

*They served our nation with honor,
and at tremendous cost to themselves.*

*They have come here for their college education,
and now it is our turn to serve them.*

Listening to Student Veterans

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Listening to Student Veterans...

“I feel like I’m at home. I grew up in the Sacramento area so I knew what to expect when I transferred here. I feel like I don’t have many difficulties here.

As a vet I like the direction its going in concerning the VA but it was tough figuring out everything I need to know”

—22 year old white male & junior & a vet

“It is somewhat difficult to adjust to the relaxed organizational structure as a student here. However it also frees me to oversee my own time management. I’m not always sure what is expected and sometimes it’s not clear which office I need to go to for services or information.

The transfer orientation was helpful

Some courses have vague, unclear, or inconsistent directions and guidelines”

—veteran

“As a vet I feel like I know some stuff. Especially as a female I think people never see me in that manner.

As an ‘older’ student I want to tell younger students to stop wasting their time & take school seriously.

The convenience of vet office and all the resources is great.”

—Mexican Female Vet

“There are days that I feel younger students make too many excuses and lack accountability. I feel that if we’re to speak out against liberal ideas + ask that people to work or serve before getting privileges that I would be treated negatively.

I like that I found (my) program, as well as the Veterans Success Center.”

—An Older White Male Veteran who is returning to school

“My demographic faces many challenges, but also, it has advantages. Challenges: Relating to most college-aged students who are not parents. Many of the younger students don’t have a grasp of how important education is. Pro: I’m rarely surprised and overwhelmed by obstacles.

Some professors should use the soapbox less and encourage discussion.

I would like people to understand the journey from veteran to student.”

—Vet, Parent, Male, Native American, Older, Straight (Hetero)

“It is hard to relate and interact with other students. Priority’s and dedication to class material is often completely different. Many of the students come from a very privileged background. Their understanding of what challenges their peers face is often nonexistent.

Parking is bad, the kids don’t know how to park. I suggest a parking test as part of the enrollment process.

The veteran community has many organizations that help. I have enjoyed connecting with the veteran community who have the same concerns and problems.

As a transfer student, I had no priority registration. Being that I had taken all my GE classes and can only take VA approved courses, I almost didn’t get enough class to get full benefits. Also, my schedule is all over the place which makes work a hard thing to schedule. This will change next semester, but it is hard for a new veteran to get what they need.”

—White, male, veteran, 35, first in family in college

“it’s not good. I feel disconnected sometimes by age.

It is difficult to stay focused on tasks at hand, because of the lack of resources”

—white 26 vet male

“I am a student who communicates with basically everyone I come into contact with and treat everyone equally. When I keep an open mind and speak to others with respect they seem to do the same.”

—23 year old female, lesbian, hispanic (Veterans Success Center)

“Once you’re out of the military, life is very different. It’s been an adjustment. I find myself wondering how I ever lived my former life before the military. I find myself uncertain about where I’m going and what I’m doing, my new role as a student, how I’ll balance all my responsibilities, and what the future holds. I am determined, however, and this mindset got me through training and deployment.”

—veteran, 28

“I think this campus is people-friendly. I have yet to have a bad confrontation with people on campus....”

—Veteran, 67, visually impaired, legally blind

“Challenging to find peers who can relate, the change of pace/environment from the military. It’s been pretty uneventful. More like a second job to me.

(I like) Summer classes to graduate faster. (I don’t like) too many pointless classes I already took at CC.”

—a veteran

“Being a veteran is the perspective I’m beginning with. Some students seem to expect me to be crazy and then get angry that I get preference when registering. I also get negative comments because I get financial assistance for school. It’s tough enough getting glares for having short hair and walking into the women’s restroom. It’s even tougher being judged for getting benefits I earned through my service. I wish students would think about the sacrifices made for certain things instead of judging.

Positive experiences...are meeting other vets. Doing things in the community to promote understanding of different backgrounds.

What has worked for me at Sac State are the opportunities and willingness of some professors to help. Professors seem to have an understanding of vets and have patience for the times we may not be ourselves.

What I don’t like about Sac State is the fact that some students are so shallow and self-centered.”

—Lesbian, Chicana, Veteran

“It’s an honor to be going to school. I wish students and teachers would think about that more often & make a bigger contribution in it.

Veterans Affairs Office, Financial Aid & Career Planning have been great. I like that since I am a veteran, I get priority for classes.”

—Sicilian Veteran 45 yrs old & athlete

“Great, no complaints.... Great experience, always got the help I needed

(I like) getting to know professor faculty members

(I don’t like) doing things at the last minute”

—African America (Veteran Center)

“I’ve had some really good professors who turned into good mentors. I had a professor talk about persistence. ‘Just keep going, you’ll be fine,’ he said. Some professors are very understanding, but others are not very supportive. I think that some professors, I understand, want to be militant about teaching their classes, which is fine, but I think it doesn’t really encompass the campus community, because we’re diverse and not everyone is an A student.

I like the other students in my classes. It’s nice to have familiar faces and the support. I was working on a project in this one class, and asked for help from the professor. He was a little harsh, when I asked classmates I got an overwhelming amount of support, and that was something I didn’t expect.

(A staff member)...is pushing but gentle, I’m here because of her. She even called me at home.”

—learning disability, veteran, female, 45, some depression

“The ability to access information is fine, however, as one might expect, the college seems to be catering mostly to students that are much younger. By catering, I mean different events. For example: Job Fairs.

It’s nice because I can walk though the quad and not get interrupted due to looking much older than the typical student.

(I like) The Veterans Center and finding a quiet place in the library.

Disabled Student Services—Although a benefit for most with a disability, due to class times, it is not ‘user friendly’ for my particular situation.”

—Disabled, white, male, veteran, 39

“Being a veteran on campus is very nice since there is a Veterans Success Center. I am as old as some of the teachers and have been mistaken as being one of the staff. I enjoy all the different backgrounds of the students in my class.

All wonderful students and teachers I work with in classes.”

—Female Veteran 40 years old

“Finding the right schedule to accommodate my son’s needs, being able to pick him up from school, finding the right study schedule is different as well. Being able to fit work in the mix as well.

There are a lot of good resources that CSUS provides to assist me.

(I like to) have breaks during the day to be able to finish my work.”

—a single parent (Veteran Success Center)

“It is very hard to deal with the ... challenges (stated below) when immersed in a non-understanding school population. The same goes for professors that don’t understand circumstances.

Almost every class that is a challenge to me, I explain to the professor that I am having a hard time and their only help to me is try harder. You cannot group all students in the same category. I have gotten so frustrated that I have walked out of a office session b/c of the advice that was given to me.

(I don’t like) most teachers and their lack of effort. I expect more for my \$.

I do like the smarthinking program that is available to students.”

—30 y/o, white, learning challenges, physical challenges, vet.

“I avoid the social aspects of the campus.

I have no real opinion. I have no connection to the campus other than this is the location where I take classes. I like the Vet center and gym.”

—White male veteran 28

“I think Sac State has so much diversity that you get to see and meet a lot of different backgrounds. Also, being a veteran helps you with different resources that you need and to get help on.

I’d like to share that at Veterans Success Center we welcome anyone that likes to study or get to know other fellow veterans in the community since Sac State is known to have the 2nd highest student veterans.”

—Asian – 29 – Veteran

“Being a minority veteran at CSUS, I have experienced great acceptance and diversity among my colleagues. CSUS is a fantastic environment that embraces polyculturalist ideology.

The professors can be helpful with your studies, only if you show that you care about the subject.

The veteran’s center has been very helpful with assisting me with my academic needs.”

—Laotian-American, Age 28, Male, Senior at CSUS

“Sometimes I feel that the problems of our society are superficial and endemic of much deeper failings. Primarily in our cultural values and education system. Teachers should be recruited and paid like athletes and entertainers.

Most professors teach to the test, that is they clearly outline the contents of the curriculum, write stuff from the textbook on the board. This involves very little critical thinking.

On the rare occasion I have found professors who think outside the box and teach beyond the test or exam I have gotten glimpses of what education could be.”

—white/male/vet/atheist/engineer

“Being a student veteran, sometimes I feel like a really old person in some of my classes. One of the big challenges is just getting used to college life, which is very different from work environment especially coming out from military.

CSUS has a huge veteran support system and is ideal for veterans looking to go back to college. The faculty here goes above and beyond to help students, which is so important!

I love the support from counselors, teachers to help me succeed here. Being a student, it is so crucial to have good mentors & CSUS has a superb support system for students’ well being.

I don’t like how CSUS is privatized in some way like bookstore & lot of eateries. Other than tuition, lot of students cannot afford to pay overpriced books at bookstore and pay average of \$10.00 per meal. I believe books & food should be subsidized, so many students can focus on school rather than figuring out how to afford super expensive books or a \$10 dollar lunch. School should not be a business to make money.”

—25 years old/male/indian background/vet

“It has been a positive experience. Have received and got assistance for any questions I have had.

I feel the veterans orientation was one of the most helpful and pleasant experiences I have had. They do tailor the veteran community and made my transition positive, as oppose to the overwhelming feeling of a drastic change, specially in environment.

The Veterans Center has been a very convenient, helpful and resourceful place.

—Hispanic, 29 yrs, female veteran

“It’s different than when I was a 19 yr old college student. Priorities are different as well as goals in school.

Having all the resources I need available to succeed academically has been a large help. I.E. Veteran Success Center, textbook checkout @Library, etc.”

—Asian, Veteran, Science major, 30

“I joined the military to serve my country but am happy to have the military benefits for my education now. I don’t have to work for money as much as some do and can enjoy learning.

I am looking forward to the next phase of my life.”

—veteran, junior standing

“Sac State has been an eye opening experience. As a veteran, this is the first school I have attended that isn’t directly linked somehow to a by. For example, when stationed at Ft Bragg, I attended Campbell Univ. Campbell had satellite courses and off-site classes located near or on base making education more achievable. These instructors were also more helpful & understanding when it came to veteran/military issues. I commute 2 hrs and I am still currently serving as a reservist. In addition the school is very diverse bringing forward many different personalities/ways of working.

As my first semester here, I feel like I am still adjusting and trying to figure out what does work for me. So far, I take things one day at a time. When asking for help, most times I get the information I need although it’s apparent most instructors hold the notion they have ‘busy’ schedules and email usually gets the least attention.

As stated above, email % communication is hard. I am essentially paying for instructor time and it’s really hard to get. If most instructors have hard times responding, maybe the number of classes one can teach at one time should be regulated. Additionally, teaching styles vary tremendously, some being more organized than others. I am finding some ‘intro’ classes feel as if they are being taught as intermediate courses. If teaching can be taught with more structure I might find it easier.”

—25 yr/Female/American/Veteran/Parent

“I think/know that it is extremely difficult to be this type of student. The first challenge is being older than most students. I don’t drink, or look for that ‘party’ every weekend. So finding friends that can relate to me is some what difficult. The next challenge, well 3 huge challenges, are the challenges of being a veteran with psychological & physical limitations from the war.

Start small and no matter your age or how many credits you have to finish, do not take on more than you can handle. Also, get a counselor in all areas you need one, ... advisors, mental health, veteran rep. I didn’t find out about half of the items until my instructor told me about them.

I like most of my instructors. When you get that one on one relationship with your instructor, and are treated more like a person than a #. Being able to have some one that really cares about you and wanting to really help you out.

(I don’t like some of the offices) and the way they treat you. You would think that a wounded warrior veteran with major disabilities and readjusting back to somewhat of a normal life would be treated with a little respect and a little heartfelt understanding.”

—White male Psychological & Physical Challenges, Vet 29 yrs. old

“I am a veteran, and working on the flight line (runways) damaged my hearing (loss of hearing and tinnitus, a ringing in the ears). I also have constant aches and pains all over my chest and body.

As a vet, I am always looking to see where the threats are, what looks suspicious or dangerous. Once I saw an altercation where I had to jump in the middle of two men fighting on campus.

I think it was kind of cool when they had an event for vets and the President was there, and he shook my hand, and there was food.”

—male, 33, straight, returning student, psychological depression, anxiety, OCD, physical challenges. A returning student, too.

Student Veterans

A little over 20 million veterans live in the United States, less than 10% of the population, and California has the highest number, over 1.7 million, according to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Coming Home: The Transition from Military Life to Civilian Society

Over five million service members are projected to transition out of the military by 2020.

Typical transitional challenges for veterans include:

- Trying to reconnect with family and friends once again, after having been gone for so very long.
- Trying to obtain work in a competitive economy and when their military experience doesn't always translate into the skills that employers seek.
- Trying to reconcile their military experience's emphasis on trust, teamwork, and knowing that your combat buddies "had your back," with the competitive "dog eat dog world" way of life that is prevalent in society. The military motto is "service before self," but the saying back home is "every man for himself."
- Trying to come to terms with the loss of their active military service when, for many veterans, "leaving the military isn't just leaving a job, it's leaving a way of life."
- Trying to come to terms with the loss of their military unit, their "brothers and sisters" in arms, who are very much like family. No longer having that strong unit cohesion and camaraderie is a tremendous loss.
- Trying to make sense of it all, their time in military service and, for some, why they made it back home but their buddies did not. The grief and survivor's guilt can be anguishing.
- Trying to find new purpose and meaning in life after the military. Many struggle with the question of what to do with the rest of their lives moving forward, and this can cause a huge amount of anxiety for them. For many veterans, moreover, the post-military career aspirations they had for law enforcement, fire-fighting, and other similar occupations may be ruined, given the physical and/or psychological disabilities and issues that they now face.

Coming to College: The Transition from the Military to College

The Post-9/11 Veterans Assistance Act, often called "the new GI bill," and other educational benefits offer returning service members financial support for their education, resulting in a definite upturn in student-veteran enrollment around the nation. According to the American Council on Higher Education's "Spotlight on Student Veterans," student veterans make up about 4% of undergraduates in colleges nationwide, with 19% of student veterans enrolled in public 4-year institutions (2014).

Here at Sacramento State University, there are 461 veterans, 1% of the student body, in Fall 2018, according to the Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning, in the "Enrollment Dashboard." Sac State was ranked 79 out of the top 100 four-year institutions that are best for veterans, according to 2015 rankings from *MilitaryTimes*, and Victory Media, Inc. named the campus a "2016 Military Friendly School."

In addition to the general transitional difficulties described previously, typical transitional challenges for veterans coming to college include:

- Completing the bureaucratic maze of GI Bill benefits paperwork and myriad related forms, in addition to all of the paperwork required for college admittance, in general. Student veterans will face numerous forms to complete so that they can start receiving money, and this is on top of figuring out their classes, getting their textbooks, and so on.
- Getting used to academia after having been in the military for a while. For some student veterans, this is their first experience in higher education ever or in a while, having spent the past four to ten or more years in the military. They face the same challenges that all students face when new or coming back to college.
- Struggling with feelings of isolation. Many student veterans feel a real gulf between themselves and other students due to the age gap and the often vastly different views and priorities that come with their military experience. This can be especially painful given that deep sense of camaraderie they had with their military unit when serving.
- Acclimating to a very different way of life in college. The military is highly structured, with chains of command to be respected, rules to abide, discipline to be exercised at all times, and the planned day-to-day tasks executed without fail. In contrast, college largely lacks that structure and is slower paced, resulting in some student veterans feeling lost or adrift.

Making It Through College: Further Challenges in Getting Their Education

While the transitional difficulties to civilian and then college life listed previously would clearly pose significant obstacles to getting their college education, there are even more challenges that student veterans typically face:

- **High Course Loads:** Student veterans tend to try to take too many classes too soon due to the desire to “catch up” with their nonmilitary friends and/or the other, younger students or the fact that most assess into remedial courses (having gone into the military rather than coming straight from high school to college, much is lost in terms of Math, English writing, and so on). Student veterans, consequently, often need to take many additional courses on top of the required courses they need to complete to achieve their educational goals, all the while knowing that their GI Bill benefits terminate in 36 months.
- **Pressure to Succeed:** Again, that clock is ticking with regard to GI benefits and student veterans really need to pass their classes. This stress is compounded by the fact that most are already facing the difficulties of new students in acclimating to college, as well as dealing with the pressures of trying to balance work and family life.
- **Stigma of Getting Help:** Military culture instills the image of the strong warrior, and in college life, this may mean that many veterans who know they have physical and/or psychological disabilities may be extremely reluctant to seek assistance from Services to Students with Disabilities (SSWD). Some student veterans will try to “tough it out” alone, without the accommodations they may really need to succeed in their classes, and even those who have received their SSWD accommodations may still choose not to present the form to their instructor and forego services.

Dealing with Pain: Psychological and Physical Injuries

On top of all of the difficulties mentioned prior, military service members may have one or more of these combat stress related injuries:

- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Severe anxiety resulting from a dangerous, traumatic experience. Symptoms include: insomnia, memory problems, poor concentration, depression, anxiety, irritability/mood swings, emotional numbing, flashbacks, and hypervigilance. Many people with PTSD will also avoid the people, places, and circumstances that trigger PTSD flashbacks or anxiety and/or will try to keep themselves excessively busy or become “workaholics” as a distraction. Please note that not all returning service members have PTSD, nor are those with PTSD the “ticking time bombs” commonly portrayed in the media.
- **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):** A head injury caused by a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain. TBI is commonly referred to as “Shaken Soldier Syndrome.” Symptoms are similar to PTSD in terms of insomnia, memory problems, poor concentration, depression, anxiety, and irritability/mood swings, and also are very likely to include: headaches, dizziness/imbalance, excessive fatigue both physical and mental, noise or light intolerance, ringing in the ears, and severe vision changes or disturbances. TBI can be hard to detect and often will go undiagnosed, which can result in many veterans feeling stupid at their inability to focus or “get things” as they were used to doing.
- **Military Sexual Trauma (MST):** Unwanted sexual attention, uninvited sexual advances, or forced sex while in the military. Both women and men may suffer MST, and reports are on the rise. MST can manifest in a number of physical and psychological symptoms, sometimes even years later, including: disturbing memories or nightmares, difficulty in feeling safe, feelings of isolation, depression, or emotional numbness, problems with anger or irritability, sleeping problems, and physical health problems.

PTSD and TBI are often referred to as the “signature wounds” of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and along with MST, are “invisible injuries,” serious and sometimes even life-threatening wounds that cannot be seen by others. We may not realize they are suffering. And for some veterans, they, too, might not know much or anything about what they are experiencing—or that they can and should get help.

In addition to the psychological conditions described above, veterans may also have one or more physical injuries that may cause discomfort in standing or sitting, decreased ease of movement or restricted mobility, and acute and/or chronic pain. Not only may this take a great toll on them physically, but the psychological adjustment to no longer having a body that works the way it once performed can be difficult, too, especially when veterans are typically in top physical condition while in active service and most are younger in age and, consequently, used to being in the prime of their health.

It should also be noted that medications taken for these physical and psychological injuries can deteriorate the health of the veteran further due to adverse side effects such as nausea, headaches, dizziness, fatigue, and sleeping problems.

Dealing with Life: Additional Risk Factors

Veterans may also engage in the following:

- **Drinking and Drug Use:** The reasons for substance abuse may vary. Veterans may be self-medicating to deal with combat stress related injuries, and drugs and alcohol are common coping mechanisms for the difficulties of re-adjusting to civilian life. Service members may also have grown accustomed to drinking as a part of military culture.
- **Living on the Edge:** Former combat veterans will often engage in high risk behavior such as getting into fights, high speed car and motorcycle driving, and so on, all to recreate that adrenaline rush or feeling of exhilaration they experienced in combat, when “you’re never more alive than when you are close to death.”

The Gravity of the Situation: What’s at Stake for Some

Veterans may face serious potential consequences in our society at this time:

- **No Job**
Those who served our nation in the most recent wartime are at greater risk of unemployment. For the year 2017 and for those who served during the second Gulf War era (post 9/11/2001): Male veterans age 25-34 had a higher unemployment rate than their nonveteran counterparts (6.0% compared to 4.5% respectively). Female veterans had an overall higher unemployment rate than that of female nonveterans (5.5% compared to 4.1% respectively), and female veterans age 25-34 an even higher unemployment rate than their nonveteran counterparts (8.0% compared to 4.5% respectively).
Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, [Employment Situation of Veterans—2017](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm>
- **No Home**
The rate of homelessness for veterans is higher than for the general population, and California is a state with the fastest growing and largest number of homeless veterans by far, at almost 30% of the nation’s total homeless veteran population, with close to 12,000 veterans homeless on a given night in the state, two-thirds of whom are unsheltered.
The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, [“The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress” \(PDF\)](https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf), <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>
- **Living Too Far on the Edge**
The tendencies toward substance abuse and risky behavior discussed earlier mean that veterans have a higher incidence of deaths from such things as vehicular crashes and drug overdose. This high rate of veteran accidental deaths is a largely unknown issue only more recently coming to light as a major concern.
Alan Zarembo, [“Death Rate Unusually High for Young Veterans.”](http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-veteran-deaths-20131217-dto-htm1story.html) *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 2013, found at: <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-veteran-deaths-20131217-dto-htm1story.html>
- **Not Wanting to Live Anymore**
Suicide rates are much higher for veterans, also, in the country, and in college, too. Veterans Affairs reports that on average, 20 veterans die each day from suicide, with an earlier study showing 22, and at a rate higher in comparison to nonveterans. In the realm of higher education, one study found that nearly half of college student veterans reported that they have contemplated suicide.
Veteran Affairs, [“Facts About Veteran Suicide” \(PDF\)](https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/Suicide_Prevention_FactSheet_New_VA_Stats_070616_1400.pdf), [va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/Suicide_Prevention_FactSheet_New_VA_Stats_070616_1400.pdf](https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/Suicide_Prevention_FactSheet_New_VA_Stats_070616_1400.pdf)
July 2016
Sara Lipka, [“Half of Student Veterans Have Contemplated Suicide.”](https://www.chronicle.com/article/Half-of-Student-Veterans-Have/128524)
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Half-of-Student-Veterans-Have/128524>
The Chronicle of Higher Education, August 4, 2011

What We Can Do

Doing all that we can to help veterans to feel strongly supported and included on campus and achieve their college education honors their service to our nation and shows the depth of our appreciation.

1. Be aware:

Not all student veterans will self-identify as such. We might not always know who they are, but there are certain signs. Student veterans tend to be a little older in age, often are physically fit, and sometimes will wear boots or camouflage clothes (or backpack), and have tattoos (which sometimes honor fallen comrades or mark significant events in their military experience). They may communicate more formally (e.g., the use of titles or “sir” or “ma’am”) or use lingo (e.g., “affirmative,” “roger,” “copy that,” “stand by”).

Some students will be comfortable with others knowing their student veteran status and that becoming public knowledge, while others may want that to remain private.

2. Get it right:

Referring to all veterans as “soldiers” may not go over well with some.

The proper terms are: U.S. Army—Soldier, Air Force—Airman,
Coast Guard—Guardian, Marines—Marine, and Navy—Seaman.

More general terms to use are troops, armed forces, and military service members.

Referring to all veterans as men is also not accurate: 21% of student veterans in higher education are female, and about that same number of women make up active duty service members in the U.S. Armed Forces. It’s also important to note that women may be exposed to combat action as well, given the guerrilla-style fighting occurring nowadays.

3. Keep uppermost in your mind that:

Coming to college can be a huge step for many veterans, due to all of the challenges student veterans face in transitioning to and succeeding in college, described previously. Some veterans will tell you that they felt more afraid of going to college than into combat.

Oftentimes military members in combat learn to “shut off” their minds in order to cope with the horror of warfare. Here in college, however, they are sometimes forced to “turn back on” their minds, and this can be difficult for some.

4. Take some time to say hello and help out:

Visit the Veterans Success Center (Lassen 3003) and introduce yourself. Offer student veterans there, out on campus, or in your class a heartfelt “Thank you for your service.”

Consider volunteering your time and skills, and learning more. You might mentor or offer some other form of support or service that would be greatly appreciated in the Veterans Success Center or clubs for veterans on the campus. Sigma Omega Delta, for example, is an organization that

provides a safe and welcoming space for veterans, as well as welcomes non-veteran members, dependents, survivors, and other supporters, providing an environment where they will be able to gain insight into the world of veterans and better understand veterans' issues. Further information may be found about the organization on the Student Organizations and Life (SOL) website for campus clubs and organizations:

[SOL Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/student-organizations/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/student-organizations/>

5. Understand:

Veterans will very likely have their “bad days” due to the many transitional stresses they face, the pain of their injuries, lack of sleep due to nightmares or insomnia, and/or the fact that a specific day falls on the anniversary date of a traumatic event from their military past.

In the military, anger is a sanctioned emotion because it is adrenaline essential to survival in battle. Anger is what keeps you awake, alert, and alive in combat, and returning service members may not be able to easily and immediately step out of this “battle ready” mindset. Then, too, while the expression of personal feelings is often discouraged in the military, anger can also sometimes be the one acceptable default emotion for hurt, grief, sorrow, confusion, frustration, or embarrassment.

Some veterans may not want to talk about their military experiences and others might, so you can simply let a veteran know that you are available if they ever feel like talking. If you ever enter into a more personally disclosive conversation with a veteran, then you will need to be prepared for what you might hear. Sometimes the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of the veteran may be very difficult to hear and, as you may imagine, perhaps even harder to disclose to someone. Take great care to listen supportively and without judgment to the veteran who has chosen to confide in you.

6. Be there for student veterans:

Some veterans may become a little stressed from time to time. They are, after all, facing all of the enormous transitional difficulties of veterans coming out of the military and into college described previously, while also potentially coping with the pain and debilitation of injuries. Encourage a student veteran who appears a little stressed or agitated to take a short break, relieve stress through physical exercise or relaxation techniques at the WELL, or seek relaxation, camaraderie, and support at the Veterans Success Center.

If a student veteran shows consistent signs of stress or the level of stress has risen, or if you just feel concerned about the student's well-being for any reason, then you may want to try to talk to the student more in depth to see how they are doing. Additionally, referring the student to the appropriate campus services—and making sure to normalize the act of getting help to veterans who come from a proud tradition of independence—may be the encouragement they needed. You will find a list of campus services for student veterans at the end of this section.

In the Classroom

1. Let them know you are here for them. Offer veterans an invitation in your syllabus and/or your remarks in class to approach you if they are experiencing any difficulties in college or in the course and remind them that the Veterans Success Center and student veteran organizations are available, as well. This will not only show that you have a veteran-friendly class, but will also increase awareness of campus services that student veterans might really need.
2. Be aware that many student veterans potentially face certain “triggers” in campus life or in the classroom:

Large crowds such as full classes (especially in the first few weeks of the semester) and a crowded campus location or event can trigger that “situational awareness” instilled in military training to constantly be on your guard. Student veterans with PTSD, also, may go into hypervigilance mode (on constant “red alert” and feeling unsafe).

Noises (a door slamming, book falling off of a desk, etc.) can also trigger alarm or a panic attack and make it very hard for student veterans to return their focus to the lesson at hand.

Timed tests can trigger that combat setting mentality and the accompanying hyperarousal of battle readiness. And note that in an exam situation, the student veteran must sit, be silent, and concentrate, with no physical outlet for all of that adrenaline, which may not be conducive to the student’s best exam performance.

Clips of conflict or warfare can take those student veterans right back into the past and trigger terrible memories, vivid flashbacks, and painful emotions.

Understand that one or more of these triggers may result in the student veteran needing to leave the classroom and, if possible, give them your permission to do so ahead of time. This may give them some peace of mind in knowing that they have a way out, should they need it.

3. Be aware that student veterans will often need to sit in the back of the room and by the door or in view of the door in order to feel most comfortable in your classroom. Again, that “battle ready” mindset and need for situational awareness in order to survive (to know what’s going on at all times, to know where your escape route is or where potential incoming threats might occur) is deeply ingrained.
4. Understand that sometimes absences are unavoidable for student veterans, especially ones due to medical appointments and military reserve or National Guard training obligations that may conflict with class schedules. Veterans typically have to schedule medical appointments one to two months out for Veterans Administration healthcare, and each injury usually requires a separate appointment. Failure to keep a medical appointment may result in the veteran not receiving the necessary care for the injury and, worse, having their healthcare benefits being terminated for that injury. Military training obligations also cannot typically be missed without serious consequences.

5. Be sensitive to the fact that comments in class lecture or discussion regarding past or present military conflicts may affect veterans adversely, even when it isn't a trigger. For these students, the subject of war is more than class content—it is deeply personal. They may still have buddies deployed at risk of combat or have lost someone in their unit. Other students, also, with loved ones in the military may be affected. For these reasons, it might be wise to give students a “heads up” ahead of time if you plan to have a class discussion or show a clip regarding military conflicts. It might also be appreciated if you gave student veterans permission to miss that segment of class or to not contribute during that class discussion, should they choose.
6. Avoid a power struggle if a student veteran speaks out a little strongly in class, as any student may do. Simply let the veteran know that you appreciate their comments or concerns and want to fully discuss the matter, but would like to give your full attention to them at a designated time after class.
7. Try to prevent questions such as “How many guys did you kill?” “What was it like?” and “How do you feel about war?” from being asked to a student veteran in your class. Some veterans may want to share their thoughts and experiences in the military, but others may not, and no one should ever be put on the spot or singled out.
8. Be aware that some course assignments may bring back or intensify feelings or thoughts for student veterans regarding their military experience. Sometimes student veterans choose a topic or assignment to work through their military experiences and emotions, while other times they may start to work on an assignment and then be hit unexpectedly with difficult memories or feelings evoked by the topic. In either case, the student veteran faced with an emotional onslaught may go awry of the topic parameters or assignment requirements, or quit working on the assignment altogether.
9. Appreciate all that veterans bring to the college campus and classroom:

Necessary insight: Very few of the American people know first-hand the realities, complexities, and consequences of military deployment and warfare. Student veterans have essential perspective to share that can help us all to become more fully informed civic members of society on matters and choices regarding military engagement.

Valuable expertise: Student veterans bring experience of different lands and cultures, organizational and leadership training, select technical skills, and other specialized knowledge and abilities gained in the military, all of which can greatly enrich course content and class discussions.

Superb qualities: Student veterans have great maturity and discipline, real desire to serve as mentors and to assist others, great enthusiasm to learn, strong motivation to succeed, excellent critical thinking and problem solving skills, and outstanding leadership ability.

[The information in this section is based primarily on:

Morris, C., Blake, J., & Turner, C. (Producer). (2012). *How Your Campus Can Better Serve Student Veterans* (Webinar), and Morris, C., Theer, E., & Martinez, C. (Producer). (2013). [Supporting and Working with Student Veterans in the Classroom: Toolkit for Faculty and Staff \(Webinar\) \(PDF\)](#).

https://www.azwestern.edu/sites/default/files/awc/veteran-services/THE_ROAD_HOME_FROM_COMBAT_TO_COLLEGE_AND_BEYOND.pdf]

(With appreciation to all who work with student veterans on our campus, and especially to Austin K. Sihoe, Interim Director, Veterans Success Center, for assistance with this information.)

Campus Resources

Veterans Success Center (VSC)—

Helps veterans to access their VA Education benefits and get those benefits certified in a timely manner and find veteran-related resources, as well as providing leadership development opportunities, peer mentoring, and support in transferring to a meaningful career. The VSC also offers a lounge for student veterans to socialize and study (with free printing services), and helps students get involved and find employment through the program described below.

Location: Lassen Hall 3003

Phone: (916) 278-6733

[VSC Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/veterans-success-center/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/veterans-success-center/>

Veterans Career Pathways Program (VCP)—

Assists student veterans and dependents with the resources needed to obtain gainful employment and transition to the civilian workforce both during college and following graduation, with a program that includes mentoring, networking, career counseling, interview and resume writing skill development, informational interviewing, job shadowing, and other personal and professional development opportunities. Further information about the program and application may be found on the website.

[VCP Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/veterans-success-center/career-pathways.html) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/veterans-success-center/career-pathways.html>

Sigma Omega Delta—

Offers a safe and welcoming space for veterans to share comradery with fellow students with common experiences, and serves as an extension of service where veterans can continue to live their core values and be a resource for each other when dealing with veterans' issues. Sigma Omega Delta is a great resource for veterans for help with school, work, or personal or family issues. The fraternity also welcomes non-veteran members, dependents, survivors, and other supporters, providing an environment where they will be able to gain insight into the world of veterans and better understand veterans' issues. Further information may be found about the organization on the Student Organizations and Life (SOL) website for campus clubs and organizations.

Location of SOL Office: University Union, Second Floor 2035 Phone: (916) 278-6595

[SOL Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/student-organizations/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/student-organizations/>

Counseling (Student Health and Counseling Services)—

Helps students to cope with such things as stress, academic difficulties, relationship issues, anxiety, depression, bereavement, post-traumatic symptoms, addiction and alcohol abuse. The privacy and confidentiality of all who use Counseling Services is maintained fully within the bounds of law and professional ethics.

Location of Counseling Services: The WELL, Second Floor Phone: (916) 278-6461

Location of Urgent Care Clinic: The WELL, First Floor

[Counseling Services Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/>

Students in an immediate crisis should contact 911 or the Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Students with urgent concerns who would like to see someone right away may walk in to receive counseling at the Urgent Care Clinic (WELL, First Floor) any time during its hours of operation or call to speak with the After Hours Nurse at: (916) 278-6461.

Students who want to receive counseling or explore if counseling is right for them may schedule an appointment by calling or coming in Counseling Services, or going online through the Patient Portal. This typically begins with a consultation appointment, where the student can talk about their concerns and receive support and feedback. Many students find that they feel better and their needs are met in just one session. Students who want to continue counseling may choose individual counseling in follow-up single session appointments (to meet their needs in the moment) or short-term individual therapy (more than one session with the same mental health clinician). Students may also join group therapy (with five to ten other students).