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January 5, 2013

Veterans' Graduation Rates Are Focus of New Partnership

By Libby Sander

Orlando, Fla.

The graduation rates of veterans attending colleges under the GI Bill will soon become available to the public, thanks to a new collaboration between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Student Clearinghouse, and a leading student-veteran advocacy group.

The federal agency approved a memorandum of agreement on Thursday formalizing the arrangement, according to the U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki. He announced the partnership here while speaking at the national conference of Student Veterans of America.

"The best measurements of success are completion rates," Mr. Shinseki told a crowd of several hundred student veterans.

"Degrees, certificates of completion, certifications, licensing—that to me is how you measure. Not who goes in the front door, but who completes the program."

"This kind of collaboration is critical for us, and critical for you all as well," he added.

To date, more than 817,000 veterans have used the Post-9/11 GI Bill to enroll in college courses and training programs at more than 6,000 institutions. In the 2012 fall semester, there were 480,000 students enrolled under the GI Bill, Mr. Shinseki said.

Despite [growing calls](#) for firm numbers on how veterans are performing in college, data on their academic performance has been sparse. In June 2011, the veterans-affairs department asked institutions to begin voluntarily reporting graduation rates and program-completion rates. Between June 2011 and December 2012, 2,600 institutions reported on 62,000 veterans who graduated, as well as 4,800 who completed nondegree training programs at vocational or technical schools, Mr. Shinseki said.

"That's a small percentage of what is being accomplished out there," he said. "We need better data."

Under the new agreement, the department will provide the National Student Clearinghouse with information for up to a million beneficiaries of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Montgomery GI Bill. (The latter program took effect in 1984 and was the primary education benefit for veterans until passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008.) The clearinghouse will compare the data with its own to determine how many veterans graduate.

Student Veterans of America, which has 700 campus chapters around the country, brokered the agreement between the department and the nonprofit clearinghouse. The student-led group has grown increasingly concerned about the possibility of cuts to the GI Bill if lawmakers and the public perceive that veterans aren't graduating.