Awarding of Credit for Military Education/Training

Motion

The Academic Policy Committee moved the following recommendations related to awarding credit for basic and advanced military education/training. If the proposed changes are approved during the 2013-14 academic year, the new policy will take effect beginning in September, 2014 for students applying for any future term.

Background

UWM currently enrolls approximately 1,000 military veterans, active duty service members and dependents receiving military education benefits. UWM serves the largest veteran population of any Wisconsin university, and also ranks among the top veteran serving institutions regionally.

UWM’s current practice with regard to awarding credit for military education/training is outdated and does not reflect best practices in place at many other educational institutions. At present, UWM awards 4 credits to service veterans for their basic training, without regard to the specific nature or duration of their training. The origin of this practice is unknown and does not appear to be codified as official campus policy. Most other colleges and universities that award credit for military education and training utilize a more sophisticated process to do so, namely relying upon the credit equivalency recommendations issued by the American Council on Education (ACE), the recognized national expert in this area. We recommend that UWM adopt this approach, joining the approximately 2,000 institutions nationwide that already do so.

Rationale

The policy changes detailed below will allow us to better serve military service veterans by allowing them the opportunity, where appropriate, to be granted appropriate credit, as recommended by the ACE, for some of their relevant military education and training. Service veterans will still need to fulfill all university-wide and program-specific degree requirements, but the award of appropriate credit will enable some veterans to progress more quickly to degree completion. These changes will align UWM’s policies with current best practices in place at many other educational institutions, and may also make UWM more competitive in enrolling additional military service veterans.

Policy Change Recommendations

1. Award credit for military education and training based upon American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations with regard to the nature and level of credit to be awarded. Credit for basic military training will be awarded only for education/training assessed by ACE as equivalent to, at a minimum, lower division baccalaureate degree coursework, and for which UWM offers an appropriate equivalent.

2. Establish a maximum of 12 credits that may be awarded for basic military training, based on specific ACE recommendations. These credits will be awarded regardless of the student’s academic program. Students who were already admitted or enrolled when the policy is enacted may appeal for an evaluation of basic military education credits. Students shall initiate such appeal requests through the academic advising units in the school/college in which they are enrolled.

3. Permit UWM academic units to award additional credit, based upon ACE recommendations, for military occupational specialty (MOS) or other advanced military training and education when
this education/training is relevant to the student’s particular academic program. These credits will apply only to that particular academic program. Academic units that choose to award additional credit for military training/education relevant to a particular program or major may establish a limit on the number of such credits that may be awarded.

4. Credit awarded for military training/education will be clearly identified as such and posted on the UWM transcript in the same manner as other types of transfer or advanced standing credit. Such credit is not included in computing the UWM GPA.

Approved by the Academic Policy Committee on March 28, 2014.

**Academic Policy Committee**
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prior Learning Assessment: Credit for Military Training and Education

Current Practices at UW-Milwaukee and Recommendations for Future Policy Development

(Final version, revised March 10, 2014, to conform to the wording of policy change recommendations approved by the Academic Policy Committee on March 28, 2014)

UWM currently enrolls approximately 1,000 military veterans, active duty service members and dependents receiving military education benefits. The vast majority are veterans who have separated from active military service and are pursuing a first baccalaureate degree. UWM serves the largest veteran population of any Wisconsin university, and also ranks among the top veteran serving institutions regionally.

Most recent military service veterans are eligible for generous Federal (and, in some cases, additional Wisconsin) educational benefits. Since these benefits are highly portable rather than institution specific, we ought not take UWM’s currently strong veteran enrollment for granted. If UWM does not do a good job of meeting their needs and expectations, these students are free to “vote with their feet,” choose another educational institution, and take their financial support with them.

While UWM has in recent years made substantial progress in improving services for military service members and veterans, with, among other things, added staff resources, and creation of a new Veterans Resource Center, we have not made similar strides with our academic policies. In particular, we have not examined our practices with regard to awarding credit for the often extensive military training and education our veteran students have experienced. Our practices are outdated and do not reflect current institutional best practices.

Our current practice is to award 4 elective credits to service veterans for their basic training, without regard to the specific nature or duration of their training. The origin of this practice is unknown and does not appear to be codified as official campus policy. Many other colleges and universities utilize a more sophisticated and, we would argue, preferable process in awarding credit for military training and education, namely relying upon the credit equivalency recommendations put forth (and regularly updated) by the American Council on Education, the recognized national expert in this area. We recommend that UWM also adopt this approach, joining the approximately 2,000 institutions nationwide that already do so.

The specific recommendations we are submitting for consideration and approval are as follows:

1. Award credit for military education and training based upon American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations with regard to the nature and level of credit to be awarded. Credit for basic military training will be awarded only for education/training assessed by ACE as equivalent to, at a minimum, lower division baccalaureate degree coursework, and for which UWM offers an appropriate equivalent.

2. Establish a maximum of 12 credits that may be awarded for basic military training, based on specific ACE recommendations. These credits will be awarded regardless of the student’s academic program. Students who were already admitted or enrolled when the policy is enacted may appeal for an evaluation of basic military education credits. Students shall initiate such appeal requests through the academic advising units in the school/college in which they are enrolled.
3. Permit UWM academic units to award additional credit, based upon ACE recommendations, for military occupational specialty (MOS) or other advanced military training and education when this education/training is relevant to the student’s particular academic program. These credits will apply only to that particular academic program. Academic units that choose to award additional credit for military training/education relevant to a particular program or major may establish a limit on the number of such credits that may be awarded.

4. Credit awarded for military training/education will be clearly identified as such and posted on the UWM transcript in the same manner as other types of transfer or advanced standing credit. Such credit is not included in computing the UWM GPA.

Assuming these policy changes are approved during the 2013-14 academic year, it is further recommended that the new policy will take effect September 1, 2014, for students applying for a future term.

See the complete report that follows for additional detail including analysis of practices in place at other institutions and examples of the potential impact of this policy.
DISCUSSION PAPER

Prior Learning Assessment: Credit for Military Training and Education

Current Practices at UW-Milwaukee and Recommendations for Future Policy Development

(Final version, revised March 10, 2014, to conform to the wording of policy change recommendations approved by the Academic Policy Committee on March 28, 2014)

Background

UWM currently enrolls approximately 1,000 military veterans, active duty service members and dependents receiving military education benefits. The vast majority are veterans who have separated from active military service and are pursuing a first baccalaureate degree. UWM serves the largest veteran population of any Wisconsin university, and also ranks among the top veteran serving institutions regionally.¹

The Federal Post-911 GI Bill provides generous educational benefits to military service veterans, some of whom also qualify for additional benefits from Wisconsin through various state programs. As a result, most recent service veterans (and some of their dependents) have access to significant financial support for higher education. But it is important to bear in mind that most of these educational benefits are highly portable rather than institution specific. Therefore, we must not take UWM’s currently strong veteran enrollment for granted. If UWM does not do a good job of meeting their needs and expectations, these students are free to “vote with their feet,” choose another educational institution, and take their financial support with them.

In recent years, UWM has made substantial progress in improving services for the military/veteran student population. A UWM Veterans Advisory Committee, with broad representation from campus academic and administrative units, has been active in advocating for continued expansion and better coordination of services, and has helped achieve some tangible gains. Within the Office of Enrollment Management, for instance, some additional staffing resources have been provided to the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and the Military Educational Benefits Office to help recruit, enroll and support veterans; a new Military & Veteran Resource Center was created within the Division of Student Affairs; an orientation program specifically tailored to the needs of newly enrolling veterans has been developed; the Department of Veterans Affairs recently opened a “VetSuccess” office on the UWM campus to support military personnel, family members and veterans; and various initiatives have been undertaken to better educate campus faculty and staff about working these students. While more remains to be done, these are all very positive changes that help us become a more “veteran friendly” institution.

We have not, however, seen similar progress with regard to our academic policies. Although we do have some provisions in place making it easier for military service members to accommodate being (re)called to active duty, we have not examined our practices with regard to awarding credit for the often extensive military training and education our veteran students have received. Our practices are outdated and do not reflect current institutional best practices.

With this issue in mind, the Division of Academic affairs submitted a grant proposal to the University of Wisconsin System earlier this year, and in May, 2013 received funding to support a project aimed at expanding prior learning assessment options and credit awards for military service members and

¹ According to a report prepared earlier this year utilizing data from the St. Louis Regional Office of Veterans Affairs as of April, 2013, UWM ranked third in the 8-state Midwest region and first among our 5-state Upper Midwest region (Wisconsin + 4 adjacent states)in terms of the number of veterans (not including dependents) enrolled.
The specific focus of this project in its initial phase is on examining our current institutional policies and practices, comparing these with best practices at other institutions, and recommending appropriate changes aimed at better meeting the needs of these students. Further discussion of these issues follows below.

**Current practices at UWM**

UWM currently awards a total of 4 credits to enrolling veterans for aspects of their basic military training. Without regard to the specific nature of their training or when it occurred, each veteran, upon presentation of appropriate documentation, receives the equivalent of 1 credit (1 semester hour) in personal physical conditioning (UWM SPT&REC 110), 1 in outdoor skills practicum (UWM SPT&REC elective), 1 in marksmanship (UWM SPT&REC elective), and 1 in first aid (HMS 211). No credit is awarded for any additional military training or education, regardless of its nature or potential equivalence to UWM coursework, and indeed we do not even encourage enrolling veterans to submit their military transcripts for further review.

The origin of this practice is unclear. We have an email record from 2006 confirming agreement, on the part of an appropriate individual in the College of Health Sciences, with this credit award to veterans, but no indication that this decision was based on any formal policy decision approved through formal governance procedures. Most likely it was based on an informal review of the credit award guidelines that the American Council on Education (ACE), the organization which has reviewed military training and education and made recommendations on credit equivalencies since 1945, had in place when this practice first began. This credit award also mirrors the practice long in place at UW-Madison, so it is also possible that we simply modeled our policy after theirs. In any event, we believe that this practice needs review and revision to bring it into line with current thinking about the value and academic relevance of some types of military training and education.

**Current practices at other colleges and universities**

Not surprisingly, practices vary widely across the spectrum of U.S. colleges and universities with regard to the award of credit for military training and education. We did not undertake a formal survey of these practices, but did attempt a small scale assessment of policies in place at 1) a number of other UW

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2 The grant proposal referenced here was submitted by Associate Vice Chancellor Phyllis King on behalf of the UWM Provost’s Office to the UW System under the auspices of its “Expanding Prior Learning Assessment” grant initiative. Funds received were originally provided to UWS by the Lumina Foundation, a private philanthropic trust which supports a variety of educational initiatives. In July, 2013 Beth Weckmueller was hired to lead the project on behalf of the Provost’s Office. The “we” referenced in this paper refers to the Provost’s Office staff guiding this project.

3 Until recently, each service branch maintained a separate “registry transcript” documenting the service member’s military training and education. Now, Army, Navy, Marine and Coast Guard veterans have their complete record of military training and education documented on an official “Joint Services Transcript” which is available to them free of charge and which includes credit equivalency recommendations from the American Council on Education. (The Air Force still uses a separate transcript issued by the Community College of the Air Force.) Some enrolling veterans do submit these documents to UWM but we do not currently require them or make use of this information.

4 The American Council on Education (ACE) has long been the recognized authority nationally with regard to reviewing military training and education and recommending, where appropriate, equivalency to higher educational course credit. They utilize a formal, highly respected review process that employs current college and university faculty in appropriate disciplines to make these recommendations. The vast majority of colleges and universities that grant credit for military training and education utilize ACE recommendations in determining equivalence. See [http://www.acenet.edu/higher-education/topics/Pages/Military-Evaluations.aspx](http://www.acenet.edu/higher-education/topics/Pages/Military-Evaluations.aspx) for more information.
institutions and local colleges and universities with which we compete for students; and 2) a sampling of peer and aspirational peer universities selected from among the “Urban 13” and other large, primarily public research universities. We also worked with ACE to identify a number of institutions which they believe to demonstrate best practices with regard to the award of credit for military education and training.

Practices at the institutions sampled range from no credit awarded to extremely generous awards (e.g. 60 or more credits potentially granted for military education/training), with most institutions somewhere in between these two extremes. Interestingly, many of the institutions sampled that currently award no or very few credits for military education and training indicated that they, too, are reviewing their practices with an eye towards making them more generous.

Practices in place at other institutions also varied considerably with regard to 1) the specific types of military training and education for which credit is awarded; and 2), the applicability of credit awarded to completion of specific degree programs. Most institutions that grant credit for basic military education and training award elective or general lower division credit, regardless of the student’s academic program. A smaller, but growing, number of institutions awards credit for more specialized military education and training, with such credit mapped to specific degree programs. In these cases, the student must remain enrolled in that particular program in order to receive credit. At almost all the institutions we surveyed, those awarding credit for military education/training rely on ACE recommendations in determining the nature of the credit to be awarded. (See Appendix A for further details).

**Policy Recommendations for UWM**

As noted above and in Appendix A, there is a great deal of variance among colleges and universities with regard to their practices for awarding credit for military training and education. While no one approach predominates, there does appear to be a general trend towards increased “generosity” in terms of credit awards, with more institutions beginning to award credit for military occupational specialty (MOS) training when it is deemed relevant to a specific degree program. We believe it is appropriate for UWM to move in this direction also.

UWM has not yet closely examined the congruence between particular MOS training and specific UWM degree programs so as to be able to recommend such mapping. However, this is a goal for the future, since it will likely provide the most substantial benefit to some of our veterans. To this end we will soon begin meeting with the appropriate UWM academic units to determine their interest in developing such MOS-to-degree-program maps.

Meanwhile, we believe that a number of policy recommendations could—and should—be considered to position UWM to better serve our enrolling veterans and make ourselves more attractive to future veteran students in the current, highly competitive educational marketplace.

The specific policies we recommend for adoption are listed below, followed by the rationale and likely impact of each.

1. **Award credit for military education and training based upon American Council on Education (ACE) recommendations with regard to the nature and level of credit to be awarded. Credit for basic military training will be awarded only for education/training assessed by ACE as equivalent to, at a minimum, lower division baccalaureate degree coursework, and for which UWM offers an appropriate equivalent.**

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5 A brief description of the policies and practices in place at a representative sampling of the institutions we surveyed is found in Appendix A.
Rationale:

Adoption of such a policy will bring UWM into compliance with current best practices at the nearly 2,000 accredited colleges and universities which accept ACE recommendations for military training and education. While UWM is currently listed among these, we are in fact misrepresenting our credit acceptance policy and thus do not really meet this criterion for inclusion as a “veteran friendly” institution. Adoption of this policy in essence affirms that—subject to an overall credit limit, and while retaining the campus prerogative to determine whether and how such credits may satisfy specific academic requirements—we will rely upon the ACE recommendations rather than substituting our own judgment for the credit equivalency.

Impact:

As noted above, currently all veterans entering are awarded 4 credits for basic training, with all such credit awards entered as equivalent to the same Sport & Recreation and Human Movement Sciences coursework regardless of the actual training/education the veteran received. If we adopt a policy accepting current ACE recommendations, a veteran entering with 4 credits recommended by ACE will see no or minimal impact (i.e., at most his or her specific credit equivalencies might change slightly). However, this change does pave the way for the awarding of additional credit when warranted, as indicated below.

2) Establish a maximum of 12 credits that may be awarded for basic military training, based on specific ACE recommendations. These credits will be awarded regardless of the student’s academic program. Students who were already admitted or enrolled when the policy is enacted may appeal for an evaluation of basic military education credits. Students shall initiate such appeal requests through the academic advising units in the school/college in which they are enrolled.

In cases where ACE recommends the award of more than 12 credits for such training, all the relevant ACE recommendations will be included on the student’s UWM transcript (in case any might satisfy specific program or degree requirements) but the credit award will be capped at 12. These credits will be awarded regardless of the student’s academic program.

Rationale:

By permitting the award of up to 12 credits for basic training, based upon ACE recommendations, we will be bringing UWM’s policy into conformity with best practices in place at many other institutions serving large veteran populations. We believe this change will be positive not only for these students (who will, potentially, be able to make quicker progress toward degree completion) but also for UWM in that it will help us be more successful in recruiting and retaining veteran students given today’s highly competitive educational marketplace. Even if most of these additional credits are awarded as electives, veterans will, at the very least, have the opportunity for quicker advancement to upper division status and its related benefit in terms of registration priority.

Recent research from the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)\(^6\) also indicates that the award of credit for prior learning has a positive impact in terms of adult learner motivation and

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\(^6\) The Council on Adult and Experiential Learning has conducted a number of and published a number of studies and reports showing the positive correlation between the awarding of credit based on prior learning assessment (PLA) and the persistence and eventual degree attainment of adult learners. One relevant report, entitled “Duty, Honor, Country... & Credit” focuses in particular on the value of PLA for military service members and veterans. It is available at: [http://www.cael.org/pdfs/128_2010dutyhonorcountryandcreditforumandnews](http://www.cael.org/pdfs/128_2010dutyhonorcountryandcreditforumandnews), but many other related publications available on the CAEL website may also be of interest:
persistence to degree completion—perhaps, in the case of veterans, because the awarding of such credit presents a form of validation/recognition of the value of their military service. Thus we also hope that a revised credit award policy at UWM may have a positive impact the retention and graduation rates of military veterans.

The recommendation that UWM limit to 12 the number of such credits accepted (some, albeit few, institutions have no such limit) stems from two considerations. First, we do not want to be perceived as “giving away” a substantial number of credits when of course we would like our veteran students to enroll in most of their coursework here. Second, we realize that only a limited number of the credits granted for basic military training will actually satisfy specific UWM degree requirements for most students. To grant such credit without limit therefore might be perceived as misleading to prospective veteran students. The proposed 12 credit limit seems reasonable in that, while a substantial improvement over our current practice, it still represents only 1/10th or less of the total number of degree credits required.

Impact

ACE credit recommendations for basic training are now very detailed and specific to both the veteran’s service branch and the time at which the training occurred. This reflects both the diversity of training offered among the various service branches and the fact that ACE frequently reviews military education and training modules and updates its credit recommendations accordingly. The following examples—all actual cases of veterans recently admitted to UWM7—may be illustrative:

a) For veterans who completed Army basic combat training during 2002-2005, ACE recommends an award of 5 credits (we would equate these to 4 credits of Sport & Rec and 1 of First Aid).

b) For Army basic combat training offered beginning in 2006, ACE guidelines have been revised to recommend a total of 6 credits (which we would equate to 3 of Sport & Rec, 1 of First Aid, and 2 of Military Science.)

c) The ACE recommendation for a Naval recruit participating in basic training in 2010 is that only 2 credits (1 Sport & Rec, 1 First Aid) be awarded, whereas the credit recommendation for Marine basic training completed at about the same time equates to 11 credits (6 Sport & Rec, 5 Military Science).

To summarize: In practice, ACE recommendations for basic training are such that most military veterans would still be granted fewer than 12 credits. As can be seen above, most veterans will likely be awarded 6-11 credits, while some will receive only 2 or 3 credits based on current ACE recommendations.

3) Permit UWM academic units to award additional credit, based upon ACE recommendations, for military occupational specialty (MOS) or other advanced military training and education when this education/training is relevant to the student’s particular academic program. These credits will apply only to that particular academic program. Academic units that choose to award additional credit for military training/education relevant to a particular program or major may establish a limit on the number of such credits that may be awarded.

Such awards could be made either based upon individual review of a particular student’s prior learning in the military, or as the result of a specific MOS being mapped to a particular UWM program. In either case, the academic unit will determine both the number of credits to be awarded and the applicability of such credit to satisfaction of specific degree requirements.

http://www.cael.org/Research-and-Publications/Colleges---Universities

7 All examples taken from Joint Services Transcripts submitted to UWM during 2013
Rationale:

This change will position us favorably in today’s highly competitive educational marketplace without compromising academic integrity. This policy will be permissive rather than prescriptive, so those academic programs not interested in participating, or whose programs do not align well with any Military Occupational Specialty training, need not opt in.

Impact:

We cannot yet offer specific examples of how this policy might be implemented at UWM, pending further discussion with individual academic units. Meanwhile however, a few examples of what other institutions are doing in this regard may be helpful in understanding how this might work at UWM:

a) At George Mason University, one of UWM’s peer “Urban 13” institutions, up to 45 credits of relevant military training/education may be granted for students entering their Bachelor’s of Individualized Study program, a program similar to some of the adult degree completion programs currently offered by a number of UWS and private universities in Wisconsin. While UWM does not at present have any directly comparable program, this is a good example of how a university in many ways similar to UWM may decide to grant a substantial number of credits for military training and education to students entering one particular program, while not committing other degree programs to similar practices.

b) Old Dominion University (ODU) has developed a sophisticated web-based system which allows prospective veterans to see a listing of all of the military education/training that, based on ACE recommendations, will potentially be granted transfer credit. The prospective student can sort this listing to see what specific credit may be available based on a particular Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) if the student enters a relevant field of study at ODU. For example, a veteran who completed MOS training as a Military Police Officer and enters a related major (such as criminal justice) may receive up to 9 additional credits towards that degree.8

c) Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi recently gained national attention for its “eline Military Program” which targets Texas veterans who have military training and experience in various medical related specialties (such as hospital corpsman, health care specialist, field medic, etc.) and who now wish to enter the nursing profession. The specific number and type of credits awarded vary, and in some cases the veterans must demonstrate proficiency by passing a series of exams designed to assess competency before credit is granted. The program has served over 400 students since its inception less than 3 years ago, and the institution estimates that, on average, participants save approximately 1 year towards degree completion.9

Next Steps

Recommended next steps in this policy development process include the following:

1) Share this document with relevant campus constituents, including heads of the academic advising units, the Office of Enrollment Management, Registrar’s Office, Military Educational Benefits

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8 For additional information about the Old Dominion system showing military training/education transfer equivalencies, go to: https://www.leoonline.odu.edu/plsql/web/SWKTRNA.P_WS_FIND_SUBJ_CLASSES
9 More information about this program and others related to the mapping of military training and education to nursing and other fields in health care may be found in a recently released (February, 2013) White House report entitled “The Fast Track to Civilian Employment: Streamlining Credentialing and Licensing for Service Members, Veterans and their Spouses.”
Office, the Veterans Resource Center and appropriate academic unit representatives, for their input and reaction. (It has to some extent already been previewed to many of these, and has to date been universally well received.)

2) Assuming there is sufficient support to proceed, draft specific policy language to be presented by the Provost (or designee) to the Academic Policy Committee for approval during the current academic year, with a proposed effective date of Fall, 2014.

3) If such approval is forthcoming, develop appropriate implementation and communication plans and meet as necessary with the relevant academic and operational units to ensure a smooth rollout of the new policies for Fall 2014.

4) During 2014, continue meeting with academic units potentially interested in implementing the third policy recommendation for particular academic programs.