

The Bachelor's Option: Did it Benefit Veterans?

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Purpose

A physician assistant (PA) program retained an undergraduate option in the lead-up to the all-master's-level requirement. The core PA curriculum is the same for both degrees. The master's degree includes additional graduate-level academic material. However, military veterans and service members might face challenges in applying to master's programs. This focused study asks: do military veterans enroll in the bachelor's option for PA school at rates higher than the master's-level option?

Methods

A demographic data set from entering students describes basic student characteristics. Classes entering from 2010 (E2010) through 2014 (E2014) are included. The data were examined using Chi-square and regression analysis.

Results

There were a total of 567 students from E2010 through E2014. Half ($n = 280$, 49.4%) were female. Women were more likely to enroll in the master's option (women 178, men 156, $P = 0.026$). The proportion of ethnic minorities (21.3%) is comparable to the nation's population. Educational (28.7%) and economic (25.4%) disadvantage was self-reported based on federal definitions. Educational disadvantage was not a significant factor in degree choice ($P = .17$), but economic disadvantage was ($P = .02$). Of the 567 students, 135 (23.8%) had military experience. Students with military backgrounds entered the undergraduate option ($n = 74$) at significantly higher rates than the master's option ($n = 61$, $P < .001$). Logistic regression analysis demonstrated that disadvantaged status, sex and ethnicity did not significantly influence this outcome.

Conclusions

The PA program's goals include enrolling students with military backgrounds. This study suggests that the veteran student population has been served by the bachelor's option. The program will transition to an all-master's program by the accreditation deadline. In the meantime, many veterans are completing PA education at the undergraduate level. Further study will be needed to quantify barriers to graduate education for veterans, and to develop methods to facilitate entry into master's PA options for them.

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