



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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STATE COLLEGES WIN \$100,000 ACE/WAL-MART “SUCCESS FOR VETERANS” COMPETITIVE GRANT

Operation College Promise Expects to Serve Thousands of Veterans

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<http://www.njascu.org/OperationPromiseServices.html>

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Trenton, April 23, 2009 – The New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (ASCU), today, announced that the nine state colleges and universities have been awarded a \$100,000 ACE/Wal-Mart “Success for Veterans” grant – one of only 20 such grants awarded nationwide. The ASCU institutions are: The College of New Jersey, Kean University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, Rowan University, Thomas Edison State College and William Paterson University.

The group’s consortial application on behalf of the member institutions was submitted by the Ramapo College Foundation of Mahwah, New Jersey, and proposes to establish *Operation College Promise* – an outreach program for student veterans’ and servicemembers’ programs.

“As public institutions, our campuses continually strive to meet the evolving needs of both current and potential students,” said Dr. Peter Mercer, president of Ramapo College of New Jersey. “With the passage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill in 2008 we recognized that student veterans would have an increasing presence on our campuses and that they would have some very specific needs. To prepare, our institutions made a strong commitment to researching, developing and enhancing services that are intrinsic to a military service friendly campus,” Mercer continued. “The funding provided by the ACE/Wal-Mart grant will permit us to share our best practices with our colleagues across the state and let servicemembers know that we welcome them and want them to excel in meeting their higher education goals.”

Operation College Promise is an expansion of the existing *Operation Promise for Servicemembers (OPS)* initiative - an online clearinghouse of information and benefits for veterans and active-duty servicemembers. *OPS* was established by ASCU in the Fall of 2008 to ease access to programs and services essential to the transition from soldier to student. ACE/Wal-Mart grant funds will be used to enhance the site as well as develop additional outreach and informational materials promoting college accessibility for servicemembers.

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www.njascu.org

*The College of New Jersey
Kean University
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University
Ramapo College of New Jersey
Richard Stockton College of New Jersey*

*Rowan University
Thomas Edison State College
William Paterson University*

Currently, New Jersey is home to more than 500,000 veterans, although only 5,000 (1%) are utilizing their education benefits. This number is likely to increase under the new Post 9/11 GI Bill which takes effect August 1, 2009 and includes, among other new provisions, a generous housing allowance. Experts hope that the enhanced benefits, combined with outreach and education, will encourage many more veterans and active-duty servicemembers to pursue a college degree. More than 2 million servicemembers have served since 9/11 with nearly 15,000 of those veterans residing in New Jersey. Several thousand are expected to return to the Garden State annually over the next five years.

Recognizing this growing population, ASCU Executive Director/CEO Dr. Darryl G. Greer noted, "We developed the OPS web portal to respond to research demonstrating a void in readily-available information that inhibited potential students from accessing their benefits. In many cases, veterans have no or very little awareness of their education options, which is reflected in the small percentage earning a college degree. As an association, we realize that we have a duty to close this information gap. We look forward to increasing these efforts and encouraging more of our bravest citizens to access and utilize their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits."

Operation College Promise will highlight the most innovative student veterans programs in the state through workshops focusing on subjects ranging from transfer of credits to managing traumatic brain injuries. Over the past six months, the institutions have been collaborating through an inter-campus workgroup to ensure a framework for a military service friendly campus was in place on each campus. On-campus offices, student organizations and orientation programs are several of the new initiatives that have been put in place. An advisory panel will evaluate current programs to establish the best practices across the state; however, all institutions will be invited to participate in the program's bi-annual workshops.

Wendy A. Lang, Project Director for *Operation College Promise* said the project highlights the value of collaboration among institutions, noting "The diversity in our member institutions' demographics and constituencies is illustrated in their varied range of experience to meet the needs of veterans. With the funds provided by the ACE/Wal-Mart grant, we will be able to expand our primary objectives to ensure that servicemembers and veterans are aware of the education benefits they have earned and that institutions are able to provide the on-campus resources necessary for them to succeed. We are proud to take the lead in serving those who have so courageously served our country."

ASCU is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy advocacy organization created by the State of New Jersey in 1985. Its members are: The College of New Jersey, Kean University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, Rowan University, Thomas Edison State College and William Paterson University. These institutions collectively serve about 98,000 students.

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