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SUPPORTING VETERAN' SOCIETY IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP: BEST PRACTICES FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Supporting Veteran' Society in Entrepreneurship: Best Practices for Entrepreneurship Centers in Higher Education Institutions in the United States

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Centers (ECs) within veteran-friendly Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the United States (US) capital region by integrating insights from the 2022 Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers (GCEC) conference. This is an extension study to a previously published qualitative study titled "Entrepreneurship Centers: A Qualitative Study on their Mission, Vision, and Support Services for Veteran Entrepreneurship in the United States" (Taffal, Ivanov, Maritz & Anyu, 2025). This study focuses on best practices to support the veteran society at EC's in the U.S. capital region. The research reveals that while many ECs acknowledge diversity and inclusion principles, few have explicitly developed targeted strategies focus specifically on veterans. The results demonstrate why standardizing best practices along with an aligned mission and vision and specific veteran support systems remains crucial. The analysis highlights the value of community engagement and support structures tailored for veteran populations. Key insights from the conference included the need for ECs to have clear, specific, and veteran-specific goals and programs that will help promote a level playing field for veterans. The findings from this paper are intended to help guide policy makers, HEIs, and ECs to develop more comprehensive and effective initiatives to support veterans in their

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entrepreneurial journeys and efforts to support the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the veteran community as a whole while creating social impact and achieving inclusion, empowerment, and systemic change.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Centers (ECs); veteran entrepreneurship; higher education institutions (HEIs); entrepreneurship programs; 2022 GCEC conference; veteran society.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship functions as a crucial pathway toward social progress while being acknowledged as the main driver of innovation and advancement. It is considered a primary means of economic development and particularly for the underprivileged (Boldon, Maury & Armstrong, 2017). In the case of veteran entrepreneurs, they face unique challenges transitioning from military service to civilian entrepreneurship, including difficulties in accessing tailored resources, mentorship, and networks supportive of their military-acquired skills (Maury, Tihic, Pritchard, McKelvie & Euto, 2022). Veteran entrepreneurs encounter difficulties when they attempt to apply their military-developed leadership skills and perseverance towards establishing successful businesses (Ojo, 2023; Maury *et al.*, 2022). They also lack the essential resources and services to transform these acquired skills into well-designed ventures (Dilger & Cilluffo; 2022; Maury *et al.*, 2022). Recognizing these challenges, many Entrepreneurship Centers (ECs) at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have undertaken efforts to foster inclusive environments that accommodate veteran needs. However, existing research indicates a gap between principles of diversity and inclusion and the practical strategies employed to support veteran entrepreneurs effectively (Taffal *et al.*, 2025).

This paper builds upon the qualitative research initially conducted by Taffal *et al.*, (2025) by further examining the findings of the study of how ECs within veteran-friendly HEIs in Washington, DC, developed and aligned their missions, vision, and programs to address the needs of veteran entrepreneurs. This study also utilizes the main findings from the 2022 Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers (GCEC) conference to assess both effective programs and system obstacles present in delivering Entrepreneurship Education (EE) to veterans. The GCEC conference allowed participants to identify best practices, proven models, and emerging trends to further strengthen veteran entrepreneurship in HEIs.

Through analysis of both the existing literature and the detailed case study results from the 2022 GCEC conference, this research will evaluate ECs support

systems and their strategic alignment and programmatic inclusivity for veteran students. In essence, this study aims to determine gaps, leverage lessons learned and develop practical strategies that enable ECs to serve veterans better. This will enable the positioning of ECs as agents of social innovation and systemic change to generate more inclusive and impactful entrepreneurial opportunities for veterans.

Literature Review

Recent studies have shown that factors like environmental dynamism and entrepreneurial autonomy have been observed as factors that contribute to the success of students at HEIs and entrepreneurs. Ryandono, Gunawan, Haque, Pitchay, Rosyidi, Zulaikha & Ratnasari, (2024) study showed that pro-growth is seen as an environment that is facilitated by external dynamics, which provides conditions for innovative business start-ups. From a social innovation perspective, Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan, (2010) described this growth as the process of creating innovative ideas and solutions for complex problems that engage participants and the community in order to facilitate better social progress. This idea helps determine that the entrepreneurship programs at ECs should not just focus on creating technology or business innovations but instead design programs that are more inclusive, equitable, and dynamic entrepreneurial landscape that benefits society at large, including veterans, to build a resilient ecosystem. This social innovation describes the initiatives that are intentional and strive to stimulate social change in social practices and institutional processes (Nastase, Lisetchi & Bibu, 2014). As a result, programs that support veterans can become a force of social change because the programs that focus on veterans can become embedded in a community ecosystem that aims to enhance the inclusion of veterans and reduce structural barriers that can make an impact in the long term.

Furthermore, recent research also shows that entrepreneurship educators can be considered important in producing the effectiveness of veteran focused programs. Zhu & Ren (2023) argued that HEIs instructors should be trained in EE in order to produce an effective entrepreneur. EC in HEIs can be involved in this activity by conducting special faculty development training that can increase their ability to educate a veteran entrepreneur. In addition, they must consider that HEIs mission and vision philosophy “mission and vision” must be aligned with the experiences and needs of students to create a collaborative, warm, and trusting atmosphere that can support a learning environment for entrepreneurs (Zhu & Ren, 2023). Creative teaching methods can not only foster creativity and taking risks but also develop an entrepreneurial mindset that can be used by veterans in this case when

transitioning to a civilian entrepreneur. It is also necessary to continue feedback, assessment, and program development to ensure that EE at EC's in HEIs is always in line with the veteran's challenges and aspirations.

On the other hand, "Entrepreneurship Centers: A Qualitative Study on their Mission, Vision, and Support Services for Veteran Entrepreneurship in the United States" (Taffal, et al, 2025) is a qualitative study that looked into the function and success of EC's within 17 veteran-friendly HEI's in Washington, DC where only 6 of the 17 have an EC (Taffal et al., 2025). The 6 EC's included American University (Veloric Center for Entrepreneurship), Gallaudet University (Gallaudet Innovation and Entrepreneurship Institute -GIEI), George Washington University (The Office of Innovation & Entrepreneurship - OIE), Georgetown University (Georgetown Entrepreneurship), Howard University (University - PNC National Center for Entrepreneurship), and The catholic University of America (The Ciocca Center for Principled Entrepreneurship). These 6 centers were studied based on their mission and vision statements as well as their programs to promote veteran entrepreneurship. The findings from the study showed that there was great variation between the centers. Some centers offered a broad spectrum of support, such as mentoring and financial aid to veterans to provide an entrepreneur atmosphere suited to them while other centers offer little support with little relation to the veterans' needs.

The research by Taffal, *et al* (2025), highlights the importance of aligning mission and support services with veteran-specific entrepreneurial support to enhance inclusion and economic empowerment among veteran students. Other key findings from the study also indicate that although many HEIs recognize the importance of diversity and inclusive support, only a few ECs explicitly embed veteran-specific objectives into their mission and programs. Notably, only one of the 6 evaluated ECs explicitly mentions "veteran" support in its mission or vision statements, despite providing some targeted programs.

Case Study

The information provided during the 2022 Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers (GCEC) Conference held at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) provided insight into effective methods for teaching entrepreneurship, especially in regard to incorporating veteran students. The 15 themes presented at the GCEC 2022 conference have been summarized into 6 main themes as Figure 1 illustrates.



Figure 1: Themes at the 2022 Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers

These themes collectively emphasized the propriety of a complex reasoning approach to creating an entrepreneurship curriculum that incorporates non-classroom learning, community engagement, and minority voices like veterans.

The importance of the so-called inclusive and diverse pedagogy for EE was undoubtedly one of the primary messages of GCEC. Some of the challenges posed by ECs were debated, demonstrating the need to improve veteran friendly policies and practices for aspiring veterans who encounter many challenges in their entrepreneurial activities (GCEC, 2022). Several approaches were cited as the methods that may help address this group's needs. These methods include mentoring specialized groups like veterans, providing resource centers, or collaborating with private enterprises and government organizations. Syracuse University hosted a panel session "Advancing Veteran Entrepreneurship Through Entrepreneurship Centers" to show how veterans require additional resources as demonstrated in the National Survey of Military-Affiliated Entrepreneurship by Tihic & Maury (2022). The session discussed how veteran entrepreneurs faced challenges in the path due to uncoordinated services and thus needed stakeholders' collaboration. Many veterans are unaccustomed to business incubators, and existing services often lack veteran friendly practices, suggesting a need for improvement or partnerships

and collaboration with other enterprises. Some of the session's recommendations included encouraging faculty research on military-connected entrepreneurship, developing veteran-specific activities like business plan competitions, and providing financial literacy training with embedded incentives. Additionally, it was proposed that educating people about crowdfunding opportunities and increasing access to small business grants and alternative funding could better help veteran entrepreneurs.

One of the sessions, "Jump Into the Deep End with Immersive Hands-On Entrepreneurship Education Programming for the Community," introduced the Veteran Entrepreneurship Program (VEP), a program that aims to provide support for veterans to start businesses. This session integrated several programs by the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Florida. The VEP emphasizes personalized education, experiential learning with seasoned entrepreneurs, and exposure to influential role models—the core mission of this initiative is to promote the growth of veteran-owned, profitable ventures (Cordell & Mills, 2022). The session featured presentations demonstrating the dynamic process of veteran business creation through active discussions between faculty members, entrepreneurs, and experts who provided veterans with essential business-starting tools and methods.

Another workshop titled "Community of Practice in the Military-Connected Space" was delivered by researchers from Florida State University and Texas A&M University. Through the Community of Practice method, it showed the importance of creating a culture of multicultural and diversity in the veteran entrepreneurial space to create a thriving ecosystem in the space (Roberts, Moran, Spencer & Kissner, 2022). This ecosystem can encourage collaboration and shared learning among veterans and their communities.

By adopting the above practices, ECs will consolidate the delivery of impact that concerns veteran students while concurrently expanding the capacity of the entrepreneurship *minority* across the nation. Furthermore, the 2022 GCEC conference also underlined the necessity to establish all forms of partnership between various stakeholders, including university ECs, local government, and the private sector. According to Christy & Mingchang (2021) these relationships were vital for improving the solvent entrepreneurial environments involving students and creating regional values. They are vital for improving the entrepreneurial environment for students and for creating a regional value, thereby contributing positively to the community and the economy (Maritz, Li, Utami & Sumaji, 2022; Welsh & Tullar, 2014). The topics discussed at the GCEC conference correlate to issues in EE, demonstrating the importance of a multidisciplinary approach for diverse student populations including veterans. HEIs must continue to build their ECs while adapting lessons learned at the conference to better support veteran entrepreneurs and the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Methodology

A case study research was conducted to augment the content analysis research referenced in our literature review and offer an in-depth understanding of the best practices supporting veteran entrepreneurship. The case study was designed based on findings from the 2022 GCEC, which illustrated strategies for incorporating support for veterans into diverse facets of entrepreneurship.

This paper has evaluated the findings of all 6 ECs of veteran friendly HEIs located in Washington, DC and compared the research outcomes of the content analysis applied to the determined best practice at the GCEC conference. The study evaluates the world’s ECs’ correlation with the conference topics and observes how Washington, DC, EC’s can support veterans. Therefore, the content analysis from our literature review—along with the findings derived from the specific case study—contributes toward an unobstructed vision of how the ECs’ support might adapt their practices to improve the circumstances of those *minority* veteran students who seek to initiate a beneficial business career.

This multi-pronged approach ensures that the evaluated data is qualitatively sound and offers in-depth insights into the accessibility of ECs for students of diverse backgrounds who may require support to embrace entrepreneurship. Thus, the conclusion of this study is essential in improving the delivery of effective EE programs to minority groups like veterans.

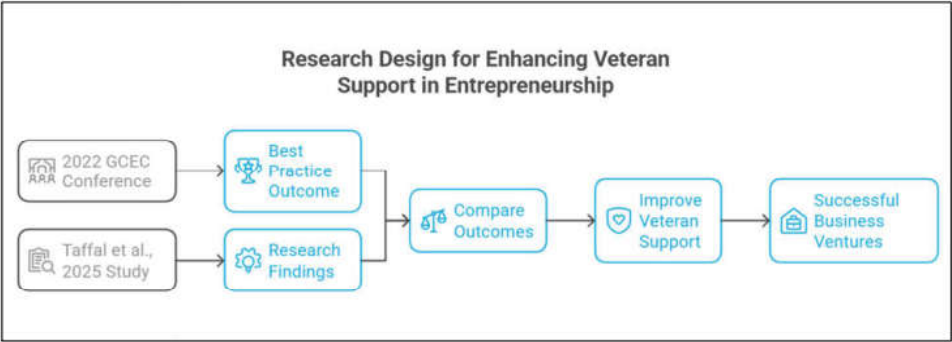


Figure 2: Research Design

Findings and Discussion

This study incorporated information from the 2022 GCEC, highlighting the value of inclusive and supportive ecosystems to help minority entrepreneurs, such as veterans. The study also supported the insights and findings in the 2022 GCEC. For instance, it was concluded that ECs must design feasible ecosystems to create

equality, emphasizing the employment of qualified and well-motivated learners, including veterans and minorities.

Through a comparative analysis of all 6 ECs within Washington, DC, this study evaluates their strategic alignment with all of the 15 conference themes presented in Figure 1.

Taffal *et al.*, (2025) study evaluated all 6 ECs, where multiple themes were identified concerning the mission and vision statements and the support programs. The 6 ECs were about *Diversity and Inclusion*, *Community Engagement and Development*, and *Entrepreneurial Support Structures and Education*. These themes were repeated and supported as part of the overall strategic objectives of developing HEIs to promote entrepreneurship as an economic activity to benefit individuals and society at the 2022 GCEC case study. The conference themes—such as focalization on community, promoting entrepreneurship spirit, and introducing diversity—are evident in the more developed ECs' organizational missions and programs. For example, the spirit of venture creation and the support of EE for the underprivileged was reflected by the programs providing targeted assistance to veterans and other underrepresented groups. This was emphasized under conference session titled “*Community of Practice in the Military-Connected Space*” reflecting both themes of this study: *Diversity and Inclusion*, and *Community Engagement and Development* (Roberts *et al.*, 2022). Nonetheless, the differences in the degree of support at various universities imply that uniform use of best practices is required, as demonstrated at the GCEC conference. In particular, more efforts are needed to make all the ECs include support strategies for the veterans, as the conference promoted the agenda for exclusive programs and services for certain minority groups (Tihic & Maury, 2022). This was emphasized in the conference sessions titled “*Advancing Veteran Entrepreneurship Through Entrepreneurship Centers*” reflecting the outcome of this study's theme: *Entrepreneurial Support Structures and Education*.

In addition, the conference themes were all within the parameters of the ECs' mission and vision statements. The results indicate that, while accommodating the principle of diversity is a general goal, the analysis from Taffal *et al.*, 2025 study reveals that while all 6 ECs aim to uphold diversity principles, only one (American University - Veloric Center for Entrepreneurship) explicitly endorses veteran-specific objectives in its support programs. Notably, institutions like Georgetown University and Howard University have initiatives aimed at supporting minority populations, including veterans, but the degree of targeted veteran support varies significantly across ECs. This implies that although the universities in Washington, DC, have recognized the need to adopt diversity and inclusion, but lack clear objectives to serve the veteran population.

Washington, DC's academic institutions understand the importance of diversity and inclusion but lack clear objectives to serve the veteran population. One of the lessons learned from GCEC 2022 is that ECs should agree on best practices

such as clear objectives within the mission and vision statement for veterans, making ecosystems that are easy to navigate, and creating stronger connections to the community. This case study illustrates that despite widespread acceptance of diversity principles universities struggle to implement these principles into strategies that specifically benefit veterans. Additionally, it emphasizes the need to align institutions' missions with explicit commitments to veterans through dedicated programs, mentorship, and access to resources. Ideas from the GCEC 2022 conference helped expand the context and urgency of improving the educational quality in entrepreneurship and evaluate contemporary trends. Using mission and vision statements and program descriptions from HEI websites might reveal only some methods universities use to assist veteran entrepreneurs. The variation in support structures across ECs illustrates the need for a standardized set of best practices, as advocated at the GCEC conference. Successful ECs should demonstrate the importance of community engagement combined with veteran support organizational collaboration and mission-program alignment. These elements contribute to fostering an environment supportive of veteran entrepreneurship.

The current practices suggest that HEIs and ECs must evolve and adapt to address the specific needs of veteran entrepreneurs actively (Taffal *et al.*, 2025; Cable *et al.*, 2021; Ziencik, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2013). Implementing consistent policies, developing dedicated programs, and adapting a supportive community for veteran entrepreneurs will be critical steps in closing existing gaps and building resilient ecosystems (Maury *et al.*, 2022; Montgomery *et al.*, 2021; Cumberland *et al.*, 2020; Boldon *et al.*, 2017).

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical need for EC's within veteran-friendly HEIs to adopt more explicit, targeted support strategies for veteran entrepreneurs. While concepts such as diversity and inclusion are embraced, the link between those ideas and effective support actions remains inconsistent. The 2022 GCEC conference's best practices and qualitative case analysis demonstrated that specific, veteran-focused goals, a comprehensive set of support initiatives, and a committed approach to community engagement are the keys to developing robust and successful veteran entrepreneurship. Insights from the 2022 GCEC conference include lessons such as establishing mission alignment with clear veteran-specific goals, community engagement, and developing support resources, including mentorship, funding, and training. The second finding is that it is vital for ECs to recognize their roles as a mechanism to advance social innovation and systemic change. By putting veteran-specific programming into the context of the community and engaging veterans as co-creators, ECs can help foster social change that goes beyond individual entrepreneurship. Once institutional support shifts

from transactional support to engaged community engagement, a key goal for all stakeholders is to support entrepreneurs to add value to the local economy and the quality of life (Nastase et al., 2014). The variation among institutions signals the need for standardization of best practices to provide more effective and equitable support for veteran entrepreneurs. The main takeaways are that there is a need for more explicit, strategic commitment, community engagement, and targeted programming to strengthen the ecosystem for veteran entrepreneurs. Findings from this research can be used to inform policy, institutional strategic planning, and future research to better serve veteran entrepreneurs at the national level. Policy and institutional leaders can advocate for standardization of best practices and encourage collaboration that prioritizes veteran-specific needs. This will allow them to create a national infrastructure that supports veteran entrepreneurs and ensures social equity. Future research can look at long-term impact of targeted programs and can expand regional analyses to see how differences in the ecosystem affect veteran entrepreneurship. In addition, research can examine faculty development and innovative pedagogies (Zhu & Ren, 2023) to better serve veterans in the long term. Overall, by aligning mission with explicit commitment to supporting veteran entrepreneurs, institutions can foster a more inclusive, equitable, and adaptive entrepreneurial ecosystem that benefits both veterans and society (Taffal et al., 2025; Cable et al., 2021; Christy & Mingchang, 2021; Ziencik, 2020).

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