,200 degree-seeking veteran students enrolled at Penn State. Although the veteran population is relatively small in relation to Penn State’s overall enrollment, these numbers are likely to continue to grow as America draws down its commitments in Afghanistan and reduces the overall size of its military. Further, with billions of dollars invested in GI educational benefits, many are looking to colleges to demonstrate that these are dollars well-spent.

As a starting point, it is important to develop a comprehensive view of this population of students. At Penn State, data limitations make this task difficult, but in this report we have attempted to create a reasonably accurate picture of our veteran student population in order to provide a foundation for further study, as well as for program and policy development. Further, we hope that this report will call attention to the need for better ways to identify this population at Penn State in order that we might evaluate our success and document outcomes.

³ The Gateway admissions process to Schreyer Honors College for students already at Penn State requires a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.70. In addition, students must have at least one full-time semester of study completed at Penn State, at least four full-time semesters of study remaining before graduation, and an application-semester GPA of 3.50 or higher for rising juniors and 3.70 for rising sophomores. For more information, see <http://www.shc.psu.edu/future/gateway/index.cfm>.

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