

Teaching America's Best

Preparing Your Classrooms to Welcome Returning Veterans and Service Members



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Introduction to *Teaching America's Best*

If you're an educator or trainer committed to recruiting, retaining, and providing the best possible education and employment training to our nation's returning veterans and transitioning service members, you'll be helping yourself, your students, your institution or organization, your community, and your country. By finding effective ways of reaching out to these students, you have the opportunity to:

- Bring some rare and valuable strengths, skills, knowledge, and experience into your classrooms
- Enhance your institutional culture
- Enrich the educational experience of your student body
- Set an example for your community and earn its gratitude and respect
- Provide crucial opportunities for men and women who have made great sacrifices for our country
- Contribute to their reintegration into civilian life after deployment
- Do the right thing

The men and women who have volunteered for today's Armed Forces are a well qualified, well disciplined, and highly motivated group. The values they've embraced in the military culture, the skills they've practiced through military service, and the lessons they've learned through military teamwork can bring great benefit to the educational institutions and training organizations that help prepare them for the civilian workforce. They also tend to be driven by a strong sense of mission and purpose, much needed in the civilian world.

If deployment has left some service members and veterans with injuries, it has also left them with considerable ingenuity, resilience, and adaptability. From the "citizen soldiers" who serve in the reserve components (the National Guard and Reserves) to veterans returning to civilian life after medical retirement from active duty service, this is a pool of potentially stellar students.

Even beyond the career development role, your school or training organization can play a pivotal part in the reintegration of these men and women into civilian life. Many veterans and service members face challenges in reintegration, but they may feel alienated from civilian support systems. Many—particularly many younger veterans and individuals with war-related disabilities—are economically disadvantaged and underserved. Moreover, the traditional stigma against admitting anything perceived as personal weakness within the military culture may leave them hesitant to seek services that would help with the reintegration process.

However, the military culture does place a high value on education and training. So the opportunities for connection, involvement, and referral that the well prepared educational institution or training organization provides can make all the difference to men and women who would otherwise struggle in isolation. The organization or institution can serve as both a resource in reintegration and a bridge to other forms of assistance that individuals might need. Educators and trainers can be valuable mentors and guides in navigating the many challenges that individuals and families encounter during reintegration.

This brief booklet provides some introductory information to help you find the most effective ways of attracting, recruiting, welcoming, and educating service members and veterans. It has seven short chapters:

1. Attracting service members and veterans
2. Creating a central resource
3. Identifying the issues
4. Educating faculty, staff, and students
5. Removing obstacles to enrollment
6. Accommodating the effects of war-zone injuries
7. Getting your message to service members and veterans

The information presented in this booklet was gathered and synthesized from a wide variety of sources. These and other sources are listed in the final section, “Downloadable Resources.”

Resources in the “America’s Best” Series

Hiring America’s Best is part of a series of materials written to address the growing need for information and ideas that can help our nation’s schools, training organizations, and workplaces make a welcoming, productive, and satisfying place for returning veterans and transitioning service members.

The series starts with four core booklets:

- *Teaching America’s Best: Preparing Your Classrooms to Welcome Returning Veterans and Service Members* offers educators and trainers information and ideas for attracting, retaining, involving, and giving the best education and training to service members and veterans.
- *Hiring America’s Best: Preparing Your Workplace to Welcome Returning Veterans and Service Members* offers employers insight into this pool of potential employees, suggestions for lowering stress and enhancing productivity for all employees, and information on effective responses to war-zone stress injuries.
- *Preparing America’s Best: Twelve Leaders Offer Suggestions for Educating, Training, and Employing Service Members and Veterans* presents interviews with leaders involved in a variety of aspects of education and employment of service members and veterans.
- *Learning about America’s Best: Resources on Educating, Training, and Hiring Returning Veterans and Service Members* provides a quick list of some of the many books, articles, and web sites that offer information for educators, trainers, employers, service members, veterans, and family members.

Also included in the “America’s Best” series are several fact sheets and worksheets. These tools are collected in a document called *Tools for America’s Best*, so they can be duplicated and used for faculty, staff, student, and employee training and education.

Tools for Educators, Trainers, and Employers:

- **“Welcoming Service Members and Veterans Home”** offers suggestions for appropriate responses to service members and veterans.

- **“The United States Armed Forces”** provides information for civilians about the military and its culture, which have shaped much of the thoughts and actions of returning veterans and service members.
- **“Resilience, Stress, and Trauma”** will help people understand the effects of heavy psychological and physical stress and threat and the options for getting help—whether it is a veteran, another staff member, or a friend or family member who is experiencing these effects.
- **“Myths and Realities about Service Members, Veterans, and PTSD”** will help people acknowledge and answer some of the common myths that can sustain stigma and get in the way of clear understanding and communication

Additional Tools for Educators and Trainers:

- Two tools—**“Strategies for Improving Attention”** and **“Strategies for Improving Memory”**—will give counselors and advisors ideas and home practice tasks that they can provide to students who approach them regarding the effects of injuries or disabilities.
- **“Accommodations for Learning Challenges”** will provide a comprehensive list of strategies that counselors and advisors can use in helping students overcome educational challenges commonly associated with many types of injuries and disabilities.

Additional Tools for Employers:

- **“Organizational Assessment: Welcome and Respect for Service Members and Veterans”** will help employers determine where their organizations are in their progress toward more effective responses toward service members and veterans.
- **The “Organizational Stress Survey”** will help employers assess and address any sources of unnecessary stress in the workplace, for the good of all employees, for productivity, and for organizational health and viability.
- The **“Job Accommodation and Productivity Support Checklist”** offers managers, supervisors, and employees a number of suggestions for managing specific effects of PTSD, depression, anxiety, TBI, etc. in the workplace and increasing employee productivity and effectiveness.
- The **“Job Accommodation and Productivity Support Worksheet”** offers a framework in which employees can work with their supervisors to identify the difficulties they are experiencing and their effects on performance, and explore possible accommodations. This can be used together with, or separate from, the “Job Accommodation and Productivity Support Checklist.”

All materials in the “America’s Best” series have been co-published by the National Organization on Disability (NOD) and Give an Hour™ (GAH) and are available for free download from their web sites. For the use of any excerpts from this series, we request that appropriate credit be given to NOD and GAH, and to the authors and contributors.

Chapter One:

Attracting Service Members and Veterans

In an economically competitive environment, where it is vitally important for educational institutions and training organizations to recruit and retain good students, service members and veterans constitute a particularly attractive pool of prospective enrollees. Many service members and veterans:

- Bring valuable experience, maturity, dedication, and leadership skills into the academic/training culture
- Have a strong need for retraining and preparation to enter the civilian workforce, a need made more acute in times of economic challenge
- Have access to excellent academic benefits through the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other sources

“If the schools get that knowledge out there and soldiers and military personnel start to know these guys take care of the military—they don’t pave the way for you, but they understand. If schools develop that partnership, they’ll get service members.”

—Currently enlisted service member
Columbia, SC

One would hope that large-scale supply and large-scale demand would simply find one another, but a number of challenges often stand in the way of institutions’ and organizations’ attempts to recruit and retain veterans, and veterans’ attempts to enroll and participate in academic and training processes. For example:

- Many service members and veterans believe that colleges and universities don’t understand their needs—and in some cases this is true, even if these institutions very much want to understand.
- Through word-of-mouth networks, service members and veterans often tend to let one another know which institutions and organizations have made system-wide efforts to accommodate their needs. For institutions/organizations whose efforts are not fully developed or not fully known to these networks, attracting military/veteran students can be difficult.
- Many service members and veterans are confused or misinformed about the extent or details of their educational benefits, so they become frustrated in the process of trying to sort through all the obstacles. Even more challenges may arise during the enrollment process.
- Many service members and veterans represent the first generation in their families to have access to higher education and may not be as familiar with their options as some of their contemporaries.

What can an educational institution or training organization do? This booklet proposes a five-step plan for attracting, recruiting, and retaining service members and veterans:

1. Create a central point of responsibility and contact for all military/veteran-related services, activities, policies, and procedures (Chapter 2).
2. Identify the major challenges for service members and veterans in your organization or institution (Chapter 3)

3. Educate administration, faculty, and staff about service members and veterans, including common strengths, circumstances, challenges, and needs (Chapter 4).
4. Identify and address any barriers to enrollment, access, retention, and learning, to make your school or organization a welcoming, accessible, and effective home for service members and veterans (Chapters 5 and 6).
5. Tailor your marketing efforts to service members and veterans, meeting them on their own “turf,” learning and addressing their needs and concerns, and letting them know about the veteran-specific programs and procedures you have in place. Reach out into your community to collaborate with all the systems that provide support to service members and veterans, to increase your institution’s connection with potential students (Chapter 7).

Making it Work for Service Members and Veterans

The bulk of this booklet will be devoted to ideas for making your organization or institution more attractive to and effective for this student population, including the following:

- Programs and services designed for military/veteran students, with service members and veterans playing central roles in their design, development, and staffing
- Clear, logical, consistent, and well known structures for finding information and addressing logistical challenges in benefit application and enrollment processes
- Well trained phone operators, receptionists, and other support staff, who present a welcoming face and voice, and who know where to send service members and veterans who have questions about enrollment issues, financial aid, service members and veterans programs, etc.
- Well trained faculty, counseling, guidance, and administrative staff who understand the strengths that service members and veterans bring to the academic setting and the challenges that they may face after their war-zone experiences, ranging from common reintegration challenges to the effects of war-zone trauma, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), and other deployment injuries
- Classes, seminars, peer support groups, and other activities geared toward common interests among service members and veterans and/or designed to promote connection, constructive dialogue, and mutual understanding between military and non-military students and faculty
- Academic credit for training, education, and work experience gained in military service
- Discounts, scholarships, and in-state rate eligibility for service members, veterans, and their family members
- Streamlined administrative procedures for people returning from deployment, including expedited re-enrollment processes for reserve component members who attended before deployment, and a waiver of penalties for service members and veterans whose benefit payments have been delayed
- Policy allowing tuition refunds for people who are activated or deployed during the academic period, and/or allowing for completion after they return from deployment
- Faculty and trainers who present their material in logical and accessible formats that will enhance learning experiences and capacities for all students, including those with educational challenges related to injuries and disabilities

- Classes and services designed to help students address the financial management issues that are common among younger service members and veterans, who may lack financial resources and financial management skills
- Counseling and guidance staff who understand and are willing to help students who approach them with challenges related to injuries and disabilities—including posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and traumatic brain injury—without stigmatizing or marginalizing students who need accommodations
- Accommodation for the range of physical disabilities that service members and veterans may bring with them from the war zone

When you've taken appropriate steps to make your school or organization a welcoming and effective home for service members and veterans, the process of attracting these students will fall into place far more easily.

The first step is to establish a presence within your organization or institution, driven by the knowledge and experience of service members and veterans, that can help guide you through these efforts.

Chapter Two:

Creating a Central Resource

As welcoming and supportive as civilians and civilian institutions may want to be, the civilian world can still be a source of tension and confusion to many men and women who have been immersed in the military culture in far-away lands. They've worn the military experience long enough that the civilian experience may not always be a comfortable fit.

For many service members and veterans, the academic culture can seem particularly foreign, with its firm anchor in civilian popular culture, unfamiliar rules and procedures, lack of apparent structure, and a student body that is in most cases younger and less experienced than they. This can be particularly difficult for those who enlisted right after high school and never had a chance to develop civilian coping skills or knowledge of civilian educational institutions. If there is an Office or Center staffed by veterans and dedicated to making their transition to academic life more successful, it will be a source of comfort, hope, and relief.

“At most colleges and universities, it seems like no one in administration ever talks to anyone else. You go here for one thing, there for another thing—it’s just confusing. We need a one-stop place where we can find out everything we need to know. If they don’t have the answer to everything, at least they’ll know where we’re supposed to go.”

—University student and combat veteran
(Kosovo and Iraq)

The best time to set up this kind of central resource is at the beginning of your efforts to assess and improve your organization’s or institution’s responses to service members and veterans. The veteran(s) you hire to head these efforts, and the military/veteran students who become involved in their activities, are natural guides and advisors for this process. They are your best experts on your prospective students’ strengths, values, challenges, and goals.

In your planning for this central resource, you’ll want to reach out to some of the organizations that exist on campuses across the country to help military/veteran students, including national organizations like Student Veterans of America and organizations that have sprung up in individual institutions. These organizations can provide a wealth of ideas, resources, and support for your efforts.

Leadership

The first step is to hire someone to develop and lead this office, a combat veteran who also has experience and expertise in administration, benefits counseling, and organizational development. A number of titles might fit this full-time position, but for simplicity’s sake in this booklet we’ll use the term Veterans’ Services Coordinator. The position might fit logically into any number of administrative departments, but it’s important that it apply to all academic or training departments.

Duties of the person who fills this position might include the following:

- Leadership role in short- and long-term planning of services for service members and veterans, in collaboration with other key personnel and service members and veterans within the student body
- Establishment, staffing, and management of an Office or Center to house these services
- Development of and support for student veterans' organizations on campus (e.g., clubs, councils) and collaboration with leadership of these organizations in their efforts to recruit and involve members and design programs and activities for service members and veterans
- Recruitment and development of military/veteran students as staff members and volunteers
- Oversight in gathering, coordinating, and disseminating information about challenges that service members and veterans face in enrollment and access, benefits and services available to service members and veterans, and streamlined ways of navigating institutional policies and procedures
- Recruitment of service members and veterans among faculty and staff to help in the process of information gathering and resource building
- Development and coordination of the organization's or institution's web pages for and about military/veteran students and their activities, including any databases developed to connect military/veteran students with resources
- Submission of articles and other relevant information to faculty and student newsletters and newspapers within the institution
- Active leadership role in the development and oversight of training and educational programs for faculty, staff, and students on the reintegration of returning and transitioning service members and veterans
- Coordination with the development office on the identification and pursuit of additional funding for programs and services for service members and veterans
- Community outreach, to determine appropriate sources of referral of service members, veterans, and family members to your organization or institution; to coordinate services in support of these community members; and to make the community aware of your efforts in this area

The remaining chapters include a number of ideas for services that this office might develop and/or provide, but the size and shape of these efforts will depend largely on the size of your organization or institution, the resources available, the needs identified in the development process, and the vision of the people behind these efforts.

Of course, even with one person providing central leadership, other staff and faculty members will still be responsible for learning about and relating to military/veteran students effectively. But a good leader will be the best catalyst for outreach, both to the military/veteran student population and to faculty and staff.

A Home on Campus

Picture a suite of offices in your student center, with a lounge area in the center and four offices arranged around the hub. The central area has one or two comfortable couches and overstuffed chairs, a card table and chairs, and a bookshelf full of selections that might be of particular interest to many service members and veterans—history, biographies, books on the military culture and operations, literature on the experience of war, books on psychology, technology, electronics, career guidance, etc. In one corner is a TV and DVD player, and in another, some computers with internet access. Service members and veterans can gather in this lounge to talk, study, look up resources, hold meetings, watch DVDs, etc.

The office closest to the main entrance belongs to the Veterans' Services Coordinator, a combat veteran on staff who serves as the central repository of information about benefits and services available to service members and veterans, Veterans' Club activities, enrollment and re-enrollment policies and procedures, transfer of credit from military work and training, career development, etc.

The next office is a little larger. With its conference table and chairs, this office serves many purposes—a planning room for Veterans' Services and Veterans' Club activities, a location for focus groups, a place where volunteers and staff can work on special projects, etc.

The next office offers some privacy for dialogue, tutoring, and counseling sessions, as needed and available. These might range from informal and impromptu private conversations between students to scheduled sessions with tutors or with counselors who have expertise in the effects of war-zone trauma and head injuries, accommodation of disabilities, referral to social service networks, family financial management, etc.

The most remote office is the quiet room. With subdued lighting, a comfortable couch and chair, and a yoga mat in the corner, this room is there for service members and veterans who want a quiet place—from those who just want to meditate or “chill out” to those whose injuries bring them the kind of fatigue that's best addressed with a nap in the middle of the day.

This may be a distant ideal, and your existing resources may cover only a portion of it, but many funding agencies and organizations are willing to contribute to worthwhile programs and services for service members and veterans. It's also important to remember that new students bring in new revenue, and that a safe and welcoming home on campus can be a tremendous draw for many of the service members and veterans among your prospective students.

It's also essential that benefits and services for service members and veterans be offered, not out of sympathy or an assumption that these students will have problems, but out of gratitude and appreciation for the extraordinary service they have provided their country. Not all of the students who qualify will want to take part in these programs. Some service members and veterans would like to be recognized for their contributions, but others prefer to remain anonymous and blend in with the rest of the student body. The wishes of each individual deserve respect.

Once a central position has been established, and as the vision for military/veteran student facilities and services is beginning to develop, a parallel process should also begin: the training and education of faculty, staff, and the student body. The next chapter offers some considerations for this process.

Chapter Three:

Identifying the Issues

One of the first duties of your veterans' services staff and volunteers will be a thorough inventory of needs unmet and issues to be addressed. Although there are some common issues across institutions, your school will have its own unique character and primary concerns.

A number of tools can help your staff gather this information, including focus groups, surveys, literature searches, informal conversations, openness, and common sense. It would be a mistake to wait until all the information has been gathered before instituting any changes or programs, but it would also be a mistake to assume that you knew what the problems were before you consulted the people whose lives and educational careers were being affected.

To help you begin the process of exploration, this chapter provides brief discussion of four key categories of information that educators should know:

- Assets that service members and veterans bring to the academic setting
- Cultural differences that can make reintegration difficult
- Deployment-related challenges for Guard and Reserve members
- Addressing fears that civilians sometimes have about service members and veterans

"Many young veterans went directly into the Army upon high school graduation. Now they are back in civilian life, and many are grievously injured. It's important to recognize that they often lack many of the civilian coping skills developed by their peers who did not enter the Army and who now know much more about employers, educational institutions, and civilian service agencies. Many returning veterans also lack adequate family financial management skills, and they're often poor or on the financial edge. This is a population that is both underserved and economically disadvantaged. They need mentoring, guidance, and support to navigate such challenges."

—Administrator
Disability Organization

Service Members and Veterans Bring Many Assets

The first thing you notice when you get to know a returning or transitioning service member or veteran might be a strong sense of discipline, dignity, courtesy, and respect. These are just a few of the qualities that today's military culture, training, and service tend to instill in service members.

As service members and veterans become part of your academic or training community, you'll notice many more valuable qualities that are important in these settings, including:

- Inner qualities like loyalty, maturity, leadership, and integrity
- Focus on mission and purpose
- Solution-oriented approaches to problems
- Ability to focus on clearly defined expectations

- Motivation
- Willingness to lend a hand
- Willingness to take initiative
- Respect for procedures
- Team attitude
- Punctuality, arriving early and ready for work
- Consciousness of health and safety standards
- Excellent performance under pressure and extreme stress

In the military, these men and women have learned to operate in complex environments, in diverse teams, often on accelerated learning curves. They tend to function well in results-oriented academic programs and organizational cultures. They've often been driven by a powerful sense of mission and purpose and are looking for opportunities to make a meaningful contribution in civilian life. They've also built up quite a bit of resilience, learning to triumph over adversity again and again.

Military service also offers training and experience in a wide variety of skills and technologies, many of them valuable in preparation for the civilian classroom. These include skills in:

- Leadership
- Team building
- Project management
- Computer and information technology
- Efficiency

These students have the highest respect for education and training and the benefits that these services offer to career and personal development. They're more likely than other students to graduate, and most want to earn advanced certificates or degrees.

Of course, when even the most highly motivated students find themselves in academic or training cultures where they don't know all the rules and don't feel as if they fit in, these stellar qualities may not be the first things you notice. It may take some time to work through an outer layer of reserve and caution. Just remember that what lies underneath that reserve is worth getting to know.

Cultural Differences

Reintegration challenges can be particularly pronounced for young service members and veterans enrolling in or returning to colleges, universities, and training settings where most of the students are younger and lack experience with and exposure to the military. Even faculty and staff may have limited knowledge or experience of the military culture.

The academic or training culture itself can be even more foreign to returning and transitioning service members and veterans than general civilian life. "The culture shock is really extreme, really drastically different," says one student veteran. In the military, rules are well documented and orders are absolute. In civilian life in general, in academic settings, and in youth cultures, the rules may change from day to day, there may be "unwritten rules" that everyone is supposed to "just know," and there may be unspoken

distinctions between the rules that everyone has to follow and those that one can get away with not following.

It's also natural for civilian undergraduates and trainees in their late teens and early twenties to wear their lack of discipline and structure like a badge of freedom, and many academic institutions and training organizations have had to accommodate this by creating relatively loose and mutable structures and atmospheres. For service members and veterans, whose success and survival have often depended on structure and discipline, this can be very frustrating.

In the words of one student veteran, "It's even the little things, like when people show up. In the military, if you're not 15 minutes early, you're late, but at the university, they show up late all the time. I remember they were having a special event in the evening. I got there 10 minutes early and the whole building was closed, with the lights off. They didn't show up until 10 minutes after the event was supposed to start."

Students back from deployment who are also members of ethnic minority groups may have additional challenges in their attempts to find their place in academic cultures heavily influenced by dominant-culture values and traditions. This may be compounded for students from economically disadvantaged communities, and/or from families that have not had access to higher education in the past. In general, many service members and veterans have educational opportunities that others in their families have not had. Lacking family traditions in higher education, these students might feel more adrift in the college or university setting, and have a harder time finding a sense of belonging.

One additional challenge is not limited to military/veteran students, but may be more prevalent among them. There may be a large discrepancy between the student's intelligence level and his or her reading, writing, and/or mathematical skills. Trouble with the "three Rs" is not uncommon in the generations raised on television, but it may be even more common among men and women whose maturation processes have taken place in non-academic environments full of stress and lacking in opportunities for sleep. Effects of war-zone psychological trauma and traumatic brain injuries can also hamper the development and exercise of some of these skills.

Important measures will include access to classes and tutoring designed to help bring students up to speed on specific skills, and a general policy making activities such as reading aloud in class optional. Pockets of the civilian culture still hold onto the old stereotype of service members and veterans as less intelligent or less well educated than civilians. An important part of reintegration is the process of dispelling the stereotypes and helping people develop the skills that will make it easier for them to prove their intelligence.

Many service members and veterans also have more practical and concrete educational and training goals than their civilian counterparts. Military service might have given them strong skills in hands-on areas such as mechanics, technology, cooking, etc. Providing opportunities to use and grow their existing skills can be an excellent way of engaging these students, whether they choose to maintain this focus or branch out into other academic realms. Many service members and veterans begin with a concentrated focus on concrete skills and career goals and soon develop interest in other educational and training topics.

Deployment-Related Challenges for Guard and Reserve Members

The reserve components of the United States military include the Army and Air National Guard (state-based) and the Army, Navy, and Marine Reserves (federal). Members of these forces serve active duty in war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan and are often called up for multiple deployments overseas. Between deployments, they live in their home communities and report for monthly drill weekends (which might in some cases be three- or four-day weekends) and annual training sessions (generally two weeks each year).

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is classified as an anxiety disorder, a set of psychological and physical responses to exposure to an extreme traumatic event or process.

- Many kinds of events and processes can leave people vulnerable to the development of PTSD.
- Not all post-trauma effects are signs of PTSD.
- There are many effective forms of help for PTSD, and people's natural resilience can be a powerful tool in overcoming its effects.

Even if members of the reserve components would rather not disclose their service status to faculty or staff, conflicts between service duties and academic responsibilities will often make it necessary to disclose. It's essential that faculty and staff fully understand that these duties are legally required rather than optional and that service members' compliance doesn't indicate any lack of respect for or commitment to the academic process. Academic policies, practices, and individual faculty and trainer approaches toward these situations should all have the same effects:

- Understanding and acceptance of students' military duties
- Opportunities to make up missed classes and exams, and extension of assignment deadlines
- Provisions for seamless transition before and after redeployment

Chapter Five, "Removing Obstacles to Enrollment," provides a bit more information on ways of accommodating reserve component duties.

Addressing Fears about Service Members and Veterans

For people who don't know many service members or veterans, common concerns often center on the effects of combat stress—which at the extreme end include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety disorders—and traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

- PTSD and other post-trauma effects are direct results of psychological stress and threat, so they're most accurately understood as injuries
- A TBI might be a mild, moderate, or severe injury to the brain. Concussion and the effects of concussion are the most common TBIs.

Depressive Disorders

Depressive disorders are included among the mood disorders, conditions related to the way we process information about stress, fatigue, fear, happiness, sadness, and reward. People with PTSD and/or TBI often have depressive disorders, too.

- Depression isn't constant; it can come in "waves."
- There are highly effective forms of help for depressive disorders.
- Therapy and medication can help people overcome depression and its effects.

- Depression and anxiety disorders are common among the conditions caused or triggered by experiences of extreme stress and trauma, though these disorders are not always related to trauma.

Of course, all of these conditions are present in the general population as well—effects of family violence, community violence, car crashes, natural disasters, etc.—but most of the media attention has associated them with service members and veterans. The movies and television have often painted dramatic and exaggerated pictures of PTSD and its effects—and the news media have focused on isolated extreme cases—leaving a number of mistaken beliefs about the character, characteristics, and capacities of service members and veterans.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Many of the TBIs seen in OIF/OEF veterans come from direct or indirect exposure to blasts. These injuries range from mild and temporary concussions (the most common type of TBI in returning service members and veterans) to severe head injuries (those with long periods of unconsciousness or amnesia). A TBI may be the result of a jolt to the head, air pressure or sound waves from a blast, or a penetrating blow.

- People can get TBIs from many types of situations.
- People with impairment from TBI can still have many intellectual strengths that enable them to be highly successful in their work.
- People with TBI can and do make progress, often recovering most or all of their abilities.
- Effects that might linger include difficulty handling emotions, impulsiveness, and difficulty filtering out distractions.

As a result, it's common for people who aren't familiar with service members and veterans to worry about upsetting them, for fear it will trigger unpredictable and even volatile responses. Particularly in the academic community, where student violence has been so devastating, that concern might be particularly pronounced, in spite of the fact that the students who have committed the recent high-profile acts of campus violence have been troubled civilians.

Some faculty members and administrators may wonder what they should do to monitor the psychological stability of service members and veterans, so they can see the “warning signs” and intervene “before something bad happens.” The answer to this question is not a simple one. While educators and trainers can and should play an essential role in identifying possible psychological challenges and shepherding students into appropriate assessment and counseling services, it is equally important that educators and trainers help build an atmosphere in which service members and veterans are understood and regarded as “normal,” valuable members of the student body. That understanding starts with knowledge of some of the basics. For example:

1. Common responses to war-zone stress live on a long continuum. At the low end are very mild, manageable, and temporary responses, and at the high end are diagnosable disorders like PTSD and depression. Most people have only mild and temporary effects, and most brain injuries (80%) sustained in these wars are mild concussions with temporary effects, rather than serious and debilitating injuries—but even students with serious injuries can do excellent work and contribute much in training and educational settings.

2. Within the small percentage of service members and veterans who do come back with diagnosable disorders or disabilities, in many cases their effects are not even noticeable, and in few cases do these effects interfere with the quality or completion of their academic work. People with PTSD, TBI, or depression might experience effects such as memory problems, difficulty concentrating, difficulty managing stress, time-management issues, disorganization, anxiety, sleep problems, or irritability. However, many service members and veterans have developed strategies for managing their effects. If they need to take a “time out” or skip the occasional class, they’ll make up their work through extra effort. And people can and do regain their psychological and physical resilience and/or learn to manage the effects of all these conditions.
3. In most cases, when people do have more serious injuries or disabilities, significant abilities still remain. Like other students with disabilities, these service members and veterans often show the kinds of skills, talents, and initiative that can lead to academic and professional success. If they need assistance in compensating for their challenges, many resources are available, including several educational tools in *Tools for America’s Best*.
4. Military experience has not been a factor in campus shootings, and the educational institution’s duty in monitoring the actions or well being of service members and veterans is no greater than or different from its duty in monitoring those of other students. Particularly in residential undergraduate settings, the college years are often volatile times, when students whose troubles were somewhat contained within the structure of the family system begin to drift in the freedom of campus life. If service members and veterans have received training in combat, they’ve also received extensive training in the development of personal discipline and the protection of their comrades and their communities.

It is true that, for some, PTSD, TBI, and other war-related injuries can be severe and debilitating. However, it would be a mistake and a discourtesy to assume that a particular service member or veteran has PTSD, TBI, depression, or another war-related injury simply because of his or her experience of combat. And if someone discloses the presence of one or more of these conditions, it would be a mistake to assume that he or she can’t manage the effects or fulfill academic or training requirements. The best response is to:

- Be open to each individual student as an individual, with curiosity about his or her interests, strengths, and academic/training challenges and needs
- If a military/veteran student—or any student—discloses even mild effects that are interfering with academic work, be open to working with him or her to develop creative ways of overcoming these challenges
- If the military/veteran student asks you if these effects might indicate an injury or disability, offer current and accurate referral information that will lead him or her to assessment and counseling that is appropriate for the military experience and for these types of injuries
- If the military/veteran student—or any student—volunteers to disclose an injury or disability that is causing challenges in the learning process, be ready to work collaboratively with the student toward accommodations that will address these challenges, and/or to refer to others within the organization/institution with expertise in this area.

The central theme in answers to all these concerns is that the service members and veterans in your student body are students and individuals first. Though their war-zone experiences are markedly different from the experiences of civilian faculty and students, the experience of extreme stress and trauma is common within the general population. School/organizational policy and faculty/staff training should emphasize seeing and responding to individuals as individuals, and dispelling the stereotypes that reinforce isolation and prevent successful reintegration.

No matter how much an instructor or staff member might want to help, effective guidance and mentorship requires great respect and a willingness to know and appreciate the individual and all of his or her strengths and challenges.

Chapter Six, “Accommodating the Effects of War-zone Injuries,” offers more information, as do three of the Tools that are included in *Tools for America’s Best*:

- “Compensation Strategies for Impaired Attention”
- “Compensation Strategies for Impaired Memory”
- “Accommodations”

Strength and Courage

None of the injuries or disorders that sometimes follow exposure to trauma are matters of choice or signs of weakness. They’re rooted in the way the human body, mind, and spirit naturally handle stress and threat. Strength and courage can’t keep people from developing these conditions. But the ability to keep functioning and facing each day in spite of challenging effects and impairment is a sign of strength and courage.

Chapter Four:

Educating Faculty, Staff, and Students

The experience of war can change people in many ways, some positive and some painful. Many service members and veterans come home feeling different and separate from the civilian world, just when they most need to rejoin and connect with their communities. One of the greatest challenges in reintegration can be civilians' lack of information about the military, the experience of war, and the effects of war and war-related injuries.

“Sometimes when you tell people you’re a veteran, things just get strange. They treat you like they think you’ll explode, or like you’re from another planet.”

—University student and combat veteran
(Afghanistan)

Civilians can feel awkward and frustrated as well, unable to enter or understand the military world that the service members and veterans have occupied. They may have some misconceptions about the military, about service-related injuries, or about the men and women returning from wartime service. They might try to connect in many ways, some of them a little misguided. Some of the questions that well-meaning civilians ask can be jarring and intrusive, and can drive service members and veterans farther into their sense of isolation and separation from the society they have served.

“The veterans I talk to generally don’t tell people they’re veterans unless it has to come up. You bring it up, and the conversation just stops.”

—University student and combat veteran
(Kosovo and Iraq)

By making available the most accurate and least sensationalized information about service members and veterans and the military culture, you can make your campus or training setting a safe, respectful, and welcoming home. Your coordinator of veterans' services and the other service members and veterans within your student population will be your most important resources in developing educational programs for civilian faculty, staff, and students.

Forums and Venues for Faculty/Staff Education

The first step is to educate faculty and staff, with information/resources directed toward people's specific roles. For example:

- The coordinator of veterans services might hold an in-service training for administrative, finance, and support staff (including phone operators and receptionists), giving them basic information about the logistical challenges that might arise around benefits, enrollment, re-enrollment, etc., and making it clear where questions from service members and veterans should be directed.
- The coordinator of veterans services and other service members and veterans in the student body might hold department-specific training sessions and/or round-table sessions to talk about their experiences on campus and answer any questions that faculty might have. Information about

implications for service members and veterans in the student body can also be woven into other training and in-service programs.

- Counseling and guidance staff should receive more extensive training on the military culture, the effects of war, challenges in reintegration, signs of conditions such as PTSD and the effects of brain injuries, appropriate referral to assessment and other services for these injuries, and accommodations for learning challenges brought on by war-related injuries and disabilities.
- Faculty in human service departments such as psychology, social work, and medicine should receive continuing education and training in the provision of culturally competent services to service members and veterans, so they can incorporate this information into their coursework.

In a report on Combat2College, a collaborative effort between a Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Montgomery College (Maryland), Bleiberg and colleagues (See “Downloadable Resources”) suggest a number of issues for discussion in faculty training, including:

- “The assumptions, belief systems, and political views that can affect student/teacher relationships and the teaching environment for OEF/OIF veterans¹”
- “Comparisons of present veterans’ return-to-home experiences to prior warrior-to-civilian transitions (e.g., *Life Magazine* photos of ticker-tape parades for returning World War II veterans)”
- “The differences between transition from high school to college, versus transition from combat to college”
- “Analysis of factors in the current college environment that might cause difficulty or discomfort to veterans, and exploration of how to mitigate these”

Of course, highly visible commitment on the part of organizational/institutional and departmental administration will be necessary to motivate faculty and staff members to attend these sessions. Commitment from the top will be one of the most crucial factors in the success of all these efforts. Making attendance mandatory and awarding continuing education credit might be two ways of improving attendance.

An even more important incentive, though, is the individual faculty or staff member’s sense of emotional engagement. This can include everything from a sense of identification based on his or her own experience with the deployment of loved ones to a sense of empathy for the difficulty that many service members and veterans have encountered in reintegration into the civilian world. One way of engaging the emotions of your faculty and staff might be to hold departmental receptions and show some of the films that have been produced recently showing the impact of war and the challenges of reintegration.

Forms and Venues for Student Education

Student education may require a bit more creativity. These classes and events should be planned collaboratively by service members, veterans, and civilian students and/or faculty and designed to be

¹ The acronym OEF stands for Operation Enduring Freedom, the war in Afghanistan. OIF stands for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

attended by a mixture of service members, veterans, and civilian students. Ideas from student service members and veterans² include:

- The inclusion of a session on service members and veterans in freshman orientation courses, designed by service members and veterans, who also present in a panel format
- A veterans' fair for all students and faculty, with information, exhibits, and discussion sessions
- A community roundtable including service members, veterans, civilian students, and community members
- Attendance at national student veterans' conferences
- Community service projects and other volunteer opportunities that harness the skills and creativity of both military/veteran students and civilian students and offer opportunities for collaboration
- A discussion course or seminar on reintegration of service members and veterans, with all civilian students and faculty, service members, veterans, and military and veteran family members (from the academic community and the wider community) welcome, and academic credit awarded to students who attend
- Courses and seminars on the military culture and effects of war and reintegration, held within human service departments (e.g., psychology, social work, medicine) but open to all students, with panels of student service members and veterans as co-presenters and opportunities for facilitated discussion among civilian, service member, and veteran students
- Courses or seminars on topics associated with the military, beginning with adequate preparation for constructive discussion of potentially controversial issues (see the next subsection, "Preparing for Discussion Between Service Members and Veterans and Civilians"). A few examples:
 - A discussion course or seminar on the history of war
 - A media course focusing on the cinema of war
 - Art courses focused on service members and veterans, with civilian and military/veteran students paired for collaborative projects, similar to the model developed by the Vet Art Project (www.vetartproject.com)

These are just a few ideas to prime the pump. Your students will probably come up with many more. The more interesting and collaborative the courses and events—and the more incentives they provide, including academic credit—the more likely they are to attract students. And the more care you take in the unfolding of these sessions, the more constructive the discussion will be, and the more likely it is that these efforts will increase a sense of unity and mutual understanding.

Preparing for Training and Discussion of War and Warriors

Caution is an essential element in the design and delivery of these types of training efforts and events for faculty, staff, or students. The subject of war and its effects can easily tip over into a dramatic focus on the negative or a stereotypical portrait of service members and veterans as dangerous, unstable, or objects of

² Many of these ideas were contributed by a focus group that included Ilona Meagher (author of the online journal *PTSD Combat*) and members of the Veterans Club at Northern Illinois University.

sympathy. The best focus will emphasize respect for these individuals, appreciation for their service, welcome within the civilian community and academic community, and belief in their strength and potential.

War-related discussion between civilians and service members/veterans can also have its challenges. The aftermath of Vietnam has taught us well that a failure to welcome and support returning service members can do long-term damage to people's minds, bodies, and spirits. As a nation we've reached a level of maturity where we're able to voice and show support for the troops, no matter what opinions we might have of war itself or of the conflicts in which they've been deployed.

Even so, many civilians haven't yet learned to know or respect:

- The limits of our understanding of the experience of war
- The diversity of experience, opinion, and political leanings within the population of service members and veterans
- The limits of service members' and veterans' roles as representatives of the U.S. military
- The boundaries between constructive discussion of war and using service members and veterans as sounding boards for our opinions and beliefs
- The point at which honest expression of our views shades over into discourtesy and disrespect
- The complexity of experience that service members and veterans bring with them, and the vulnerability that some carry in situations where they don't know how to explain their views in ways that civilians will understand, so they just stay silent and shut down
- The damage that even well meant comments can inflict on relationships and on the development of a sense of unity between the military and civilian communities

Young people are particularly passionate about their beliefs and often unaware of the effects that their comments may be having on others. It is a common misconception among the young that a failure to express their opinions might constitute dishonesty. Without adequate preparation and facilitation, a discussion that began as a constructive exchange can devolve rapidly.

As educators and trainers, you know that unity is often forged from conflict honestly expressed and discussed among people who want to reach some accord. However, you also have a responsibility to lay whatever groundwork you can to promote constructive dialogue and discourage exchanges that are likely to increase military/veteran students' sense of isolation and mar their ability to connect with the academic community.

So whenever you set up a situation in which military/veteran and civilian students will be discussing war, its effects, or the military culture, it will be best to begin with a panel discussion in which service members and veterans are given some time to prepare the civilian students with information that will help them understand a little bit of the military experience—even if they can gain only a small glimpse of how little they know about it. If all parties approach the discussion with a degree of humility, the exchange is far more likely to be constructive and productive of unity.

While this educational process is going on, parallel processes should also be developing, including steps within administration and finance to identify and remove some of the barriers to enrollment that many service members and veterans encounter. That is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Five:

Removing Obstacles to Enrollment

For academic institutions and training organizations trying to attract and retain service members and veterans, an important step is to identify the barriers that might keep them from enrolling and staying in school. This chapter offers a brief discussion of some of the common barriers, a quick look at benefits available, and a checklist that can help you identify some of the things your institution is doing to eliminate barriers and to help military and veteran students avoid or overcome the many obstacles to enrollment and retention.

“One of my biggest problems was how to pay for my textbooks and tuition before the GI Bill kicked in. When I tried to talk to people at the university, no one seemed to know how to help me. I was about to drop out before the semester even started.”

—Army Specialist (retired)
Dallas

Access to education, training, and educational benefits is important for any prospective student, but among these students the need can be particularly acute. Many service members and veterans are operating under conditions of financial hardship, and some are also living and coping with the effects of injuries. Both their families' economic needs and their need to find productive roles in civilian society can make a smooth transition into higher education or employment training all the more important.

Major Challenges

It's part of human nature to find it easier to understand the things we already know. To the people who design systems for applying to academic institutions or large training organizations, finding and enrolling in classes, and navigating benefit streams, these systems may seem logical and understandable. For the rest of us, though, they hold many mysteries.

For example, one student veteran speaks of trying to sign up for courses using a search engine in a university computer system, where the acronyms that had served as departmental identifiers in the catalogue were slightly different from the ones the search engine had been taught to recognize, so the literal-minded search engine couldn't find any of his courses. For those who don't expect these little twists and turns, they can stop the process. Another student veteran tells the story of enrolling for the academic year well in advance of the deadline, and several months later receiving notice that the university didn't have all the forms it needed, so he wouldn't be able to attend.

The logistics of obtaining benefits and enrolling in an educational institution or training program can be challenging to many people. After deployment in a war zone—where challenges were often organized around life-and-death issues—these logistical challenges can be so frustrating that they discourage some potential students. The effects of war-zone injuries such as PTSD, depression, or traumatic brain injury (TBI) can increase that frustration exponentially. The sense of pride that is strong within the military culture can also work against asking for help, so it becomes far easier just to give up.

Educational benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill may be excellent, but the process of applying for those benefits can present obstacles that some service members and veterans may find daunting. Even if benefits are approved, the money may not arrive in time to pay for tuition, books, etc. before the semester begins. At this writing (Spring, 2010), the government is experiencing a large influx of GI Bill benefit applications, further delaying processing and payments. Institutions/organizations that are willing to wait are guaranteed to receive payment, even if payment is delayed. But if the student doesn't have the money to pay up front and wait for reimbursement, the school loses a student.

Many service members and veterans have earned significant credit for courses taken in the military, but that credit is not always honored in civilian academic institutions. "I knew one woman in the Navy who had earned 60 or more credit hours in the service," says one student veteran, "but almost none of them counted at the state university." Few academic institutions have instituted policies for giving credit for military work experience, which is often highly technical in nature and can constitute an education in itself.

As students, many service members and veterans find themselves having to take courses whose content they know thoroughly from military training and experience, just to fulfill prerequisites. They risk spending much of their limited GI Bill capacity on courses they don't need, running out of benefits before they've earned the certificates or degrees they do need, and being unable to afford to attend without those benefits.

According to one student veteran, it would be in the schools' interest to award credit for training, education, and experience in the service, because service members and veterans are highly motivated to attend school or training and earn skill certificates and undergraduate or advanced degrees. "As long as those benefits are there, they're going to use them."

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, members of the reserve components (National Guard and Reserves) face additional challenges when activation and deployment pull them out of school mid-semester, and when they return. These challenges might include the loss of tuition money paid for classes they won't be able to attend because of deployment, and complicated procedures for re-enrollment when they return. The processes of preparing for deployment and making the transition back home can be difficult enough without these extra burdens, which might discourage some students from re-enrolling.

Available Benefits

An important element in eliminating obstacles is a thorough knowledge of the benefits that are available. You'll need far more information than this booklet can hold, but here are a few highlights:

- The federal government is expected to spend \$78 billion in next decade on educational benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. That legislation has allowances for housing and books and covers in-state tuition at public educational institutions.
- From time to time the federal government institutes programs to bridge gaps in the funding system (e.g., in Fall of 2009, the government issued emergency checks to students awaiting veterans' benefits).
- Service members who (on or after 8/1/09) have served at least six years in the Armed Forces and agree to serve an additional four years have the option to transfer unused GI Bill benefits to their spouses. On their 10th anniversary of service, they may assign unused benefits to any spouse or

dependent. (The Department of Defense may impose additional eligibility requirements and limit the transferable benefits to 18 months.)

- If tuition expenses exceed the highest public in-state undergraduate tuition rate, the federal government will match any additional tuition aid provided by a school through the Yellow Ribbon Program (a provision of the Post-9/11 GI Bill), as long as the participating institution:
 - Provides this aid to applicants on a first-come, first-served basis
 - Makes its contributions as grants, scholarships, etc.
 - States in its application the dollar amount to be spent for each participant during the academic year
 - States the maximum number of students to be served in any academic year
 - Provides (for each year participating) information verifying that the student shows satisfactory progress, conduct, and attendance

Students are eligible to receive Yellow Ribbon benefits if one of the following is true:

- The student served at least 36 months (aggregate) after 9/10/01
- The student was honorably discharged for a service-connected disability and served at least 30 continuous days after 9/10/01
- The student is a dependent eligible for Transfer of Entitlement under the Post-9/11 GI Bill (with the service members and veterans meeting one of the first two criteria)
- Other local and national sources may also offer grants or scholarships for service members and veterans students.
- Service members and veterans can obtain transcripts for education received in the service through the Army/American Council on Education Registry Transcript System (AARTS) or the Sailor-Marine American Council on Education Registry Transcript (SMART).
- The VA has launched VA Once, an enhanced internet-based means of submitting select forms (22-1999, 22-1999b, and 22-6553c) developed by a team of academic institutions and VA representatives.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a number of web-based resources for learning how to navigate these systems, including online training for new certifying school officials, a user training guide for using VA Once, and other resources for certifying officials.

Eliminating Barriers

On the next page is a quick checklist to assess your ability to eliminate or help service members and veterans navigate some of the obstacles to enrollment. Feel free to add more ideas at the end and check off items as they go into effect.

Checklist: Eliminating Barriers

- We have a single point of contact—on site at our organization/institution—who has the knowledge and power to help military/veteran students and prospective students eliminate barriers and navigate systems, including veterans benefit systems and our own administrative and financial systems.
- Administrative, support, reception, and switchboard staff have all been trained to refer service members and veterans to that single point of contact.
- We've had a variety of computer novices who are unfamiliar with our enrollment procedures test our web-based tools for enrollment, etc. to make sure they're user friendly.
- We've instituted streamlined enrollment policies and processes for service members and veterans.
- We have clear policies for the processing of education benefits, and we make information about those policies readily available and train staff to explain them in understandable ways.
- We communicate and collaborate with local VA offices, Military Education Centers, and other military resources to make transition and enrollment processes as smooth as possible.
- We waive late fees if a payment is late because of a delay in receiving veterans' benefits.
- We have clear, logical, and liberal policies for accepting transfer credits for training, education, and work experience gained in the military, and we make information about these policies freely available to service members and veterans who are considering enrollment.
- We have clear policies that allow members of the reserve components to take needed time for drills and annual training and to make up for any missed tests or assignments when they return, and faculty and staff have been trained on those policies.
- We have clear policies concerning activation and deployment of service members in the reserve components, and faculty and staff have been trained on those policies.
- Service members called up for activation and deployment during the academic period are eligible for tuition refunds.
- When service members who were activated (placed on active-duty status) in mid-semester return from deployment, they're allowed to rejoin the same classes at or before the point where they were deployed, and they don't have to pay tuition for the same class twice.
- We've streamlined re-enrollment procedures for students returning from deployment.
- _____

- _____

- _____

These are only a few ideas. The service members and veterans on staff and within your Veterans Club will be able to provide more suggestions tailored to your student body and the challenges and requirements of your administrative systems.

It's also important to remember that, for some students, obstacles to enrollment aren't the only serious challenges to their quest for an education. The next chapter provides some suggestions for accommodating the effects of war-zone injuries such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and traumatic brain injuries.

Accessibility and Affordability: Ideas From the University of Phoenix

The University of Phoenix is the largest private university in North America, with 18,000 faculty, more than 200 campus locations (many near military installations and some overseas), and online programs available in most countries around the world. The University offers a multifaceted approach toward making education accessible, affordable, and effective for service members and veterans—wherever they may be.

At any given time the University of Phoenix averages about 40,000 military students (51% of these are veterans and 27% are military spouses), roughly 10% of its total student population. The counselors who serve these students are trained in the navigation of GI Bill benefits, and the University ranks first in the country in use of GI Bill dollars. The University has lowered its per-credit tuition rate to the military tuition assistance level, so that service members won't have to touch their GI Bill benefits during active service. Counselors are also trained to explore all available financial resources, so that out-of-pocket expenses are as low as possible and loans are an option of last resort.

The University has a separate Military Division, staffed with 1,000 counselors (enrollment, academic, financial, etc.), all of whom are former students. Most of these counselors have served in the military, and the rest are military spouses or civilians who have worked with the military in past positions—and other counselors on the campuses have been trained to “speak military.” Each student is assigned a team of counselors who follow him or her from enrollment through graduation, providing customized guidance, with the help of software that allows the counselors to communicate and share appropriate records.

The University accommodates “rolling start-dates,” so that students don't have to wait for the semester or quarter to start, but can fit their studies around their deployment schedules. Many service members continue their online studies during deployment, and they can also accelerate their progress between deployments.

The University also (as of Summer, 2010) has two collaborative scholarship programs:

- In partnership with the Armed Forces Foundation, the Severely Injured Veterans Scholarship Program (targeting Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, DC), offering four full-tuition scholarships to severely injured veterans or service members, and one to a spouse or primary caregiver
- The University of Phoenix AMVETS Scholarship Program, offering 50 \$7,000 scholarships to service members, veterans, spouses, and children (within the age guidelines)

Chapter Six:

Accommodating the Effects of War-zone Injuries

Of all the measures your school might take to help service members and veterans gain access to education, your responses to the effects of war-zone injuries may be your greatest chance to prove your understanding and skill.

Responses to purely physical injuries and disabilities are often straightforward—ramps, railings, and the like—and the injuries themselves are often visible and easy to understand. The effects of war-zone injuries like posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety disorders, and traumatic brain injuries can be more complex, less easily apparent, and less well known to educators and counseling staff—and in some cases even to the staff responsible for counseling students with disabilities or psychological challenges.

“I keep my head down; I go to class; I don’t mix it up with the students. When I get a migraine, I leave class and go sit in my truck and run the AC full blast and put my hat over my head to keep out the light. And then, when I can, I go back into the school.”

—Sergeant, Retired
Fort Bragg

Additional complicating factors include the shame and stigma that are still associated with these “hidden wounds” within the military culture—as they are in the civilian culture—in spite of efforts by military leadership to dispel the stigma. The military places high value on strength, courage, and emotional discipline, and many people don’t understand these injuries well enough to know that they are **not** signs of weakness, cowardice, or lack of emotional discipline.

“I always sit next to the door, so if I start getting anxious about the crowded classroom, I can leave quickly without causing a disruption.”

—Sergeant, Retired
Dallas

Military/veteran students interviewed say that most of those who do need accommodations will not want to disclose these injuries or their effects to their instructors, and it’s essential for the organization/institution and instructors to respect their privacy. Yet the effects of these conditions can include challenges in attention, concentration, understanding, memory, and communication—any of which can affect the educational process.

So how do you provide effective accommodations for challenges you can’t see, from injuries you don’t know about, among people who don’t want to—and have a right not to—disclose their injuries? And knowing this, how do you keep from assuming that military/veteran students will have these challenges, since most service members and veterans do not have the injuries, and many of those who do have the injuries can manage their effects effectively?

This chapter proposes a four-part response:

1. Normalize these kinds of conditions within the educational culture
2. Normalize the use of strategies to improve concentration, memory, etc.
3. Promote clarity in education for all students
4. Prepare counseling, guidance, tutoring, and veterans' services staff and volunteers to provide information, assistance, and appropriate referrals

Normalizing These Conditions

One of the reasons conditions such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety disorders have kept their stigma is that people have so little understanding of them. The most common source of information about these conditions is the popular media, and the media have a vested interest in painting the most dramatic pictures possible. As an educational institution or training organization, you have some excellent venues for spreading accurate and down-to-earth information about these conditions in general.

You might offer a course or seminar for a general student audience that explores the continuum of reactions to stress and trauma, from everyday resilience through post-traumatic responses. This would include information about human responses to psychological and physical stress and threat in general, not just those of service members or veterans. You might make the Tool called “Resilience, Stress, and Trauma” (in *Tools for America's Best*) available to the broad audience of students.

Most students would also benefit from more information about traumatic brain injuries, including ways of telling if one has an injury and ways of compensating for the effects of these injuries. Those who aren't familiar with head injuries often think they diminish basic intelligence, when they usually just impair specific functions. Information about the experiences that cause these injuries might help some students—and not just service members and veterans—understand some of the effects they've been experiencing.

Normalizing Strategies for Challenges in Concentration and Memory

Brain injuries and post-deployment stress effects may in some cases impair some learning skills, but they're not the only conditions that do. Challenges in attention, concentration, comprehension, and retention are common, particularly in young adults. Common causes include excessive stress, sleep deprivation, poor nutrition, use of or withdrawal from alcohol or other drugs, emotional conflict, attention deficit disorder, and a variety of learning disorders. For older students, the effects of age can also make concentration and memorization more difficult.

A number of good tools exist for improving study habits, attention, concentration, understanding, and memory. Two sample tools—“Strategies to Improve Attention” and “Strategies to Improve Memory”—are included in *Tools for America's Best*. As an educator or trainer, you can make these kinds of tools widely available. You can also hold seminars for general audiences of students on improving learning skills.

There are also some concrete measures you can take, such as creating quiet spaces with few distractions for study and safe places to take a nap between classes, reducing the number of distractions in the classroom, and allowing students to use headphones or earplugs during non-interactive activities within classes.

Promoting Clarity in Education and Training

Many of the accommodations that faculty, trainers, or counselors might make to help people overcome learning challenges are really just elements of sound adult education. If your organization or institution launched a campaign to promote training/educational clarity, these efforts might produce many positive effects, far beyond the military/veteran student community.

Faculty and trainers might use the following checklist to identify measures they'd be willing to take to improve the clarity of their instruction and make it easier for students to stay focused and retain the information. It's provided in checklist form so they can take note of the measures they're already taking.

Clarity in education and training

- Provide a schedule of assignments for the semester before or at the beginning of the course
- At the beginning of each class session, ask the class to name the major points made in the last session
- Be clear and direct
- Preview and review information presented
- Use consistent terminology and presentation formats, to minimize distraction and confusion
- Build concepts, etc. in educational sequence
- Provide your information in a recognizable structure (outline, clear explanation of structure, diagrams, etc.)
- Find and use opportunities for students to relate your information to their own life experiences and preexisting knowledge
- Use multiple learning modalities (auditory, visual, kinesthetic)
- Help students find their strongest learning modality, and give each the option to encode the information in his or her strongest modality
- Group your information into logical "chunks"
- Categorize the information by similarities and differences
- Have students discuss in dyads the answers to the following questions: Do I understand? How is this meaningful to me? How does this fit with what I know?
- In dyads, give students a chance to paraphrase and summarize the information you've given them
- Use discussion activities
- Encourage questions in the classroom
- If you can't follow a person's comment, don't pretend you can. Paraphrase and ask, "Do I have this right?"
- At the end of the class (10 minutes before class ends), ask the class to name the major points you've made

Helping people stay focused

- Provide visual focus cues at the front of the room, such as a sign that says, "Stay Focused" or "Attention"
- During study sessions, minimize interruptions and distractions, gradually increasing distractions to build tolerance
- Suggest home practice tasks for staying focused (from the Tool, "Strategies to Improve Concentration," in *Tools for America's Best*)

- ❑ Give students opportunities to discuss what you've said and repeat it aloud, to promote stronger attention and more accurate encoding of the information
- ❑ Do things that make it easier for students to concentrate on what you're saying (e.g., using anecdotes, clear explanations, relating things to experience, metaphors, etc.)
- ❑ Cue people when they seem stuck on prior topics or have lost the topic, and treat those instances as normal human experiences

Reinforcing Memory

- ❑ Provide a detailed syllabus or training outline
- ❑ Ask questions to prompt recall of what you've just said
- ❑ Record your lectures (a digital format might be most useful), and encourage students to do the same
- ❑ Photocopy and distribute your notes after class
- ❑ Encourage the use of laptops for note taking in class
- ❑ Have a designated note taker each week, who will email the notes to all students who want them
- ❑ Encourage people to ask you to repeat directions
- ❑ Encourage students to see you individually for clarification

Some faculty members or trainers might wonder if this constitutes “dumbing things down,” but it really doesn't. Conveying information in a clear and creative structure does not imply that the information you provide should be any less rich, any less interesting, or any less intellectually challenging. It's simply that the challenges should be limited to the information itself, rather than the instructor's method of conveying it. And, of course, the most important challenge is that of taking the information and using it. That's a challenge we all must meet, and often the best source of interest in the academic or training setting.

These and other steps outlined in this booklet have addressed many facets of human experience that are not limited to service members and veterans, but can be very important to their enrollment, retention, and success in the academic setting.

The next chapter touches on what to do when you've put these measures in place—how to craft the messages that will let service members and veterans know what you're offering, and how to make these messages available.

Chapter Seven:

Getting Your Message to Service Members and Veterans

When your efforts to make your campus or training organization a welcoming and accessible place for service members and veterans are well underway, your next task will be that of finding out how to communicate what you have to offer in terms that will be relevant to the service members and veterans you seek to attract.

Crafting Your Message

By this time you'll have a group of active and involved service members and veterans, on staff and in your student body, who can help you craft your message.

In developing this message, you'll want to keep in mind some of the elements that the military culture values highly, including:

- A powerful sense of mission and purpose that may have begun with the military mission but is still very much needed in civilian life—in whatever form that sense of mission takes in the life and goals of an individual student
- Respect for the Armed Forces, the nation, the families who have endured the long wait at home, the service members and veterans who have sustained injuries, and those who have fallen in battle
- Values such as strength, courage, honor, discipline, courtesy, responsibility, and personal sacrifice—and a personal and service-wide image that reflects those values
- Education, training, knowledge, and skill development
- Evidence that your institution is respected within the academic and professional realms
- Transferability of credit earned in the service toward your degree or certificate
- Effective procedures for navigating the red tape and helping service members and veterans afford and receive the education that is their due
- Evidence that your organization or institution understands the circumstances of service members and veterans and provides opportunities for meaningful involvement and self-determination
- Evidence that you work in partnership with other organizations in your community to support service members and veterans and meet their needs

The tone that you take in your materials will also be important. Although it's hard not to feel empathy for the suffering that many service members and veterans have seen and endured during deployment, these men and women don't play the victim's role and don't want to be approached in sentimental terms. Nothing in your materials or your message should indicate that you expect military/veteran students to

have special problems or need special help. Your marketing efforts will be most effective if they are positive (but not “cute”) and matter-of-fact, focusing on strengths and opportunities.

The length of your promotional materials is also important. Service members are given large quantities of written matter to read and digest, so materials that are short and to the point will be most likely to catch their interest. You might create a brochure, half-page postcard, or wallet-sized laminated card that can be mailed to individual service members and veterans or left in places where they congregate. The most effective messages will be those that not only affirm that your organization/ institution cares about service members and veterans, but also list some evidence of this, including types of services offered, veteran-specific activities, and opportunities available to service members and veterans.

It’s also important to give prominent placement to information about opportunities, services, and activities for service members and veterans in your overall communication efforts, including your web site, catalogues, newsletters, and alumni magazines.

Getting the Message Out There

When your message has been crafted and refined/approved by your military/veteran students and coordinator of veterans’ services, it’s time to find ways of getting your information to service members and veterans. This is an excellent opportunity to take the initiative to form partnerships with the organizations and agencies that have the closest contact with service members and veterans. Depending on your institution’s size and catchment area, these might include local, regional, or national:

- Army, Navy, and Air Force bases, National Guard Armories, and Reserve Center Administrative Offices
- Federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities and Vet Centers (community-based service centers run by the VA)
- State-based departments, agencies, or offices in charge of service members’ and veterans’ affairs
- Organizations like Student Veterans of America; Web sites like the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America; and veterans’ service organizations (VSOs) such as the Military Officers Association of America, Blue Star Families, National Military Family Association, American Legion, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Projects that provide support to wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans, including the Army Wounded Warrior program, the Navy’s Safe Harbor program, the Air Force Wounded Warrior program, and the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment
- Providers of informal support to service members, veterans, and their families, such as the Military Family Life Consultants and the Fleet and Family Support Centers
- Media geared toward service members and veterans, such as the *Stars and Stripes*, the *Army Times*, the *Navy Times*, etc., or the newsletters of local agencies, organizations, and service offices
- Web-based resources that offer job assistance or educational information to service members and veterans

As you form relationships with key personnel in these resources, and provide evidence that what you have to offer will benefit their constituents, you'll learn about opportunities for conveying your message. These might include participation in events on local military bases and events hosted by VSOs (e.g., job and educational fairs), articles or advertisements in their news media, opportunities to leave your materials in visible places in their facilities, and inclusion of your materials in their mailings—or a special mailing of a postcard briefly outlining your service members and veterans programs and services.

Don't discount the civilian media. If you're providing effective services and support, an article in the mainstream press, a TV news feature, or a radio interview about individual military/veteran students' experiences at your school and involvement in your activities might paint a very attractive picture of what you have to offer. It might also offer hope and inspiration to service members and veterans who are "stuck" and need a little motivation to reconnect with civilian life.

And finally, don't underestimate the power and importance of social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn) in reaching service members and veterans, particularly those in their 20s and 30s. If your veterans' club or veterans' services office creates an effective page on one of these sites, that might reach far more of the younger prospective students or trainees than traditional channels and media are likely to reach.

Conclusion

Many of life's decisions are difficult because they pit one problematic choice against another. When we come across a true "win-win" situation, we're relieved. The decision to enhance your organization's or institution's responsiveness to the needs of service members and veterans is one of those rare win-win propositions. Everyone stands to gain.

From the satisfaction of doing the right thing through the far-reaching benefits to your organization/institution, your enrollment, and your community, effective efforts to recruit, welcome, support, and retain service members and veterans just make sense. These things are worth doing, and worth doing right.

What are some possible next steps? Here are a few ideas:

- It is essential that educators and trainers engage in dialogue about the needs and opportunities that military and veteran students present, and ways in which the academic and training communities can respond. These discussions should take place both within and among institutions of higher learning and employment training organizations.
- The academic and training communities also have a responsibility for outreach into the surrounding community, where many service members, veterans, and their families need support in reintegration.
- Educators and trainers can develop simple means of evaluating the effectiveness of their programs for military and veteran students.
- Organizations and institutions that have developed innovative and particularly effective programs can offer their guidance and example to the larger academic community.

Our nation has made enormous progress since the Vietnam era, when opposition to the war translated into disregard or even scorn for the veterans who returned from that war. The isolation in which those men lived and suffered still haunts some veterans to this day. Many of us have resolved that those circumstances will never again be repeated on our soil.

As an educator, a trainer, a member of your community, a citizen of your country, and a human being, you have a chance to break through the isolation and create a place of understanding, respect, and opportunity. It is only a fitting "thank you" to the men and women who have risked their lives, careers, and well being to serve our nation. Please give them a chance to find their mission and purpose here at home, and in the process help you fulfill your own mission and purpose.

Downloadable Resources

Most of the information contained in this booklet and the accompanying tools has been drawn and synthesized from resources listed in this section. The authors and organizations that have published these materials deserve recognition as the true sources of this content.

For ease of access, only resources that can be found on the internet and downloaded at no cost are included in this list. However, many of these resources detail and link to additional materials and services of all sorts. The resources listed here are divided into three categories:

- Education of Service Members and Veterans
- Resources Related to the GI Bill and Other Veterans' Benefits
- Information about PTSD, TBI, and Other Conditions

Many additional resources are listed in one of the companion documents in this series, *Learning about America's Best*.

Education of Service Members and Veterans

All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service, Mary McNaught Yonkman and John Marshall Bridgeland, Civic Enterprises, <http://www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/allvolunteerforce.pdf>

“Campuses as Vet-Friendly Zones,” *Inside HigherEd online*,
<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/06/05/veterans>

“Combat2College: Facilitating College Success for Combat Veterans,” Joseph Bleiberg and colleagues.
<http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/edu/tertiary1.aspx?urlid=53>

Easing From Combat to Classroom: GI Bill's Growth Fuels a Rush of On-Campus Advisory, Advocacy Services, Emma Brown, *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/gallery/2009/09/17/GA2009091703737.html>

From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus, Bryan J. Cook and Young Kim, Lumina Foundation for Education,
<http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=33233&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm>

“More colleges develop classes on how to treat war veterans,” Gregg Zoroya, *USA Today*,
http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-10-04-ptsd-schools_N.htm

The Path to Healthy Homecomings: Findings From the Community Reintegration Summit: Service Members and Veterans Returning to Civilian Life, Booz, Allen, Hamilton
http://www.boozallen.com/media/file/Path_To_Healthy_Homecomings.pdf

Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS), web page on Department of Labor Web Site
<http://www.dol.gov/vets/>

Resources Related to the GI Bill and Other Veterans' Benefits

Information Resources for Education Professionals, GI Bill Web page for educators,
http://www.gibill.va.gov/School_Info/school_resources.htm

Training Resources, GI Bill Web page for educators, <http://www.gibill.va.gov/Training/Index.htm>

VA-Once, GI Bill Web page for submitting VA Forms,
http://www.gibill.va.gov/School_Info/once/index.htm

Yellow Ribbon Program, GI Bill Web page for educators and students,
http://www.gibill.va.gov/School_Info/yellow_ribbon/index.htm

Information about PTSD, TBI, and Other Conditions

"Accommodating Employees with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," America's Heroes at Work,
<http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/forEmployers/factsheets/accommodatingPTSD/>

"Accommodating Employees with Traumatic Brain Injury," America's Heroes at Work,
<http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/resources/factsheets/accommodatingTBI/>

BrainLine.org: Preventing, Treating, and Living with Traumatic Brain Injuries (many written, video, and web-based resources), www.BrainLine.org

"Dispelling the Myths About Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) & Other Psychological Health Issues," America's Heroes at Work, <http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/resources/factsheets/dispellMyth/>

Finding Balance After the War Zone: Understanding and Optimizing Your Stress System After Deployment, Pamela Woll, Human Priorities, <http://sites.google.com/site/humanprioritiesorg/home/resilience-101>

The Power and Price of Survival: Understanding Resilience, Stress, and Trauma, Pamela Woll, MA, Human Priorities, <http://sites.google.com/site/humanprioritiesorg/home/tools-for-growth-and-therapy/the-power-and-price-of-survival>

PTSD Combat: Winning the War Within, blogspot, <http://ptsdcombat.blogspot.com/>

"Recovery from Head Injury: A Guide for Patients," Wiley Mittenberg, Renee Zielinski, and Sharon M. Theroux, South Florida Psychology, <http://www.southfloridapsychology.com/head-injuries.html>

"The Road to Rehabilitation, Part 1: Pathways to Comfort: Dealing with Pain & Brain Injury," John J. Dabrowski, PhD and Frank Sparadeo, PhD, Brain Injury Association of America,
<http://www.biausa.org/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=48451&A=SearchResult&SearchID=2621029&>

“Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Just the Facts,” Carol Ware Duff, MSN, BA, RN,
<http://www.vetsenews.com/200912-articles/TRAUMATIC-BRAIN-INJURY.html>

Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS), web page on Department of Labor Web Site
<http://www.dol.gov/vets/>

The “America’s Best” Series

The “America’s Best” series was originally conceived by Basil Whiting, a senior fellow at the National Organization on Disability and former program director for the NOD Army Wounded Warrior Career Demonstration Project (Wounded Warriors Careers).

Early in the 2008 start-up phase of Wounded Warriors Careers, the NOD Career Specialists informed Basil that they had no useful materials or guidance that they could provide to those in educational institutions or training organizations (teachers, trainers, classmates) or in workplaces (employers, supervisors, co-workers) about the nature of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). More important, there seemed to be little if any practical information about ways in which those in classrooms and workplaces could help veterans with these afflictions succeed in their education, training, or work. In the absence of clear, positive, practical information and guidance, many educators/employers, etc. were reacting to sensationalized press accounts about sometimes-problematic behaviors on the part of veterans with PTSD and/or TBI. These conditions did not bode well for veterans seeking jobs or educational/training opportunities.

Since it was the mission of NOD’s Wounded Warriors Careers project to help wounded veterans and their family members succeed in education, training, and work, Basil quickly surveyed the available materials. That effort revealed that the resources that existed at the time were fragmented, limited, sometimes too technical, and generally inadequate for these purposes. Although excellent resources were available, they tended to focus on limited aspects of the topic, requiring that educators/employers/trainers gather and synthesize information from a number of sources—something that most would not have the time or the motivation to do.

NOD needed to mount a project to develop the kind of practical, laymen’s materials needed by NOD and others working with injured veterans. Basil wrote a paper outlining what was needed and why; allocated modest NOD consulting funds for it; recruited Pam Woll (author) and Celia Straus (project manager, editor, and contributor) to develop these products; and contracted with Barbara Van Dahlen of Give an Hour™ to direct the project, oversee the work of the consultants and volunteers involved, and ensure the technical accuracy of product contents. Throughout the life of this project, Mr. Whiting continued to work as an active colleague, guide, and mentor.

The “America’s Best” series took more than two years from conception to completion, and during that time others have produced valuable information in response to the same perceived need. We believe that these NOD/GAH products hold an important place in that limited array of practical resources and would welcome the comments and reaction of the readers and users of these products.

Acknowledgments

Under the leadership of Carol A. Glazer, President, The National Organization on Disability has sponsored and provided funding for this project. Under the leadership of Barbara Van Dahlen, PhD, Founder and President, Give an Hour™ has directed and carried out the development of these materials.

As mentioned in the previous section, Basil Whiting of NOD conceived and funded the project and continued to serve as advisor and mentor, providing everything from enthusiastic encouragement to meticulous subject matter and editorial support. In the development process, Dr. Van Dahlen served in the role of Project Director, providing thoughtful editing of all drafts and invaluable knowledge and technical expertise from many perspectives, including that of the clinician working with PTSD, TBI, and other combat stress effects. As Project Manager and Editor, Celia Straus, MA provided tireless and insightful mentorship, encouragement, and editorial expertise.

The writing and compilation of these materials was the work of many hands, including the following:

- Consultant Pamela Woll, MA, CADP researched and wrote two of the booklets in this series (*Teaching America's Best* and *Hiring America's Best*), developed or compiled many of the additional Tools, and compiled the resource booklet, *Learning about America's Best*.
- Project Manager and Editor Celia Straus, MA also wrote the boxed-in stories and examples of veterans' experiences in *Teaching America's Best* and *Hiring America's Best*. She originated development of the project with Basil Whiting and contributed content and editorial guidance based on her research and writing of her book, *Hidden Battles on Unseen Fronts: Stories of American Soldiers With Traumatic Brain Injury and PTSD* (Casemate, 2009).
- Give an Hour™ student volunteer Micheline Wijtenburg, MS made a significant contribution to this effort by interviewing a variety of subject matter experts and writing the booklet entitled *Preparing America's Best*. Volunteer Ellen Gibson also contributed one of the interviews to this effort.
- A number of the resources listed in *Learning about America's Best* were contributed through the “DMEC Workplace Warrior – Think Tank 2007 Resource List” developed by the Disability Management Employer Coalition.
- Two of the Tools for educators and trainers (“Strategies for Improving Attention” and “Strategies for Improving Memory”) were compiled by Jason Demery, PhD, neuropsychologist at the North Florida/South Georgia VA Medical Center
- The Tool entitled “Accommodations for Learning Challenges” was developed by Duane E. Dede, PhD, Valerie Pitzer, PhD, and Susan Swiderski at the University of Florida.

One additional reviewer, Mary E. Dolan-Hogrefe, MA, Director of Public Policy for the National Organization on Disability, also contributed her expertise to the effort.

For the gathering of resources to build these materials—particularly for the overview of resources presented in *Learning about America's Best*—Give an Hour™ drew from its large pool of dedicated volunteers. Seventeen volunteers were assigned to help on this project, in most cases with the literature search process. The volunteers who contributed to these efforts were Jill Anderson, Mark Brayer, Hillary Bilford, Susan Buckmaster, Staci Bullard, Katherine De Launay, Gabriel Feldmar, PhD, Geri Hart, Kate Hurley, Sarah McCumiskey, Lisa Prudenti, Leonora Rianda, Daniella Saunders, Sarah Smith, Christina Trefcer, Micheline Wijtenburg, MS, and Paul Weaver. In her role as Project Manager and Editor, Celia Straus organized, oriented, and managed this volunteer pool.

The twelve subject-matter experts interviewed for *Preparing America's Best* gave graciously of their time and expertise. Their ideas and insights not only made *Preparing America's Best* possible, but also informed the development of the other booklets and Tools in the series. These leaders included:

- Marcia Carruthers, MBA, ARM, CPDM, Co-founder, President, and CEO, Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC)
- Dr. Jason Demery, Neuropsychologist, North Florida/South Georgia VA Medical Center
- L. Tammy Duckworth, MA, Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Carol Harnett, MS, Clinical Physiologist, Assistant Vice President and National Disability and Life Practice Leader, Group Benefits Division, The Hartford
- Ilona Meagher, Editor, *PTSD Combat: Winning the War Within* and Author, *Moving a Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*
- Patrick O'Rourke, Retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, Director of Veteran Affairs, California State University, Long Beach
- Gary Profit, Senior Director, Military Programs, Walmart
- Michael Reardon, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor and Manager, America's Heroes at Work
- Ed Veiga, Vice President, Strategic Communication and Development, Military Child Education Coalition
- Garland Williams, Associate Regional Vice President, Military Division, University of Phoenix
- Mary Yonkman, Chief Strategy Officer, The Mission Continues and Co-author, *All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service*

Of course, this selection represents only a few of the many leaders who are contributing to these vital efforts. Thanks are due to all of the dedicated and creative souls who have made this mission their own.

Thanks are also due to the Veterans Club members at Northern Illinois University who met with Ilona Meagher and Pam Woll to talk about their group's excellent work and their ideas for effective approaches, and to former club president JD Kammes for his generous and insightful interview.

The most significant acknowledgment goes to the service members and veterans who have offered their experiences and insights to this process, and to all the brave men and women who have served our country in the theater of war. They have persevered through hardship, injury, challenges in reintegration, and often-formidable obstacles to education and employment. From the veterans of past wars whose reintegration struggles have taught us a sobering lesson to the current generation of service members and veterans whose story is still being written, all have inspired and informed this project. Words are not sufficient to express our gratitude for their service and for their continuing courage and dedication.

Sponsorship, Direction, and Authorship

Although the “America’s Best” series was inspired by and focused on a single mission—helping service members and veterans succeed in the civilian world—it was created with the help of many hands. This section provides more information on the organizations and individuals who have played central roles in this process.

Organizational Sponsorship and Direction

The National Organization on Disability (Project Sponsorship)

The National Organization on Disability (NOD) is a private, non-profit organization that promotes the full participation of America’s 54 million people with disabilities in all aspects of life. In 2006 NOD narrowed its focus to increasing employment opportunities for the 67 percent of working-age Americans with disabilities who are unemployed.

With programs on the ground, the National Organization on Disability is demonstrating new employment practices and models of service delivery, evaluating results, and sharing successful approaches for widespread replication. NOD is conducting research on disability employment issues, including the field’s most widely used polls on employment trends and the quality of life for people with disabilities. And the organization’s subject matter experts in disability and employment provide consulting services to public agencies and employers seeking to harness the unique talents that people with disabilities can bring to the workforce.

To achieve its goals, NOD works in partnership with employers, schools, the military, service providers, researchers, and disability advocates. Current employment programs are benefiting high school students with disabilities transitioning into the workforce, seriously injured service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, employers seeking to become more disability friendly, and state governments engaged in policy reform.

Founded in 1982, NOD is the oldest cross-disability organization in the country. To this day, the National Organization on Disability remains one of few organizations committed to representing all Americans with disabilities, regardless of their particular conditions or circumstances.

Give an Hour™ (Project Direction)

Give an Hour™ (GAH) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, founded in September, 2005 by Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, a psychologist in the Washington, DC area. The organization’s mission is to develop national networks of volunteers capable of responding to both acute and chronic conditions that arise within our society.

Currently, GAH is dedicated to meeting the mental health needs of the troops and families affected by the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Give an Hour’s™ volunteers provide counseling to individuals, couples and families, and children and adolescents. GAH offers treatment for anxiety, depression,

substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, sexual health and intimacy concerns, and loss and grieving.

In addition to direct counseling services, Give an Hour's™ providers are working to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues by participating in and leading education, training, and outreach efforts in schools and communities and around military bases.

With increasing frequency, GAH has been featured and Dr. Van Dahlen has been interviewed in countless articles, television segments, and radio casts, as the mental health needs of the troops have become strikingly apparent.

Individual Contributions

Carol Glazer (Project Sponsor)

Carol Glazer joined the National Organization on Disability (NOD) in July, 2006 as the Executive Director of its National EmployAbility Partnership. She became NOD's President in October, 2008. Under her leadership, NOD has doubled its revenues and increased net assets by more than 300 percent; increased its focus on employment by a factor of ten; and developed important new relationships with the US Army, leading employers, national and local foundations, scores of new corporate donors to its programs, and the CEO Council. She put in place NOD's signature employment demonstrations, Wounded Warrior Careers and Bridges to Business.

For seven years prior to joining NOD, Ms. Glazer was a program development and management consultant to foundations, universities, and nonprofit organizations working to improve conditions in inner-city communities. Before that, she held positions as Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and Senior Vice President for National Programs for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), where she served on a five-member senior management team that grew the organization from a staff of forty with \$10 million in assets to a \$3-billion, 500-staff bank with 36 field offices.

Ms. Glazer holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. She has two children, one of whom was born with hydrocephalus and has physical and cognitive disabilities.

Barbara Van Dahlen (Project Director)

Barbara Van Dahlen, president of Give an Hour™, is a licensed clinical psychologist practicing in the Washington, DC area for 20 years. A specialist in children's issues, she served as an adjunct faculty member at George Washington University. She received her PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Maryland in 1991.

Concerned about the mental health implications of the Iraq War, Dr. Van Dahlen founded Give an Hour™ in 2005 to provide free mental health services to U.S. troops, veterans, and their loved ones. Currently, the organization has 5,000 providers nationwide.

Dr. Van Dahlen frequently participates in panels, conferences, and hearings on issues facing veterans. Recently, she was named among “50 Women Changing the World” by *Woman’s Day* magazine and was named a 2010 recipient of the Maryland Governor’s Volunteer Service Award. She also writes a monthly column for *Veterans Advantage* and has contributed to a book on post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries. She has become an expert on the psychological impact of war on troops and families.

Basil Whiting (Project Originator and Advisor)

Basil Whiting has more than 45 years of line and staff leadership in the public and private sectors, for both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Mr. Whiting served for five years in U.S. Army Counter-Intelligence and attained the rank of Captain. Upon returning to civilian life, he earned his master’s degree in 1967 from Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. He then spent nine years as Senior Program Officer at The Ford Foundation, in charge of workforce and community development programs, among other responsibilities.

Mr. Whiting served for four years as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA throughout the Carter Administration, after which he spent six years consulting to management and labor on joint teamwork efforts to improve work life, productivity, quality, and organizational performance. From 1987 to 1991 he implemented such concepts in his role as Vice President, Human Resources for the Long Island Rail Road, the nation’s largest commuter railroad.

In 1991, Mr. Whiting returned to consulting, working with foundations, non-profits, and business groups. For more than a decade, he worked with the nonprofit arm of the National Association of Manufacturers, helping the peer structure of employer organizations engage more effectively in workforce development. Mr. Whiting joined NOD in 2006.

Celia Straus (Project Manager and Editor)

Celia Straus is a writer/producer for print, video, and new media, with special expertise in the fields of adolescents, mental health, military issues, and disaster response and crisis training. She is the author of *Hidden Battles on Unseen Fronts, Stories of American Soldiers with PTSD and TBI* (Casemate Publishing, April, 2009).

Celia is also a nationally known author and workshop facilitator on adolescent girls and spiritual parenting. She has authored three books: The national bestseller, *Prayers on My Pillow, Inspiration for Girls on The Threshold of Change* (Ballantine 1998); *More Prayers On My Pillow, Words of Comfort and Hope for Girls On The Journey To Self* (Ballantine 2000); and *The Mother Daughter Circle, Making Lifelong Connections With Your Teenager* (Ballantine, 2003) www.motherdaughtercircle.com.

Celia is a graduate of Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia and holds a master’s in Literature from Georgetown University. She lives in Washington, DC.

Pamela Woll (Author)

Pamela Woll is a Chicago-based consultant in writing, training, and instructional development. Pam has been writing books and manuals in addiction treatment, prevention, mental health, and other human

service fields since 1989, on topics including stigma reduction, strength-based treatment, resilience, trauma, depression, cultural competence, addicted families, violence, and disaster human services. She received her bachelor's degree from Bradley University in 1975 and her master's from DePaul University in 1995.

Since 2007, Pam's primary focus has been on trauma, resilience, neurobiology, and the needs of service members and veterans. Her most recent works include *Resilience 101: Understanding and Optimizing Your Stress System*, a workbook for service members and veterans; and *The Power and Price of Survival: Understanding Resilience, Stress, and Trauma*, a workbook for general audiences, both published by her own organization, Human Priorities. Other recent works include the *Finding Balance After the War Zone* manual for civilian clinicians, co-published by Human Priorities and the Great Lakes Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC); and *Healing the Stigma of Addiction: A Guide for Helping Professionals*, published by the Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center and the Great Lakes ATTC.

At the other end of the spectrum, Pam is also the author of the *How to Get the Piranhas Out of Your Head* booklet and workbook. You can find many of Pam's materials at <http://xrl.us/humanpriorities>, and most are available for free download.

Micheline Wijtenburg (Author, *Preparing America's Best*)

Micheline Wijtenburg received a bachelor's degree from Florida State University and non-terminal master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Nova Southeastern University. Currently she is a doctoral clinical psychology trainee and is on internship at the Oklahoma Health Consortium, University of Oklahoma.

Micheline has clinical experience with both inpatient and outpatient populations. She has gained experience working with adolescents, adults, and older adults. Micheline formerly worked as a practicum therapist at the Healthy Lifestyles/Guided Self-Change Clinic, The Renfrew Center, and the Psychological Assessment Center. Her areas of interest include compulsive and addictive behaviors, co-occurring disorders, trauma, and psychological and neuropsychological assessment.