Many military veterans return home and seek further education. This study indicates that these student veterans face a number of barriers while transitioning into academic life, which can include residual physical and mental harm, feelings of exclusion and discomfort, perceived judgment from professors and other students, and difficulty accessing tuition benefits.

Student Veterans

- **60%** of student veterans in Nevada feel that they do not fit in on campus. They report that their military experience has given them a perspective on life that professors and other students cannot understand.
- **36%** of student veterans in Nevada have felt unfairly judged in the classroom when:
  - Faculty and students make disparaging remarks about the military.
  - Student veterans are called upon to speak for all veterans, ignoring the diversity of veterans’ opinions and experiences.
- **19%** of student veterans in Nevada experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), characterized by startling easily, avoiding anything that reminds them of combat, persistently reliving the trauma of combat (through, for example, flashbacks or hallucinations), and episodes of extreme anger or hyper-vigilance.
- **Over 1/3** of student veterans in Nevada are still suffering physically from injuries sustained during their military service.

Faculty

- Nearly ¼ of faculty say they are unlikely to volunteer for training on how to meet the needs of student veterans.
- Faculty who are unlikely to attend training are more likely to do the very things in class that student veterans say are disturbing, such as share their opinions on the post-9/11 wars without regard for the veterans in the room who may have fought in those wars.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

- **G.I. bill tuition benefits** are now being processed quickly in most cases, but many student veterans report that the VA Call Center is unable to answer their questions in a timely fashion.

There are a number of approaches to combating these problems. These strategies should be enacted by institutions of higher education, policy-makers, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

What can institutions of higher education do for student veterans?

- Designate a physical space for student veterans to call their own in order to reduce alienation and create a sense of belonging on campus.

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1 These findings apply to the Nevada System of Higher Education, containing 626 student Veterans, and may not represent student Veterans throughout the U.S.; this research was sponsored by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)
• Set aside new-student orientation sessions for student veterans only, incorporating issues specific to veterans.
• Recruit existing student veterans to mentor incoming student veterans, helping them transition from military to academic life.
• Foster the success of student-veteran organizations by offering institutional assistance with advisement, recruitment, and funding.
• Ensure that student counseling centers, student health centers, and disability resource centers are outfitted to meet the needs of student veterans. For example, these centers should be prepared to evaluate and treat PTSD and unresolved physical injuries, and should offer accommodation for disabilities, such as note-takers and alternative testing arrangements.
• Provide events designed to bring together the military and civilian communities, such as guest speakers with expertise on military issues.

What can institutions of higher education do for faculty and other staff?
• Mandate basic training for faculty in how to be sensitive to student veterans in the classroom. This training may be compared to similar programs sometimes prescribed on how to recognize and refer students in psychological distress, or how to avoid the unconscious expression of prejudice toward minorities.
• Develop a faculty representative in each academic department with advanced knowledge of student veteran issues.
• Ensure that each campus has adequate staffing to certify student veterans’ coursework and remain in compliance with the VA; when the number of students using the G.I. bill approaches 300, hire both a Certifying Official and a Veterans Services Program Coordinator.
• Belong to the Service members Opportunity College (SOC) and follow guidelines of the American Council on Education (ACE) in granting course credit for military service whenever appropriate.

What can the Department of Veterans Affairs do for student veterans?
• Increase the staff support of the VA Call Center to ensure that questions are answered in a timely fashion.
• Continue to process G.I. bill benefits as efficiently as possible so that student veterans’ educations are not delayed.
• Assist student veterans in registering for services available to them through the VA.

How can institutions of higher education work together with the VA to help student veterans?
• Coordinate services between colleges/universities and the VA to ensure that all student veterans who need mental health care, physical health care, or disability resources receive the support they need in a timely fashion.
• Work together to ensure that processing of G.I. bill applications are submitted, processed, and funded in a timely fashion.

The Post 9/11 G.I. bill has made college more accessible and affordable to our nation’s all-volunteer military force, many of whom have endured significant hardship in the service of their country. However, paying for college is just the beginning. Ensuring that student veterans have an equal opportunity to succeed in college and beyond requires the collective will of institutions of higher education in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Read more details at the University Veterans Coalition website: http://www.unr.edu/uvc.

For any questions on the information contained in this fact-sheet, please contact SPSSI policy director Dr. Gabriel Twose at 202-675-6956 or gtwose@spssi.org.