Culture Shock: Helping Veterans Transition from the Military to College

Duane Short, Ph.D.
San Diego Miramar College
Welcome!

- Introduction
- Who’s here?
- Your questions?
- Disclaimers
Objectives

- Compare and contrast military and college culture
- Evaluate and interpret behaviors that interfere with student success
- Develop strategies for assisting your student veterans
Overview

- About the military
- From military to college
- Military culture
- Mental health
- Helping your vets
- Resources


About the military
About the military

Five armed services

**Army:** Soldiers

**Air Force:** Airmen

**Navy:** Sailors

**Marine Corps:** Marines

**Coast Guard:** Guardsmen

“Troops”

“Servicemembers”

“Veterans”
About the military

- Reserve / National Guard components
  - Army Reserve
  - Army National Guard
  - Air Force Reserve
  - Air Force National Guard
  - Navy Reserve
  - Marine Corps Reserve
  - Coast Guard Reserve
About the military

- Typical military career cycle
  - Basic Training
  - Occupational Training
  - Assignment to a unit
  - Pre-deployment
  - Deployment
  - Homecoming
  - Change units or separate from military
  - Repeat
About the military

Since September 11, 2001, more than 2 million American military personnel have been deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, or both.

About 1 million have deployed more than once.
About the military

Every deployment is difficult
Impact of Deployment

- Relationship with Spouse:
  - Positive Impact: 16
  - No Impact: 33
  - Negative Impact: 48

- Relationship with Children:
  - Positive Impact: 22
  - No Impact: 32
  - Negative Impact: 44

- Health:
  - Positive Impact: 21
  - No Impact: 38
  - Negative Impact: 40

Rewards and Burdens of Military Service

Percentage of Post 9/11 Veterans who say that as a result of their service:

- More Prepared for Job/ Career: 72%
- Gained Self Confidence: 90%
- More Mature: 93%
- Proud of Service: 96%

Positives of Military Service

- Pride
- Values and honor
- Significant responsibility, especially during war time
- Competency
- Sense of accomplishment
- Sense of meaning and belonging
- Development of close relationships/family
- Benefits (e.g., healthcare, education)
About the military

The military is good at turning civilians into warriors
About the military

…but not so good at turning warriors into civilians
From military to college
California accounts for over 80,000 Education Program Beneficiaries (FY12)

Note: State statistics may include individuals who used their education benefits in more than one state. Therefore the national totals in the Annual Benefits Report summary statistics should not be used to reflect the total number of beneficiaries during the fiscal year as these counts are calculated as the sum total of the state statistics. These beneficiaries are not unique individuals.

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Annual Benefits Reports, 2000 to 2012.
From military to college

National survey of 362,000 first-year students and seniors attending 564 US colleges and universities by NSSE (2010) found:

- Student Veterans perceived lower levels of campus support than non-Veterans
- Interacted less with faculty members
- Spent twice as many hours per week working
- Six times as many hours on dependent care
- Twice as likely to report at least one disability

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), 2010
When you first became a student at a community college, was the transition from military life to student life a stressful one?

- Somewhat or Very Stressful: 57.30%
- Not Stressful: 27.50%
Picture a veteran in your mind...

- Imagine what they look like
- What they act like
- What they say
- What they believe
- What they feel

What did you imagine?
From military to college

- Common stereotypes
  - All veterans are in crisis
  - All veterans can obtain VA and other government services
  - All veterans have served in combat
  - Veterans are angry/aggressive
  - Veterans are men
Increasingly Diverse & Complex Military

More ethnic minorities → 30% of Armed Services

More women → 14% of Active Duty

In relationships → 56% married

Educated → 94% H.S. Diploma/ GED

Young & Old

- Active Duty → 42% deployed are 17-25yrs
- Reserve → 56% deployed are 30yrs +
Female Veterans

As of October 2010, there were 1,840,380* female veterans

- 166,709 * in California
- Little recognition for combat
- More likely to be homeless
- More likely to get divorced
- MST more likely
- Less likely to find treatment groups.
- Less likely to find a social cohort that can relate to their experiences.

Projected Veteran Population 2010 to 2040

Source: Office of the Actuary, Veteran Population Projections Model (VetPop2011), Table 1L
Feelings about service can be complicated

- Some veterans have complex or contradictory feelings
- Some veterans want to downplay or conceal their service
- Some feelings are context-dependent
- Different experiences while serving lead to different expectations after serving
Common educational barriers

- Information: Transfer credit; financial aid; adult student services
- Culture: Feeling comfortable on campus; mainstreaming
- Injury / Trauma: Disabilities; mental health
- Financial / Time: Process and time for GI Bill or other tuition assistance; Reserve duty commitments
From military to college

- Common transition challenges
  - Feeling separate from peers
  - Intimacy issues
  - Finding employment
  - Rebuilding relationships & social network
  - Communicating less assertively
  - Lack of daily structure
  - Finding excitement in everyday activities
Military Culture
Military culture

Organizational Context

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<th>College</th>
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<td>No one is totally in charge</td>
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<td>You know a person’s role in the organization by looking at them</td>
<td>Appearance tells you little or nothing</td>
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# Military culture

## Routine & Structure

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Military culture

WARNING: The following video contains:
• A combat scenario
• Images and sounds of gunshots and tank/artillery fire
Please excuse yourself if the video might make you uncomfortable.
The video is one minute long.

PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 13
Military culture

What does this video tell us about the physical and social environment during deployment?
### Military culture

#### Environment & Trust

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How do these differences help explain student veteran behavior?
Military culture

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## Valued Behaviors

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<td>Results orientation</td>
<td>Process orientation</td>
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<td>Action</td>
<td>Deliberation</td>
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<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Nonviolence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decisiveness</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<td>Clear, direct communication</td>
<td>Nuanced communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task focus</td>
<td>Relationship focus</td>
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<td>Respect for authority</td>
<td>Question authority</td>
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Mental health
Mental health

WARNING: The following video contains:
• A combat scenario
• Violent imagery consisting of an explosion
• Coarse language
Please excuse yourself if the video might make you uncomfortable.
The video is two minutes long.
STRETCH BREAK
Mental health

What stood out for you about this video?
Mental health

Most combat veterans have experienced:

- Receiving small arms fire
- Receiving artillery, rocket, or mortar fire
- Being attacked or ambushed
- IED/booby trap exploding nearby
- Knowing someone seriously injured or killed
- Seeing dead bodies or human remains
- Having a member of their unit become a casualty
Mental health

- Disorders in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) & Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Veterans
  - About 30% have
    - Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or
    - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or
    - Depression or
    - A combination of the above
  - About 70% have no mental disorder
Mental health

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Mental health

- TBI
  - Traumatically induced disruption of brain function
  - Caused by head injury
    - Direct
    - Nearby (explosions)
  - May not be noticed/diagnosed until in college

See Handout
Mental health

WARNING: The following video contains:
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Please excuse yourself if the video might make you uncomfortable.
The video is one minute long.

RESTRICTED
UNDER 17 REQUIRES ACCOMPANYING PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN
Mental health

What stood out for you about this video?
Mental health

PTSD

Chronic anxiety disorder that can occur following a traumatic event

Common symptoms

- **Reliving** traumatic memories and thoughts
- **Avoiding** triggers and reminders
- **Hyper-arousal** – Fight or Flight response at inappropriate times
- **Numbness & detachment** from people, activities

See Handout
Mental health

- Common PTSD triggers on campus:
  - Parking
  - Noises and distraction
  - Timed tests
  - Class assignments
  - Campus crowds
  - Crowded classrooms
Mental health

- Suicide
  - Veterans have double the suicide rate of the civilian population
- Warning signs
  - Depression, anxiety, agitation, guilt, shame
  - Neglecting personal welfare
  - Significant decrease in attendance
  - Failure or decreased performance
Mental health

- Common existential issues
  - How can there be a higher power and such bad things happen?
  - Why did I live and other died?
  - Am I a murderer because I killed? Because I let others kill?
  - How can I ever get close to someone again? How can anyone understand me?
  - How do I make sense of my experiences?
Helping your vets
Helping your vets

- Mental health and physical issues
  - May not be obvious
  - Ask in private if any assistance is needed
  - Structure the learning environment
  - Refer to DSPS if it seems appropriate
  - Refer to local mental health services if it seems appropriate
  - Refer to veteran-specific services if it seems appropriate
Helping your vets

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Helping your vets

- Navigating bureaucracy
  - Vets often have more “pieces of the puzzle” to put together: VA funding, military education, multiple transcripts, enrollment rules, etc.
  - Have a contact person on campus familiar with veteran-related issues
  - Make “warm handoffs” from service to service
  - Designate a veterans counselor for education planning and referrals
Helping your vets

- Encouraging involvement & reconnection
  - Non-veteran students can learn a lot from vets
  - Student veterans can learn a lot from non-vets
- Ways to encourage involvement
  - College activities
  - Welcoming text in syllabi
  - Student veterans club
  - Student veterans resource center
Helping your vets

- Sensitivity
  - Discussions about war
  - Protests and signs
  - Class assignments
  - Insensitive comments
  - Insensitive questions

- Ways to start a conversation
  - What did you do in the military?
  - Where did you go?
  - How are you and your family doing?
Helping your vets

- Dealing with inappropriate behavior
  - Maintain control of the learning environment as needed
  - Seek to understand where the behavior and feeling is coming from
  - Suggest a solution or refer to an appropriate service in a nonjudgmental manner

There’s no “right” way to do this
Resources

- Vets are less likely than non-vets to access mental health/disability services
  - New to their disability and unaware of available services
  - May not understand how their disability affects learning
  - May view disability as weakness or harmful to career prospects
  - May have other things to deal with: Family, children, work, etc.
Resources

- Veterans Crisis Line
  www.veteranscrisisline.net
- Vet Center
  www.vetcenter.va.gov
- ACE Supporting Student Veterans
  www.acenet.edu/higher-education/Pages/Military-Students-and-Veterans.aspx
- CCC SMHP
  www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org
Conclusion

- Veterans are all different... and all the same
- Focus on what we do well: teaching and learning
- Our vets are the new "greatest generation"
Conclusion

Questions?
Discussion?

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