Executive Summary of the
Report of the Undergraduate Veterans Subcommittee
of the Diversity Advisory Board

October 2012

In 2009, student veteran Chaney Harrison, RUE ’11.5 developed a report entitled “Policy Recommendations for Veterans at Brown University.” Review and discussion of the report with the Office of Institutional Diversity resulted in issues related to undergraduate student veterans being placed on the agenda of the Diversity Advisory Board and the creation of a subcommittee for the 2011-12 academic year.

Charged with considering issues related to undergraduate student veterans, the subcommittee developed a plan of work to discuss and develop recommendations in four areas: admission and recruitment, financial aid, academic and campus life support, and institutionalization.

Throughout our conversations, a broader sense of the opportunities and challenges developed. We represent these here as themes that we hope will help the University and readers of this report to contextualize the specifics and details that follow.

1. *Military service should and must be recognized by the University for the extraordinary service to our nation that it is.* Policies, procedures, structures, and University ceremonies must all work together to reflect the University’s recognition of the service of veterans.

2. Recognition of this service requires that the University *move from being reactive to proactive* (e.g. building exceptions for veterans into policies rather than relying on the potential for waiving standard requirements) and *from relying on volunteer efforts* of students, alumni, faculty, and staff to *institutionalized support*.

3. *Developing a critical mass of undergraduate student veterans* should be a stated University priority and be accompanied by the allocation of appropriate resources and support in admission and financial aid.

4. A *concerted, sustained effort is needed* to enable Brown to move from being perceived as, at best, indifferent to military service to holding such service as valued in the University’s culture.

At our first meeting, we discussed the importance of also considering the experience of graduate and medical student veterans. Our subcommittee concluded that our task would be more successful by focusing on one population and its unique needs and challenges. We strongly recommend that the University undertake a similar effort as ours to consider opportunities for enhancing veteran recruitment, aid, and experiences in the graduate and medical schools.
Recommendations: Critical First Steps

1. Institutional Value Statement: Establish the recruitment and admission of veterans as a University priority and direct the Office of Admission to allocate staff and financial resources to support the effort.

2. Dedicated Staffing and Resources for the Office of Student Veterans and Commissioning Programs: A dedicated staff member with appropriate expertise is critical to advancing most if not all of the recommendations in this report and assessing their impact. Recommendations in the report related to peer advising, faculty mentorship, and community events require the allocation of program funds.

3. Assumption of Responsibility for Ongoing Advocacy within the University’s Governance Structure: While the subcommittee did not endorse a specific recommendation regarding responsibility, we recommend that Brown determine which board(s) and/or councils will be formally charged with advancing veterans’ issues.

4. Web-based Information: Establish a strong Web presence related to student veterans in Admission, Financial Aid, and the University more generally. An example of critical web accessible information for potential veteran applicants would be the ability to estimate their financial aid packages (including Brown scholarships, federal aid, and VA benefits) in advance of their application.

Recommendations: Important Next Steps (One to Two Years)

5. Applicant Pipeline: Establish and implement strategies for identifying potential veteran candidates.

6. Maximize Veterans Affairs and Institutional Aid: Evaluate Financial Aid policies with the goal of providing, to the extent possible, the opportunity for student veterans to maximize their institutional aid and VA benefits.

7. Get the Full Match: Brown’s current level of participation does not enable student veterans to get the full Yellow Ribbon Scholarship Program match from the VA.

8. Bring Greater Attention and Focus to Brown’s History with Military Veterans: Tap into and maximize the impact of existing resources such as memorials, the Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection at the John Hay Library, and Manning Chapel, including auditing campus tour content and representation in 250th anniversary celebrations and documentation.

9. Gather Data: Brown needs better data and information related to alumni and current veteran undergraduate, graduate, and medical students, including a comprehensive strategy for gathering and recording information related to military status (e.g. via Banner).

10. Institutionalized Peer Support: Particularly given the small numbers of student veterans and our desire to ensure peer support is institutionalized, ensure a cohort of trained peer advisors that includes summer outreach. Additionally, provide student employment opportunities for student veterans engaged in this work.
Recommendations: Sustaining and Institutionalizing (Two to Five Years)

11. Need-Blind Admission: Perhaps the most significant change Brown could make is to ensure that veterans, regardless of the application process through which they enter the University, the GI-bill in effect, or amount of GI-bill benefits that remain, will be admitted need-blind.

12. Veteran-friendly Application Processes: Depending on the strategies identified as being most likely to be successful, Brown needs to review current admission timelines and processes to establish veteran-friendly processes.

13. Ensure the Yellow Ribbon Scholarship Program Can Accommodate All Student Veterans: While this is currently not an issue, as the number of student veterans increases, Brown will need to expand its commitment to the Yellow Ribbon Scholarship Program.

14. Embrace Non-Traditional Students in Formulation of Financial Aid Package: For both veteran and non-veteran non-traditional students, the assumptions in the financial aid package (student support of dependents/spouses, change in income due to departure from a career, etc.) need to be reevaluated to ensure they take into consideration the life circumstances of non-traditional students.

15. Protect University Commitment to RUE: Efforts to increase veteran enrollment should not financially impact commitment to non-veteran RUE students. As veterans represent an expanding demographic, additional financial resources should be contributed to the RUE financial aid budget or an additional veteran budget should be established.

16. Establish an Annual Calendar of Veteran Events and Ceremonies: Events, ceremonies, and initiatives related to veterans are an important avenue for communicating values, engaging the campus community, and creating materials that can be used in outreach to the alumni community and general public. Funding and staffing support will be critical to these efforts.

17. Strengthen Brown’s Presence in Military Networks: Develop media and other strategies that strengthen Brown’s presence in formal and informal military and veterans’ communities and networks. Potential applicants need a sense that Brown is looking for people like them.

18. Enhance Orientation and Transition Advising: Expand veteran-specific information and sessions in existing programs and offer targeted transition programs.

19. Advising/Mentorship for the Future: Develop a cohort of faculty, staff, and alumni who are informed of veterans services, are visible participants in veterans programs and activities, and have regular interaction with student veterans.

20. Student Financial Aid Advising and Staff Expertise: The intersection of traditional student financial aid with VA benefits is complicated. Brown should proactively work with veterans to maximize their financial aid packages and provide dedicated and informed expertise.
Additional Recommendations

21. Leadership in Veterans’ Issues: The University should endeavor to play a visible role in veterans’ issues, with Rhode Island being the most likely context. Such efforts would also continue to build a perception of the University as having a culture that is supportive of military service. We recommend ongoing conversation with Public Affairs and University Relations, the Swearer Center for Public Service, and others to identify such opportunities.

22. Veteran Services Network: Identify offices and programs that are critical to the experience of veteran services and ensure a system of communication and coordination among offices.

23. Learning the Concepts and the Language: Successful interface between Brown, the military, and veterans requires Brown to become more conversant in military culture, language, and systems.

24. Policies and Procedures for Reservist Activities: Such policies and procedures, if not already developed, should be developed and readily available and should support, to the greatest extent possible, a student’s commitment as a reservist.

25. Review Financial Services: As the subcommittee did not meet with a representative of Financial Services (Bursar’s Office, Loan Office), we recommend a review of recommendations in this area be undertaken.

26. Make a Health Insurance Scholarship Part of Every Veteran’s Package.

27. Gaining Critical Mass Beyond Brown: Given our small veteran population, the subcommittee encouraged continued development of networks of student veterans outside of Brown including with other Ivy League institutions and across Rhode Island.

Membership

Jabbar Bennett, Graduate & Medical Schools  Sam McNeal, Ph.D. ‘13
Maitrayee Bhattacharyya ’91, The College  Peter Newcomb, Admission
Janet Cooper Nelson, Chaplains & Religious Life  Elena Oancea, Medical Science
Ricky Gresh, Campus Life (Chair)  Robert Pelcovits, Physics
Chaney Harrison, RUE ‘11.5  David Salsone, RUE ‘12.5
Margaret Klawunn, Campus Life  R. Tyson Smith, Sociology
Elizabeth Love, Office of the Provost

Philip Crean ‘14 and Lauren Rouse ‘15, both student veterans, also made substantial contributions to the work of our subcommittee.