

Combat Zone to Campus: Facilitating Effective Transitions

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Student Veterans

- At end of Fall '09-'10 semester, 173,000 veterans in classrooms at 6500 colleges and universities.
- New GI Bill (Chapter 33) improved benefits makes pursuit of post-secondary education more attractive, especially in present difficult employment environment.
- Veterans often mature, highly motivated, study hard, and have wide-ranging experiences including exposure to other cultures.

Successful campus environment for the Student Veteran

- Elements of successful campus environment
 - Welcoming environment
 - Peer Support
 - Mental and behavioral health services knowledgeable about readjustment problems of student veterans.
 - Readily available assistance for obtaining benefits and services from VA and elsewhere.

Student Veteran- supportive campus

- Interacting with veterans
 - Welcome veteran home, express appreciation for service.
 - O.K. Questions: Where were you stationed? What did you do in the military? How are you doing now?
 - Ill-advised Questions: Did you kill anyone? Did you see anyone die? Do you think we're winning? Do you think it's worth the cost?

Interacting with the student veteran

- Avoid
 - Pressing a veteran for information about their military service they might not want to share with you.
 - Minimizing the challenges the student veteran might face.
 - Making assumptions about any veteran's political or foreign policy views.
 - Singling out a veteran without prior approval.

U. of Minnesota website

Student Veterans: Campus Support

- Importance of peer contact and peer support:
 - Campus locations encouraging veterans to interact.
 - E.g., VETS Center, TTC
 - Student Organizations
 - Student Veterans of America (SVA): national coalition of student veteran groups; founded in 2008 as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization to help develop student groups on campuses, connect these groups with resources, and advocate at state and national levels for student veterans. Over 200 member groups.
 - Mentoring (“buddy”) practices: established student veterans helping newer student veterans learn the ropes.

Campus support: Mental Health

- American Psychological Association recommendations to Congress regarding student veteran mental and behavioral health care on campus:
 - Making resources available for efforts to address mental and behavioral health risks, including suicide risk.
 - Providing training to campus mental health professionals regarding deployment and readjustment issues of student veterans and their families.
 - Developing mechanisms to outreach to veterans who begin their post-secondary education online while deployed.
 - Presented 5/19/09 to House Veterans Affairs Health Subcommittee by Jeffrey Pollard, Ph.D., ABPP, Director of the Counseling and Psychological Services Center, George Mason University.

Student Veteran and Suicide

- Recently deployed veterans at increased risk for suicide, especially if readjustment not going well.
- Everyone can be alert for warning signs: talking about death or suicide; depressed mood.
- If underlying condition (e.g., Depression, PTSD, mTBI) is treated effectively, suicide can usually be averted.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK)
 - Veterans press “1” and are routed to VA Crisis Counselor; available 24/7.
 - www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org internet chat with VA Crisis Counselor; available 24/7

Student Veteran: Suicide Programs

- SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) Suicide Prevention Resource Center grants:
 - Purpose: “provide prevention support, training, and resources to assist organizations and individuals to develop suicide prevention programs, interventions, and policies...”
 - “SAMHSA strongly encourages all applicants to consider the unique needs of returning veterans and their families in developing their proposal project.”

Campus support: veterans' benefits

- Maintain effective working relationships with DoD, VA and SC County Veterans Affairs. Events such as VA Health Fair on campus can facilitate student veteran's access to care and better health.
- VA contacts
 - Charleston Vet Center (843) 789-7000
 - VAMC OEF/OIF Care Management Team
 - Pat O'Leary, Transition Patient Advocate (843) 789-6648
- SC County Veterans Affairs
 - Charleston County (843) 974-6360
 - Berkeley County (843) 377-8506
 - Dorchester County (843) 832-0050

Effective campus environment: summary

- Student veteran feels welcome and their military service appreciated. Help is available to transition from the battlefield to the classroom, including counseling services.
- Peer support helps the student veteran make effective transition to new environment.
- Cooperative relationships exist between campus and available VA and DoD resources. Benefits resources are readily accessible with minimal red tape.