



# Washington's Community and Technical Colleges Getting Veterans Back to Work



## A critical mission

Thousands of military personnel leave the service each year and select Washington state as their home, bringing with them a wealth of experience and a wide range of skills. The number of troops exiting the service at Joint Base Lewis-McChord alone is projected to nearly double from 6,000 to 7,000 per year to 13,000 in January 2014. Washington ranks among the top five most popular states for military personnel separating from the service.<sup>1</sup>

Washington's 34 community and technical colleges are a perfect fit for returning veterans who are transitioning to civilian life and private-sector jobs. Two-year colleges offer small class sizes, flexible hours, veterans services, and real-world education and training so veterans can hit the ground running.

## Another type of courage

Veterans need to reconnect with academic work, navigate the college registration process, handle the transition from combat to classrooms, and join a student population where most have never experienced war. Moving back to civilian life requires another type of courage; community and technical colleges are with our veterans every step of the way. Twenty-seven Washington community and technical colleges are among the top military friendly schools in the nation according to the 2014 Military Friendly Schools list produced by Victory Media.

## Home base on campus

About 22,000 veterans, active-duty personnel, and their dependents are enrolled in Washington community and technical colleges.<sup>2</sup> Colleges provide:

- Specialized training aimed at transitioning service members into high-demand careers.
- Educational advising.
- Counseling and assistance.
- Financial aid and tuition assistance, including help with the post-911 GI Benefits.
- Services for students with disabilities.
- Tutoring and job support.
- Flexible class schedules and online learning so veterans can study at their own pace and manage work and family responsibilities.
- An older student population where veterans feel at home; the average Washington community or technical college student is 26 years old.

Washington boasts two federally-funded "Centers of Excellence" for veterans, located at Pierce College and Shoreline Community College. The centers provide veteran students a designated space to gather and learn, personal attention, and services to help them transition into civilian life. Faculty and staff are trained in war-zone stressors and the needs of veterans.

Pierce College also provides educational programs at Joint Base Lewis-McChord specifically designed for active duty military personnel and their families.

## Credit for prior learning

Community and technical colleges are helping vets build on previous experience to earn credits. Our colleges offer credit for prior learning, which may be based on transfer-in credit, test results, portfolios or training certificates. Twenty-two colleges are designated as "Service Member Opportunity Colleges" – a nationwide effort funded by the Department of Defense to help service members complete college degrees even when they move from one location to another in the United States.

## Early registration

In April 2013, Gov. Jay Inslee signed House Bill 1109. This new law requires all public colleges and universities that offer early course registration to some students to extend the offer to veterans and National Guard members so they can get into the courses they need to train for new careers.

The community and technical college system supported this measure and is acting to make this new benefit a reality for veterans.

## Succeeding in the work arena

Washington's community and technical college system is looking beyond campus-based efforts at the entire labor market that awaits veterans.

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges participates in the "Washington Transitions Workgroup" -- Washington's response to the federal "Vow Act," which aims to provide the nation's veterans a smoother transition to civilian life.

The workgroup is mapping a strategy to help veterans get a head start on their civilian dreams 18 months before they even leave service. The workgroup has drafted a personal assessment to help veterans decide whether to attend college, get an apprenticeship, become self-employed, or move straight into the workforce. The assessment will lead to deeper information and counseling on goals and finances.

Community and technical colleges are also developing programs to sync veterans' skills with high-demand jobs. Examples include army health care specialist to allied health career or nurse; military police to criminal justice; and flight and mechanics to certain FAA certifications.

In addition, eight Washington community and technical colleges in May 2013 received an \$11.8 million U.S. Department of Labor grant to train veterans in high-demand health information technology jobs, such as data analytics, mobile healthcare application development, and health IT security.

Our nation has an obligation to ensure veterans and military families can move into promising careers and succeed after their years of service and sacrifice. Washington's community and technical colleges are honored to answer that call of duty.

### Characteristics of student veterans <sup>3</sup>

- 73% of student veterans are male; 27% are female.
- Only 15% are traditionally aged college students (18-23).
- 47% of student veterans have children.
- 47.3% are married.
- Only 35.3% are unmarried and without dependents.

### Washington state facts <sup>4</sup>

- Washington state is home to more than 629,000 veterans.
- One in every nine Washington citizens is a veteran.

Sources:

1. Transition Services, Joint Base Lewis-McChord
2. SBCTC data warehouse
3. National statistics from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website, last updated Nov. 6, 2012
4. Confirmed by WA State Department of Veterans Affairs, July 29, 2013