

PAVE helps student veterans adjust to college life

Posted by Nathan Clark on October 18, 2013 at 7:00 am

Transitioning from the structured environment of military service to college life can be a frustrating experience for incoming student veterans.

A new peer mentorship program at Central Michigan University hopes to make this transition easier by offering counseling from the kinds of people they recently left behind: Other veterans.

The new veteran advising program Peer Advisors for Veteran Education, or PAVE, is a peer mentorship program that connects incoming student veterans with other student veterans who have been living the college life for a while and can help new veterans adjust.

"We can empathize with veterans better than anyone else," said Peer Adviser and Flint senior Led Marq Hicks. "It's frustrating to get the 'uh huhs' from counselors who don't fully understand what we are going through. We have a connection to our fellow veterans that cannot be quantified."

PAVE is a pilot program formed by the University of Michigan's Depression Center with only three other participating schools: Auburn University, the University of Maryland and George Washington University.

The CMU program has four lead advisers and seven applicants to be regular advisers, all of whom are veterans. Being a veteran is a requirement to be an adviser in the program.

"I had a friend who got out of the military and didn't know what to do," said lead adviser and Indian River senior Will Rigling. "He didn't have the kind of direction he had back in the military, so he was just lost."

Simply being a veteran adds credibility to the program when a veteran is looking for help, as many veterans might be reluctant to talk to non-veterans about problems and concerns.

Professor or instructors might have a hard time dealing with veterans because they might not fully understand what is or isn't a problem for a veteran. The PAVE advisers can act as a liaison to fix problems and ease tensions between the student veteran and the university.

The PAVE program is not a registered student organization and does not have to follow RSO bylaws or reporting policies, making the group completely independent.

Prior to the creation of the PAVE program, student vets seeking help went to and still can go to the Counseling Center located on the first floor of Foust Hall.

"The Veteran Resource Center has brought a wealth of experience for helping student veterans," said Counseling Center Director Ross J. Rapaport. "The center has helped to address many problems that veterans deal with."

Rapaport recently went to a special training session at Michigan State University that covered deployment terminology, special conditions veterans may have and how to be mindful of what veterans have been through.

The Counseling Center is a free service provided to CMU students to help them with any problems they may be having outside of academic counseling which is handled within the academic departments.

CMU was chosen to participate in the program because of Veteran Resource Center Director Steve Relinger's dedication and determination to make CMU as veteran friendly as possible.