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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION and WORKFORCE TRAINING
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Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ken Sauer, and I serve as chief academic officer of Indiana's coordinating board for higher education. I am also part of the leadership team of a multi-state collaborative, currently involving seven states, that is focused on maximizing ways service members can translate their military training and experience into college credit, and it is in this capacity that I offer some remarks.

The Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit began 18 months ago with a meeting in Indianapolis comprising representatives of three states: Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Since then, four other states – Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, and Missouri – have been added. Those active in the Collaborative communicate on a regular basis and they include representatives from state higher education agencies, university system offices, and individual colleges and universities.

The Collaborative is founded on several key premises. First, states, especially state higher education agencies, need to work together in order to better meet the needs of returning service members and their families. A second corollary premise is that the federal government needs to work in close partnership with states to make progress in this area. States can play an important role in identifying and publicizing a wider range and variety of institutional best practices and can coordinate statewide efforts with essential stakeholders within the state to adopt these best practices.

A third key premise of the Collaborative is that we very much support the recommendations on military credit that have been developed by the American Council on Education (ACE) under contract with the Department of Defense. ACE has a long history of making these recommendations, and we believe the approach that is used to make the recommendations – including visits by a team of faculty to a military instillation and interviews with trainers and trainees – has integrity. Our interest is in having the recommendations used more, and to better effect, and in developing feedback mechanisms for further enhancements.

One recommendation to ACE is to reveal more of the information that is garnered from these site visits – most importantly, the specific competencies and skills, or learning outcomes, acquired through the military training – so that institutions would be better able to apply the credit for the right course. Institutions, especially large ones, may have several courses that are taught in a specific discipline, and one of those may be a much better fit with the ACE credit recommendation than the others. This will also help to ensure that veterans are earning credit for courses that will count toward the degree programs they are pursuing and will permit them to complete their studies within the thirty-six month time limit allowed by the post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

The Collaborative would also like the complete data file of all Military Occupational Specialties and ratings, and the corresponding ACE credit recommendations, to be made public for inclusion in widely used software that is designed to facilitate transfer of credit among institutions. At least 17 statewide university systems or states, including Indiana and three other states in the Collaborative, as well as hundreds of individual institutions and campuses, license software that makes it easier for institutions to determine and store transfer equivalencies, i.e. this course at this institution is equivalent to that course at that institution.

The contract that the Department of Defense has with ACE does not allow the vendor, CollegeSource, which all of these states and institutions use, from freely downloading that file and making it available for institutions to access. This needlessly makes much more difficult for institutions to make full use of the ACE credit recommendations. Among other things, it also prevents metrics from being developed that would give the Department of Defense, ACE, and other stakeholders data on how the ACE credit recommendations are actually being used by institutions.

I also want to stress that any student or prospective student, including a servicemember or veteran, can access this transfer software for free, irrespective of whether your state, university system, or campus licenses the software. I would also add, that as a result of the Collaborative bringing this problem to the attention of the Department of Defense, our contact at the Department, who is very much on the side of changing the contract, is now working on this issue.

The Multi-State Collaborative is also in the process of developing and identifying good examples of how institutions are looking at degree and licensure requirements, and using the ACE credit recommendations, to allow veterans to translate their training and experience into substantial progress toward earning a degree or acquiring a license. In Illinois, community colleges have developed a transition program that allows Basic Medical Corpsman to take a specially designed course, completion of which qualifies them to become a Licensed Practical Nurse. In Indiana, Ivy Tech Community College has identified relevant military training and experience that can equate to more than half of the major coursework needed to complete an associate degree in Criminal Justice, and just less than half of the major coursework required for a Construction Technology associate degree.

These examples benefit all parties. They save money for both the veteran and the taxpayer, they help ease the transition from military to civilian life, which can be especially difficult for veterans who have seen combat, and they also contribute toward a better educated workforce.

Members of the Multi-State Collaborative have more recently identified two other areas that need attention: data and communications. We need consensus on what data should be collected by institutions and states about veterans, to track how successful veterans are in completing their degrees. We believe there are ways in which the data reporting requirements of institutions can be eased if the federal government works in partnership with states in collecting data. State agencies like the Indiana Commission collect a lot of data, and some of the data that the federal government requests duplicates that. There is also a real need for better communication tools – including webinars and information available on web sites – that can help base education officers and veterans understand what options are available to them (the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities has a superb web site for veterans).

I am grateful to the members of the subcommittee for convening this important discussion and thank you for the opportunity to contribute testimony.

★ Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit ★

ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE

The Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit has representation from Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri and Ohio. State higher education executive officers (SHEEO) agencies, university systems, campuses, and other organizations from each state are involved, such as the Illinois Dept. of Veterans Affairs and the Illinois *u.select* project (an interstate transfer hub software), the Illinois Community College Board and the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC).

The Multi-state Collaborative on Military Credit is prepared to develop and deliver innovative solutions when it comes to higher education and student service members and veterans as well as providing valuable, and much needed, data about this group.

GOVERNANCE

The overall direction and implementation of the collaborative is carried out by a Leadership Team consisting of representatives from initial founding states and organizations. However, this grass roots effort is inclusive in nature and as the collaborative evolves, additional members to the Leadership Team may be added.

GOALS OF THE COLLABORATIVE

- Maximize ways for student service members, veterans, and their family members to transition to college
- Create models for consistently, transparently, and effectively awarding credit for military training and experience that can be scaled regionally and nationally
- Establish strong partnerships with institutions and organizations for the purpose of promoting our shared interests
- Generate a system for documenting and tracking academic progression at the state level

SHARED PARAMETERS

- We believe there is strength and efficiency in collaboration. This allows us to benefit from the lessons learned by our partners, create synergies, and ‘speak’ with a larger voice. Although originating in the midwest, we welcome other SHEEO agencies and organizations that may not be included in the MHEC.
- Any approach we pursue needs to be comprehensive, i.e. it must involve community colleges, technical programs, and 4-year schools and include certifications and other types of non-diploma credentialing.
- Our work should include state and federal agencies, e.g. a states’ department of veterans affairs, licensing boards.
- The strategies must be multi-pronged:
 - Encourage academic departments and institutions to learn from one another.
 - Build on work that already exists.
 - Include non-collegiate learning, such as various methods of prior learning assessments.

- The plan will respect the processes, roles, and conditions at local institutions and states, and recognize faculty as essential partners.

WORKGROUPS

In order to move the goals of the collaborative forward, we have established the following workgroups

- Articulation of Credit
 - Work with ACE to gain access to SLOs associated with the “team consensus sheets” from the review teams.
- Certification and Licensure
 - Determine how MOSs can or will translate directly into licenses and certifications or as milestones toward college degrees that lead to licensure.
- Technology
 - Work with DOD so that its contract with ACE can be modified to all MOSs and ACE credit recommendations to be incorporated into the CollegeSource product TES as index-level data, which would allow institutions to more easily create course equivalencies; TES would include hyperlinks to ACE, to allow more detailed data about the recommendations to be accessed by institutions as they create the course equivalencies.

Chairs and co-chairs of the workgroups report to the Leadership Team. Members of the workgroups are not limited to participate on just one initiative. They are welcome to join any and all they deem appropriate for their state and/or organization’s needs.

PROJECTS

- Using technology for transfer and data collection
- Collaborating with the American Council on Education (ACE) to refine information to ensure that information presented to higher education personnel is transparent and consistent in the granting of college credit to student service members and veterans
- Translating military occupation specialties, if applicable, directly into licenses or certifications or as milestones toward college degrees that lead to civilian licenses and certifications
- Developing and nurturing communication to and between vital stakeholders to better assist student service members and veterans

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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