

Statement for the Record
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Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

Department of Defense Actions Concerning Voluntary Education Programs

November 29, 2016

On behalf of the more than 1 million alumni, students, faculty and staff of the University of Phoenix, I offer the following statement to the United States Senate Committee on Armed Services in connection with its examination of Department of Defense Voluntary Education Programs.

University of Phoenix holds a unique place in American higher education. Nearly 40 years ago, the University was founded to help individuals that had for too long been underserved and overlooked by traditional colleges and universities. Although so-called nontraditional students still face many challenges in obtaining a quality higher education in America, the nation has come a long way in its service to these students, in no small part because of the innovative leadership role the University of Phoenix has played. In 2015, University of Phoenix taught a reported 214,500 students. More than half of them are first-generation college students determined to pave a new path to success in life through higher education. Most are working adults over 30 years old who juggle work responsibilities, including serving in the military, and care for dependents at home while attaining a degree — a milestone that not only changes their families, but future generations. Nearly half (46.4 percent) report as ethnic minorities, and 66 percent are female.

As a regionally accredited, degree-granting academic institution, University of Phoenix proudly serves thousands of U.S. Service members and understands its obligation to provide quality degree and certificate programs that advance their personal and career aspirations and prepares them for future career and technical pursuits, both inside and outside of the Department of Defense.

The value of University of Phoenix degrees is evidenced by the 950,000 alumni who live in every region of the country and work in all sectors of today's job market. It is also directly related to the faculty practitioners who teach at the University — 9,539 faculty have worked or are currently working for Fortune 1000 companies. The University faculty have an average 20.7 years of professional experience and have taught at the University for an average of 8.4 years. The average class size is 14.2.

University of Phoenix proudly issues an Academic Annual Report to publicly demonstrate its commitment to transparency and outline what independent third-party and internal tools are used to measure student learning, academic quality, affordability and the alignment of our academic programs and student learning goals to employers' needs in this countryⁱ. The University's value is further demonstrated by the U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard, released in September 2015. The first College Scorecard included data on 7,676 colleges and universities, including University of Phoenix, on a wide variety of criteria. In the Scorecard, University of Phoenix placed in the top 25 among large institutions in salary after attendingⁱⁱ.

Since its founding in 1976, not only has the University of Phoenix proudly served the military community, but it has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to policies, regulations, and statutory requirements that ensure active-duty and veteran students are well served and have the resources and protections necessary to maximize the return on their educational investment.

On February 2, 2012, University of Phoenix joined with leading Veteran Serving Organizations in calling on President Barack Obama and the Congress to support new safeguards that would foster responsible decision-making and protect Service members and veterans who seek to use their educational benefits. The University called for mandating upfront educational counseling and developing a formal, integrated government-wide complaint tracking system. Ardent and effective advocacy on behalf of these enhancements designed to "rein in bad actors across all sectors of higher education" helped lead to the enactment of Public Law 112-249 (*Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act*)

and the President's Executive Order 13607 – *Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members*.

Both the Executive Order 13607 and the new postsecondary education complaint system are integral parts of the Department of Defense Memorandum of Understanding outlining requirements related to participation in the Voluntary Education Programs. University of Phoenix supports each of these initiatives and has taken direct steps to advocate for enhancements and improvements that help students. In a June 29, 2012 letter expressing support for Executive Order 13607, the University wrote: "We believe the student protections, systems and procedures we have in place can help inform the final framework and implementation guidelines of the President's Executive Order, including the Principles of Excellence. Our institutions' doors are wide open to the Secretaries of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Education as the operational requirements are developed."

The vital role of Department of Defense Voluntary Education Programs in serving military personnel pursuing postsecondary education and training cannot be understated. The integrity and sustainability of the Tuition Assistance program must be prioritized and diligently maintained. We thank the Committee for its work in this regard and appreciate the steps taken by the Department of Defense to partner with us to improve operational processes in a manner that protects educational choices made by active-duty students and eliminates unnecessary complexity and confusion.

Institutions of higher education, taxpayers and active-duty and veteran students themselves are best served when the rules are clear, fair and transparent. When there are shortcomings in this regard, they must be identified and immediately corrected in order to continue to meet the essential goals of Voluntary Education Programs to: (1) play a critical role in the recruitment of high-performing talent in the Armed Services; (2) enhance the preparedness of service members for 21st century warfare; and, (3) ensure successful service member transitions to civilian life where they become active and engaged citizens.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to provide access to higher education opportunities that enable students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their professional goals, improve the performance of their organizations, and provide leadership and service to their communities. We stand ready to work with the Committee, the Department of Defense and all higher education stakeholders to improve services to students and protect investments made by taxpayers.

ⁱ 2015 Academic Annual Report

http://www.phoenix.edu/content/dam/altcloud/doc/about_uopx/academic-annual-report-2015.pdf

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Education, College Scorecard. (2015). MERGED2011_PP.csv. Retrieved September 15, 2015 from <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/> Note: Data for the University's main campus, as well as several other campuses, is not displayed on the 2016 College Scorecard due to changes in the IPEDS Unit ID's assigned by the Department of Education.