



# Veterans KC Newsletter

WINTER 2017

## Common Barriers and Effective Solutions to Support Student Veterans

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**Submitted by the AHEAD – Veterans with Disabilities in Higher Ed Special Interest Group**

**Dan Standage, Co-Chair; Director of Disability in Education, Student Veterans of America**

**Jorja Waybrant, Co-Chair; Coordinator of Disability Resources, University of North Carolina School of the Arts**

Common barriers can create an impediment to academic success particularly for student veterans with disability-related needs. Although obstacles are not invented as intentional roadblocks, being aware of the dynamics and working through the challenges on your campus will allow students to reach their highest potential. Listed below are a few barriers as well as some effective solutions that can be tailored to your own needs.

One major barrier for veterans is a lack of knowledge about the types of services available to help students be academically successful. While this dilemma is problematic for all students; it is particularly challenging for student veterans with an acquired service-connected injury or wound. More importantly, since veterans are typically

not a student with a disability at the K-12 education level, they are unaware of the types of accommodations and disability-related services available on campus. They are also not aware of what office or person they should meet with for assistance.

Another barrier is that a veteran may not make the connection between their academic struggles and an acquired

injury or wound. For example, if they are suffering from a cognitive problem such as memory loss or a physical impairment, they may not realize its connection to concentration, focusing or learning. All they know is that they are failing in their studies and don't know where or to whom to turn for assistance. Moreover, some veterans may view having a disability as someone in a wheelchair, or someone who is blind, or someone who is considered a wounded warrior. Since they do not see their own challenges at that same level they may disregard themselves as having a disability so they won't and don't ask for help.

A third barrier is that some campuses (probably most campuses), students with disabilities serve as the vehicle for making direct accommodation requests to their faculty and discussing how accommodations will be implemented in a course. Most students are not comfortable navigating through this process, and veterans may feel the same. They may also encounter challenges on how to connect their functional limitations to their academic needs.

There are some simple and effective solutions to combat the above barriers – increased campus collaborations, outreach to your campus student veteran organization, and direct outreach to student veterans. Here is how they might work:

**Campus collaborations** between resource and other offices on campus in the form of cross-campus outreach and training, promote learning opportunities so staff, faculty and administrators learn what other

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# Veterans Day on our Campuses

Coastal Carolina University's SVA aimed to [help veterans continue their education](#)

Georgetown University's [Office of Campus Ministry](#) Chaplain's Tea with the [Veterans Office](#) on November 8, 2016 offered students, faculty, staff, and alumni to come together over sweet treats and relaxing tea to engage in conversations about the military-connected community. Following the reception, participants met in the Dahlgren Quad to pray as a community for peace and justice in the world.

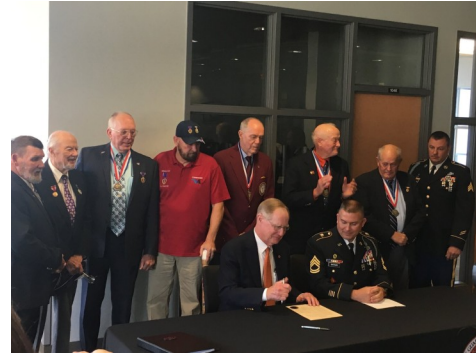
The [Georgetown University Student Veterans Association](#) (GUSVA) and the [Georgetown University](#) President's Office hosted the Veterans Day Ceremony on November 10, 2016 to bring together the campus community to honor, remember, and celebrate veterans on campus. Keynote speaker, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Readiness), Daniel Feehan (SFS '05), [reflected on Georgetown's history](#), dating back to the years following the Civil War, on how veteran students were the example of bringing opposing sides together to form the University's official colors of blue and gray.

[GUSVA](#), [Veterans' Voices](#), [Campus Ministry](#), [Counseling and Psychiatric Service](#) (CAPS), and the [Veterans Office](#) hosted the film screening of *Almost Sunrises* on November 17, 2016. The film that follows two veterans who are haunted by their own combat experience and decide to take a 2,700-mile trek on foot across America to seek redemption, acceptance, and a way to close the moral chasm opened by war. Following the movie screening, movie Director, Michael Collins, Campus Ministry's Rabbi Rachel Gartner, and CAPS Psychologist Michael Tartaglia discussed the impacts of the film and answered questions from the audience.

Sen. Mark Warner Speaks at [Old Dominion University's Veterans Day Observance](#)

Oklahoma State University (OSU) was designated a Purple Heart University on Veteran's Day and hosted a ceremony

with local members of our Military order of the Purple Heart.



At OSU-Tulsa we put out our first annual Flags for the Fallen display with over 1700 flags. Each flag placed represented four service members who have lost their lives since 9/11. Our main campus had a similar display with almost 7,000 flags, one for each service member.



RIT hosts a Veterans Day Breakfast and invites the campus and any campus-connected veteran to attend. Local providers of veterans services are also invited to have a table and share information on services. The Veterans Club also has a table.



**CONT'D FROM PG 1** folks do and how they can best support veterans. This process creates knowledge building, aids in early identification of at risk students, increases teamwork and referrals. Disability offices must play a role in the process. When all campus staff are aware of disability services on campus - what they are, and what is provided – they are able to connect the pieces and are best positioned to refer veterans to important and needed resources.

**Conduct outreach to your student veteran organization on campus.** The most effective way to reach students is by utilizing other students. Student veterans are one of the most strategic connections for sharing information about what is offered on campus to help students be academically successful. Veteran to veteran referrals are powerful, particularly for veterans with disability-related needs. When veterans learn about the types of services available for teaching purposes, they also become aware of what is offered to help themselves. There are a number of veterans who don't acknowledge their own challenges but could equally benefit from services and supports. Also, involving your SVO in an outreach session to your military-connected students during Orientation is essential and again a learning tool.

**Offer a syllabi statement to faculty for student veterans on how to connect with vital resources on campus.** This aids from both an advising and a disability perspective. A sentence could be inserted into the existing ADA statement or as a standalone. The statement would seed the concept that disability culture in the veteran space needs special attention. The desired goal would be to alter the culture of veterans and ultimately remove the statement. There's zero cost, but the benefits would be measurable. An example of the statement could be: *"If you are a current or former member of the US military, contact xxx (URL, phone, etc) at xxx (VRC, DS, etc) for additional information."*

Veterans are not one homogenous group. They are as widely diverse as the selection of academic programs and campuses on which we work. Strengths and weaknesses contributing to or prohibiting success may vary. Understanding your unique population of students as well as your campus structure and any potential barriers and then working to effectively remove the obstacles will help move your campus to providing a better opportunity for student veterans and all your military-connected students to reach their highest potential.

## Building Strategic Partners—MFRI

The Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University has a new set of [How to Help](#) issues released in fall 2016 that focus on supporting various professionals in the higher education space. The How to Help Military and Veteran Families is a series of publications that offer valuable information to various audiences to help them assist and support members of the military, veterans and their families.

Each issue provides evidence-based guidance on how a particular group can help, with short, practical suggestions and links that point to additional resources. Each issue has been carefully reviewed both by subject matter experts and military family support organizations. The series

is the result of a joint effort between the Department of Defense and the Department of Agriculture, in collaboration with the Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University and the National Military Family Association.

MFRI is excited to release these documents through various NASPA outlets to share evidence based best practices with the VKC membership looking to learn more about serving military-connected students on their campus.

The issues referenced below are available in "web-friendly" and "printer-friendly" formats. Please

feel free to access these documents and share with others on your campus that may benefit from the information.

The new issues are as follows:

- How to Help for Higher Ed Faculty
- How to Help for Higher Ed Academic Advisors
- How to Help for Higher Ed Disability Services

Keep an eye out on your email later this spring, as we are working with NASPA to host a series of webinars focused on these very important topics!



# What I Wish I Knew as a Veteran Undergrad

**Bob Heckrote, M.Ed. (Army, Ret.)**

**Academic Advisor for Military and Undeclared Students**

**Bloomsburg University – Office of Military and Veterans Resources**

When I began my undergraduate time in August 2006, I was fresh off of an 18-month deployment to Ramadi, Iraq, and I was hopelessly lost in college. Back then there were no support systems on my campus for military members, and it felt as if I was the only who was a veteran, and the only one who didn't go straight to college after high school. I had a poor transition from the deployment to higher education, and I was in way over my head.

As a current student affairs professional looking back to my undergraduate time, I wish I would have known what student affairs was. I wish I would have known that getting involved in something, anything, would have probably helped me to connect with my peers and would have probably helped me get connected to campus resources better. I think I can boil it down to two main problems: 1) I felt I was different than everyone, so when our orientation people were telling us all about the different activities and organizations to get involved in, I felt they were for the traditional students and 2) I was still in the National Guard, so I felt like the time commitments were more than I could handle.

It is funny to look back and see that I had plenty of time to get fully involved in events or organizations, and it is also funny now to see just how many types of organizations and offices exist that I would have loved to participate in, or get involved with. Another thing I wish I would have known in my early years of college, is the concept of receiving help. I struggled transitionally, physically, and academically for most of my undergraduate time until I finally made a connection with a few professors, and an undeclared academic advisor. They were able to push me to go talk with professors I wasn't understanding, and to double check my schedule before I took a class I didn't need. If I

only would have admitted that I was clueless and in over my head a year or two earlier, I am certain my undergraduate GPA would have been *vastly different*.

In my position now, I am the face of almost everything military-related at my campus, and I am the natural go-to person for all of my military students and anyone connected to them. So the issue of feeling alone is hopefully being addressed with our campus presence and our constant communication. However, I still see my students going through two of the same problems I had – They say they do not have time to participate, and they are still hesitant to admit when they need help.

The student veterans association on our campus is a very active organization and when we get a new student, of course we tell them all about the association, and encourage participation. We try to make it clear that even a minimal amount of participation can help, and can have a positive impact on their higher education experience. Having been on both sides of the situation, and now seeing just how much of an impact getting involved can make, I now do everything I can to encourage participation and encourage my students to speak up when they need help. I often tell my students that when they got to their first unit, there were people there who had 'been there, and done that' and they were taught how to be a service member, and the same holds true for college. No one gets through college alone, and the sooner a student realizes this, the better their experience will be.

## Upcoming Events - Mark your Calendars!

### 2017

Feb 9-11, NASPA Symposium on Military-Connected Students, Washington, DC [Registration open HERE](#)

Feb 26-Mar 7, DAV Mid-Winter Conference, Arlington, VA

March 6-9, CCME Professional Development Symposium, Atlanta, GA

March 11-15, NASPA Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX

July 29-Aug 1, DAV National Conference in New Orleans, LA

Oct 23-26, NAVPA Annual Conference, Atlantic City, NJ



# Organizations to be Aware of: NOVA

National Organization of Veteran Advocates is a national group of advocates who can represent a veteran before the Board of Veterans Appeals – lawyers, social workers, VFW representatives all turn to the organization as the main national training organization, and the largest advocacy network for VA ratings issues. Student-Veterans who believe that their

compensation does not reflect their injuries, who have questions about upgrading a discharge, or family members seeking assistance with a veteran's pension or survivors benefits can find an accredited representative through the organization – unlike every other board of appeals, the BVA allows non-attorneys to pass a test and represent appellants in

Veterans Benefits cases. NOVA is the only organization in the country dedicated to “develop and encourage high standards of service and representation for all persons seeking benefits through the federal veterans benefits system and in particular those seeking judicial review of denials of veterans benefits.”

## HB 6416—The Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvements Act

This bill passed in December 2016, and was signed into law by President Obama December 6, 2016. This is worth a complete read by anyone working full time or overseeing compliance and certification; some of the changes that will directly affect military-connected services in Higher Education include:

- Section 412 changes rates of the reporting fees; rates would change from \$9 and \$13 per student to \$6 and \$12 per student until September 25, 2017. From September 26, 2017, to September 25, 2026, the rates would be \$7 and \$12 per student.
- Reporting Changes:
  - In the wake of the struggles to improve outcome reporting with IHLs this year, the Act mandates the Secretary of Veterans Affairs must collect data on all Post 9/11 student's outcome, and report one year from enactment.
  - The VA is now required under section 411 to conduct an annual compliance survey of any school with over 20 veterans receiving benefits. The bill also specifies that every institution must be surveyed every 2 years, and that the SAA must be informed September 1 which schools will be surveyed the next fiscal year.
- Creation of a provision that the VA may elect, on behalf of an student applying for benefits, to apply for Post 9/11 GI Bill, if they determine it is a better fit for a student's course of study. The student will receive written notification, and have 30 days to contest it, if they prefer to receive benefits under 1606, or Chapter 30.
- Section 409 requires that programs WITHOUT accreditation that lead to a licensure or certification must demonstrate that they meet state or national requirements for that program. (i.e., if a nursing program is not accredited for some reason, they must demonstrate that a student graduating their program will meet all requirements for state licensure as a nurse.
- Additionally, any school leading to a law degree must be accredited by an accrediting agency or association. (This is expected, over time, to tighten to require ABA Approval.)
- Tightening the VocRehab Standards: In an attempt to standardize what programs get approved by the VA's VocRehab counselors, the bill mandates that as much as possible students only be enrolled in programming that is approved by your SAA for use under one of the GI Bills. This won't have as big an impact on IHLs – it is expected to have a larger impact on trade schools and vocational training.

# Coming Out Day at Wright State

Last semester, Wright State University held there, “National Coming Out” week. I had the honor of contributing to their panel, “Do Ask Do Tell”, about the transition of LGBTQ student veterans. As a gay veteran it was important to include my voice as at times we forget that the LGBTQ community share many of those same transitional challenges on campus that student veterans face. This diverse panel included university faculty and veterans both homosexual, transgendered and heterosexual. I found that by participating on this panel I was enlightened by the impact of those who have faced similar challenges as I. The biggest challenge was finding my identity (place) within the campus community. When I first started my higher education journey I didn’t feel

as though I had the support on campus quite frankly because I was unsure how I would identify. Hearing from one panelist on his support of the LGBTQ community was one that was a welcome addition to the panel. As time has shown I understood that I could comfortably identify as both a gay male and a veteran. His perspective offered a new take on the transitional issues of LGBTQ. I also had the opportunity to provide a training session entitled, “Taking Back My Life: From Victim to Victor”, addressing rape culture in today’s society. During this session, we walk through my own journey as a male survivor of military sexual trauma and subsequent reporting to navigating past adversity towards life today. Afterwards, we had an informed discussion on campus resources and what could be done today to empower those who have faced issues of sexual

assault within the LGBTQ community to report and seek treatment on their campus. Having participated and meeting the students within the Wright State University campus community I was moved by the level of support shown. The campus was enlightened and motivated to learn and contribute. Having the Veterans Military Resource Center, Women’s Center and LGBTQ Center partner together to provide a diverse week of programming for their student body was different and highly effective. My biggest takeaway from this event was the need to have more combined events on their campus as a means for the student veterans to interact and expand their knowledge on not just their transition issues but that of their fellow LGBTQ student veterans.

## Keynote Speaker for 2017 Symposium!

The opening keynote speaker has been [announced](#): Lisa Jaster- Senior Project Engineer, Shell Oil, US Army Reserves, Major, Engineer. Major Jaster is the 3rd woman to complete Ranger school.

## Military Culture Corner: Did you know?

Acronyms, what they mean, and the time the operations were active:

OIF (Operation Iraqi Freedom) 2003-2010

OEF (Operation Enduring Freedom) 2001-2014,

OND (Operation Dawn, formerly OIF) 2010-2011

OFS (Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, formerly OEF) 2014-present

OIR (Operation Inherent Resolve) 2014-present

# Get to Know the VKC Board

## **BOB HECKROTE, M.ED. (ARMY, RET.)**

Supervisor for the Office of Military and Veterans Resources

Academic Advisor for Military and Undeclared Students

Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania

VKC Supra Et Extra Award Liaison

I decided to get involved with the NASPA VKC in order to be as best informed as possible about the national pulse in all things related to military students. I joined, and became active in the VKC in an effort to best serve my students, my campus, and all military related individuals throughout higher education. Being involved with the VKC has been an excellent reciprocal relationship which has greatly supported my career and my campus, but most importantly, my students.

## **CHRISTINE M. BLACK, J.D.**

Director

Office of Military & Veterans Services

Veterans Resource Center

Marywood University

VKC Communications Co-Chair

I look forward to working with the VKC, and helping grow a vitally necessary part of the higher education experience. As a veteran-student throughout my career, I experienced how the differences from institution to institution in terms of dedicated space, staffers, and institutional knowledge can change the experience. I know what a difference one friendly face helping navigate the challenges of higher education can mean to the student-veterans we work with, and I hope to help each institution find their way of pro-

## **About This Newsletter**

The VKC published a semi-annual newsletter highlighting stories, fellow veteran-focus organizations, campus events, programs, and professionals, along with important national stories that affect the student veterans on our campuses. If you would like to contribute or have an idea for a story, please reach out to Christine or Chelsea. We look forward to learning with you!

Lauren Runco, Chair

Chelsea O'Brien & Christine Black, Communication Co-Chairs

Contact us at [NASPAvkc@gmail.com](mailto:NASPAvkc@gmail.com)

# VKC at #NASPA17

## **Examining Transitions of Military-Connected Students of Color**

Coordinating Presenter: Ann Gansemer-Topf

Location: 006 D – Convention Center

Date/Time: March 13, 11:15 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.

## **Experience the TRANSFERmation: Developing a first year experience for Transfer and Military Students**

Coordinating Presenter: Karsan Hardy

Location: Grand Ballroom Salon D – Marriott Rivercenter

Date/Time: March 14, 8:30 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

## **Examining the perspectives of student veterans concerning a large public university's veterans specific career development program**

Coordinating Presenter: Brian Neighbors

Location: 215 – Convention Center

Date/Time: March 13, 2:30 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.

## **Welcoming Veterans: A holistic and collaborative approach to student veteran transitions**

Coordinating Presenter: Amber Mathwig

Location: 006 D – Convention Center

Date/Time: March 13, 8:30 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.

## **Focus Forward: An experiential program engaging women student veterans beyond the classroom**

Coordinating Presenter: Lauren Runco Williams

Location: 006 A - Convention Center

Date/Time: March 13, 2:30 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.

## **Meeting the Transitional Needs of Military-Connected Students**

Coordinating Presenter: Mark Eister

Location: 007 C - Convention Center

Date / Time: March 14, 2:30 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.

## **Advising Student Veterans**

Coordinating Presenter: Chelsea O'Brien

Location: 212 AB – Convention Center

Date/Time: March 14, 10:00 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.

## **VKC Presentation Roundtable Session**

Location: Alamo Ballroom, Salon A

Date/Time: Tuesday, March 14th 3:30pm-4:45pm

## **VKC Open Business Meeting and Social**

What: The Military Affairs Council of San Antonio Chamber of Commerce will be hosting a reception for the NASPA VKC

Location: Chamber Office, 602 E. Commerce St

Date/Time: Tuesday, March 14th 5:30pm-7pm