



How to Help Military & Veteran Families

FOR DISABILITY OFFICES AT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Since the GI Bill was introduced during World War II, millions of veterans have used their earned education benefits—drastically increasing the number of veterans on postsecondary campuses, especially at two-year institutions. Tens of thousands of veterans returning to civilian life from recent conflicts have endured physical injuries such as burns, amputations and impaired vision and hearing; many more have sustained cognitive injuries such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Military-affiliated students face challenges that include social adjustments, financial burdens and reluctance to disclose their newly acquired disabilities. Emerging research shows that participation in postsecondary education can play an important role in mitigating some of the effects caused by these injuries and trauma.¹ Many of these veterans will use educational benefits to return to school and improve the quality of their lives by earning postsecondary degrees.



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Did you know?

- » Military-affiliated students transitioning to higher education bring with them a degree of maturity, experience with leadership, familiarity with diversity, and a mission-focused orientation that exceeds those of nearly all of their peers.² However, many of these students acquired these assets at great personal expense, including battlefield injuries.³
- » The most common injuries facing today's returning service members and veterans are predominantly sustained hearing or vision loss, PTSD and TBI.⁴
- » The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) prohibit discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities by covered entities, including most colleges and universities. These laws protect many wounded service members and veterans.⁵
- » Whether a student with TBI is in vocational school or college, transitioning back to school post-injury can be difficult on many levels. Problems at school that result from a TBI can include: attention and concentration; memory; planning and organization; reasoning and problem solving; expressive speech or language problems; impulsivity; difficulty processing complex information; social interaction.⁶
- » Other challenges often associated with difficulty in classroom performance may include the effect of additional stressors (home, work, unit, etc.), sleep disturbance, difficulty with time management and panic attacks⁷

Practical Applications

- Most service members and veterans are new to their disabilities, and are not familiar with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 eligibility requirements. Additionally, most veterans will be unaware of their specific rights as students with disabilities or how to go about receiving academic accommodations.⁸ Educating a student about available options can help them better understand the process.
- When meeting with a student veteran who is experiencing academic performance concerns, it may be useful to recommend commonly accepted accommodations for concentration, memory, test taking and stress alleviation. Faculty members may allow the following provisions:
 - › Permit in-class use of laptop computers for note taking.
 - › Be willing to wear microphones and provide improved listening technology.
 - › Provide handouts and texts available in electronic formats.
 - › Ensure required texts are available in an accessible electronic format.
 - › Plan ahead to ensure all audio clips, videos and movies are captioned, as many veterans have experienced hearing loss. Captioning may also help keep them on track.
 - › Permit the in-class use of tape recorders or other audio recording devices as memory aids.
 - › Administer tests on the computer.
 - › Permit completion of assignments or tests in a private room or testing center with extended time limits.



- › Allow students the ability to take a short break during class sessions or testing environments when stressful situations arise.
 - Student service members and veterans with newly acquired injuries may not yet know how their disability will affect their learning. For example, a student may have acquired a learning disability as a result of a TBI, having had no previous history of such a disability. Allowing the student to seek services after the term starts, and assessing their needs as they arise will greatly assist in the student's return to the classroom.⁹
- The psychological process for accepting their disability status will take time. At first, military-affiliated students may view their disability as a sign of weakness. Reassuring the student that using various accommodations to help them overcome these challenges can ease their burden of asking for help.

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Additional Resources

A disability should not deter a military-affiliated student from using the educational benefits he or she has earned. On average and over the course of a lifetime, a college graduate will earn nearly one million dollars more than a high school graduate. This drastic earnings gap is even more pronounced when degreed persons with disabilities are compared non-degreed persons with disabilities. Student service members and veterans with disabilities have specific rights and laws protecting them, but how can postsecondary institutions best support veterans with disabilities on their campuses? Below is a list of resources for disability offices to familiarize themselves with military-specific information. Many administrators will find that most perceived barriers and challenges can be removed or addressed, or simply do not exist.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

- › *ADA: Know Your Rights – Returning Service Members with Disabilities*, www.ada.gov/servicemembers_adainfo.html
- › *American Council on Education, Supporting Student Veterans*
- › *Accommodating Student Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder*, www.acenet.edu/newsroom/Documents/Accommodating-Student-Veterans-with-Traumatic-Brain-Injury-and-Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder.pdf
- › *Military Students and Veterans*, www.acenet.edu/higher-education/Pages/Military-Students-and-Veterans.aspx
- › *Toolkit for Veteran Friendly Institutions*, vetfriendlytoolkit.acenet.edu
- › *Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center*, <http://dvbic.dcoe.mil>
- › *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf
- › *National Resource Directory (NRD) for Wounded, Ill, and Injured Service Members*, www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov
- › *Military Family Research Institute, Frequently Asked Questions about the Military and Student Service Members and Veterans*, www.mfri.purdue.edu/FAQstudentveterans
- › *Student Veterans of America*, www.studentveterans.org
- › *U.S. Department of Education – Office of Civil Rights (OCR) Letter to Veterans*, www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/back-to-school-2008.html
- › *Veterans with Disabilities: Promoting Success in Higher Education*, www.ahead.org/publications#bo16

For a printer-friendly version of this please visit www.mfri.purdue.edu/howtohelp

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About MFRI

The goal of the Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University is to create meaningful relationships that bring organizations together in support of military families. Working with researchers and practitioners from both the military and civilian communities, MFRI strives to develop outreach and research programs grounded in scientific evidence.



About the *How to Help* Series

The *How to Help* series equips communities to better serve service members, veterans and their families. The series offers effective, evidence-based guidance on how best to help military and veteran families given the unique challenges they face. Each *How to Help* addresses a different segment of that community, such as extended family, friends and neighbors; teachers; early childhood educators; faith-based groups; and professional service providers. We hope that by increasing understanding of the unique stresses, obstacles and opportunities that often accompany military service; we can strengthen communities by building their capacity to better support the military families within them.

Developed by THE MILITARY FAMILY RESEARCH INSTITUTE at Purdue University
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United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture



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The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the reviewers, the Department of Defense, their officers, or employees.

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