

Because of the Post-9/11 GI Bill recently started, there will be many more veterans attending colleges and universities throughout the country in the near future. Growing up as a military dependent and my service on active duty give me insight into what many individuals have experienced in the military and may experience when attending institutions of higher education. Military veterans tend to have had unique responsibilities and opportunities by the time they are discharged. These experiences often separate them from traditional students enrolling in colleges or universities for the first time. I attribute many of my professional choices to my military-related background. Consequently, I would like to continue serving the military and its veterans by researching and developing higher education programs that focus on them.

My father retired from the military after more than twenty years of service. Because of this, I grew up attending Department of Defense Dependent Schools, shopping at post exchanges and commissaries, and answering the question, "Where are you from?" with extended answers. I attended college immediately after I completed high school. Upon graduating from college, I followed my father's example and joined the US Army. I served four years on active duty and am now a veteran myself. Though I already had a degree, I went to Basic Combat Training (Basic) before attending Officer Candidate School (OCS). Completing Basic allowed me to relate more to the soldiers I later supervised. OCS also helped because I learned about the Army from previously enlisted soldiers who would soon be commissioned officers. They shared knowledge with me regarding the culture of the Army which it might otherwise taken me years to learn. For instance, officers rarely lead unit physical training (PT) sessions, but they are expected to be in excellent physical condition. Officers who are unable to pass their PT exams are not well-respected by their soldiers. Being aware of the thought processes and the cultural atmosphere of the Army helped me tailor tasks and requests to my audience (e.g., the senior enlisted person in the battalion, the Command Sergeant Major or my direct supervisor, the Battalion Executive Officer). In the same way knowledge of soldiers helped during my time on active duty, it will help in my pursuit of a Doctor of Arts degree that focuses on veterans.

After separating from the Army, I went back to school to complete a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) in International Business. My first semester was very challenging, but in a social sense, rather than an academic one. Interacting with civilians on a daily basis felt like uncharted territory. I could not understand why people were not regularly moving with a sense of purpose when going to classes, meetings, and events. When individuals walked in twenty minutes late for class, I expected them to be slightly reprimanded by the professors, and it confused me when that did not happen. Additionally, my colleagues and I participated in several team projects throughout the program. Within our face-to-face meetings, I always expected one person to be the leader, similar to a chain of command. Instead, I found myself faced with a lot of collaboration and discussion, and it would take much longer to reach consensus. Though I appreciated that we were all able to express our ideas, it conflicted with my thoughts that we should just make a decision and move on. And so, the transition from soldier to civilian required an adjustment in my way of thinking. For many military personnel now separating from service, returning to the civilian world also involves adjusting from the trials of war. The transition for them will involve even more change, and it may be difficult for non-veterans to comprehend the resulting implications.

In observing higher education, one may notice the senior population (over age 65) differs from the students who are traditionally enrolled in college for the first time. Likewise, veterans vary from the traditional first-time students. Servicemembers often leave the military having had much more responsibility and life experiences than their peers of the same age. Time in the military allows one to develop skills and abilities that are not easily captured in paperwork, but are invaluable, nonetheless. With respect to professional development, military training permits one to develop excellent transferable skills, though he or she may not be fully conscious of it until preparing to leave the service. Throwing a hand grenade is not a useful skill in a corporate environment, but knowing how to effectively communicate information to an audience certainly is. Donning a nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare mask is not a required daily task in most businesses, but paying attention to details could save a company from legal and financial troubles. These are a few examples of the qualities that soldiers and veterans employ on a daily basis which set them apart from traditional first-time

college and university students. ***Benefits such as these are not always easily described or quantified, but they do exist.***

My military knowledge and academic background have together provided a strong foundation for working on higher education programs geared toward veterans. I would like to continue contributing through civil service and teaching. ***A Doctor of Arts degree focused on veterans higher education would allow me to capitalize on my education, as well as the managerial and leadership skills honed during my time in the Army and within the Defense Department.***