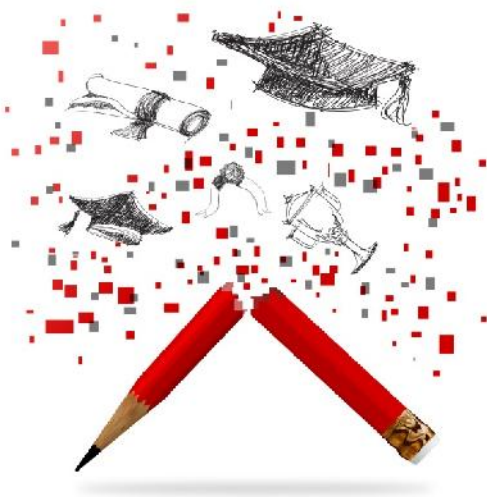


X. Faculty roles in ‘Separations’: convocations, graduations, end of class.

Will there be a Victory-in-College Day for the average American veteran who is going to college?...[That Victory-in-College] Day is important not merely for the veterans but for everyone: its realization will determine to a large extent the success of the former's servicemen's transition from military to civilian life; it will make possible a happier future, both for the veterans and for those with whom they live -- George E. Simmons. "The Veterans as I See Them." The Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 17, No. 6 (Jun., 1946), pp. 315-318



ABSTRACT:

Veteran related special events (Memorial day, Veteran's day – do students even know the difference? Do Faculty? Anniversaries of starts and ends of conflicts) are ripe with faculty ready 'teachable moments,' service learning opportunities, and prompts for classroom conversations. Faculty's final point of contact at the end of a semester can encourage or discourage a student veteran from continuing another semester, sticking to a program of study, or even in staying in college altogether. Further, faculty presence (and the existence of) a veteran population convocation, or recognition-during-graduation of military service, can serve multiple interests: of the school, of student-veteran advocacy, of role as teacher or exemplar of an academic discipline. Good separation can be as simple as showing up for closure. Good closure can be as rewarding as the satisfaction of mission accomplished for all involved..

Three top learning goals:

- 1) Review a few quick beneficial 'what next' things to reminder at end of class during public or office hour interactions with student veterans, for better chance of retention and 'warm handover' to next semester of classes;
- 2) Understand that graduations that recognize student veteran/military personnel status, with faculty presence in attendance, with faculty active at student veteran specific convocations, serve multiple interests: celebratory (the student veterans and supporters); moral ('initiate' a population often 'at risk' for college completion towards transition into community roles; instill a value for learning); opportunistic (the college enhanced as veteran/service friendly 'brand'); cathartic (a sense of some great reward, finally, for service personnel/veterans among the families, and ESPECIALLY among the college's staff and employees) and the interest of education (meeting the missions of being better teachers).
- 3) Consider the value of student veterans as alumni-assets for either one shot, short term (exit surveys that are 'honest,' or as potential speakers at orientations, etc) or in longer term roles (reach back to SVO, motivational or special event speakers, networking or employment contact and resources)

BRIEFINGS:

Memorial day, Veteran's day – do students even know the difference? Do Faculty? Anniversaries of starts and ends of conflicts: are they more than just footnotes on the news or in a history class? What about anniversaries or memorialized dates on the unit level? What does your institution do to draw attention, serve, celebrate –whatever is appropriate – veteran related commemorative dates or special events?

Last day of class – is there anything the instructor can do or say to a student veteran as they learn about the final exam coming up or the deadline for the last paper? Bigger ending: student veterans completed a degree, or finished some type of certificate program. What about convocation – a separate recognition or sub-ceremony within graduation for just student veterans? Will a good portion of student veterans even show up for graduation? Other than sit in the audience in graduation, maybe shake a hand or say goodbye (or even think privately, 'that troublemaker made it through'), is there any role for faculty at this point? The answer is yes. Student veterans don't necessary know that it's okay to re-contact favored faculty for letters of recommendation – that this is not a breach of protocol or rank. The presence of faculty (especially any who were in fact veterans!) that were involved with serving student veterans, and the visible presence of student veterans themselves in numbers, at graduations and convocations, can be a peer pressure to motivate other faculty to at least understand that student veterans are a real presence among the student body – and at least some minimal training and faculty development in working with them is worth the investment in time.

Exit surveys can reveal with more honesty the climate, gains, and the problem with student veteran services and/or faculty interaction, and their roles in (successful or failed) acculturation to college life. Graduates can sometimes serve as mentors or orientation speakers or leave a blurb for the website or a recruitment video, which indirectly leads to a better classroom experience for faculty (understand the availability for student veterans to return as alumni can be even more time demanding than for other students, but if they felt kinship with faculty and others at the college, student veterans WILL find the time).

Finally, the importance of ceremony is a characteristic of military culture. Not just for those graduating, but for their families and even more so for staff, employees, instructors, administrators who were military or have family in service. Word of mouth goes even further than 'military friendly' certifications and recruitment booths and promises of inclusiveness and diversity on websites, both in attracting student veterans, in retention, and garnering resources from administration and budgets. Branch insignia on academic regalia, graduation cords, vocal announcement of service along with their academic program... not to mention the good marketing and local media coverage that successful student veterans attract to the college or university.. Faculty may not be aware of the effect of inclusion or view themselves as part of the school's marketing package, but the reality of having helped transition a population from military duty to civilian/ civic duty is a punctuation rewarding to all involved.

Table of Contents for Faculty Roles in Separations:

Faculty Tips:

- 1) End of Class/Learn what could be better
- 2) Encourage student veterans join SVO, committees or follow up with community participation
- 3) Consider suggesting a student veteran event or activity for the next Veteran's day or a student showcase
- 4) Presence at convocations/graduations...counts

Faculty TIP 1): End of Class/Learn what could be better: If you have a last day office hour or do a general exit class, some of the most useful things you can do for student veterans include:

a) **Exit survey.** Specifically useful would be a question such as, "I wish someone had told me/done _____ when I first came to campus". This will give you insights to problems, needs overlooked or that could be done better, etc. Other possible, useful exit interview questions: "What were your first days on campus like? What do you know now that you wish you knew then? What strategies would you recommend to other [veteran] students? What is the hardest part of being a college student? What do you miss most about the military?"¹ Share results with office of student veteran services or the student veterans steering committee. Information garnered right after a class can reveal needs and boons that would otherwise be forgotten / continue unknown, as well as where/what made emotions run hot. **This information may also drive week of accountability/ instructor development offerings related to student veterans towards 'real needs' rather than 'expected training needs' for faculty.**

b) **Have template or suggested next class to take.** Though you are not expected to be an academic advisor, faculty have 'inside' knowledge about classes and class combinations that work well or are worrisome. Consider going over a few suggestions or addressing specific scheduling recommendations for students who come in during that last office hour.

Faculty TIP 2): Encourage student veterans join SVO, committees or follow up with community participation: Use student veterans to steer the needs and tasks of vet interest: suggest they join committees and work with SVO, that they consider community organizations or set up non profits to help other veterans and apply for related grants and scholarships to pursue entrepreneurial ideas that serve general population and/or veterans.

¹ Margaret Bellafiore. "From Combat to Campus". *Academe* (Journal of American Association of University Professors). Volume 98, Number 5 . September-October 2012

Faculty TIP 3): Consider suggesting a student veteran event or activity for the next veteran's day or a regular student showcase:

If you've had good work submitted, consider sharing or recommending student veteran writing (with student permission) for departmental archives, sample work usage, ideas towards showcase projects (art or writing exhibitions, docents for memorial day events, etc) for the school. You also now have some 'alumni' who are good assets to leverage as speakers, for next-time student veteran orientations, etc. It's not only educational for the school, but gives the post military 'mission' sense to student veteran experiences that will increase retention and make them part of the population.

Faculty TIP 4): Presence at convocations/graduations...counts. Showing up at graduation or convocations (special population 'celebrations' or ceremonies for constituencies) helps with the emotional transition of student veterans. Opening/Closing/graduation/promotion ceremonies are important parts of the military experience. To close out the same way in academia is worthwhile – not to mention an excellent marketing opportunity, college publicity and showcase to college administration that attention to the student veteran population is both student-friendly and positive talent management (keeping you, faculty who supports veteran students, happy, involved, and at the college). With drawdowns and retirements and separations on the rise, with GI Bill continuing as assured money for tuition and the college budget, student veteran populations will only increase and become even more part of your college's regular students. Why not honor their transition and affirm yours, in better serving all types of students, including veterans and active personnel who serv(ed), by being present at the end?