Welcome Home: Veterans on Campus

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Developed by David M. Joseph, Ph.D.

With 2.2 million veterans in the state of California, many will join the ranks of Community Colleges.
Welcome Home: Veterans on Campus Training

Some will experience readjustment challenges.

Some will struggle with mental health issues.

All of them have earned our help.
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Purpose and Objectives

1. Learn about military culture and today’s veterans
2. Consider how veterans’ experiences may impact their learning
3. Review common challenges for veterans, such as PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury.
4. Suggest strategies for increasing academic success for today’s returning veterans.

The following slides and videos address mature themes.

Please take care of yourself and excuse yourself if you feel uncomfortable.
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Veterans in California’s Community Colleges

- With **2.2 million veterans** residing in California, the state leads the nation in the number of veterans.
- **Many of these veterans will enroll in a California community college.**
- In **2010-11, more than 44,000 veterans** utilized education benefits at a California community college.

History of the GI Bill

- **1944** ➔ The Servicemen's Readjustment Act was created for World War II Veterans. During its peak in 1947, **49% of college admissions were Veterans.**
- **1984** ➔ became known as the Montgomery GI Bill.
- **2008** ➔ **Post 9/11 GI Bill**
  - Enhanced benefits to Veterans that have served on active duty on or after September 11, 2001,
  - Eligible Veterans can transfer their education benefits to family members.

Benefits of the Post 9/11 GI Bill

- Tuition and fees are paid directly to the school
- **A basic allowance for housing (BAH) at the rate of E-5 with dependents**
- An annual books and supplies stipend
  - BAH and book stipends are sent directly to the student
- A one-time rural payment benefit

The Post 9/11 GI Bill will cover up to **36 months** of education benefits and benefits are payable for **15 years** following your release from your last stint on active duty.
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A few downsides...

- Not paid for time you are on break from school. If you aren’t in school for the summer or winter break, you will not be paid BAH.
- The percentage of benefit you receive depends on how much time you served on active duty after 9/11. 36 months is the minimum to get 100% of the benefit.
- Most students require more than 36 months to finish school.

Growth of Post 9/11 GI Bill

ENGAGEMENT

National survey of 362,000 first-year students and seniors attending 564 US colleges and universities by NSSE (2010) found:
- Student Veterans perceived lower levels of campus support than non-Veterans
- Interacted less with faculty members
- Spent twice as many hours per week working
- Six times as many hours on dependent care
- Twice as likely to report at least one disability

NSSE: National Survey of Student Engagement, 2010
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Common stereotypes about veterans:

Veteran Education Benefit Recipients

Connecting Military Service and Civilian Life, September 2011, CCCCO
Common stereotypes about veterans:
- All veterans are in crisis
- All veterans can obtain VA services
- All veterans have served in combat
- You have to be in combat to “get” PTSD
- Veterans are angry
- Veterans are men

Branches of the Armed Services
- Marine Corps → Marine
- Army → Soldier
- Navy → Sailor
- Coast Guard → Guardsman
- Air Force → Airman

A Critical Distinction

Oorah! Vs. Hooah!
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### Branches of the Armed Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Employed full time by the military – 24/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserves</td>
<td>Typically 1 weekend per month and a once yearly 2-week training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army and Air Force National Guard</td>
<td>Comes out of state militias, under direction of the state Governor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available during times of national crisis or war.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responds to natural disasters, e.g. Hurricane Katrina.</td>
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### Basic Military Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OIF</td>
<td>Operation Iraqi Freedom (Operation New Dawn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEF</td>
<td>Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GWOT</td>
<td>Global War on Terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOS</td>
<td>A person’s job (Example: infantryman, or mechanic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device (bomb)</td>
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### Basic Mental Health Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBI</td>
<td>Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mTBI</td>
<td>Mild Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MST</td>
<td>Military Sexual Trauma</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Increasingly Diverse & Complex Military

More ethnic minorities → 30% of Armed Services

More women → 14% of Active Duty

In relationships → 56% married

Educated → 94% H.S. Diploma/GED

Young & Old

• Active Duty → 42% deployed are 17-25yrs
• Reserve → 56% deployed are 30yrs +

Female Veterans

As of October 2010, there were 1,840,380* female veterans

• 166,709 * in California
• Little recognition for combat
• More likely to be homeless
• More likely to get divorced
• MST more likely
• Less likely to find treatment groups.
• Less likely to find a social cohort that can relate to their experiences.

Elements of Military Culture

• Chain of command means following orders
• Routine & Structure – what happens when this is gone?
• Aggression – faster, harder, louder, meaner
• Respect – for authority and for oneself
• Strength – not asking for help
• Honor – used to being trusted
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Military Service in U.S.

How Many Have Served in OIF & OEF?
Since Sept. 11, 2001, 2,400,000 American military personnel had been deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan or both. As of August, 2011.

At least 1,000,000 have deployed more than once.
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What have veterans experienced while in combat?

- 58% Received small arms fire
- 78% Received incoming artillery, rocket or mortar fire
- 58% Being attacked or ambushed
- 47% Clearing/Searching homes or buildings
- 52% IED/Booby trap exploded near you
- 72% Knew someone seriously injured or killed

What have veterans experienced while in combat?

- 36% Shooting or directing fire at the enemy
- 13% Being directly responsible for the death of an enemy combatant
- 60% Saw dead bodies or human remains
- 33% Handled or uncovered human remains
- 56% Had a member of their unit become a casualty
- 49% Saw dead or seriously injured Americans

Typical Deployment Cycle

- DEPLOYMENT: Combat, constant danger, unable to help at home
- PREPARING FOR DEPLOYMENT: Not really home. Working many hours. Stress of leaving family and preparing for being away.
- HOMECOMING: Adjusting to non-war environment, reconnecting with family, knowing you have to deploy again.

Deployment

Warning!

- The following brief videos depict combat scenarios in Iraq.
- The scenes do not depict graphic bloodshed, but they are violent, and the language is coarse.
- Please feel free to excuse yourself if you would not like to watch.

Clearing a House in Fallujah
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Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED)

Driving Differently

Combat Zone: Keeping other vehicles at a distance, driving fast, on guard for ambush or IEDs.

Home: Aggressive driving leads to speeding tickets, accidents, fatalities.

Driving in Iraq
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Impact of Deployment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive Impact</th>
<th>No Impact</th>
<th>Negative Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Children</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Spouse</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
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Rewards and Burdens of Military Service

Percentage of Post 9/11 Veterans who say that as a result of their service:

- More Prepared for Job/Career: 72%
- Gained Self Confidence: 90%
- More Mature: 93%
- Proud of Service: 96%

Positives of Military Service

- Pride
- Values and honor
- Significant responsibility, especially during war time
- Competency
- Sense of accomplishment
- Sense of meaning and belonging
- Development of close relationships/family
- Benefits (e.g., healthcare, education)
Coming Home:
Transitioning to Civilian Life after OIF/OEF

“Home - the place many think is the safe haven to find relief from the stressors of war-may initially be a letdown. When a loved one asks, ‘What was it like?’ and you look into eyes that have not seen what yours have, you suddenly realize that home is farther away that you ever imagined.”

Down Range: From Iraq and Back, by Cantrell & Dean, 2005
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Wounds of War

43% report an “emotionally traumatic or distressing experience.”

16% suffered a serious injury.
  o 2x more likely to report “difficulty adjusting”
  o 3x more likely to have PTSD
  o Less likely to hold full-time jobs.

Typical Transition Challenges

• Feeling separate. Vet has changed, and others too
• Managing expectations to be the same as before
• Letting down “guard” – allowing intimacy
• Finding employment – choosing a career
• Rebuilding community – connecting to old friends
• Lack of daily structure – what should I do today?
• Finding excitement in every day activities

Communication & Language

Many vets find it very difficult to explain their experiences, their thoughts and their feelings to others who were not there.
Communicating Less Assertively

Adjusting to a less direct communication style can be difficult and take time.

Mental Health Challenges for Veterans
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Common Existential Issues
• How can there be a higher power and such bad things happen?
• Why did I live and others died?
• Am I murderer because I killed? Because I let others kill?
• How can I ever get close to someone again?
• I will always feel alone. No one will ever understand me.

Disorders in OIF & OEF Veterans
• ~18.5% have PTSD or depression
• ~19.5% a traumatic brain injury
• ~70% have no mental health disorder

Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Diagnoses in All Services
As of September 7, 2010

U.S. Military Census Individual Services, Department of Defense Disability and Readjustment Programs, October 4, 2010
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**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur following exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.

**STRESS DISORDER**

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
A stress disorder that can occur following a traumatic event.
- Directly experiencing
- Witnessing in person
- Learning that traumatic event occurred to a family or close friend (violent)
- Extreme repeated exposure to details.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of a traumatic event.
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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Symptoms usually begin soon after the traumatic event, but they may not appear until months or years later.

- Lasts longer than 4 weeks
- Causes great distress
- Interfere with work or home life

PTSD = Failure of RECOVERY

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Many people with PTSD naturally get better over time. But for some, PTSD is a chronic condition that does not improve over time.

- Reliving (re-experiencing memories & intrusive thoughts)
- Avoiding (triggers & reminders)
- Hyper-aroused (overwhelming feelings)
- Numb & Detached (other people, activities)
Reliving (re-experiencing symptoms):
If you have PTSD, you might:

- **Think about trauma** when you don’t want to.
- Have frightening **nightmares** about the trauma (every night).
- Experience **flashbacks** during which you are **re-experiencing** the trauma.

Avoiding
If you have PTSD, you might:

- Avoid situations or people that **remind you of** traumatic events.
- *Avoid* **talking or thinking about** the trauma.
- Avoid situations that trigger a **fight or flight** alarm response.
- Prefer to spend most of your time alone at home, to avoid being triggered.

Hyperarousal
If you have PTSD, you might:

- Feel **jittery** or **stressed** most of the time.
- Be **constantly alert** and on the lookout for danger
- Feel very **uncomfortable with strangers**
- Feel suddenly (VERY) angry or irritable
- Have trouble falling or staying **asleep**
- Find it difficult to **concentrate**
- Be easily startled by unexpected **noises**
Who Get’s PTSD?
After a traumatic event, you are more likely to get PTSD if:
✓ You have experienced trauma in your past.
✓ You have family members with mental health problems.
✓ You do not have a good “social support” system.
✓ You are female.

Short Break

PTSD Affects the Brain
Impaired Fight or Flight Response
Fight or Flight
- Heart rate and blood pressure increase
- Pupils dilate to take in as much light as possible
- Muscles tense up
- Nonessential systems (digestion & immune system) shut down to allow more energy for emergency functions
- Trouble focusing on small tasks (brain is directed to focus only on big picture in order to determine where threat is coming from)

PTSD is Affects the Brain
Impaired Fight or Flight Response

PTSD Affects the Brain
Impaired Fight or Flight Response
PTSD Affects the Brain
Impaired Fight or Flight Response

Common Fight or Flight Triggers
• Someone standing too close
• Strangers
• Feeling cornered, trapped or stuck
• Feeling out of control & overwhelmed
• Reminders or associations (tiger or kitten)
• Disorder – lack of order & chaos
• Being surprised or startled

Common PTSD Triggers
On Campus
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PTSD on Campus

Parking

Noises and Distractions
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Timed Tests

Class Assignments

Campus Crowds
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Crowded Classrooms

Coping with PTSD
And the Consequences of Trauma

PTSD & Substance Use
Alcohol can be a culturally acceptable way to blow off steam and be sociable...
PTSD & Substance Use

But it (along with other substances) can be a way to manage the overwhelming experience of PTSD.

PTSD & Substance Use

The odds of substance use disorders are 3 times greater in individuals with PTSD.

- Numbing out
- Avoiding triggers
- Avoiding intimacy
- Getting sleep
- Being sociable
- Giving up
- Punishing oneself

PTSD & Relationships
PTSD & Suicide

Veterans with PTSD have a 6-10x greater chance of committing suicide than U.S. pop.

Panagioti, Gooding & Tarrier, 2009

PTSD & Suicide

• VA reports 22 suicides per day among the entire veteran population and 1,000 suicide attempts per month.

• Female veterans are 2-3x more likely to commit suicide than nonveteran women.

Panagioti, Gooding & Tarrier, 2009

Losing the Battle
The Challenge of Military Suicide
Center for New American Security
October, 2011, p3
Suicide: Precipitating Events

- Loss of health (real or imaginary).
- Recent, loss (especially a marriage or relationship)
- Being faced with humiliation or failure.
- Difficult times: holidays, anniversaries.
- Loss of job, home, money, status, self-esteem, personal security.

Suicide: Possible Warning Signs

- Appearing sad or depressed most of the time.
- Anxious, agitated, unable to sleep, or sleeping all the time.
- Neglecting personal welfare; deteriorating appearance.
- Poor attendance when usually consistent
  - Frequent and dramatic mood changes.
  - Expressing feelings of excessive guilt or shame.
  - Failure or decreased performance.

A Remedy for PTSD

*Lack of social support* has been found to be the strongest predictor of PTSD.

(Brewin et al. 2000)
Military Sexual Trauma

Pentagon reports sharp rise in military sexual assaults
The 35% increase in unreported incidents over two years underscores a growing problem despite repeated initiatives to combat rape and assaults.

May 07, 2013 | By David S. Cloud, Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon estimated that 26,000 members of the military were sexually assaulted in unreported incidents last year — 35% more than in 2010 — a severe trend that senior officials warned could threaten recruiting and retention of women in uniform.

Military Sexual Trauma

Did you experience any unwanted sexual attention, uninvited sexual advances, or forced sex while in the military? Does this experience continue to affect your life today?

20% of Women & 1% of Men Answered “Yes”
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How is MST Unique?
Particular aspects of military culture make it more difficult and complicated to report MST:
- Strict code of chain of command
- War Zone: Nowhere to go!
- Weakness vs. self reliance
- Effect on Career and advancement
- Need to rely on perpetrators for safety/security
- Report may not be believed, or victim may be punished.

Traumatic Brain Injury
The “signature wound” of the current conflicts

What is Traumatic Brain Injury?
Traumatically induced physiologic disruption of brain function as manifested by at least one of the following:
- Any period of loss of consciousness (LOC)
- Any loss of memory for events before or after the injury
- Any alteration in mental state at the time of the accident
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Warning!

- The following video depicts combat scenarios in Iraq.
- The scenes do not depict graphic bloodshed, but they are violent.
- Please feel free to excuse yourself if you would not like to watch.
Common Symptoms – mTBI & PTSD

Cognitive Problems
- Memory
- Concentration & attention
- Learning difficulties
- Following complicated directions
- Language problems
- Impulse control
- Slow or cloudy thinking

Affective / Behavioral Problems
- Frustration or irritability
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Reduced tolerance for stress
- Sleep problems
- Stumbling out or flipping out
- Inflexibility
- Feeling guilty
- Denial of problems
- Social appropriateness

Somatic Complaints
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Poor balance
- Dizziness
- Changes in vision, hearing, or touch
- Sexual problems

mTBI
What you might not see:

A Day in the Life
of a Student Veteran with PTSD, mTBI
- Poor sleep, due to hyper-vigilance (thought she heard a noise outside).
- Intrusive thoughts and memories about past
- Takes meds to sleep (prescribed or not prescribed)
- Overslept due to effect of meds
- Stuck in rush-hour traffic due to late start
A Day in the Life of a Student Veteran with PTSD

- Runs to class exacerbates chronic pain
- Regular seat not available
- Feels out of control due to change in routine
- Remembers that test is open book but forgot backpack in car.
- Anxiety, shame, frustration, and test has not yet started.

A Day in the Life of a Student Veteran with PTSD

It’s only 9am

Short Break
Returning Veterans: Challenges on Campus and in the Classroom

Advisory

- The following video was made by an OIF veteran.
- The dialog contains obscenities
- Please feel free to excuse yourself if you would not like to watch.
Iraq Veteran and Student Talk

Typical Challenges on Campus

How can Military Service affect a student’s learning experience?

- Wants to accomplish too much too quickly
  - Age, past accomplishments, known path
- Classroom peers may not be able to relate to them
- Feels offended when not trusted
- Boredom – this is all there is?
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Managing $$$

Waiting in Line

Bureaucracy
Protests and Signs

Disrespect to Instructors

Most veterans feel strongly about acting respectfully towards instructors.
- Texting
- Arguing
- Talking in Class

Lack of Cultural Competency

I have drill this weekend but finals — what can I do? If I fail classes it will kill my GPA and my GI Bill.

I have no idea.

So who can help me?

I have no idea.
Insensitive Comments

“You would have to be a complete idiot to join the Army these days.”

— Community College Instructor

as reported by OIF Veteran

Asking Questions

Good ways to start a conversation include:

• What did you do in the military?
• Where did you go? (Don’t assume all veterans served in Iraq/Afghanistan.)
• How are you and your family doing?
Recommendations

• **Remember:** Cultural, mental health & physical issues can make it difficult for veterans to adapt to the requirements of campus life.

Recommendations

• Be specific, slow and methodical when giving instruction.
  
  • Use *outcome specific* language.
  
  • Refer for treatment or to DSPS when it seems appropriate.
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Recommendations

• **Encourage involvement** in campus activities. Many vets find it hard to reconnect.

• Give **direct** and **honest** feedback.

Recommendations

• Include **welcoming text** in syllabus.

• **Be flexible** when possible.

• **Warm handoffs!** Make that extra call.

Recommendations

• Have a **contact person** on campus who is familiar with veteran related issues. Know how to reach that person.
Recommendations

• Do not **underestimate the challenges** that some veterans face.

• **Don’t underestimate** what veterans have **accomplished** already – and what they can and will accomplish (with some guidance)!

How Veterans Enhance Your Campus

• Resiliency and Strength

• Alternative perspectives & life experiences

  = **DIVERSITY**

• Motivation & determination

• Leadership

• Maturity

Remember, when you are not sure what to say to a veteran, just say...
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Welcome Home.