

## Chapter 13

# Impactful Academic Supports for Students Enrolled at Military Colleges

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### ABSTRACT

*Military colleges have historically been respected and viewed as results-driven institutions of higher learning. These colleges have strong reputations for producing both leaders and scholars. Though gaining admission to a military college is usually somewhat more formidable than the admission process at many civilian colleges, students are accepted with varying academic abilities, skills, and backgrounds. Most of these students, however, are retained, experience academic success, and graduate. The author describes distinct military college academic support initiatives that promote scholarly success among college students, from those who struggle to pass a course to those who want to turn a satisfactory grade into a better grade. Included in those initiatives are tutoring, advising, and mentoring. A case study of the establishment of the Academic Success Center at Marion Military Institute is included, along with data markers indicating the success of the center and its programs.*

### INTRODUCTION

Military colleges have historically been respected and viewed as results-driven institutions of higher learning. Though gaining admission to a military college is generally somewhat more formidable than the admissions process at many civilian colleges, students are accepted with varying academic abilities, skills, and backgrounds. Most of these students, however, are retained, experience academic success, and graduate. Obviously, a student's personal characteristics (including drive, sense of self-confidence, and prior academic preparation) influence his or her academic success in a military college. Are there collegiate influencers in place, however, that also influence a student's success?

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The answer to this question has been researched in recent years by various scholars, but perhaps no one more than Vincent Tinto. In an essay published in 2016, Dr. Tinto enumerated several factors that influence student success, including a student's sense of belonging, a welcoming and supportive collegiate environment, systems that will quickly alert the college when a student is struggling, and the student's perceived value of the curriculum (Tinto, 2016). A college's response to these factors, all of which influence retention and completion, may take different forms, but all of the military colleges reviewed for this chapter have various types of academic support in place to influence student success. This chapter will provide a review of academic support program elements in place at various military colleges, including all U.S. Service Academies, The Citadel, Virginia Military Institute, Georgia Military College, Marion Military Institute, New Mexico Military Institute, and Valley Forge Military Academy and College. The chapter will conclude with a case study specific to Marion Military Institute with a description of the Institute's success upon instituting an Academic Success Center.

Dr. Tinto indicates that it is impossible to “pose a simple characterization of a college dropout” (Spann & Tinto, 1990, p. 21). It is then, likewise, not possible to name one specific college program or initiative that keeps students enrolled and ensures success. Student academic needs are varied, resulting from dissimilar secondary school preparation, various levels of family support, and distinctive differences in student motivation. Colleges, therefore, must be multifaceted in their approaches to academic support initiatives.

## **MILITARY COLLEGE ACADEMIC SUPPORT INITIATIVES**

### **Tutoring and Course Assistance**

A standard academic support program found in today's military colleges is that of tutoring, both peer and professional. Many times, students feel more at ease in discussing their course-specific questions with their peers or with a discipline expert who is not their instructor. Peer tutoring also has the advantage of sharpening the course knowledge for the tutor as well as for the student being assisted. One of the best ways to become more proficient in a subject is to teach the material to another student.

Tutoring programs are currently in place at all U.S. Service Academies, as well as The Citadel, Virginia Military Institute, Georgia Military College, Marion Military Institute, New Mexico Military Institute and Valley Forge Military Academy and College as referenced on their web pages. Most of the colleges describe an academic support services center, known by several different names, but all providing a centralized location for students to receive additional academic assistance, including discipline or course-specific help, along with general academic skill improvement such as writing or mathematics labs. Many descriptions reference on-line tutoring assistance as well as tutoring available by appointment in-person, when the colleges are able to be in session on campus. Some indicate assistance and oversight available by faculty members, in addition to that provided by other personnel.

The United States Air Force Academy's (USAFA) Academic Success Center offers various services to cadets in support of their academic endeavors. Cadets may receive help with reading skills, time management, and extra instruction in difficult subjects. USAFA provides formal Learning Strategies Courses 101 and 102, where students can learn and strengthen their academic skills in areas such as “time management, goal setting, avoiding procrastination, test-taking and note-taking techniques” (*Academic Success Center*, n.d.). Additionally, the Air Force Academy has established a Writing Center where

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