Understanding & Supporting Our Student Veterans: Serving Well Those Who Have Served!

Colonel Gerald “Jerry” Smith ’82, USMC (Ret.)
(Veteran Resource & Support Center)

Bridgette Ingram ’99 – Veteran Services Office
(Scholarships & Financial Aid)

Coffee Conversations – 15 April 2016
Our Plan of Attack…

• A Little Aggie History
• Who We Serve & What We Do
  • VSO
  • VRSC
• Student Veteran Awareness
  • Transitions, Environments, Myths, & More
• Student Veteran Panel
Almost 100 years ago...

4 months later...

7 March 1919

“The College began its first work in the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers and sailors with the arrival...of Sidney O'Hara, a former soldier, and H. A. Camp, a sailor, who were sent here by the vocational training board of the War Department for special training.”
After World War II...

5 months later...

11 March 1946

"J. W. Rollins reported 3100 veterans in A&M’s present 4355 enrollment…"

“The A. and M. College of Texas has provided a full-time employee to serve as Veterans Advisor and assist ex-servicemen and their families with problems.”
More recently…

1990: VSO moves under Financial Aid

2008: TAMU…”not one of the 1,700!”

2012: VRSC opens (Student Affairs)

2016: Great Partnerships

VSO + VRSC + others!
Veteran Services Office (VSO):
- Part of Scholarships & Financial Aid within Academic Affairs.
- Mission is to maximize college funding for military affiliated students.
- Located in the Pavilion

Veteran Resource & Support Center (VRSC):
- Part of Student Affairs.
- Identifies, develops & provides uniquely tailored resources for military affiliated students & their families.
- Houses Military Admissions & the Vet-Success on Campus Counselor.
- Located in Koldus
Any stereotypes?

What comes to mind when you hear the term…

“Student Veteran?”
Who We Serve…

- ~1,200 Student Veterans
- Older – 27/32
- Transfer Students (70%)
- Grad Students (48%)
- Married/Families (40%)
- Still serving (30%)
- Combat (55%)…17% have >20 months deployed
- Time in Service (5+ yrs avg)
- Female (16%)
- ~2,300+ Dependents on benefits
- Survivors…~100 apply each year
• Race
  – African-American (7%) - Hispanic (17%)
  – Caucasian (51%) - Asian American (8%)

• Enrollment
  – Liberal Arts (17%) - Engineering (22%)
  – Ag (17%) - Bush School/Mays (7% each)

  – Construction Science (4%)
Veteran Services Office
Veteran Services Office

• **Responsibilities:**
  o Process federal and state education benefits.
  o Provide scholarship and financial aid advising.
  o Award military scholarships.
  o Ensure compliance with federal and state veteran benefit policies and regulations.
  o Primary responder to data requests and surveys.

• **Collaborates with the VRSC on:**
  o Veterans presentations and resource tables.
  o Troops to College Committee.
  o Veteran events (Vet Camp, Boots to Backpacks, etc.).
Veteran Educational Benefits

Types of Veterans Educational Benefits:

Federal Benefits:
• Chapter Benefits
  • Chapter 33 – Post 9/11 GI Bill
  • Chapter 30 – Montgomery GI Bill
  • Chapter 31 – Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment
  • Chapter 1607 – Reserve Educational Assistance Program
  • Chapter 1606 – Selected Reserves
  • Chapter 35 – Dependents’ Educational Assistance
• Tutoring Assistance

State Benefits:
• Hazlewood Exemption
Veteran Educational Benefits

**VA Chapter Benefits for Veterans:**
Pays tuition and fees, books, and a housing stipend:
  - Chapter 33 – Post 9/11 GI Bill
  - Chapter 31 – Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment
Pays a monthly stipend directly to the student:
  - Chapter 30 – Montgomery GI Bill
  - Chapter 1606 – Selected Reserve
  - Chapter 1607 – Reserve Educational Assistance Program

**VA Chapter Benefits for Dependents:**
Pays tuition and fees, books, and a housing stipend:
  - Chapter 33 – Post 9/11 GI Bill
Pays a monthly stipend directly to the student:
  - Chapter 35 – Dependents’ Educational Assistance
Veteran Educational Benefits

Hazlewood Exemption

What it Pays For:
- Pays resident tuition and required fees for a total of 150 credit hours.
- Can be applied to Undergraduate, Graduate, or Professional School.
- Students using Legacy benefits will only be eligible for the hours needed to graduate from their program (maximum degree certified hours).
Military Scholarships

University – Military Affiliated:

• Honored Service Scholarship
• Aggie Ring Scholarship for Veterans
• Faye Leeth Memorial Endowed Scholarship
• Heroes of the War on Terrorism
• Jorge Bermudez
• Association of Former Students

You can apply for most of these through the University Scholarship Application on scholarships.tamu.edu.

Outside – Military Affiliated:
– Tillman Military Scholarship
– Folds of Honor Foundation
Veteran Services Office

• Current Topics
  o Accepting documents from NEW students for Summer ‘16 and Fall ’16. Will accept continuing students documents once they are registered for the semester.
  o Pat Tillman Foundation Scholarship
  o TAMU Veterans Benefit Workshop in April
  o Hazlewood will be a hot topic at upcoming State Legislature
Veteran Resource & Support Center
Veteran Resource & Support Center

Mission:
To enhance TAMU’s "military friendly" legacy by identifying, developing & providing uniquely tailored resources & programs to current/former military students, families & survivors to enrich their academic success & holistic development.

We facilitate successful Aggie veteran transitions by applying Aggie Core Values to our "application to vocation" mindset to truly...

Serve Well Those Who Have Served.
What We Do……

- Current Programs = 37
- 65+ Events each year
- 57+ Presentations each year
- 150+ Campus/Community Partnerships
- 9 Committees/Advising
- Scholarships & Development
- Employment
- Publications, Media, & Consulting
The VRSC Team…

- Director & an Assistant
- Program/Outreach Coordinator
- (2) Military Admissions Liaisons
- VSOC (VA) Counselor
- Grad Assistant
- (12+) VA Work Study
- (2) Interns
Aggie Veteran Network (AVN)

Connects Aggie student vets, dependents, military families, & faculty/staff with each other & with external organizations.

The Mission:
- Connect those who provide, resources & support to our students.
- Link our students with high-impact opportunities to support each other & the local community.

Current Active Contacts = 480+

“Application to Vocation Support!”
VRSC Core Program

A peer support program…
Connects incoming student vets with current student vets to help them navigate college life & ease the transition from the military to college.

TAMU is 1 of 32 PAVE Partners w/ University of Michigan
What is Military Admissions?

Personalized services & a uniquely collaborative support network that recognizes & engages student veteran experiences & strengths to ensure the highest graduation rates & the most successful career outcomes.
A Full Range of Support…

Typical Veteran Support Model = “Orientation to Graduation”

Orientation  Graduation

Application  Orientation  Graduation  Vocation

Expanded Veteran Support Model
“Application to Vocation”
What is VSOC?

Vet Success On Campus (VSOC) Counselor

- A collaborative effort between the host university & VA to provide on-campus support for student veterans.
- Mission - Provide supportive services to ensure that student veterans are successful in their academic pursuits, adjust to the campus environment, & eventual transition to civilian employment.
- TAMU is 1 of 96 universities with VSOC
More VRSC Programs…

- Vet Camp
- Aggie Ring Program
- Tickets for Aggie Student Vets Program
- Recognition Programs
- VetConnect Program
- Gold Star Network
- Research & Assessment Coalition
- Up-Armoring Relationships
- Employment & Career Programs
- Veteran Legal Initiative Program
- Equine Services for Heroes Program
Veteran/Military Related Student Organizations

LEAD

whoop!

4 TROOPS

IF YOU CAN'T STAND BESIDE THEM
STAND BEHIND THEM.

BUILD
A TRADITION OF UNITY

PatriotPaws
Service Dogs
Aggieland

Aggie Adaptive Sports

Stand Behind Them.

Aggie Guide-Dogs and Service-Dogs
WHERE DOGS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.

Aggie Gold Star Network

Veterans In The Corps

Aggies Support

Courtney Cares

Texas A&M

Aggie Shields

Aggie Student Chapter

Gratitude Initiative

Team RWB

WHERE DOGS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.
A New Program...
Faculty, Staff & Advisor Recognition Program

$2,500 Stipend
Troops to College (T2C) Committee

**History:** Created in 2008 to help TAMU meet the needs of a growing military affiliated student population.

**Committee Member Representation:**
- 5 Student Veterans & 27 Faculty/Staff from offices across campus.
  - Academic Advisors, OGAPS, Undergraduate Studies, Disability Services, Career Center, Student Counseling Service, Registrar, Admissions, Student Business Services, Student Health Services, Community Rep, and more.
- Now co-chaired by VSO & VRSC.

**Mission:** To provide advice & support for the development, improvement, & implementation of services & programs that will facilitate military-affiliated student success from application to vocation.
Survey Rankings…

• #23 Best for Vets Colleges
• #9 (#1 in Texas) Best for Vets Business Schools
• #1 College Factual Best Colleges for Veterans ROI as reported by USA Today
• #4 – USAA Best Places for Veteran Education
• Military Advanced Education’s Military Friendly Colleges & University’s List
• Award -Top 10 School
• Military Order of the Purple Heart Designation
Making an Impact…?

- Military Admissions
- Scholarships & Benefits
- Academics
  - Vet Camp & Veteran Designated Courses
- Career Outcomes
- Social & Health
- Future Programs, Partnerships & Research
- We are at a “tipping point…”
Student Veteran Awareness
Fact or Fiction?
After the military (or combat), college should be easy for student veterans!

FICTION

- The transition to the college environment presents challenges.
- Many suffer from the change (or loss) of identity.
- Relating to younger traditional students is hard!

“I never expected college to be more stressful than combat!”
It’s about the transition(s)…

Traditional Student: Sequential Transition
- High School to College (maybe 1st Generation)
- College to Workforce

Student Veteran: Overlapping Transitions
- “Sandbox” to Home & Family – A process; not an event!
- Becoming a civilian & a student (maybe again)
- For the entire family…another PCS move!
- Full-time Employment to Unemployed/Part-time
- Multiple universities
- College to Workforce (older than “Traditional Students”)

GOAL = To & Through, Engaged!”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veteran Mindset</th>
<th>Higher Ed Mindset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can fix my own problems...I shouldn’t need help...Asking for help gets me labeled as “weak.”</td>
<td>Asking for help doesn’t get you “labeled.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Strong ideas about strength & weakness:**  
  • Those who need help are weak.  
  • Physical strength is prized & necessary for survival. | **Strong ideas about strength & weakness:**  
  • Asking for help is a sign of strength/maturity.  
  • Mental strength is prized.  
  • Survival doesn’t depend on physical strength. |
| **Training:** Repetitive, practical, memorization, a checklist mentality. | **Education:** Reflective, theoretical, synthesis & analysis mentality. |

*It’s more than just a little different...*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veteran Mindset</th>
<th>Higher Ed Mindset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Used to structure:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Prefers less structure:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schedules/regimentation are critical.</td>
<td>• Regimentation inhibits personal freedom &amp; expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taking orders, giving orders &amp; the chain of command make sense.</td>
<td>• Leading by committee works.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24/7</th>
<th>7/24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Push” Mentality: Much is provided &amp; directed to/for you.</td>
<td>“Pull” Mentality: You must find &amp; seek what you need.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The contrast can produce “College Shock!”*
Student Veteran Challenges

- Isolation or Alienation
- Change of Identity (“Hero to Zero” & “Priority of Self”)
- Time Management
- PTSD/TBI
  - Anger Management
  - Substance Abuse
  - Relationship & Trust Issues
- The BIG 5: GI Bill benefit processing, Health Care, Insurance, Academic Advising & $$$ (bills, billing cycles, living expenses)
- Transfer Student “GPA Drop”

Often…this is where we tend to focus!
Fact or Fiction?
Student vets bring notable strengths to the student body!

FACT

• They bring significant leadership training & diverse experiences to the classroom.
• Their strong core values often reinforce university values.
• They tend to be goal oriented, committed to success & focused on timely degree completion.
• They understand collaboration & team work.

“Veterans are a significant resource for universities. They are accustomed to serve…and they continue to serve as students. They not only animate the classroom, but often become student leaders, organizing campus activities and community service projects.”
Student Veteran Strengths

• Maturity & Discipline
• Diverse Experiences
• Leadership
• Core Values
• Communication
• Collaboration
• Interpersonal Skills/Team Player
• Focused on Achievement & Success
• They just know how to “get things done!”

Focus on “identifying & applying their strengths!”
Fact or Fiction?

With a tuition “full ride,” student vets are “set” financially!

FICTION

• Student vets previously earned a “full-time” paycheck.
• While GI Bill benefits pay for a lot, most arrive on campus with a recent & significant income reduction.
• They have different financial needs; many are married with children & few have parental support.

Nearly 1/2 will run out of GI Bill benefits before graduation...~ 2/3 of these will have 2+ semesters remaining until graduation!
Veterans are a diverse group!
Don’t assume much about their religion, sexual orientation or political views. BUT you can bet they love their country & most are very loyal to their branch of service.

Veterans never view themselves as a “victim!”
They are more open to “Adapting & Overcoming” than seeking “treatment.”

For the 1st time in (?) years, they are separated from their social system/”battle buddy!”
They may feel alone & vulnerable…helping them feel welcome & confident really helps.
More Awareness Tips…

Don’t be surprised (or offended) if they “seem to like” combat…this tends to be “normal!”

The adrenaline, intensity & comradeship made them feel alive…it became “normal…” they need to adjust!

Veterans may appear disrespectful!”

– Their perceived vulnerability, lack of support, or isolation may cause them to overreact.
– *It may make perfect sense to them*, to be late for class, absent, or arrive very early to get the “safe location” in class (i.e., the very back).
– They value & honor authority figures…their actions are usually not intended to be disrespectful.
Awareness Tips: Never say/ask this…!

• “That war was an atrocity & a waste of human life.”
• “Why are you having so much trouble…you volunteered, right?”
• “Did you kill anyone?”
• “Were you scared?”
• “Did you see dead people?”
• “What was the worst thing that happened to you in combat?”
Awareness Tips: These are better…!

• “Thank you for your service!”
• “What motivated you to serve?”
• “How long (or when) did you support & defend our Constitution?”
• “What branch of the military were you in?”
• “Are you still serving?”
• “Where were you stationed/Did you travel?”
• “What do you like best about being in school right now?”
The Meaning for Aggies...

Being Veteran Friendly is not just something we should do...it's who we are!

– At the intersection of our Core Values, our heritage & our vision we find a foundational Aggie principle:

“SERVE WELL THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED!”
Final Thoughts

Surveys…turn them in!

Sign up for Vet Camp!

QUESTIONS?

Student Veteran Panel:
Sharing Their Perspectives

Serve Well Those Who Have Served!