

Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations and Admissions Committee (ASRAC)
Response to Charge S-1414: Removing Barriers to the Education of Military Veterans
May 2015

Charge S-1414 - Removing Barriers to the Education of Military Veterans

Examine obstacles preventing military veterans from expeditiously completing their education at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. If appropriate, recommend policy and process changes that would expedite completion of studies, and promote growth of intercampus collaboration. Refer to the Student Caucus rationale for this charge when deliberating.

Background

This charge was issued at the request of the Senate's Student Caucus, whose rationale for the charge is given in the Appendix. The Student Caucus originally recommended that the charge be issued to the Student Affairs Committee, but the Senate Executive Committee decided that ASRAC would be more appropriate

ASRAC discussed this charge at four consecutive committee meetings. On December 5, 2014, we met with two Camden student Senators, who are veterans and who had helped write the rationale for the charge. On January 23, 2015 we met with Colonel Steven Abel, Director of the Rutgers Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services, as well as with his Assistant Director, Robert Bright¹, to get their views about the concerns raised by the student veterans and to learn more about the services provided to veterans at Rutgers. On February 27, we met with Newark Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs and Services John Gunkel, who told us about academic services for veterans at Newark and about NJ PLAN (Prior Learning Assessment Network), a consortium of New Jersey colleges and universities that was created to expand access to prior learning assessment programs and to enable more students to earn credits for college-level knowledge acquired outside the traditional classroom, including professional and military training². On March 27, the committee discussed and approved the recommendations presented below.

ASRAC Co-Chair Cotter also spoke with Mary Beth Daisey, Camden Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, who provided information about services for veterans in Camden and about Camden's participation in the Service Opportunity College and Rutgers' commitment to the Principles of Excellence enunciated in Federal Executive Order 13607. Co-Chair Winkler spoke with Robin Diamond, Director of the Transfer Advising Office at SAS, New Brunswick about transfer of credit policies in SAS.

Findings

It became clear to ASRAC from our discussions with Rutgers veterans, administrators, and staff members that veterans at Rutgers are facing a number of difficulties associated with transfer of credit and academic advising.

¹ Col. Abel retired as Director of Veteran and Military Programs and Services and Robert Bright was appointed as Acting Director on April 1, 2015.

² Rutgers-Newark just joined NJ PLAN, which is spearheaded by Thomas Edison State College, a national leader in prior learning assessment. It is much too soon, however, to know if membership will enable veterans at Newark to get more academic credit for their military training and be able to complete their studies somewhat faster.

First, there is a lack of appropriate assistance for veterans who are trying to get transfer credit for education and training received in the military. In some Rutgers units, veterans seem to be largely left on their own to try to negotiate transfer credit with schools, academic departments, and even individual faculty members. Veterans who are more savvy, or more often, just lucky, may get appropriate credit while those less lucky or less adept at navigating the system may not receive appropriate credit.

Second, some veterans believe that they were not given an adequate opportunity to demonstrate that the knowledge they acquired in the military was equivalent to a specific course or courses at Rutgers. Some veterans apparently have been denied transfer credit because their school or unit does not offer courses in a particular subject area although other units in the Rutgers system do offer such courses. Other veterans have been told that transfer credit cannot be obtained for military education or training unless that education or training appears as a course or courses on a transcript from an accredited college or university³.

Third, some veterans complain that when they first arrived as transfer students at Rutgers, they were not given sufficient help in learning how to navigate the complex university bureaucracy or how to lay out a comprehensive plan for completing their studies as efficiently as possible. These veterans said that they were eventually able to figure things out and be successful at Rutgers. But they were concerned about the time they had wasted and the unnecessary frustrations they had endured.

During our consideration of this charge, we also learned indirectly of two additional problems. First the quality of the services provided to veterans in Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick are not the same. Second, communication and coordination among those who provide services to veterans throughout the Rutgers system needs to be improved significantly.

Recommendations

To address the problems we have noted above, ASRAC makes the following recommendations.

1. There should be one or more academic advocates for veterans at Rutgers – Camden, Rutgers – Newark, and Rutgers – New Brunswick, all charged with
 - helping veterans receive the transfer credit for military education and training they deserve from schools and academic departments;
 - helping newly arrived veterans to prepare a realistic plan for completing their degree program in the most efficient manner and to learn to navigate the highly complex Rutgers system.
2. Each academic advocate should be an academic staff member or faculty member already engaged in undergraduate advising who is knowledgeable about degree requirements and transfer policies in his or her unit and willing to learn about military education and training

³ It has been suggested that this last restriction is required by our accrediting agency. We doubt this, however, because there appear to be a number of colleges and universities accredited by Middle States which grant transfer credit for courses taken at certain military training schools and approved by the American Council on Education.

programs. A staff member taking on the role of academic advocate for veterans would likely already have a position as an advisor and would add this role to their other duties.

3. The SAS policy of offering 6 ROTC credits to all undergraduate veterans who provide a DD-214 with honorable discharge should be adopted by other undergraduate schools in New Brunswick and by Rutgers - Camden and Rutgers - Newark.
4. Schools and departments should be strongly encouraged to make use of proficiency exams and portfolio reviews to enable students to receive graduation credit for courses for which they mastered the material while in the military, but for which they cannot produce a transcript from an accredited college or university.
5. There should be greater cooperation, coordination, and communication among Rutgers units to provide improved academic advising and support to all veterans. For example:
 - There should be greater communication and sharing of information and best practices among those who provide academic advising and support to veterans.
 - Academic departments in any Rutgers unit should be willing to offer placement and proficiency exams and evaluate transfer-of-credit requests for students in another unit that does not offer courses in the particular subject area.
 - There should be user-friendly websites at Rutgers- Camden, Rutgers-Newark, and Rutgers-New Brunswick providing comprehensive up-to-date information about services for veterans at that university and a link to the appropriate website should be prominently displayed on the Camden or Newark or New Brunswick home page.⁴
6. Veterans at Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick should have access to the same level of academic support and services. The increased autonomy of the three universities in the system should not keep any veteran at Rutgers from getting the best support and services the Rutgers system can offer.
7. Rutgers – Camden and Rutgers – New Brunswick should seriously consider joining NJ PLAN if Rutgers - Newark finds that membership proves beneficial to its veterans.

⁴ Newark already has a dedicated [website](#) for veterans but in order to get to it from the Newark home page, one has to click on Info for Current Students and then scroll through a long list of links. The New Brunswick home page does have a link to the [website](#) of the Office of Veterans and Military Programs and Services, which seems to be undergoing reconstruction at the moment and many of its links do not work. It is not clear whether this website when fully operational will be suitable for our purposes.

Resolution

Whereas, the Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee (ASRAC) has carefully considered the problems with academic advising and transfer of credits faced by veterans at Rutgers and has made a number of recommendations to address those problems; and

Whereas, members of the Rutgers University Senate have considered ASRAC's recommendations and found them to be sound;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Rutgers University Senate endorses the recommendations of its Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee and calls upon the Rutgers administration to implement those recommendations.

2014-2015 ASRAC Members

<i>Martha Cotter, Co-Chair</i>	<i>At-Large New Brunswick</i>
<i>Matthew Winkler, Co-Chair</i>	<i>NB Staff</i>
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Amita Avadhani	Nursing, Faculty
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Katalin Balog	FAS-N, Faculty
Sanjib Bhuyan	SEBS, Faculty
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Evan Covello	SAS-NB, Student
Anthony Covington	Student Charter Trustee
Babu Dasari	CCAS, Faculty
Cecile Feldman	Dean, RSDM, Administration
Patrick Gibson	SAS-NB, Student
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Hamzah Raza	NCAS, Student
Robert Schwartz	NJMS, Faculty
Hui Sun	SMLR, Student
Ted Szatrowski	At-Large Newark, Faculty
Gretchen Van de Walle	Assoc. Dean, Undergraduate Education, NCAS, Administration
Velan Vetri	Engineering, Student
Mark Vodak	SEBS, Faculty
Sana Yousaf	GS-New Brunswick, Student

APPENDIX Student Caucus Rationale for Charge S-1414

A number of obstacles currently prevent military Veterans across all Rutgers campuses from expediting their education in order for them to graduate faster and cheaper and compete in the societal job market. One such obstacle is the administrative difficulty of transferring the maximum amount of course credit from military SMART transcripts to academic course credit in order to accelerate the educational process at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Another is the administrative difficulties of considering whether or not all Rutgers campuses and academic departments will enable college credit for training and experience with respect to a military Veterans time and grade within a military occupational specialty. The Student Affair Committee shall look at these obstacles, as well as others not enumerated in this charge but which the Committee may find relevant in the course of discussion, and investigate changes the University can make to promote and encourage the growth of inter-campus collaboration on the part of students. This includes not only changes to current policies which may inhibit such activity, but also affirmative steps the University may take to promote an enhanced educational pathway for military Veterans. Military Veterans at all Rutgers campuses are actively discouraged and frustrated that much of their federal and state level professional military educational courses and SMART transcripts are not taken into consideration as college course credit within their academic departments. Various administrative and academic barriers both at the University and department level disincentivize Military Veterans from graduating faster and cheaper which prevents them from returning to society sooner and competing in the job market. It is unconscionable for Rutgers, through administrative and academic negligence, to continue erecting additional barriers or exacerbating the natural ones further for their military Veterans. It is a direct contradiction of our professed commitment to the principal of "One Rutgers," our desire to enhance the opportunity of our American military Veterans and as an academic institution named after Colonel Henry Rutgers, whom was a Revolutionary War hero. As long as our actions and our words differ in this regard, feelings of mutual disappointment, distrust and frustration will continue to characterize the relationship with all Rutgers campuses and their military Veterans. If we are to truly consider ourselves an academic institution that enhances the educational opportunities of our military Veterans so that they can quickly return to society in an effort to utilize their skills for its improvement, it is incumbent on us to seek to mitigate these barriers as much as we can.