

**Million Records Project
A Review of Veteran Achievement in Higher Education
Executive Summary**

Accurate data on the postsecondary academic outcomes of today's generation of student veterans have been difficult to find. Inconsistent methods of collecting such information has led to confusion about the completion rates of student veterans in higher education, and without strong, empirical data, the uncertainty will persist.

The Million Records Project was envisioned, planned, and implemented by Student Veterans of America to address these gaps in knowledge and, with additional research, ultimately determine best practices and policies that promote student veteran success. The result of a public-private partnership among Student Veterans of America, the National Student Clearinghouse, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Million Records Project explores the postsecondary academic outcomes of nearly 1 million student veterans who initially used Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits between 2002 and 2010. The outcomes explored in the first phase of the project include student veteran postsecondary completion rates, time-to-completion, level of education, and degree fields.

The Million Records Project's initial results showed strong postsecondary outcomes for the current generation of student veterans. A majority (51.7 percent) of student veterans in this sample earned a postsecondary degree or certificate, despite the challenges they face. Like other nontraditional student populations, they tend to be older, have families to support, and juggle employment and school. Unlike their nontraditional peers, however, student veterans are unique in that they may delay their enrollment or interrupt their progress in higher education due to military obligations, and may have service-connected disabilities.

As Reservists and National Guard units perform a greater function in today's military, the perception that most veterans join the military after high school, serve their country, separate from service, and then enter higher education is changing. Consequently, veterans follow very different paths to graduation compared with their traditional peers. Despite these and other challenges common to nontraditional students, student veterans are persisting towards their educational goals and succeeding. At both the two- and four-year degree level, the majority of veterans who graduate do so within four and five years respectively—a rate similar to the traditional student population.

The vast majority of student veterans are enrolling in public institutions (79.2 percent), with a smaller percentage enrolling fairly evenly in private nonprofit (10.7 percent) and proprietary schools (10.1 percent). Following a similar distribution, the large majority of student veterans who graduate do so from public schools (71.7 percent), with the remaining population graduating in much smaller but fairly even percentages from private nonprofit (15.5 percent) and proprietary (12.9 percent) schools. Based on the sector of initial enrollment, the private nonprofit sector had the highest student veteran graduation rate (63.8 percent), though a significant number of those students (21.6 percent) actually completed their degree at a public or proprietary institution.

Of those who completed, approximately 9 out of 10 (89.7 percent) initially earned degrees at the associate level or higher. In addition, many student veterans achieve higher levels of education: 31.3 percent of the sample who initially earned a vocational certificate, 35.8 percent of the sample who initially earned an associate, and 20.8 percent of the sample who initially earned a bachelor's degree went on to also earn a degree at a higher level. Results also indicate that a high percentage of student veterans are pursuing degrees in business, public service, health, science, and engineering.

The Million Records Project represents one of the most comprehensive examinations of student veterans' postsecondary academic success in decades. The initial results of the project are critical first steps in filling research gaps regarding student veteran outcomes, but more is still needed. This and future studies have the potential to aid policymakers, institutions of higher education, and other stakeholders as they decide how best to allocate resources to better serve our nation's veterans. In addition, Veterans Service Organizations, such as Student Veterans of America, The American Legion, and Veterans of Foreign Wars, can use this new, up-to-date information to advocate more effectively on behalf of their constituents. It is Student Veterans of America's hope that the results of this project will demonstrate that America's investment in its nation's veterans is paying off—confirming that today's veterans are earning college degrees, entering the workforce armed with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, and continuing to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

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Student Veterans of America is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides military veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education and following graduation.

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