

Supporting Veteran Students and Active-Duty Service Members with Organizational Tools

Michigan SVRS



Turning a simple planning tool into a resource for time management, academic success, and connection

For student veterans and military-connected students, returning to college can mean navigating a very different environment from the one they left behind. Some students are balancing coursework with work, family responsibilities, or reserve commitments. Others may be returning to an educational setting after four or more years away.

For one university's Center for Veterans and Military-Affiliated Students, that transition created an opportunity to take a familiar tool and make it significantly more meaningful: a custom academic planner designed specifically for their student veteran population.

The goal was not simply to give students another way to record assignments and appointments. The planner became part of a broader approach to teaching time management, reinforcing study habits, connecting students with campus resources, and helping student veterans feel recognized on campus.

A practical tool for a digital world

Time management is an important part of the support this university provides to returning servicemembers. While students have access to countless digital tools, the university saw value in giving students something tangible they could use during time-management workshops and throughout the semester.

The custom planner provided a practical starting point for those conversations.

Rather than simply telling students to manage their time effectively, staff could use the planner to help students practice the fundamentals: writing down their schedules, planning ahead, tracking deadlines, and developing a routine for staying on top of academic responsibilities.

The approach also resonated with the structured environment many veterans are accustomed to.

“ For many of us, digital tools aren’t available in the field. You should always have a notepad and a writing tool though, the university representative explained.

The physical planner harkened back to that mindset of being prepared, while also teaching skills that students could eventually transfer to digital planning tools.

Putting the right resources in students’ hands

One of the biggest advantages of a custom planner was the ability to make it specific to the students who would actually use it.

The university incorporated commonly used campus resources directly into the planner, including information about the Center for Veterans and Military-Affiliated Students and other student affairs offices.

The planner also highlighted the Student Parent Resource Center, an especially relevant resource given that approximately half of student veterans are also parents or caregivers.

Instead of requiring students to remember which office could help them or search for resources when they were already facing a challenge, important information was placed directly inside a tool they were likely to carry with them throughout the semester.

Supporting students returning to the classroom

The university also recognized that some student veterans may be returning to an educational environment after a significant break.

For students who have spent four or more years away from school, basic academic skills and study habits can require a refresher. The custom planner therefore included study habit sections and other resources designed to reinforce those fundamentals.

The planner became more than a calendar. It served as a physical reference students could return to as they rebuilt academic routines and learned how to manage the demands of college.



From planner to proactive student support

The university incorporated the planners into a first-year experience course for student veterans. This allowed staff to introduce planning and time-management concepts early rather than waiting until students were struggling.

The planner also provided a natural way for Veteran Services staff to begin conversations around topics such as:

- Time management
- Avoiding burnout
- Developing effective study habits
- Tracking important campus deadlines
- Building consistent academic routines
- Connecting with campus resources

The university observed that students who received the planners were actively using them and reported that they were better able to track campus deadlines and stay on top of the basic flow of the semester.

While the university does not attribute those outcomes solely to the planner, staff saw a meaningful connection between the planner, the time-management instruction surrounding it, and stronger planning habits among students who participated in the first-year experience course.

“ It was normalizing the process of writing down the schedule and sticking to a plan.



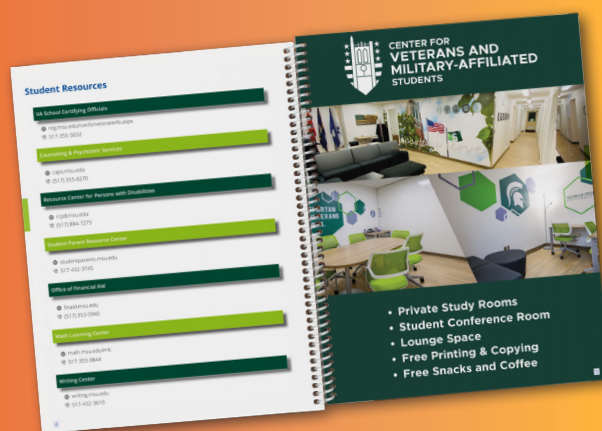
Creating a stronger sense of belonging

The planner also offered something that a generic academic tool could not: recognition.

Because the planner was designed specifically for the student veteran population, receiving one communicated that the university had considered their specific experience and needs.

The response was very positive.

Having a useful item that students carried with them around campus made the program visible while giving students something unique that was not available to everyone. For students who may already be navigating a major transition, that small distinction can reinforce the feeling that their experiences are recognized and valued.



The planner became both a practical resource and a subtle symbol of connection to the campus community.

For institutions working with limited budgets, every student-support investment needs to provide meaningful value.

The university viewed the custom planner as an opportunity to combine several functions in one resource. Rather than spending money on a promotional item that might quickly be discarded, the planner could remain useful throughout the academic year while carrying important campus information and supporting student development.

As the university representative put it, a planner may cost more than a pen or lanyard, but it is less likely to be tossed aside and can provide significantly more resources.

For a smaller student population where institutions can prioritize quality and impact over quantity, that distinction matters.



A simple tool with a bigger purpose

The success of the initiative was not about the planner alone. It was about how the university used it.

By pairing a customized physical resource with workshops, first-year experience programming, campus resources, and conversations about time management and academic habits, the planner became part of a larger student-support strategy.

It gave staff an approachable way to start important conversations. It gave students a tangible way to practice planning. And it gave the university an opportunity to recognize its student veterans with something created specifically for them.

For institutions considering a custom planner for their own veteran or military-connected students, the university's advice is straightforward:

“ At worst they're useful tools that can hold a lot of resources.

At their best, they can become much more: a daily academic tool, a resource guide, a conversation starter, and a tangible reminder that students have a campus community behind them.

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