

Military Life vs. Student Life: Advising Methods to Lessen the Culture Shock

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Some Simple Facts:



- Expect a significant wave of military veterans leaving service to pursue a degree
- Most recent GI Bill (post 9-11) allows veterans to attend state colleges
- There is a disconnect between military life and academic life (culture shock)
- Many (but not all) will have disabilities that are not reported to University personnel
- Historically high drop-out rates (88%); low graduation rates (3%)

Who Are Military Students?



- Both male & female, all ages
- Some have been deployed into combat zones
- Some are national guard personnel
- Some are still on active duty
- Some joined the military for the benefits
- Some were successful in high school; some not
- Some don't see college as part of their "life mission"

Assumptions

- Not all are the same and not all are broken
- Avoid the terms soldier and “veterans”
- Marines are Marines
- Navy Personnel are seamen
- Air Force personnel are Airmen
- Army personnel are soldiers
- Ranks in each branch can be googled



Common Characteristics

- Show drive and initiative
- Mission and task oriented
- Have leadership qualities
- Possess a team mentality
- Value accountability and loyalty
- Have immense resilience
- Can follow complex directions



What are Common Barriers?

- Physical and/or mental limitations
- Financial concerns
- Work/family/school conflicts
- Lack of awareness of resources (25% access services and benefits)
- Unwilling to ask for help or admit need
- Uncertainty of goals/plans
- Don't feel they fit in with less mature students



Why Avoid Seeking Help?

- Fear of the unknown
- Procrastination
- Fear of making a mistake
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Relies too much on the opinion of others
- Don't want to stick out; perceived stigma
- Don't believe they qualify for accommodation



Advocate for CLEP Testing



- Active duty military can take CLEP tests at no cost to them
- Can move students more quickly into advanced-level classes
 - These are funded for
 - Military personnel (active, reserve, National Guard) & spouses and civilian employees in several military branches (Air Force and Army Reserve, Air and Army National Guard, active and reserve Coast Guard)

College Board (2013). CLEP for Military. <http://clep.collegeboard.org/military>

The Culture Clash

Military Life	Higher Education
Follow orders/protocol	Be creative, autonomous
Collectivism	Individualism
Spoon fed info on need to know basis	Learn to think critically/question
Respect authority	Ask questions/be leaders
Dress code strictly enforced	Anything goes

Actions to Avoid

- Do not fake interest or your own experience
- Do not say you understand how they feel
- Do not assume that their experience was horrible for them
- Do not assume that they need mental health services
- Do be direct and directive
- Do be dependable and authentic



Use Motivational Interviewing



- Help them create a new identity and goals by:
 - Finding out what is going well
 - Discussing how they've been able to resolve problems and handle difficulties
 - Discover what they like about themselves and what others seem to admire in them
 - Talk about what they like to do and what they can do well
 - Help them create goals and design steps toward those goals (develop a life mission)

Preparing for Military Students



- Create a single point of contact (Vet Corp Rep)
- Dedicate a “safe place”
- Organize a military student club
- Advise using a more prescriptive technique
- Provide peer mentors
- Require periodic check-ins on progress
- Refer to campus/community resources

Connecting with Community Resources

- Learn to use the 2-1-1 system
- 2-1-1 is the human services hotline number
- On the web: www.211info.org
- Text: text zip code to 898211
- Vet Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255



Conclusion



- Focus on three key principles of care:
 - 1. Identify, appreciate, and become culturally competent to work with military students.
 - 2. Offer assessment and treatment within the campus counseling center, if appropriate, and other types of administrative support.
 - 3. Increase the quantity and quality of outreach programming (i.e., resources, faculty mentors, support groups, gathering space)

There's work to be done!

Resources

- <http://maketheconnection.net/> (stories)
- <http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/> (resources)
- <http://www.socialworkers.org/military.asp> (guide to helping)
- <http://www.veteransunited.com/network/> (general resource for individuals/families)
- <http://www.operationhomefront.net/> (mutual aid/support organization)
- <http://www.combat2college> (liaison program VA/College)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXlel20tpSA> (*In Their Own Words*, a documentary film by Esther Schwartz-McKinzie)

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