**AHEAD 2017
Veterans with Disabilities in Higher Ed
SIG Meeting Minutes**

**Meetings/Sessions were held:**Friday, 21 July from 12:45p to 1:45p in Lake George room

Similar to last year, attendance was low. A total of five people attended the meeting.

We are unsure if SIG membership increased, due to the conference. No one explicitly requested to join as a result of attending the meeting.

During the meetings we covered new updates from the SIG Chair Meeting and provided a brief introduction of the SIG to let folks know who we are and what we do as a group.

The following items were covered:

The SIG’s strategic plan/current goals.

We also discussed the SIG’s current long term goals while encouraging prospective and continuing members to take an active participation in leading or contributing to any one of the following items we discussed:

*• The building a disability point of contact (POC)database as a tool to assist student veterans.* Dan Standage is heading this project and has already had a large number of respondents from his outreach who have contributed information. AHEAD members from five states contributed POCs for their respective state. In addition, more than 700 of the current 1455 Student Veterans of America (SVA) Chapter campuses have an identified POC. This project is ongoing and will serve to aid in connecting student veterans and Disability Services at each campus where the GI Bill is accepted.

• *Developing a Disability in Education series.* This is an upcoming project that serves to correct misinformation about disability in education for veterans. It will become the basis for the training related to the Disability Services Liaison (DSL) program currently underway. Longer term, it will serve as a community outreach tool. Anyone interested in contributing to the curriculum, or knows a student who needs curriculum development or teaching experience, please contact one of the Veterans SIG chairs.

• *Developing a peer mentoring program for student veterans in disability service office via the VA Work Study Program.* This is currently called the Disability Services Liaison (DSL) and is in a 15 campus pilot. This program provides universities with a no-cost, veteran outreach program, while also providing student veterans using the GI Bill with servant leadership opportunity. A key strength of the program is the ability for student veterans to normalize help-seeking behaviors amongst their peers. In addition, the Disability in Education series will provide consistent information to correct for the “barracks lawyer” fallacy. Any schools interested in implementing DSL can contact the Veteran SIG chairs to get the DSL Toolkit and a consultation.

• *Monthly collaborative calls with other organizations that also focus on student veterans in the educational space.* One goal we have as a SIG is to bring leading national organizations that support student veterans together. We are also supporting our SIG members who may wish to submit conference/program proposals, so they can reach a broader audience. We are currently collaborating with the following groups:

* + NACADA [National Academic Advising Association]
	+ NASPA [Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Ed]
	+ NCLCA [National College Learning Center Association]
	+ SVA [Student Veterans of America]
	+ CCME [Council of College and Military Educators]
	+ MFRI [Military Family Research Institute]

• *Expand realm of what we do as a SIG to include all postsecondary institutions where veterans also access the GI Bill*. For years, veterans have been enrolling in various trade, vocational and technical schools while utilizing their GI Bill. In addition to online-only schools, veterans transitioning from the military are also introduced to career and technical education (CTE) schools. Although these schools are considered post-secondary ed (PSE), not much is known about the available support. We are looking for someone with experience in this area who can lead this project.

• *Broaden our scope to include employment as a goal of education as it relates to veterans with disabilities*. AHEAD has a Career Planning and Placement Special Interest Group. One goal is to collaborate with that SIG on this initiative. We have established contact with Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy for the Workforce Recruitment Program (DoL ODEP WRP). ODEP is currently looking for a better way to connect to student veterans and has invited Dan Standage to speak on engaging this population with campus coordinators on 30 August.

• *Be inclusive of student veterans in our work.* We are transitioning away from a prescriptive model that comes across as exclusive to those we are serving. We believe that the peer mentorship is the key ingredient to solving problems within the veteran culture. DSL involves student veterans to connect parts of their campus that may not be communicating well with each other. It provides buy-in from those who will be most affected. The Veterans SIG newsletter is another area that is using more inclusive language, so we’re not just talking to AHEAD membership. We’ve added a human interest element that allows student veterans to see themselves in this unique space, while also providing a different perspective that professionals in Disability Services can appreciate.

• *Membership communications format change.* We previously pushed monthly updates using direct email. AHEAD then provided listserv accounts for each SIG, but the format was still the same. Taking a cue from our NASPA collaboration, we switched the format to a newsletter. This allows us to keep an archive on the Veterans SIG landing page and reduce email size by only sending a link to the membership. Doing this also forces us to update the landing page more consistently; currently every four months. In addition, it forces traffic to the website to create more visibility to AHEAD broadly.

• *An introspective look at document accessibility.* As a mindful way of being more inclusive, the Veterans SIG created a new position, a Technology Specialist. This position is currently being held by Jim Weier from the University of Mississippi. All documents produced now, including the tri-annual newsletter and goals and accomplishments reports to the AHEAD Board, are screened by Jim to ensure they are fully accessible before they are distributed outside of the SIG leadership. We feel this is an important leadership step, as we model the behavior that we expect from others.

We wrapped up the meeting by opening the session to questions by the attendees. One attendee was implementing the DSL position and asked whether the position should be a graduate student to ensure a certain maturity level is attained. While that issue is understandable, veterans are often older, with life experience that exceeds traditional undergraduates. One concern raised was about the ability to understand the seriousness of FERPA and the confidentiality of health-related records that are associated with disability services. The response to this related to security clearance requirements of military members and troop management that involves Official Military Personnel File (OMPF), medical and dental records, and adverse material record-keeping. Veterans are often viewed through the same lens as a traditional college student. This occurs by faculty and staff on campus, as well as by employers that are seeking veterans for internship and employment opportunities, but are unable to locate them in Career Services. Veterans don’t fully understand how to properly engage with campus services, when it’s appropriate, and why these services are important to their success. The Veterans SIG seeks to bridge those gaps through our projects and programs, with validation coming from student veterans, and word-of-mouth advertising.