

House Committee on Veterans Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

Field Hearing

Best Practices in Veterans Education and Transition to Civilian Life

Texas Tech University

November 17, 2017

Witness Statement

Lou Ortiz, Colonel, USAF Retired

Director, Military & Veterans Programs

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the House Veterans Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, welcome to Texas Tech, and thank you for the opportunity today to describe our main campus programs that directly support the education goals of our military and veteran students who have served and sacrificed for our nation.

Texas Tech University Military & Veterans Programs was created in 2010 as a department solely dedicated to helping veterans and their families succeed. We currently serve more than 2,200 student veterans and dependents on the Texas Tech University main campus and have developed a veteran support structure and culture that serves their needs. We are proud to assist these students in transitioning from military to academic life, providing them with a campus support structure that presents the best opportunity for academic success, and preparing our veteran graduates to enter the workforce. We serve undergraduate, graduate, and law students on our main campus and satellite locations across the state including Waco, Dallas, Junction, Fredericksburg and Marble Falls, Texas.

Our core mission is to assist veterans in obtaining the federal and state education benefits they have earned by virtue of the service to our nation. VA federal benefits we administer include:

1. Chapter 30 Montgomery GI Bill
2. Chapter 31 Vocational Rehabilitation
3. Chapter 32 Veterans Educational Assistance Program
4. Chapter 33 Post 9/11 GI Bill
5. Chapter 1606 Reserve GI Bill
6. Chapter 1607 Reserve Educational Assistance Program
7. Chapter 35 Dependent's Educational Assistance

We also administer the State of Texas Hazlewood Act (Exemption) for Texas veterans as well as DoD Tuition Assistance Programs for students who are on active duty.

Beyond our core benefits role, the Military & Veterans Programs Office serves as an integration and resource office for all military and veteran related organizations, activities, events on the main campus. We work hand in hand with the Student Veterans of America Chapter-- Veterans Association at Texas Tech, Tech Law Military Association, Faculty & Student Veterans Association, Army and Air Force ROTC, and the Military & Veterans National Alumni Chapter. We also partner and coordinate with key veteran support organizations and resources throughout the local community. We place significant emphasis on providing a supportive environment and culture by instituting programs at three key stages for veterans at Texas Tech University—transition to campus, campus support, and job search and employment.

1. Transition from Military to Academic Life

- a. Tech Vet Boot Camp – Before the start of each Fall and Spring semester, MVP hosts Tech Vet Boot Camp. Our two-day Boot Camp is designed to help veterans transition to college life by providing best practices in study skills, time management, writing, and money management. Special guests include the Brain Performance Institute offering high performance brain training program known as Strategic Memory Advance Reasoning Training. TechVet Boot Camp is a great way to meet other veteran students and network at the start of the semester. As non-traditional students, peer to peer interaction with other veterans is vital to establishing social connections in their new academic setting. We are developing an expanded program of one week duration that will incorporate additional math and writing and information on community resources.

- b. Stars and Stripes Lounge – Centrally located in the Student Union Building, our Stars & Stripes Lounge opened in Spring 2014. It serves as a study and social area for military and veterans and is furnished with tables, computer terminals, a big screen TV.
- 2. Providing a Support System and Culture for Veteran Success on Campus – As a preface to outlining veteran support, I must tell you that the vast majority of our military and veteran students are emotionally mature, goal oriented, mission-driven, and self-sufficient role models. Academically, they perform equal to or better than our general student population. However, based on their unique military service experiences that may include combat, some veterans do experience social, administrative, financial, and physical or mental health challenges in transitioning from military to the classroom.

As a starting point for campus support, there are over 300 faculty and staff members who are veterans at Texas Tech. These faculty members serve as role models, advisors and mentors for current student veterans.

Another key component of our support structure is a comprehensive Green Zone training program that incorporates 7 distinct training modules for faculty and staff.

- a. Green Zone –Our Green Zone program is tailored to provide increased awareness and understanding of our veteran population and guidance on where to refer them for assistance. Over 700 TTU faculty and staff members have attended one or more of 7 training modules. Our unique multi-module approach, incorporating training by subject matter experts in key support areas on campus, allows faculty and staff to gain a more comprehensive understanding of veteran challenges, how to recognize them, and where to refer veterans for assistance.

- i. Module I: Core Training is open to all faculty and staff members as the first module of veterans' advocacy training and a prerequisite for all other modules. This course is designed to assist faculty and staff to better serve student veterans and their family members on campus. Attendees learn about the transition issues veterans face as they as they leave military service and enter campus life, specific information about Texas Tech's veteran students, and insight about campus and community resources. Green Zone module I must be taken before subsequent training modules can be scheduled.
- ii. Module II: Understanding Benefits is taught by MVP certifying officials for faculty and staff who are interested in an overview of how federal and state veterans' benefits work. Learning objectives include having a basic understanding of federal, state, and DOD benefit programs offered at TTU including eligibility & awards, and basic responsibilities required of the university and the students.
- iii. Module III: Mental Health is taught by Student Counseling Services for faculty and staff members who are interested in gaining a greater understanding of mental health issues faced by veterans and service members. Attendees will increase their understanding of mental health concerns sometimes faced by veterans and service members; decrease the stigma of mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, and PTS; explore the nature of interpersonal violence and sexual assault and; be provided with referral resources.

- iv. Module IV: Student Disability Services is for faculty and staff members who are interested in a basic overview of how TTU Student Disability Services works with veterans and service members on campus. Learning objectives include understanding Student Disability Services programs and services offered, learning how students can register; gaining a basic understanding about applicable federal/ state laws and guidelines; understanding student responsibilities; and gaining greater familiarity with resources and support available to faculty and staff on campus.
- v. Module V: Advising Veterans is taught by senior MVP staff for faculty and staff advisors of veterans and family members on campus. Learning objectives include a veteran ‘snapshot’ and their expectations, responsibilities of the advisor in the context of Veterans Educational Benefits, responsibility of the school in reporting to the state/federal government, and best practices in advising veterans.
- vi. Module VI: Hiring Veterans is presented by Human Resources and open to faculty and staff members who are interested in hiring veterans at Texas Tech University in their department. Trainees will learn about the soft skills that all veterans bring to the workforce, how to use the “Veterans’ Only job posting”, and “Veteran Direct Appointment hiring initiative” authorized by state law.
- vii. Module VII: Other veteran, military, or family related topics are explored in this module. Guest speakers from on or off campus may present on topics of interest to the military and veteran community.

- b. Veteran Liaisons – In addition to our faculty and staff veterans, we have over 35 veteran liaisons in each academic college and major staff support function who are dedicated to veteran success. They provide front-line support for veterans who have questions or need assistance in their respective colleges or offices. A prerequisite is attendance at Green Zone Module 1, Core Training. Liaisons meet with the Military & Veterans Programs Office staff quarterly to share information and report specific veteran related information.
3. Transition to Employment – As veterans succeed in earning their degrees, their next step after graduation is finding employment and beginning their career. Career preparation begins before they complete their degree program. The University Career Center has developed a Veterans Career Program for veterans to receive the assistance they need to be successful in preparing for their future careers. A career center counselor meets with them to identify individual career needs and creates a career development plan. Among the services provided are career testing, job search resources, career workshops, mock interviews, and translating military experience into career readiness.
 - a. Camo to Corporate Program – In Spring 2017, Military & Veterans Programs partnered with the University Center to develop a pilot Camo to Corporate Programs.
 - i. This program is for graduating veteran seniors designed to better prepare them for job search and employment
 - ii. Students signed agreements to participate in six (6) evening sessions including a Strong interest inventory, resume and cover letter writing, networking, interviewing, etiquette, and proper dress

- iii. As part of the program, veterans who complete all sessions acquire valuable skills job search skills and a tailored business suit to prepare for the professional world after graduation
- b. Military & Veterans National Alumni Chapter – In May 2016, recognizing the value of a broad network of military and veteran alumni across the state and nation, we created a Military & Veterans National Alumni Chapter. One of the primary goals of our chapter is to connect current students and graduating seniors with alumni who are serving in business, corporations, government, and the military. We have begun connecting alumni employers who may provide internship, mentoring, and employment opportunities to our students through the career center and Camo to Corporate program. Additionally, the alumni chapter benefits students by providing education scholarships for veteran students.

We are proud of our Texas Tech veterans and do our best to recognize them at every opportunity. One way we do this is our unique camouflage stole that we award at a special ceremony the day before graduation. The stole is highly visible when veterans walk at graduation and they are singled out for their service by leadership at each graduation ceremony.

This is a brief overview of the Texas Tech programs that support the remarkable men and women veteran students who have served our nation. Central to our success is the strong commitment of campus leadership in providing the resources, facilities, and support that extends across our administration, faculty, staff, and local community. We very much appreciate the support of the House Economic Opportunity Subcommittee in providing your leadership, legislation, and resources for our veterans at Texas Tech and across the nation. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today. I look forward to your questions.