



***** CONSORTIUM of *****
MICHIGAN VETERANS EDUCATORS

2014 Presenter Bios

Tanya Ang

Tanya Ang is the Associate Director of Veterans' Programs at the American Council on Education. Tanya oversees ACE veterans initiatives such as the Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions and the Severely Injured Service Members program. Prior to her role in Veterans' Programs, Tanya served as a Senior Program Manager in ACE's Military Programs working with evaluation teams to provide credit recommendations on service member's military transcripts.

Tanya has worked in higher education for over 13 years in a variety of roles including Administrative Analyst for the VP of Student Affairs Office at California State University, Fullerton and Associate Registrar at Vanguard University. She was the certifying official at her institution for student veteran GI Bill benefits.

Jeff Barnes

Jeff began his career as an Armored Cavalry Officer in the United States Army with overseas assignments in Korea, the Balkans and Iraq. Jeff's awards include 2 Bronze Stars with Valor Device, Meritorious Service Medal, Combat Action Badge, and induction into the Honorary Order of St. George for Outstanding Leadership in Combat. Jeff holds a Bachelor of Arts from Capital University in Columbus, Ohio and a Masters of Public Policy with a concentration in National Security and State and Local Government issues from the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. He is a graduate of the United States Army Airborne School, Armor Captain's Career Course and the Combined Arms Services Staff School. Jeff served as the Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff, Deputy Director of Strategy and Executive Director of Public Safety, and as a member of the Governor's Council on Law Enforcement and Reinvention. Jeff Barnes was appointed to the cabinet-level position of Director of the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency by Governor Rick Snyder, effective March 20, 2013.

Michael Bean

Michael Bean joined the United States Marine Corps in January of 1997 and earned an honorable discharge in January of 2006. Michael then attended Delta College where he served as a VA Work Study while earning an Associate of Arts, Associate in Liberal Arts and Associate in Business Studies. Upon graduation from Delta College, Michael attended Saginaw Valley State University and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. Michael then worked as the Youth Coordinator for Midland Area Partnership for Drug-Free Youth and as an Undercover Tobacco Agent for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In 2012, Michael began work at Delta College as the Coordinator of Veteran Services. In this role he co-founded the Great Lakes Bay Veterans Network with entities from Michigan Works! and has secured a grant to open a Veteran Resource Center at Delta College. Michael is a member of the Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars and CMVE.

Merry Jo Brandimore

Merry Jo Brandimore is the Vice President for Student Affairs/Dean of Students at Saginaw Valley State University and oversees a range of programs and services that are critical to a student's success at the University. The offices that fall under the Vice President/Dean's oversight are: Campus Recreation, Disability Services, Residential Life, Student Conduct Programs, Student Counseling and Health Promotions and the Student Life Center. These departments provide resources and opportunities that enhance the SVSU student experience overall. In May 2013, SVSU launched its Military Student Affairs Office under the direction of Denise Berry.

Michael Brennan

Michael Brennan is a member of the Veterans Task Force at Oakland University, and works with Undergraduate Admissions with incoming military and veteran students. He serves on the CMVE Recruiting and Outreach Committee as well as the Statewide Steering Committee.

Helen Budd

Helen Budd joined the University of Michigan-Flint in May, 2013, as the Veterans Certifying Evaluator. She has several years of experience in a private not-for-profit IHL as a VA certifying official at Cleary University in Howell, MI, and is a Cleary University alumnus. Helen also volunteers for the Women Supporting Women Veterans organization in Livingston County and is a committee member of the Michigan Challenge Balloonfest, primarily focusing on the annual Veterans Ceremony.

Margie Clark

Margie Clark, MSN, RN, GNP, is the Dean of the Health and Human Services Division at Lansing Community College. She led the college's initiative to assist veterans in transitioning into the workforce with licensure capability and the development of a crosswalk system to award college credit for medical experience within the various military branches. Her vision led to the development of accelerated tracks within the Emergency Medical Services and Nursing Programs. In addition, LCC has partnered with several universities such as Michigan State, Western Michigan and Eastern Michigan to provide students with advanced degree tracks for Nursing (BSN) and Physician Assistant (PA) degrees.

Chris Engle Ed. D

Chris Engle is the Dean of Enrollment, Retention and Registrar at Mott Community College. In this capacity, Chris implemented a Veteran Resource Center, a Military Culture & Awareness training platform and has designed retention efforts for his student Veterans. Chris is also a Veteran of the United States Army and used the Montgomery GI Bill to fund his education.

Zack Frazier

Zachary Frazier entered the United States Army as an Infantryman in August 2009, and upon completion of One Station Unit Training, he was stationed in Vilseck, Germany, with the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment - Hawk Company. In June of 2010 he deployed to rural Kandahar, Afghanistan, where he spent 12 months stationed at Combat Outpost Rath. After his deployment he returned to Germany and served out the remainder of his contract. Zachary was discharged from the service in December of 2012 at the rank of E-4, Specialist. Upon his honorable discharge he returned to his home town of Lansing, Michigan to pursue higher education. Zachary is currently a student at Lansing Community College, where he works as a Student Assistant at LCC's Veteran Services Office. Zachary is pursuing his goal of transferring to Michigan State University.

Patrick Hannah

Patrick Hannah came to Wayne State in 2008 on Vocational Rehabilitation through VA. He was in the Marine Corps from 1981-1988, and was medically discharged for an injury. He received both his Bachelor's and Masters in Social Work. Patrick then started the Student Veterans Organization with the idea of veterans helping veterans; because of it's success, the University gave the organization it's own space which eventually morphed into creating the OMVAE.

Dichondra Johnson

Dichondra R. Johnson currently serves as Education Analyst with the Michigan Veteran Affairs Agency (MVAA), established in 2013 by Executive Order to oversee operations to connect veterans to services and benefits in Michigan. In addition, she is a faculty member at Lansing Community College (LCC), in the Business and Economics Department, where she teaches undergraduate courses in Business, Marketing and Advertising. She anticipates receiving her MPA in Public Administration and Affairs Summer 2014 from Western Michigan University; she received her MBA in Marketing & Global Business from Davenport

University; BS in Arts Administration & Marketing from Eastern Michigan University. Ms. Johnson is a 2011 Fellow of the Michigan Political Leadership Program, Michigan State University.

Philip Larson

Philip Larson is the Program Director for the Veteran and Military Services at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He is a native of Kendallville, Indiana and joined the Air Force in 1988, serving four years at McConnell AFB in Wichita KS working on the B1b Bomber. In 1992 he began the pursuit of an education at Indiana University in Bloomington where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Certificate in Journalism. During this time he served in the Air Force Reserves out of Grissom AFB in Peru, Indiana. He completed his Master's in Education from IU in 1999. Mr. Larson has a long experience with helping students transition into college and university life. In addition to starting the Student Veterans Assistance Program at UM he also started a mentoring program for transfer students at UM in 2008. He is a founding member of the Consortium of Michigan Veteran Educators and sits on its steering committee. He chairs both the Veterans Week Planning Committee and the UM Council on Student Veterans.

Michael Lehnert

Major General Michael R. Lehnert is a 1973 Central Michigan University graduate. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant through the PLC program and has served in various roles across the world including Quantico, Virginia; Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Okinawa, Japan; Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines; San Antonio, Texas; Camp Pendleton, California; Norfolk, Virginia; and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In 1979, Captain Lehnert attended the U.S. Army Advanced Engineer School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Then, in 1987 he was selected for Armed Forces Staff College and upon graduation reported to the United States Southern Command for duty as Chief, Central American Exercise Branch, J-3 Operations Directorate. Following Central America, Major Lehnert was assigned as Inspector-Instructor, 6th Engineer Support Battalion, Portland, Oregon. While there he was selected for top-level school and completed the Naval War College in 1993, earning a master's degree in International and Strategic Studies. In April 2005 he took command of Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California. In the same year Major General Lehnert assumed command of the newly activated Marine Corps Installations West and its seven subordinate installations. Decorations include the Defense Superior Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster, the Legion of Merit with Gold Star, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal with two oak leaf clusters, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with gold star, and the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal. After serving for two years as a senior adviser to the Commissioner, Customs and Border Protection, General Lehnert was invited to serve as a Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow where he lectures on leadership and ethical decision making.

Kristina Leonardi

Kristina Leonardi is the Director of Strategy for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA), where she oversees the coordination of employment, education, healthcare, and quality of life areas for veterans. She and her team work with government and community partners to identify and remove barriers veterans encounter.

Steven Lipnicki

Steven Lipnicki relocated to Michigan in 1988 and earned his master's degree in Adult and Continuing Education from Michigan State University. He received his Bachelors at the State University of New York, College at Oneonta. He serves as Assistant Dean of Students at Grand Valley State University, working to assess and improve services for students, including military veterans and adult students. Lipnicki was instrumental in launching Grand Valley State University's Veterans Network, creating a Veterans Kick-off, and assisting student veterans with establishing a Student Veterans of America chapter at Grand Valley.

Lipnicki is actively involved with WGVSU's Veterans Engage Committee, the West Michigan Veterans Coalition, and other community initiatives. He serves on the steering committee and previously served as co-chair of the Professional Development Committee for the Consortium of Michigan Veteran Educators. Prior to arriving at Grand Valley, Lipnicki recruited current and former military members, evaluated credit for military experience and training, certified GI Bill benefits, and organized services for current and former members of the US armed forces, including coordinating classes at Michigan National Guard armories.

Elizabeth Lyons

Elizabeth Lyons is the Director of Student Veteran Services and Credit for Prior Learning at Kalamazoo Valley Community College. In her role she serves as the central point of contact for service members and student veterans, chairs KVCC's Veterans Support Committee and serves as an advisor to the college's Student Veterans of America. Elizabeth is a member of both the CMVE Steering Committee and Best Practices Committee, as well as a Michigan representative to the Multi-State Collaborative for Military Credit. Charged with facilitating the college's prior learning assessment process, Elizabeth works closely with KVCC's deans and academic department chairs to assess a student's learning through such methods as portfolio evaluation and certification/licensure recognition. Elizabeth holds an M.A. in Communication from Western Michigan University.

Sarah Mellon

Sarah Mellon is the Student Veterans Resource Center Coordinator at the University of Michigan-Flint. She started at the University of Michigan-Flint in 2009 as the Veterans Admissions Coordinator and still handles all admission functions for the SVRC. Sarah is active in several professional organizations and serves as the CMVE Recruitment and Outreach Committee Chair.

Danielle Middleton

Danielle Middleton is a graduate from Mott Community College and has recently transferred to the University of Michigan-Flint to work on her bachelor's degree in nursing. Danielle has worked as a Veteran Services Representative at Mott Community College for two years. She and her family moved to Michigan two years ago from Cheyenne, Wyoming after she received an honorable discharge from the United States Air Force.

Danielle served a total of 8 years in the Air Force, both active duty service and Air National Guard as a Security Forces Craftsman. Among the many deployments Danielle was assigned were South Korea, Baghdad, Iraq, Qatar and Sevilla, Spain. Danielle was discharged from the Air Force at the rank of E6, Technical Sergeant and held the position of Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of the Training and Stan-Eval section for the 153rd Security Forces Squadron.

Justin Peters

Justin served five years Active Duty Navy as a Dental Technician and then, two years Navy Reserve as a Hospital Corpsman. He was recently commissioned an Officer in the Navy Reserve. He is currently working for the Veteran Hospital Administration (VHA), but he previously worked for the Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA) processing disability compensation, pension, dependent indemnification, and other benefit claims. As a VHA employee, he has experience in a variety of healthcare administration roles. As a student, Justin was a student Veteran with 7 separate colleges/ universities over 12 years.

Michael Poyma

Michael Poyma has been with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs since January 2007. Before joining the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) Program as an Employment Specialist, Mike spent nearly five years serving veterans in Illinois as a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist, Transition Assistance Program (TAP) facilitator, VR&E Coordinator, and Assistant Statewide Coordinator for Veterans Programs, all within the Illinois Dept. of Employment Security (IDES). Mike is a service-connected disabled Army veteran who served on active duty from 1990 to 1993 as a Blackhawk Helicopter Repairer. His overseas tours include stops in Germany, Turkey, and Iraq during the Gulf War. After military service, he obtained a bachelor's degree from The Ohio State University while participating in the VR&E program.

Julie Yunker

Julie Yunker is a United States Air Force veteran and also served a three-year enlistment in the Michigan Air National Guard. Julie's career has been in law enforcement, specifically at the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety. In almost fourteen years at KDPS, she served in many different capacities and assignments. In 2009, Julie was hired as the Director of Criminal Justice Training at Grand Valley State University. Director Yunker's main responsibility at Grand Valley is the administration of the traditional 16-week Police Academy and the new abbreviated Military Police Academy sessions. She also teaches Criminal Justice classes, is active in the West Michigan Criminal Justice Training Consortium and is the advisor to the Student Veteran's Organization at Grand Valley.

Tracey Quada

An employee of Western Michigan University for over 14 years, Tracey Quada has been the director of the office of military and veterans affairs for four years and has taught technical communications to aviation and engineering students for the past 11 years. Tracey has a strong commitment to serving the veteran population on WMU's campus and led the efforts that have earned WMU national recognition as a top military friendly institution in the state of Michigan. She earned a bachelor of science in psychology at Northern Michigan University, a master of arts in counseling in higher education at Western Michigan University. Her areas of expertise include working with student veterans, students in the fields of engineering and aviation, as well as addressing generational influences in the classroom and workplace.

Shane Taylor

Shane is an 8 year Marine Corps veteran who served in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in Fallujah, Iraq from Sept. 2006 until April 2007. Shane is currently a Junior studying Sport Management, with minors in Athletic Coaching and Event Management. He works at CMU's Veterans Resource Center and is the President of CMU's chapter of Student Veterans of America, a Peer Advisor Mentor in the Peer Advisors for Veteran Education, a Representative in the Student Government Association, and Event Coordinator for the Sport Management Association.

As a high school senior, Shane entered the Delayed Entry Program. Shane completed boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot: San Diego, California and graduated in August 2005. Shane attended the Marine Corps School of Infantry at Camp Pendleton, California. During Shane's deployment to Fallujah, Shane's platoon was hit with Improvised Explosive Devices, Mortars, Rocket Propelled Grenades, Sniper Fire, and a countless number of small arms fire. Shane also spent some time in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where he trained Brazilian Marines in the art of Military Operations on Urban Terrain.

Ingrid Tighe

Ingrid Tighe works for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency as the Employment Analyst. Her role is to develop strategies for veterans' outreach and program coordination regarding employment. She also serves as a liaison between MVAA and other state departments/agencies regarding veterans' employment issues and coordinates the activities between these departments/agencies. Ingrid served as a U.S. Army Signal Corps officer from 1998 to 2005 with the 1st Infantry Division in Germany participating in NATO peacekeeping operations in Macedonia and Kosovo and later with the 1st Cavalry Division leading troops in 2004 to 2005 in the combat zone of Baghdad, Iraq.