

Good morning,

The University of Vermont is a public research land-grant university located in Burlington, VT. My name is David Carlson and I am the Coordinator of Student Veteran Services for UVM. I served in the United States Marine Corps, where I deployed three times in four years, and then attended UVM using the Post 9/11 GI Bill. For me, UVM was a great place to transition from being an active duty marine back to the civilian world. I learned to leverage and articulate the skills, leadership, and attitude I gained in the marines, and apply them in the workforce. My current position has two main roles which allow me to be successful supporting veterans' transitions.

The first role is basic; it is helping students understand the admission process at the University and how to access to VA education benefits. That involves assisting with the application process, submitting accurate enrollment information, monitoring VA payments, and making sure that students understand their VA education benefits. To accomplish that, we have to understand that VA and DOD systems have associated norms and rules for accessing information and accomplishing tasks and, likewise, so do institutions of higher learning. Students' navigating both VA and higher education systems must understand the differences between those two disparate bureaucracies in order to be successful. That is the basic level, and no further levels of support can be successful without that process taking place accurately and in a timely fashion. I am still learning, and will continue working hard to learn how to quickly, accurately and correctly certify student enrollment. VA technical support, liaison availability and partnership are critical to the success of schools administering VA education benefits.

My second role at UVM is implementing an all-inclusive student veteran support system which focuses on educating students about what is available to them on campus and in the community. UVM is creating a system of support and encouragement for veterans through the entire higher education process, from first contact with a prospective student all the way through successful academics, to graduation and engagement with the Career Center. That support includes academic, financial aid, social (i.e. peer support through the Student Veteran Organization, a student run club and member of Student Veterans of America), mentorship (e.g. faculty, staff, senior students), and personal wellness. When describing what I do, I think of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. We need to make sure students understand their benefits, and that they are working, before we can proceed to providing higher levels of support.

It is important for me to note, that I see both student and system barriers to accessing higher education for military veterans. Many veterans might be reticent to receive help but as a veteran coordinator with personal domain expertise, I use my experience to break down some of those barriers with knowledge, social management and awareness. I work hard to build trust based relationships with students which gives me the ability to become a trusted advisor and build bridges through previous layers of distrust or misunderstanding with VA or UVM.

The fact is that this is high stakes. This is an important issue which has the ability to influence people's lives; students' success or failure, and their future, are somewhat dependent on being successful in college. That's important to me. Student veteran success matters to me in a huge personal way and I'm so thankful, and humble to have had access to a fantastic education benefit.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and I look forward to your questions.