

# **An Analysis of the Pros and Cons of the Policy of Exempting Veterans from Examinations for Upgrading to Undergraduate Studies and Their Needs from a Macro Social Work Perspective**

Guochao Li

School of Politics and Law, University of Jinan, Jinan 250022, China

Corresponding author email: 1658917746@qq.com

## **Abstract**

**This paper reviews recent research on the reintegration of retired college students into academic life, focusing on the policy of exempting veterans from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies. From psychological, environmental, academic, and employment perspectives, and based on the studies of numerous scholars, this paper identifies issues specific to veterans who benefit from this policy. It objectively analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of the policy, aiming to provide macro-level social work interventions to better assist this special group in adapting to campus life.**

## **Keywords**

**Veterans; Reintegration; Upgrading to Undergraduate Studies**

## **1. Introduction**

On March 17, 2018, the First Session of the 13th National People's Congress approved the State Council's institutional reform plan, officially establishing the Ministry of Veterans Affairs. One of its key responsibilities is to "organize education and training for veterans." In fact, Article 56, Paragraph 3 of the 1984 "Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China" stipulated that "after retiring from active duty, conscripts shall be given priority admission to higher education institutions and secondary specialized schools under equal conditions with other candidates." This marked the beginning of the state's encouragement for self-employed veterans to receive education and training. Today, educational assistance for veterans has transitioned from skill training to a combination of project training and academic education.

On August 21, 2021, Presidential Order No. 95 announced that the revised "Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China" had been passed at the 30th Session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress and would take effect on October 1, 2021. This means that starting in 2022, China will conduct two recruitment cycles each year, in spring and autumn. To accelerate the modernization of national defense and the military, and to build a modern people's army capable of winning wars, the state encourages and actively guides college students to enlist. A series of preferential policies, such as tuition reduction, exemption from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies, and special plans for retired college students pursuing master's degrees, have attracted a large number of students to join the military with their youthful enthusiasm.

On January 20, 2022, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs issued the "Summary of 23 Policies on Education and Training for Retired Soldiers," of which Article 3 states: **【Upgrading to Undergraduate Studies】** Starting from the 2022 admissions cycle, vocational college (junior college) graduates and current students (including new college students) who enlist and complete their vocational college studies after retirement can apply for upgrading to undergraduate studies without taking cultural course examinations. Relevant universities will

organize vocational adaptability or comprehensive vocational skill assessments, evaluate comprehensively, and admit students based on merit. 【"Notice from the General Office of the Ministry of Education on Doing a Good Job in the 2022 Admissions for Upgrading to Undergraduate Studies" (Teaching Office [2021] No. 8)】. This marks the full implementation of the policy of exempting qualified veterans from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies.

Taking Shandong Province as an example, on April 18, 2024, the Shandong Provincial Education Admissions Examination Authority released the "List of Retired College Students Exempted from Examinations for Upgrading to Undergraduate Studies in Shandong Province in 2024," which showed that 7,569 individuals qualified for the policy. Compared to undergraduate students who return to school after military service, junior college students who upgrade to undergraduate studies after at least two years of academic interruption and with relatively weaker academic foundations are more likely to face challenges in adapting to campus life. Given the large size of this group, guiding them to better adapt to campus life, successfully transition from military to civilian roles, improve their scientific and cultural knowledge, and contribute to local economic development has become an important task for social workers.

With the increasing societal expectations for higher education and the improvement of policies encouraging college students to enlist, tens of thousands of veterans enter or return to universities each year. Due to the highly heterogeneous cultural background of the military, whether veterans can smoothly transition to university life, adapt to campus life, and succeed academically remains under-researched in China, and the effectiveness of educational assistance policies is poorly understood. This paper will use the special group of veterans exempted from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies to analyze the pros and cons of this policy on their life trajectories and explore how social workers can respond to their needs from a macro social work perspective.

## 2. Literature Review on the Reintegration of Retired College Students

Current research on the reintegration of retired college students is extensive. As individuals who have dedicated their youth to the country and its people, they often face multiple challenges when returning to campus life due to various reasons. Scholars have analyzed and proposed solutions to these issues from multiple perspectives. Below are the views of several scholars:

Li Hui notes that many studies focus on a single aspect of college students' adaptation to campus life, such as career choice adaptation [1], interpersonal adaptation [2], life adaptation [3], and academic adaptation [4]. Some studies examine the overall characteristics of college students' adaptation, but the research subjects are mainly freshmen, with fewer studies focusing on adaptation throughout the entire college period [5].

Zhu Yan points out that retired college students are a new group that emerged after China implemented the policy of encouraging college students to enlist in 2001. Currently, domestic research on retired college students is limited, and systematic and comprehensive studies are almost non-existent. Existing research mainly follows two lines: school education management and individual students. Practical studies have identified the problems and difficulties retired college students face upon returning to campus. For some retired college students, although they understand the importance of building new interpersonal networks on campus as a form of social capital and a means of integrating into the new environment, rejection and marginalization by new groups often lead to a loss of confidence and enthusiasm for developing emotionally driven peer relationships [6].

Zhang Zaiyun argues that for retired college students, the transition from leaving campus to enlisting and then returning to campus involves two significant life changes. The shift from

military to campus life not only signifies a change in physical environment but also a profound transformation in their roles from soldiers to students. Current academic research has extensively described the interpersonal adaptation issues of retired college students. Studies have found that under the influence of the highly heterogeneous military culture, retired college students form a distinct subcultural group on campus, frequently encountering difficulties in adaptation and integration [7].

Wang Weiping notes that although veterans face high costs and psychological pressure when pursuing higher education, recent research confirms that, compared to others, their military service experience has a significant and long-term positive impact on their employment income [8]. With the increasing societal expectations for higher education and the improvement of policies encouraging college students to enlist, tens of thousands of veterans enter or return to universities each year. However, due to the highly heterogeneous cultural background of the military, whether veterans can smoothly transition to university life, adapt to campus life, and succeed academically remains under-researched in China, and the effectiveness of educational assistance policies is poorly understood [9].

### **3. Analysis from Psychological, Environmental, Academic, and Employment Perspectives**

#### **3.1. Psychological Perspective**

**Lack of Independent Thinking:** The military emphasizes obedience, which may hinder retired college students from developing independent and creative problem-solving skills in academic settings.

**Collective Patriotism:** The military's emphasis on collectivism and collective honor may make it difficult for retired college students to express individual values and innovative thinking in academic environments.

**Adaptation Issues:** The significant differences between military and academic life may lead to adaptation issues, including academic pressure and disciplinary transitions.

**Discipline and Obedience:** Retired college students, having undergone rigorous discipline training, are more likely to follow rules and maintain academic discipline.

**Team Collaboration:** The military's emphasis on teamwork makes retired college students more adept at collaborating with peers in academic settings.

**Sense of Responsibility:** Military service fosters a strong sense of responsibility, which is advantageous for academic success and active participation in campus life.

#### **3.2. Environmental Perspective**

**Age Differences:** The age gap between retired college students and their younger peers may lead to social difficulties and challenges in integrating into peer groups.

**Academic Knowledge Gap:** Retired college students may face significant gaps in academic knowledge due to their military service, leading to academic challenges.

**Social Barriers:** The unique nature of military life may create barriers to social interaction, making it difficult for retired college students to integrate into academic circles.

**Cultural Differences:** The differences between military and academic cultures may require retired college students to spend time adapting to academic norms and communication styles.

**Rich Life Experience:** Retired college students often bring diverse life experiences, enriching campus culture and providing unique perspectives.

**Maturity and Stability:** Older retired college students tend to be more mature and stable, contributing to a positive learning environment and better adaptation to academic pressures.

Team Collaboration: Military training fosters teamwork, making retired college students more effective in building cooperative relationships with peers.

### 3.3. Academic Perspective

Academic Knowledge Gap: The gap between military life and academic knowledge may require retired college students to make extra efforts to catch up, especially in challenging or interdisciplinary fields.

Adaptation Time: The unique nature of military life may require retired college students to spend time adapting to the demands of advanced or interdisciplinary studies.

Academic Pressure: Advanced or interdisciplinary studies often come with greater academic pressure, requiring retired college students to develop better time management and learning strategies.

Decision-Making Skills: Military experience enhances decision-making and problem-solving skills, which can help retired college students tackle academic challenges.

### 3.4. Employment Perspective

Decline in Academic Performance: The unique nature of military life may lead to academic challenges, resulting in lower grades and reduced competitiveness in the job market.

Limited Career Choices: The policy of exempting veterans from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies may limit their career options, reducing flexibility in the job market.

Stereotypes: Some employers may hold stereotypes about retired college students, believing they are only suited for certain careers, which may create biases in hiring.

Adaptation Issues: Poor adaptation to academic life may affect academic performance and future career competitiveness.

Rich Experience: Retired college students often bring valuable practical experience, which is an advantage in job applications, especially for roles requiring leadership and teamwork.

Higher Education Level: The policy of exempting veterans from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies enhances their education level, increasing their competitiveness and lowering employment barriers.

## 4. Discussion

When retired college students return to campus, their former classmates may have graduated or are about to graduate. Those who upgrade to undergraduate studies after retirement will face entirely new faculty and classmates, initially experiencing a sense of unfamiliarity and loneliness. The diversity of campus culture and the relatively free and unstructured campus life may clash with the political responsibility and discipline emphasized in the military. The psychological 落差 after retirement hinders their reintegration into campus life and affects their academic progress. Therefore, schools and social workers should jointly provide psychological counseling for this group, strengthen their role as students, encourage active adaptation to campus life, and help them successfully complete their studies.

Due to at least two years of military training, retired college students who upgrade to undergraduate studies often face challenges in reacquainting themselves with professional knowledge and bridging the gap between their previous knowledge and the current curriculum. They must not only relearn foundational courses but also take on new, more advanced courses, which can be particularly difficult for those with weaker academic foundations or self-study skills. As a result, many retired college students who upgrade to undergraduate studies perform below average academically. As a social worker, I call on schools to establish targeted support groups for retired college students, involving faculty and high-achieving students to provide tutoring and help them pass challenging courses.

Retired college students who upgrade to undergraduate studies face numerous psychological and academic obstacles. Some may lose motivation and become disengaged from their studies after experiencing academic setbacks. Schools should take appropriate measures to 激励 retired college students, reigniting their motivation to learn and enabling them to fully utilize their military qualities of perseverance and determination. Writing a personal career development plan upon upgrading to undergraduate studies and revising it annually based on 实际情况 can effectively guide retired college students in completing their studies systematically and achieving their goals. Offering timely career guidance courses and encouraging students to attend job fairs early can help them identify gaps between their qualifications and employer requirements, motivating them to improve and overcome academic challenges.

## 5. Conclusion

Retired college students typically possess practical experience gained from military service, including leadership, teamwork, and adaptability, which are often more valuable than purely academic backgrounds. The policy of exempting veterans from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies provides a more flexible pathway to higher education, increasing their opportunities for advanced degrees and enhancing their competitiveness in the job market. This policy is a form of societal service to the country, reflecting society's care and respect for military personnel. Integrating veterans into higher education helps cultivate diverse talents, enriches campus culture, and promotes among individuals from different backgrounds.

The policy of exempting veterans from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies helps. In its implementation, it is necessary to establish, including academic training and career guidance, to ensure their smooth integration into higher education and the workplace. Overall, the policy of exempting veterans from examinations for upgrading to undergraduate studies has more advantages than disadvantages for the life trajectories of retired college students.

As a social worker, I also reflect on the limited research on social work interventions for retired college students. Currently, their adaptation to campus life mainly relies on counselors and class advisors, who, due to their other responsibilities, often fail to conduct comprehensive and systematic investigations into the issues faced by this group and adjust accordingly. I considered using the strengths perspective theory to help group members improve interpersonal relationships, but I wonder if other theories, such as resocialization theory, might be more effective. Additionally, establishing permanent social work stations on campuses and collaborating with veterans' affairs bureaus could provide more timely and effective support for retired college students, helping them better adapt to campus life and alleviate age and employment anxieties.

## References

- [1] Cong Jianwei. Analysis of College Students' Career Choice Psychology and Measures to Promote Career Success [D]. Harbin Engineering University, 2005.
- [2] Wu Dan. Analysis of Contemporary College Students' Communication Psychology and Adjustment of Communication Barriers [D]. Harbin Engineering University, 2005.
- [3] Zhao Bo. On College Students' Life Adaptation Issues and Countermeasures [J]. Journal of Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications (Social Science Edition), 2002(02): 34-38.
- [4] Feng Tingyong, Li Hong. A Preliminary Study on Contemporary College Students' Learning Adaptation [J]. Psychological Exploration, 2002(01): 44-48.

- [5] Li Hui, Zhu Lifan, Li Mei. A Review of Research on College Students' Campus Adaptation [J]. Journal of Yunnan Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 2006(02): 125-127.
- [6] Zhu Yan, Fan Minglin. From Barracks to Campus: A Life Course Study of Retired College Students [J]. Contemporary Youth Research, 2020(01): 108-114.
- [7] Zhang Zaiyun, Luan Zhengwei, Zhang Hefeng. Identity and Distinction: A Study on Interpersonal Adaptation of Retired College Students [J]. Youth Studies, 2021(04): 74-84+96.
- [8] Duncan G J, Hoffman S D. The Incidence and Wage Effects of Overeducation [J]. Economics, 2002, 9(1): 1-16.
- [9] Wang Weiping, Shang Xiaoming, Zhang Tianjiao. From "Policy Coordination" to "Transition Support": A Review of U.S. Veterans' Transition from Military to College Students [J]. Fudan Education Forum, 2019, 17(02): 85-93.