

Military Transcript and Experience Review: A 13-state scan of policies

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POLICY REPORT
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NCHEMS

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) is a nonprofit research and consulting organization founded in 1969 whose mission is to improve the management and effectiveness of higher education institutions, systems, and state agencies. In its more than fifty years of history, NCHEMS has successfully completed projects in costs and finance, governance, mission review, organizational/institutional effectiveness, assessment and student outcomes. The Center is located in Boulder, Colorado, and has a staff of 13 researchers and support staff. www.nchems.org.

MHEC Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit (MCMC)

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) convenes the 13 states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin for the purpose of advancing best practices that are designed to ease the transition of veterans and their families from military life to college campuses. Emphasis is given to translating competencies acquired through military training and experiences into milestones toward completing a college degree or earning a certificate or license. www.mhec.org/mcmc.

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INTRODUCTION

In autumn of 2019, NCHEMS and MHEC were awarded a competitive grant from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) as part of its National Research Collaborative on Postsecondary Competency based Education and Learning (www.cberesearch.org). The collaborative “focuses on answering key questions that advance the field and build evidence for CBE and CBL”. Being partners in AIR’s collaborative allows NCHEMS and MHEC to

interact with other researchers in the fields of CBE and CBL and provides the organizations the opportunity to share the following research more widely to support the development of foundational knowledge in the field. The following policy scan demonstrates the many ways military-connected students’ Joint Service Transcript and other related military documents are utilized to award college credit via CBE/L.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ Variety exists across the thirteen states included in the scan. Eight of the thirteen have formal legislation related to the review of military transcripts and experience for military connected students entering or reentering postsecondary education.
- ▶ Variety also exists across the eight states with formal legislation. Each has found a way to coordinate processes and encourage compliance with the policies by institutions, including development of communities of practice for training and sharing of promising practices at the institutional level.
- ▶ Having legislation in place related to the review of military transcripts and experience for military-connected students does not mean transfer credits will be awarded, awarded applicably or awarded to the students’ degree program.

The following report outlines the research project and summarizes the results of its findings, including detailed information regarding the interpretation of each state’s policy. These findings will be particularly pertinent to policy makers and researchers interested in military-connected students and their success in postsecondary education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DESIGN

States vary in their development and passage of policies related to higher education, including policies related to the review of military transcripts and experience for military-connected students entering or reentering postsecondary education. This study proposed to answer the questions:

1. What policies do the 13 states involved in the MHEC’s MCMC have in place related to the review of military transcripts and experience for military-connected students entering or reentering postsecondary education?
2. How are these policies generally interpreted by the state agencies involved with military-connected students in postsecondary education?

The key methods used in this research were primary research and individual and team interviews. Primary research was used to identify and describe the related policies in the 13 MHEC MCMC states. Individual and team interviews with related state agency staff was used to better understand the interpretation of the state policies. The unit of analysis for this research is the state with the sample being the 13 states that participate in the MHEC MCMC convening: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. To date, a policy analysis has not been conducted reflecting on the affect these state and institutional policies have on CBE/L. The following analysis demonstrates the many ways military-connected students’ Joint Service Transcript and other related military documents are utilized to award college credit via CBE/L.

TABLE 1. Summary of State Policies

STATE	POLICY DESCRIPTION	CITATION
Illinois	<p>Creates the Educational Credit for Military Experience Act, provides that each institution of higher education shall adopt a policy to award academic credit for military training applicable to the student's certificate or degree requirements, requires the policy to apply to any individual who is enrolled in the institution of higher education and who has completed a military training course that meets certain requirements.</p> <p>Requires higher education institutions to adopt a policy to award academic credit for military experience. A student's military experience must be recommended for credit by a national higher education association that provides such recommendations and included on the student's military transcript or otherwise documented. The institution must provide this policy to an applicant who lists current or prior military experience on their application. The institution must maintain a list of military courses and programs that qualify for academic credit.</p>	<p>IL H 3701 2018 Educational Credit for Military Experience Status: Enacted - Act No. 195 08/18/2017 - Enacted</p> <p>110 Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. 32/10</p>
Indiana	<p>State higher education institutions are required to adopt a policy to award academic credit for military experience. Military experience must meet American Council on Education standards. Students must complete a CLEP, DANTEs, or Excelsior College exam. A minimum score for CLEP exams is designated. Awarded credit must be applicable to degree requirements. Policies must be published to the institution's website and the commission for higher education's website. Credit limits are established for in-person and online programs.</p>	<p>Ind. Code Ann. § 21-42-7-1 (West) et. seq. 2015</p>
Iowa	<p>Amends current law which requires that community colleges, accredited private postsecondary institutions, and the board of regents file annual reports with the governor and the general assembly relating to the award of educational credits to veterans for military education, training, and experience, amends the definition of veteran to include certain members of the reserve forces of the United States and of the national guard.</p> <p>Extends veterans reporting requirements of postsecondary educational institutions to include certain members of the reserve Forces of the United States and certain members of the National Guard, requires that community colleges, accredited private postsecondary institutions, and the board of regents file annual reports with the governor and the General Assembly relating to the award of educational credits to veterans for military education, training, and experience.</p>	<p>IA H 205 2016 Veteran Educational Credits Status: Enacted - Act No. 8 03/05/2015 - Enacted</p> <p>IA S 133 – Companion 2015</p>

TABLE 1. Summary of State Policies (continued)

STATE	POLICY DESCRIPTION	CITATION
Kansas	No policy identified.	
Kentucky	No policy identified.	
Michigan	<p>Requires public universities receiving certain funds to ensure that admission application processes meet certain requirements concerning transcripts and transfer credits if an applicant is serving or has served as a member of the military, National Guard, or military reserves.</p> <p>Public universities receiving state aid for higher education are required to notify military applicants that they may receive academic credit for their military experience. Upon receipt of the student’s military transcript, the university must evaluate and notify the applicant what academic credit is available to them.</p>	<p>MI H 4060 2015 Public University Admission Status: Enacted - Act No. 44 06/08/2015 – Enacted</p> <p>Mich. Comp. Laws Ann. § 388.1875b (West)</p>
Minnesota	Requires Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to award academic credit for military experience, if the experience meets American Council on Education or equivalent standards. The University of Minnesota and private institutions are encouraged to do the same.	<p>Minn. Stat. Ann. § 197.775 (West) 2017</p>
Missouri	Requires the coordinating board for higher education to adopt a policy by January 1, 2014 that requires every institution of higher education to award educational credits to an enrolled student who is also a veteran, for courses that are part of the student’s military training or service and that meet the standards of the American Council on Education or equivalent standards for awarding academic credit. Also requires the department of health and senior services and the department of insurance, financial institutions and professional registration to require every health-related professional licensing board to establish a procedure to ensure any member of the U.S. armed forces on active duty who, at the time of activation, was a member in good standing with any professional licensing body in this state and was licensed or certified, to be kept in good standing by the professional licensing body. The license or certificate shall be renewed without the payment of fees and without obtaining continuing education credits when circumstances prevent such training, or the service members performs the licensed occupation as part of duties performed while on active duty.	<p>MO S 106 2013 07/10/2013 - Enacted</p>

TABLE 1. Summary of State Policies (continued)

STATE	POLICY DESCRIPTION	CITATION
Missouri (continued)	Directs the coordinating board for higher education to adopt a policy that requires every public postsecondary university, college, vocational and technical school to award academic credit for military experience. The governing boards of public institutions must adopt the requisite rules and procedures to implement this policy. Military experience must meet American Council on Education or equivalent standards and be determined by the department or faculty to be appropriate to institutional course content.	Mo. Ann. Stat. § 173.1158 (West)
Nebraska	No policy identified.	
North Dakota	No policy identified.	
Ohio	<p>Requires state institutions of higher education to award credit for military training, increases penalties for theft and identity fraud offenses where the victim is an active duty service member, allows a civil action for victims of identity fraud, requires each licensing agency to prioritize and expedite certification or licensing for applicants that are a member, veteran, spouse, or surviving spouse of a member or veteran, relates to preference in any federally funded employment and training program.</p> <p>The Chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education is directed to develop standards and procedures for public higher education institutions to use when awarding academic credit for military experience. Information about standardized resources and a database that shows how military experience translates to academic credit must be made available online. The Chancellor must also develop a military articulation and transfer assurance guide, and a statewide training program for faculty and staff that prepares them to evaluate military experience. The program shall use recommendations from the American Council on Education and standards from the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning. Costs or fees for transcription services for service members are prohibited.</p>	<p>OH H 488 2014 Enacted - Act No. 117 06/16/2014 - Enacted</p> <p>Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 3333.164 (West); § 3345.424</p>
South Dakota	No policy identified.	
Wisconsin	No policy identified.	

POLICY INTERPRETATIONS

Illinois

- ▶ Multiple entities in Illinois are responsible for following through on the policy, including: the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission.
- ▶ The American Council on Education (ACE) military credit recommendations are used in the state to encourage consistency across institutions in their awarding of credit. There is leeway at the institutional level in interpreting whether a military training course meets certain course requirements and every institution has an appeals process if the student expected to receive credit for prior training. A Transfer Working Group and Academic Leadership Group collaborate to discuss data and processes as an additional effort to encourage consistency.
- ▶ The statute requires public institutions in Illinois to adopt a policy to award academic credit for military training. Private institutions in the state are not required to adopt such a policy, but many have one in place.

Indiana

- ▶ The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) is responsible for following through on the policy.
- ▶ ICHE can encourage consistency across institutions because it is the entity responsible for implementation at all public institutions, which are the only ones the code applies to. To encourage implementation of the code, ICHE periodically checks that institutions have their policies publicly available on their institutional websites.
- ▶ Institutions generally use the American Council on Education (ACE) military credit recommendations. It is the faculty at an institution that makes the decisions about awarding credit. They may also confer with admissions personnel. If a military-connected student is awarded a large amount of credit that does not necessarily fit within their degree requirements, financial aid professionals may also be conferred with to ensure the best result for the student.

Iowa

- ▶ Multiple entities are involved in following through on the policy because they present a joint report to the legislature. These entities include the Iowa Department of Education (representing the community colleges), the State of Iowa Board of Regents (representing the public 4-year institutions), private colleges in Iowa, and the Iowa College Aid Commission. The Iowa College Aid Commission serves as the collector of the report data because they have additional reporting requirements, so it is logical for them to serve in this role.
- ▶ When the policy was enacted, a collaborative group was formed to develop data definitions and outline a process for the report's development. This collective effort encourages consistency across institutions while also acknowledging that institutional professionals must interpret definitions as they adjust data systems to collect, store, and report these data. In addition, the public institutions in Iowa have a statewide transfer agreement that includes credit for military training and experience. The American Council on Education (ACE) military credit recommendations are generally used by institutions for consistency.
- ▶ This law requires the reporting of data on the awarding of educational credits to veterans for military education, training, and experience. It does not require institutions to review military training and experience for credit. By requiring the reporting, the legislature is encouraging all accredited postsecondary institutions (public and private) to have a review process.

Michigan

- ▶ Due to constitutional autonomy for higher education institutions in the state, there is no state entity in Michigan with the authority to enforce this state policy.
- ▶ The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency conducts a regular survey administered to all public institutions in Michigan to collect information related to the policy. It is neither a government agency, nor does it have oversight authority. Work by higher education institutions in Michigan related to the receipt of academic credit for their military experience varies by institution. There is collaboration among the institutions to allow for opportunities to learn from one another.

Minnesota

- ▶ The legislation is not specific about which entity is responsible for following through on the policy. Public institutions in the state of Minnesota interpret the policy in their own setting and their faculty make determinations on transfer of credit.
- ▶ The Minnesota State system has developed collective processes for assisting its institutions in determining credit for military-connected students. They began with four military occupations (human resource specialist, healthcare specialist, military police, and wheel vehicle mechanic), bringing small groups of faculty from across the system together to understand the training and certifications and how they translate to courses and programs in the Minnesota State system. When they determined this process was moving too slowly, they flipped it and, using the recommendations from the American Council on Education (ACE), determined the equivalent transfer credits for all the military occupations that included that piece of training. By shifting the process, Minnesota State was able to evaluate almost 30,000 military occupations for transfer equivalencies, allowing for some institutional autonomy while taking advantage of collective work.

Missouri

- ▶ The Missouri Coordinating Board of Higher Education is directed by the legislature to manage the process outlined in the policy. It provides official policy for higher education. The Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development is the entity with which institutions work to enact the policy. It answers questions that institutions may have as they interpret the policy in their own settings. The Missouri Veterans Commission, an independent agency of the Governor, is also gaining some influence in the state and getting more involved in veterans within higher education in the state. The State Approving Agency, housed within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Missouri, is the consistent messaging body on the topic. There is some variety of interpretation and process across institutions. There are also informal, educational and networking groups to assist in sharing best practice related to military-connected students and their needs in higher

education, like a group called Veterans in Higher Education in St. Louis.

- ▶ In defining who qualifies as a veteran for the purposes of the policy, Missouri casts a wide net. They defer the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) to determine financial and legal implications of the label, but also include, for purposes of qualifying for postsecondary education credit determination, National Guard and family members of veterans. Missouri has embraced the term military-connected students to indicate this broad definition. As a state they are enacting policies to attract military-connected families to the state.

Ohio

- ▶ The Ohio Department of Higher Education is responsible for follow through on the policy. The Chancellor was charged with developing standards for the awarding of military credit which fit with the already established articulation and transfer policy. The Department's Military Strategic Implementation Team held a convening, created an implementation team, and developed a toolkit for institutional implementation. The institutions also helped one another through the process in order to meet the implementation deadline. A statewide faculty panel evaluates military training courses to encourage consistency across the 36 institutions.
- ▶ The Department has created a website, Ohio Values Veterans (https://www.ohiohighered.org/ohio_values_veterans), that contains information needed by faculty, staff, and military-connected students to navigate the process. The Military Transfer Assurance Guides (MTAGs) were created to guarantee that specific forms of military training, experience, and coursework line up to current college and university courses and will be awarded meaningful and applicable credit. Training is supplied to institutions by the Ohio Department of Higher Education, as public colleges and universities are required to assess military training, experience, and coursework for prospective configuration with their own courses and programs.
- ▶ The Department provides extensive training related to military-connected students in higher education, including the awarding of credit for prior experience and training. The state of Ohio was divided into quarters and

volunteer teams of three to five individuals, including staff with expertise in military-connected students, credit transfer, and someone from the office of the registrar, were recruited to attend train-the-trainer educational opportunities. This approach ensures that training can be provided within resource constraints.

OVERALL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Formal legislation and statutes have led to groundbreaking efforts in the area of awarding meaningful college credit to military-connected students based on their training and experience. As a result of legislation one Midwest state requires an in-depth report from public postsecondary institutions and some private and independent colleges. This report requires institutions to share the number of first-time ever enrolled (post-high school graduation) and verified veteran undergraduate students, total number of veteran undergraduate students who received transcribed credits, average number of total credits applied, average number of military credits applied toward the first intended major of an academic credential, and the total number of veterans served through credit enrollment in the fiscal year. Another state provided training to faculty members and institutional staff in the process of how to award meaningful college credit for military-connected students. This state also created, and continues to update, a list of courses for which certain types of military training, experience, and/or coursework align to existing college and university courses and will be awarded appropriate credit. A university system has established consistent practices and procedures among colleges and universities for awarding undergraduate and graduate credit for learning assessed from military courses and military occupations. This information, introduced in 2009, can be accessed via a portal and the system has awarded more than 212,000 credits to military-connected students for military courses and occupations which in turn has saved them more than \$40 million and 8.5 million hours of duplicated course time.

Having legislation in place related to the review of military transcripts and experience for military-connected students entering or reentering postsecondary education does not mean transfer credits will necessarily be awarded, awarded appropriately or awarded to the students' degree program. Some institutions within the Midwest that have this type of legislation possess constitutional autonomy and are exempt

from the statute but are strongly encouraged by the state to participate. Other institutions are very conservative in awarding credit not only to military-connected students but any transfer student as material covered must be similar to the material taught in a course at the receiving campus. Military-connected students might be pursuing a degree completely different from their military occupation thus any transfer credits could potentially hurt rather than help in pursuit of their educational goals. Lastly, the legislation reviewed for this project predominately declare that the institutions have a policy for review not that they are required to award credit.

Some states in the Midwest that do not have formal legislation related to reviewing military-connected students' education and training to award credit are actively engaged in processes that do just that. The state higher education executive office may have worked with institutions and other organizations to create a portal that makes recommendations for awarding credit for military training extremely transparent. Other states have institutions directly working with federal agencies allowing military employees, and civilian, transfer agency course credits to a bachelor's degree.

Interviewees were asked to identify potential new developments that could impact how evaluating military training experience will be processed into meaningful college credit. Areas mentioned were the establishment of relationships with Army University, Defense Language Institute, and the new Naval Community College. The subject of competency-based education was also discussed as some states and or institutions have begun pursuing this option. Interviewees also reflected on past challenges and despite best efforts are still struggling to overcome those. Some expressed difficulty in connecting with the Community College of the Air Force in order to clarify course content and continue to attempt to establish this connection. Another topic of concern for the states in this study is that of the American Council on Education's (ACE) credit recommendations that may result in the awarding of one or two credit hours, an amount not useful or applicable in postsecondary education. Interviewees also expressed concern over the lack of College-level Examination Program (CLEP) tests being taken by military-connected students which would assist in reducing redundancy and duplication of education at colleges and universities. Increasing access to this exam for military-connected students could assist in

further reducing the number of courses these students need to complete their degree, speeding the completion of their degrees.

As the Coronavirus pandemic has hurled universities and colleges into financial chaos this is an excellent time for them to continue to expand their work related to the evaluation and appropriate awarding of credit to attract military-connected and civilian students. As a recently published article in Inside Higher Ed stated, “Colleges that do the best job serving transfer students will be the ones to thrive over the next several years.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NCHEMS and MHEC gratefully acknowledge the assistance of individuals and organizations in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, and Ohio for providing information and insight for this report. We know other states and territories across the United States, including others participating in the MHEC MCMC convenings, are conducting work related to the review of military transcripts and experience for military-connected students entering or reentering postsecondary education. Because this project was focused on states with enacted policies, these states are not represented in this report summary. Future research may include this information.



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Mission MHEC brings together midwestern states to develop and support best practices, collaborative efforts, and cost-sharing opportunities. Through these efforts it works to ensure strong, equitable postsecondary educational opportunities and outcomes for all.

Who MHEC Serves MHEC is comprised of member states from the midwestern United States. MHEC works with and for a variety of stakeholders within and across member states, including higher education system leaders, state policymakers, legislators, and institutional leaders, while always maintaining a focus on students and their success.

How MHEC Works MHEC’s strategic approach highlights member states’ strong desire for collaboration, effectiveness, and efficiency. MHEC believes that collaborative actions informed by research and best practices are the catalyst for improving quality, accessibility, relevance, and affordability of postsecondary educational opportunities. MHEC does this primarily through the following approaches: convenings, programs, research, and cost-savings contracts. Increasingly, MHEC looks to leverage these approaches in conjunction with each other to serve its strategic priorities.

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