

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Higher Education Committee

BILL: SB 532

INTRODUCER: Senators Altman, Gaetz, and Sachs

SUBJECT: College Credit for Military Training and Education Courses

DATE: January 10, 2012

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Fleming</u>	<u>Carter</u>	<u>MS</u>	Favorable
2.	<u>Harkey</u>	<u>deMarsh-Mathues</u>	<u>HE</u>	Favorable
3.	_____	_____	<u>BC</u>	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

This bill directs the Board of Governors to adopt regulations and the State Board of Education to adopt rules that enable members of the U.S. Armed Forces to earn academic credit at public postsecondary educational institutions for college-level training and education acquired in the military.

This bill creates section 1004.096 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Military servicemembers and veterans represent a growing proportion of the student population within postsecondary institutions. The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, otherwise known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, offers an unprecedented level of educational benefits to nearly 2 million individuals nationwide who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces since the attacks of September 11, 2001.¹ As a result of this benefit, the state of Florida and other states have experienced an influx of veterans on college campuses. Nationwide the number of veterans enrolling in college and using the GI Bill has increased to approximately 800,000 in 2010, which represents a 40 percent increase since 2009.²

¹ RAND Corporation. Research Brief. *How Military Veterans Are Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Adapting to Life in College* (2010). Available at: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9560.html.

² *Vets go from Combat to Campus* by Trevor Hughes, USA Today, April 12, 2011. Available at: http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2011-04-11-college-vets_N.htm.

Currently, neither the Florida Board of Governors nor the State Board of Education have rules or regulations in place that require or prescribe a process for Florida public educational institutions to award college credit to members of the U.S. Armed Forces based on training and education acquired in the military. Despite the absence of the mandate to do so, evaluating military training and experience for college credit is a common practice among all Florida public higher education institutions. The processes and policies which individual postsecondary institutions have established for the evaluation of military training and experience vary among institutions.

The American Council on Education

Since 1945, the American Council on Education (ACE) has provided a collaborative link between the U. S. Department of Defense and higher education through the review of military training and experiences for the award of equivalent college credits for members of the U.S. Armed Forces.³ In doing so, the ACE maintains the ACE Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services (ACE Military Guide). The ACE has established a rigid process in evaluating military service school courses to determine the appropriate amount and level of academic credit that should be awarded by postsecondary institutions.⁴

More than 2,200 higher education institutions recognize ACE course credit recommendations for granting credit to their military students.⁵

According to the Board of Governors, state universities recognize ACE requirements when granting course credit as follows:⁶

Institutions consult with and follow the ACE Guide Online to determine how military training and experience might be awarded for equivalent course credit. Military courses that are recommended by the ACE Guide for college credit would be considered first to determine if they meet degree requirements, and second to determine if they can fulfill any electives. Some of the military training involved may be more vocational in nature, such as the Advanced Helicopter Pilot Training 1 course. This course would not be accepted at a state university because there is no equivalent course and it is more vocational in nature than academic credit.

Each branch of service provides transcripts for current and former service members as an official record of military education, training, and experience. Postsecondary institutions using the ACE Military Guide evaluate an individual's military transcript according to the ACE standards for recommended college credit. The following is a break-down of the service-specific transcripts available to current and former service members:

³ Available at: http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Military_Programs.

⁴ Military courses that are eligible for inclusion in the ACE Military Guide are courses that are conducted for a specified period of time with a prescribed course of instruction, in a structured learning situation, and with qualified instructors.

⁵ ACE College and University Services. Available at: www.acenet.edu and <http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/CCRS/CollegeServices/index.htm>.

⁶ Board of Governor's Legislative Bill Analysis, November 23, 2011, on file with the Committee on Higher Education.

- **U.S. Army:** Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript System (AARTS)
- **U.S. Navy/U.S. Marine Corps:** Sailor/Marine American Council on Education Registry Transcript (SMART)
- **U.S. Air Force:** Community College of the Air Force (CCAF)
- **U.S. Coast Guard:** U.S. Coast Guard Institute (CGI)⁷

Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges Consortium

The Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC)⁸ was created in 1972 to provide educational opportunities to servicemembers who, because they frequently moved from place to place, had trouble completing college degrees.⁹ The SOC supports a consortium of approximately 1,900 colleges and universities pledged to support the higher education needs of military personnel. SOC works with civilian and military educators to overcome obstacles associated with gaining a college education when pursued through traditional means.

Among the SOC Consortium key goals is the award of credit for military training and experience. All SOC Consortium institutions provide processes to determine credit awards and learning acquired for specialized military training and occupational experience when applicable to a servicemember's degree program. In doing so, SOC Consortium members recognize and use the ACE Military Guide in evaluating and awarding academic credit for military training and experience. Other key features of the SOC Consortium include:

- Reasonable Transfer of Credit;
- Reduced Academic Residency; and
- Credit for Nationally-Recognized Testing Programs.¹⁰

Florida has a high representation within the SOC Consortium in that 25 of the 28 Florida College System institutions and 9 of the 11 State University System institutions are members.¹¹

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill creates s. 1004.096, F.S., to require the Board of Governors to adopt regulations and the State Board of Education to adopt rules to provide guidance to their respective institutions regarding procedures for military credential evaluation and the award of college credit for military training and education.

⁷ ACE. *A Transfer Guide: Understanding Your Military Transcripts and ACE Credit Recommendations*. pp. 11-14. (August 2011). Available at:

http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/TransferGuide_Updated2011.pdf.

⁸ SOC is funded by the Department of Defense (DoD) through a contract with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). The contract is managed for DoD by the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES).

⁹ For more information, see SOC homepage at: <http://www.soc.aascu.org/>.

¹⁰ Information in this paragraph obtained from the *SOC Principles and Criteria* website, available at: <http://www.soc.aascu.org/socconsortium/socPrinCriteria.html>.

¹¹ For a comprehensive list of SOC consortium membership, see http://www.soc.aascu.org/pubfiles/socmisc/SOCConsort_Schools.pdf.

The procedures must include equivalency and alignment of military coursework with appropriate college courses, course descriptions, type and amount of college credit that may be awarded, and transfer of credit.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Students who are either members of the U.S. Armed Forces or who are veterans will have their college-level training evaluated and be provided equivalent college credit as appropriate. To the extent a student with military training earns college credit for such training, the cost to the student to complete a postsecondary degree may decrease.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Board of Governors notes no fiscal impact to the state universities as a result of this bill.¹² Information is not available as to the expected fiscal impact this bill would have on the State Board of Education and their higher education institutions.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

¹² Board of Governors 2012 Legislative Bill Analysis, November 23, 2011, on file with the Committee on Higher Education.

VIII. Additional Information:

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
