



## Supporting Student Veterans

### Background



More military veterans reside in California than anywhere in the nation, and in 2010-11 more than 44,000 enrolled in a California Community College. An additional 8,000 to 10,000 active duty personnel were also enrolled (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2011). The number one reason cited for joining our all-volunteer military was the promise of support for post-secondary education (Asch, Fair & Kilburn, 2000; Congressional Budget Office, 2007). Many endured long tours in Iraq or

Afghanistan, and while most (70%) who fought in these wars have no mental health diagnoses, roughly 1 in 5 (18.5%) have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or depression; another 1 in 5 (19.5%) experienced a traumatic brain injury during deployment; and many more experience significant stress readjusting to civilian life (Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008). Roughly half of those who need treatment seek it, but only half who receive treatment get minimally adequate care (Ibid). Veterans of recent wars are already an integral part of college campuses, and their numbers are expected to increase dramatically. The more campus stakeholders know about student veterans and their experiences, daily stresses, and mental health issues, and the resources available to support them, the more likely our veterans will receive the benefits our nation promised in exchange for their service.

### Resources and Support

The Chancellor's Office is engaged in several statewide projects to expand support services for veterans entering system colleges:

- **Welcome Home Trainings.** Provided free of charge through the CCC Student Mental Health Program, "Welcome Home: Veterans on Campus" is a 4-hour training developed to provide faculty and staff with the knowledge needed to respond better to issues that emerge in the classroom and on campus, and information on where to make referrals for services on campus and in the community. Topics covered include military cultural competence, PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Military Sexual Violence (MSV), and other transition challenges specific to student vets, and includes a panel of local student veterans. Participants report that the training:
  - Increased their ability to identify and respond to potential behavioral issues that may emerge with student veterans
  - Improved their ability to work with student veterans

- Increased their awareness of the mental health issues and daily stresses that student veterans may face
- Increased their awareness of resources available for student veterans

The form to apply to host a Welcome Home Training on your campus can be found at [www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org/training/onsite\\_training\\_events.php](http://www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org/training/onsite_training_events.php). Additional downloadable resource materials are also available at the site to assist faculty and staff in supporting student veterans on campus.

- **Veterans on Campus Online Training.** Also provided free of charge through the CCC Student Mental Health Program, online suicide prevention training from Kognito Interactive is available upon request to all California community colleges. The training uses avatars and role playing simulations to present faculty and staff with typical challenges faced by student veterans so they are better able to assist and potentially refer



students to appropriate support services. Veterans on Campus was developed with input from leading education experts and veteran organizations. In this training you can engage with virtual student veterans in three situations they might encounter due to their transition: redeployment, a class discussion about conflicts overseas, and signs of post deployment stress. In order to qualify to receive the training, colleges need to participate in a one hour consultation call to review readiness. If you are ready to set up trainings for your California community college, please contact the Program Director, Julie Spiegler at [julie@kognito.com](mailto:julie@kognito.com). Learn more about Kognito trainings available through the CCC Student Mental Health Program at <http://resources.kognito.com/ccc/trainings/>.

- **Veterans Resource Center Project.** Fifty-one community colleges have established a Veterans Resource Center (VRC) on campus where student veterans can interact with one another and obtain information and services to support them in their transition from a military culture to a college culture. To encourage more colleges to develop a VRC, the Chancellor's Office has provided free hardware, software and on-site training in assistive technology to pilot and auxiliary sites. VRCs address three components of veterans' lives:

- *Academics* – Providing students with tools, strategies and insights that optimize academic success
- *Comradery* – Providing services and counseling directly through fellow veterans, building upon the military traditions of shared values and experiences, and providing a bridge to a wide range of campus services
- *Wellness* – Providing referrals to on- and off-campus resources, such as the student health clinic, and providing consultation to college faculty and staff regarding issues specific to returning veterans and their family members

VRCs provide the following services:

- Access to computers and assistance in the use of assistive technologies, including specialized software for those suffering the effects of traumatic brain injury
- Academic counseling and tutoring
- Peer support and mentoring
- Financial aid and veterans benefit information and application assistance
- Referral to on- and off-campus resources (e.g., Disabled Students Programs and Services, local VA center, etc.)



For additional information on Veterans Resource Centers, contact your local community college, or go to [www.htctu.fhda.edu/vrc/vrc\\_sites.html](http://www.htctu.fhda.edu/vrc/vrc_sites.html) for a listing of pilot and auxiliary VRC locations.

- **Troops to College Program.** Through this program designed especially for combat veterans, veterans and their families may enroll in courses about combat stress, PTSD, and other issues related to a successful transition to civilian life and the college environment. Classes provide instruction in interpersonal skills, methods of adapting to civilian life and work careers, and techniques for managing military operational stress. For more information, visit <http://www.labor.ca.gov/pdf/troopstocollege.pdf>.
- **“Honor a Hero, Hire a Vet” Job and Resource Fairs.** The Chancellor’s Office co-sponsors and coordinates local campus participation in regional job fairs held throughout the state. These events inform veterans of employment opportunities as well as technical education and workforce training resources. Participants can
  - Find out about job opportunities
  - Meet and interview with employers
  - Learn about educational opportunities
  - Obtain information about benefits, training, and career options
  - Get assistance with CalVet home loan financing

To access an up-to-date listing of job fairs and workshops for veterans throughout California, look for the American flag at [www.edd.ca.gov/Jobs\\_and\\_Training/Job\\_Fairs\\_and\\_Events.htm](http://www.edd.ca.gov/Jobs_and_Training/Job_Fairs_and_Events.htm).

- **Veterans Clubs.** Many community colleges have veterans clubs that are connected with the Student Veterans of America (SVA). Founded in 2008, SVA is a coalition of student veterans groups on college campuses across the United States. These groups coordinate campus activities, provide pre-professional networking, and provide general support for student veterans in higher education. For more information, visit [www.studentveterans.org](http://www.studentveterans.org).

## Additional Support and Technical Assistance

The Chancellor's Office has established a support and communication infrastructure for campus veterans' programs coordinators:

- **Veterans Web Page.** This resource provides up-to-date information about educational benefits for veterans and their families, training and apprentice programs, and housing assistance provided by the US and California Departments of Veterans Affairs and the California Department of Veterans Affairs. [www.californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Students/SucceedinCollege/Veterans.aspx](http://www.californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Students/SucceedinCollege/Veterans.aspx)
- **Veterans Summit Web Page.** The California Community Colleges hosted the second Veterans Summit in December 2012 in Redwood City to examine college best practices for serving those who served their country, including VA benefits and education plans, creating Veterans Resource Centers, women veterans, mental health issues confronting veterans, and accessing federal, state and local resources. The third Veterans Summit will be held in Los Angeles/Orange County at the end of 2013. On this web page you can view a short film on innovative programs statewide, and multiple video vignettes submitted by individual colleges that feature student veterans sharing their personal stories and discussing the importance of understanding their circumstances and needs. [www.californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/2012VeteransSummit.aspx](http://www.californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/2012VeteransSummit.aspx)
- **Regional Advisory Committee.** The Chancellor's Office has organized a Veteran Services Regional Representatives Advisory Committee and hosts regular meetings of this group to better identify student veteran needs across the system, and to encourage the exchange of innovative ideas and effective practices for serving them. Contact David Lawrence, Veterans Program Specialist at [dlawrence@cccoco.edu](mailto:dlawrence@cccoco.edu) if you would like to connect with your campus representative.
- **Systemwide Email List.** The Chancellor's Office has established an internal system wide email list, through which it communicates information and strategies related to serving student veterans. This list provides an efficient way to rapidly disseminate important or urgent information to all veteran programs and service providers at each college, and is a forum for the exchange of ideas between colleges about issues related to student veterans. To add yourself to this listserv, contact David Lawrence, Veterans Program Specialist at [dlawrence@cccoco.edu](mailto:dlawrence@cccoco.edu).

Asch, B.J., Fair, C.C., & Kilburn, M.R. (2000). *An assessment of recent proposals to improve the Montgomery GI Bill*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2011). *Connecting military service and civilian life*. Special report: Board of Governors. Retrieved from [http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/reportsTB/veterans\\_report\\_090811\\_final.pdf](http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/reportsTB/veterans_report_090811_final.pdf) on 4/12/13.

Congressional Budget Office. (2007). *The all-volunteer military: Issues and performance (Pub.No. 2960)*. Retrieved April 12, 2013 from <http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/ftpdocs/83xx/doc8313/07-19-militaryvol.pdf>.

Tanielian, T.L., & Jaycox, L.H. (2008). *Invisible wounds of war: psychological and cognitive injuries, their consequences, and services to assist recovery*. Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation.

## California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program (CCC SMHP)

Toll-free: (855) 304-1647 ~ [www.ccstudentmentalhealth.org](http://www.ccstudentmentalhealth.org)

**The California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA)** is an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Prevention and Early Intervention programs implemented by CalMHSA are funded through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63). Prop 63 provides the funding and framework needed to expand mental health services to previously underserved populations and all of California's diverse communities.