

Building Bridges: Veterans in Transition



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Outline



- **Dissertation (December, 2011)**
“Gearing up for Student Veterans:
A Case Study of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa”
- **STEM Think Tank (March 22 & 23, 2012)**
“Navigating the transition from military to civilian life;
challenges and opportunities for pursuing STEM
(Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)
education and careers”
- **Updates about UHM**

Purpose of the doctoral study



- To explore the preparedness of UHM to support combat veterans as they pursue their higher education.

Trauma



- Trauma is referred to as “an extreme traumatic stress involving direct personal experience of an event that involves **actual or threatened death** or serious injury, or other threat to one’s physical integrity, or **witnessing an event that involves death**, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person.”

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.) DSM-IV)

Assumptions



- Being exposed to trauma can be a destabilizing experience; therefore creating a safe environment is key to recovery.
- Posttraumatic growth is possible.
- Strategies used to support school children might be applied to adult learners.
- Availability of support services might reduce violence.
- Providing psychosocial support may affect retention.

Literature Review



- **Combat veteran post-deployment issues**
 - Transition
 - Post 9/11 GI Bill
- **Trauma**
 - Resilience
 - Posttraumatic growth
- **Transformative learning theory**
 - School connectedness

Theoretical Framework



- **Positive Psychology**
 - Strengths-based vs. medical model of pathology
- **Constructivism**
 - People organize their experiences into a coherent narrative that shapes their worldview

Methodology



- Qualitative research
 - Case study design
 - ✦ Fall 2010 – Spring 2011
 - ✦ Semi-structured interviews
 - ✦ 8 cases
 - ✦ 13 faculty and staff
 - ✦ 1 noncombatant student veteran

Research Questions



- In what ways is the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa campus aware of or sensitive to the unique psychosocial needs of combat veterans?
- In what ways do combat veterans feel informed about psychosocial services available on campus?
- In what ways do faculty and staff feel informed about how to address potential mental health issues of combat veterans?
- How do student veterans and faculty interact around these issues?
- How might the campus improve its services for both combat veterans and those serving them (i.e., faculty and staff members)?

8 Cases

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Graduate/ undergraduate</u>	<u>War</u>	<u>Branch</u>	<u>Enlisted/ Commissioned</u>	<u>Job</u>
Barry	M	Vet	Graduate	OEF/OIF	Navy	Commissioned	Pilot
Brent	M	Vet	Undergrad	OEF/OIF	Army	Enlisted	Infantry
Kevin	M	Vet	Graduate	OEF/OIF	A.F.	Commissioned	Navigator
Mark	M	Vet	Undergrad	OEF/OIF	Army	Enlisted	Infantry
Ralph	M	Vet	Undergrad	OEF/OIF	Army	Enlisted	Infantry
Stanley	M	Active	Graduate	OEF/OIF	Army	Commissioned	Infantry
Steven	M	Vet	Undergrad	OEF/OIF	M.C.	Enlisted	Intel
Todd	M	Vet	Undergrad	OEF/OIF	Navy	Enlisted	Intel

6 Major Themes Emerged

- **Culture Shock** of 'We' vs. 'me' – Putting on the Uniform
- **Transitioning** from Boots to Slippers – Taking off the Uniform
- **UHM is Military-unfriendly** – Veteran-specific Services Lacking
- ***Semper Fidelis*** – Never Leave a Comrade Behind
- **Addressing Stigma** – Creating a Safe Haven
- **Apathy to Empathy** – Connecting the Dots

Combat Exposure



- 89% were attacked or ambushed
- 86% know a troop injured or killed
- 65% saw dead or injured American
- 69% saw injured women/children and
- were unable to help
- 86% received artillery fire
- 93% were shot at with small arms
- 77% fired at the enemy
- 95% saw dead bodies or remains

The PTS Syndrome

- Intrusive thoughts/
memories
- Nightmares
- Avoidance/isolation
- Anger/angry outbursts
- Hyper-startle response
- Flashbacks
- Hypervigilance
- Feelings of grief, guilt, &
loss...



(Padin-Rivera, Schupp & Buck, 2011)

Returning Veterans Experience



- Significant depression 24%
- Alcohol abuse issues 27%
- Anger issues 43%

(Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health, 2007)

Transition(ing)



- **Involvement:** before any notion of leaving has been raised;
- **Leaving:** from when the idea of leaving is raised as a certainty, to the point of departure;
- **Transition:** beginning with leaving one place and ending when, as Pollock and Van Reken put it, ‘we not only arrive at our destination but make the decision, consciously or unconsciously, to settle in and become part of it’ (1999: 66);
- **Entering:** where the individual has decided to become part of the new community, but is still figuring out what that means;
- **Reinvolvement:** where the individual once again becomes ‘part of the permanent community’ (1999: 62-71).

(Hayden, Mary. Introduction to International Education : International Schools and Their Communities. London, GBR: SAGE Publications Inc. (US), 2006. p 53)

Veteran Suicide



- Feelings that one does not belong with other people
 - Feelings that one is a burden on others or society
 - An acquired capability to overcome the fear and pain associated with suicide
- 20% of 30,000 suicides committed in the U.S. per year are veterans
 - 30 attempts per day
 - 18 completed suicides (now up to 22)

(DoD, American Forces Press Service, 2010)

Postcombat Battlemind



- **Heightened** sensory **awareness** of sights, sounds & smells
- **Action-oriented** ways of coping with new experiences
- Identification and closeness with their military unit and comrades who have shared similar experiences
- Regimentation into **highly structured** and efficient routines
- Profoundly realigned ideals, values & identity shaped by war
- Habituation to intensity and extreme emotions of combat life

Impact on Learning



- Inability to focus
- “Vague” subject matter
- Lack of structure
- Subject matter or presentation may arouse anger, irritation (politics, history, social sciences)
- mTBI issues may create short term memory deficits
- Internal chaos
- Hyper-arousal
- Disconnect with other students
- Social isolation

Limitations of the Study



- Access to student veterans
- Challenges with data collection
- Gender diversity in the research sample
- Ethnic diversity in the research sample
- Guardedness on the part of student veterans to share their stories

Recommendations



- Create a safe environment
- Identify existing services and programs on campus and create an umbrella or support network
- Create a one-stop-shop Veteran Resource Center
- Create partnerships with the VA
- Appoint a person to act as a liaison between UHM and VA
- Provide training to faculty and staff on veterans' issues
- Create a class in multicultural or diversity education
- Develop an interdisciplinary program on Trauma Studies
- Establish programs for military social work and military psychology
- Make volunteering opportunities available for student veterans

Place for Narrative

- Cognitive Processing
 - Writing – ‘scriptotherapy’
 - Narrative – storytelling
- Therapeutic
 - CPT
 - ✦ Healing, processing loss
- Academic
 - Transformative learning
 - ✦ Meaning-making

Strengths-based Approach



- Maturity
- Leadership
- Teamwork

- Real-world experience
- Money
- Mission-driven

Suggestions for Future Research



- The needs of female student veterans
- Issues of dependents of student veterans
- How the university could capitalize on the strengths and skills that the student veterans bring to the campus
- Tracking of student veteran retention
- Ways to facilitate understanding between student veterans and Native Hawaiians to address the tensions that exist as a result of the unique history of Hawai'i; target Native Hawaiian student veterans' experiences coming to UHM to explore cultural issues of identity
- Polytrauma – This will be an increasingly urgent issue on college campuses

STEM Think Tank

(March 22&23, 2012)

- Transition
- College
- Employment

STEM Think Tank Report



Adobe Acrobat
Document

Transition

- Establish connection with bases prior to discharge
 - ✦ TAP (Transition Assistance Program)
 - ✦ Recruit for STEM
- Wounded Warrior Battalion
 - ✦ Hank Cashen
 - ✦ Rodney Sueoka
 - Aptitude testing (STEM)
- Pacific Vocational Rehabilitation
 - ✦ Thomas Walk (assists with independent living)
- Veterans' Court
 - ✦ Lindsey Joesting (State Office of Information Practices)
- TBI support
 - ✦ Ho'ikaika Project
- Suicide Prevention
 - ✦ David Brown (Tripler)
 - ✦ Training (ASIST, safeTALK, etc.)

College (Access, Retention, Completion)



- Mentorship program/Buddy programs
- Briefings
- Cohort system
- Support with different learning styles/memory issues
- Math tutoring
- College of Engineering
 - Dean Crouch – STEM proposals specifically for veterans
- College of Medicine
 - Larry Burgess, Joining Forces

Employment



- Collaboration with business community
 - Hawai'i Chamber of Commerce
 - ✦ President James Tollefson
 - ✦ VP Charlie Ota
 - Native Hawaiian Veterans
 - ✦ President Ray Jardine
 - Guam Veterans Outreach Center
 - ✦ Frank Crisostomo-Kaaihue
- Think Tank Camp
 - ✦ Urban Miyares

Conclusion



- Build on established network
- Collaborate across the UH system in an interdisciplinary way
- Grant writing committee
- Meet regularly with other stakeholders
- Include veterans in all stages

Resources



- After Deployment <http://www.afterdeployment.org/>
- American Council on Education
<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/MilitaryPrograms/serving/index.htm>
- At War: Notes from the Front Lines
<http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/>
- DCoE - Defense Centers of Excellence
<http://www.dcoe.health.mil/>
- National Center for PTSD <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>
- Real Warriors <http://realwarriors.net/>
- Student Veterans of America <http://www.studentveterans.org/>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs <http://www.va.gov/>

Office of Veterans Support Services (OVSS)



- Csaba Hutoczki, VSOC Counselor – UHM / LCC
- Phone: (808) 265-2803

- University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
- 2600 Campus Road, QLC 214L
- Honolulu, HI 96822
- Phone: (808) 956-2192
- Email: ovss@hawaii.edu
- Website: studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/veterans/