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Building Partnerships for Serving Student Veterans: A Professional Development Roadmap

Katherine Selber, Nancy Feyl Chavkin, Gregory Marshall, and Dean Shaffer

The nation's 2.4 million troops who have deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and New Dawn (ND) are transitioning back, and many are entering universities, fueling an increase in student veteran enrollment (Hassan, 2013). As a result, numerous campuses have initiated efforts to support student veterans as they pursue their degrees. To help these veterans succeed, universities will need to provide a range of supportive services which will require professional development for an understanding of the unique needs of veterans on each campus, as well as knowledge of existing literature on non-traditional and diverse populations common to the student affairs field of practice (Coll & Weiss, 2013; DiRamio, 2011; Gwin, Selber, Chavkin, & Williams, 2012; Minnis, Bondi, & Rumann, 2013; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 2000).

Some universities lack the capacity to develop these programmatic efforts for student veterans and could benefit from a professional development roadmap on how to build and implement these pathways of success. The specialized services needed to addrss the veterans' unique financial, personal, and educational challenges when transitioning to higher education will become ever more valuable in helping them succeed, finish their degrees, and move into civilian careers as enrollments of student veterans continue to grow (Gwin et al., 2012; Jackson, Fey, & Ross, 2013; Minnis et al., 2013; Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). To help address this gap in the literature, this article presents a professional development roadmap for developing services for student veterans on campus, the basic elements of a best–practices model, and examples of partnerships and collaborations developed by social work faculty and students to support services for student veterans. We also suggest implications for university administrators, student affairs professionals, and policymakers.

The Challenges for Universities

Since the post-World War II era when veterans poured into campuses nationwide, the military and universities have partnered together to help veterans. Indeed, in the post-World War II era, veterans made up as many as 49% of all students on campus and changed the face of universities forever (U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs Administration, 2012). As a result of this partnership, universities produced a generation of graduated war veterans that became the leaders of the business, government, and civic sectors and helped ensure our nation's leadership on the world stage.

Universities usually welcome this challenge of serving our student veterans because as students veterans have many things to offer. Student veterans bring maturity, leadership qualities, and the ability to independently finance their education through G. I. Bill benefits. Veterans are mature from carrying high levels of responsibilities including routinely making life and death decisions, exposure to diverse environments and cultures, and being focused on mission and team-based approaches to decision-making and problem-solving with few resources. It is well reported that many veterans also come with challenges from their military experiences. One in five soldiers returns with disabilities including post-traumatic stress, mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI), and a range of injuries that provide physical challenges such as hearing loss and joint problems that can make for a rough transition into academia (Center for American Progress, 2012; Vacchi, 2012; Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods, & Liu, 2013). Given the advances in battlefield medicine and technology, our wounded warriors also are growing on campuses. In a 2013 survey of Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)

Katherine Selber, PhD is a Professor at Texas State University's School of Social Work.
Nancy Feyl Chavkin, PhD is a Regents' Professor at Texas State University's School of Social Work.
Gregory Marshall, PhD is the Chair of the Department of Respiratory Care and an Associate Professor at Texas State University.
Dean Shaffer, MS is a Master of Social Work student at Texas State University.

alumni of almost 14,000 respondents, over one third were pursuing some type of degree. These wounded warriors also reported concerns that might impact academic tasks on campus. For example, 48.3% reported problems concentrating and 42.8% had problems sleeping. In addition, more than one third of alumni reported they were receiving insufficient mental health services (Wounded Warrior Project, 2013). Such challenges can be addressed by universities with a strategic plan based on a needs assessment and an evaluation of its implementation.

Specialized university programs and services are crucial to student veterans' success, and without them these students are at risk for dropping out. Although research is still developing on graduation rates, some recent reports indicate that there is a gap between regular traditional students and student veterans in terms of graduation rates (Selber, in press). Closing these gaps will be crucial in making sure that the generous benefits of the post-9/11 G.I. Bill are viewed as a sound investment by the nation. Some higher education institutions are not prepared to deal with these challenges. They lack the capacity to assess the needs of their campus' student veterans as well as the skills of how to develop programmatic initiatives to respond to those needs (National Association of Student Affairs Personnel and Administrators [NASPA], 2013).

During the past five years of implementation of the new G.I. Bill, campuses have responded to the influx of veterans by searching for best practices to address these unique challenges. These policies, programs, and services have been referred to in the literature as *veteran-friendly*, although no consensus about the criteria for achieving this status has emerged (Gwin et al., 2012; Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009). Although much of the literature is anecdotal, researchers are now beginning to develop descriptions of veteran-friendly services by better understanding gaps in policies and examining best practices (Center for American Progress, 2012; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Selber, in press). In a 2008 national survey of 2,582 institutions of higher education that explored the services provided to student veterans, 57% of the 723 responding institutions were providing some level of programming for student veterans and military personnel (Cook & Kim, 2009). By the 2012 survey that figure had risen to 67 % of responding higher education campuses. In the 2012 survey, however, 77% of institutions also stated they were still concerned about how student veterans were persisting and completing their degrees, and 55% were concerned about student veteran transitions and acculturations into civilian life and academic environments. The survey also pointed to the need for additional resources to accomplish these priorities for student veteran programming with 54% indicating they needed added resources for tracking student veterans and their needs and 58% stating they needed internal resources including more qualified staff to assist with programming. Providing the technical assistance needed in the field for pushing these plans to completion is needed at this point in the field of campus-based veteran services (Center for American Progress, 2012; Cook & Kim, 2009; 2011).

Professional Development Roadmap to Serve this Generation of Student Veterans

What universities need then is a professional development roadmap for coordinating campus services around the identified needs of student veterans. To respond to the challenge of supporting student veterans, a four-year university created the Veterans Initiative, a coordinated collaborative approach to campus services for student veterans. The campus has an enrollment of over 35,000 students with 2,800 veterans and dependents and is located in a military corridor with a substantial active duty, Guard, and Reserve presence. The university also has a strong historical foundation for supporting the military with two long-standing ROTC units on campus.

In 2008 the university created a collaborative Veterans Advisory Council (VAC) of faculty and staff from key departments on campus to identify and develop services to address the needs of the increased number of student veterans on campus. With the formation of this advisory body that has met monthly since its inception, the university began to develop a model.

After five years of providing services on cam-

pus to our student veterans we have learned that there are a number of important steps in the process for laying the foundation for serving student veterans. These include developing a mission and internal team, developing external partnerships in the community, developing a strengths-based framework, promoting active outreach and follow up, developing the student veteran organization, and remaining veteran centered. The professional development roadmap and experiences in designing and implementing this model are described in the sections below.

Developing the Mission and Internal Team

An advisory council should be developed that fits your university. This collaborative group of internal partners contrasts with an approach commonly used on campuses where student veteran support emanates only from the office responsible for processing the veterans' educational benefits. An advisory council approach draws the university together and sends a strong message to the campus that everyone should be involved. Advisory councils provide an advantage of bringing together various stakeholder opinions and giving them a chance to have input on important policy issues that they may be required to implement. Research indicates that this mechanism is important for increased constituent participation and results in increased effectiveness where there are multiple goals, such as in a university setting (Jun & Shiau, 2012).

The issue of crafting the correct mission for the council is also important. Supporting student veterans in transition, persistence, and graduation are equally important charges to the council, and seeking input from the university's president, provost, council members, and student veteran leaders about the mission is crucial. Also, the issue of expanding the focus to include military dependents must be decided upon. Will the focus remain primarily on veterans or also include their family members as well? Since the post-9/11 G.I. Bill is a legacy program under certain conditions, the campus may experience enrollment gains from dependents as well. The issue of organizational structure must also be attended to, and usually the task force is located in terms of reporting within the academic affairs, enrollment management, or student affairs divisions. Co-chairing of the council is also another model that works for equal emphasis on both administrative issues and support services issues.

It is essential to choose the right administrative units and members for the advisory council. Usually all units, from the front end of entering the university in admissions to the back end of career services, have a seat at the table. Any unit that has an impact on student veterans transitioning into, through, and out of the university is essential in order to remove any potential obstacles in processes, procedures, and policies that might impede student veterans' success. It is recommended that the emphasis on members who know the university well but do not hold administrative roles that are so high up in the organization that work is tied up due to role restrictions and time limitations. For this group to be successful, members must be able to understand the university procedures, get the work done, and not be limited by administrative role expectations or missed meetings. Members who know the university well and have a developed network on campus can be helpful in pushing the campus initiative to serve student veterans. A balance of veterans and family members and people interested in supporting the military is also essential. This work is for the long haul and will take several years to develop, so choosing those with a passion for the cause helps with sustainability. Keeping issues of turf out of the picture is indeed important, and the way to do that is to share credit where each unit represented can bring something to the table from their unit, tailoring services provided to the student veteran population.

Other internal team members can be added to service delivery on campus as the effort grows and additional needs are identified. Partnerships on campus are equally important. Input from campus faculty who are veterans, researchers with interests in veterans' issues, and campus stakeholders such as volunteers, advisor groups, and key administrators are important to the overall success of the program. They are necessary to providing comprehensive services, engaging the campus community, and raising awareness on campus. An example of an internal partnership

will be discussed in more detail in another section of this article.

Developing External Partnerships to Serve Student Veterans

Another step in the professional development roadmap is developing a wide range of partnerships with external organizations. Student veterans' needs can cut across academic, health, behavioral health, career, leadership, employment, financial, legal, and social areas. More often than not, such efforts to respond to the multiple needs of student veterans will have to be buttressed by a host of partnerships both off campus and on campus beyond the original advisory council.

Such partnerships to provide needed services are not new (Kecskes, 2006; The Audit Commission, 1998). As Bronstein (2003) recounts, social work educators have worked with colleagues from other disciplines and from other settings since the earliest days of the professions. Chavkin (2006) also addresses partnerships in university settings and human services and suggests that "reframing" our approach to partnerships is essential both in terms of what professionals see as the task and how professionals see their roles. There are no easy steps for building these crucial partnerships, and there are no specific strategies that will work with every university. The components and processes within partnerships are too inter-related, too inextricably connected to be seen as steps or straight lines. In many ways, the partnership is always developing and being fine-tuned. Chavkin compares successful partnerships to a Slinky—looping backwards before they move forward. A successful partnership is more than just a series of activities that groups do together; a successful partnership is a process that takes time.

In the field of veteran services, practice models and research stress the importance of partnerships. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (2013) has a website devoted to "National Campaigns and Partnerships" signifying the importance of collaborations across organizations to serve veterans. The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA, 2013) also uses partnerships to fulfill its mission of building programs to help returning veterans. IAVA reports that in the past year, by leveraging the strengths of their partnerships, they have been able to impact the lives of over 30,000 veterans and have reached more than 30 million people. Also, Christy, Clark, Frei, and Rynearson-Moody (2012) have argued in favor of multiple stakeholder collaborations and input into research, policy, practice, and advocacy issues for providing services in a complex field such as jail diversion for veterans in the community.

Although no clear definition exists of partnerships, the literature points to the great potential that partnerships bring to the field of serving student veterans where the needs are multiple, university resources are limited, and the stakes are high. Persistence and retention in college have been tied to a number of factors including the environment of the university. When a match exists between the strengths and needs the student veteran brings to campus and the manner in which the university can respond with supportive systems, students stay longer and many more veterans will graduate. This complex mission and multi-dimensional set of needs will entail creating both internal and external partnerships given the current budget realities within universities.

To accomplish these partnerships that are crucial for service provision, the members of the veteran advisory council must know the community's resources—federal, state, and local government as well as community-based non-profit veteran service organizations. This will take considerable time in the community to make these connections, sustain these partnerships, and work to establish the student veteran community as a priority population to serve. It will take knowledge of the resources in the community and the ability to reach out and sustain these partnerships in order to provide a significant level and continuum of services.

Developing a Strengths-Based Framework

The model uses Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) role theory framework adapted by DiRamio et al. (2008; 2009) for veterans. The framework for the model emphasizes the needs of student veterans for information and psychosocial education as they transition into, through, and out of their roles on campus. See Figure 1 for an adapted version of DiRamio's transition chart. In addition, the individual student veteran is viewed from a strengths-based, holistic manner that

acknowledges the importance of many areas in the student veteran's life including their prior military experience, health and behavioral health needs, family and financial needs, and their academic and career aspirations. The university environment plays a part in this holistic view as providing both supports and obstacles and thus draws attention to closing the gaps between needs and support within the university bureaucracy. This approach also focuses on the importance of coordination across university units, an issue often cited as one of the most frustrating factors of campus life for veterans. See Figure 2 for an adapted version of DiRamio's holistic view of veterans.

Promoting Active Outreach and Follow-Up

An effective model must include a strategy for conducting active outreach and follow-up. It has been well documented that there is a perceived stigma in veteran culture about accessing services (Hoge, 2011; Selber, Chavkin, & Williams, 2012). A variety of types of outreach activities are important because the perceived stigma is embedded in a culture where independence has been valued and external help has been discouraged. In addition, many veterans report that they are hesitant about seeking help due to a perceived impact on job performance. Hoge et al. (2004) reported that even among troops needing help the most, a stigma exists against accessing needed services and called for increased efforts in outreach and education. Specifically, they call for a proactive outreach effort to engage military personnel in need of services. Once established, this reluctance for seeking help can follow the troops into the community when they transition as veterans and remains hard to change (Selber et al., 2012). Thus, an effective model of a veteran-centered program will require active outreach as well as follow up.

Events for outreach should be frequent and visible in the university community. To appeal to

Figure 1: University Model: Transitional Services for Student Veterans
(Adapted from DiRamio, et al. 2008)

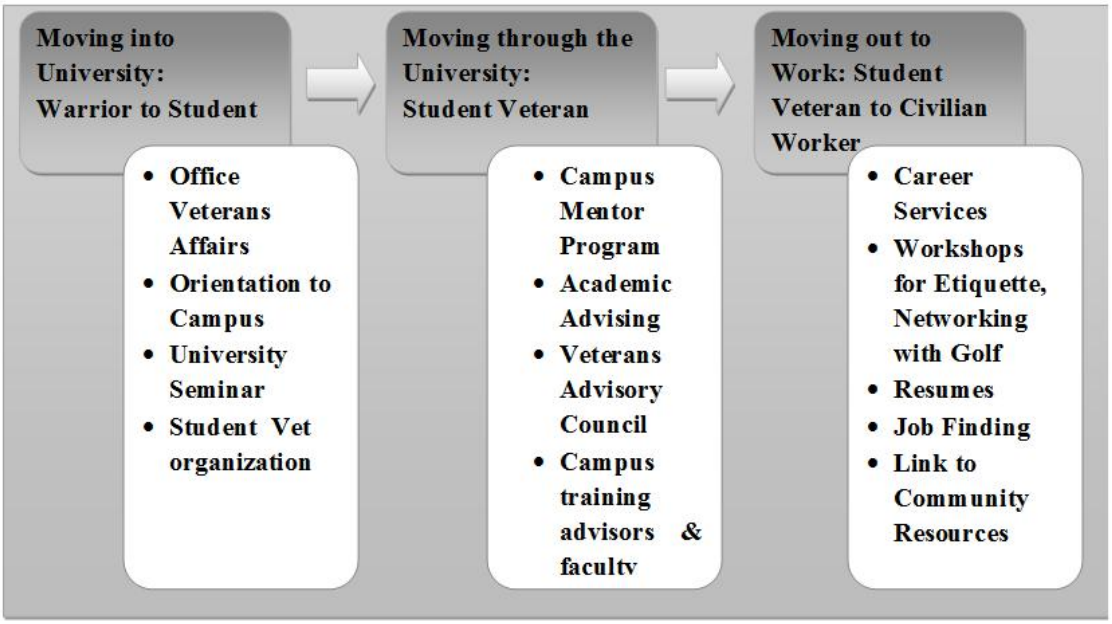
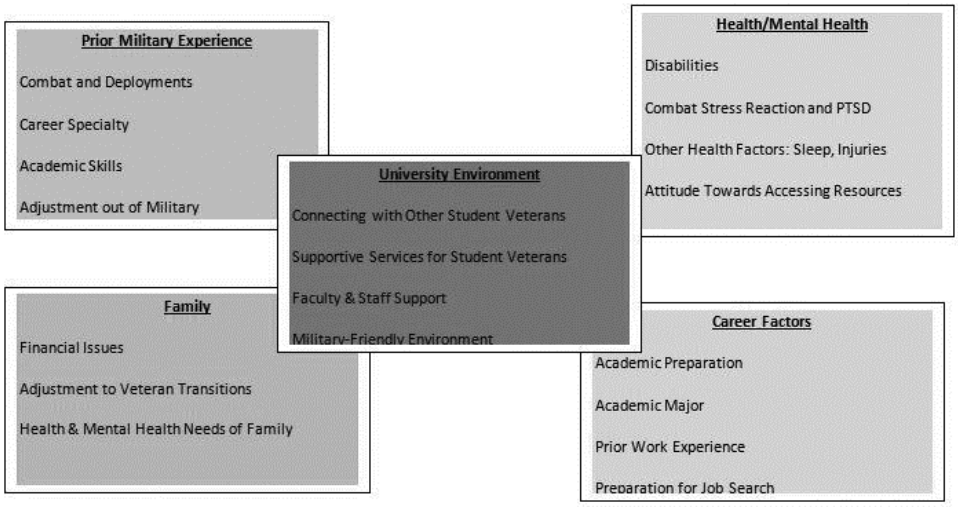


Figure 2: Framework for Understanding Student Veterans

(adapted from DiRamio et al., 2008)



a wide range of veteran interests, a variety of types of events should be scheduled such as luncheons, commemorative events, and recreational, academic, and social events. Scheduling should also be varied so that all veterans might have a chance to attend some event. The peer-to-peer approach in outreach is crucial so that veterans are helping each other and are knowledgeable about information and referral to other services. The events should be organized by student veterans for student veterans.

In addition to actively reaching out to draw student veterans into services, follow-up is also important. Once outreach has been performed and information about a potential referral has been provided, someone must follow-up with veterans to make sure that they actually have accessed services and used them. A good method of follow up is to train faculty, specifically advisors, as university points of contact to stay in contact with the student veterans. In addition, there is new technology that can be helpful to produce reminders to attend events and access services. Such technologies are seen by these young veterans as veteran-friendly since many are familiar with these from their active duty assignments.

Developing the Student Veteran Organization and Remaining Veteran-Centered

Peer-to-peer efforts have been reported as critical with veterans given the strong culture that exists in the military and the perceived stigma of seeking help reported in studies (Coll & Weiss, 2013; Defense Center of Excellence, 2011). Common military experiences formed in training and combat bond veterans together, and that bond follows them through active duty out to the community as well. In addition, because of the stress involved in military service, service members are taught to depend on and take care of each other (Money et al., 2011). Thus having veterans involved in the development of services can lend the necessary credibility to lower the stigma of accessing services. In addition, peer-to-peer support has been positively associated with improvements in a number of health, behavioral health, and social issues, and this is crucial in achieving the results of the program (Defense Center of Excellence, 2011).

To accomplish being a veteran-centered pro-

gram requires a commitment to using veterans' feedback at every level of program development. First, in terms of policy input, veterans must serve on the veteran advisory council and be represented on committees and task forces. Second, one must know the needs of student veterans on your campus. This is accomplished by conducting needs assessments, focus groups, and individual interviews with student veterans and ensuring that this data and information is used for further program development. Thus, identifying veterans' needs, developing a response to those needs, pilot testing, and implementation and feedback for further development help keep the focus on what veterans need and want in order to be successful on campus. Third, student veterans must be involved and visible on the campus in every aspect of the campus community. This is equally true for involving veterans in their own outreach and services as well as contributing to other campus initiatives as members of the community.

To ensure that the program remains veteran-centered will require a leadership team of student veterans that is constantly growing and seeking new students to keep the ranks of those who serve on the student veteran organization diverse. To have a strong student veteran organization requires that a faculty sponsor who is also part of the veteran advisory council is involved and can help the student veteran leadership form a strong team and get connected to projects and networks on campus. Creating a reserve of leaders and co-leaders is crucial as students graduate and someone else must step up to provide leadership. The student veteran organization must retain an active presence on the veteran advisory council where they can bring items to the campus leadership. It is also important that female veterans and veterans of color be represented on the student veteran leadership team. Female veterans and veterans of color provide the visibility at outreach activities to draw other student veterans to the organization and to encourage them to access services on campus. Diversity across ethnic groups and service branches is also important. Student veterans are diverse in their political views and although they have earned every right to advocate for causes, it is best to keep political opinions out of the leadership conversations so as not to offend other veterans. Advocating for causes to help veterans can be encouraged without discussing political party affiliations. In addition, a strengths-based approach should be used as a guiding framework for the provision of all supportive services on campus. Using a strengths-based approach will help ensure that the input of student veterans is valued and that the perceived stigma of student veterans who access services is diminished.

Services in the Veterans Initiative Model

Services included in the model consist of: academic support, health and behavioral health, career, and leadership. A brief overview of the services and examples of internal and external partnerships developed to help provide services are described below. In addition, a more comprehensive list of services by area is included in Table 1.

Academic Support Services. Academic support services are at the center of services provided since persistence and graduation are central to the mission of the overall program to support student veterans. Veterans can enter the university with special challenges from being out of an academic environment for a number of years and from military experiences that have created health issues that can have an impact on learning such as exposure to concussive events from improvised explosive devices that result in mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI; Glover-Graf, Miller, & Freeman, 2010; Selber, in press). The need for providing entering veterans with information about the requirements, landscape of services, and roles and expectations of their new mission is fundamental to their successful transition. Therefore, a variety of approaches to orient student veterans to campus are needed. Examples of services in this area include: (a) a campus orientation session given by veterans specifically for veterans prior to enrollment, (b) a first semester one hour credit course for freshman that has veteran-only sections for understanding campus and off-campus resources and self-care issues, (c)a faculty-mentor program using faculty who are also veterans, (d) early warning alerts by faculty when veterans are at risk of failing a class, (e) calling low grade point average student veterans at midterm and at the

Table 1: Highlights of Veterans Initiative Services for Student Veterans

Academic Support

- Educational benefits assistance by expert veteran staff members.
- Open house for veterans.
- Veteran sections of a one-hour credit course (US 1100 Seminar) that orients them to campus and off campus services and trains them in self-care techniques.
- Orientation sessions for new student veterans by successful student veterans.
- Mentoring program with faculty and staff who are veterans
- Low GPA calls.
- Tutoring and writing skills assistance by the SLAC lab on campus.
- Recognition at graduation ceremonies with special regalia- red, white, & blue cords.
- Resource Fairs.
- Writing assistance by the Writing Center on campus.

Health and Behavioral Health Support

- Mental health counseling, support groups, bio-feedback, and one hour workshops by Counseling Center staff and a partnership with a local Vet Center to provide on-campus counseling services to our vets.
- Case management by Social Work interns to refer and link student veterans to campus and off campus services
- An active student veteran organization – Veterans Alliance of Texas State (VATS)-
- Pilot mobile actigraphy sleep study capability by the Respiratory Care Dept.
- Mediation skills group for veterans to improve stress management.
- Outreach to wounded warriors focusing on adaptive sports.
- An initiative to offer training on campus for vet-to-vet self-care skills.
- Partnerships in the community are developed to expand our services for veterans
- Warrior Challenge recreational clinics.

Career and Leadership Services

- A Career Services unit that provides resources for career and job search with veteran staff members.
- Workshop series for veterans on resume writing, networking, business etiquette, and mock interviews.
- Partnerships with leading state/ county service providers for job search assistance.
- Networking through golf. Golf skills clinics.
- E-portfolios for accumulating work within the university to use for job search.

end of the semester to assist in getting them back on track academically, (f) special tutoring in areas such as math, writing skills, and study skills provided by veterans, and (g) special trainings for advisors regarding how to help student veterans succeed.

The Campus Writing Center Partnership. An example of an effective partnership in the academic area is the partnership with the campus writing center. Writing skills are an essential component to success in all academic fields. Unfortunately, many student veterans have been outside of a formal school setting for several years and may

need significant help in this area. The individualized, one-on-one tutoring sessions offered by writing centers has the potential to foster a safe and open environment to develop these skills. Having a tutor who is a fellow veteran, someone who shares a common language and set of experiences, can go a long way toward establishing the trust and rapport needed to obtain the maximum possible benefit from these sessions. We have found veterans are often uncomfortable asking for assistance and are unlikely to return unless they have a positive first experience. The best way to ensure this positive first experience at a writing center is by pairing them with a tutor who can not only help their writing, but also relate to their personal circumstances. The writing center was able to tailor their services to student veterans by hiring a veteran on staff and also housing a student veteran social work intern, both of whom worked with student veterans needing this academic support. A typical tutoring session lasts a half-hour to an hour and involves the student bringing in a writing assignment. As the tutor points out structural and grammatical issues in the writing, as well specific strengths, the student learns over time how to avoid common errors and progressively becomes a more capable writer. Writing centers may also provide group instruction through specialized workshops tailored to student veterans' needs. A writing center program for veterans can also yield benefits beyond the purely academic. In addition to providing writing assistance, a veteran tutor can help to normalize a client's feelings and experience of being a veteran on a college campus, as well as provide a measure of academic mentorship. A veteran tutor may also serve as an information conduit, helping to connect student veterans to campus and community resources, thus easing the access to services. By recruiting one to two student veterans with an interest in helping other veterans, the most essential component to launching the program is in place. Promotion and continued monitoring is critical to maintaining a program's success, but we have found that once a student veteran experiences a tutoring session, they often become repeat customers and, subsequently, better writers.

Health and Behavioral Health Services

Services in this area of health and behavioral health include a number of options that provide a range of support to student veterans. Some recent services in this category include: (a) counseling services by veterans; (b) biofeedback sessions; (c) case management services provided by the social work interns including assessment, referral, and linkage to on-campus and off-campus service; (d) resource fairs to bring partners from community agencies to campus to share resources; and (e) an active student veteran organization that provides a social network, outreach, special events, and self care assistance for peers. A meditation skills group has also been added to assist student veterans and family members in dealing with the stress of being in an academic setting. In addition, a recreational sports dimension has been added to supportive services by partnering with the Recreational Sports Division on campus and a local sports organization Warrior Challenge; assisted pet therapy and horse equine activities as well as supportive scuba diving with wounded warriors have been other short-term services in this area.

The Respiratory Care Department Partnership. In 2010 The Respiratory Care Department of the university began a partnership with the Veterans Initiative in the form of a pilot study and follow up with our student veterans. Since our needs assessment had discovered that around 40% of our student veterans reported sleep issues we saw that this was a partnership that could begin to work on some important health issues. The Respiratory Care Department has a sleep center that is a fully functioning sleep diagnostic and treatment center and is nationally accredited by the American Association for Sleep Medicine (AASM). The center is staffed by Registered Polysomnographic Technologists (RPSGT) who perform sleep studies. A pilot study was performed using student veterans and actigraphy technology, which is a non-invasive method of monitoring human rest/activity cycles using a small actigraph unit that is worn by a patient as a wristwatch-like device. The recorded measurements are stored and downloaded to provide a visual graph used to interpret rest and activity periods over 24 hour

periods. Actigraphy allows measurement of an individual's sleep cycles via activity and light exposure and can potentially be utilized to rule out or suggest circadian sleep phase disorders. Actigraphy has been well documented in sleep research literature with subjects ranging from newborn infants to the elderly and has many advantages for student veterans because it is portable and less invasive than a sleep study in a lab since the device can be taken home to gather data. Multiple, substantial studies linking data recorded by actigraphy devices to sleep efficiency have established the usefulness of portable actigraphy in assessing various sleep issues. Student veterans were assessed using this technology and then Respiratory Care staff followed up to interpret and explain the results. Social work interns then helped connect those student veterans that needed further assistance to referrals on campus and in the community for help. Also, after this study was completed a meditation skills group was initiated on campus and is still ongoing to help student veterans deal with sleep and stress issues. The partnership with the Respiratory Care Department is ongoing and is an excellent example of an interdisciplinary internal partnership to help serve our student veterans.

The American Widow Project (AWP) Partnership. The AWP is a non-profit organization whose founder and Executive Director, Taryn Davis, is a 26-year-old military widow. In 2008, shortly after losing her husband to an improvised explosive device in Iraq, she created the organization and a documentary to reach out to this generation of military widows. The mission of AWP is to provide support to help military widows rekindle their love of life while honoring their lost hero's legacy. The organization provides a supportive hotline, special widow retreats around the country to help widows connect to each other and to their passions for life, and a creative website to promote outreach and sharing. Run entirely by widows, it is an excellent example of a peer-to-peer model of services and support. The AWP has been a long-standing partner for our campus, and the partnership has grown to include a number of events and types of activities. This partnership has remained important not only because of the importance of honoring this level of sacrifice reflected by the AWP organization, but because of having military widows enroll as students on campus. Our partnership has included several dimensions. The AWP founder is a regular guest lecturer in an elective course on helping troops and veterans transition, and the campus spotlights AWP services at special events. In addition, service-learning projects have been completed that benefit AWP widows, performed by teams of students volunteering to help make the widow retreats special. Interns have been placed in their administrative offices, and technical assistance by faculty has been provided in the area of grant-seeking and database development. Recently a university donor honored the founder by naming a student veteran emergency fund for her late husband.

Career and Leadership Services

There are also supportive services in the area of career and leadership services that are often needed by veterans to find part-time jobs and internships to supplement their educational benefits and to prepare for their new careers in the civilian workforce. Although veterans come to campus with many leadership capabilities, holding leadership positions in the civilian world requires the polishing of new skills and a deepening of leadership experiences that can be transferred to the civilian workplace. Veterans are clearly concerned about career issues. Having had a career in the military, they are now focused on getting their degree so they can have another career in the civilian world. This focus is seen in a recent survey of student veterans that showed either major or moderate levels of concern about all items dealing with career and employment with the top concerns including finding a job (63%), being happy with a job (60%), worrying about future job satisfaction (57%), sustaining certainty in career plans (55%), and maintaining confidence about job searching (48%). In addition, about one third voiced concern regarding needing part time work (34%), transitioning into the civilian workforce (31%), getting along with their bosses (30%), and getting along with co-workers (30%). These data indicate that student veterans are concerned about their future and approach their degrees accordingly (Gwin et al., 2012).

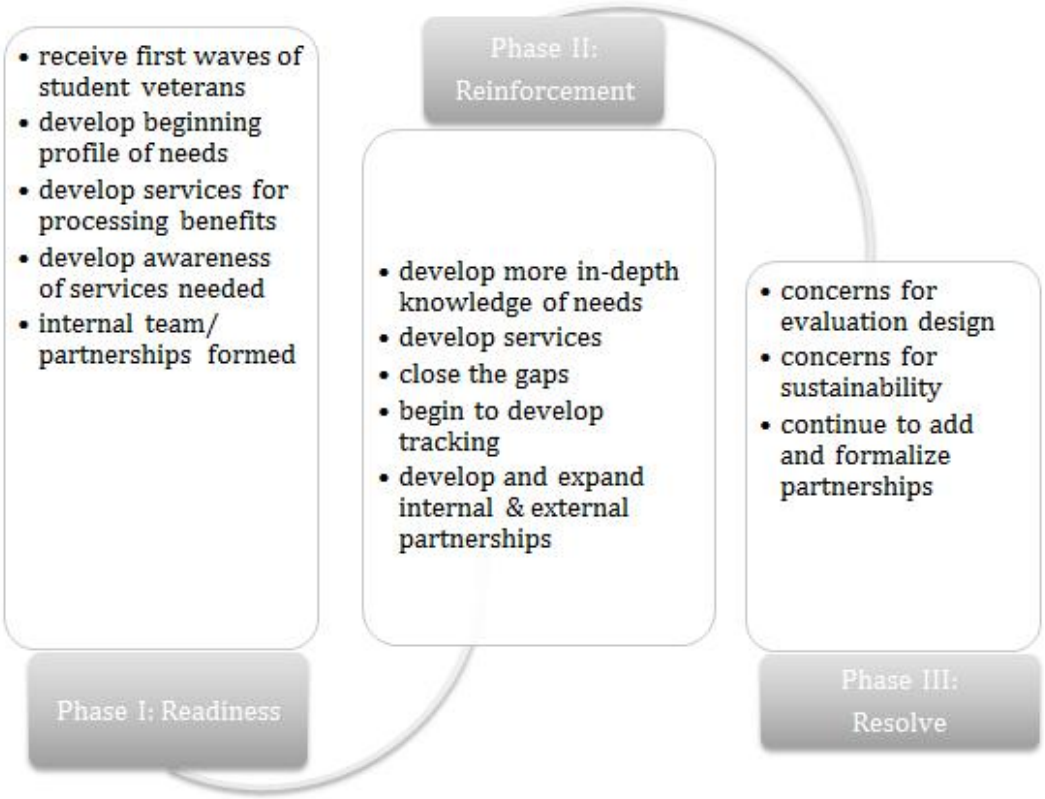
Services in this area tailored to veterans have included workshops for resume writing, business etiquette, and golfing for networking, as well as partnerships in the community for job search and career preparation. E-portfolios are also being used to gather career assessment and bank materials developed as veterans move through the university. Staff in the Career Services office who are veterans have provided the blending of a veterans' perspective and future employers. Student veterans have also been part of student leadership development workshops and programming, volunteered in other student campus activities and organizations outside of those related to veteran issues, and presented on panels both on campus and in the community.

The Campus Student Veteran Organization Partnership. The partnership with the student veteran organization illustrates the critical importance of internal partnerships. Student veteran organizations are often organized around two general purposes, providing veterans with information regarding benefits and services and facilitating a positive social environment that brings veterans together. With regard to the former, we have found that student veterans are often aware of only a small fraction of the useful services available to them on campus. Much of this can be attributed to the structure and compartmentalization of campus services, which makes it difficult for any one source to be knowledgeable about all veteran-related services. A student veteran organization is likely to attract campus agencies that wish to serve veterans, but are uncertain of how to reach out to them, thus they are a partnership that leverages other partnerships. Perhaps even more valuable in bridging the service and information gap is the collective experience and knowledge of the group's members; it has been our experience that student veterans are more likely to value the information they receive from their peers. With this in mind, the social purpose of the organization can be seen as intimately connected to its informational purpose. When student veterans get together they talk, and one of the things they talk about is their experience with benefits and services. A student veteran organization informed of a recurring problem by its members may even choose to engage in advocacy efforts on behalf of the institution's veterans.

The value of creating a social space for student veterans to gather and interact on campus is difficult to overstate. Student veterans often note the challenge of connecting to traditional student peers with whom they have little in common with in terms of age or life experience. This can feel especially isolating to people accustomed to the strong bonds of friendship and camaraderie forged during military service. The group may be capable of partially recreating this by organizing periodic social gatherings, such as monthly group meetings and luncheons. One is likely to be surprised by the immediate level of comfort and openness veterans display at these gatherings, as they appear to feel immediately welcome and understood. Additional veteran gatherings can take many forms, such as attending school sporting events, celebrating holidays like Veterans Day, or anything of mutual interest that connects the group's members. We have seen that these social gatherings build the type of friendships that function as an effective buffer against the stressors of life as a student veteran. Whether the organization is functioning as a social club, an advocacy group, or an information depository, there is perhaps no better way for an institution to help its veterans than by helping them to organize and develop as a strong leadership organization and then to partner with them in everything they do.

The County Veteran Service Provider. A crucial link to the community is a network of county-level veteran service providers. This government-based entity provides information and referral to all levels of government assistance for veterans and is an important referral link for our student veterans. Often our veterans have not applied for a variety of benefits such as disability ratings and other potential career-related services for job searches and internships. Our partnership with this organization also includes using the office as an internship site for our student veterans. Also, the office has been a co-sponsor of many of our campus events and regularly attends our campus events to have a presence on campus to accomplish outreach for their services.

Figure 3: Phases of University Preparation for Serving Student Veterans--The Context for a Professional Development Roadmap



The Road Ahead: The Future of Services for Student Veterans on Campus

Although universities have made gains in the past five years to prepare for student veterans pursuing their degrees, much work remains to be done. Figure 3 depicts the phases of university preparation for serving student veterans and the context for the professional development roadmap. Phase I of this work can be considered the Readiness Phase where campuses receives the first wave of the influx of veterans and identifies a beginning profile of these students and their needs as well as developing beginning services. Phase II can be considered a Reinforcement Phase where services are further developed and a deeper understanding of student veterans needs and the matching of services can be honed to close the gaps between the needs and what is available. Partnerships are identified and initiated and developed. Phase III can be considered the Resolve Phase where the campus develops strategies and evaluative measures to sustain an enduring resolve to a commitment to serve these students. In this phase the university develops a more in-depth evaluation process and more partnerships are developed and efforts initiated to ensure that services are sustainable. In this phase, the university moves to institutionalize its commitments, processes, and procedures to serve

the population of veterans. The process is not linear but iterative, and each phase builds on the prior phase, circling back to rebuild and improve. Overall the field of student veteran services is primarily in Phase II.

The field of student veteran services within the broader field of social work education, student affairs, and professional development remains underdeveloped. Little research exists about student veterans, and most is anecdotal in nature. A better understanding of the needs of student veterans, their unique leadership qualities, their transitions, and their challenges within the university is needed. In addition, evaluation of different programs to serve student veterans remains descriptive and lacks rigor. Universities are beginning to grapple with measuring graduation rates spurred largely by Congressional oversight committees' review of private, for-profit university involvement in the field.

Although many universities have made progress, some remain without any substantive program to respond to the needs of student veterans. The professional development roadmap can help those universities jump-start their efforts and enhance those efforts already underway by providing information on next steps in a program development model that is veteran-centered and uses both internal and external partnerships for program improvement. Social work educators in partnership with student affairs staff can take the lead in professional development and make a difference in the future of student veterans. With the war in Iraq over and the war in Afghanistan coming to a close more active duty service members will be transitioning out of the military and into civilian life. With a slow economy into the foreseeable future, budget deficits, and a down-sizing of the military, veterans will likely continue to pursue their degrees using their hard earned educational benefits. The question that looms over the field of services for veterans in general is will the public keep the focus on veterans as the wars continue to slip from the headlines. These veterans understand the meaning of sacrifice for the greater good because that has been the way they have conducted their lives in the service. The question though is can the nation learn that lesson and implement it when veterans need our help completing their degrees? If we can, we will all greatly benefit from their leadership off the battlefield…again.

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