



**Challenges and Opportunities for Current
and Former Members of the Armed Services
Student-Veterans in Transition**

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**When a service member
comes home, he/she may
find it hard....**

...to be sympathetic of students who grumble about their homework



...to be understanding when a fellow student complains about a bad night's sleep.



...to ease up on the gas when a wife or husband says to drive slower



...to sleep through the night



...to be tolerant of a roommate who complains about the hassle of getting ready for school



... to feel comfortable with a stranger behind him.



...not to be startled by loud noises



...to make new friends in college



... to forget the things he has seen and done



**...to remember what it was like to be
carefree**



The “Phenomenon” of
the Student Veteran



I'm inclined to think that a military background wouldn't hurt anybody.

~ William Faulkner (from an interview in 1962)

The Post 9-11 GI Bill

- **Enhances and expands the educational benefits available to service members and veterans who served on active duty following September 11, 2001**
- **Benefits include tuition payments directly to schools, monthly housing allowance, annual stipend for books and school supplies**
- **The Bill grants up to 36 months of higher education aid, based on service and enrollment status**
- **It authorizes active duty service members to transfer education benefits to immediate family members**

Who are our Student Veterans?

The New Veteran Population

Among all 981,834 separated OEF/OIF Veterans

- 51% Former Active Duty troops
- 49% Reserve and National Guard
- 43% (425,538) of total separated OEF/OIF veterans have obtained VA health care since FY 2002

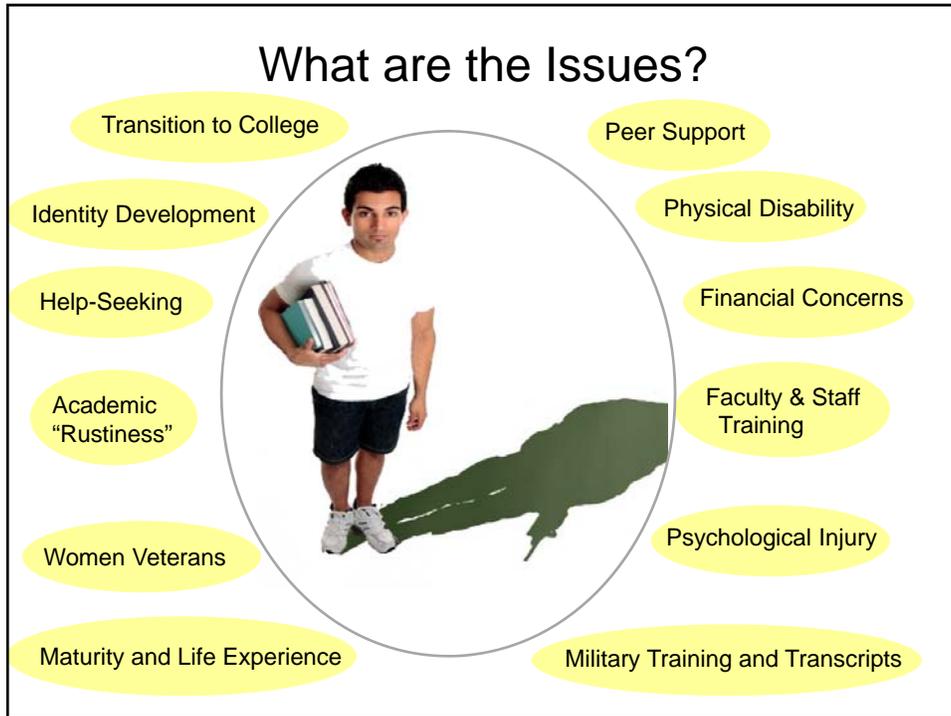
OEF – Operation Enduring Freedom

OIF – Operation Iraqi Freedom

VHA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards May 2009

Who are our Student Veterans?

- Age
- Families
- Experienced
- Self reliant
- Disability/Injury
- First Generation
- Academic preparation
- Disconnected
- Others?



What can the Higher Education Community do to Help?

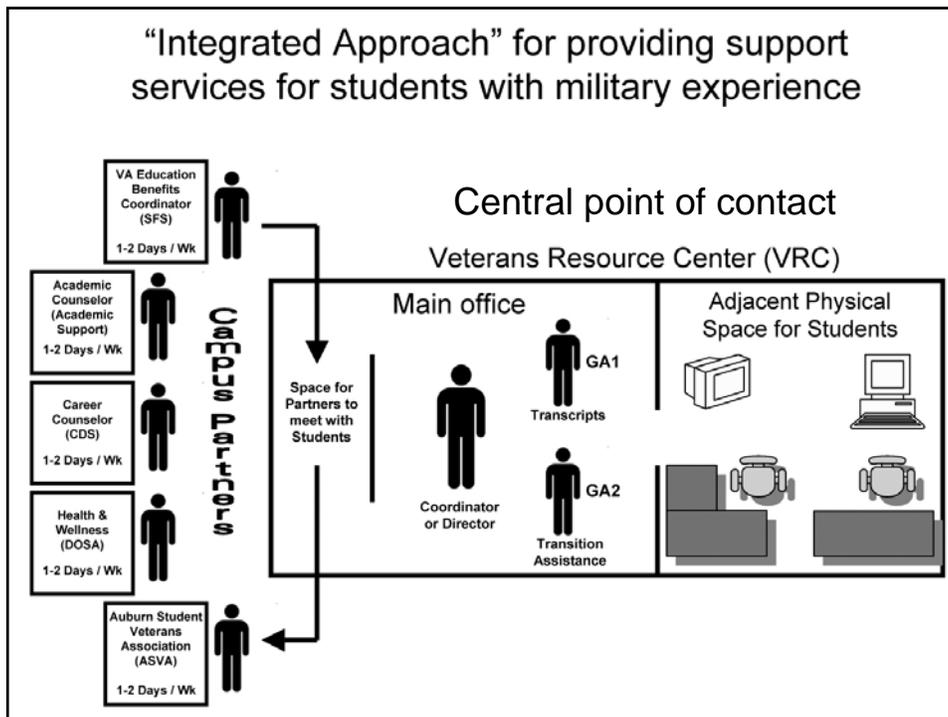
- Provide transition programs for veterans
- Mentoring opportunities
- Sponsor veterans' groups on campus
- Maintain a veterans' committee to facilitate dialogue between veterans and the university community

What can the Higher Education Community do to Help?

- Evaluate policies to avoid negative consequences if veterans are called back to duty
- Establish an online resource to show veteran specific services on campus
- Educate administrators, faculty, and staff about veterans' issues/needs
- Survey veterans about their needs
- Create and award veteran specific scholarships

What can the Higher Education Community do to Help?

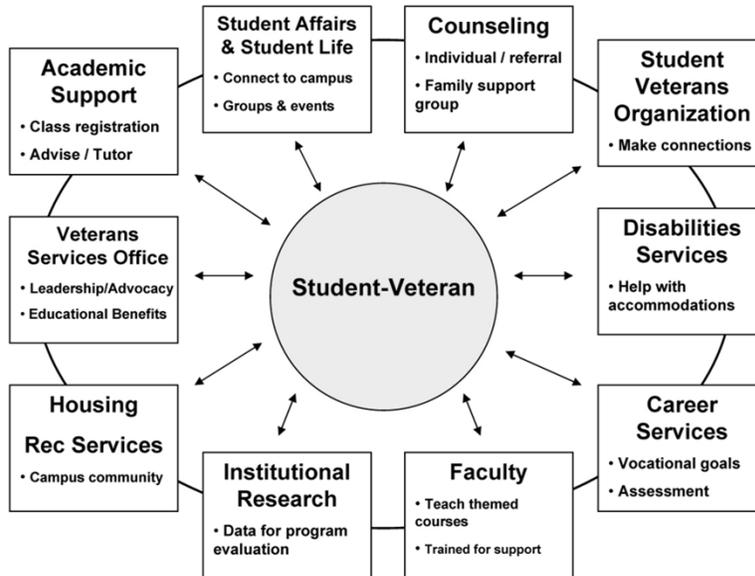
- Have a central point of contact to resolve veterans' issues
- Provide guidance translating military experience to academic and career readiness
- Advocate for veterans with regard to transfer credits, university policies, housing, etc.



What can the Higher Education Community do to Help?

- Accommodations
 - Modified testing options
 - Priority registration
 - Audio/video recording of lectures
 - On-Campus Veteran resources
 - Tutoring
 - Evidence-based psychotherapy
- Resilience and Stigma Reduction Strategies

Example of a holistic service model for supporting student-veterans at a large research university (FTE > 12,000) with high veteran enrollment (>3% of total enrollment).



Examples of Policy/Law Challenges

- Baltimore Community College Case

Student essay for English Comp class in Fall 2010: "War is a drug and killing is an addiction"... went further describing some of the student's darkest feelings about the taking of a human life. Instructor suggests submit composition to campus newspaper... where it was published (uproar ensues). Student barred from campus till psychological evaluation performed and satisfactorily documented. Public reaction mixed / School officials reasonable. "He didn't make any direct threats, but we still found some of the content disturbing... we have to really be cautious in this post-Virginia Tech world." Student chooses not to return to school, making plans to attend elsewhere, and may pursue civil litigation.

Examples of Policy/Law Challenges

- Veterans Sue Over Tuition Benefit at Mizzu and 3 other Missouri Colleges

Veterans seek class-action status for the 2011 lawsuit saying the Missouri Returning Heroes' Education Act (caps tuition at \$50 per credit for combat vets) should apply to the entire cost of college, not just tuition. The plaintiffs say law "damages Missouri combat veterans" because it doesn't consider the cost of room and board, transportation, books, and other expenses, according to the lawsuit. University official said the four campuses use a procedure recommended by the state's department of higher education.

- For-profit colleges under attack for treatment of veterans (2012)

Illinois Attorney General sued Westwood College, claiming for-profit colleges mislead students enrolled in its criminal justice program, putting them deep in debt and saddling them with a nearly worthless degree for pursuing careers in Illinois law enforcement.

What about Female Veterans?

- By 2020, 10 % of the veteran population will be women
 - 85% are under age 40
 - 58% are between ages 20-29
 - Leave service early in their careers
 - Balance career and family
 - 70% have some prior college experience
 - 1 in 5 report having experienced sexual trauma

US Dept of Veteran's Affairs, 2011

What about Female Veterans?

- Almost 1/3 of female veterans were assaulted or raped in service
- Only 8% of offenders are prosecuted in military
- More than 70% of women veterans experienced sexual harassment in service
- Major health problems of Military Sexual Trauma
 - Depression
 - Eating Disorders
 - Miscarriages
 - Hypertension

Female Veterans

- Showcase the unique leadership qualities and transferable skills of women veterans
- Provide opportunities for integration of women veteran students into existing student organizations and leadership roles
- Encourage women veterans to practice networking and to seek mentors within your organization

H.R. 5385: Student Veteran Counseling Improvement Act

- “To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a toll-free hotline to assist mental health professionals at institutions of higher learning, to provide training to mental health professionals at institutions of higher learning, and for other purposes.”
 - <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h111-5385>
 - U.S. Representative, Pennsylvania’s 10th District--
Christopher Carney

Health Concerns

Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans seen in the VA

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| • Musculoskeletal | 50.0% |
| • Mental disorders | 45.6% |
| • Nervous system (hearing) | 37.4% |
| • GI (dental) | 32.8% |
| • Endocrine/Nutrition | 24.1% |
| • Injury/Poisoning | 23.6% |
| • Respiratory | 21.4% |

VHA Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards (2009)
Seen at VA by 3-31-09, *N* = 425,538

Degree Attainment for Veterans

- Are student-veterans staying in school (persisting) or dropping out?
- Study reported that only 6% of veterans have used the entire 36 months of educational benefits (Field, 2008)
- Recent research indicates that “peer connections” are vital for starting college
- “One-stop-shop” approach to veterans services is helpful
- What’s next for student-veterans? (after peer connections are made and educational benefits/paperwork are under control)?

Field, K. (2008, July 25). Cost, convenience drive veterans' college choices. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Findings from “First Wave” of research (since 2007)

- **Adjustment difficulties...** sense of purpose and identity



“Supermarket Scene”

Sergeant James stands amazed in a supermarket, experiencing dissonance by the contrast in the cleanliness and overabundance represented in the store versus his gritty experiences in Iraq. Mark Boals, screenwriter and co-producer of *The Hurt Locker*, described the scene noting, “The supermarket scene is one that veterans in particular have pointed out to me—it’s probably the single scene that they talk about the most, which is surprising to me. It really seems to ring true to a lot of them in the sense of capturing that feeling of being lost when you come back to a normal life.”

Findings from “First Wave” (cont’d)

- **Adjustment difficulties...** reconnecting with family & friends

Video Clip



“Conversation with Connie”

Sergeant James shares with his wife a disturbing story from his experiences in Iraq. His story doesn't go over well and an awkward moment arises. James realizes that his wife really doesn't want to hear about his experiences related to the calamities of war. This scene is illustrative of the difficulties of adjustment, even with support from family members. In one study, a veteran remarked, “It's kind of hard because your family can't understand, and that's the worst part” (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008, p.86-87).

Findings from “First Wave” (cont’d)

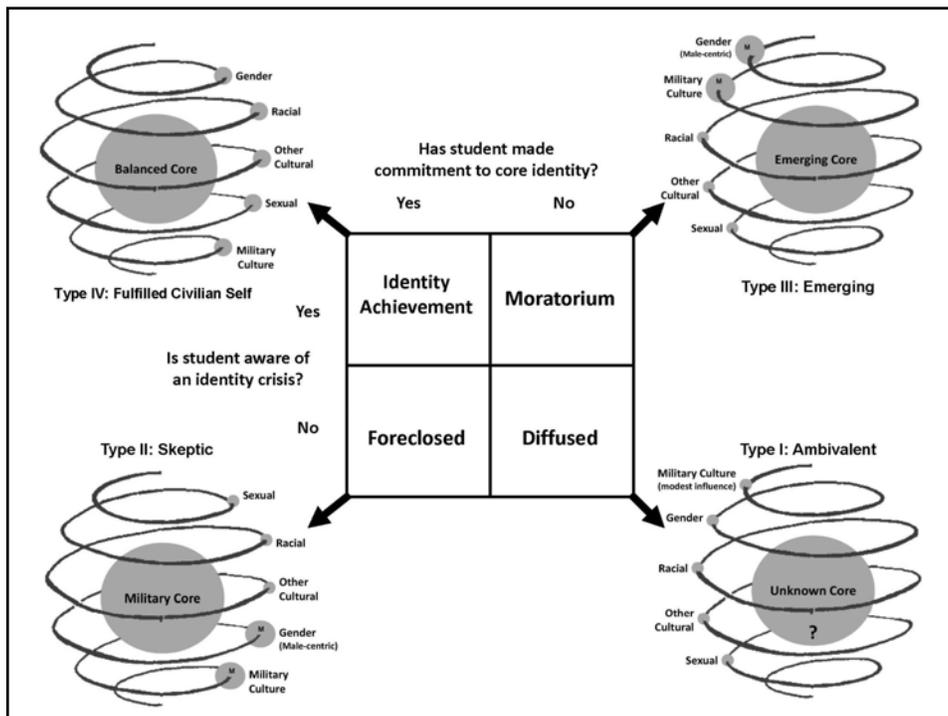
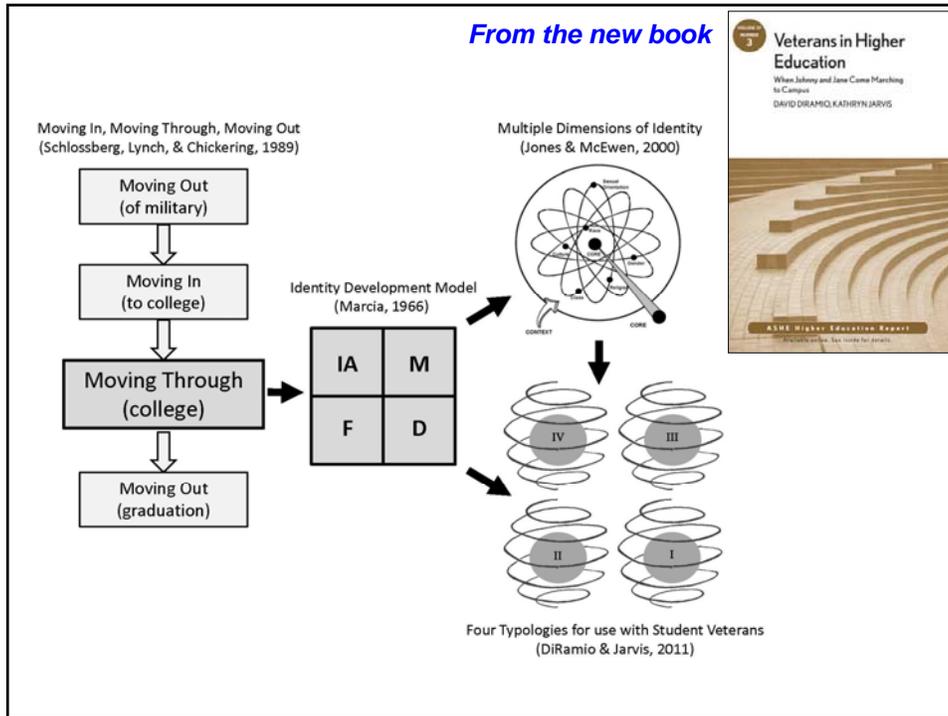
- **Adjustment difficulties...** (more) sense of purpose and identity

Video Clip



“Monologue and Toddler Son”

James' monologue to his son reveals an important point to consider. He described how as we grow older the number of things we love diminishes, perhaps even, as he says, down to one. Sadly, in the movie, an addictive compulsion for the intensity and thrill of war is James' most persistent and, apparently, sole passion. As the film concludes, we find out that he volunteered for another combat tour in Iraq. Although *The Hurt Locker* is a fictional work, albeit based on real experiences, one wonders if in a real life scenario, such passion in an individual can be redirected to postsecondary educational pursuits contingent on seeking assistance in the transition process.



Conclusion

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

- Questions and Discussion
- Resources