Unique Issues for Student Veterans

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By The #s

• 73% of Student Veterans are male; 27% are female.
  • With only approx. 15% of military personnel being women, female student veterans are over represented in postsecondary education.

• 62% of Student Veterans are first generation students.
• 79% Student Veterans using GI benefits are attending public schools.
• In 2013, 1.6 million veterans were younger than 35\(^2\).
• States with 1 million or more total veterans in 2013. California (1.7 million), Texas (1.5 million) and Florida (1.5 million)\(^2\).

Most Veterans go through some period of adjustment while transitioning from service and military life. Some people deal with the transition in ways that make it difficult to enjoy life or to be successful in the civilian world. Many Veterans experience the following:

- Frequently feeling on edge or tense
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling angry or irritable
- Having trouble sleeping
- Feeling down for weeks or months

- Polled recent vets said they had felt isolated, and had difficulty adjusting to the campus culture and trouble relating to younger students.  

Many said they were bored with college life.

"It's the mundaneness of it," said a nursing student who traveled the world and did two Iraq tours as a security officer during six years in the USAF.

Almost all vets said they missed the action and camaraderie of the military and had considered returning.
So a big part of the problem is transitioning from these daily activities:
To this daily activity:
What issues can that feeling of anti-climax and other difficulties adjusting to college life lead to?

1. Boredom/dissatisfaction with collegiate life can lead some veterans to drop out prior to completion:
   • In 2014, the completion rate for veterans was 52%. 5% lower than the four-year graduation rate for non-veteran peers.

2. Interaction with non-vets:
   • It can be mutually difficult for student veterans to relate to college life and to interact with their non-veteran peers (sea-story 1)

3. Real-life intrudes—Student Veterans are non-traditional students.
   • Only 15% of Student Veterans are traditionally aged college students (18-23). Most are between the ages of 24 and 40.
   • Many Student Veterans have families. 47.3% of Student Veterans are married and 47% of Student Veterans have children.

http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveteran/docs/ed_todaysStudentVets.html
Other issues that can negatively affect a vets assimilation into college life:

**Disabilities**

*3.6 million* - Number of veterans with a service-connected disability rating in 2013. Of this number, 957,504 had a rating of 70 percent or higher. A "service-connected" disability is one that was a result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. Severity of one's disability is scaled from 0 to 100 percent, and eligibility for compensation depends on one's rating².

• That means that these 3.6 million are all missing limbs, paralyzed, horribly burned, or otherwise visibly scarred; correct?
• And under the ADA, all we need to do is give them reasonable accommodations and they’ll be good to go?
• For example, if a vet had a traumatic brain injury that affected his writing hand and he has difficulty taking notes in class, we just need to give him an accommodation to use a tape recorder and problem solved!

Not Necessarily.

• The Department of VA released a report on post-traumatic stress disorder, showing that since 9/11, nearly \(30\) percent of the 834,463 Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans treated at V.A. hospitals and clinics were diagnosed with PTSD\(^4\).

• According to the VA, Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur after someone has been through a traumatic event\(^3\). Often those physical injuries with resulting disabilities caused by the traumatic event are accompanied by PTSD.

• PTSD is a disability that can be service connected through VA Disability Compensation if it is diagnosed by a doctor. \(^3\) Unlike some issues that peak at 10-30 \%, a Veteran can get service connected compensation up to 100 \% for PTSD.\(^3\)

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\(2. \) http://www.infoplease.com/spot/veteranscensus1.html  
\(3. \) http://www.ptsdveteran.com/compensation.html  
\(4. \) http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/10/21/nearly-30-of-vets-treated-by-v-a-have-ptsd.html  
\(5. \) http://www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/resources_comp01.asp
Symptoms that a student vet with PTSD may have

- Feeling upset by things that remind him of what happened
- Having nightmares, vivid memories, or flashbacks of the event that make him feel like it’s happening all over again
- Feeling emotionally cut off from others
- Feeling numb or losing interest in things he used to care about
- Becoming depressed
- Thinking that he is always in danger
- Feeling anxious, jittery, or irritated
- Experiencing a sense of panic that something bad is about to happen
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Having trouble keeping his mind on one thing
- Having a hard time relating to and getting along with his spouse, family, or friends (anger issues)
In addition to the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33), Veterans that have a service-connected disability rating of at least 10% from the VA are eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E).

VR&E provides Post-secondary training at a college, vocational, technical or business schools.

Veterans participating in the VR&E Program are paid at the 100% rate level for their school and training time, even if their Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility is less than 100%. Additional benefits are also available through the VR&E Program, such as full payment of all books, fees and supplies as well as other supportive services.
5 Things You Should Know About Today’s Student Veteran
5. Student veterans are a highly diverse group—as diverse as America itself.

• There are no generalizations that are remotely accurate about this group, other than their common hope that more education will make their and their families’ lives better. Returning military personnel come from all over, and are a rainbow of colors, religions, and political views.

• It will benefit everyone if you open yourself to the enriching experience of listening closely to what they reveal about themselves and their lives. 
4. Veterans do not see themselves as victims. Ever.

• Victims are people who feel no control over their lives and perceive themselves as being at the mercy of others. Even when student veterans are psychologically or physically struggling, they still see themselves as powerful warriors.

• This is part of the reason it’s difficult for them to seek appropriate accommodations in the classroom. How can they acknowledge the change in their functioning as disability and still maintain their identity as a strong soldier living by the Warrior Ethos?

• Framing these accommodations as “adaptations” that many people need, not just veterans, helps this internal struggle. And, once they can accept the adjustments, academic life often gets significantly easier.
3. They can feel very alone on campus.

- When a service member is discharged from the military, it’s aptly termed “separation” and it comes with all the heartbreak and disorientation that being torn from one’s tribe brings.

- They just spent the last several years inextricably tied to some type of social system, whether it was a squadron, battalion, ship or just one on one with a ‘battle buddy’.

- During those years, solitude was rare. Now, suddenly they’re no longer attached to those systems, and the feeling of vulnerability can be terrifying.
2. They are often unaware of their own mild traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).

- Many frontline Marines and Soldiers have experienced a significant explosion, but if it wasn’t their HMMWV that blew up or their limb lost, they often don’t see it as their experience.
- When any explosive device detonates, its concussive impact on nearby soldiers is massive.
- If it weren’t for the brain’s remarkable plasticity and the indomitable human spirit, these men and women would be mostly incapable of learning.
  - Difficulties with memory, attention and concentration, as well as mental processing, abstract reasoning, and executive functioning, are common problems for student veterans.
- However, these TBIs can/are being overcome and a Vet that suffers from one should not be patronized (sea-story 2)
1. There are three things you should never say to a student veteran (but they still hear them every day).

1. “These wars were atrocities and a waste of human life”.
2. “I don’t get why you’re having so much trouble—you volunteered, right?”
3. And worst of all, “Did you ever kill anyone?”

• These comments do more than upset veterans; they wound the hearts of men and women who may already be overburdened with sorrow.

• For this reason, I believe faculty’s opinions about the military or recent wars are best kept out of the classroom.

• You may not always be able to prevent a student from saying something hurtful, but you can model awareness of other viewpoints, and explain how these comments might be hurtful (sea-story 3).
A place/entities for veterans is key to helping them fit into college.

• Well, the VFW and American Legion still exist, so why don’t recent vets join those? Some do; however:
  • The average age of American Legion members is about 70\(^8\). VFW posts are similar in age.
  • Therefore, recent OEF & OIF veterans are hesitant to join.

• Modern creations such as the Iraq, Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and Student Veterans of America (SVA) have memberships in similar demographics to our student vets and they therefore frequently join.

Summation:

• If a student veteran is struggling, he or she will probably do everything they can to hide that fact.
• A student veteran absolutely does not want your pity, to be patronized, or to be differentiated from other students.
• Providing access to vibrant entities to support veterans with assimilation into college life is key.
• Our ancestors fought the Civil War (600,000+ soldiers died), WWI (116,516 US dead) & WWII (405,399 US dead) and those that lived came home and got on with life\(^\text{10}\).

• **Current Veteran’s just want to do the same.**

10. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_casualties_of_war](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_casualties_of_war)
• How can you assist student vets?