



## **2010 Report to the Legislature Higher Education Veterans Program**

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**Legislative Charge**

Minnesota Statute 197.585, Subd. 4

*Beginning January 15, 2007, and each year thereafter, the steering committee established in subdivision 2 shall report to the chairs of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance and higher education policy and finance regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the program established in this section.*

**Estimated Cost of Preparing this Report (as required by Minn. Stat. § 3.197)**

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## **PART 1: PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

The 2006 Legislature allocated funding through June 30, 2011 to the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) for the creation of the Higher Education Veterans Assistance Program (commonly referred to as the “Higher Education Veterans Program”). The program is uniquely designed to serve the needs of Minnesota’s students and prospective students that are impacted by military service, including current military members, military veterans, and military families.

A novel concept when launched in July 2006, the Higher Education Veterans Program has helped thousands of returning Minnesota veterans transition to college. The program has also worked to forge innovative partnerships and outreach efforts to develop comprehensive solutions to aid in the very difficult transition from military to college. To reach the goal of a seamless transition to college, the MDVA actively collaborates with many agencies and organizations throughout the state, including all branches of the military reserve and Minnesota National Guard, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System, the University of Minnesota, private colleges and universities, the Office of Higher Education, the Department of Employment and Economic Development, County Veterans Service Officers, non-profit veterans service organizations, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

One statewide director and twelve regional coordinators serve colleges and veterans in all areas of the state. Based out of a “host campus,” coordinators work with colleges and universities throughout their defined region. Coordinators provide one-on-one assistance for veterans, military members, and their families, as well as work with campus officials to address the needs of student veterans and create Veterans Resource Centers. Working with service providers from other agencies, coordinators attempt to provide coordinated and comprehensive services through their regional offices and campus Veterans Resource Centers. Finally, the director and coordinators provide training at numerous military, campus and community events throughout the year.

## **PART 2: 2009 HIGHLIGHTS**

2009 was a year of continued growth for the Higher Education Veterans Program. Services were increased at many campuses and thousands of veterans were served. The program expanded its outreach role by working with returning veterans before they enter college, which helps to ease the difficulties of transition through early information and assistance. Some of the most important progress and activities of program staff are detailed below:

1. The Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) is a new federal benefit which allows for a much more generous education financing option for many recent veterans. Unfortunately, the Post 9/11 GI Bill also adds a new layer of complexity to benefits already known to be very difficult to understand and access. With the Higher Education Veterans Program in its third year and associated Veterans Resource Centers, Minnesota was well prepared for the launch of the new benefit. The Higher Education Veterans Program was able to assist

thousands of veterans determine their eligibility for the Post 9/11 GI Bill and enroll in the VA education program best suited to their needs.

2. Coordinators assisted campuses in establishing two new campus Veterans Resource Centers, bringing the total number of centers in operation to 59. Coordinators also assisted an additional five campuses with increasing the size and programming of existing centers.
3. Coordinators served 5,110 *new* individuals in 2009, and thousands of more individuals who returned for continued assistance. Overall, the program had a total of 56,245 contacts in 2009, which represents a 44.7 percent increase over 2008.
4. Coordinators continued to provide advice, information, and support of campus efforts to offer appropriate policy and procedure flexibility to military members facing deployments, a seamless transition for returning veterans, and other objectives aimed at creating veterans-friendly institutions. This advocacy became especially important as many National Guard members were deployed to the flooding on the Red River in the spring of 2009, as well as current problems of delayed payments of benefits from the VA.
5. The director and coordinators provided a tremendous amount of training and outreach at campuses, community events, veteran organizations and service providers, and most notably, reintegration events coordinated by the Minnesota National Guard. In addition, the program has partnered with the Minnesota National Guard to provide training directly to their units located around the state.
6. The Higher Education Veterans Program Call Center ([www.mymilitaryeducation.org](http://www.mymilitaryeducation.org)), a collaboration between the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and Minnesota Online, has also seen remarkable growth and has been a valuable resource for both individuals seeking help, as well as to service providers. Due the success and efficiency demonstrated through the call center, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs has collaborated with Minnesota Online in other areas, notably the LinkVet program, to improve efficiency and service.
7. In order to ensure that the program is meeting the needs of the campuses and the people it serves, a self assessment, in the form of an online survey, was completed. The survey was sent to over a hundred campus staff at dozens of colleges and universities who were familiar with the program and staff. While the results were overwhelmingly positive, work is being done to address the issues that were revealed to better serve the diverse needs throughout the state.

**PART 3: 2009 VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER USAGE DATA**

**Establishment of Veterans Resource Centers**

<b>57</b>	Previously established Veterans Resource Centers (as of Dec 31, 2008)
<b>2</b>	Newly established Veterans Resource Centers (Jan 1 to Dec 31, 2009)
<b>59</b>	Total Veterans Resource Centers (see attachment #2 for a listing of locations by region)
<b>5</b>	Existing Veterans Resource Centers increasing space or programming

**Utilization of Veterans Resource Centers**

<b>5,110</b>	Total first time visitors
<b>56,245</b>	Total contacts (Jan 1 to Dec 31, 2009)
<b>44.7%</b>	Increase over 2008

**Veteran Status of Visitors**

<b>64%</b>	Veteran (at least 180+ days on active duty)
<b>17%</b>	Current military member (non-veteran)
<b>7%</b>	Family of military member/veteran
<b>2%</b>	Former military (non-veteran)
<b>10%</b>	Other or did not declare status

**Student Status of Visitors**

<b>72%</b>	Current student
<b>15%</b>	Prospective student
<b>1%</b>	Former student
<b>12%</b>	Other or did not declare status

**Top Purposes for Visits**

Veterans education funding/assistance from coordinator
Connecting with other veterans
Utilize other Veterans Resource Center services

**Referrals to Other Service Providers**

Serving as a comprehensive information hub for veterans and military members on campus, coordinators have developed well defined referral networks to link veterans on campus with the appropriate campus staff or service providers in the community. The numbers below reflect these referrals.

<b>2,255</b>	Internal campus resources
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<b>782</b>	External community resources
<b>1,478</b>	County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO)
<b>753</b>	Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED Vet Reps)
<b>213</b>	Other

### **Veterans Resource Center Staffing (Average Weekly Hours)**

Since coordinators cover wide regions and manage many campus Veterans Resource Centers, staffing for centers is often supplemented by various resources from the campus and community. While the information and assistance role is conducted by the coordinators themselves, this additional staffing helps to ensure the center is an open, welcoming place for all who enter and allows campus centers to provide additional outreach and programming. The figures below show statewide hours worked in Veterans Resource Centers in an average week. In fact, approximately 61% of the hours worked in Veterans Resource Centers are from student workers, volunteers, and in some cases campus staff. Through these efforts, the investment in regional coordinators can be multiplied to better serve veterans in colleges and universities.

<b>467.0</b>	Regional coordinator
<b>444.9</b>	Federal work study
<b>145.6</b>	Campus work study
<b>120.0</b>	Campus-paid employee
<b>16.0</b>	Campus volunteers
<b>4.3</b>	Community volunteer

### **PART 4: 2009 PRESENTATION & OUTREACH DATA**

Throughout the year, staff of the Higher Education Veterans Program is heavily relied upon to provide training on their area of expertise: military education benefits & creating veterans-friendly campuses. The training is conducted in a variety of formats and locations – from post-deployment education briefings at the very return of National Guard units, to faculty and staff in-service days on campuses; from professional higher education associations on a national scale, to drill floor briefings at armories throughout the state. The figures below highlight the variety and scale of the program’s outreach and training efforts.

<b>Number of Events</b>	<b>Number of Individuals Trained</b>	<b>Type of Training</b>
<b>35</b>	<b>3,584</b>	Reintegration activities (coordinated by the Minnesota National Guard)
<b>31</b>	<b>1,412</b>	College and university faculty and staff training
<b>6</b>	<b>444</b>	Service providers and veterans service organizations
<b>9</b>	<b>668</b>	Community events
<b>81</b>	<b>6,108</b>	Total

**PART 5: 2009 MY MILITARY EDUCATION CALL CENTER USAGE DATA**

The call center and associated website ([www.mymilitaryeducation.org](http://www.mymilitaryeducation.org)) continues to be an important part of the Higher Education Veterans Program. By providing an added dimension to the program’s services and an important outreach component, the call center is able to inform and serve military members stationed around the globe and acts as a portal to the program as well as a one-stop informational resource.

**Types of Call Center Contacts**

<b>33,874</b>	Self service
<b>1,837</b>	Advisor/counselor help
<b>35,711</b>	Total (2,976/month average)

**Top Purposes for Call Center Contacts**

Military education benefits/finances
Getting ready for college
Career information and resources
Information about the Higher Education Veterans Program

## **ATTACHMENT # 1: IMPACT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION VETERANS PROGRAM**

During the last legislative session, the MDVA was asked to provide supplemental information on the Higher Education Veterans Program. The report, included below in full, details the impact of veterans education benefits in Minnesota and the role of the Higher Education Veterans Program using the best available data. The report was based on 2008 data that was compiled in early 2009. While there is not presently appropriate data available for 2009, a similar report will be created once that data becomes available. 2009 data will have an added layer of difficulty due to the major USDVA backlog in processing educational benefits claims. At present, the numbers being reported by the USDVA appear to be low simply because thousands of claims have yet to be processed and are not included in the cumulative numbers being reported.

### **EDUCATION BENEFITS IN MINNESOTA: IMPACT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION VETERANS PROGRAMS A Supplemental Report for the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Higher Education Veterans Program**

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The following information is provided to illustrate the significant contribution that veterans' educational benefits bring to Minnesota's economy, as well as the contribution of the MDVA Higher Education Veterans Program. A considerable effort is made by the Higher Education Veterans Program to record the utilization of our services by veterans. However, the program is not in a position to calculate with certainty the direct impact it has on the increase of benefits being used. Neither is it possible to accurately predict future enrollment of veterans in Minnesota colleges and universities.

Currently, no higher education campus or system in Minnesota has a comprehensive process in place to gather data about the "success" of veterans at their respective institutions. Therefore, the Higher Education Veterans Program can only gather data regarding the utilization of our services. In order to provide more detailed data in the future, including the retention and graduation rates of veterans, we are encouraging both individual campuses and their system offices to develop and implement processes aimed at gathering and analyzing information regarding their student veterans.

This report provides three types of information:

Graph 1 illustrates the amount of federal and state benefits provided to Minnesota veterans and eligible family members. The amount of benefits being used has increased substantially from \$51.6 million in 2006 to about \$62.7 million in 2008. This trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. These funds make higher education possible for thousands of Minnesotans each year, and make a significant contribution to Minnesota's economy.

Graph 2 illustrates the growth in the population of Minnesota student veterans and eligible family members. This number has grown by 38% from 2006 to 2008 and is expected to increase from 2009 to 2016, with fluctuations largely based on expected deployments by Minnesota

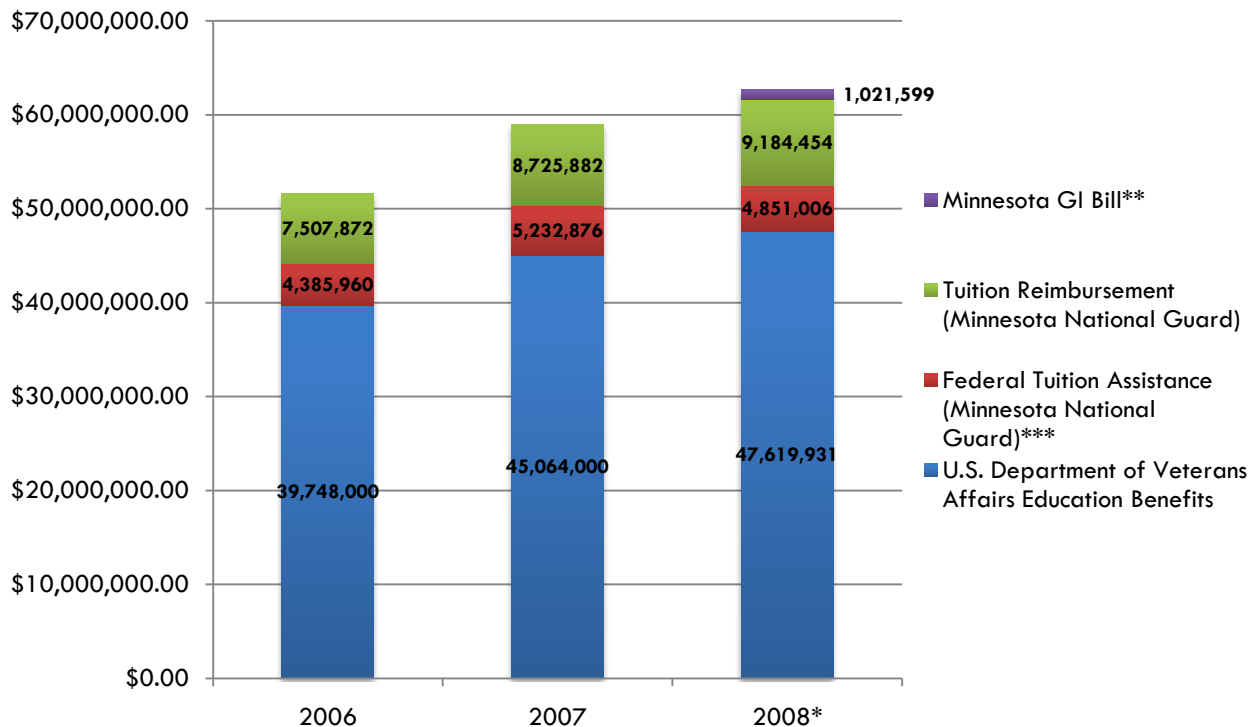


Guard/Reserve units. We anticipate the number of individuals using education benefits will decrease during the “high number deployed” years and then increase when those members return home.

Graph 3 illustrates the Minnesota Army and Air National Guard deployment projections through 2016. While this represents only one component of Minnesota service members, it is currently the only deployment projection available (data from the reserve components and active duty is not accessible by program staff) and assists in predicting the future need for higher education services for veterans. Further, as this graph shows, Minnesotan’s will continue to strongly support their country and deserve all the assistance possible to obtain the benefits they have earned.

**PART I. IMPACT OF VETERANS EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS IN MINNESOTA**

COMBINED EXPENDITURES FROM STATE AND FEDERAL VETERANS EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT PROGRAMS



\* USVA education data not yet available for 2008. The amount listed is an estimate based on the 5% increase in students from 2007 to 2008.  
 \*\* The Minnesota GI Bill began in the 2007-2008 academic year.  
 \*\*\* Federal Tuition Assistance is a program available to most reserve components in addition to the Army National Guard. The numbers reported are for the Minnesota Army National Guard, the only data available.

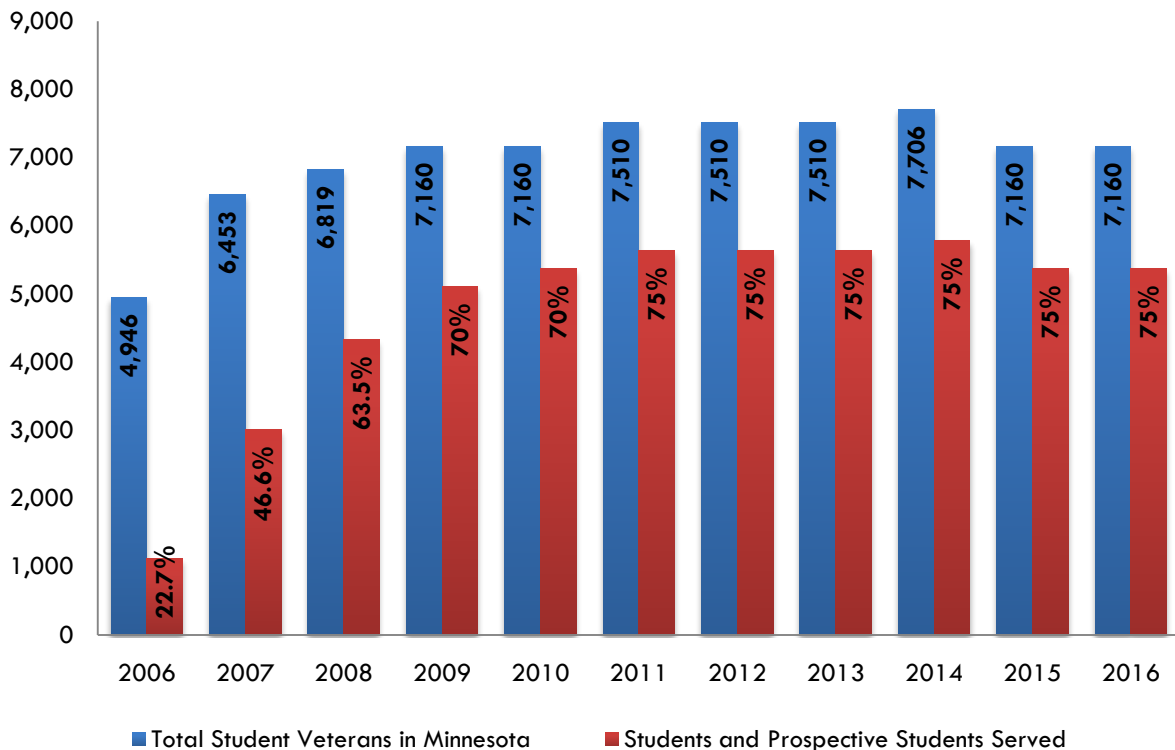
This graph shows the large and growing revenue generated by student veterans in Minnesota. While state sources of funding for veterans educational benefits are included, the graph clearly

shows the large amount of federal funding brought to Minnesota in the form of USVA educational benefits and the Federal Tuition Assistance program. Further, the graph highlights the growth in use of educational benefits since the Higher Education Veterans Programs started in 2006.

While this program has assisted thousands of veterans access higher education, there is currently no way to determine the number of students who started or stayed in college *solely* as a result of the program. What is certain, however, is that a significant number of veterans seek the assistance of the program’s coordinators as they transition to college. While financial benefits are available to most veterans, assistance is often needed to untangle the various eligibility requirements and enrollment processes that are unique to each suite of benefits that a given veteran might be entitled to. Further, coordinators often serve as an initial point of contact for veterans interested in higher education and thus stand in an important position to encourage and facilitate the use of these benefits.

**PART II. IMPACT AND PREDICTED GROWTH OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION VETERANS PROGRAMS**

TOTAL STUDENT VETERANS IN MINNESOTA COMPARED TO HIGHER EDUCATION VETERANS PROGRAMS  
STUDENT CONTACTS



This graph shows the total number of students using USVA educational benefits, the only comprehensive source of data for student veteran enrollment in Minnesota. Also shown is the percentage of these students served by the Higher Education Veterans Programs. To specifically

highlight the ratio of students that the program likely helped to access benefits, the program percentage consists only of contacts who were prospective or current students.

It is important to note that the program percentage reflects only a first time visit, while the USVA figure includes repeats (a student is counted every year that he/she uses a VA benefit). Thus, while a student may return for help multiple times, he/she is only counted once in a lifetime compared to the VA figure which counts every student once per year. Due to this, the impact of the Higher Education Veterans Programs is actually higher than reflected in the graph.

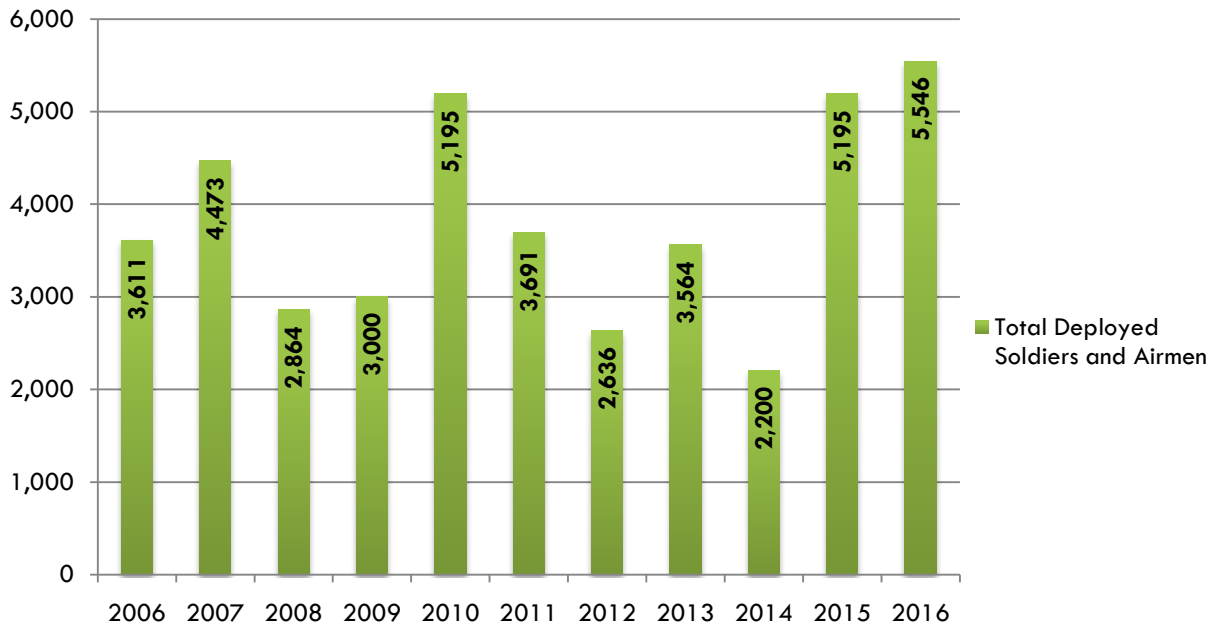
As requested, this graph also shows the predicted growth of student veterans in Minnesota as well as target goals for Higher Education Veterans Programs. Since the number of student veterans pursuing higher education in Minnesota depends on several factors, a definitive number is nearly impossible to predict. However, taking into consideration the current economy and limited employment opportunities available, the increased federal education benefits for some veterans beginning August 1, 2009, and the projected future deployments of Minnesota National Guard and Reserve units, it is expected that the number of student veterans will continue to rise in the short term, fluctuating slightly to reflect the following deployment projections.

A survey in June and July 2007 of the 1/34 BCT discovered that 79.8% of those returning home planned to attend college. It is anticipated that the percentage of future returning Guard members will again show a high level of interest in attending college upon their return. In addition, the Federal VA estimates that a 25% increase in college attendance will occur for those veterans who have earned the new Chapter 33 (Post 911 GI Bill).

While the goal of the Higher Education Veterans Programs is to serve every veteran, military member and military family member as they pursue higher education, the graph shows the program leveling off at a target service rate of 75%. This is due to several factors, most significantly the different data gathering technique between the USVA and the Higher Education Veterans Programs as previously mentioned. The fact that any given student likely remains in college for 2-4 years but may only require assistance once also contributes to this discrepancy. Finally, program coordinators provide several informational seminars each year at campuses and reintegration activities throughout the state. Although the attendees receive detailed information and assistance, they are not counted as contacts. These students might otherwise have come in for assistance and would then have been counted as a contact. Given these factors, providing direct service and support to 75% of Minnesota's student veteran population presents a realistic annual target goal.

### PART III. COMBAT VETERANS WILL CONTINUE TO RETURN TO MINNESOTA

MINNESOTA NATIONAL GUARD DEPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS



This graph is based on data provided by the Minnesota National Guard and illustrates the likelihood of on-going combat tours. While the graph shows only Minnesota National Guard deployments, reserve units and returning active duty veterans will also continue to return to the classroom by the thousands. It is also important to remember that although a veteran has returned from a deployment, he/she may not return to college until several years after. Most veterans have between 10 and 15 years from their date of discharge to use their educational benefits. Regardless of the status of deployments, Minnesota will have returning combat and non-combat veterans on its college campuses indefinitely.

## Attachment # 2: Regional Offices and Veterans Resource Centers

### **Director's Office:**

Host Campus: Central Lakes College  
501 West College Drive  
Brainerd, MN 56401

### **Donald Pfeffer, Director**

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218-855-8148 Office

### **Tyra Osvold, Administrative Assistant**

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### **Northwest Region:**

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1101 Hwy One East  
Thief River Falls, MN 56701

### **Northwest Region Campus Veterans Centers**

- University of Minnesota - Crookston Campus
- Bemidji State University, Bemidji
- Minnesota State University, Moorhead
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Moorhead
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Detroit Lakes
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Fergus Falls
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Wadena
- Northland Community and Technical College, Thief River Falls
- Northland Community and Technical College, East Grand Forks
- Northwestern Technical College, Bemidji

**Northeast Region:**

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**Wesley Judkins**

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218-262-6739

Host Campus: Hibbing Community College

1515 E. 25<sup>th</sup> Street

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**Northeast Region Campus Veterans Centers**

- University of Minnesota, Duluth
- Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, Cloquet
- Hibbing Community College, Hibbing
- Itasca Community College, Grand Rapids
- Lake Superior College, Duluth
- Mesabi Range Community and Technical College, Eveleth
- Rainy River Community College, International Falls
- Vermillion Community College, Ely
- College of St. Scholastica, Duluth and other locations

**Central Region:**

**Laura Boden**

[mnva@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:mnva@stcloudstate.edu)

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720 4<sup>th</sup> Ave South

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**Charles Egerstrom**

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320-762-4467 Office

Host Campus: Alexandria Technical College

1601 Jefferson St

Alexandria, MN 56308

**Central Region Campus Veterans Centers**

- University of Minnesota – Morris Campus
- St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud
- Alexandria Technical College, Alexandria
- Central Lakes College, Brainerd

- Central Lakes College, Staples
- Ridgewater Community College, Willmar
- Ridgewater Community College, Hutchinson
- St. Cloud Technical College, St. Cloud
- College of St. Benedict/St. Johns, St. Joseph

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**Katherine Bachman**

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Host Campus: Anoka Ramsey Community College

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Coon Rapids, MN 55433

**Metro Region Campus Veterans Centers**

- University of Minnesota, Veterans Transition Center, Minneapolis
- University of Minnesota, One Stop Service Center, Minneapolis
- University of Minnesota, One Stop Service Center, Saint Paul
- Metropolitan State University, Minneapolis
- Anoka-Ramsey Community College, Cambridge
- Anoka-Ramsey Community College, Coon Rapids
- Century Community College, White Bear Lake
- Dakota County Technical College, Rosemount
- Inver Hills Community College, Inver Hills
- Hennepin Technical College, Brooklyn Park
- Hennepin Technical College, Eden Prairie
- Minneapolis Community and Technical College
- Normandale Community College, Bloomington
- North Hennepin Community College, Brooklyn Park
- Pine Technical College, Pine City

- St. Paul College
- University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis
- University of St. Thomas, St. Paul

**Southwest Region:**

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**Southwest Region Campus Veterans Centers**

- Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall
- Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Canby
- Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Granite Falls
- Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Jackson
- Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Pipestone
- Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Worthington

**Southeast Region:**

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192 Centennial Student Union

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**Joshua Howe**

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507-529-6142 Office

Host Campus: Rochester community and Technical College

851 30<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.E.

Rochester, MN 55904

**Southeast Region Campus Veterans Centers**

- Minnesota State University, Mankato
- Winona State University, Winona
- South Central College, North Mankato
- South Central College, Faribault
- Southeast Technical College, Winona
- Rochester Community and Technical, Rochester
- Riverland Community College, Austin