



NEW JERSEY

# Association of State Colleges and Universities

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## **NJ state college group launches effort to serve veterans: Extensive web-guide and support to expand services –seeks to become national model**

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Trenton, November 10, 2008--New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (ASCU) today is calling upon the nine state colleges and universities to “be all they can be” when it comes to serving members of the military, including recently retiring military service members. ASCU has launched a web-based guide for veterans and members of the armed forces dubbed Operation Promise for Servicemembers (OPS). The site is one of the most extensive provided by any group of public colleges in the nation.

ASCU member institutions, nine in all, currently serve 97,000 students. That number includes several thousand active duty service members enrolled in distance learning through Thomas Edison State College. The other eight ASCU institutions are: Kean University, Montclair State University, New Jersey City University, The College of New Jersey, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Richard Stockton State College, Rowan University, and William Paterson University.

The Garden State is home to more than 500,000 veterans, although it is estimated that only 1% (5,000) take advantage of current tuition benefits. The US Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that an additional 5,000 returned to the state after completing their active military service in 2007. Experts predict that the expanded benefits provided under the **Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act** (or Post 9/11 GI Bill) coupled with a steady stream of retiring veterans will substantially increase the number of student veterans seeking higher education opportunities. The Post 9/11 GI Bill will go into effect in August 2009.

In recognition of this expected jump in student veteran attendance, ASCU Executive Director /CEO Dr. Darryl G. Greer recently met with college/university presidents to discuss a concerted effort to ramp up programs and services tailored to the unique needs of these students through the following concrete steps:

- Consider becoming Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (if they are not ones already) which means the institutions would establish credit acceptance policies for credit earned from other collegiate institutions and/or other documented learning deemed college-level, including military training or accomplishments. Kean University, Thomas Edison State College and Ramapo College are active Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges
- Adopt flexible policy that will allow student veterans who wish to study here to receive the benefits of in-state, or at least reduced tuition, even though they may not have met the state’s residency requirements.

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[www.njascu.org](http://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*

- Establish student veterans services offices, allocating staff resources to help meet the diverse and, in some cases extensive, needs of retiring or separating members of the military.

Dr. Greer said today he is confident all nine institutions, which are already doing much, will step up to serve our veterans. “How much more they will do will depend on demand and institutional service mission. Other factors include the institution’s current student enrollment capability and its proximity to large retiring military population centers. All nine institutions are all keenly aware of this emerging student population, their service to our country and our responsibility to assist them in any way feasible.”

Greer also spelled out what he sees as a role for the Association in helping to make what he calls the Nine Strong (state colleges and universities) a national model for educating veterans:

- Serve as a clearinghouse for information and policy facilitation related to student veterans programs, services and funding, beginning with a new website section called Operation Promise for Servicemembers (OPS) which was launched today and can be accessed via [www.njascu.org/Operation Promise Services.html](http://www.njascu.org/Operation Promise Services.html)
- Report to the Governor, Legislature, the public and veterans groups on progress made at the nine institutions during 2009 and beyond.
- Work with the Legislature on pending legislative initiatives affecting veterans.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill – effective in August 2009 – is acknowledged as the largest scale effort to bolster services for military veterans since WWII. Because the federal program is so new and extensive, providing an estimated \$62 billion over 10 years, the Association’s OPS coordinator, Wendy A. Lang, says there are likely to be a number of coordination challenges (technical and policy-related) in system implementation. Accordingly, cooperation in problem solving to get adequate information to veterans is vital.

“This initiative represents the Association’s efforts in preparing to assist both our member institutions--as well as student veterans—adapt to and utilize the broad benefits of the new GI bill. Our institutions have a longstanding history of serving the changing educational needs of our citizenry and this emerging student veteran population will be no different. ASCU is committed to assisting our member institutions establish the programs and services necessary for a seamless transition from combat service to college. Considering what these individuals have sacrificed for our country, it’s the least we can do.”

ASCU institutions have already taken steps to assist student veterans. For example:

Thomas Edison State College has been providing specialized educational opportunities for

members of the United States military for more than 30 years. Its flexible “Military Degree Completion Program” assists active-duty service members engage in degree programs wherever they are stationed.

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