

Information about Military Veterans Enrolled at UW-Madison

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As the full provisions of the Post 9/11 GI Bill became effective in August 2009, colleges and universities nationwide have seen steep increases in the enrollments of student veterans. In 2014, UW-Madison opened the Veterans Services and Military Assistance Center (VSMAC) in an effort to coordinate services for veterans and serve this population and their dependents. This report provides information about the demographic characteristics and educational interests of student veterans enrolled at UW-Madison over the last three years. The focus is on veterans whose prior active duty status has been verified by the VSMAC and includes all veterans whether or not they are actively using their veteran-related educational benefits.

Key Findings

1. Staff at UW-Madison's Veterans Services and Military Assistance Center (VSMAC) have implemented standards for recording and verifying veteran status for enrolled UW-Madison students. These standards have allowed for the identification of student veterans separate from their dependents, have separately identified veterans who served on active duty, and have allowed us to track veterans who are enrolled but may not currently be using veteran-related educational benefits.
2. Around 500 veterans enroll at UW-Madison each year (average of 509 veterans per year in the last three years). Veterans constitute around 1% of enrolled students at UW-Madison.
3. Sixty-one percent (61%) of veterans are enrolled in undergraduate (bachelors level) programs and 31% are enrolled in graduate or clinical doctorate programs. The remaining 8% are enrolled in courses but are not enrolled in a degree-granting program.
4. Compared to students who are not veterans, veterans are more likely to be in master's and clinical doctorate level programs and are less likely to be in undergraduate or PhD programs.
5. Undergraduate veterans are more likely than non-veteran undergraduates to be enrolled in the College of Engineering and less likely to be enrolled in the School of Business.
6. Compared to students who are not veterans, student veterans are more likely to be older, male, and Wisconsin residents for tuition purposes. They are less likely than non-veterans to be from underrepresented minority groups.
7. Compared to undergraduates who are not veterans, undergraduate veterans are more likely to enter UW-Madison as transfer students and are more likely to be first generation students (without a parent who earned a four-year college degree).

Considerations

There is increasing interest in the educational outcomes for student veterans and the effectiveness of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Military-related agencies such as the Veterans Administration as well as the federal Department of Education are interested in evaluating how educational outcomes for student veterans compare to other students. This report demonstrates that metrics used to evaluate the outcomes of traditional undergraduates who enter as new freshmen, such as retention and graduation rates, may not be the best way to evaluate the effectiveness of the Post 9/11 GI Bill because 40% of veterans enrolled at UW-Madison are not undergraduates and those who are predominantly entered as transfer students.

The VSMAC estimates that 25% of enrolled veterans are not actively using federal education benefits. There are several reasons, including ineligibility (because service was prior to 9/11 or because they have already used all their available benefits) and the desire to save their benefits for later graduate or professional degree programs. For this reason, agencies that use the number of federal benefit recipients in analyses as a proxy for the number of enrolled veterans are undercounting the enrollments of and service to veterans at some colleges and universities.

Introduction

The Post 9/11 GI Bill, passed in 2008, was an update to federal veterans education law that paid in-state tuition and fees for veterans or their designated dependents in addition to providing a monthly stipend for housing and other education-related expenses. Between 2009 and 2010, when the bill's provisions took full effect, there was a 42% increase nationwide in college enrollment of veterans and their dependents¹.

Interest in data related to the enrollment, persistence, and graduation of students with veteran's benefits started soon after the Post 9/11 GI Bill took effect. Many federal, state, and other educational and military-related agencies requested information from colleges and universities, initially related to usage of benefits. While the responses to these inquiries clarified how many students were using military benefits to pay for college, most of the data was not specifically about veterans themselves. The first effort to document the number of veterans and dependents at UW-Madison was made by the Division of Student Life in 2009. These early efforts highlighted the complexities of identification of veterans and laid the groundwork for the data systems that exist today.

Because of the expected increase in the enrollment of veterans and their dependents, many colleges and universities, including UW-Madison, increased the staffing related to veterans services and the resources devoted to serving student veterans. In 2014, UW-Madison opened its Veterans Services and Military Assistance Center (VSMAC) by co-locating two academic staff members – the Certifying Official (appointed liaison between UW-Madison students and the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs) from the Office of the Registrar and an Assistant Dean of Students from the Division of Student Life. The newly created VSMAC implemented procedures to identify and record information about veterans and their dependents separately. This new tracking methodology enabled this report, which is specifically about student veterans attending UW-Madison, a subset of the total recipients of military benefits on campus.

Identification of Veterans at UW-Madison

Answering the seemingly simple question of how many veterans are enrolled at UW-Madison is harder than it seems. Different interpretations of the term "veteran" and even slight differences in the types of military service that are counted exist between and among state and federal agencies. There are multiple sources of data and different lengths of time that they have been implemented.

The longest standing source of information is the undergraduate application for admission which asks students "Have you served in the U.S. Military"? Students who answer "yes" can be considered veterans. The limitation of using this as a data source is that many data requests from federal and state agencies have qualifiers that cannot be addressed using this question alone. For example, many data requests want only veterans who have served on active duty, or who are receiving certain types of benefits, or have served since a point in time. Others explicitly exclude students in the military reserves or veterans without honorable discharge status. The benefit of using this data source is that it has been asked for a long period of time (several decades) thereby enabling trend analysis. It is also asked at the time of application, allowing for the tracking of veteran applicants in addition to enrolled students.

Since 2014, the VSMAC has begun tracking veterans separately from their dependents. For the last three years, "active duty veterans" have been identified. These students have been verified by VSMAC staff to have some active duty time in one of the United State military branches. The benefit of using this data source is

¹ <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/veterans-and-college.aspx>

that it is verified based on staff contact with students as they interact related to veteran services and benefits. One limitation is that it does not have a long history limiting the ability to analyze trends in enrollments and outcomes. Another limitation is that it is restricted to veterans who have interacted with VSMAC staff. While this necessarily includes all veterans eligible for and receiving education-related benefits, it may exclude older veterans who are no longer eligible for education-related benefits.

Enrollment of Veterans at UW-Madison

In the last three years (fall terms 2015, 2014, and 2013), more than 67,000 (67,161) individual students were enrolled at UW-Madison. Of these students, 1137 (1.7%) either identified as a veteran on their application for admission and/or were verified as an active duty veteran by the VSMAC. These two sources of information about student veterans result in very different counts of the number of student veterans enrolled at UW-Madison. Of the 1137 possible veterans enrolled over the last 3 years:

- 54% identified themselves as a veteran on the application for admission but were NOT verified as a veteran by the VSMAC.
- 36% identified themselves as a veteran on the application for admission AND had their active duty service verified by the VSMAC.
- 10% had active duty service verified by the VSMAC but did NOT identify as a veteran at the time they applied for admission.

Based on these two sources, there were either 1023 veterans enrolled at UW-Madison over the last three years (based on self-identification at the time of application for admission) or 509 veterans enrolled (based on verification of service by the VSMAC).

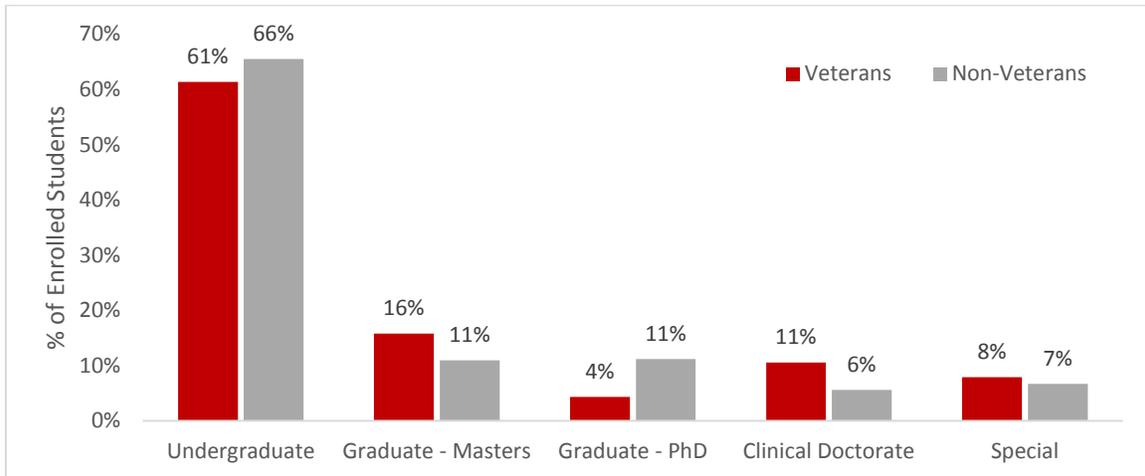
Because interest in information about student veterans is coalescing around a component of prior active duty service, this report on the enrollment of student veterans at UW-Madison uses the population of 509 active duty veterans verified by the VSMAC. This includes students who are currently using military benefits, students who are enrolled after having exhausted their benefits or are not eligible for military benefits, and students who are benefit eligible but are saving their benefits for graduate or professional school. Because the verification of active duty service is complete for the last three years, we focus on averages over the three most recent fall terms – fall 2013 to fall 2015. This report does not include the nearly 300 dependents using veteran benefits which are also processed by the VSMAC.

Degree Program and School/College

Most student veterans at UW-Madison (61%) are enrolled in undergraduate programs (Bachelors degree level). An additional 20% are enrolled in graduate programs (16% in Masters degree programs and 4% in research doctorate (PhD) programs). Eleven percent (11%) are enrolled in clinical doctorate level programs (non-research doctoral degrees) and 8% are enrolled in courses but are not in a degree-granting program (Figure 1).

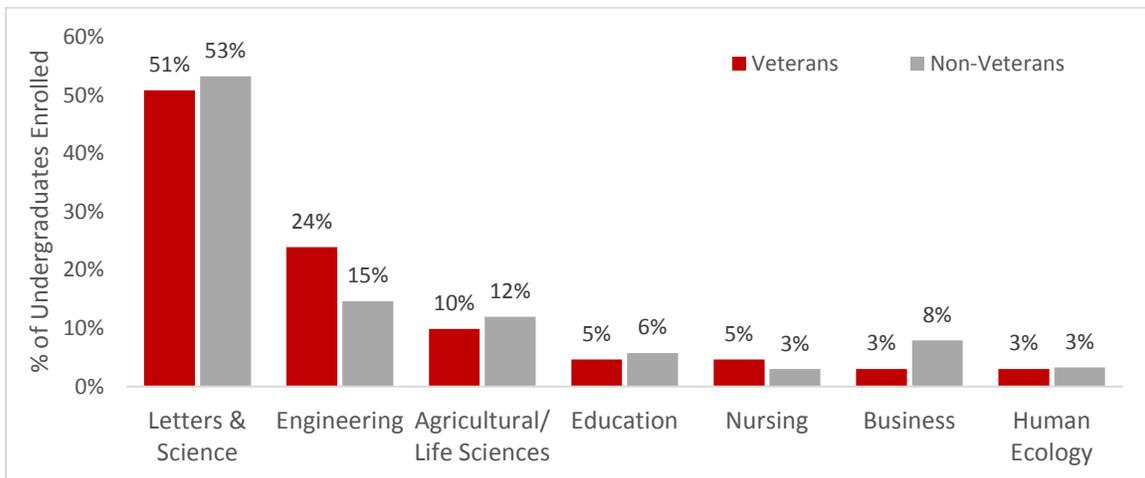
Compared to non-veteran students, student veterans are less likely to be enrolled in undergraduate programs and in research doctoral (PhD) programs. They are more likely to be enrolled in programs that lead to masters and clinical doctorate degrees. More than half of the veterans enrolled in clinical doctorate programs are in Law (JD program) or Medicine (MD program).

Figure 1: Percentage of Enrolled Students by Degree Program Level and Veteran Status



Among undergraduates, 75% of veterans are enrolled in degree programs in the College of Letters and Science (51%) or the College of Engineering (24%) (Figure 2). Compared to non-veteran undergraduates, veterans are more likely to be in the College of Engineering (24% of undergraduate veterans compared to 15% of non-veteran undergraduates). Veterans are less likely to be in the School of Business (3% of undergraduate veterans compared to 8% of non-veteran undergraduates).

Figure 2: Percentage of Undergraduates by School/College and Veteran Status

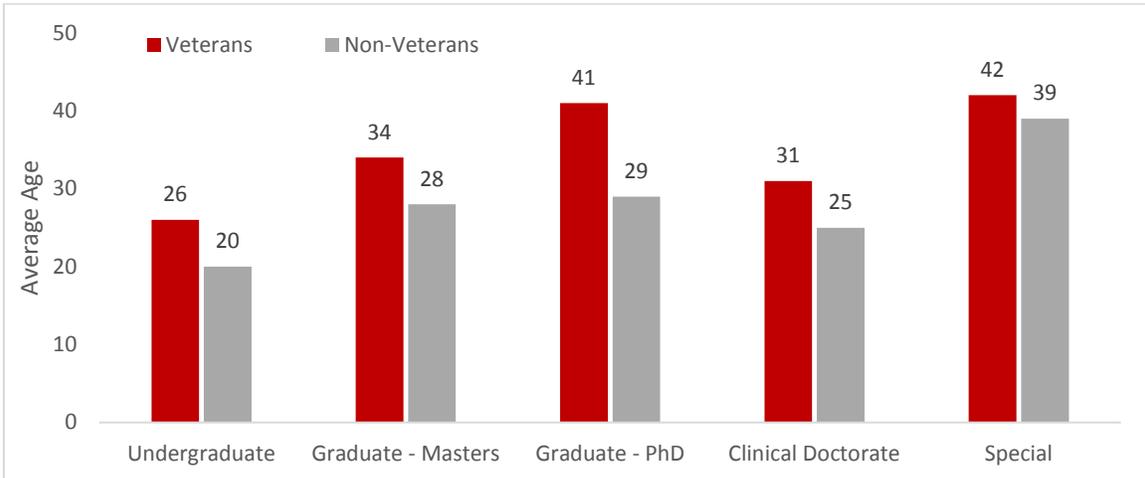


Demographics

Age

The average age of veterans at every degree program level is older than the average age of students who are not veterans (Figure 3). The largest discrepancy in average age is at the PhD level where there is a 12 year difference in average age between veterans and non-veterans. At the undergraduate level, veterans are, on average, six years older than non-veterans.

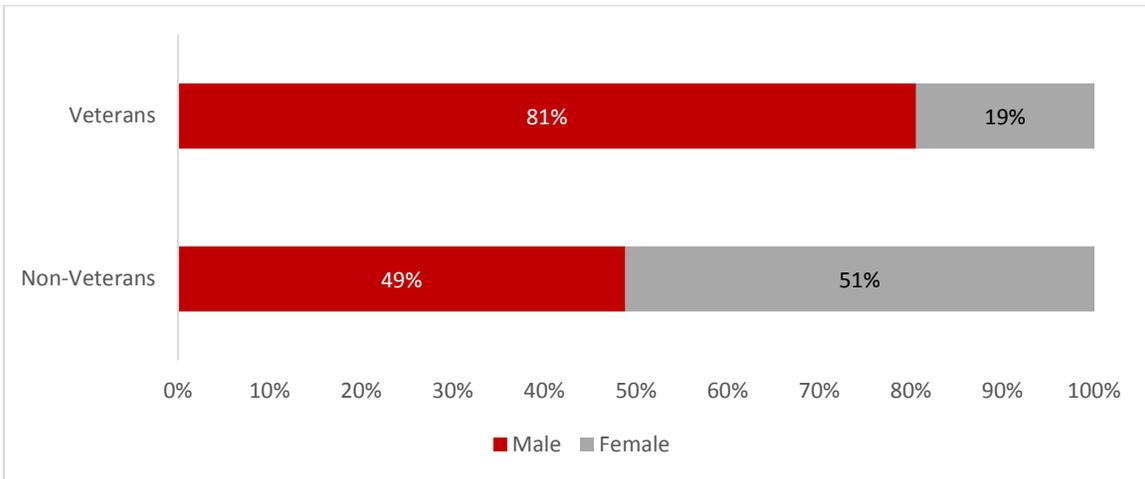
Figure 3: Average Age by Degree Program Level and Veteran Status



Gender

Student veterans are much more likely to be male than students who are not veterans (Figure 4). More than 80% of student veterans are male compared to the 49% of non-veterans who are male.

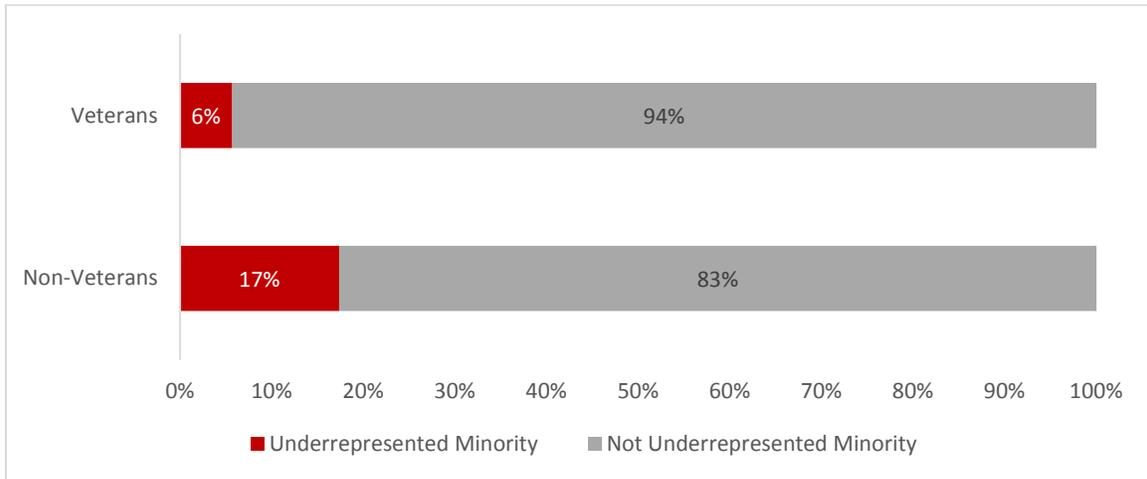
Figure 4: Enrollments by Gender and Veteran Status



Underrepresented Minority Status

Student veterans are less likely to identify as an underrepresented minority (Figure 5). The underrepresented minority groups (sometimes referred to as targeted minority groups) include domestic students who identify as African American, Hispanic/Latino(a), American Indian, or Southeast Asian (Hmong, Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian). Six percent (6%) of student veterans identified with one or more of these racial/ethnic groups compared to 17% of non-veteran students.

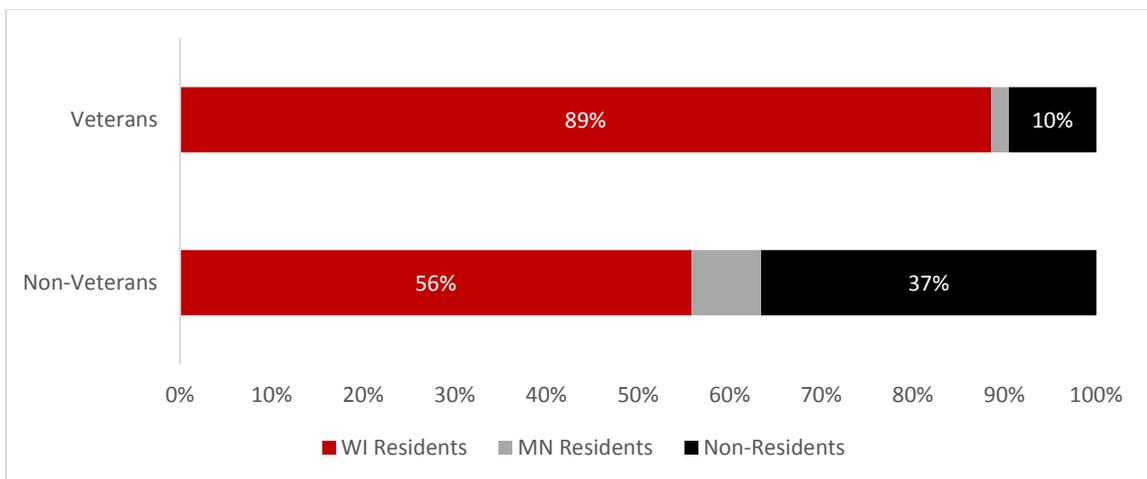
Figure 5: Enrollments by Underrepresented Minority Status and Veteran Status



Residency for Tuition Purposes

Compared to students who are not veterans, student veterans are much more likely to be Wisconsin residents for tuition purposes (Figure 6). Almost nine in ten student veterans (89%) are Wisconsin residents for tuition purposes compared to 56% of students who are not veterans. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of non-veterans are non-residents for tuition purposes compared to 10% of student veterans. The fact that international students (non-citizens) are non-residents for tuition purposes and cannot be U.S. military veterans contributes to this disparity.

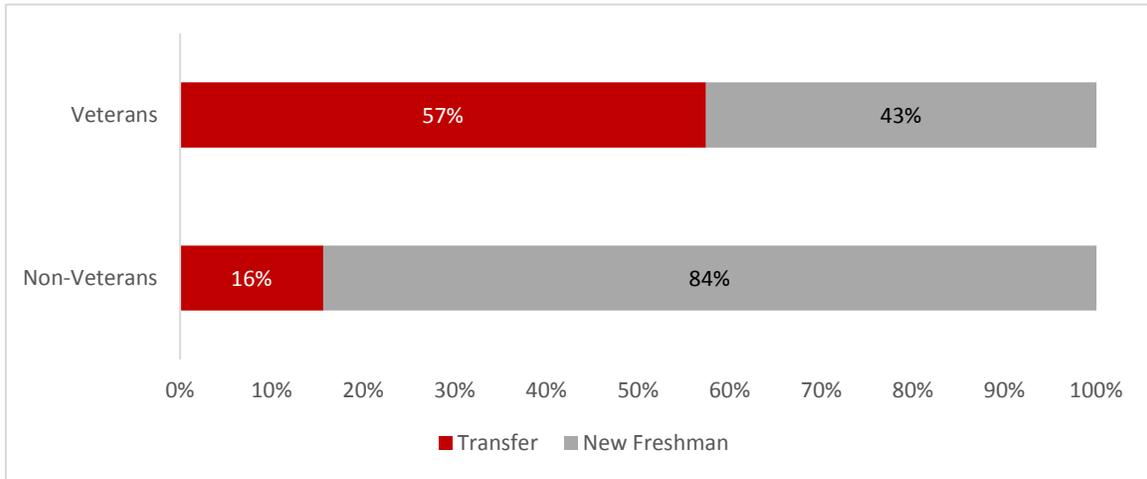
Figure 6: Enrollments by Tuition Residency and Veteran Status



Undergraduate Entrance Type to UW-Madison

Undergraduate veterans are more likely to enroll at UW-Madison by transferring from another institution rather than immediately after high school as a new freshman (Figure 7). Fifty-seven percent (57%) of undergraduate veterans enrolled at UW-Madison as transfer students compared to 16% of non-veteran undergraduates.

Figure 7: Undergraduate Enrollments by Entrance Type and Veteran Status

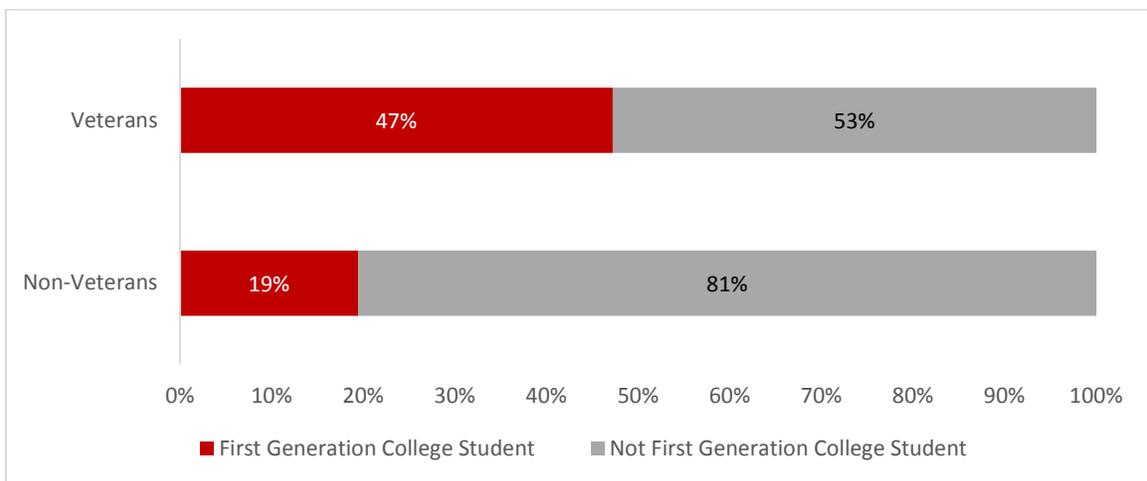


First Generation Status of Undergraduates

The term “first generation” refers to undergraduates whose parents do not have four-year college degrees. These students may be the first in their families to attend college and would be the first to earn a bachelors degree. A large body of research exists demonstrating the barriers these students face in navigating the challenges of college on the path to a bachelors degree.

Undergraduate veterans are more likely to be first generation students than non-veteran undergraduates (Figure 8). Forty-seven percent (47%) of undergraduate veterans enrolled at UW-Madison are first generation students compared to 19% of non-veteran undergraduates.

Figure 8: Undergraduate Enrollments by First Generation Status and Veteran Status



Summary

There are a large number of veterans with educational benefits who are entering higher education. At UW-Madison there was a large number of new veterans who enrolled in fall 2015 and the two UW-Madison staff members who work with veterans are tasked with serving an increasing number of students and processing veterans benefits, which increasingly have regulatory and compliance components. Federal and state agencies who fund veteran benefits also have expectations that colleges and universities are able to document how these benefits contribute to key outcomes for student veterans. This underscores the need for good data systems to track veterans and the types of benefits they are eligible for and using.

The Veterans Administration and other military-related organization are starting to ask questions about the educational outcomes of student veterans and the effectiveness of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. Many of these questions hint at a supposition that all student veterans are undergraduates and that they entered UW-Madison as traditional new freshmen. For example, questions about retention and graduation rates (outcome metrics for students who enroll as full-time new freshmen) are not relevant for the majority of undergraduate veterans at UW-Madison who enter as transfer students. This report illustrates that there is a variety of educational programs in which student veterans are enrolled and varied paths they take to and through UW-Madison.