Veterans in Your Classrooms:

*Successful Strategies and Interventions*
Issues that May Affect Veterans

1) Returning to School After Many Years
2) Cultural & Linguistic Differences
3) Logistical and Family Issues
4) Reserve & National Guard Obligations
5) Mental Health Challenges
ENGAGEMENT

National survey of 362,000 first-year students and seniors attending 564 US colleges and universities by NSSE (2010) found:

– Student Veterans perceived lower levels of campus support than non-Veterans
– Interacted less with faculty members
– Spent twice as many hours per week working
– Six times as many hours on dependent care
– Twice as likely to report at least one disability

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), 2010
Returning to School after Military Service

Think of student veterans as 2\textsuperscript{nd} \textit{Career Students}

- Returning to school may be the first time in a very long time that they do not feel highly \textit{competent} and \textit{confident}.

- Previous military career demanded high levels of expertise, discipline and responsibility.
Before they were in your class, they were...
Instilling Discipline
Providing Nutrition
Managing Millions of $$$ in Equipment
Saving Lives
Maintaining Security
Averting Disaster
USING YOUR GI BILL
EXACTLY HOW IT FEELS
Cultural & Linguistic Differences

• The transition from military to civilian culture is not as simple as it might seem and can lead to stress, frustration and conflict in a classroom environment.
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Cultural & Linguistic Differences

Other Examples:

• Frustration over specificity on syllabus
• Assignment goals *appear* unclear
• Language misinterpreted
Cultural & Linguistic Differences

• Suggested Strategies
  – Be aware of cultural & linguistic differences
  – Consider your own cultural style
  – Give direct & specific feedback when necessary
  – Include “welcome text” on syllabus
Different Learning Styles

• Practical vs. theoretical
• Objectives specific vs. diffuse
• Directions concrete vs. abstract
A contrast in teaching style

• The following period of instruction is designed to teach you the rules of conduct related to playground activity.

• Upon completion of this course, you will be able to...
What you need to know

• Please note the rules

• Your ability to master these rules will determine your grade in this class.
A contrast in teaching style

The objective of this class is to UNDERSTAND the concepts of authoritarian vs. permissive parenting styles, using the playground as a metaphor for diverse human interaction.
A contrast in style

If you were visiting a community that valued authoritarian than permissive values, which sign would you be more likely to see at a local playground? Give support for your answer from the reading and the lecture material. **Extra credit:** If you were designing a sign to reflect authoritative values, what sign might you make?
Golden Rules

✓ Do be gentle
  Don’t hurt anyone
✓ Do be kind and helpful
  Don’t hurt other people’s feelings
✓ Do be polite
  Don’t be rude
✓ Do listen to people
  Don’t interrupt
✓ Do be honest
  Don’t cover up the truth
✓ Do play co-operatively
  Don’t spoil other people’s games
✓ Do look after property
  Don’t waste or damage things

Playground Rules

- Do not use equipment when wet
- No running, pushing or shoving
- Do not use play equipment improperly
- No bare feet, wear proper footwear
- Adult supervision required for use play carefully!
Maintaining Consistent Attendance

• Logistical and Family Issues
  – 38% Women & 44% Men in active duty have children
  – Female veterans more likely to be single parents
  – Veterans may have little experience coordinating multiple INDEPENDENT systems.
  – High levels of stress from deployments + medical and mental health consequences.
Maintaining Consistent Attendance

• Medical & Mental Health Appointments
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  – Catch them when they come around or have to wait.
  – VA appointments typically offered between 8am-3:30pm
  – Important for recovery from wounds of service
Maintaining Consistent Attendance
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• National Guard & Reserve Commitments
Maintaining Consistent Attendance

• National Guard & Reserve Commitments
  – Often interfere with classes.
Maintaining Consistent Attendance

- National Guard & Reserve Commitments
  - Often interfere with classes.
  - Veterans only have certain amount of choice.
Mental Health Issues

• Mental health issues such as **PTSD** and **traumatic brain injury** can have a negative impact on class performance, and can lead to frustration and conflict in the classroom.
Common Symptoms – mTBI & PTSD

Cognitive Problems
- Memory
- Concentration & attention
- Learning Difficulties
- Following complicated directions
- Language problems
- Impulse control
- Slowed or cloudy thinking

Affective / Behavioral Problems
- Frustration or irritability
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Reduced tolerance for stress
- Sleep problems
- Numbing out or flipping out
- Inflexibility
- Feeling guilty
- Denial of problems
- Social appropriateness

Somatic Complaints
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Poor balance
- Dizziness
- Changes in vision, hearing, or touch
- Sexual problems
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Mental Health Issues

• Concentration can be impaired
• Assignments & class activities can be triggers
• Class discussions can be difficult
• Group work can be especially challenging
• Attendance can be affected
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Assignments & class activities can be triggers

- Consider if a workaround is possible
  - Can traumatic or violent scenes that can be skipped?
  - Give “trigger warnings”
  - Start after a break
  - Are there other similar things you can do that do not have violent or traumatic elements?
  - Can the student do an alternative assignment?
Review

• Cultural, mental health & physical issues can make it difficult for veterans to adapt to the requirements of campus life.

• For those veterans who have disabilities, many are new to navigating their disabilities – or seeing themselves as disabled. Some will struggle with asking for help.
How to Help Veterans Help Themselves

“This is not a handout, it’s your civil right, that you defended”

“Stay focused on the mission – to succeed in school”

“No one is going to do the work for you – don’t worry, that’s still on you”
Recommendations

• Be *specific and methodical* when giving instruction.

• Give *direct and honest feedback*

• Refer for treatment *and/or* assessment

• Consider adding *reasonable accommodation text* to every syllabus.
Recommendations

- *Warm handoffs* make a HUGE difference. Whenever possible, make personal and specific referrals.
Recommendations

• Have a **contact person** on campus who is familiar with veteran related issues. Know how to reach that person.
Thank You

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