Partnering to Assist Disabled Veterans in Transition: ACE and NASPA

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American Council on Education
• Membership organization
• Unifying voice for higher education
• Center for Lifelong Learning
• “What an individual learns is more important than when, where, or how.”
• www.acenet.edu
An Overview
Severely Injured Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams

When veterans with severe injuries return to civilian life, they face difficult transitions and often lose the convenience of direct access to the government’s educational support programs.

About the Program

• Started April 2007
• Funded by contributions and donations
• 250+ participants

• 60 taking classes or enrolled
• 13 completed program plans
• Numerous volunteers and volunteer organizations
Program Volunteers

• Individuals
• Organizations
  › Veterans Upward Bound (VUB)
  › National Association of School Personnel Administrators (NASPA)
  › PrepMatters
  › Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)

NASPA’s Role

• Ultimate higher education “rolodex”
• Professional association with a broad scope (student learning, student life, co-curricular, more…)
• Research and collaboration
• Advising ACE about current trends and hot topics on campus
The Advising Process

Walter Reed Army Medical Center (DC)
Bethesda Naval Hospital (MD)
Brooke Army Hospital (TX)
Naval Medical Center San Diego – Balboa (CA)

Individualized Support

**General Advising:**
- Identifying educational resources and programs
- Applying a “high-touch” approach – no one model for support
- Maintaining patience and flexibility (unknown recovery times, family issues, military obligations)
- Brainstorming options and providing encouragement

**Pathway Planning:**
- Identifying varied academic and professional interests
- Determining full-time, part-time, traditional “on-campus” and distance learning interests
- Locating institutions across the country (state, private, and accredited)
- Finding “champions” to engage with members
Ryan Haerer, Army

- Owned and ran his own landscaping business before he joined the Army
- Medic w/ 10th Mountain Div
- Sustained injuries to his legs
- 2 years credit University of Florida / AARTS
- The Ohio State University
- Full-time student
- Interested in career in intelligence

Natasha McKinnon, Army

- Injured in 2005
- Single leg, above the knee amputee
- Internship at the National Zoo during recovery and therapy
- North Carolina State University
- Animal Science (goal to be a Veterinarian)
Corey Smith, Marine

- Joined at 17, entered a day after turning 18
- Wounded September 2006
- Had to retake ACT
- Kent State University
- Full-time, living on campus
- Criminal Justice
- Earned 3.4 GPA first semester

Ashley McGonagle, Marine Spouse

- Wife of wounded Marine, Brian
- Prior credits from University of Toledo
- Attending University of the Incarnate Word
- Bachelor of Arts
- Now Brian is ready to take courses; Ashley's influence and support from program
Scott Leifker, Army Reserves

- Military Police
- Married with 2 kids
- Deployed twice, second deployment injured (August 2006)
- Severe burns
- Distance learning program
- Colorado Technical University
- Mentor for other soldiers

Feedback and Lessons Learned (Members)

- Uncontrolled variables
  - Voc Rehab
  - Medical Review Boards
  - “Big Military” (Example: Raymond Hubbard)
  - Medical recovery – setbacks and surgeries

- Transition
  - Timing factors
  - Plans change (Example: Jose Sanchez)

- Memory challenges
Feedback and Lessons Learned (Members)

• Benefits
  › Navigating myriad of resources
  › Understanding VA / decision processes

• Overwhelming information and solicitation of services
  › Build credibility – follow through

• Anonymity (for some)

• Academic culture, language, terminology
  › Applications – deferments – transfer credit

Campus Advocacy

Provides sources of information, encouragement and advocacy in areas ranging from academics to campus culture
What is a “Champion?”

• Someone willing to invest time and energy to help veteran is make informed decisions

• Provide the veteran with guidance on dealing with the chaos of college and assist in bridging the gap from the military mission-oriented structure to the academic environment

• Also serves as a resource to assist with matters such as study skills, tutor support services, Veterans Affairs issues, and enrollment challenges

• Will seek to build a community-based team of support for the veteran and/or family member

• Needs to be flexible and persevere, because, undoubtedly, the veteran or family member will face set-backs and obstacles on their journey, particularly when getting started.

Excerpt from an e-mail to a NASPA colleague

“Can you think of someone who could be a ‘transition sponsor’ or ‘champion’ to assist [veteran] at [your school]? This volunteer will help the veteran deal with administrative hurdles, academic advice, and support for the emotional aspects of a transition to civilian life. My research shows that peers and former military personnel are likely to prove most helpful.”
Program Volunteers

Sean-Michael Green, University of Pittsburgh

- Assistant Dean, College of General Studies
- USMC: 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines
- A licensed attorney in Pennsylvania
- Author of *Marching to College: Turning Military Experience into College Admissions* (Random House, 2004)

Dan Allen, The Ohio State University

- Director, Student Affairs Fiscal Support Services
- Colonel (Ret.) in the Army Reserves
Feedback from “Champions”  
(Sponsor-Mentors)

• Just offering the extra service to veteran bolsters confidence, whether they use the service or not

• ACE program advisors may want to periodically remind veterans to take advantage of the program and maintain regular and meaningful contact with their champion-mentor

• Vets voiced concern about fear of acceptance in college (older student, “liberal” campus, etc.)

Feedback from “Champions”  
(Sponsor-Mentors)

• Getting them involved with veteran’s group on campus

• Symptom of PTSD is inability to complete necessary paperwork… and they often don’t know why?

• Many don’t want “learning disability” (LD) designation on their record… not seeking help

• Reluctance to retrieve mental health records from the military for use by counseling staff at school
Feedback from “Champions”  
(Sponsor-Mentors)

- Misinformation about the “system” from military and others? Example: those diagnosed with PTSD will not be eligible to receive security clearance later?
- Some not talkative at first meetings w/champion
- Some students opted to not take advantage of pre-arranged mentoring opportunity

Challenges

- Continuous change (members, programs and services)
- Individualized advising process
  - Need more formal process to review academic planning in advance
- Constant flux of veterans and families
- Scholarships to veterans
- Fragmentation of programs and support (not just education)
- Unique nuances of each hospital location
- Volunteer coordination
Model Programs - Ideas

• Designate a group, committee or team
• Focus a commitment to process
• Connect and leverage local community and state resources
• Engage with VUB operations
• Learn to better understand the veteran profile

Future Strategies

To be extraordinarily effective, providing accessible assistance to severely injured veterans and their families and ensuring that our nation’s heroes can pursue their dreams of going to college
The Need for Growth

• Funding a sustainable plan
• Identifying other hospital locations
• Building program access and infrastructure
• Streamlining fragmentation of information on programs and resources

ACE Presidents’ Summit
Serving Those Who Serve: Higher Education and America’s Veterans

• Sponsored by Georgetown University
• June 5-6, 2008
• Engaging from the top
• Limited to 300 participants
• Provide the opportunity to engage in a candid conversation on the issues faced by returning veterans with higher education leaders and student veterans

Summit Objectives
• Identify emerging issues and provide a forum for national cross-sector discussion
• Learn from first-hand accounts of student veterans
• Discover and explore innovative practices
• Encourage collaboration among institutions and with other organizations
Let’s Discuss…

• Program(s) at your campus
• Veterans as an emerging student population
• Students with disabilities
• Other thoughts… the future… where do we go from here?

Questions or Comments?

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