

Faculty Development Workshops with Student- Vet Participants: Seizing the Induction Possibilities

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While many colleges and universities have earned a “military friendly” designation, too few offer opportunities for faculty to learn about military culture and the specific issues facing student veterans as they transition from active duty to student status. This article chronicles the authors’ experiences with and approaches to a workshop series, “Working with Post-9/11 Student-Veterans: A Faculty Primer,” which we have facilitated over the last several years at Colorado State University. Stressing the importance of a strength-based (versus deficit) model for the workshops and the integral role of student-veterans’ participation in the workshops, the essay offers an overview of strategies, common themes, materials and outcomes for faculty development workshops about this important issue.

***A Short Course on Student-Veterans in the
Classroom: Sponsored by the CSU Institute
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Over a quarter of a million veterans are currently enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, and a quarter million more have applied for GI Bill education benefits. In total, nearly 2 million

military personnel who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are eligible for the 2009 Post-9/11 GI Bill.

In many ways, CSU is well-situated to respond to the needs of this student population; we have earned a “veteran-friendly” designation and have initiated efforts to identify and reduce barriers to veterans’ educational goals, to assist veterans as they transition from active duty to college life and to provide timely and accurate information about veterans’ benefits and services.

As we continue to strengthen programs, we need to focus our efforts at the pedagogical level. According to a 2010 NASPA report, student-veterans often report a sense of isolation on campus and frustration with traditional students: they express concern about entering into a potentially liberal college culture that may conflate anti-war sentiment with anti-military sentiment, and they can face difficulty finding mentors amongst faculty whose values may differ significantly from their own.

Not only are some student-veterans struggling with financial pressures and dealing with physical and mental health disabilities (including the “signature wounds” of TBI and PTSD), they also share the challenges many nontraditional students face, such as childcare, “relearning” study skills, and understanding (often unspoken) academic expectations. Only a well-informed faculty can understand and address such challenges to ensure retention and degree-completion. This short course draws from recent research on best practices for working with student-veterans.

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Since the enactment of the 2009 GI Bill—the most generous in history in terms of financial support for veterans seeking post-secondary degrees—most universities and colleges have recognized the lucrative potential, as well as the socially responsible necessity, of working with student-veterans. Many have instituted

“military friendly” initiatives, such as VA participation in financial aid and advising services, student-veteran orientations, veteran centers and lounges, support for student-veteran organizations, and specific dispensations (e.g., early enrollment in required courses) for student-veterans who are accorded only 36 months of support to complete their bachelor’s degrees. These are important efforts, but they alone cannot ensure student-veterans’ success in post-secondary institutions. Unless faculty are aware of the interests, circumstances, and strengths of this particular student population, we miss an important opportunity to foster veterans’ success.

Yet, as Hart and Thompson note in their landmark 4C’s survey and report, “An Ethical Obligation,” “few [faculty] have received formal training on veteran issues, military culture, or military writing conventions” (4). We can assume that, just as 71% of the general public admit to knowing little about veterans’ experiences and common military mores and practices, many faculty have little more than moderate understanding of veterans’ experiences as they transition from active duty to higher education (Kirchner 115). While faculty can take advantage of webinars (such as those offered by The American Council on Education or Student Veterans of America) to get up to speed, relatively few faculty participate in webinar options, not only because faculty are unaware of the need but also because they prefer professional development options that address their institutions specifically. Moreover, when colleges and universities do offer faculty development workshops, Hart and Thompson found that institutions too often engage a deficit model, focusing not on the significant contributions that student-veterans bring to campus but on pathologized versions of PTSD and other signature wounds associated with combat veterans’ experiences.

This essay opens with the announcement for the faculty workshops we have offered every semester over the past seven years at Colorado State University. As the announcement emphasizes, the workshops have focused on greater understanding of the local CSU student-veteran population and on a strength-based pedagogy. The workshops have also been informed by our longitudinal study of over twenty student-vets—a study that we began in 2009. These workshops have been driven by an effort to address the gaps that we had come to

see in campus support; CSU, as a “military-friendly” campus, offers significant resources and support to most veterans through our Office of Adult Learners and Veteran Students (ALVS), as well as the Veterans Affairs representatives who work with advisors and the Registrar’s office. Nonetheless, opportunities to educate faculty about the new student-veteran demographic have been uncommon, and we wanted to drive home the idea that this kind of sweeping educational opportunity had not been seen since the passage of the Montgomery Bill in 1945. Just as the Montgomery Bill advanced a new WWII middle class by providing educational opportunities to those who otherwise would have been unlikely to obtain college degrees, the 2009 GI Bill was designed to meet the needs of Post-9/11 veterans who were expected to number two million by 2014. While it was clear to us that the teaching and learning opportunities associated with such an initiative would be unequaled in our generation, we were dismayed by the lack of attention to faculty development. In many ways, it seemed that the all-too-common gap between student services and academic faculty was being reasserted, and the stakes seemed far too high to only offer workshops to members of the English department, without sharing research with faculty across the curriculum. Given our backgrounds as military family members (Sue as a military spouse, Lisa as an Army brat), our efforts to develop veteran-specific composition courses and the longitudinal study we had recently launched with an early cohort of GI Bill recipients, we realized that there might be few others more interested in developing a professional development series than we were ourselves.

We developed the “Working with Post-9/11 Student-Veterans: A Faculty Primer” workshops in concert with CSU’s Institute for Learning and Teaching (TILT) and the Adult Learner and Veteran Services Office (ALVS). In addition to our role as workshop leaders, we arranged for an array of co-facilitators—ALVS representatives, non-tenure track faculty from STEM and Liberal Arts colleges, graduate student instructors, and graduate students conducting research on veterans’ issues. The earliest versions of the workshop were designated “short-courses;” they were a total of four hours over a two-day period and entailed the following topics:

Working with Post-9/11 Student-Veterans: A Faculty Primer (Version 1)

Session I: Demographics and Pragmatics: What Do We Need to Know about Post-9/11 Student Veterans?

- A Demographic Overview of Student-Veterans at CSU*
- Understanding the Basics of the Post-911 GI Bill, the VA, and Reservists*
- Strength-based Pedagogy and Student-Veterans: Avoiding the Deficit Model
- From Active Duty to College Campus: Teaching to Address Student-Veterans' Transition to Civilian Life
- Signature Wounds: What Do Faculty Need to Know about TBI and PTSD?
- Pedagogical Scenarios: Developing Strategies for Teaching Student-Veterans
- Student-Veteran Panel: Veterans' Transition Experiences

Session II: From Military Culture to Academic Culture: Pedagogical Responses to Cultural Clashes

- Understanding Military Culture: Authority, Decision-Making and Self-Reliance
- Tensions between Traditional Students and Student-Veterans
- Disconnecting Anti-War Sentiment from Anti-Veteran Sentiment
- Pedagogical Scenarios: Drawing from Critical Pedagogy and Mediation Strategies to Open Dialogue When Cultures Clash

After a few semesters, we redesigned the workshops into a single, two-hour format, in hopes that more faculty and staff could find time to participate. The first hour provided information and conversation about four key issues:

- U.S. Veteran demographics (see Appendix 1)
- Veterans' experiences transitioning from active duty to student status (see Appendix 2)

- Veteran services at CSU (including services for those experiencing PTS)
- Features of strength-based pedagogy for student veterans (see Appendix 3)

We found after some experimentation that it was preferable to open the first half of the workshop only to enrolled faculty and staff. They needed an opportunity to learn about veterans' issues, to ask questions, and share experiences with one another—without the fear of saying something “wrong” in the presence of student-veterans. Many also needed the chance to express their conflicted feelings about how to support their student-veterans without necessarily supporting war in general or these wars in particular. As one participant, a young female graduate student instructor who experienced challenges from an older, male student-veteran, explained, “If they [student veterans] were in the room, I’d be afraid to talk about the guy, because he made my life harsh for a while.”

We have found, therefore, that an open discussion of veteran-related issues and an enhanced understanding of military culture that such a discussion entails, offers participants a chance to develop a new vocabulary, even as they develop greater understanding of key challenges faced by student-veterans. In the particular case mentioned above, the graduate student instructor came to understand that, while gender and age differences certainly exacerbated the situation (and the student-veteran should be held accountable for inappropriate behavior), it is vital to understand that he was responding inappropriately in great part because of a clash of cultures—the military and the academic. As we note in the strength-based pedagogy handout (Appendix 3), newly-separated veterans “may expect a certain kind of authority at the front of the classroom and misunderstand the cultural shift demanded by a new form of authority and expertise.” This instructor reported that she has since worked to clarify assignment expectations and to help her students articulate “meta-awareness” about why certain features of her assignments are open-ended and designed to inspire creative problem-solving. This meta-awareness about the process, not just the product, associated with completing an assignment, has subsequently helped this

instructor's student-veterans, like many other students, to be more receptive to assignments that require veering from the "dress-right-dress" structure of assignments that a commanding officer might issue while on active duty.

We began our workshops with introductions and sharing of the issues that most concerned faculty and staff. Some reported feeling bullied by student-veterans who had corrected them in class on issues ranging from domestic politics to policy in the Middle East. Others expressed uncertainty about how to respond to deployments of those on active duty reserve status, even though policy in this regard is well established in the university's Faculty Manual. Some wondered how to enforce absence policies for those undergoing surgery or regular appointments at the VA. Another faculty member asked: "If a student-veteran disappears inexplicably for an extended period or shows signs of anxiety or stress, do I communicate with the GI Bill certifying official, the ALVS, the student's advisor, or the counseling center?" Some worried that they might get the veteran in trouble if they reported excessive absences or other challenges, and some worried that as civilians, they lacked credibility in the eyes of veterans. Some asked why veterans who were clearly suffering from injury often refused to go to the Office or Resources for Disabled Students but instead struggled despite repeated failure. Some voiced frustration when student veterans who were clearly failing didn't simply withdraw from the course. These and many other questions came up, allowing us to address the profile of veterans who were unlikely to seek help or document disability and for whom, as had been drilled into them, "failure was not an option."

We also used the opportunity of the workshop to explain to faculty why some veterans might miss classes for reservist obligations, why missing an appointment at the regional VA hospital might mean not getting another appointment for six months or more, and our legal obligations to veterans. For example, we informed faculty about Executive Order No. 13607 (2012), otherwise known as the Principles of Excellence, which "ensures Federal military and education benefit programs provide service members, veterans, spouses, and their families deserved information, support, and protections" (Kirchner 114). Included in this order is the requirement to accommodate

student veteran absence if it occurs due to service obligations. We were able to talk about why a break in continuity of courses could jeopardize GI Bill benefits, which would have implications not just for coursework but for rent and living expenses. We discussed strategies for meeting such needs without compromising standards. And we were able to talk about the role of pride among military service members and their family members. Here we emphasized the challenge of re- entering the general population when fewer than 1% of U.S. citizens have served in the military. Additionally, we addressed that veterans' special status as members of that 1% can contribute to a sense of otherness and marginality that is also tinged with pride or even indignation when so few Americans are fully informed about current conflicts and military culture. For veterans, we explained the situation in civilian contexts, such as our own college campus too often seems to be about self-actualization or even self-absorption, when the entire point of their recent experience has been about looking out for others and an associated commitment to fellow service members and units.

In these ways and others, we worked toward emphasizing the ways in which military experience enhances the strengths and academic potential of many student-veterans. We called on faculty to recognize veterans as adult learners who, having served in the military, possess skills, attitudes, and strategies conducive to learning. Often exposed to diverse cultures, most have developed time management strategies, are accustomed to holding themselves to high standards, can articulate an idea with clarity, have worked collaboratively toward an objective, demonstrate disciplined thinking and attention to detail, and work toward the polished completion of projects. Workshop participants soon realized that these habits of mind positioned veterans to be among the more mature and sophisticated of students in classrooms (see Appendix 3). Even as we made these points, however, several student veterans who participated in the workshops challenged the strength-based characterizations that seemed to glorify all veterans, merely because they were veterans. Respect and admiration, one participant emphasized, had to be *earned*; he explained that he had, indeed, worked with any number of veterans who simply “were not good people.” The uncritical valorization of veterans can be nearly as limiting as a pathologized characterization, since such generalizations

fail to deepen our understanding of veterans and instead reassert stereotypes.

After this initial discussion in the workshop, we turned to the topic of the transition from active duty to student status, which not only offered us an opportunity to discuss one of the most research-rich areas of scholarship about student-veterans but also gave us a chance to talk about features of military culture that most faculty—and indeed, most civilians—have very little awareness of. Reminding faculty that student-veterans are often undergoing a dramatic change (and challenge) to their identities, we discussed the key points in Appendix 2, “Transitioning from Military Service to Academic Contexts.” While all of the points included in that document are important for faculty to consider and to address, we found that many participants were especially concerned about the tensions they observed between student-veterans and traditional students. Some workshop members recounted situations in which veterans seemed to dismiss, belittle, and even bully traditional undergraduates. One faculty member interpreted a student-veteran’s behavior as “smug and superior, when it’s not the fault of the non-veteran student that he or she hasn’t been to war.” By emphasizing why veterans may have a hard time connecting with traditional college students and how transition periods are particularly difficult and generative periods, we suggested to faculty that they speak to the veterans in their classes about such issues and work to demystify expectations regarding interactions among students.

One veteran, we’ll call him Jake, relayed his experience in his first college course at CSU: On the first day of class, the teacher asked students to pair up and interview one another; they were then going to share one interesting fact about their interviewee with the class as a whole. When Jake dutifully explained to his interviewer that he had returned from Afghanistan less than two months prior, his classmate asked, “Oh, were you there on vacation?” Jake responded with disgust and frustration, blurting out, “You need to get your head out of Facebook and see what’s happening in the world.” He explained that, on reflection, he regretted his comment, and he apologized to both the student and teacher for it. But his classmate’s lack of attention to the recent wars was unsettling to him on a deep level. Jake

recommended that faculty make it clear they are available and willing to meet with student-veterans to talk about specific challenges such as this, especially if course content might initiate conversation about current military actions. In response, we developed some simple language that faculty might include, modify, or strengthen on their syllabi to foster such connection:

Student Veterans: *I am delighted that CSU encourages veterans to study here, and I hope that you will visit me during office hours, and let me help you in any way.*

Discussion of transition issues, we found, usually leads to comments and concerns about signature wounds, particularly Post-Traumatic Stress or PTS. And here we use the acronym PTS, rather than PTSD, because most professionals, such as Paula Caplan, former President of the American Psychological Association and authority on bridging the military-civilian divide through conversation, now agrees that post-traumatic stress is often not a function of disorder but a natural and appropriate response to unnaturally difficult situations. Our most recent versions of the workshop, however, de-emphasize the issue of PTS. In earlier workshops, we dedicated a considerable amount of time to its discussion as our Adult Learner and Veterans Services (ALVS) coordinator shared statistics and characteristics of PTS/D. She pointed out PTS can affect everything from where student-veterans sit in a classroom, to whether a student-veteran is willing to discuss certain issues. As we gained more experience working with faculty and staff in the workshop, however, we grew more sensitive to our increasing sense that, no matter how much we emphasized the complexity and diversity of PTS in a two-hour workshop, the stereotype of the ticking-time-bomb veteran often took hold of the group, making it difficult to reel the conversation back toward strength-based approaches. To address this problem without minimizing the impacts of war, our ALVS coordinator switched tactics: rather than focus on PTS, she offered information about CSU services available to student-veterans; for instance, our Occupational Therapy program offered specific assistance with attention and concentration issues; math tutoring was available in face-to-face settings, and the Student Veterans of American (SVA)

chapter offered an opportunity to engage with fellow veterans and advocate for their support.

One of the student-veterans who participated in both our study and the workshops described PTS this way:

Since most Americans are not experts on Afghanistan and Iraq, terms are thrown into the media whirlwind, so that we may all understand what troops feel. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is one such term. I absolutely despise this diagnosis as it serves as a convenient string of words supposedly capturing the essence of nearly every serviceman and woman who has experienced some significant event. It also implies that something is inherently wrong with service members by the mere definition of the word disorder. Why do these men and women who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan have to have a *disorder*?

This veteran, who chose the pseudonym, Phineas, feared that the association of veterans with an inherently pathological and dangerous kind of PTS might lead to an insidious form of persecution masquerading as care and concern. He explained,

I refuse to be diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder, as that would imply that something is wrong with me. I do not require someone to tell me that I have seen some messed up things. I already know that. I saw those things and I was there when they happened. I can decide how those memories affect me. I have reflected upon my past a great deal and found my own ways to benefit from my experiences. It may be reasoned that my belief that I do not have a problem is a problem in itself, but I simply cannot claim issues that do not exist...[Yet] My past has only ever adversely affected individuals I have interacted with. I was denied a job I was qualified for because the hiring official hinted that she feared I may snap and go on an office rampage. My polite and friendly attitude stoked her fears to the point in which I could not be hired. Her presumption presumably stemmed from reading my resume while watching the 24 hour news circuit, so the equation of veteran plus Iraq plus Marine infantry apparently equals I will snap without notice, snatch up my automatic rifles

and explosives I obviously possess and relapse into some war crime mode I must have been in.

We could see many faculty coming to new insight when Phineas explained that, in fact, PTS had made him a better person:

My confidence is leaps and bounds beyond where it once was. I have been actively targeted for death and I survived. If that doesn't boost your ego, nothing I can think of will. I no longer toil over what I deem unimportant details. I do not care that I missed two questions on a hundred question exam. That is still a 98%, but I honestly would have panicked in earlier life. No past actions can be taken back; instead, I have to focus upon what is now and what lies ahead. I know that I have done well as long as I am happy. I do not become angry nearly as fast as I used to. My temper used to cause me to lash out, but I can control my anger today and harness it to allow coherent and precise thought. It has taken practice. Above all, a new sense of what is important in life has been gifted to me: life. I could come up with another full list of positive life lessons I have learned, but that would require too much space.

As Phineas' explanation suggests, veterans themselves are aware of the stereotypes and their own pathologization. At the same time, the best conversations were *between* veterans. For example, after Phineas shared his perspectives on PTS at one of our earlier workshops, another veteran who experienced PTS in very different ways, explained why he valued the designation because of the much-needed accommodations he received upon registering with our Resources for Disabled Students office. He explained that he was "that" veteran who sat with his back to the wall, had bad days when he couldn't make it to class, and who tried, especially with fellow-veterans, to de-stigmatize PTS. Congenial and supportive, the conversation between these two men clearly struck a chord with the workshop participants who observed two men of honor with very different experiences of and attitudes toward PTS. This kind of exchange almost always occurred in the workshop, which is why we always moved inexorably toward student-veteran leadership of a panel in

which they spoke candidly and as subject-area experts on “being a student-veteran.”

Thus, in the second hour of the workshop, we place a panel of student-veterans at center-stage and encourage conversations between vets, and between vets and workshop participants, about classroom scenarios involving veterans. Over time, we have realized that these panels are the most important facets, of the workshop, and we have invited a diverse group of student-veterans to participate in these panels—representatives from multiple military branches, combat veterans, non-combat veterans, women, veterans of color, Liberal Arts and STEM majors, liberals and conservatives, etc. The diversity of the panelists has reflected the diversity of veterans in general, and with few exceptions, the student-veterans we have invited have been quick to say “yes.” Placing them at the front of the room, they find themselves in a position of authority, performing a poised and professional carriage, or making a clear effort to look non-military in sloppy t-shirts, ball caps, and jeans. At the same time, student veterans have seen faculty in a new light when positioned differently. In this context, the veterans found the faculty open-minded, student-centered, and eager to learn, complicating their view of the professors who until then may have seemed singularly interested in their research.

Once the student-veterans take the floor for the panel discussion, we distribute a set of scenarios (see Appendix 4) and divide the room into small discussion groups. The small group conversations then give way to whole-class discussion, which without fail are animated and full of insight. We attribute any success here to the articulate and engaged veterans who openly share their perspectives, experiences, and concerns about higher education and to the faculty and staff who are willing to shift roles. In addition, the scenarios we distribute are helpful in that they structure the topics and concerns of the whole-group conversation. Given time constraints, we typically distribute two scenarios for discussion. The two that we will spotlight here are based on the published account of combat veteran Michelle Wilmot’s experiences in college classes (“Scenario 1”), and the experience of one of CSU’s student-veterans, Daniel (“Scenario 2”), who initiated conversations with CSU administration on an important campus

policy. We'll discuss each of these scenarios and responses to them, but it's important to note that, because the scenarios were founded in "real" situations, they encouraged respectful and thoughtful conversation. They also, however, provided some distance for participants and led to powerful conversation, often about issues that would otherwise be difficult to discuss.

We ask the student-veterans to read and consider the scenarios before arriving. Faculty and staff participants read the scenarios after the student-veterans are introduced. Once the reading period is over, we begin conversation by simply having faculty-staff reiterate their sense of what had happened in the scenario so that we can see how they frame these situations. We then ask a series of questions such as why the event occurred and how it might have been handled differently or been avoided altogether. We then invite student-veterans to offer their insights, and at that point, we consciously fade from the scene, positioning the veterans front and center. They have no problem with their leadership of the discussion, demonstrating not only their ability to listen to what participants have to say but also their willingness to share their perspectives. At this point, the faculty-staff participants seem barely aware of how the tables have turned, with all eyes and ears now directed toward the student-veterans who meaningfully engage in conversation with faculty for the better part of an hour. On many occasions, we have watched faculty relax as the transformation unfolds, and they become learners, and the veterans became teachers. In early workshops, we reserved substantial time near the end of the workshop for synthesizing the conversation and pulling it back to the research materials we had provided. But in time, we realized that the best strategy was to let the veterans and faculty-staff sum things up on their own. We always concluded each workshop with a brief feedback survey, and invariably, faculty state that the workshop was profoundly effective because of the student-veterans' role in the discussion.

Because the student-veteran-facilitated discussions of the scenarios are so integral, we want to spend some time here explaining why we chose the two scenarios and how both the student-veterans and faculty-staff responded to each one. The two scenarios that we chose to highlight here, both deal with forms of PTS, but we have not used

the two in the same workshop and have instead presented other scenarios that deal with different pedagogical situations involving veterans, such as how faculty have responded when student-veterans miss a considerable number of classes but have not registered with our Office of Resources for Students with Disabilities (such registration would authorize special consideration and alternative assignments) or how faculty might address the needs of a student who is a military dependent whose parent is deployed. These two scenarios have been most provocative and have elicited moving insights and more open discussion than we initially thought possible in the workshops.

The first scenario (see Appendix 4) is derived from *The Girls Come Marching Home: Stories of Women Warriors Returning from the War in Iraq*, Kirsten Holmstedt's series of essays about women veterans of the Iraq War. One of Holmstedt's interviewees, Michelle Wilmot, talks about her experiences upon returning home after a tour of duty in Iraq and enrolling in a college philosophy course. As the scenario explains, Michelle felt silenced in the course, invalidated by the instructor and the traditional students in the class who had no idea she was a veteran (like many women vets, Michelle chose to assimilate, rarely identifying as a veteran). When a traditional student, however, made a blanket statement about troops who were killed in action in Iraq, Michelle could no longer remain silent and exploded in anger, saying, "I was in Iraq for a year, so I should be fucking dead? Really? Why don't you come over here and fucking kill me? Come on. Do it!" (191). Obviously, this scenario could easily reproduce every stereotype about the ticking-time-bomb veteran. But as the veterans facilitated discussion about it, they acknowledged that potential, yet curtailed it by asking questions that invited faculty-staff participants to trouble the easy stereotypes and to complicate the scenario in productive ways.

Their first strategy was to focus not on Michelle's motivation but on the instructor's role in the situation. They asked faculty to comment on the fact that the instructor remained silent during the exchange between Michelle and her classmate. They asked what the instructor might have done to prevent such an exchange in the first place. The workshop participants responded vigorously: If the instructor knew the class would be discussing controversial issues relating to war,

she should have ensured everyone would be heard in a respectful and empathetic manner. One veteran panelist stated his belief that the instructor failed in virtually every way, as she didn't prepare the class for the conversation and, after the students' exchange, she missed an important teachable moment, in which she could have provided what we might define, in writing circles, as a "structured reflective activity" to ensure that the situation was diffused and so that all of the students could consider the exchange and refine their positions about the topic. The veteran panel adroitly managed the conversation—and added their own perspectives—when faculty and staff suggested a multitude of contradictory actions the instructor might take: Send Michelle to counseling, and don't allow her back into class until there's evidence from professionals that she wasn't a threat to her classmates. Send Michelle to student conduct for uncivil behavior and swearing in class. Ask Michelle to meet privately with the instructor to discuss her experiences and get insight about how Michelle could feel safe again in the class. Mediate a meeting between the classmates to give them a chance to understand one another's perspectives and to heal from the hard feelings.

Of course, like the faculty-staff participants, the student-veterans had disparate ideas about solutions, and as they spoke to one another about how to handle this situation, they dispelled any notion of a unified "veteran" identity. Neither the veteran panel nor the faculty participants forced a conclusion to this debate about best practice and ethical action; instead, participants obtained a repertoire of possible strategies for addressing difficult conversations and honoring both veterans' and traditional students' experiences.

Perhaps one of the most resonant outcomes of discussing this scenario, however, was the way it challenged deeply-held gendered assumptions. When one of the student-veterans said he would respond differently if "Michelle was a Michael," while another veteran, whose fiancé was also a female medic and served three tours of duty, asserted that the sex of the veteran shouldn't matter. This sparked a lively conversation about gender stereotypes and the hypermasculinity of the "soldier" trope. In this scenario, Michelle Wilmot's fury, experience in combat (which, it is important to point out, was not officially recognized as combat until 2014), and her threat of violence born of PTS were

the traditional masculine characteristics associated with service members. Several participants noted that they hadn't realized how deeply gendered their assumptions about veterans were until this conversation made those assumptions clear.

It is unlikely that this kind of discussion would have been possible without the opportunity to discuss the scenario and to observe the veterans' conflicting responses to it. It is also important to note that Michelle Wilmot continues to advocate for veterans—particularly as an artist who paints her wartime experiences and has had multiple art shows over the last five years. In her painting, she explores anger and PTS as, definitively, women's realm. In a recent interview she explains, "A lot of what is in the media about the military is about sexual trauma. Rape is more palatable to (Americans) than a woman serving in combat. That women are able to defend themselves, able to kill, that is just not part of the gender stereotype" (quoted in Kazikof). Sharing with workshop participants, Wilmot's work and life beyond the explosion in her first-year philosophy course worked to vex implicit bias about female veterans and about veterans who experience PTS.

The second scenario we'll discuss here was recommended by one of our participating student-veterans, whom we will call Daniel. We decided to use the scenario after Daniel mentioned his attempts to express concern about veteran-related issues with CSU's administration. His story elicited so much conversation and shared frustration among those present that we thought it would be a worthy scenario to integrate into subsequent workshops.

On the CSU campus, like many other campuses around the nation, a protest group called "The Genocide Awareness Project," sponsored by organizations like "Survivors of the Abortion Holocaust," "Created Equal," and the "Center for Bio-Ethical Reform," regularly stages a display on our "Free Speech Quad." The display is an installation of sorts, featuring a series of huge posters each ten feet high and firmly braced. This tableau depicts fetuses in various states of dismemberment, bloody afterbirth littered with infant's feet and hands, and other graphic, violent, and disturbing images. The Genocide Awareness Project targets colleges and university campuses,

claiming that “Public universities ostensibly promote ‘genocide awareness,’ but no discussion of genocide is complete without an assessment of whether and why *abortion* is genocide.” This exhibit has prompted protests, such as the one at Pomona College, where students described the posters as “triggers.” Across the country, at the University of Georgia, the Women’s Studies Program teamed with the Sexual Health Advocacy Group to shield onlookers from the graphic images, blocking them with sheets of fabric held up by protestors (see Seitz; Jones; McLaughlin).

Daniel pointed out that for veterans suffering from PTS, even a surprising sound can set off an anxiety attack. Here, Daniel’s confirmation of PTS demonstrates a moment of difference among veterans when considered alongside the earlier points made by Phineas who rejected outright the entire label of PTS. Daniel, meanwhile, maintained that the posters with their vivid depiction of blood, cadavers, and violently dismembered remains could be potent triggers for veterans recently returned from war. He discussed his own efforts at controlling his reactions and mentioned that he was getting counseling, but that it was going to take time. Perhaps most importantly, he talked about his appeals to university officials to ban the posters. He reported that administrators defended the free speech area of the campus plaza. However, Daniel continued to press, believing that university administrators would be persuaded by a rational weighing of rights. He pointed out that the posters represented a violation of his safety on a campus that he knew to be military-friendly, offering a welcoming and supportive campus climate. He explained that other veterans had similar responses to the posters, though they were less likely to voice their experiences because of the ongoing stigma of PTS. The posters were, he explained, akin to shouting “Fire!” in a movie theater and hence did not qualify as free speech. Ultimately, however, no administrator was willing to support his request, which led to Daniel to believe that the university had failed in its promises and its mission.

Daniel’s willingness to talk about his PTS in light of these events offered an exceptional moment among our workshop experiences. First, he had shared this story without our prompting; in virtually every other case with the student-veterans panels, the vets waited for

the scenarios we provided and the participant questions that followed. While they were enthusiastic about responding, they usually didn't introduce new discussion topics. So when Daniel did so, we felt we had been gifted a scenario that would generate new discussions in future workshops. With Daniel's permission, we began to use his scenario regularly, and Daniel even offered the published poem about soldiers that he had sent to university administrators when his plea to put an end to the placards was denied. That poem, which we include here and which he valued greatly, may help to explain the higher purpose that he felt he was responding to without the full understanding and much less appreciation of civilian administrators who responded.

Daniel's description of his own post-traumatic stress response in light of the abortion posters helped us understand what re-traumatization feels like for veterans. He described a classic stress response of elevated heart rate, clammy palms, an inability to think clearly, a sense of disorientation in time and space, and a combination of raw fury and helplessness. He described the necessity of getting away from the site as quickly as possible, and he explained the way the images haunted him for days afterward, generating flashbacks that left him feeling as bad as he did after combat. Daniel's description also helped us to see how disappointing and even damaging the "balanced" approaches of the university can be to those who feel they have earned something more than even-handed neutrality and what can seem a parsimonious dispensation of respect in light of the sacrifices made in the course of military service. Indeed, what seems to have bothered Daniel in part was the cool evenness of the academic approach that the CSU administration took in this case. For people like Daniel, who have served "at the tip of the spear," such disinterest can seem like a jolting betrayal of trust. Daniel's sharing of the poem with us and his request that we distribute it through the workshop conveyed his sense of disillusionment with civilian culture and his eagerness to explain himself and his fellow service members—what they risk and what they sometimes lose. Interestingly, advocates of other causes who were present, such as Pro-choice advocates, sought to join with veterans on activism against the posters, attempting to create a most unlikely alliance. Whether such an alliance would be good or bad or was even likely to materialize, we cannot say. On our campus, we never saw it occur despite initial enthusiasm.

We have learned much from watching student-veteran and faculty interactions. In concert with the claims of Angie Mallory and Doug Downs, we have found that among the many challenges student-veterans face are misplaced expectations of faculty. Given student-veterans' recent experience with leadership models that are quite different from how leadership is enacted in the academy, the resistance to open-ended assignments, like the dissatisfaction with a faculty member's casual appearance, can be perplexing. As Mallory and Downs point out, the dissonance in leadership models is compounded by discomfort with the central tasks of higher education in which students are called to question unqualified claims, to embrace uncertainty, to find their own way rather than be mission-directed, to immerse themselves in ideas rather than commit too early to a single idea, to value and embrace multiple perspectives, to reject dichotomous thinking and be suspicious of polarized views, to revise one's thesis regularly when presented with new information.

Faculty workshops about student-veterans can step into this terrain, preparing faculty to consider the important project of college as a reintroduction into civilian society, a bridge between military service, and civilian workplaces and communities. College can be a place for shifting an initial disappointment in the seeming absence of leadership into an appreciation for leadership's varied forms. College can broaden a student-veteran's repertoire of acceptable models of authority and can unsettle rigid values inculcated in military contexts. But if faculty hope to foster such new understandings, they need far more nuanced insight about the identity work that such efforts entail for student-veterans.

We believe that student-veteran advocates in the higher education setting might engage student-veterans in a kind of comparative literacy exercise, in which the values and norms of military life are brought face to face with varying civilian values. Objectifying such differences, making them explicit and worthy of study, might be one way to engage student-veterans in this effort as an intellectual exercise that is worthy of their commitment and talent. The substantial project of reconfiguring military norms into approaches that are workable in civilian environments can draw specifically on the strength-based approaches that are common to military habits

of mind. And given the potency of the induction processes that service members have been through in their military service, it may make sense to acknowledge that military service involves “forms of specialized literacy learning that leave a lasting imprint, often becoming central to the identity of the people who experience them” (Doe and Doe). Acknowledging the value of this imprint to future negotiations of leadership and authority could be seen as a central instructional role of college faculty working with student-veterans. Without such bridges, civilian life might remain a disappointment, the best years of the young veterans’ life already behind him or her.

Given that military induction literacies obtain their focus from stakes that could not be higher, there is likely no comparable form of induction back into civilian sectors. But we can certainly do better than the military’s own “transition assistance,” which too often involves superficial out-processing that blithely launches the veteran back into the civilian context. Such shocking abandonment suggests not just a casual disinterest in the veteran’s unspecified future but a betrayal of the thoroughness with which induction *into* the military was conducted. Weak transition processes then too often also compound in civilian society where the challenges of transition are simply not understood, much less taken up, largely because so few people understand the task at hand. The civilian setting of college offers various ways in which reintegration can be made explicitly meaningful, even if it is inevitably, also, difficult. Eschewing the thorough efficiencies of military induction in favor of messy and varied analytical approaches can prepare the student-veteran for the variety of persons and experiences he or she will encounter in civilian life and provide tools for the evaluation of options. Student-veterans might come to understand in a critical and analytic way why induction is so powerfully efficient (and necessary) in military settings and yet also undesirable in civilian ones.

Our workshops only began to address such complex topics since we attempted, in only modest ways, to introduce student-veterans to faculty and vice-versa. We want to confront the misapprehensions of veterans by faculty and vice versa, to address beginning assumptions in which faculty tended to lump all veterans together, seeing them as broken survivors of combat, and veterans tended to see universities

as hotbeds of liberal politics where one need always to keep the guard up when dealing with faculty. Over the course of a workshop, those assumptions had substantially faded. However, we also found that on our campus the needs of veterans were not stable but even today are shifting. Over time, fewer of the student-veterans we encountered were in need of immediate transition assistance from combat contexts. Instead, veterans' diverse, often non-combat military experiences, required increasingly nuanced responses, and more and more of the student-veterans that we observed, wanted new experiences that helped them to separate from the military. This portion of the student-veterans population wanted full immersion in the civilian college environment—to essentially undergo a kind of full and fast induction into civilian life through the structured pathway of college.

Hart and Thompson's national survey points out the various classroom experiments undertaken to address student-veteran demographics, including classroom models that singled veterans out for cohort instruction, models that adopted military themes/topics, and models that went for veterans less directly by establishing veteran-friendly policies. Their examination of these efforts suggests that early efforts may have focused on the student-veteran as combat veteran and on stereotypes about military service that filled in for evidence-based understanding of the varied experiences of military service. At the same time, while most veteran-friendly faculty today realize there is no consistent experience of military service, much less a universal experience of combat, they also recognize that there are features of military experience that are predictable and important to recognize. Such features include respect for rank, an appreciation for disciplined ways of thinking and acting, vigilance in regard to safety, and high expectations for performance. These elements cut across time, space, branch, and even MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) and therefore all faculty should know them.

Each time, as our workshops approached their end, it was common for the faculty and staff to offer their thanks to the veterans for participating in the workshop. Nearly every time, this moment led to broader faculty-staff statements of thanks to the veterans. These statements of appreciation occurred in ways that were organic and earned. They offered the civilian faculty-staff space and opportunity

to legitimately state their appreciation in ways that far exceed the predictable and clichéd “Thank you for your service.” The effect was to offer a small gesture of healing across the military-civilian divide. As we might expect, the student-veterans returned the favor, warmly accepting the professors’ thanks and offering their own.

APPENDIX 1

FACT SHEET: OEF/OIF VETERANS BY THE NUMBERS (U.S.)¹

Over 2 million U.S. citizens have served since 9/11. This is one half of one percent of the American population. In contrast 12% of population served in WWII and 2% in Vietnam.

Demographic Breakdown

- 89% male; 11% female
- 64% under age 30; 30% between 30-34; 5% over 35
- 74% white, 10% Latino, 7% African-American
- 48% of OEF and OIF veterans are married. Post 9/11, one in five veterans is divorced.
- Vets are the parents of 6 million of children.
- 93% have high school diploma; 15% have a bachelor's degree
- 11% are officers and 89% are enlisted

OEF/OIF Veteran Challenges

- 50% report mental or physical injury as result of OEF or OIF wars
- Over 3000 OEF/OIF veterans in the U.S. today are homeless
- Unemployment rates for OEF/OIF veterans vary between 10-20% depending on demographic group. Women veterans are particularly hard hit by unemployment with a rate estimated to be double that of males in the same demographic group. Most current figures: For October 2013 the post 9-11 veteran unemployment rate is 10% (9.5% male, 11.5% female), which equates to 246,000 unemployed post 9-11 vets. This number does not include the approximately 1 million that are in some type of civilian schooling or training. The national unemployment rate is 7%.
- Suicide rates for OEF/OIF vets ages 20-24 are 2-4X higher than the civilian rate

1 Most data derived from "All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service"—Civic Enterprises 2009, a public advocacy group families and wounded vets ; 2) 88%—disaster relief; 86%—at-risk youth; 82%—older Americans; 69%—the environment

Veteran Survey Highlights

- 13% report their transition home is going well
- 90% believe Americans can learn something from the example of national service of veterans
- 90% strongly believe national service is a basic responsibility of every American
- 70% are motivated to volunteer in their communities but of this group, over half of those who have not yet volunteered said they had trouble finding information on service opportunities and have not been invited to participate where opportunities did exist. Causes vets are particularly passionate about are
1) 90%—military

APPENDIX 2

TRANSITIONING FROM MILITARY SERVICE TO ACADEMIC CONTEXTS²

The transition of a veteran from military service to a college environment produces a unique set of challenges and stresses. Reintegration challenges faced by Post-9/11 veterans include:

- Developing a primary identity other than as a service member.
- Difficulty relating to and connecting with traditional college students. Age differences and the experience of service and/or combat frequently cause veterans to feel alienated from traditional college students. Typical student concerns like grades, parties, and joining organizations seldom have the same significance to veterans, who often voice a sense of greater maturity and seriousness than traditional students.
- Finding importance and meaning in experiences and ideas that are not urgent or that don't affect a great number of people. Campus life and concerns may seem trivial compared to those found in service.
- Negotiating the structural and procedural differences between the military and higher education bureaucracies (e.g., knowing the rules and mores of the campus, where to go to get things done, how to address professors and others in positions of authority).
- Making a much greater number of decisions in a far more complex world. While the potential consequences of a combatant's decisions are staggering, the total number of autonomous daily decisions is quite small when compared to college life.
- Negotiating collaborative and small group discussion activities. Military decisions are often made quickly and individually (by a superior), so veterans may need time to

² Information adapted from two sources: 1) "Research for Returning War Veterans." www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/Resources/veterans.html and 2) "Best Practices for the "Classroom" www.dva.va.gov/veterans success include relationships, social support, and access to alternative solutions when problems arise.

adjust to the deliberate discussions and collaborative decision-making common in college pedagogy. Concrete outcomes of collaborative work may address this issue.

- Developing a sense of safety on campus (e.g., choosing classroom seats that allow for monitoring of others and rapid escape, such as sitting with their back to the wall and near a door).
- Negotiating financial challenges and change of status connected to income.
- Boredom (e.g., missing the task-focused, hectic schedule of service and/or the adrenaline rush experienced in the 'high' of battle).
- Having difficulty returning to their role as children of their parents. The maturing process of service may cause younger veterans to be less accommodating to parental expectations and demands.
- These issues, when coupled with the challenges related to returning to general civilian life, place returning veteran students at a significantly higher risk of dropping out. The key variables for

APPENDIX 3

TEACHING STUDENT-VETERANS: STRENGTH-BASED PEDAGOGIES

Student-Vets are engaged, adult learners and:

- Are mission and project oriented and hence complete tasks
- Are time conscious and hence manage time toward completion
- Are able to give and receive orders
- Respect authority
- Generally speak with clarity and conviction
- Maintain awareness of the “guy” or “gal” next to them—look out for buddies
- Have often traveled and seen some of the world

Challenges they may face:

- Although high school graduation rates are higher than the national norm, they may have struggled with their studies
- May not have grown up in reading households
- May be first-generation college
- May feel that the defining experience of their lives is over
- May expect a certain kind of authority at the front of the classroom and misunderstand the cultural shift demanded by a new form of authority and expertise
- Misunderstand priorities, perhaps advantaging surface polish at the expense of deeper critical thinking
- Have little or no familiarity with the “look” of academic products

Many student-veterans:

- Are prepared to be asked their opinion on world events
- Seek opportunity to share knowledge gained during service
- Look for peer leadership opportunities
- Respond well to mentoring and seek it in the academy
- Wish to be held to a high standard
- Possess particularly strong speaking skills
- Seek explicit guidance but may be served by expanding their repertoire into less explicit guidance and will cooperate (and grow) if the rationale for the approach is explained. Explain why it's important for the student (and student-veteran in

particular) to develop his or her own topic for a research paper

- Demonstrate high levels of professionalism and polish in finished products

APPENDIX 4

PEDAGOGICAL SCENARIOS FOR DISCUSSION

Scenario 1: Michelle

In *The Girls Come Marching Home: Stories of Women Warriors Returning from the War in Iraq* (Stackpole Books, 2009) Kirsten Holmstedt tells the story of Michelle Wilmot, a 24 year old Latina Army sergeant who had just returned home from Iraq. Wilmot joined the Army when she was 17, and like many other veterans re-entering college, Wilmot chose to assimilate and not draw attention to her veteran status. Holmstedt explains, "If she was going to talk about the war, she preferred to discuss it with people who had been on the battlefield and had gone through similar experiences" (192). In a philosophy course, students were discussing the ways that moral perspectives on war had changed throughout history when a fellow student expressed her position that "what American soldiers were doing in Iraq was wrong and that they all deserved to die" (191). Wilmot's response was immediate: "Excuse me?" Wilmot said. "I was in Iraq for a year, so I should be fucking dead? Really? Why don't you come over here and fucking kill me? Come on. Do it!" (191)

Holmstedt explains that Wilmot often felt silenced in her college classes, and that, in this altercation, "She reverted to her role as sergeant, and the person she was talking to became a private" (193). "Wilmot felt her entire year on the battlefield being invalidated by this student and the others, including the instructor, who remained silent" (193). She explains that "It sickened her to look at her classmates. . . . If she had to listen to anymore students talk about the war as if they knew what was going on, she would get up and smash a desk over their heads" (215).

Scenario 2: Daniel

Daniel, a student-veteran explains the difficulty presented to student-veterans who experience PTSD by calling attention to the giant anti-abortion placards that are posted in the free speech area several times a year. These placards, he points out, are PTSD triggers for many student-veterans. Daniel states, "Those who have been in combat do not need to be revisited by images of dismembered body parts."

When Daniel asked that university officials prohibit the placards, he was told that they were exhibited in the free speech area on campus, and thus the university would not refuse the anti-abortion group an opportunity to express their perspectives. Daniel, in a response to the university, acknowledged that he and other vets are fully aware of the importance of the free speech area. However, he also pointed out that one person's freedom of speech cannot impinge on another's safety, and these placards do just that.

Daniel's continued requests that the placards be banned have gone unanswered. To drive home his point to university officials that he understands freedom of speech better than most, he sent them this poem:

IT IS THE SOLDIER

BY CHARLES M. PROVINCE*

It is the Soldier, not the minister, who has given us freedom of religion.
It is the Soldier, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the Soldier, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech.

It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer, who has given us freedom to protest.

It is the Soldier, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the Soldier, not the politician, who has given us the right to vote.

It is the Soldier who salutes the flag,

Who serves beneath the flag,

Who allows the protester to burn the flag,

And whose coffin is draped by the flag.

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