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2020 Military Times Best for Vets College Rankings: Georgia Southern Unranked

Submitted by: Grant Gearhart

12/30/2019

Question(s):

1. What has precipitated Georgia Southern's fall in rankings from Military Times from the number one university for veterans in 2019 to not being ranked in the top 134 in 2020? What factors has the university identified that caused this decline? Will the newly hired Veterans Affairs director build intentionally on Armstrong's previously successful strategies, and if so, how? On which campus will this person be based?

Rationale:

Military Times rankings are based on data from the previous year, so rankings for 2020 are based on 2019 statistics, 2019 rankings on 2018, etc.

As noted in the Fall 2019 graduation program, the Armstrong Campus has enjoyed sustained success as one of the nation's most military and veteran friendly institutions. As recently as 2016, Armstrong State University was ranked 7th in the nation for veterans in Military Times; in 2017, Armstrong State University was ranked 4th in the nation for veterans in Military Times; in 2018, Armstrong State University was ranked 3rd in the nation for veterans by Military Times. In 2019, the first year these rankings considered Georgia Southern and Armstrong State a consolidated university, Georgia Southern was ranked first in the nation for veterans in Military Times. Then, in 2020, Georgia Southern drops completely out of the Military Times rankings (consequently, eight other USG institutions were ranked by Military Times). Current students and alumnae who are veterans have expressed concern to me.

Considering that enrollment is a priority, particularly on the Armstrong Campus, this drop in ranking is very concerning. The Armstrong Campus has had a documented tradition of excellence in serving our veterans, drawing both active duty and retired military personnel and their families to study here. It is part of the Armstrong Campus legacy and one of the distinguishing characteristics of our institution. Being exceptional at serving this demographic also aligns with our Strategic Pillar #3: Inclusive Excellence. It would appear that, post-consolidation, something has drastically changed that has had a negative effect on our ability to serve veterans and be recognized for it. Other than searching for (and potentially hiring) a new Military and Veterans Services Director, what other steps are being taken to reposition Georgia Southern atop the rankings as one of the premier institutions nationwide for our service people?

Sources:

2016 rankings: <https://bestforvets.militarytimes.com/2016/colleges/4-year/>

2017 rankings: <https://bestforvets.militarytimes.com/2017-11-01/colleges/4-year/>

2018 rankings: <https://bestforvets.militarytimes.com/2018-11-20/colleges/4-year/>

2019 rankings: <https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/9>

2020 rankings: <https://charts.militarytimes.com/chart/15>

Response:

SEC Response: Approval of RFI.

Response from Dr. Scot Lingrell, Vice President of Enrollment Management
Jan. 27, 2020

In response to the RFI regarding the Military Times rankings of Best for Vets, let me first say that I am also very concerned about dropping out of the rankings in 2020. To better understand the reasons behind this decline I have asked Institutional Research to review data related to the survey responses for Military Times--going back to 2015 (for both campuses) through 2019 (combined campuses). This will provide us a much clearer picture of the situation so that we can respond to the questions on the RFI. I will be happy to share our conclusions with this group once the research has been completed.

The rankings, however, are secondary to our obligation to student services and making sure that all students eligible for educational benefits are able to access those in a timely fashion.

The dedicated employees of the Military and Veteran Services office work hard every day to provide such excellent service. In July 2019 the department was reorganized to combine staff from the Registrar's Office (School Certifying Officials) and staff from Student Affairs (Outreach Coordinators) and they now report to Enrollment Management. Since that time the department has been reporting directly to the Vice President for Enrollment Management, and we have recently hired a new Director. The new Director will have an office at both the Armstrong and Statesboro campuses, and will travel between all campuses weekly. Additionally, we have an Outreach Coordinator position at all three campuses (Liberty currently vacant), and three School Certifying Officials (2 at Statesboro; 1 at Armstrong). With these strategic investments of resources, we are confident that the actual student experience has improved and will continue to improve over previous years, despite what the rankings for 2020 say.