



The Road Home...From Combat to College and Beyond

# How Your Campus Can Better Serve Student Veterans

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# Content Overview

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## Section 1

# Introduction

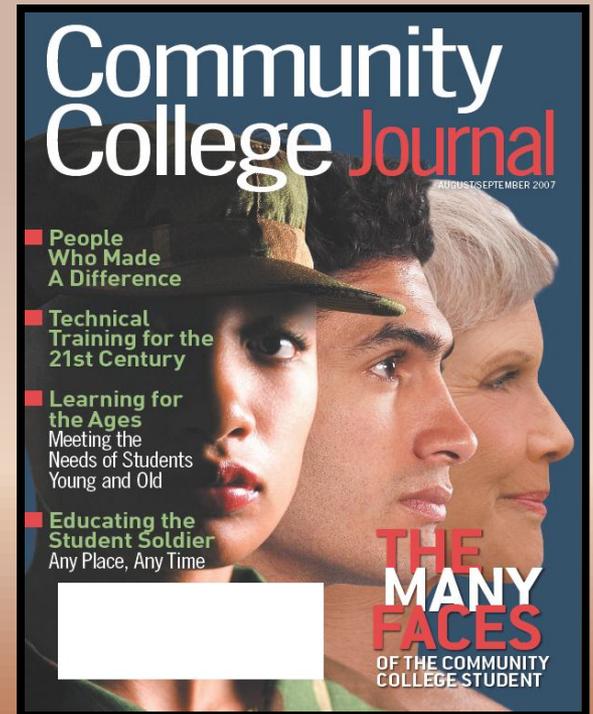
- American Troops have deployed almost 3.3 million troops to Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Females make up 14-15% of the US active-duty. The percentage of women in the military has doubled in the last 30 years.
- 30,000 men and women leave the military and return to California each year. That number is expected to increase dramatically as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down and as the military downsizes due to budget cuts.
- With an estimated 2.2 million veterans residing in California, the state's veteran population leads the nation.

# Introduction Continued...

More than 26,600 veterans utilized their educational benefits at a community college in 2009. In addition, there were an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 active duty military personnel enrolled in the education system during that same period.

# Introduction Continued...

As these veterans transition back to civilian life, many will take advantage of their educational benefits and look to the community colleges as their best option.



# Introduction Continued...

However, for the majority of veterans attending community colleges, this is their first real experience in higher education, and the transition from military to college can be quite challenging.



## Section 2

# Understanding our Student Veterans: Military Culture 101



U.S. Coast  
Guard  
(Guardsman)



U.S. Air Force  
(Airman)



U.S. Army  
(Soldiers)



U.S. Marines  
(Marines)



U. S. Navy  
(Seaman)

# Military Lingo...

**Active Duty** = Employed full time by the military –  
24/7

**Anniversary Date** = dates that have an adverse effect  
on our life based on a traumatic event or events.

**CalVet** = California Department of Veterans Affairs

**DD-214** = Standard Separation Document from the  
military

**DOD** = Department of Defense

**GWOT** = Global War on Terror

**IED** = Improvised Explosive Device

# Military Lingo continued..

**KIA** = Killed in Action

**mTBI** = mild Traumatic Brain Injury

**MOS** = Military Occupation Specialty (a person job classification)

**MST** = Military Sexual Trauma

**OEF** = Operation Enduring Freedom (i.e. the Afghanistan War)

**OIF** = Operation Iraqi Freedom (i.e. the Iraq War)

**OND** = Operation New Dawn (marks official end to the Operation Iraqi Freedom & combat operations by U.S. forces in Iraq)

# Military Lingo continued..

**PTSD** = Post traumatic Stress Disorder

**TAP** = Transitional Assistance Program

**TBI** = Traumatic Brain Injury

**Reserves/National Guard** = Typically 1 weekend per month & 2 week long training during summer months.

**VA** = Veterans Administration

**WIA** = Wounded in Action

# BATTLEMIND



- A soldier's inner strength to face fear and adversity during combat with courage. It is the will to persevere and win; It is resilience.
- This training helps soldiers stay alive in combat but can become problematic when carried over to life at home.

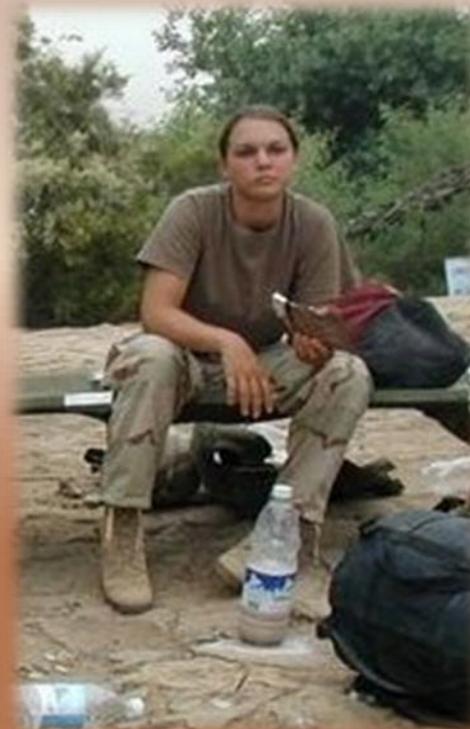
## Section 3

# Typical Transition Challenges for Student Veterans

### Marriage, Family & Work Stressors



### Multiple Deployments



### Loss of Camaraderie



# Transition Challenges Continued...

Due to the length of absence from school, the majority of veterans test into remedial courses, making it difficult to reach their educational goals before their GI Bill benefits terminate.



# Transition Challenges Continued...



Financial Aid stressors  
(FAFSA, unemployment  
forms, GI Bill payment,  
etc.)

Difficulty navigating  
through the  
bureaucracy of VA  
paperwork in order to  
receive their benefits.  
(i.e., GI Bill, disability  
claims, health benefits,  
medical care, etc.)



## **Transition Challenges Continued...**

- Concerns about career and educational goals can cause anxiety.
- Lack of awareness regarding VA benefits, financial aid, and other available resources.
- Trying to take on too much too soon.  
(Veterans often feel like they are behind in obtaining their degree when comparing themselves with younger college students.)

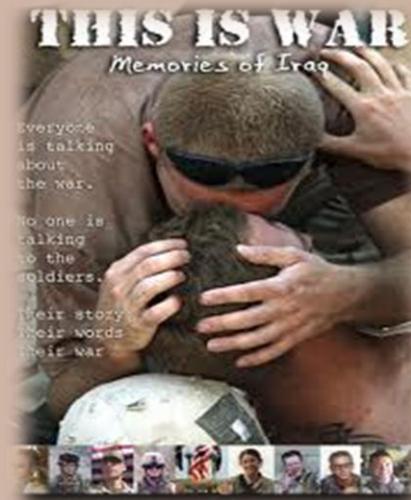
## Transition Challenges Continued...

- Approximately 40% of OIF/OEF veterans are from the National Guard and Reserve. These veterans and their families have less access to the support they need than those of active duty service members and their families.
- Unemployment for young veterans is 20% which is double the national average.

## **Transition Challenges Continued...**

- Age differences and life experiences can cause veterans to feel isolated.
- Conflict between classes and scheduling medical appointments with VA Health Care.
- Military reserve/National Guard obligations conflicting with class schedules.

# Transition Challenges Continued...



- Trust issues. In combat, you always knew your buddy had your back no matter what.
- Struggle to find new purpose and meaning in life after combat.

**Leaving the military isn't just leaving a job...its leaving a way of life.**

-Student Veteran, Marine, OIF/OEF

Risky behaviors such as getting into fights, living on the edge, high speed motorcycle riding, etc., can recreate adrenaline rushes experienced in combat.



# Challenges from Combat Stress Injuries



Although not all veterans serve in combat, those that do, may experience additional challenges such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).

# What is **PTSD**: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

“PTSD is the inability to flip the switch from combat soldier to every day citizen to stop reliving the war at so high a frequency that it interferes with the ability to function.”

Betsy Streisand, U.S. News & World Report, Oct. 2006

*“At the early stages, it’s like a toothache, painful and troubling. Left untreated, the infection festers and grows.”* Ilona Meager, *Moving a Nation to Care*

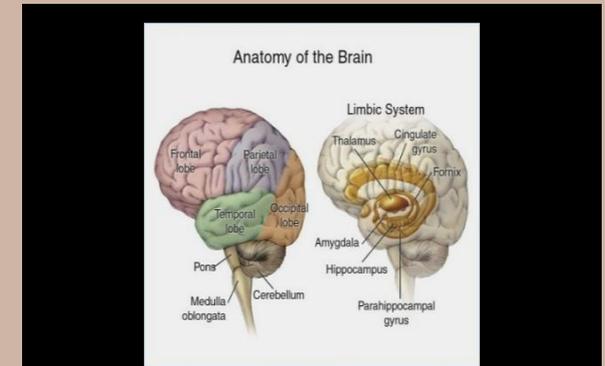


# *Signs and Symptoms of PTSD*

- Insomnia
- Flashbacks
- Hyper vigilance
- Memory problems
- Poor concentration
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Emotional numbing
- Avoidance



# What is Traumatic Brain Injury (mild-TBI)?



- A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is caused by a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain.
- Caused by external physical force to the head
- Acceleration-deceleration injury (motor vehicles)
- Concussion, with or without loss of consciousness
- “Shaken Soldier” Syndrome

(DVBIC/CBHCO conf. 2006)

# Incidence of **mTBI**?

- Between 10-20% of Iraq and Afghanistan vets have suffered a TBI (IAVA.org)

## *Why?*

- Technological advances in battlefield gear, reduces deaths, increases severity of injuries to head and limbs
- Modern military medicine allows for life-saving trauma care in the war zone with immediate transport to definitive care and rehabilitation

# Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI)

What you *might not* see:



# Signs and Symptoms of mTBI

## **Mild Traumatic Brain Injury**

- Insomnia/sleep problems
- Impaired memory
- Poor concentration/attention
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability/mood changes
- Headache
- Dizziness/imbalance
- Excessive Fatigue: physical and mental
- Noise/light intolerance
- Ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
- Vision change: blurred or vision

# What is MST?

## (Military Sexual Trauma)

- Any unwanted sexual attention, uninvited sexual advances, or forced sex while in the military
- MST can negatively impact a person's mental and physical health, manifesting in a number of symptoms even years later
  - Disturbing memories or nightmares
  - Difficulty feeling safe
  - Feelings of depression or numbness
  - Problems with alcohol or other drugs
  - Feeling isolated from other people
  - Problems with anger or irritability
  - Problems with sleep
  - Physical health problems

# MST Cont...

- In 2006 there were 1,167 reports of MST
- In 2009 it increased to 3,200
- VA disability claims are rejected because the victim cannot prove an initial assault or rape
- Sexual assault occurs twice as often in the military as they do within civilian society
- 40% of homeless women veterans have been sexually assaulted while serving in the armed forces

([www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)),([www.pubrecord.org](http://www.pubrecord.org))

Triggers that may adversely affect veteran students suffering from combat stress injuries...

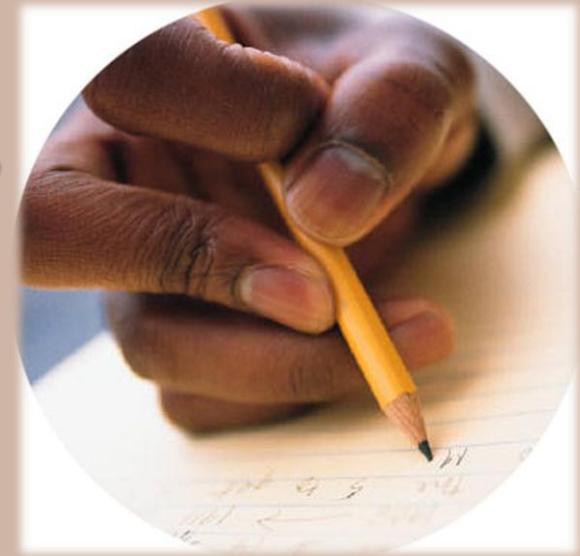


# Crowded Classrooms and Campus Crowds





# Timed Tests

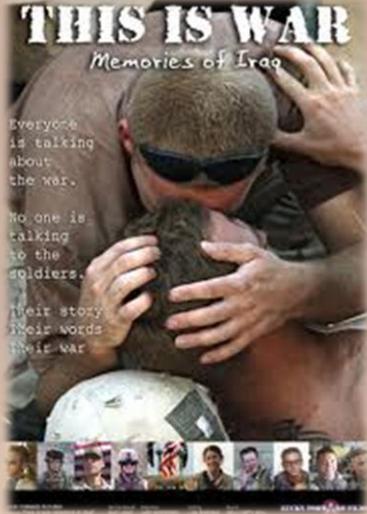


Pressure of timed exams may trigger hyper-arousal thus making it difficult for students to concentrate.



# Television & Movies

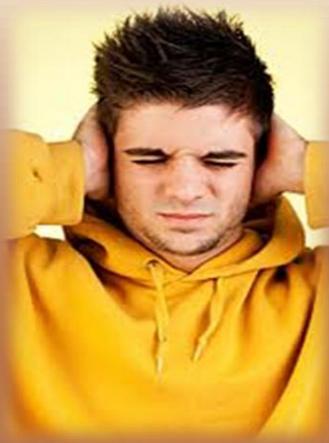
## Anniversary Dates



## Smells



## Driving



## Loud Noises



# Potential Obstacles That May Interfere with Veteran Students' Success in College

- Difficulty getting a full night's sleep due to hyper vigilance or nightmares
- Side effects from prescribed or non-prescription medications
- Inability to find a seat in the back of the room near the exit can cause additional stress in classroom

– Being a veteran makes me feel a little out of place sometimes.

—24 Year Old Caucasian male Veteran

# Continued...

Veterans often end up self-medicating to deal with combat stress injuries



Use of alcohol and drugs as coping mechanism

# Myth Busters!!!

Please remember...

- Not all veterans have served in combat
- Not all veterans that served in combat have PTSD
- Not all veterans diagnosed with PTSD are ticking time bombs waiting to explode
- Not all veterans are males
- Women veterans are also exposed to combat action

Remember...most veterans bring great assets and diversity to your campus. In addition, they can offer...

- Outstanding leadership qualities
- A desire to serve as mentors and assist others
- Maturity, motivation, discipline, and an enthusiasm about learning in your classroom



# Obstacles to Treatment

Over 40% of those experiencing mental health problems associated with combat refuse treatment due to fear that treatment will:

- **hurt their image**
- **ruin their military career and/or promotion**
- **cause negative perception from peers and leadership**

This stigma carries over into the college environment. Veterans are extremely reluctant to seek help from Disabled Student Services.



## Section 5

# Suicide and Homelessness Among Veterans

- The high suicide rate among veterans has already emerged as a major issue, but a larger trend that has remained hidden from society is the surge in the number of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans who have died not just as a result of suicide, but also because of vehicle accidents, motorcycle crashes, drug overdoses or other causes after being discharged from the military.  
(Aaron Glantz, [The Bay Citizen](#))

# Suicide & Veterans

- “An analysis of official death certificates on file at the State Department of Public Health reveals that more than 1,000 California veterans under 35 died between 2005 and 2008. That figure is three times higher than the number of California service members who were killed in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts over the same period.” Source: (Aaron Glantz, The Bay Citizen)

# Suicide & Veterans

- A Recent news article reported nearly half of student veterans have contemplated suicide.
- Nearly half of student veterans show significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, a third suffer from severe anxiety, and a quarter experience severe depression, according to the study.

(The Chronicle of Higher Education, by Sara Lipka. August 4, 2011, )

# Homelessness & Veterans

- Approximately **33%** of homeless males in the U.S. are veterans.
- **Woman are 4 times more likely to become homeless than their male counterparts.**
- Veterans are twice as likely as other Americans to become chronically homeless.
- **Veterans represent 11% of the adult civilian population but make up 26% of the homeless population, according to the Homeless Research Institute (2007).**
- The number of homeless Vietnam-era veterans, male and female, is greater than the number of soldiers who died during the war.

(VeteransInc.org)

# **Primary causes of homelessness among veterans are:**

1. Lack of income due to limited education and lack of transferable skills from military to civilian life (especially true of younger veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan)
2. Combat-related physical health issues and disabilities
3. Combat-related mental health issues and disabilities
4. Substance abuse problems that interfere with job retention
5. Weak social networks due to problems adjusting to civilian life
6. Lack of services

(VeteransInc.org)

## Section 6

# *How Campuses Can Better Serve Student Veterans*



# Designate a College Veterans Counselor

- Questions for Veteran Counselors to ask during counseling appointments with veterans
  - Where the veteran served while in the military and what was their MOS (job)
  - If the veteran was deployed, where was their deployment and how long have they been home
  - Have they contacted VA to enroll in the VA Health Care system
  - Do they need information about filing a disability claim
  - Does the veteran have a solid family/friend support system
  - Are there any concerns or questions they may have



# Veterans Counselor should be educated in following:

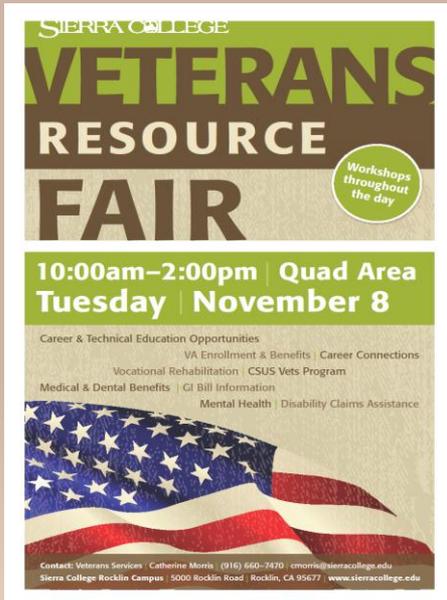
- GI Bill process and regulations
- Military customs & traditions
- Community Veteran Services & Resources
- Combat Stress Injuries (PTSD & TBI)
- Degree, certificate, transfer, and internship programs, to include industrial and technical education trades programs

Returning veterans can identify which California community colleges offer industrial and technical education trades programs and skills training in the area in which they have interest by logging onto two websites for more information...



- [www.CCCIndustrialTech.org](http://www.CCCIndustrialTech.org)
  - On the home page of this website under resources, click on Directories, then click on Prospective Student/ Returning Veterans Guide to California Community College Industrial & Technical Education Programs/ Skills Training. Programs are shown in the right column.
  
- [www.CaliforniaTechResources.org](http://www.CaliforniaTechResources.org)
  - On the left margin under MAPS, click on CC Technology Programs. When loaded, look to the right side of School Information and click on Collapse All. You will now see a listing of technology programs. Click on a specific technology programs, and community colleges with this program will be listed.

# Campus Recommendations



- Provide specialized orientations for veterans & dependents
- Create a Multidisciplinary Veteran Advisory Team
- Network with veteran community services (VA auditors, Vet Centers, Veteran County Service Offices, VFW's, American Legions, Am Vets, non-profit veteran programs, Rotary Clubs, etc.)
- Develop a Veteran's website & Facebook
- Host Veteran Education/Resource Fairs



# The Road Home...

## From Combat to College and Beyond

- Provide Workshops for faculty, staff & administrators:
  - Academic challenges with veteran student population
  - Practical learning techniques and solutions to common learning difficulties
  - Military competency & sensitivity training

The Sierra College Veterans Club proudly presents

### The Road Home...

From Combat to College and Beyond

**Friday • Sept 28 • 2007**  
8:30am - 3:30pm • Dietrich Theatre  
5000 Rocklin Rd • Rocklin California



**Free** forum  
for Educators and Community  
Advocates for Veterans featuring:

**Shad Meshad...** Founder and President, National Veterans Foundation  
**Paul Rieckhoff...** Executive Director, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America  
**Laura Gomez...** Case Manager, Operation Iraqi Freedom / Operation Enduring Freedom, Palo Alto VA Center

**Issues Examined** • Challenges faced by Veterans upon returning home • The importance of a Veterans' program on campus  
• Helping Veterans through campus-community collaboration

**Seating is limited!!**  
**RSVP by Friday, September 14, 2007**  
to Catherine Morris, Veterans Counselor, [cmorris@sierracollege.edu](mailto:cmorris@sierracollege.edu)

For more information contact the Sierra College Public Information Office at 916-781-0411



# Campus Veterans Resource Center (VRC)

## Mission:

Provide safe and welcoming place for veterans and their dependents to receive support, information, and camaraderie; including space where vets can work on their homework, unwind, or just have another vet to talk to.



# Utilize Veteran Work Study on your campuses:

- No costs for campuses if veterans are enrolled minimally at  $\frac{3}{4}$  time and receiving their GI Bill
- Veteran Work Study can assist in the following ways:
  - Educational Benefits/GI Bill
  - Veteran Community Resources
  - Financial Aid
  - Campus Tours
  - Class Registration
  - Vet to Vet Tutoring
  - Camaraderie
  - Veteran Student Club



**I really enjoy the veterans lounge to get help with homework.**

—I am an older adult female veteran returning to school

# Develop Experiential Learning Challenge Courses

- Challenge Courses typically are one to three days in length.
- Focused on personal growth, self-determination, & leadership skills. Veterans participate in a series of physically, mentally, & spiritually challenging exercises.
- Benefits include increased competence & skill in areas of trust, inter-personal communication, decision-making, & stress-management awareness.



“I really enjoyed this weekend and I have new brothers and sisters, there’s nothing I wouldn’t do for every last one of my new family members.” -Sierra College Student Veteran

# Experiential Learning Challenge Courses

**The vast majority of military training is hands-on/experiential learning, which includes both physical and mental challenges.**



**Recreating this environment in the academic setting, provides a familiar component to ease the transition from military to college, as well as allowing veterans to recognize skills developed from service are applicable and relevant to success.**



# Experiential Learning Challenge Courses

- 1 – 3 day event that may include activities such as:
  - Ropes courses
  - Camping
  - White water rafting
  - Skiing
  - Rock-climbing
  - Cook-outs
  - Surfing
  - Etc.

“This weekend up here at Granlibakken has been life changing for me, it has shown me life is not planned out or just a ride we all are on.”

– Sierra College Student Veteran





## **Ropes Challenge Course 2008 & 2010**

“This ropes course was really tremendous for all of us in the class. It really brought unity and camaraderie to us all. I became friends with many guys and ladies that normally were just a face in the classroom.” –Sierra College Student Veteran



# Student Veterans Rafting Trip 2011





**Student Veterans Writers Workshop**  
**Santa Cruz Trip 2009**

# Boots to Books Community Learning

- 16-week semester program
- (5-6 units) College Orientation & English writing course
- Transition class for veterans. Focus on developing camaraderie, keys to success, goal setting, time management, college & community resources, combat stress, etc.

**College success class for Veterans...**  
**Boots to Books & English A**

**A Learning Community Class**  
**Fall 2008**



Boots to Books and English A are joining together to offer a learning community class for veterans and their families.

- ✓ Boots to Books (Personal Development 1) is a college success course designed to help veterans transition from military to college life.
- ✓ English A offers students the opportunity to develop their writing and critical thinking skills with an emphasis on veteran issues.

**Class meets:**  
Tuesday and Thursday  
6:30pm – 9:35pm  
Roseville Gateway Center, Room 116

**Must be registered in both classes.**  
**Personal Development 1, course code #42790**  
Instructor: Catherine Morris, Veterans Counselor  
**English A, course code #42643**  
Instructor: Michelle Johnson

For more information contact...  
Catherine Morris, Veterans Counselor  
916.789.2879 or cmorris@sierracollege.edu

**SIERRA COLLEGE**

# Additional Class Combinations for Boots to Books Community Learning

- Variations of Boots to Books Community Learning could include the following:
  - College Success and career exploration combined with trade-industrial and technical programs, remedial English, reading, and math courses



# Recommendations for the classroom

- Include in the course syllabus, a comment inviting veterans to approach instructors if they are experiencing any difficulty in their transition from military to college
- Invite veteran work-study into your classroom to provide a brief presentation regarding campus veteran programs and resources

**I sacrificed my life for my country but don't always feel like people really get that.**

—Sierra College Vet

Please be sensitive to the fact that there are likely students in your classroom who have a loved one serving in the military, and they can be affected by the comments made about current or past conflicts.



**Sometimes it's all on me...the house, the kids, the yard, the car, the dog,... I take care of everything, it all falls on me. When you add in the real fear for my husband's safety half way around the world, well, I don't know how I make it through school. —military wife, parent, 28**

**I lost my brother in the Afghanistan war. I am going to school for him. I know he would want his little brother to graduate. —19 years old**

# **Tips on how to avoid and/or diffuse challenging situations with veterans**

- Please be sensitive to comments made about the war in Iraq/Afghanistan.
- Remember that even though the veteran is back home, they are likely to still have close contacts with buddies in combat.
- Avoid power struggles. Let the veteran know that you will address their concern, but would like to give him/her your full attention at a designated time after class.

# Continued

- Give the veteran permission ahead of time to leave classroom if they encounter “triggers” during class
- If the veteran appears stressed or agitated, encourage him/her:
  - To take short break
  - Use of gym or physical fitness facility
  - Contact a support person
  - Utilize relaxation techniques: meditation, yoga, tai-chi, etc.

# Asking Questions ??

**You should avoid asking questions such as:**

- How many guys did you kill? What was it like?
- Do you think it was worth it?
- Political view of the war.

**I don't like it when people ask me if I killed someone.**

**I feel uncomfortable when the subject of war comes up in class.**

—Sierra College Veteran, Iraq

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

**Welcome Home!**

**Many people don't realize what it's like to be part of  
something greater than just themselves.**

**I would like to share that.**

—Sierra College Veteran, 24 years old

## Recommended reading:

- **Achilles-Vietnam-Combat Trauma and Undoing of Character**, by Jonathan Shay
- **Black Knights, On the Bloody Road to Baghdad**, by Oliver Poole
- **Chasing Ghosts; Failures and Facades In Iraq: A Soldier's Prospective**, Paul Rieckhoff
- **Courage After Fire**, By Keith Armstrong
- **Down Range to Iraq and Back**, by Bridget C. Cantrell & Chuck Dean
- **Exit Wounds, A Survival Guide to Pain Management For Returning Veterans and Their Families**, by Derek McGinnis, Iraq War Veteran
- **I Can't Get Over It, A Handbook for Trauma Survivors**, by Aphrodite Matsakis, Ph.D.

## Recommended reading:

- ***Moving a Nation to Care***, by Ilona Meagher
- ***On Killing, The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society***, by Lt. Col. Dave
- ***Operation Homecoming***, by Andrew Carroll
- ***Restrepo***, by Sebastian Junger
- ***Rule Number Two-Lessons I Learned in a Combat Hospital***, by Dr. Heidi Squier Kraft
- ***The War Comes Home***, by Aaron Glantz
- ***Vets Under Siege, How America deceives and Dishonors those Who Fight Our Battles***, by Martin Schram
- ***What Was Asked of Us, An oral History of the Iraq War by the Soldiers who fought it***, by Trish Wood

# Resources

- **[www.VetCenters.VA.gov](http://www.VetCenters.VA.gov)** (Provides free counseling to combat veterans and their family)
- **[www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)** (Provides information on educational benefits)
- **[www.GiveAnHour.org](http://www.GiveAnHour.org)** (Provides free counseling to OIF/OEF vets & family)
- **[www.USAtogether.org](http://www.USAtogether.org)** (Helps meet specific needs of injured service members)
- **[www.ComingHomeProject.net](http://www.ComingHomeProject.net)** (Provides free retreats/workshops to OIF/OEF veterans, their families, and service providers)
- **[www.CalVet.ca.gov](http://www.CalVet.ca.gov)** California Department of Veterans Affairs
- **[www.nvf.org](http://www.nvf.org)** (National Veterans Foundation)
- **[www.calegion.org](http://www.calegion.org)** American Legions
- **[www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org)** Veterans of Foreign War
- **[www.cacvso.org](http://www.cacvso.org)** (county veteran service offices)
- **[www.semperfifund.org](http://www.semperfifund.org)** (Provides financial assistance to injured marines and their family)
- **[www.AmVets.org](http://www.AmVets.org)** (Veteran Service Organization)
- **[www.soldiersproject.org](http://www.soldiersproject.org)** (Provides free counseling to OIF/OEF veterans and their family)
- **[www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov)** (Provides information on mental health issues and suicide prevention)

# Special Thanks to:

- Aaron Glantz, Editor at New America Media, Author & journalist
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- Shad Meshad, National Veterans Foundation
- Sierra College student veterans and their families
- Statewide Leadership Collaborative for Industrial and Technical Education Grant 011-0162
- U.S. News & World Report, Oct. 2006
- Veterans Inc.
- The Chronicle of Higher Education
- The Wilderness Institute
- Tributary White Water Rafting