

## Military and Veteran Student Services

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## Teaching Student Veterans

### 22 Things You Should Know about Teaching & Advising Student Veterans

*“The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.” – George Washington*

1. Student veterans add tremendous value to the classroom with their global experience, leadership skills, discipline, focus, and ability to work under pressure.
2. Student veterans are a diverse group with respect to their personal backgrounds and capabilities. While there are commonalities in military experience, each veteran is unique and should be treated and supported as an individual. Faculty who wish to learn more about their students can administer a brief student survey (e.g., major, year, outside work, interests) on the first day of class, including a question about veteran status.
3. When meeting one-on-one, faculty and advisors can ask, “Are you a veteran?” or “Have you served in the U.S. military?” Most veterans are happy to hear that you appreciate their service.
4. Some faculty have included the following statement on their syllabus: “Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances are welcome and encouraged to communicate these to the instructor, in advance if possible.”
5. Don’t assume that all veterans in your class are male. Women served in Iraq and Afghanistan in record numbers, with the majority providing combat support and experiencing hostile action.
6. Veterans often feel isolated on campus because they are older and have had different life experiences than their classmates. Leaving military service can mean loss of friends, identity, purpose, structure, and income. Connecting veterans to the campus Student Veterans Club or Veterans Center may help them to establish new friendships and obtain guidance from veterans who have successfully transitioned to college life.
7. Veterans often have questions about their benefits. Acquaint yourself with your college’s veterans affairs coordinator so that you can refer veterans to staff who can assist them with benefit-related questions and issues.

8. Refrain from expressing your personal opinions about military service or recent wars/conflicts in your classes or advising appointments. Veterans may interpret negative views as a negative attitude toward their own service.
9. If a course focuses on military policies (e.g., history, government and politics), ask veterans about how they wish to participate. Even if veterans are outspoken in class, they may not wish to talk about their time in the military. Welcome veterans to talk about their experiences without putting them on the spot or making them feel uncomfortable.
10. One of the most insensitive questions to ask a returning veteran is, “Did you kill anyone?” If another student asks the question in your classroom, make it clear that this question is not appropriate and put a stop to it.
11. Do not act as if you understand stressful events that you have not experienced. If you have not personally been in combat, don’t pretend you know what it’s like or how it may affect a veteran.
12. Veterans are serious about college. Thus, they may become irritated with fellow students who demonstrate lack of respect for their teachers and/or lack of commitment to class assignments. Be prepared to help veterans manage their frustrations and deal with students who have different academic standards or work ethics.
13. Veterans know how to lead and work in a team. However, they may be frustrated by small-group class projects that drag on for long periods given their past experiences of working quickly to achieve a goal. Help veterans to learn the value of collaboration by seeing the results of team efforts in this new environment.
14. Significant numbers of student veterans are first generation college students, and may be unfamiliar with how to apply for scholarships/awards. Many also fail to recognize the value of internships in securing future jobs. Help student veterans to take advantage of these opportunities and learn about your college’s career services.
15. Most recent veterans have deployed and experienced combat situations. While they may not have suffered personal injuries, they are likely to have friends who were injured or killed. Some veterans have experienced Military Sexual Trauma. Coping with service-related stressors can be challenging. Familiarize yourself with counseling services provided by your college and make an appropriate referral if you encounter a student veteran experiencing distress.
16. Veterans are typically independent and taught to be self-reliant. Thus, it may be difficult for them to ask for help or an accommodation, even if it would enhance their academic success. If a veteran’s classroom behavior or homework reveals discomfort, consider offering help, even if it is unsolicited.
17. Be flexible when it comes to accommodating veterans’ appointments with the Veterans Health Administration (VA). While most veterans do not want to miss class, they must often attend appointments to stay current with their health care and benefits.
18. Since military service has taken veterans away from school, some may need learning assistance or tutoring with subjects such as math and English. Others may need accommodations for physical injuries or cognitive difficulties stemming from brain injuries. Help veterans to connect with campus Disability Support Services and work to reduce any stigma associated with help-seeking.
19. Veterans may not be aware of their own mild traumatic brain injuries. Assist students with attention and concentration issues through accommodations such as posting lecture notes

- ahead of time, allowing them to take notes on laptops, and using electronic texts in situations where the student needs the text to be read aloud. Allowing highly anxious students to take exams in alternative settings may also be helpful.
20. Some student veterans are uncomfortable in crowds or sitting with strangers behind them. Allowing veterans to sit in the back of the class or with the wall behind them may help them to focus on learning class material.
  21. Students in a Reserve or National Guard unit or active duty may be called up for service and deployment at any time. If you have students in this situation, refer them to your campus veterans' advisor to minimize any negative financial, benefit, or academic credit consequences that could result from being called to active service.
  22. Student veterans are one of the nation's greatest untapped resources. Providing them with respect, understanding, and support honors their service and helps them to succeed in college, enabling them to contribute to their communities in new and meaningful ways.

**Prepared by the Maryland Veterans Resilience Initiative, University of Maryland School of Public Health, Spring 2014 Maryland Veterans Resilience Initiative**

**Adapted from:**

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