



UW-La Crosse

Supporting Student Veterans:

A Guide for Staff and Faculty

What YOU need to know about student veterans

The number of student veterans and dependents on college campuses has been increasing due to the high numbers of troops returning from deployment, high unemployment rates among young Veterans, and enhanced GI Bill educational benefits.

- There have been over 2 million American service members deployed to a combat zone in the past ten years.
Of these:
 - 1/3 have served multiple tours in combat zones
 - 20,000 have been deployed into combat more than FIVE times
 - 30,000 are single mothers
 - 93% have been shot at or received artillery fire
 - 77% have had to fire at the enemy
 - 95% have seen dead bodies or remains
 - 89% were attacked or ambushed
 - 86% know a comrade who was injured or killed
 - 69% encountered injured civilian women or children and were unable to help
- The suicide rate among college-aged veterans is estimated 4 times higher than civilian peers.

Credit goes to the New England Journal of Medicine, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the American Council on Education, Student Veterans of America, and the University of California for the facts, figures, findings, and recommendations

Understanding Student Veterans

The following is an excerpt from Heather Landers from the Institute for Learning and teaching at Colorado State University

Student veterans have had a variety of experiences, from being in combat zones... to being posted administrative positions in the U.S. or all over the world. If a student identifies him/herself as a veteran, do not make assumptions about what his/her experience has been.

The transition from military to [college] life can be jarring for students, and students transitioning into civilian life and working to assimilate to being a college student can be overwhelmed. Be patient with students who are transitioning out of military life and into the [classroom], and know that they are working to understand a system which [may] seem very foreign to them.

Often student veterans are adult learners who have not been in a classroom since high school. As such, they may need academic support to "get them up to speed." Be familiar with the academic support services available to support your class so that you can refer the student should they need additional help. In addition, student veterans are also likely to have broad life experiences that have matured them, and a global perspective that can inform their studies.

Like other adult learners, student veterans generally are goal-oriented and motivated students. They may be frustrated by other students in the classroom who do not take their studies and their roles seriously. They tend to have high expectations of themselves and others, which can lead to frustration in the classroom if they are placed in groups with students who are not as motivated.

Although many student veterans are leaders in the classroom and may be outspoken,

never assume that the veteran wants to talk about his/her military experience. You can't know whether the student has positive or negative feelings about their experience in the military. Similarly, never ask the student veteran to give her/his opinions on the war or to speak about her/his experience unless you have developed a relationship with the student and are confident that they are comfortable speaking about it.

It is never appropriate to ask a military veteran, "Did you kill anyone?" Veterans say that they are frequently asked this question, and it is important that should this question come from another student in your class, you address its insensitivity and inappropriateness in the classroom.

Student veterans, especially those who are transitioning to college from combat zones, may be agitated or distracted by loud noises, or become "on alert" if they hear particular sounds. Instructional technology such as laser pointers, if accidentally directed at a combat veteran, can lead to a reaction. Be aware that a student veteran may need to leave the classroom because of anxiety related to unfamiliar sounds or distractions. These students may also feel more comfortable and secure sitting with their backs against a wall, so they may be inclined to sit in the back of the classroom. Be sensitive to this need for security and refrain from asking these students to move closer to the front of the room. If you notice a student who seems to be struggling with this sort of anxiety, and you have concerns, talk with that student in a private setting rather than in class or in front of other students. "

The full article can be found at this website:

<http://tilt.colostate.edu/tips/tip.cfm?tipid=152>

Classroom Tips

Tips on Making your Syllabus Veteran Friendly

Creating a syllabus that reflects awareness of student Veterans as a student group can communicate your interest and respect for their service and success in school.

One possibility is to include a Veteran-friendly statement in your syllabus. This one has been used at a number of different universities.

"Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) *are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to the instructor.*"

If possible, provide the syllabus in advance, with specific dates for assignments and tests to allow for planning around work and childcare. While it may not seem helpful to give specific dates for exams, the student can schedule childcare or work schedules around this, or use this as an opportunity to speak to you about rescheduling.

Common Classroom Situations

For veterans who appear easily distracted in class

Your first inclination may be to encourage the Veteran to sit in the front of the classroom, out of sight of some of these distractions. However, Veterans often prefer to sit in the back, where they have a better opportunity to assess the situation and any danger. Invite a conversation about what seating arrangement would work best for the Veteran. It may also be helpful to set rules around conduct in the classroom. For example, cell phones should be turned off or put on silent.

For veterans who appear sleepy in class

If you notice this behavior, it may be helpful to speak with the Veteran in person. Brainstorm together for ways to help him or her stay engaged (taking notes, asking questions, calling his or her name). It is not a good idea to

tap/touch a Veteran who is sleeping, as he or she may react quickly and in a manner of self-defense.

Be aware that class content may contain triggering material.

Certain writing assignments, readings, or videos may serve to bring up painful reminders. Although these materials may seem innocuous, the Veteran may still attribute meaning to them. This could lead to difficulty in concentrating.

What can I do? Provide information and prompts prior to introducing potentially distressing content (e.g., combat, war videos). Encourage pre-screening of videos, or skimming of readings and assignments. Be open to discussing alternative options for fulfilling the requirements of the class.

Other Ideas

Plan ahead to ensure all audio clips and videos are captioned, as many vets have experienced hearing loss. Captioning can also help keep them on track.

Ensure handouts and lecture notes are available on D2L.

Allow for attendance flexibility, as long as absences do not conflict with the core requirements of the class.

Consider allowing students to use an index card with faculty-approved notes for exams, or build memory joggers into exams.

Allow students to use index cards, blank paper, or a ruler to help keep their place on exams.

Allow students to take short breaks (5-10 minutes) during class sessions or exams when stressful situations arise.

If you think a veteran would benefit from a quiet testing area, encourage them to seek out guidance from disability resources.

Campus Resources

Veteran Educational Benefits

Nicole Jablonski

(608)785-8751

njablonski@uwlax.edu

Disability Resource Services

Jennifer Bell

(608) 785-6900

jbelle@uwlax.edu

Financial Aid

Jennifer Weber

(608)-785-8604

jweber@uwlax.edu

Counseling and Testing Center

Randy Kahn

608-785-8073

rkahn@uwlax.edu

Academic Advising

Frank Tierney

608-785-6953

ftierney@uwlax.edu

UW-L Services for Veterans

**Veterans Center
264 Cartwright**

UW-L Student Veterans Association

Priority Registration for Veterans

New Student Veteran Orientation

To request additional copies, or for more information, please contact:

Nicole Jablonski

116 Graff Main Hall

608-785-8751

njablonski@uwlax.edu



UW-La Crosse Veteran Services

Resources in the Community for Veterans

Benefit Assistance

Local County Veterans Office

Adam Flood

Room 130 400 4th St N

La Crosse, WI 54601-3228608-785-9719

Transition and Counseling

La Crosse Vet Center

20 Copeland Ave

La Crosse, WI 54603

608-782-4403

Medical Care

Tomah VA Medical Center

500 E. Veterans Street

Tomah WI 54660

608-372-3971

Quick ways YOU can help:

Foster Peer Support

Encourage participation in the Student Veterans Organization, along with:

- Other clubs and organizations of interest
- Peer-aged tutoring
- Group counseling/therapy, if needed

Offer Transitional Support

- Help students secure funding and housing
- Provide opportunities for physical activity
- Create leadership/volunteer opportunities
- Help students recognize signs of physical or mental stress, how to avoid triggers, and where to seek help when they need it
- Encourage students to talk things out
- Create "safe zones" where they can fall back, relax, and mentally regroup

Provide Academic Support

- Give appropriate enrollment advice, as VA benefits don't pay for "extra" classes
- Help students ease into their schedule; avoid "hard" classes in the first term back
- Help students obtain physical or learning accommodations if needed
- Coordinate supplemental tutoring if needed.
- Be willing to provide flexibility when military obligations conflict with class