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National Association of Institutions for Military Education Services

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AFTER ACTION REPORT

NAIMES Roundtable Discussion: Defining “Quality” Post-secondary Education
Council of College and Military Educators (CCME) 2022 Professional Development Symposium
Marriott Rivercenter, San Antonio, TX
Monday, February 7, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NAIMES is an organization comprised of institutional members dedicated to the delivery of quality post secondary education programs to the military community. Through collaborative partnerships with the Department of Defense (DoD) Voluntary Education leadership; sister organizations and agencies, NAIMES continuously seeks to promote quality degree programs, student support services, and principles of good practice. At its core, NAIMES is committed to the academic successes of students within the military community.

NAIMES Mission: NAIMES is an organization dedicated to excellence and advocacy for military-affiliated students.

NAIMES Vision: To advocate for and influence decisions that impact policy, legislation, and practices that safeguard the academic success of military-affiliated students.

NAIMES Beliefs and Values:

- Sharing and advocating for institutional best practices in education
- A collective voice of reason is more powerful
- Making a positive difference requires mutual respect and collaboration

NAIMES Practices:

- We promote and advocate for best practices of institutions serving military-affiliated students.
- We recognize diversity is an asset essential to accomplishing our mission. Membership is comprised of various types of educational institutions.
- We collaborate with professional colleagues with transparency and mutual respect to build, and best ensure, student success.

NAIMES has hosted several roundtable discussions at CCME Symposium’s in recent years in an effort to fulfill our mission, vision and carry out these practices and beliefs by bringing together the military and

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veteran education community to discuss current topics in higher education, specifically related to the military-affiliated student. Most recently, the topic of “quality” post-secondary education has been highlighted in the media, by the Department of Education, across the military Services Voluntary Education programs and Department of Defense Voluntary Education leadership. NAIMES desired to host the roundtable discussion around defining quality post-secondary education in an attempt to dig deeper into this hot topic and:

- Gain a better understanding for the need and desire to show or prove quality
- Receive input from all stakeholders and sectors that support military-affiliated students
- Inquire how academia or training providers can help the Services, DoD, the VA, etc., and each other, better address this topic

The roundtable session was highly attended with over 75 CCME attendees present. Attendees included representatives from institutions of higher education and academia, Department of Defense Voluntary Education leaders and military Voluntary Education Service Chiefs, Education Service Officers, Specialists and Counselors, Department of Education, corporate organizations, technology companies and others. The attendees appeared to enjoy the dialogue, many staying long after the session was over to continue the conversation, and appreciated the opportunity to discuss this topic candidly among their peers, colleagues and partners. More than twenty pages of notes were reviewed and summarized to present in this report to our community.

NAIMES would like to thank all those that participated in this roundtable discussion and provided thoughtful feedback on the questions posed. We hope that the findings of this report are useful as the discussion of defining quality post-secondary education programs continues. NAIMES will continue to address and follow this topic through monitoring policy and regulation development surrounding quality assessment, hosting webinars with stakeholders also interested in quality of post-secondary education programs, conducting a thorough literature review of the resources currently available and engaging with leaders, stakeholders and the military education community on this important subject.

OBJECTIVE

Discuss with a broad cross-section of military voluntary education stakeholders the issue and concern of defining and measuring educational program quality; assessing outcomes and return-on-investment for the higher education programs delivered to military-affiliated students; and the amount of type of credit (e.g., general education, major, elective) awarded for prior learning associated with military training, education and experience. Gather feedback on a list of pre-determined topic discussion prompts from each table and summarize feedback for the military-affiliated education community with recommendations for next steps.

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METHODOLOGY

Alisha Miller, current NAIMES President, provided a brief presentation of NAIMES history, mission, vision and practices, as well as background on the desire for this roundtable discussion as presented in the Executive Summary. Six questions surrounding the topic were drafted by the NAIMES membership. There were approximately eight tables of participants; each table received a handout with two of the following questions for discussion:

1. Why does the quality of post-secondary education need to be defined? What benefit can this discussion have to your organization?
2. What is the focus? Is it education pursuant to a degree? Or skills and training with credentials and certifications?
3. What attributes of quality need to be examined and defined? Course completion rates? Graduation rates? Employment rates? Are there measures in the Services that should be tracked, such as promotion rates?
4. How does quality of post-secondary education programs relate to the ROI of earning a degree? Consider academic quality, affordability and accessibility.
5. How could we help the Services assess programs to examine quality? NAIMES suggests that perhaps the Services could require servicemembers to complete an assessment survey after course completions and graduations using TA funds to collect the information and data desired from the student to assess quality of the program and various outcomes. This assessment could be built into the Service portals (AIM, AI Portal, ArmyIgnitED) and be required for the student to complete before they could request their next TA. NAIMES could help develop this survey with the Services. Please discuss any interest in this idea.
6. DoD and the Services have always asked institutions to award maximum credit for military training through the development of the JST for standardized credit award, as well as institutions undergoing their own review processes of training programs to award maximum credit. We are now hearing from the Services that institutions are awarding “too much” credit for military training, and this is degrading the quality of the educational programs. What is each Services stance on this topic today?

A NAIMES member was present at each table and took notes of the discussion had. Notes were compiled into the Assessment summary of this report.

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ASSESSMENT

1. Why does the quality of post-secondary education need to be defined? What benefit can this discussion have to your organization?

- Ultimate goal is to ensure education is beneficial and useful
 - o Translates to ensuring those educated are marketable
 - o Students should be changed when they take academic courses - they should learn
 - o Facilitating
 - o Academic degrees are now noted for concern over jobs, it is not just education any longer
- Provides assurance to 3 groups:
 - o Students: assist students in selecting right programs/schools
 - o Taxpayers: greater ROI
 - o HEIs: must know how quality is defined if we are to be able to provide quality
- Who determines what quality is important and often differs from entity to entity (e.g., accreditor vs. Dept. Of Education vs. DoD)
 - o Consistency of criteria defining quality across the industry becomes increasingly important
 - o Must be industry-relevant
- Parameters of quality must include:
 - o Oversight requirements
 - o Transparent processes
 - o Confidence in accreditors and programs

2. What is the focus? Is it education pursuant to a degree? Or skills and training with credentials and certifications?

- Discussion combined with question 1 noted above
- Does not need to be defined the same for every entity
- Needs of students have increased over the years

3. What attributes of quality need to be examined and defined? Course completion rates? Graduation rates? Employment rates? Are there measures in the Services that should be tracked? Such as promotion rates?

- Course completion rates
- Graduation rates: some discussion around the possibility/probability and graduation rates can be “too high” if everyone graduates every program
 - o Want students to graduate, but only with appropriate KSAs for the program

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- Employment rates:
 - o One of the more useful attributes is to produce graduates who are marketable/employable in fields that correlate with their degree
 - Caveat: while immediate employment data is a key factor, long-term tracking of employment provides a more complete picture (e.g., the BLS tracks beginning, mid-career and life-time average earnings for labor fields)
- Quality of instructors: significant factor generally subsumed under the responsibilities of the accrediting body
- Student support: go straight to the source, ask students their opinions on programs and institutions
 - o Suggestion: a mandatory survey that students must complete every term before they can receive TA/VA benefits – survey would be to determine satisfaction with the institution and/or program

4. How does quality of post-secondary education programs relate to the ROI of earning a degree? Consider academic quality, affordability and accessibility.

- Focus on STEM and leadership;
 - o Potentially an opportunity to bring in stronger elements of general critical thinking and writing
 - o Incorporation of elements of liberal arts into a STEM curriculum
- Time to degree could be a complication for students who enrolled in general education courses at the beginning of their academic plan
- “Quality” could be higher ed’s better understanding of the military Servicemember’s educational journey
 - o Is this the same learner experience that a student on campus would get if they took the class online?
 - o Military students may not be getting the same standard of instruction
 - o Quality is about holding students to standards of excellence and instructors to a certain teaching standard
- The importance of quality assurance in academic programs
 - o ROI is tied closely to the external view of quality (i.e., number of complains, etc.)
- Meeting goals; did the program provide what it said it was?
 - o Course evaluations provide feedback on program courses
- Military credit; should be honored in the way that makes sense to that institution
 - o How do institutions take military credit and make sure that students are prepared for upper-level alignment?

5. How could we help the Services assess programs to examine quality?

NAIMES suggest that perhaps the Services could require service members to complete an assessment survey after course completions and graduations using TA funds to collect the information and data desired from the student to assess quality of the program and various outcomes. This assessment could be built into the Service portals (AIM, AI Portal, ArmyIgnitED) and be required for the student to complete before they could request their next TA. NAIMES could help develop this survey with the Services. Please discuss any interest in this idea.

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- Service level assessment discussion similar to school generated survey data discussion in Question 6
 - o Possibility to collaborate with selected institutions around specific questions for institutional-level assessments to better measure quality
 - o Current outcome-based measures (course completion, retention, degree completion, GPA) are insufficient
- Concerns with assessments
 - o Too many current issues hindering the accessibility of TA
 - Why build additional barriers
 - o Could be emotionally based, problematic and skewed
 - o Already having issues at the school level getting students to complete end of course surveys
 - o Funding: who would fund this?
 - o How would the survey separate TA or other financier issues with issues regarding quality?
- Students are the best form of advertisement; good or bad
 - o Feedback directly from the students is important, although not always the best source of information – could be biased (only provide feedback when extremely good or bad experience)
 - o Word of mouth is one of the most common ways that student’s express quality

6. DoD and the Services have always asked institutions to award maximum credit for military training through the development of the JST for standardized credit award, as well as institutions undergoing their own review process of training programs to award maximum credit. We are now hearing from the Services that institutions are awarding “too much” credit for military training and this is degrading the quality of the educational programs. What is each Services stance on this topic today?

- Too much credit – especially when it diminishes the quality of the degree is an issue. The Services want Servicemembers to get credit for what they’ve learned, but see some schools give ‘too’ much credit
- Focus on outcome-based measures of quality that are more centered in academics (e.g., learning competencies, writing skills, critical thinking, problem solving) rather than traditional performance-based measures (e.g., course completion, retention, graduation rates, etc.)
- Course waiver option
 - o Course waiver based on ACE, JST, CCAF transcript
 - Still retain the credit requirement but fulfilled by a different course
- Surveys
 - o Services would be interested in seeing the feedback from TA users to understand student experiences and credit awarding
- Communication
 - o Better communication with Servicemembers regarding expectations when entering higher education, managing expectations for credit given for JST, etc., to include the number of credits possibly awarded, the type of academic skills they may be awarded for and those that are typically cultivated through academic skills (writing, mathematics, arts & sciences, and critical thinking and reasoning)

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- Schools should also have strong communication on what they want their schools to be known for
 - Be clear on how many credits may be awarded, reinforce the need that students will need to take challenging courses in writing, math, arts, and sciences to build the necessary skills expected by employers
- Need to find this “sweet spot”

RECOMMENDATIONS

NAIMES recommends and plans to take the following actions as a result of this roundtable discussion and report:

- Distribute this After Action Report (AAR) to our network and community and ask for any additional input on each topic. Additional input will be included as an addendum to the original AAR.
- Distribute the AAR to the Military Voluntary Education Service Chiefs and ask those that were not in attendance or have not yet had an opportunity to review and provide their specific feedback on each topic. Specifically request a response on if each Service is interested in partnering to develop a student assessment to examine quality of their program/courses taken using TA and ask for next steps.
- Develop a “literature review” and provide articles and references to date on the quality discussion
- Monitor policy and regulation from the Department of Education, DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs in regard to academic program quality assessment
- Continue the discussion on quality
 - Share resources and seek feedback on the NAIMES LinkedIn page
 - Host webinars with stakeholders
 - Include the topic and request updates at the NAIMES 2022 and beyond Annual Meeting with DoD/ Voluntary Education Service Chiefs/ VA
 - Continue proposals to host roundtable discussions at CCME symposiums