Introduction and Executive Summary: The report that follows is the result of the hard work of student veterans and staff members of the Governor and Chancellor. The entire report, completed by the Student Veterans Advisory Council, is focused on improving veteran success on Nevada campuses. It contains a general overview of the educational landscape for veterans in Nevada, an account of their travels, tours, and other activities, and finally, specific policy recommendations for the Governor, the Board of Regents, and the Legislature.

The Student Veterans Advisory Council (Council) was created through an Executive Order signed by Governor Sandoval in August of 2013. Members represent each of the seven Nevada System of Higher Education campuses and one private institution. Following the creation of the Council, they gathered numerous times, over the telephone and in person, to examine the landscape student veterans face in Nevada higher education. They collaborated to develop recommendations based on their findings as well. This report fulfills the requirements outlined for the Council in the founding Executive Order.

The institutional recommendations developed by the Council at the end of this report are intended to be general in nature. To paraphrase the guiding principles embraced by the Council, each higher education institution in the state is unique, and they are encouraged to consider, interpret, and implement these recommendations with respect to their own missions, challenges, and opportunities. The recommendations to the Governor contained in this report are intended to develop a structure to maintain the momentum developed by the Green Zone Initiative and continued by the Student Veterans Advisory Council.

The Council could not have completed its work without the generous welcome and extraordinary support provided by the institutional faculty and staff during the course of the campus visits. Not only did veteran and administrative staffs provide expert briefings, but also, in many cases, institutional leaders, including Presidents, Vice Presidents, and others were present to support the Council’s efforts. The Council found the institutions’ remarkable warmth and openness to be further examples of their commitment to serve veterans on their campuses and beyond.

It is the distinct hope of this Council that the findings and recommendations that follow will be embraced by all who wish to create a culture that recognizes the unique challenges of veterans, and works to accommodate their transition from military service. There has been a tremendous amount of focus and effort on the success of Nevada’s veterans in
higher education over the last year, as well as a tremendous amount of progress. The recommendations herein are intended to continue that momentum.

**Guiding principles:** As derived from the Governor’s strategic priorities, the education objective of the Green Zone Initiative states that “service members, veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen have access to high quality higher education programs, and have the financial means to attend Nevada’s colleges, universities, and other degree-producing institutions of higher learning.”

Accordingly, the guiding principles of the Student Veterans Advisory Council are:

- In accordance with the Executive Order establishing our Council, we have made “topics dealing with student success” a central focus of our overall efforts.
- Each institution of higher learning in Nevada, state or private, has unique constraints, challenges, and opportunities with respect to carrying out their equally unique missions, and we appreciate that these recommendations will be interpreted, considered, and implemented accordingly.
- Every student population faces unique challenges and opportunities. It is not the intent of this Council to treat veterans as a special constituency but rather to develop recommendations that we believe will best meet student veterans’ needs as they transition from military service into our communities, workforces, and schools.

**Background:** Due to the enormous benefits provided by the various versions of the G.I. Bill, to include the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, and the importance of civilian education for transitioning military members, higher education has been one of the three major focus areas of the Green Zone Initiative (GZI) since it began. We began by gathering data, identifying challenges and opportunities, and finally, developing an implementation plan going forward. Since that time, the Higher Education Focus Area of the GZI has grown in several important ways.

Starting in May of 2012, the Nevada Department of Veterans Services (NDVS) hosted convenings to develop recommendations for the Governor, the Board of Regents, the Legislature, and other entities to improve success for Nevada’s student veterans. Institutional leaders, student veterans, service organizations, veteran certifying officials, and others took part in the initial
discussions. The first round of recommendations developed and published in the GZI Business Case in early 2013 are as follows:

1. **Orientation for Veterans:** This recommendation suggests that veterans in higher learning institutions receive a special orientation program that is separate and apart from their peers.

2. **Single Point of Contact for Information:** There are many organizations that serve veterans needs and this recommendation addresses a desire by student veterans to have a single, friendly, and informed conduit for information on each college campus.

3. **Staffing Structure:** Because every university and college must have a veteran certifying official to process federal education benefits, this person becomes the de facto veteran staff for the school. Processing the benefits alone is a full-time job on most campuses, and it is difficult for the certifying official to also provide student veterans with adequate counseling or to develop new programs.

4. **Improved Information Sharing:** There needs to be a way for the various veteran service providers and veterans to communicate and stay up to date on information.

5. **Career/Job Mentorship in Public/Private Sectors:** There are several different possible formats for this, but this is a key to helping veterans find jobs in the civilian workforce after they graduate with their higher education degree.

The vision at the time was for these recommendations to be implemented throughout the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) schools, as well as in private and other post-secondary opportunities. Establishing the support of the NSHE Chancellor for these concepts was a crucial first step, and once achieved, it allowed NDVS to create a statewide leadership team that continues to meet to drive progress towards the recommendations, share ideas and best practices, and work towards making Nevada’s campuses more veteran friendly. To date, each NSHE school has approached these issues differently, some with increased funding from their institutions and others with grant money and volunteer efforts. Some institutions have formed new student veteran groups while others have used volunteers or allocated resources to develop veteran centers on campuses. Since this initial effort began, several schools have been recognized by national organizations as being military- and veteran-friendly.

In order to build and expand on these initial recommendations and successes, Governor Sandoval signed Executive Order 2013-09, which established the Governor’s Student Veterans Advisory Council. The Executive Order was signed on August 12, 2013, and the Council ceases to exist on May 1,
2014. It is the first governor-appointed student veterans group of its kind in Nevada.

The Council was established to develop a set of recommendations for all higher learning and post-secondary institutions in Nevada to help ensure veteran success in Nevada’s classrooms and training programs. It is made up of student veterans who are Nevada residents, as well as members of the staffs of the Governor and NSHE Chancellor. While there has been tremendous effort to help transitioning veterans from an academic and administrative perspective, this group was established to ensure that Nevada’s student veterans have a voice when it comes to developing policies and practices that will affect them directly.

Specifically, the Governor’s Executive Order requires that the Council “work to identify and prioritize the needs of Nevada’s veteran students within the Nevada System of Higher Education and other post-secondary opportunities within Nevada.” The order requires that the Governor appoint members, the Council meet regularly, and that it deliver a report to the Governor before May 1, 2014. Biographies for each of the Governor’s appointees to the Council can be found in Appendix A of this report.

In order to meet the requirements of its charter, the Council met six times. The first three meetings were held by telephone during October, November, and December of 2013, and the remaining meetings were held in person during January, February, and March of 2014. In accordance with Nevada Open Meeting Law, agendas, meetings, and minutes of these meetings are available through the Nevada Department of Veterans Services’ Website.

The initial meeting was held on October 15, 2013 at 2:30 PM, with the primary purpose of introducing group members to one another and to the larger statewide discussion of veterans in higher education in Nevada and nationally. Caleb Cage, serving in his role as chair for the meeting, provided the group with an overview of the Green Zone Initiative, the Executive Order that created the Council, as well as with other relevant materials. The group also agreed upon a meeting schedule for the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, agreeing that there was value in visiting Reno, Carson, Las Vegas, and Elko to see how each institution and area served their veteran populations.

The second meeting was held on November 14, 2013 at 2:30 PM. After Caleb Cage provided a brief overview of the purpose of the Council and the progress to date, the group launched into brainstorming recommendations for the Governor and the Legislature. The recommendations were broad in nature and have been refined in subsequent meetings for this report. The Council members agreed that an overview of the benefits and services provided by the State of Nevada would be a valuable addition to this report, and the compilation of those benefits and services can be found in Appendix B.
The third meeting was held on December 12, 2013 at 2:30 PM. Once again, the group engaged in a brainstorming and refining session with respect to recommendations and finalized the logistics planning for the 2014 campus visits. In addition, Mr. Bruce Reumann from the Commission on Postsecondary Education provided a briefing on his role as the State Approving Agency for colleges and universities in Nevada accepting federal education benefits.

The first in-person meeting for the Council was held in Las Vegas over two days, January 23 and 24, 2014. The second was held in Reno and Carson City over February 20 and 21, 2014, and the third was held in Elko over March 20 and 21, 2014. A detailed overview of each tour and meeting can be found in the section below.

Findings:

University of Phoenix: On January 23, 2014, the Council toured the main Las Vegas campus of the University of Phoenix (UoP). Paul Green, campus director, Michelle Nash, and others presented. It started with a tour of the new facility, which included the Student Resource Center, the Faculty Resource Center, common areas, and classrooms.

UoP was founded in 1976 in Phoenix, Arizona, and is a private, for-profit university regulated in Nevada by the Commission of Postsecondary Education. It offers non-traditional programs and classes, many of which are online. It is regionally accredited.

At UoP, students can begin a class at any time during the year. Each course costs approximately $1,600.00, all of which can be covered by the various VA G.I. Bills when students are eligible. For veterans, the academic year and VA payments start when the student starts. Students take one course at a time, for a total of five weeks per course.

UoP has a number of services that are provided specifically for its veteran students to include a veteran-specific job fair, career counseling, and a quarterly magazine. In addition, the university offers expert advice to students concerning payment issues with regards to the VA, as well as academic counseling to ensure that students are taking classes that are eligible under VA guidelines. The university has also developed a robust program to recognize military training for college credit, which ultimately saves student veterans time and money on their education. Finally, the university has built a paperless VA certification process for veteran students.

UoP recognizes military students transfer between campuses often and UoP’s structure allows them to stay enrolled. UoP’s class structure and schedules allow for numerous active duty students to attend UoP classes while deployed abroad in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. UoP also actively recruits and
educates Guard, Reserve, and Active Duty service members who are using their military benefits. In service to their students, UoP also promotes “responsible borrowing,” which encourages students not to take out more loans than they actually need to pay for school, thus reducing long-term debt.

UoP has had over 800,000 graduates throughout its history and currently serves over 80,000 veterans worldwide. In Nevada, over 16,000 students have earned their degrees from the University of Phoenix throughout the statewide locations, including three in Las Vegas and one in Reno, in addition to access for rural Nevada students via its online programs. The University of Phoenix currently serves 678 students who are using their VA educational benefits.

**College of Southern Nevada:** The Council visited the Charleston campus of the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) on January 23, 2014. The visit included an overview of the college from Director for Student Life, Chris Brown (a USMC veteran) and Veteran Certifying Official Vanessa Robledo. It also included a tour of the veteran-related facilities on campus.

CSN is the largest NSHE institution in the state with 35,000 students, including three main campuses in Cheyenne, Charleston, and Henderson. CSN primarily offer two-year degree programs but also offer a few 4-year degree programs. CSN offers small class sizes of 30 students or less, which is in great contrast with the university experience where lower division classes are much larger in size.

CSN considers veterans to be a special population. As such, the college has worked to provide a number of services to veterans, including three veteran certifying officials, a job fair for veterans at the end of every semester, new student orientation, public celebrations on each of the service’s birthdays and Veterans Day, a statewide veterans writing project, and a one-stop-shop for veteran resources.

CSN has 1,200 to 1,500 veterans every semester using the G.I. Bill. For Fall 2013, there were 1,453 vets using the G.I. Bill, in addition to over 250 students using Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP). The most popular majors for veterans are nursing, law enforcement training, and the automotive program. CSN also boasts a Veteran Resource Center so that student veterans can receive resources and counseling. There are plans to convert the current Veteran Resource Center into a veterans lounge to allow for meetings and to make wait times for certifying officials more comfortable.

At approximately $1,350 ($90 per credit including mandatory fees) for a 15-credit semester, CSN and Nevada’s other community colleges are one of the least expensive opportunities for students in the state. The VA covers this cost, including books and fees, under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. CSN has a standing
recommendation to all veterans to apply for all other financial aid available to supplement G.I. Bill benefits.

While a small campus experience is certainly one of the advantages of CSN, it has also created several challenges in serving its student-veteran population. Specifically, the number of VA education benefit claims have more than doubled over the last four years, creating an enormous amount of paperwork for the staff at CSN. Moreover, CSN does not have a system for tracking veterans who are not using their VA educational benefits, nor a system that tracks student veteran success at their institution. CSN is currently developing a survey for faculty members to take in order to identify challenges that the staff face as it applies to student veterans.

One of CSN’s future goals is to form a student veteran group. The school formerly had a student veteran group, but does not have one at this time due to the relatively short time students stay at two-year schools. In order to increase awareness of the veteran population, CSN is working on a way to identify professors who are veterans to student veterans who are students. CSN is also looking into the possibility of providing a veterans center on each campus so that the college can extend their outreach to its entire veteran population. Finally, CSN would like to have a veteran-assigned counselor who can assist veterans on all issues, which would be in addition to the Veteran Certifying Officials.

**Nevada State College:** The Council attended a presentation by Adelfa Sullivan at the administrative campus for Nevada State College (NSC) on January 23, 2014. NSC opened in 2002 and currently serves over 3,300 students, 136 of whom are student veterans (2.4% of student population). The college currently has only one Veteran Certifying Official, Adelfa Sullivan, who is responsible for certifying all of the paperwork for the college's student veterans, as well as filling the position of the Admissions Director and the Registrar.

NSC provides a number of services to their veteran students, including a newly formed Veterans and Allies Club, which currently has six active student members. NSC is also tracking student veteran success, noting that 16 veterans have graduated from their school. Additionally, NSC has a new Website checklist for student veterans and is connected to the Nevada Department of Veterans Services’ Green Zone Network.

NSC faces a number of challenges in serving its veteran population, many of which are due to a lack of staffing. Since NSC only has one certifying official, that person must learn all of the aspects of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, which are constantly changing. There is also no staff available to follow up with veterans after they are certified. Additionally, NSC is only approved for one VA workstudy based on their student veteran population.
NSC has several future plans for veterans at their school, including the allocation of a space for a Student Veterans club starting in 2015, specific orientation programs for student vets, and an academic advisor specifically for veterans. NSC has made tremendous progress toward serving its veteran population and its current and planned developments are in keeping with those trends.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas: The Council toured the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) campus and attended several other activities on January 24, 2014. UNLV currently has 1,256 veterans, including active duty and National Guard and dependents, and 922 use one of the available federal veterans education benefits. In order to serve these students, Ross Bryant (former U.S. Army) was hired as Director of Veteran Services in 2012. UNLV has two Veteran Certifying Officials and three regularly employed work studies, one of whom is the president of the student veteran organization. Over the last four years, UNLV has been ranked in the top 15% or 20% by G.I. Jobs annual publication.

UNLV has a wide range of services available to veterans. They established a Yellow Ribbon Program to support student veterans, raising approximately $84,000; they developed the “Serving Every Returning Veteran” program to train faculty on military and veteran culture; they offer priority registration for veterans; work with a neighborhood apartment complex to provide affordable housing for veterans; and they recognize veterans during graduation. In addition, UNLV hosts multiple veteran-focused events, participates in special activities for veterans, has a veteran memorial on campus, and hosts job fairs for veterans once a semester. UNLV was also chosen to receive a federal VA Vet Success on Campus Counselor.

In addition to this wide variety of services, UNLV is striving to serve their veteran students even more with a number of goals and programs. Some of these plans include continuing to improve on existing programs, tracking statistics and information on student veterans’ success, and helping the UNLV student veterans organization to engage with veterans through service activities. Continuing to pursue these objectives will help UNLV provide even better service to their veterans.

Veterans Upward Bound program: The Council toured the Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) program on February 20, 2014. The VUB program is located at TMCC’s Meadowood Mall campus, which serves as a prime location for reaching the community and meeting the mission requirements of the program. There are currently fewer than 50 VUB programs around the country. VUB in Reno started in 1989 and has received 100% of its funding through a Department of Education grant.
VUB is designed to help veterans transition from the military into the higher education system. Some of the specific services that VUB provides include outreach and retention, remediation, advisement, support services, and social skills training. Since many service members put their academic pursuits on hold while in the military, VUB focuses on remediation as its key mission.

By hosting remedial classes, student veterans can refresh their knowledge of certain subjects at VUB before applying for college. More important, veterans are able to take advantage of VUB’s services without having to use a portion of their VA education benefits, which saves the veteran student both time and money as he or she prepares to go to college. When the veteran student is ready to apply for college, the VUB can also help them with beginning the veterans education benefit certifying process.

In total, over 3,000 veterans have been served by VUB. VUB primarily serves veterans who are considered to be low-income (based on taxable income) or are first generation college students. At least 2/3 of the participants at VUB must meet both criteria, while the other 1/3 of the participants must meet at least one. However, the VUB does not turn veterans away, even if they cannot count them in their annual numbers.

At a minimum, VUB must serve at least 164 veterans a year. Most of these students are within VUB’s target area of Northern Nevada, mainly serving students who plan to attend TMCC, WNC, and GBC. In addition to classrooms at the TMCC Meadowood site, VUB also provides online classes so that students can remediate from home or from anywhere else. This is intended to address two of the biggest problems in rural Nevada as VUB sees them, education and transportation.

**Truckee Meadows Community College:** The Council completed a tour of the TMCC main campus on February 20, 2014, which was hosted by Veteran Certifying Official Roberta Bickford (U.S. Navy). Ms. Bickford began the tour by saying that the concept of a “veteran friendly” campus should not only require a veteran enrollment process, but rather it should be a concerted effort between administrative support of resources, dedicated staff, faculty awareness of issues particular to veterans, and a genuine respect for their service. Currently, TMCC has nearly 500 veterans using VA education benefits in addition to other veterans who are enrolled without using their education benefits.

TMCC offers a wide variety of resources and services that are designed specifically for veteran students. Some of these services include veteran workshops each semester, Veteran On-Track workshops; priority registration; delayed payment for Post-9/11 G.I. Bill veteran students; VA workstudy students to assist with intake of new student veterans; various social media tools; and V.I.T.A.L. (Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership) workers who help
coordinate activities, Reno Vet Center programs, and other efforts. In April of 2014, TMCC also opened a Veteran Resource Center where veteran services and activities take place. All of the activities and resources are also available to non-veterans and family members who are using VA benefits as dependents.

Although TMCC offers a robust array of services to its veteran students, it is striving to better assist veteran students. Some of the future goals that TMCC wishes to implement include a full-time veteran coordinator position; a full-time veteran academic counselor position; a veteran mentoring program; scholarships; and a way to track veteran success data.

**University of Nevada, Reno:** On February 20, 2014, the Council participated in a tour of the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) campus, which included a barbeque hosted by the Wolf Pack Veterans club as well as various organizations on the campus. The tour was lead by Terina Caserto, UNR’s Director of Veterans Services.

In order to best serve its veteran population at UNR, which consists of over 500 veteran students, the staffing structure consists of a Director of Veterans Services, a certifying official, one 80% employment position (32 hours/week), and three work-studies. In addition, UNR has been innovative in developing a graduate assistant program, in which a graduate student can pursue his or her Master’s degree while also working in the program. The current graduate assistant at UNR is also a veteran.

UNR is constantly trying to improve its services and facilities in order to better serve veterans. In 2015, the UNR Veterans Lounge will be built on campus. While it is called a “lounge,” the workspace will actually house the VA workstudy employees, a veteran service officer, V.I.T.A.L. and other service providers, and it will also be collocated with tutoring and all other student services. All programs will be developed around the lounge to ensure that student veterans are able to grow in all positions and to see how the greater workforce operates.

While the lounge is a positive step forward in serving veterans on campus, UNR’s main focus is on welcoming veteran students and ensuring that they are successful while attending college. In order to facilitate academic success on campus, UNR has instituted mandatory in-take meetings, GPA meetings, mid-semester check-ins, liaising with college deans, and advocating for student veterans who might be struggling in courses.

Additionally, UNR has developed a number of efforts that are designed to assist veteran students. Some of these efforts include a warm handoff from WNC and TMCC when continuing their education at UNR; V.I.T.A.L. workers who help coordinate activities; multiple veteran clubs; a mentorship program using workstudy employees; a veterans internship program; and a paperless certification process for processing education benefits.
UNR has future goals for veteran services as well. These include improved social media usage, transfer programs for students coming in from other schools, data gathering to track student success, priority registration, and a peer-to-peer mentoring program for veterans.

**Western Nevada College:** The Council began their tour of Western Nevada College (WNC) with a presentation by President Chester Burton (U.S. Navy). In his presentation, President Burton emphasized how important it is to fully support the veterans on campus. He stated that his goal is to make WNC the place veterans think of when they look for a place to start their post-career education. Currently, there are approximately 150 student veterans attending WNC.

After the presentation made by President Burton, Kevin Burns (U.S. Marine Corps) provided a presentation of the veteran services offered at WNC. Kevin is the volunteer veterans program coordinator on campus and he works with the certifying officials, the VA workstudy employees, and the student veterans group. Additionally, there is a dedicated social worker to assist veterans once a week. Workstudy employees are also used at intake to ensure that a student veteran is the first person to interact with an incoming veteran student.

WNC is not only concerned about providing veterans with a dedicated staff, but also about providing veterans with the resources they need to succeed. Last year, they opened the Veterans Resource Center, which they believe is the first major step towards increasing services to veterans on campus. One of the many services offered by the Veterans Resource Center is a textbook lending library.

Administratively, WNC helps veterans through a number of services. To begin with, WNC holds veterans-only orientations and offers priority registration for veterans. Since the processing of VA education benefits is one of the main hurdles that veteran students have to jump through, WNC will forego payment until the VA authorizes it in order to ensure that eligible students can begin their courses.

WNC also encourages its veterans to become involved in community activities. Currently, the WNC Veterans Club is working with outside groups in the community in order to raise awareness of veterans issues and to build network. By working with veterans on their campuses in Gardnerville and Fallon, veterans are developing lasting relationships that extend throughout the state.

There is also a strong community involvement on-campus at WNC. The “veterans cohort” program is a place where student veterans can meet each other on campus as they learn teamwork, study skills, and more. The program offers assistance to those veterans who have low test scores, as those students are sent through a series of introductory math and English courses as a group.
In conclusion of the tour, the Council also had the privilege of watching a powerful presentation on the Always Lost program, which was created by and is hosted at WNC.

**Great Basin College:** The Council toured the Elko campus of Great Basin College (GBC) on March 20, 2014. The visit included an overview of the college from President Mark Curtis and Vice President of Student Services Lynn Mahlberg. Veteran Certifying Official Tawny Crum provided an overview of the veteran-specific services on campus, along with members of other support staff and the Battle Born Veterans Club faculty leadership.

GBC was the first community college in Nevada, and one of the first two-year colleges in the nation to offer a four-year degree. They serve 10 counties in Nevada, 3,800 students statewide, and graduate approximately 400 students annually. GBC has one of the largest service areas in the nation at over 86,000 square miles.

Given their service area, GBC has student veterans at campuses throughout the state. During the 2013-14 academic year, there were 85 student veterans at GBC—35 in Elko, 26 in Pahrump, two in Ely, two in Battle Mountain, nine in Winnemucca, and 11 elsewhere. As with the academic program, many of the services provided to veterans originate from the Elko campus. The Veterans Certifying Official and other staff travel to each GBC location at the beginning of every semester to hold in-person meetings with student veterans throughout the state.

GBC offers a variety of services to students and student veterans. The Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation operates a JobConnect center there, the Department of Veterans Services provides a Veterans Service Officer on a regular basis, and they have a partnership with doctoral students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas to provide distance counseling for students. Additionally, GBC has worked with the VetCenter out of the Salt Lake City VA Medical Center to bring a readjustment counselor to Elko on a monthly basis and facilitate group sessions.

GBC student veterans recently developed a student veteran organization, the Battle Born Veterans Club. The Battle Born Veterans Club is an official club of the college and was recently recognized as a chapter of the national Student Veterans of America. Organized in February of 2014, the club already has 17 members and it uses the college’s distance learning technology to facilitate meetings between student veterans on various campuses.

GBC’s Career Technical Education (CTE) program is the most popular track for student veterans to pursue. CTE allows students to study in electrical, millwright, diesel, and welding fields, compete for extensive scholarship opportunities provided by local industry, and obtain an Associate’s Degree in
less than a year. Due to the demand for these professions in the Elko economy, CTE graduates have a near-100% employment rate following graduation.

GBC has several future goals for addressing the needs of their student veteran population. In addition to continuing their high level of support and service, they are currently working to identify a location on campus for a Veterans Resource Center. The veterans club is also looking to increase its members, its partnership with local veteran service organizations, and its impact on the local community.

Las Vegas Veteran Town Hall Event: On Friday, January 24, 2014, the Council conducted a veteran town hall event at UNLV. Ten student veterans showed up, and although that may seem like a small number, it was rich with important perspectives: there were three female veterans and seven male veterans, which is an uncommonly high representation for female veterans; although all were from the Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom timeframe, there was approximately a 30-year age range in the group; some participants were National Guard while others were active duty; and some had been out of the military for years before coming back to pursue their benefits, while one participant in particular was separated from the Army ten days prior.

Most of the suggestions brought up have been considered by the Council and other groups throughout recent years. These include creating "safe havens" on campuses for veterans; having veterans as certifying officials; mentorship programs; reaching out to service members while in the military; expanding networking opportunities; and so on. Many of the participants were passionate about these suggestions, and all were willing to listen to discussions of successes and failures in attempting to accomplish these goals throughout recent years. The Veterans Town Hall event in Las Vegas was a highlight of the trip. Although the establishment of the Council is intended to allow student veterans to have more of a voice on their campuses and within the policy process, the members of the Council are, appropriately, already very involved in student veteran services and subject matter experts in the same. This allowed the Council to reach interested veterans who were not necessarily engaged in the existing activities.

Networking event: The Council participated in a networking event to commence the two days of tours and activities in Reno. The event was held at Jack's Café in south Reno and included a total of 14 people who attended and networked for about an hour before the school tours began. This networking event was the first of an ongoing series of networking events to be held, although all of the events will not be held in conjunction with the Council.
Prioritized Recommendations: During the various telephone and in-person meetings of the Council, the group conducted several brainstorming sessions to develop recommendations to the Governor, the Board of Regents, and the Legislature. The recommendations, below, were based on the input of the experts who briefed the group, the personal experiences of the members, and the findings developed during the campus tours.

**Recommendation 1: Create a culture that recognizes the unique challenges of veterans, and works to accommodate their transition to higher education.**

There are various ways that allow institutions of higher education to set the conditions for veteran success during the education process and after. Although there are numerous individual approaches taken by each institution given its unique missions, resources, and populations, the Council found that there were several general best practices that resulted in institutions creating a culture that recognizes the unique challenges of veterans, and works to accommodate their transition. The best practices as the Council identified to highlight in this report are as follows:

- **Data collecting, tracking, and sharing:** In order to identify the challenges facing veterans as well as the resources that should be used to address those challenges, colleges and universities need to implement a data collection, tracking, and sharing system. This means that veterans need to be identified beyond a self-identified field or merely the group using G.I. Bill benefits; this data needs to be gathered and synthesized; and when compiled, the data should be shared with other agencies and policymakers who can be of assistance. See Appendix C for Florida State University's sample report format for their data collection system.

- **Optimized staffing structure and in-take procedures:** Serving veterans in higher education is a team effort, one that is ideally made up of directors, counselors, certifying officials, workstudy employees, and student veterans. Because of the various governmental entities involved, certifying veterans for their benefits can be a cumbersome process as well. While resources, needs, challenges, and opportunities vary from school to school the Council found that an optimal staffing structure and model in-take procedures do exist. See Appendix D for an example of description of what the Council considers to be the optimal staffing structure.

- **Early registration for veterans:** Early enrollment, which is the current practice of some institutions in the state, has several benefits. For those receiving G.I.
Bill benefits, early enrollment allows them to secure full-time enrollment in classes that apply to the degree they are pursuing, which means they will receive a full benefit each semester. It also allows certifying officials more time with an early registrant’s certification so that there is a higher likelihood all of the student veterans’ claims are processed before the start of the semester.

- **A thriving student veteran organization working with volunteers to mentor student veterans:** One of the keys to building success among student veterans is through encouraging a strong student veteran organization on campus. Students involved in these programs can provide a network of support for fellow veterans, mentorship, outreach development, and program support for veteran activities on campus. As noted in the optimized staffing structure model, the student veterans organizations are best used in conjunction with workstudy positions within the greater veteran services office.

- **Training for school staff on military culture:** For non-veteran faculty members, understanding veterans in the classroom can be as difficult as acclimating to civilian life is for the student veteran. An effort to create awareness of the veteran experience among faculty members is of great benefit for both sides. There are three levels of training recommended by the Council.

  - **Level 1 training (Mandatory):** Institutional registrar offices should include Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) training regarding veterans in their regularly scheduled briefings.
  - **Level 2 training (Voluntary):** Interested staff and faculty should be offered an opportunity to learn the basics of military and veteran culture. There are currently multiple online training programs, as well as programs developed by NSHE institutions.
  - **Level 3 training (Voluntary):** For staff and faculty who wish to be an additional resource for student veterans, they should be able take an additional level of training and receive a door sticker or other symbol that identifies them as veteran-committed and willing to serve as a resource. This recommendation is based on the “Serving Every Returning Veteran” (SERV) program developed by UNLV.

**Recommendation 2: Create a body similar to the Council in statute.**

The members of the Council found the experience to be incredibly valuable and believe that there are various reasons to continue it into the future. These
benefits include the ability to continue the coordination between the various institutions and their veteran services programs, facilitating continuity as student veteran organizational leadership changes, and allowing veterans to continue in leadership positions at their schools and on behalf of the Governor. The Council recommends that this body be formed as an advisory committee, that it meets quarterly and mostly by teleconference, and that it be made up of seven members and each member receive a two-year appointment. The Council’s primary mission will be to coordinate activities between campuses, create continuity for institutional student veterans organizations, and to coordinate an annual student veteran organization conference in Nevada.

Recommendation 3: Move State Approving Agency from the Commission on Post-Secondary Education to the Nevada Department of Veterans Services.

The three pillars of the Nevada Department of Veterans Services' Green Zone Initiative are education, employment, and wellness. Currently NDVS oversees functions in the employment and wellness areas, but it does not have an obvious and specific engagement mechanism with the higher education focus area. Placing the State Approving Agency under the Nevada Department of Veterans Services will not only provide that obvious connection between the two, but it will also help to ensure that the State Approving Agency’s activities are focused on serving the service member, veteran, and their families.

Conclusion: This report fulfills the requirements outlined in Executive Order 2013-09, signed by Governor Brian Sandoval on August 12, 2013. It outlines the activities of the group, it provides detailed findings, and it identifies and prioritizes the needs of Nevada’s student veterans. It also makes recommendations for further improvement, either through a detailed example of a veteran-friendly culture on college campuses, or through structural changes to continue these efforts going forward.

As with many reports of this nature, the Council believes that the prioritized recommendations are the most important aspect of this report. The Council was careful to consider the unique missions, challenges, and opportunities facing each campus serving veterans in Nevada when developing these recommendations, and endeavored to ensure that the recommendations were general enough to be successfully implemented given those unique campus characteristics. Although some elements of the recommendations can be found in other publications and in practice at Nevada colleges, the Council is proud of the original recommendations developed in this report.

The members of the Student Veterans Advisory Council are pleased with every aspect of the process that led to the development of this report. Governor
Sandoval’s leadership was crucial for the establishment of this body and will remain crucial for realizing the potential of these recommendations. Years of hard work and effort from institutions of higher education, from faculty and staff to administration, provided the impressive foundation on which this Council hopes to build. And financial and administrative support provided by the Nevada Department of Veterans Services allowed the Council members to travel to each campus, which was crucial to the Council’s success.
Appendix A: Member Biographies for the Student Veterans Advisory Council

Co-Chair—Renée Davis is the Director of Student Affairs for the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE). As part of the NSHE Academic and Student Affairs team, she works on all types of policy issues that impact students. Davis also serves as liaison between the system and the NSHE student body presidents. She has been with NSHE for 15 years, and, prior to the system office, she worked in student services on an NSHE campus.

Co-Chair—Caleb Cage is the Director of Military and Veterans Policy within the Office of the Governor. Prior to joining the Governor’s Office, Cage was the Executive Director of the Nevada Office of Veterans Services (now the Nevada Department of Veterans Services). There, in addition to leading the State’s veteran home, veteran cemetery, and veteran service officer programs, he helped establish the State’s veteran outreach and collaboration effort, the Green Zone Initiative. Before serving with the Nevada Office of Veterans Services, Cage served as a policy advisor in the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, with a focus on veteran and rural issues. A Reno native, Cage spent five years in the U.S. Army, with two tours in Iraq.

Member—Audrey Balzart retired as a Technical Sergeant from the U.S. Air Force in 2002 after serving for twenty years. She began her career in 1982 and worked Vehicle Operations at Luke AFB in Arizona, RAF Bentwaters in England, and Andrews AFB in Maryland. In 1988 she cross-trained into Communications Plans and Programs, first managing the Equipment Reutilization Program for Research and Acquisition Communications Command (RCD) at Andrews AFB. Her next assignment took her to Eielson AFB in Alaska. Audrey moved to Goldsboro, North Carolina in 1998 and continued managing projects as well as her unit’s deployment mission. She retired to Las Vegas, Nevada, where she now attends Nevada State College in pursuit of a degree in Visual Media.

Member—Originally from northern California, Timothy Galluzi enlisted in the United States Marine Corps shortly after his high school graduation in 2004. After initial training as a Telecommunications Marine he was stationed in Twentynine Palms, California, with 2nd Battalion 7th Marines (2/7). During his tour with 2/7 he conducted two combat deployments to Fallujah, Iraq in 2005 and 2007. He then received orders to the Marine Corps Mountain Training Center in Bridgeport, California. While there, Sergeant Galluzi assisted in the authoring and implementation of the Mountain Communications Course, a course designed to
train inter-service agencies and Marines to communicate effectively in Mountainous and Cold Weather Terrain. After his tour as a Mountain Warfare Instructor, Sergeant Galluzi received orders to Marine Wing Communications Squadron (MWCS) 28 in Cherry Point, North Carolina. During his tour with MWCS 28 he was deployed to Helmand Province, Afghanistan in 2011. In Afghanistan he served as the Telecommunications Chief, managing the telecommunications infrastructure for Camp Dwyer, Afghanistan. Sergeant Galluzi left the Marine Corps in 2012 and began his college career at Western Nevada College (WNC) in Carson City Nevada. While at WNC Timothy became the president of the Student Veterans Club and is as a workstudy employee in the school’s Veterans Resource Center. He will graduate from WNC in the spring of 2014 with an Associates of Science to transfer to the University of Nevada, Reno to work on a Bachelor’s of Science in Electrical Engineering.

Member—Zack Totans was born in Reno, Nevada on January 9, 1984. In 2005, he enlisted in the U.S. Army as an infantryman. During his military service, he was stationed in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, from where he served two tours in Iraq from August 2006 to October 2007 and again from October 2008 to October 2009. He was honorably discharged from the Army in March 2010 at the rank of Sergeant and began college at Truckee Meadows Community College immediately after, where he also worked at the Veterans Services Office. He is currently a senior at the University of Nevada, Reno, pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Economics and Finance. He has also served as president of Wolf Pack Veterans since July 2013, where he has dedicated his time to creating an environment for student veterans that can help them succeed in their life after the military.

Member—Christopher Nunez attends the College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas, where he is studying to become a firefighter. Prior to coming to the College of Southern Nevada, Christopher served five years in the U.S. Navy as an aviation ordnance specialist. If his ambition of becoming a firefighter does not come to fruition, Christopher intends to reenlist in the U.S. Navy until retirement. He hopes that his involvement in the Council will introduce him to new opportunities and perspectives.

Member—Jacob Park was born in Elko, Nevada and has lived there all but the almost seven years he spent in the U.S. Army. He served as a light wheel vehicle mechanic and HEMTT wrecker operator in Iraq with the 1st Cavalry Division of Fort Hood, Texas in 2004 and 2005. After returning from Iraq he reenlisted and went to Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania where he became the maintenance supervisor in a legacy EOD Company. He served in Iraq with
EOD in 2006 and 2007. Shortly after returning to Pennsylvania, as a Corporal he was chosen to become the acting 1st Sergeant of the company where with three soldiers and acting under his commanding officer moved the entire unit from Pennsylvania to Fort Stewart Georgia with zero deficiencies. He then remained the 1st Sergeant for another six months. Jacob returned to Elko in 2010 and is currently a full-time employee and student at Great Basin College. Recently he founded the Battle Born Veterans Club and is the current club president.

**Member**—Robert Papagno attends the University of Phoenix in Las Vegas where he studies in the Criminal Justice program. He served in the U.S. Army as a medic in several different capacities ranging from a line medic all the way to an administrative assistant to senior leadership. He and his wife have four children, ranging from nine months to ten years old.

**Member**—Jefferson A. Detrick joined the U.S. Army as a medic. He served 15 months in Iraq as a company senior medic and 10 months in Afghanistan as Senior Medical Training Sergeant for American forces coming into the northern theater of operations. In total, he served 12 years in the Army. He is currently attending the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in Nursing. He is also the president of the Student Veterans Organization on campus.

**Member**—Ryan Gerchman was born in Reno, Nevada, and spent half of his life in Reno and the other in rural Pennsylvania. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 2002 as a Landing Support Specialist. In 2006, he left active duty with an Honorable Discharge. Ryan returned to Reno in 2007 and is now a student at Truckee Meadows Community College, where he actively encourages his fellow students and veterans to engage in positive activities on campus and in the community.
Appendix B: Benefits and Services Provided by the State of Nevada for Veterans, Service Members, and their Families

Current Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) Offering for Veterans and Active Duty Military: While in service, members of the military have access to a number of federal programs for tuition assistance. The centerpiece of armed services education benefits is the G.I. Bill, which encompasses several Department of Veterans Affairs education programs including the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, the Montgomery G.I. Bill for Active Duty and Veterans, Montgomery G.I. Bill for Selected Reserves, Reserve Education Assistance Program, Veterans Education Assistance Program, Spouse and Dependents Education Assistance, and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Education program. Nevada’s veterans and military may be eligible for more than one educational benefit.

In addition to the numerous federal education benefits available to veterans and active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces, the State of Nevada offers several additional benefits. These include:

Non-Resident Tuition Exemption for Active Duty Members, Spouse and Dependents: Active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces stationed in Nevada, as well as their spouses and dependent children, are eligible for in-state tuition (Board of Regents Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 15, Section 3 and Nevada Revised Statutes 396.540). This provision also applies to active duty members stationed at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center at Pickle Meadows, California. For active duty service members who have a permanent change of duty station to a state other than Nevada, spouses and dependent children remain classified as Nevada residents for tuition purposes so long as they remain continuously enrolled at an NSHE institution. Additionally, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill will pay tuition based upon the highest in-state tuition charged by an educational institution in the state where the educational institution is located.

Non-Resident Tuition Exemption for Veterans: Veterans who were honorably discharged and who on the date of discharge were on active duty stationed in Nevada (including the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center at Pickle Meadows, California) are considered a resident of the state for tuition purposes and are eligible for in-state tuition (Board of Regents Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 15, Section 3 and Nevada Revised Statutes 396.540).

Non-Resident Tuition Exemption for Out-of-State Veterans: During the 77th Legislative Session, Governor Sandoval signed Assembly Bill 260, which exempts
veterans who were honorably discharged within the two years immediately preceding the date of matriculation from paying non-resident tuition (Board of Regents Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 15, Section 3 and Nevada Revised Statutes 396.540).

**Grant-In-Aid for the Family of a Member Killed in the Line of Duty:** The financially dependent child (or children) and spouse of an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces killed in the line of duty while permanently stationed in Nevada are eligible for a grant-in-aid, a financial award that does not require repayment (Board of Regents Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 18, Section 2).

**National Guard Fee Waiver:** Active members of the Nevada National Guard are eligible for a fee waiver that will permit such Guard members to register for courses without a registration fee (e.g. resident tuition) (Board of Regents Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 11 and NRS 396.544). This waiver will also pay for laboratory fees associated with certain courses. (The programs associated with the William S. Boyd School of Law, the University Of Nevada School Of Medicine, and the UNLV School of Dental Medicine are not eligible for the waiver.)

**National Guard Fee Waiver for Children and Spouse:** The child (or children) and spouse of a person who was killed while performing duties as a member of the Nevada National Guard are also eligible to register for courses without a registration fee (e.g. resident tuition), including certain laboratory fees (Board of Regents Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 11 and NRS 396.5442). The child of a person who was killed while performing duties as a member of the Nevada National Guard may use the waiver for ten years after he or she attains the age of 18 or, if he or she enrolls prior to age 18, for ten years after the date of enrollment. The spouse may use this benefit for up to ten years from member's date of death. (The programs associated with the William S. Boyd School of Law, the University Of Nevada School Of Medicine, and the UNLV School of Dental Medicine are not eligible for the waiver.)

**POW/MIA Benefits for Children and Spouse:** The child (or children) and spouse of a person who was a member of the U.S. Armed Forces permanently stationed in Nevada who has been identified as a prisoner of war or declared missing in action while performing duties as a member of the U.S. Armed Forces are eligible to register for courses without a registration fee (e.g. resident tuition), including certain laboratory fees (Board of Regents Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 17, Section 11 and NRS 396.5445). The child may use the waiver for ten years after he or she attains the age of 18 or, if he or she enrolls prior to age 18, for ten years.
years after the date of enrollment. The spouse may use this benefit for up to ten years from the date on which the member was identified as a prisoner of war or missing in action. (The programs associated with the William S. Boyd School of Law, the University Of Nevada School Of Medicine, and the UNLV School of Dental Medicine are not eligible for the waiver.)

**The Millennium Scholarship:** Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship recipients may access their awards for up to six academic years after their high school graduation date. However, for those recipients who have served on active duty as a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, an extension equal to time served, but not to exceed six years, may be granted upon appeal to the Nevada System of Higher Education (Board of Regents Handbook, Title 4, Chapter 18, Section 10.6.4 and NRS 396.930).

**USAA Distinguished Valor Matching Grant Program:** Nevada State Treasurer’s Office, together with USAA, has expanded the ability of Nevada military families to save for college through the USAA 529 College Savings Plan. Originally for families of recent Purple Heart recipients living in Nevada, the USAA Distinguished Valor Matching Grant is now available to all Active, Reserve, and Guard component service members. For Nevadans who open a USAA 529 College Savings Plan account through the Treasurer’s Office can earn up to $300 per year in matching grant funding, with a lifetime maximum benefit of $1,500.

**Institutional Resources:** Each NSHE institution has an office of financial aid whose purpose is to answer any financial aid questions students may have. In addition, each institution includes a veteran services office or coordinator who is the liaison to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for certification of your education benefits. They provide support for applying for and receiving education benefits, including submitting forms, certifying classes, and education benefit advising.
Appendix C: Example of Florida State University’s Data Report Format

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<tr>
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<td>Male Veterans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependents</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Veterans</td>
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<td>Dependents</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average age</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Most Common Area of Study</strong></td>
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<td><strong>After Graduation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Went on to grad school</td>
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</table>
Appendix D: Examples of Optimized staffing structure and in-take procedures

1. The Director of Veterans Services is responsible for managing, organizing, recruiting, marketing, fundraising, coalition building, removal of barriers, mentoring, and program development.

2. Veteran Certifying Officials are institutional representatives who are trained and authorized to verify, sign, and submit VA documents certifying a veteran’s enrollment, change in status, receipt of advance payment, and any other circumstances that affect federal education assistance benefits.

3. Counselors can come from many sources—grant funded, federal support, or institutional resources—and cover a wide variety of support to student veterans, to include knowledge of non-educational VA benefits as well as access to other institutional and local services.

4. VA Workstudy employees are three-quarter or full-time veteran students who work part-time supporting activities related to VA programs. For example, they may assist with preparing and processing paperwork; provide direct assistance to veteran students; support VA, military, and state veteran services programs; maintain veteran-related files; coordinate student veteran organization activities; and more. At the campus’ request, the VA generally approves one workstudy employee for every 100 student veterans served on a campus.
5. Student Veteran Organizations are often peer groups affiliated with the Student Veterans of America and serve to support, mentor, encourage, and support their fellow veterans while coordinating student veteran activities.