



The Veteran-Friendly Classroom:

What It Is and How To Create It

Voices of Vets

Eight college students provide an inside look at life as a returning veteran.

Rationale for this training

- ▶ At any given point in the past decade, less than 1% of the U.S. American public has served in the U.S. Armed Forces on Active Duty
- ▶ This has resulted in a growing gap between those who serve in the military and the civilian population
- ▶ “What we have is an armed services that’s at war and a public that’s not very engaged. Typically when our nation is at war, it’s a front-burner issue for the public. But with these post-9/11 wars, which are now past the 10-year mark, the public has been paying less and less attention.”

Paul Taylor, executive vice president of the Pew Research Center



Rationale for this training

- ▶ In a 2012 study conducted by the American Council of Education, which surveyed 690 U.S. colleges and universities about their offerings to veterans, the training of faculty and staff was the least prevalent:
 - ▶ $\frac{3}{4}$ of institutions have offices dedicated to serving veterans.
 - ▶ 62% offer programs and services designed specifically for veterans.
 - ▶ However, less than half of institutions offer training for faculty and staff on veteran and military students and what they need to succeed in college.



Who are your student veterans?

- ▶ Only 15% of student Veterans are traditionally aged college students (18-23).
 - ▶ 31.4% are between the ages of 24 and 29.
 - ▶ 28.2% are between the ages of 30 and 39.
 - ▶ 24.9% are 40 or older.
 - ▶ 73% of Student Veterans are male; 27% are female.
 - ▶ 47% of student Veterans have children.
 - ▶ 47.3% of student Veterans are married.
 - ▶ Only 35.3% are unmarried and without dependents.
- ▶ Source:
<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveteran/studentvets.asp>



What are some of the strengths of Student Veterans?

- ▶ A strong work ethic
- ▶ Self discipline
- ▶ Advanced teamwork skills
- ▶ Project management experience
- ▶ A global perspective
- ▶ Leadership
- ▶ Problem-solving skills
- ▶ An understanding of global conflict, history and politics

▶ Source: Institute of Learning & Teaching, Student Veterans Task Force, Colorado State University



What have our returning troops experienced?

- ▶ Received small arms fire – 94%
- ▶ Know someone who was seriously injured or killed – 86%
- ▶ Shot at or directed fire at the enemy – 77%
- ▶ Saw deceased or seriously injured Americans – 68%
- ▶ Handled or uncovered human remains – 51%
- ▶ Responsible for the death of an enemy combatant – 48%
- ▶ Responsible for the death of a noncombatant – 28%
- ▶ Source: New England Journal of Medicine, July 2004



What have our returning troops experienced?

- ▶ Even military personnel who have not been exposed to such traumatic experiences have endured daily, lower-magnitude events and circumstances which commonly exacerbate stress in war zones. Among these are:
 - ▶ Unfamiliar living conditions that include irregular sleep and eating patterns.
 - ▶ Heavy physical demands and long work days.
 - ▶ Harsh climate.
 - ▶ Separation from loved ones and missing significant family events (birthdays, weddings, funerals).
 - ▶ Career-related concerns (e.g., delayed graduation from college, losing a job, being denied a promotion).



How these experiences *may* impact the classroom

“...following orders and respecting rank and formality may run counter to the independent thinking and informality encouraged in many classrooms”

(Department of VA: What Are Common Adjustment Experiences?).

Potential Transitional Challenges

- ▶ Services and processes in the college environment can be difficult to navigate.
- ▶ Change in daily structure – survival in military depends upon discipline, obedience, and conformity, whereas education requires independent thinking and abstract reasoning.
- ▶ Campuses do not offer a hierarchy or unit commander – the different system structure could be source of frustration.
- ▶ A shift to personal autonomy can be challenging, e.g., time and financial management



How these experiences *may* impact the classroom

“Up to one-third of student Veterans may be struggling with ‘invisible wounds’ of war: traumatic brain injury, posttraumatic stress disorder, or major depression.”

Department of VA: What are Common Adjustment Experiences? 11 November 2012.

Posttraumatic Stress, defined.

PTS can occur as a natural reaction to a traumatic event, such as combat, assault, and disaster. It typically includes experiences of depression, anxiety and/or flashbacks.

Potential Physical and Emotional Implications

- ▶ Campus and Classroom Environment
 - ▶ Environmental sounds - reminders of battle
 - ▶ Sudden movements – fight or flight response
- ▶ Homework and Testing
 - ▶ Headaches
 - ▶ Panic attacks
 - ▶ Sleepless nights
 - ▶ Lack of concentration



**At the same time ...
(in the words of a KVCC
Student Veteran)**

“I don’t want to be treated with kid gloves.”

What can you do?

- ▶ Talk with students privately
 - ▶ Attempt to understand what is causing distress or impact on their life.
 - ▶ Let them know you want to help them get the most from the class and their educational experience.
 - ▶ Do not take on role of counselor – refer to a SSC Counselor and/or Special Services.
 - ▶ If demonstrating behaviors of severe depression, significant behavioral problems or they are expressing suicidal thoughts – seek consultation with Counseling, with Student Relations, or possibly with public safety.



What can you do?

(According to KVCC Student Veterans)

- ▶ “I had a teacher do an experiment in class. He did not warn us and I was shook up all day.”
- ▶ “Please keep your political comments and biases to yourself.”
- ▶ “Loud noises can be a problem.”
- ▶ “History Classes – warn us about movies or topics relating to war that might be coming up during class in the next week.”
- ▶ “Teachers need to stand up more to students. There is a lot of rudeness in class. Students need to be kicked out of class [if they are being rude].”



What can you do?

- ▶ Understand that students may miss class due to VA medical appointments.
- ▶ Understand that Guardsmen and Reservists may miss class due to military activations.
 - ▶ Drill involves a commitment of a weekend every month, as well as two weeks at some point during the year.
 - ▶ Some may be called to Active Duty Deployment.



What can you do?

- ▶ Allow self-selected seating
 - ▶ May prefer back of classroom and/or with back against the wall
 - ▶ This may allow for feeling of environmental control and will help with attendance and learning course content
- ▶ Avoid asking veterans to share their experiences or disclose military opinions.
- ▶ Use caution when thanking a veteran.
 - ▶ Some may wish to remain anonymous.
- ▶ Regardless of political opinions, veterans will be appreciative of your support and gratitude to their service



What can you do?

- ▶ Familiarize yourself with available services. Refer, refer, refer!
 - ▶ [Veteran Success Team](#)
 - ▶ Veteran Services
 - ▶ Special Services
 - ▶ Testing and Learning Centers
 - ▶ Counseling
 - ▶ Success Advocates
 - ▶ Brent Haddow, VetSuccess on Campus
- ▶ Refer students to our website
 - ▶ www.kvcc.edu/veterans



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