

SUPPORTING STUDENT VETERANS

A GUIDE FOR FACULTY AND STAFF

FOLSOM LAKE COLLEGE

What you need to know about Student Veterans

The number of student veteran and military dependents on college campuses has been increasing due to the high numbers of troops returning from deployment, high unemployment rates among young veterans and down-sizing of the military.

- There have been over 2 million American service members deployed to a war zone in the past 10+ years.
- Student veterans tend to be older than their classmates; most are in the 24-29 age bracket.
- Student veterans' strengths include being highly motivated, prepared, attentive, respectful, organized and disciplined.
- Student veterans may be less tolerant of their classmates in regards to a lack of respect toward the instructor, class interruptions, or perceived lack of focus in class.
- The suicide rate among college-aged veterans is estimated to be 4 times higher than civilian peers.
- The shift from military life to school can be a culture shock. This can be frustrating for most student veterans, even more so for veterans struggling with physical or mental health issues.

Barriers to Academic Success

Student veterans may be experiencing issues related to military service that may impact performance in school. Below are possible barriers to academic success.

- Hearing may be impaired. There are high rates of tinnitus (ringing in the ears) and hearing loss among veterans.
- Eyes may be sensitive to light, become easily tired making it hard to focus on lectures and writing on the board.
- Chronic pain, including frequent headaches, difficulty sitting for long periods, and campus mobility issues.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms include re-experiencing, avoidance, hyper-arousal, anxiety.
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) can cause a variety of cognitive difficulties depending on the extent of the injury.
- Sleep can be difficult for many, so attendance and attention span may suffer.
- VA medical appointments are not flexible, often short notice and far away, which may affect attendance.
- Student veterans may not choose to seek help for physical/mental concerns or identify themselves as veterans. Some possible barriers seeking help include:
 - Psychological – seeking help is not consistent with warrior values. Specific issues, like PTSD, could cause avoidance.

- Stigma attached with seeking help.
- Too many obligations and limited time.

Getting to Know a Student Veteran

Student veterans typically appreciate a friendly dialogue with staff and faculty. Here are some appropriate ways to start a friendly dialogue to get to know a student veteran.

ASK:

- What attracted you to Folsom Lake College?
- What branch of the service were you in?
- What was your MOS (Military occupational specialty); or job in the military?
- Are you still serving in the guard or reserves or are you out now?
- What did you like best about your service?
- What do you like best about being in school right now?
- What do you find most challenging?

DON'T ASK:

- Do you agree/disagree with (insert conflict or policy)?
This is actually one of the main causes for issues for student veterans in the classroom.
- Did you kill someone?
- Was it hot over there?
- Were you scared?
- Openly in a class – who's a veteran?
- What was it like over there?
- Did you see dead people?
- What was the worst thing that happened to you over there?
- Do you have PTSD?
- Don't call on a student veteran or use them as an example in class without their permission.

What you may see in your Classroom or Office

- Student may be uncomfortable around unfamiliar people and in unfamiliar surroundings
- Student may sit away from windows or in the back of class and be reluctant to speak up in class
- Student may be sensitive to war references and may withdraw or become confrontational when the topic is brought up
- Student may have difficulty concentrating during class and be easily distracted; which may interfere with the student's ability to learn
- Student may need increased encouragement and guidance – veterans are used to receiving direct orders and specific instructions
- Chronic pain – difficult to sit for long periods of time
- Reluctant to ask for assistance
- When talking about military topics in class, be aware that there could be veterans or service members in class and that this topic may make them uncomfortable. Ask student veterans (privately) if they'd like to share their experiences.

When you're worried about a student veteran...

- Recognize warning signs for psychological distress:
 - Often late or absent
 - Restless
 - Easily startled
 - Doesn't appear to be paying attention
 - Turns in assignments late or incomplete
 - Does poorly on exams, even when you know he/she understands the material
 - Agitated; outbursts of anger
- Trust your instincts. If a student puts effort into class, but doesn't get corresponding results, then it's good to be worried and talk to him/her to see what's going on.

When talking to a student veteran about your concerns:

- Let the student know you're worried about him/her.
- Mention specific, observable behaviors and ask what's causing those behaviors.
- Ask questions to better understand the student's need.
- Feel comfortable asking if the student is a veteran.
- Normalize the process of getting help.
- Don't generalize, e.g., "You always do X. You never do Y."
- Don't use negative labels, e.g., strange, weird, messed up, crazy.

How YOU can help

There are various types of support that student veterans need to be successful. Here's how you can help:

Transitional Support

- Encourage student veterans to visit the Veterans Success Center (PE-119, lower level) to interact with fellow veterans.
- Refer student veterans to the Veterans Success Center to set up their educational benefits.
- Create leadership and volunteer opportunities. When student veterans show signs of physical or mental stress, refer them to the Veterans Success Center for referral and support.
- Be aware of triggers that may adversely affect student veterans suffering from combat stress injuries such as crowded classrooms and campus crowds, timed tests, anniversary dates, TV and movies, smells and loud noises.

Provide Academic Support

- Give appropriate enrollment advice or refer to the Veterans Success Center, as VA educational benefits will not approve "extra" or "recommended" classes. All classes approved for VA benefits must be required classes on their educational plan (Associate Degree, ADT, Certificate, CSU/UC transfer plan).
- Consider adding a veteran friendly comment on your syllabus. For example: "Veterans and active duty military with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to the instructor."

- Allow flexibility for military obligations or VA appointments.
- Refer student veterans to one-on-one tutoring service in the Veterans Success Center.

Veteran Services

For questions about:

Veteran Services
GI Bill Benefits
Academic accommodations
Academic counseling
Veterans Crisis Line

Refer the veteran to:

Veterans Success Center (FLC main campus, PE building, room 119)
Veterans Success Center or A&R office
DSPS office (Center for Excellence, FLC main campus, Aspen Hall)
Counseling office
24/7 confidential support for veterans and their families
1-800-273-8255 (press 1)
www.veteranscrisisline.net (chat online)
www.va.gov

VA Services