

TA Training
University of Hawai`i at Mānoa

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Background

- For my doctoral work I explored the preparedness of UHM to support combat veterans as they pursue their higher education.

Research

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

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)

Combat Exposure

- 86% received artillery fire
- 93% were shot at with small arms
- 77% fired at the enemy
- 95% saw dead bodies or remains
- 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

(Padin-Rivera, 2011)

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)

Trauma

- Combat veterans of today's wars have **higher suicide rate** than at any time in U.S. History
- Military personnel with **multiple tours of duty** in combat are at higher risk for PTSD
- **Many military men and women do not seek professional help**
- Much of the public and even many **mental health professionals are uninformed** of lifelong impact of trauma
- Some trauma victims become perpetrators
- **Divorce rates** and failed relationships are **higher** among people with trauma history
- The **whole person** is affected by traumatic events: Physical, Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioral, Spiritual
- The closer a person is in **proximity** to an event the more severe the response

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 (up to 22 in 2013)
 - 5 of which were seeking mental health services by the VA

(DoD, American Forces Press Service, 2010)

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

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.

Adjusting to school after being in the military

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiuSDQIY6po>

Ten Things You Should Know About Today's Student Veteran

Alison Lighthall (2012)

10

- Student veterans are a highly diverse group— as diverse as America itself.

9

- Veterans do not see themselves as victims.
Ever.

8

- They can feel very alone on campus.

7

- They are often unaware of their own mild traumatic brain injuries.

Helpful Strategies

- Make and share recordings of your classroom lectures.
- Allow note taking on laptops.
- Make sure class videos are captioned.
- Try to use texts that can be obtained electronically (in case they need to be read aloud).
- Post notes ahead of time.
- Give option of a different time and place if they are anxious during the exam.

6

- There are three things you should never say to a student veteran (but they still hear them every day).

5

- Female veterans suffer deeply, and almost always in silence.

4

- They often want to go back to the war zone.

3

- Combat trauma is an injury, not a mental illness.

2

- To succeed, veterans need your understanding, compassion and respect.

1

- Student veterans are one of America's greatest untapped human resources.

President Obama's 8 Keys to Success

- **Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for Veterans.**
- Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.
- **Implement an early alert system to ensure all Veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.**
- Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all Veterans, together with the creation of a designated space (even if limited in size).
- Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for Veterans.
- Use a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on Veterans, including demographics, retention and degree completion.
- Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to Veterans.
- Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for Veterans.

(SVA, Monday, 12 Aug. 2013, <http://www.studentveterans.org/media-news/press-releases/127-sva-responds-to-president-obama%E2%80%99s-8-keys-to-success.html>)

Tips for Respectful Conversation With a Student Veteran

How to welcome veterans to campus:

- Welcome them home.
- Express your appreciation of their service.
- Offer to help with their transition to (or back to) campus.
- Support with patience and listening.
- Understand that the transition home is a process and can take time.

Good ways to start a conversation:

- What was your job and where did you go while in the military? (Remember: while many do, not all veterans serve in Iraq and Afghanistan.)
- How are you and your family doing?

Tips for Respectful Conversation With a Student Veteran (cont.)

Topics to avoid when speaking with a veteran:

- Pressuring a veteran regarding specifics about their service they choose not to share with you.
- Minimizing the challenges a veteran might face.
- Making assumptions about any veteran's political or foreign policy views.
- Singling out a veteran without prior approval (let them choose who they tell about their distinction as a student veteran).

Inappropriate questions:

- Did you kill anyone?
- Did you see anyone die?
- Are you glad that you're back?
- Do you have to go back?
- Do you think we are winning over there? Is it all worth it?

(ULifeline, 2013,
<http://www.ulifeline.org/articles/377-tips-for-respectful-conversation-with-a-student-veteran>)

Remember ...

- Even when approached respectfully, student veterans might not want to talk about their deployment, which is **completely understandable**. Reaching out is still important, and you'll most likely find there are many other things to discuss.

(ULifeline, 2013)

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Hawaii-at-Manoa-Office-of-Veteran-Student-Support-Services/328519763963275>

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/>
- In Their Boots <http://www.intheirboots.com/itb/>
- 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/>
- 10 Things You Should Know About Student Veterans
<http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/2012-TA-Lighthall.pdf>