

Exploring Power Dynamics in Veterans' Education Policy

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Abstract: The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (or Post-9/11 GI Bill) is the most complex and costly version of the GI Bill; notably, tuition and required fee payments are directed to higher education institutions rather than student veterans, as in previous iterations of the bill. This structure has created a new and complex set of power dynamics between higher education institutions, policy makers, and military/veteran-serving agencies. Understanding these dynamics as illustrated by legislative examples is important in bridging the civil-military gap in higher education.

Keywords: Post-9/11 GI Bill, veterans' education policy, higher education policy, student veterans

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (or Post-9/11 GI Bill) is the most complex and costly version of the GI Bill to date and runs concurrently with earlier iterations. According to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) data, in fiscal year (FY) 2016, 1,000,089 beneficiaries used VA educational benefits; of those, 790,090 were using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.¹

As can be surmised from these statistics, the Post-9/11 GI Bill dominates VA spending on postsecondary education benefits. In FY 2016, 60,271 new users of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits were enrolled in undergraduate programs alone, and new Post-9/11 GI Bill users made up 79 percent of new education

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benefit users.² In FY 2016, approximately \$11.6 billion was paid out to institutions and students using Post–9/11 GI Bill benefits.³

Because the Post–9/11 GI Bill allows eligible beneficiaries to transfer their benefits to a dependent child or spouse (unique among GI Bill iterations), the VA also collects data on these transfers. In FY 2016, 132,666 transfer benefit recipients received Post–9/11 GI Bill funding from an eligible beneficiary. Of those, 98,099 were dependent children and 34,567 were spouses.⁴

In mid-2017, 18 different amendments to the bill were amalgamated and renamed for the former commander of the American Legion who wrote the original GI Bill, Harry W. Colmery. The resulting piece of legislation, popularly nicknamed the “Forever GI Bill” for one of its provisions, moved through both houses of Congress in 20 days after being introduced and was signed into law by President Donald J. Trump in August 2017. The bill had previously been thought moribund after different veterans’ organizations disagreed about how to pay for its expected \$3 billion cost during its first decade.⁵ Notably, the bill removes the previous 15-year time limit on using Post–9/11 GI Bill benefits for both veterans who left service on or after 1 January 2013 and their qualifying dependents (hence the Forever GI Bill nickname).

Why is the Post–9/11 GI Bill and the larger field of veterans’ education policy important to higher education as a whole? An idealistic answer would reference the necessity of reintegrating veterans into civilian society and a nation’s responsibility to those it sends into harm’s way—who may return permanently disabled from serving the nation—to protect its interests. A more pragmatic answer is that because unprecedented billions of dollars in VA educational benefits are flowing to higher education institutions, it behooves today’s civilian higher education policy makers and cash-strapped higher education institutions alike to pay more attention to the student veterans and their dependents who bring that money into institutional coffers. Paying attention to those veterans and dependents includes better understanding the power dynamics among veterans’ organizations—and veterans’ political backers on Capitol Hill—that potentially affect the institutions’ receipt of said money.

As an example of new power dynamics that affect both higher education institutions and policy makers, veterans’ organizations were established or revitalized in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to serve the interests of a younger generation of veterans; Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America is one of the most prominent new organizations advocating for veterans’ interests. These organizations and older ones (e.g., the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars) often make common cause on veterans’ education policy issues along with other issues important to veterans (e.g., health care). The organization focusing on veterans’ education is the Student Veterans of America (SVA). As their account of their founding

indicates, the organization prioritizes activism on behalf of student veterans:

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the U.S. launched Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq). As OEF and OIF veterans returned home to use GI Bill benefits, they found that their campuses did not provide adequate support services to assist student veterans as they worked towards their educational goals.

Lacking support, student veterans decided to organize on campuses across the country. These groups began to connect through social media with one another—spreading best practices, sharing success stories, and supporting one another to further strengthen the student veteran community. In 2008, members from various chapters formalized this grassroots movement and Student Veterans of America was born. . . . The nation's renewed focus on veteran welfare has ignited change on campuses and in congress. SVA is committed to capitalizing on this momentum to ensure today's and tomorrow's veterans are supported in their transition to education and employment.⁶

Billions of dollars are being spent on VA education benefits to help reintegrate veterans into civil society and repaying the debt owed them for their national service. These benefits—more generous than previous versions of the GI Bill given the ability to transfer tuition/fee benefits to spouses/dependents and the removal of any time limit on benefit usage—have created a corresponding influx of veteran/dependent enrollees into civilian higher education institutions. Because of the civil-military gap in the United States—broadly defined as a mutual lack of cultural knowledge affecting how civilians and military personnel relate, but with various levels of nuance depending on viewpoint—these institutions have been largely unprepared to understand military culture and its influence on those enrollees.⁷

Both support for student veterans *and* civil-military tensions in higher education date back to the first GI Bill. In terms of civil-military tensions, the presidents of Harvard University and the University of Chicago originally raised objections to the bill based on their perceptions of veterans' college aptitude or lack thereof. Robert Maynard Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, feared that "academic institutions might well find 'themselves converted into educational hobo jungles' " and proposed not only that returning veterans be required to take national aptitude examinations to qualify for the benefit but also that colleges pay 50 percent of the GI Bill tuition benefit so that they could choose only those applicants they deemed most qualified.⁸ James Bryant

Conant, the president of Harvard at the time, later changed his stance after observing student veterans' performance on campus.⁹ During congressional discussions of the earlier Korean War-era GI Bill, "public grumblings already accused the G.I. Bill of giving veterans an unfair advantage in society and of allowing disreputable schools and businessmen to loot the public till. If Congress extended the benefits and provisions of the G.I. Bill to a new set of veterans, these problems would carry forward and perhaps become a flawed precedent for American veterans' benefits as a whole."¹⁰ Qualms over the Korean War GI Bill also were expressed by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (a higher education association in Washington, DC), when they called for a "'new approach' to veterans' benefits, saying 'when it [military service] is universal no reward should be expected or given'."¹¹

Turning to the modern era and the campus environment, perspectives on campus vary regarding the military and student veterans and parallels prior broader research on the civil-military gap. One important historical event—the Vietnam War and its legacy of antimilitary campus protests—played a part in fostering an atmosphere of distrust between academia and the military that in some ways lingers to the present.¹² In a macrolevel discussion of distrust revolving around both the role of the Service academies in educating future military officers and the larger civil-military divide, Bruce Fleming, a civilian professor who has taught English at the U.S. Naval Academy for more than two decades, opened a recent work by stating that "everything conspires against civilians and the military having a clear view of each other in the United States of the third millennium."¹³

In a different approach than Fleming's discussion, one group of researchers surveyed faculty across the United States about their views on military service and U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, their perceptions of their ability or self-efficacy to address combat veterans' classroom needs, and their perceptions of student veterans who might have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Approximately 60 percent of the 596 respondents were at public institutions; 64.4 percent were in the social sciences. The authors' analysis found that the more negative attitudes faculty expressed about military service, the less likely they were to put aside said attitudes and respect veterans' service. Further, the more negative attitudes faculty expressed about military service, the less self-efficacy they reported in being able to teach and work with student veterans with symptoms of PTSD.¹⁴

From the student perspective, one of the first studies on the post-9/11 era student veteran experience was a small-scale qualitative study of 25 combat veterans at three universities in the North, South, and West; the researchers used adult student transition theory to analyze respondent interviews about both military and civilian experiences. Analysis related to participants' college

experience revealed that “[w]hile the ages of the participants in this study were not drastically different from other students, there exists a difference in level of maturity that comes from wartime military service”; student veterans frustrated and impatient with civilian students’ perceived lower maturity levels offered comments grounded in military culture such as “they don’t have people screaming at them to get things done at three in the morning. They sit in a sheltered dorm room and do homework. It’s not too hard.”¹⁵

This led to interviewees having problems connecting with civilian student peers as well as adopting the strategy of “blending in” to conceal their military experience. A consistent, though contradictory, theme was that the student veterans “hoped faculty members would acknowledge their veteran status and attempt to understand them as a student population,” with one U.S. Marine participant stating, “The biggest thing that I want to come into this interview and say is the fact that I think the faculty needs to know who we are.”¹⁶

Following along these lines, another researcher conducted a qualitative study of student veterans’ experiences at a four-year public land-grant university to better understand their transitional experiences and, with the students’ knowledge and consent, use them to help construct a veteran support program on campus. This study also noted that student veterans felt distanced from civilian students due to military experiences combined with their sense of greater maturity.¹⁷

Negative, stereotypical reactions from civilian faculty and students were also pointedly mentioned, and “[a] perception that their military status was often met by professors and peers with uncertainty or suspicion with regard to their mental health and wellbeing was widely discussed in each focus group and interview.”¹⁸ This fed into the study’s most prominent theme: participants’ perceptions of a negative campus climate for student veterans. A majority of the students (9 of 14) expressed initial concerns about attending the university being studied given its liberal, antimilitary reputation:

Participants explained that these feelings were strengthened by their interactions with civilian classmates and professors, who they felt had made derogatory or overly simplistic comments about the military and the current conflicts in the Middle East. Additionally, participants in this study explained a perception that disclosing one’s self as a veteran was risky and left them vulnerable to inaccurate assumptions about their mental health and overall wellbeing.¹⁹

Moving back to the policy level, in the current iteration of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, tuition/fee payments are directed to the institution rather than the student. This structure has created a new and complex set of power dynamics between

higher education institutions, policy makers, and military/veteran-serving agencies. While this article does not address active duty servicemembers for whom the DOD pays education benefits to higher education institutions, they also factor into the power dynamics. Understanding these power dynamics is important not only for higher education overall to better serve student veterans but also for institutions and their representatives in the veterans' education policy community to navigate both changing policies and policy-maker attitudes on how higher education should serve student veterans.

Based on the above, this article explores selected power dynamics within veterans' education using John R. P. French Jr. and Bertram Raven's theory on bases of power as social power resources used to effect social influence. Legislative examples—both introduced and enacted—are used to show how the various bases of power play out on both sides of the civil-military equation in higher education. These suggest avenues for future research into power dynamics in veterans' education policy that have a potentially wider impact on higher education institutions as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

Of course, theories of power and social influence are not confined to veterans' education—or higher education. French and Raven define social influence as the action of one person that changes the attitude, belief, or behavior of another person targeted for such action.²⁰ *Social power* is defined as how someone brings about social influence. They originally identified five different social power bases/resources used to create social influence: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power.²¹ Raven then added the concept of informational power.²²

Reward power is defined as the perception by the target of social influence that the would-be influencer can somehow reward them; *coercive power* is defined as the ability of the influencer to punish the target for not complying; *legitimate power* is defined as the influencer's accepted authority to make the target behave in a particular way; *referent power* is defined as the target's identification with the influencer; and *expert power* is defined as the influencer being deemed an expert in a relevant issue by the target.²³ Raven defines *informational power* as explanations/persuasive reasoning by the influencer that convinces the target to do or believe something; the difference between this and expert power is that informational power is tied more to the merits of the information given to the target than the status of the influencer.²⁴

All these bases of power operate broadly within the higher education policy sphere, though their specifics and relevance differ depending on the matter at hand. In general, congressional actors can exercise combined legitimate, reward,

and coercive power in any given higher education situation (e.g., authorizing appropriations, introducing and passing legislation, and holding hearings on specific higher education issues). Federal agencies also can exercise these forms of power; in addition, some federal agencies (e.g., areas within the U.S. Department of Education) can exercise both expert and informational power. Outside Congress and the federal government, higher education associations, lobbyists, and think tanks also exercise a combination of powers. These external parties often, but not always, focus on expert power and informational power. For instance, while the case study by Susan B. Hannah of the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) does not use French and Raven's concept as its theoretical framework, its detailed dissection of how the varying political relationships between congressional staff, federal agency representatives, higher education lobbyists, policy consultants, and White House staff affected the eventual form of the reauthorized HEA shows various bases of power operating.²⁵

The specific use of these different power bases in veterans' education policy are influenced by the previously discussed civil-military gap in the United States, which has been extensively examined by sociologists and political scientists but less so by higher education researchers. One illustration of this gap is the fact that only 0.5 percent of Americans in the past decade have served in the military.²⁶ Another is that, according to the Higher Education Research Institute's 2016 Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Freshman Survey, military-affiliated first-time, full-time freshmen "describe their political affiliation as more conservative than all [first-time, full-time] FTFT, first-year students" and "military-affiliated students express more conservative views on political and social issues than the national sample of FTFT incoming students."²⁷

Sociological research on the civil-military gap stretches from the work of Samuel P. Huntington to the present.²⁸ Huntington views the concept of civil-military relations relatively narrowly as "the relation of the officer corps to the state."²⁹ Contrastingly, Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider conceptually reframe the civil-military gap as interdependent relationships "of civilian elites with military leaders, of military institutions with American society, of military leaders with their professions, among civilian elites, and of civilian elites with American society."³⁰ These interdependent relationships can be analyzed using French and Raven's bases of power, because both higher education institutions and Congress can be classified as civilian elites and the relationship of military institutions with American society includes their relationship with civilian higher education. Also, the relationship between institutions, Congress, and military/veteran-serving agencies tasked with administering veterans' education benefits is interdependent.

Legislative Analysis

The primary way by which veteran/military-serving agencies and their supporters in Congress can exert power over civilian higher education institutions as defined by French and Raven is a combination of legitimate power and coercive power. Because veterans' education benefits are legally the province of the VA, this gives the VA and its supporters legitimate power, at least to some degree—the degree is contested, as will be seen in the legislative examples—over administration of these benefits. This leads to their ability to use coercive power—the threat to withdraw Post-9/11 GI Bill program eligibility and funds in whole or in part from civilian higher education institutions.

The easiest form of coercive power on lawmakers' part is, of course, to legislatively mandate institutional cooperation. One introduced piece of legislation illustrating the use of coercive power is H. R. 1793, introduced on 29 March 2017 and titled Veterans Education Priority Enrollment Act of 2017; it was initially referred to committee, then reappeared in a different guise in the later-enacted Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act (S. 764 is its twin bill in the Senate). H. R. 1793:

prohibits the Department of Veterans Affairs or a state approving agency from approving a program of education offered by an educational institution for purposes of an educational assistance program for veterans or members of the Selected Reserve or the Ready Reserve of the Armed Forces unless any such institution that administers a priority enrollment system allows an eligible veteran, member, or dependent to enroll in courses at the earliest possible time.³¹

Simply stated, this bill proposed to withdraw *all* program eligibility from institutions if they have a priority registration system for certain student subpopulations (e.g., upperclassmen, students in specific majors, or student athletes) and do *not* allow veterans, servicemembers, or dependents to register “at the earliest possible time” under said priority registration system based on their receipt of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits.

There is no data indicating that military-affiliated students' inability to access priority registration is a national problem requiring a legislative solution. This does not mean individual incidents that may have occurred are not problematic because the legally time-limited nature of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits (36 months) is a legitimate consideration when constructing priority registration policies, particularly for military-affiliated students enrolling in majors where class space is limited. Also, there is an equity argument that student veterans have voluntarily sacrificed to serve the nation and should thus, at minimum,

be given the same prioritization for registration as other subpopulations (e.g., student athletes) who have not.

However, a national legislative mandate means institutions either *must* comply—potentially privileging military-affiliated students over civilian students who pay the same tuition and fees and thus creating the unintended consequence of a backlash against military-affiliated students—or dismantle their priority registration systems and alienate the entire student body. There was no language in the bill about complaint verification/adjudication or indeed any kind of due process for institutions. If institutions are deemed noncompliant by the VA or local state approving agencies, which are VA funded and not experts on higher education policies and procedures, they will be removed from eligibility. This means that the military-affiliated students enrolled at those institutions will have to find some other way to pay for their educations, quit school, or transfer—possibly blaming the institutions rather than Congress or the VA.

Historically, Congress and the VA have not intruded quite so deeply into the broader administrative policies of higher education institutions enrolling GI Bill recipients. This legislative threat to remove institutional eligibility, and the corresponding tens of thousands to millions of dollars of institutional revenue, depending on the number of GI Bill recipients enrolled at an institution, if institutions do not rework their internal processes to give Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients priority registration over civilian students was a new example of coercive power exerted on higher education by veteran/military-serving agencies and their allies in Congress.

If nonprofit civilian higher education institutions in particular lose Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility, this type of coercive power exercise on the part of Congress and the VA could force more military-affiliated students into the for-profit education sector. The for-profit sector aggressively recruits military-affiliated students—and has been the focus of controversy on this point—because their education benefits do not count toward the 90/10 rule requiring for-profit institutions to earn at least 10 percent of their profit from sources other than Title IV federal financial aid funds.³²

Given the preceding issues, the formal statements for the record regarding this bill submitted in response by both the American Council on Education (ACE) on behalf of itself and eight other higher education associations and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) are unsurprising in content. ACE's response states, in part, "we are unaware of any evidence documenting a widespread problem that would warrant this type of federal mandate."³³ Further, it explains to the committee that institutions' registration systems provide different types of priority registration (e.g., by class level, major, and/or by specialized course sequence required for

graduation) so that they can be flexible in equitably serving multiple student populations. The bill, as the statement points out, also erroneously assumes that all institutions register their students in the same way, so it is unclear how it would work in practice when faced with multiple registration systems.

The statement concludes with a diplomatically voiced rebuttal to the coercive power that the bill attempted to exert, reminding the committee not only that higher education institutions are autonomously operated but that state laws also must be taken into consideration:

We strongly support efforts to help veterans succeed. We recommend reframing the bill to encourage institutions to consider implementing priority policies rather than mandating them and allow institutions the flexibility to find solutions that work best for their campuses. We believe this change would go a long way toward addressing our concerns. It also has the added benefit of ensuring that the bill would not conflict with existing state laws on the subject.³⁴

The AACRAO statement was issued in addition to the organization's signing onto the ACE statement for the record. While this is not necessarily common, it is not altogether unusual in the higher education policy sphere, particularly when one association specializes in a particular issue and would like to provide more technical commentary on it (i.e., demonstrating its expert and informational power). As the higher education association specifically representing the interests of registrars and admissions officers—the higher education administrative population that would bear the burden of a mandate that veterans receive priority registration status—AACRAO thus chose to make a separate statement focusing on its own membership and issues.

After a diplomatic opener similar to the ACE statement, in which AACRAO tacitly recognizes the legitimate and coercive power of congressional stakeholders to regulate veterans' education benefits and positions itself as a partner in the effort to educate student veterans, the statement pivots to demonstrate AACRAO's expert and informational power by rebutting the necessity for the bill.³⁵ It first points out that, when queried on the issue, the national AACRAO membership was unaware of a large-scale problem with student veteran registration that would require a federal mandate to fix. Then the statement notes that some states already mandate priority registration for student veterans and thus schools would have to attempt to reconcile conflicting state and federal mandates.

AACRAO further states that mandated priority registration populations do not work in practice the way lawmakers think. The document concludes with an evidence-based opinion that the bill is unnecessary:

We are also concerned about the precedent that such a mandate would set. Such a measure could easily be applied to other categories of students and, more importantly, have adverse effects on students that truly need priority registration most. For example, one member institution with state prioritization mandate already in place reported that their institution watched their priority registration group balloon to include approximately 15 percent of their total student population, rapidly losing the intended benefit of priority registration. . . . AACRAO is committed to and will continue to pursue the best services for veteran students. Our members, however, fail to see any evidence that veterans are more frequently closed out of the courses they require to graduate due to lack of priority registration. However well-intended, S.764, [*sic*] seeks to solve a problem that does not seem to exist.³⁶

Both the ACE and AACRAO statements rely on superior expert and informational power to make their points. They position themselves as respecting the legitimate and coercive power of Congress, but they provide evidence as subject-matter experts and representatives of the national higher education community that the presumed national problem—civilian institutions of higher education denying veterans priority registration—does not exist on a scale sufficient enough to warrant federal intervention. In addition, they remind Congress that some states have already mandated this priority registration and students have experienced unintended consequences as a result; therefore, further federal mandates could make the problem worse, not better.

Apparently, these statements and whatever discussions went on behind the scenes had the desired effect, because the Forever GI Bill was amended in a very different manner than the coercive power of H. R. 1793's text would suggest. The final enrolled bill's text dropped any threat to schools' eligibility for Post-9/11 GI Bill funding and merely directed that the secretary of Veterans Affairs provide "information on whether the institution administers a priority enrollment system that allows certain student veterans to enroll in courses earlier than other students" to benefit recipients.³⁷

Another nuanced example of coercive power dynamics in veterans' education policy is in S. 473, Educational Development for Troops and Veterans Act of 2017, introduced 28 February 2017 and referred to committee with hearings held.³⁸ The bill would amend the latest version of the Higher Education Act—*not* the Post-9/11 GI Bill—to fund a small grant program to help no more than 30 individual institutions or institutional consortiums enrolling a sufficient number of military-affiliated students to establish, improve, maintain, and op-

erate campus veterans' centers. Institutions or consortiums would be considered eligible if they enroll a "significant number" of military-affiliated students compared to their civilian student populations, serve veterans and spouses in the local community, and present a "sustainability plan" to maintain the campus veterans' center with their own funds after the expiration of the grant.³⁹

This is laudable on its face and follows emerging best practices in veterans' education. The section of the bill is supported by not only the National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators (NAVPA), which represents school certifying officials and other institutional personnel involved in veterans' education programs, but also the Student Veterans of America (SVA).⁴⁰ SVA points out in its statement of support that it operates its own grant program in conjunction with Home Depot to build veterans' centers on campuses around the country.⁴¹ However, both the bill's definition of what constitutes a campus veterans' center, including workforce development for military-affiliated students, and additional criteria below rely on coercive financial power to affect institutional policies:

(3)(b)(iv) The institution or consortium commits to hiring a staff at the Veteran Student Center that includes veterans (including veteran student volunteers and veteran students participating in a Federal work-study program under part C of title IV, a work-study program administered by the Secretary of Veteran Affairs, or a State work-study program).

(v) The institution or consortium is willing to consider providing veteran students with academic credit for comparable subject-area training received while serving in the Armed Forces and commits to dedicating resources to helping its student veterans navigate their way through the transfer credit process.

(vi) The institution or consortium commits to using a portion of the grant received under this section to develop an early warning veteran student retention program carried out by the Veteran Student Center.

(vii) The institution or consortium commits to providing mental health counseling to its veteran students and their spouses.⁴²

To be clear, imposing funding requirements on institutional recipients of a grant program is a form of legitimate power. Grant funders, whether public or private, have the right to specify uses to which their monies may be put. Institutions have the corresponding right to disagree with those uses and not apply for particular funds. However, the specific provisions in S. 473 also exert a subtle

coercive power on institutions awarded these grants beyond the obvious one of being required to hire veterans on staff as in (3)(b)(iv) and thus illustrate new power dynamics operating related to veterans' education policy.

First, the issue with veterans not receiving academic credit at civilian colleges and universities for comparable military training—and the civil-military gap issue at its core—is long-standing.⁴³ This occurs despite decades of credit evaluation guides and a Joint Services Transcript produced by ACE using civilian faculty evaluators to review military training programs in subject areas they teach.⁴⁴ Thus, this bill uses nuanced coercive financial power to address the problem; if institutions want to be considered for veterans' center grants, they must provide resources to help veterans negotiate the military credit transfer process and agree to at least consider providing academic credit for comparable military training. While the term *consider* can cover a multitude of student credit denials—and allows institutions to remain largely autonomous in their academic decisions—the note of coercive power is clear.

Second, the requirement that institutions receiving grant money under the program develop a separate student veteran academic retention program administered by the veterans' center, not by existing institutional academic affairs offices, is another indication of coercive power. It also illustrates, consciously or not, civil-military tensions between separation and assimilation of veterans into society stretching back to the seminal theories of Huntington and Morris Janowitz.⁴⁵ Huntington preferred to keep the military and civilian society in separate spheres, whereas Janowitz argued for more assimilation of the military into civilian society. Requiring that student veteran retention be handled by a student veteran center and not an existing academic affairs unit harkens back to Huntington rather than Janowitz. The coercive power of telling a higher education institution how to advise a specific subpopulation of students—ignoring the institution's own expert and informational power bases in so doing—is a new power dynamic in veterans' education policy.

Third, the requirement that an institution provide mental health counseling not only for student veterans but for their spouses, regardless of whether those spouses are students at the institution, is another exercise of coercive power, particularly because student veterans have access to VA health care as one of their entitlements of service. The issue is not whether student veterans and spouses could benefit from the availability of mental health counseling services or whether mental health counseling services are better on a college campus than within the VA health care system. The question is whether or not an institution is being told it must provide this service for nonstudents and is able to sustain it out of its own funds once the grant expires. This is another new element in veterans' education policy; how the power dynamic will evolve is still unknown.

The final legislative provisions discussed in this article are other parts of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 that are further examples of power exerted by congressional actors and veteran-serving agencies over higher education institutions. The first, Section 305, is effective 1 August 2018 and is a new requirement for higher education institutions enrolling more than 20 student veterans:

(a) TRAINING REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, in consultation with the State approving agencies, set forth requirements relating to training for school certifying officials employed by covered educational institutions offering courses of education approved under chapter 36 of title 38, United States Code. If a covered educational institution does not ensure that a school certifying official employed by the educational institution meets such requirements, the Secretary may disapprove any course of education offered by such educational institution.⁴⁶

This means that if colleges and universities do not require their main school certifying officials to take a specific course of training constructed by the VA and state approving agencies for veterans' education benefits, they will no longer be eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill funds. On the school level, certifying officials are often staff working in the registrar's office who take on veterans' benefits certification as a collateral duty. However, depending on the institution, they may be financial aid office staff, dedicated veterans' center staff, bursar's office staff, or other employees; they may also be full- or part-time employees depending on the number of student veterans enrolled. This, from the higher education institutional perspective, can prevent military-serving agencies from constructing an effective training program. Not only are these employees working in different roles within their institutions, the thousands of colleges and universities in the United States have diverse academic calendars, tuition and fee structures, and drop/add procedures—all of which can affect veterans' education benefit processing. State approving agencies and the VA do not have expert or informational power when it comes to higher education administration; those power bases are the province of higher education institutions themselves. However, VA and veteran-serving agencies should have expert and informational power when it comes to how the Post-9/11 GI Bill works and be able to work with higher education institutions and their representatives to construct training that will be useful and helpful.

Training in benefit administration is a legitimate power to exercise when dealing with a complicated multi-billion-dollar federal program, and it should not be inferred from this analysis that institutions want to or should oper-

ate without guidance. However, the coercive power exercised in the training's implementation—by threatening to remove Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility from the institution if it does not comply—is complicated by years of institutional complaints about inconsistent, unclear, and sometimes flatly contradictory VA guidance on how to administer Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits. The VA, in turn, has complained that institutions do not mandate training for their employees, who then make errors in certifying benefits, and that VA should have more control over mandated training.⁴⁷ The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended more training of school officials to reduce overpayments in an October 2015 report on the program; this provision in the Forever GI Bill seems to have been a reaction to the report.⁴⁸ What will come of the interplay of power dynamics between institutions, state approving agencies, and the VA on this front remains to be seen.

Finally, in Section 307, the secretary of Veterans Affairs is directed to provide educational and vocational counseling for student veterans on campus by VA employees, not by colleges and universities' staff:

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide educational and vocational counseling services for individuals described in section 3697A(b) of this title at locations on the campuses of institutions of higher learning selected by the Secretary. Such counseling services shall be provided by employees of the Department who provide such services under section 3697A of this title.

(b) SELECTION OF LOCATIONS.—(1) To be selected by the Secretary under this section, an institution of higher learning shall provide an appropriate space on the campus of the institution where counseling services can be provided under this section.

(2) In selecting locations for the provision of counseling services under this section, the Secretary shall seek to select locations where the maximum number of veterans would have access to such services.⁴⁹

Embedding VA employees on campuses to provide college and vocational counseling services only to veterans and requiring institutions to provide counseling space for them on campus is yet another new exercise of coercive power, even ascribing good intent to the language. Counseling students about work and postsecondary options is legitimate and worthy. In addition, the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other veterans' education benefits are complicated enough that special counseling is necessary for their recipients. However, assigning VA employees to college campuses who will only counsel student veterans, while having

campuses foot the bill for housing them, is unusual. It also presents an interesting set of potential power dynamics: are the VA employees as well-trained in the wide variety of higher education options available as professional admissions counselors and advisors? What if the institution's admissions and advising staff have professional disagreements with the advice being dispensed by the embedded VA employees? Who has what power to challenge information they consider inaccurate or out of date? The legislative language is silent on this front; what will happen in the field remains to be seen.

Conclusions

The power dynamics in veterans' education policy have changed abruptly with the advent of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the billions of dollars now flowing through it to institutions that enroll student veterans and other eligible beneficiaries. Civilian and military-serving entities alike jostle for power and influence over veterans' education policy and the billions of dollars attached to it. While both sides appear to genuinely wish to serve student veterans, their policy and practice viewpoints are affected by the long-standing civil-military gap in American society and its effects on their views and ideologies.

For instance, a student veteran advocate perception of a nationwide problem with student veterans being shut out of required courses spurred the introduction of legislation designed to strip institutions of Post-9/11 GI Bill funding if they made civilian student subpopulations (e.g., athletes, juniors, or seniors) eligible for priority registration but did not extend the same eligibility to student veterans. The possibility of student veterans fitting into more than one student subpopulation and being eligible for priority registration via other means—and the following question of which of their intersectional identities should be emphasized—was not considered in the proposed legislation. Because the Post-9/11 GI Bill is limited to veterans and eligible dependents, a veteran identity was foregrounded. It could be argued that part of the civil-military gap is emphasized by veteran-serving agencies seeing student veterans *only* as veterans and not taking student status, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, parent status, or other components of their individual identities into the equation; however, both the narrow issue of whether student veterans' *student* or *veteran* identities predominate and the broader issue of intersectional identity and higher education policy are beyond the scope of this article.

The presumption of discrimination against student veterans was rebutted by higher education associations using evidence to counter the perception that student veterans were being mistreated on a large scale by civilian institutions. As one association put it in a statement for the record, the legislation, "however well-intended . . . seeks to solve a problem that does not seem to exist."⁵⁰ Finally, the legislative language was softened considerably and partially in-

corporated into the latest revision of the Post-9/11 GI Bill as a compromise.

The example above shows how bases of power (see Raven and French) are employed as both sides attempt to influence multiple policy fronts. Veteran-serving agencies and their congressional allies tend to exert a combination of legitimate and coercive power over veterans' education policy, as can be seen by both this example and earlier discussion of other legislation. In their turn, higher education institutions and their representatives in Washington tend to counter by using informational and expert power bases—including access to national institutional memberships' wealth of data—to mitigate attempted coercion and inform legitimate exercises of power. While other parts of Raven and French's theory (e.g., reward power) can be used by either group depending on the scenario, the easiest way for congressional stakeholders to influence American higher education institutions is via coercive legislative power; the stick of Post-9/11 GI Bill funding (or Title IV financial aid funding in other arenas) is large and simple to wield and offers a monetary reward for compliance.

The implications of this are clear. If advocates for military-affiliated students and their congressional allies feel that student veterans (or active duty servicemembers) are being mistreated or neglected by civilian higher education institutions, they will not hesitate to use legitimate and/or coercive power in an attempt to make civilian higher education institutions pay—literally—for it. In the post-World War II decades when traditional-age civilian students were plentiful to recruit and enroll, this might not have been a matter of paramount concern to civilian higher education institutions. Now, with billions of dollars at stake and the demographic landscape shifting to favor the nontraditional-age student category into which most student veterans fall, the power dynamics also have shifted between the two groups; how they will play out in the future is less certain.

Implications for Higher Education

Better understanding the shifting power dynamics within veterans' education policy is important to both higher education policy scholars and institutional practitioners who help educate military-affiliated students for a number of reasons. One is sheer pragmatism. An individual faculty member or administrator will probably never need to delve into the depths of legislative language and power dynamics as this article does to work with an individual student veteran using the Post-9/11 GI Bill or an active duty servicemember using DOD tuition assistance funds to attend their school. However, power dynamics directly affect institutions, particularly when coercive power dynamics are exercised by using federal funding as a combined carrot and club. Thus, civilian higher education as a whole would be wise to pay attention to the campus-level effects of power dynamics playing out in the veterans' education arena.

For instance, if an institution is selected to have VA employees embedded for counseling student veterans, per the language incorporated in the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, space must be found for those employees. That potentially affects more than just the student veteran population at that institution. Therefore, both scholars and practitioners better understanding how veterans' education policy decisions can ripple out—as seen in the attempted amendment of the Higher Education Act discussed in this article, *not* the Post-9/11 GI Bill—to affect broader higher education policy and practice is necessary.

Another, more altruistic and possibly idealistic reason for higher education researchers and practitioners to better understand the power dynamics going on within veterans' education policy is to help bridge the civil-military gap from the side of higher education. Military-affiliated students are an underrepresented and often misunderstood population in higher education.⁵¹ Therefore, higher education researchers and practitioners need more information on both the types of power dynamics operating in veterans' education policy and the emotions behind them, often rooted in the civil-military gap in American society. A clearer understanding of the complexity of these power dynamics—which have not been previously researched in this sector given how the Post-9/11 GI Bill has changed the landscape—can potentially increase higher education's bridge building with legislative allies and veteran-serving agencies to make better policy and practice to benefit this often-marginalized population.

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