Adapt and Overcome: Helping Student Veterans Transition to Academic Life

Lisa Firmin, Associate Provost for Diversity and Recruitment
Dr. Mary McNaughton-Cassill, Associate Professor
Dr. Dianne P. Hengst, Director Student Disability Services
Overview

• UTSA Student Vet Population Demographics
• Background of UTSA Student Vet Support
• Practical Details
• Why Is It Difficult To Adapt?
• Veterans with Disabilities
• Resources and Services
• Summary
Veterans Are Not Traditional Students

- They have a different set of life experiences
- Typically older because of their military service
- Unique skill sets due to military training
- Have been out of school, sometimes for years
### Fall 2012 - UTSA Student Veteran Population by Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Bac</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,797</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Fall 2012 UTSA UG Veteran Student Population by Declared College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UTSA College</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of Total UTSA UG Pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal and Fine Arts</td>
<td>579</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Human Development</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University College</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,439</strong></td>
<td><strong>9%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UTSA Office of Institutional Research
## Fall 2012 UTSA Post Bac & GR Veteran Student Population by Declared College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UTSA College</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of Total UTSA Post Bac &amp; GR Pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal and Fine Arts</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Human Development</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University College</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UTSA Office of Institutional Research
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Only</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American Only</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic of any race</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>1231</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Only</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native Only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,082</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1,715</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2,797</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UTSA Office of Institutional Research
Fall 2012 – UTSA Student Veteran Population by Gender

Source: UTSA Office of Institutional Research
Fall 2012 – UTSA Veteran Student Population by Minority Status and Gender

Source: UTSA Office of Institutional Research
Wide Spectrum of Student Vet Support

- Veteran Services Advisory Committee (VSAC)
- Vet Certification Offices; main/downtown campus
- Dedicated Veterans Portal [http://www.utsa.edu/va/](http://www.utsa.edu/va/)
- Student Veteran Association (SVA)
- VA’s VetSuccess on Campus program
- Student Disability Services
- Counseling Services
- Diversity Office (Vet Internship Project)
- Military Liaison
- Army and Air Force ROTC programs (450+ cadets)
- Outreach; corporate/non-profit/military/veteran groups
Veteran Services Advisory Committee

- **Mission:** assist veterans in making seamless transition from military service to academic community at UTSA
- Initially developed as informal Task Force in 2009
- Gained formal status as presidential committee in 2011
- VSAC w/subcommittee structure
  - Events
  - Non-resident Credit Review
  - Veteran Student Orientation
  - Communications
  - Faculty/Staff Sensitivity-Awareness
  - Student Veteran Career Development
VA’s VetSuccess on Campus Program

• Collaborative effort between VA & UTSA to ensure supportive on campus environment for student vets (2012)
• 2 full time VA funded, very experienced Vocational Rehab. Counselors
  – Direct line to VA for vets, active duty & eligible family members
• Provide info on: educational and healthcare benefits, vocational rehab, career and readjustment counseling, disability compensation, life insurance, home loans, mental health services, college credit for military training and experience, maximizing benefits, etc.
  – Referrals to on campus, community and VA resources
Veteran Internship Project

• Internship in Higher Education course; 150 hrs
• Document/showcase evolution of vet support at UTSA
  – Comprehensive central repository
  – Printed executive level summary
• *Internship will consist of 3 Phases*
  – 1) Data collection, creation of central repository, and executive summary (ongoing)
  – 2) Analysis of redundancy across campus and capture updates
  – 3) Analysis of student academic success, persistence rates & evaluation of current program success
Battle Mind vs. Civilian Mind

“Frankly Ma’am I am More Scared of Going To College Than I am Of Going Back to War”

Comment Made by a Prospective Student at UTSA, Fall 2012
For Many Veterans Going to College is Like Being an Exchange Student in a Foreign Country

They Have Resilience and Discipline, But May Not Know How To Succeed In the Classroom
Veterans **Don’t** Want us To Make School Easier, or More Like the Military...

They **Do** Want Us to Help Them Understand How to Succeed in the Academic World
So, how do the cultures of the military and academia compare and how can we learn to communicate across the gap?
Military: Strong common beliefs and values; uniforms promote a sense of identity

Academics: Take pride in independent thinking, being critical, and questioning assumptions and the status quo
Military: Formal hierarchy; Mandated authority

Academics: Fluid hierarchy; Few visible markers of status

Military: Structured training; Clear goals

Academics: Assume that students have study skills, but demands vary across disciplines, courses, and instructors
**Military:** Bonding and social support are literally a matter of life and death

**Academics:** Can be competitive, classes are often large and students are transient
Military: Focus is on being tough, taking action; Steps for advancement are clear and cumulative

Academics: Focus is on intellectual performance, but you start over in every class, every semester

(Both Tend To Lead to Sleep Deprivation!)
The result is that many Vets don’t know what to expect in college, haven’t developed strong study skills, and are puzzled by how they can feel so stressed in a Non-Combat Zone!
Stress Among UTSA Vets

Preliminary data from 22 males & 2 females
Deployed From 0 to 4 times based on a school measure (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005)

1) Stress about preparing for tests and grades

2) Skills Development- including reading, researching and writing papers
School Hassles (Blankenstein et al., 1991)

1) Having enough money for necessities

2) Dealing with academic deadlines

3) Financial security

4) Family expectations
Test Anxiety (Sarason, 1977)

- 8 of the 24 Veterans reported symptoms of test anxiety including physiological arousal before tests, blanking out during test and feeling intimidated about exams in general.

- 14 of the 24 reported feeling pressured by their own and/or other’s expectations about their academic performance.
People often say that Vets don’t want to talk about their military experiences or stress. I find that to be true in terms of asking voyeuristic questions such as have you killed someone?

However, I find them very receptive to queries about how they are adjusting to school, what they are finding difficult to understand, and the sort of help they need. The key is figuring out how to bridge the gap between our cultures.
Researchers such as Tinto and Boice have clearly demonstrated that faculty influence student behaviors, learning, and engagement. This implies that we can be the key to helping Vets figure out what they need to know. The goal is not to change our standards, for them but rather to help them succeed in a new game.
We Can Learn From Each Other!

Canine (Wolf Pack) Model

Feline (Big Cat) Approach
Veterans with Disabilities

• In a “nutshell” the new GI Bill will continue to increase the number of veterans returning to school and increase the need of services for the student veteran

• Student Disability Services will and has seen see many of these returning veterans
Trends and Types of Disabilities

Trends:
• According to the VA, the number of disabled vets has increased by 25% since 2001, but some other statistics place this number as high as 44%.
• In 2008, the Department of Defense reported that 181,000 vets from Iraq/Afghanistan are collecting disability benefits.

Types: (Huffington Post, 2012)
• PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorders), major depression and anxiety are estimated to affect 1 in 6 veterans.
• Over 1,600 lost limb/s, fingers and/or toes.
• 156,000 blind or impaired vision.
• More than 177,000 hearing loss and 350,000 report tinnitus.
• Multiple back injuries.
• Mild to moderate TBI (traumatic brain injuries).
In recent years there has been a great deal of media attention on PTSD and TBI Among Vets which turns out to be about 30% of the population. (Rand Corporation 2009)
Still, the 30% with PTSD/TBI may have trouble concentrating, focusing, anxiety, emotional lability, flashbacks, poor sleep
Some Vets use anger to cover anxiety or depression

Others may seem distant, disengaged, or hostile

Many Vets have difficulty with Insomnia and sleep quality

Vets may want to sit on aisles in class for easy escape, or have trouble in crowded common areas, and yet wish for social connection (service animals)
Of course non-Veteran Students experience PTSD, generalized anxiety, test anxiety, and depression too.

In fact, colleges in general are seeing higher levels of mental illness among their students so learning to recognize mental illness, and to differentiate it from incivility in general is a valuable skill for faculty.
Student Disability Services

Possible Accommodations and Services

• Disability Counseling
• Access to Building and Programs
• Alternative Media/Text
• Priority Registration (when do they function best?)
• Priority Seating
• Periodic Breaks (Do they need to leave the classroom?)
• Note taking assistance/Audiotaping
• Accessible Furniture
• Alternative Communication Options (ALD)
• Testing Accommodations
  • Extended Time for testing
  • Reduced Distraction area for testing
• Absence Leniency/Tardiness Leniency
• Connections with other services on/off campus
• Referrals for Adaptive Technology
UTSA Services and Resources

- UTSA Military Liaison in Provost’s Office (Jim Massaro)
- Diversity Office
- Tomas Rivera Center
  - time mgt., academic coaching, tutoring, supplemental instruction
- Writing Center and Math Lab
- Student Disability Services
  - Individualized accommodations
- Counseling Services
  - Groups, individualized counseling, and dedicated liaison (Jeff Gatlin)
- Student Health Services
- Career Center
- Student Veterans Association (SVA)
- Veterans Cert. Office (Registrars’ Office at Main/Downtown)
  - Dedicated Veteran’s Portal: http://www.utsa.edu/va/
- VSAC:
  - Online Veterans Orientation
  - VA Vet Success on Campus Program
  - Event Programs (i.e. Veterans Day)
  - Educational/Training Programs
External Resources

- 2-1-1 Texas
- National Resource Directory
- Center for Health Care Veteran Services
- Disabled American Veterans
- Texas Veterans Commission
- San Antonio Vet Center
- The Mission Continues
- South Texas Veterans Health Care System
- Dept. of Veterans Affairs/VA Voc. Rehab.
- Vet Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- VA Hospital
- American Legion
- GI Forum
- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
Summary

• Celebrate progress to date
  – Strong collaborative model of support campus-wide
  – VSAC; student survey, website, online orientation, internships, hiring, events
  – Successful collaboration with Student Veteran Association
  – VetSucess on Campus program
  – Student Disability Services, Counseling Services
  – “Military Friendly School” top 15% ranking, GI Jobs Magazine
  – Outreach; DOL Secretary visit, Heroes Initiative, USAA, etc.
  – Recognition of student vets and their accomplishments

• Continue the Good Fight
  – Documenting our efforts via intern project
  – “Academic ROE 101”, a multi session briefing for vets
  – “In person” orientation for new vet students
  – Provost’s Forum for faculty/staff on our unique vet population
  – Vet Resource Center; a true one stop shop for student vets
  – Seek funding support for programming efforts
Questions/Comments?