



## NERDSCHOLAR'S FAVORITE UNIVERSITY VETERAN SUPPORT PROGRAMS

*By Laura Pereyra on 22 MAY 2013*

About [250,000](#) men and women leave the military each year after honorably serving our country and face the challenging task of transitioning from the war-zone into civilian life. Many take advantage of the G.I. Bill, which provides a range of benefits to veterans from helping them finance their educations to helping them obtain low-interest loans to start businesses. All in all, going back to college and translating military skills into civilian careers is a daunting feat.

Luckily, higher education institutions have increasingly taken measures to address these challenges. Many schools provide counseling services, build centers to cultivate communities for vets, and provide dedicated staff to help them transition into the academic rigors of college and their future careers.

Our returning veterans are capable of making contributions to our colleges and workforces as they are disciplined, prepared to face uncertain circumstances, and carry the determination necessary to accomplish unnerving missions.

Former Virginia Senator and former Secretary of the Navy [Jim Webb](#), who updated the G.I. bill for post 9/11 veterans, put it this way, “[Veterans] paid, some with their lives, some through wounds and disabilities, some through their emotional scars, some through the lost opportunities and delayed entry into civilian careers which had already begun for many of their peers who did not serve.”

Helping our veterans gain college educations and jobs after graduation is a duty that many higher education institutions take very seriously.

To celebrate our veterans this Memorial Day, NerdScholar names our favorite Veteran Support programs in three major categories, including those that provide:

- Career and education transition programs;
- Veteran student community organizations and housing; and
- Counseling and wellness for our honored veterans

## **Career and Education Transition Programs-These unique programs help veterans translate military experience into civilian careers; veterans are especially good in operational roles where the future is uncertain.**

### **1. The University of Tennessee Chattanooga's Veterans Entrepreneurship Program**

The [University of Tennessee Chattanooga's](#) business school created the Veterans Entrepreneurship [five-week program](#) to teach veterans entrepreneurship skills. The first phase involves them shaping their business concepts. In the second phase, they go through an intense 8-day in residence boot camp involving experiential workshops and lectures by renowned entrepreneurship faculty who represent a variety of nationally ranked programs around the country. When they enter the third and final phase, veterans are provided with 10 months of mentorship to build their ventures by getting peer feedback and network with technical experts. Candidates interested in the program have to apply to be accepted.

Next week, 21 men and women from all branches of service will begin phase 1 of the program to hone their business skills. The program has seen great success. Take 2013 alum Bret Moldenhauer for example. He came to the VEP program with his existing acupuncture business and used the tools he learned to expand and rebrand it. With the program's help he has built a high end world class Olympic Sports Medicine Practice where he cares for world class athletes like Dee Dee Trotter, Olympic medalist Tyson Gay, and Olympic gold medalist Lo Lo Jones.

### **2.The Florida State University's Entrepreneurship Bootcamp**

Florida State University has an [Entrepreneurship Bootcamp](#) for Veterans with Disabilities that offers student veterans the chance to get business skills that can potentially help them start their own small business. Veterans go through rigorous training modules moderated by Florida State University Faculty and seasoned entrepreneurs. Ashley Edwards, Program Coordinator at FSU, was excited to share that, "[they] are excited to be hosting our 6th EBV program coming up this June. We have another great group of veterans who are excited to bring their business ideas to life and a wonderful group of speakers and staff to help them with this process."

After the boot camp is completed FSU gives veterans 12 months' support to help them launch their endeavors. This bootcamp program helped [Trisha Hartmann](#) start her own business after getting medically discharged. She makes personal care products such as soaps, lotions, and bath salts, which she has successfully commercialized using websites like Etsy. Programs like this are invaluable for entrepreneurial veterans seeking to start their own company ventures.

### **3. University of Pittsburgh's ELeVATE Veterans Program**

Transitioning back into college from military service is challenging and the [ELeVATE Veterans Program](#) at the University of Pittsburgh seeks to bridge this gap. To start their program, veterans must complete a ten week research experience project, begin classes at a local college, and work with a vocational coordinator to create an individualized plan for reaching their academic and career goals. Once their goals are defined and they formally enroll in the University of Pittsburgh, the ELeVATE program provides a supportive community of both veterans and traditional undergraduate students. In this way, veterans can share their experience and focused dedication while learning the academic and study skills they will need to succeed. The program focuses on wounded warriors and is accessible to veterans of all abilities.

"The new generation of vets are service oriented...They embrace the opportunity to give back to other veterans, especially Wounded Warriors by engaging in rehabilitation engineering research projects," said Maria Milleville, education and outreach coordinator.

Students have the opportunity to leverage such a great resource. Matt Hannan, 2012 ELeVATE student, said the following, "My experience in the ELeVATE program was a life altering experience that afforded me the chance to get back on my feet after my medical separation from the United States Marine Corps after 15 years of honorable service. I was undecided which path I wanted to take prior to ELeVATE. Now, I am a University of Pittsburgh student, working for my undergraduate degree in advocacy, and planning to go to graduate school for rehabilitation counseling in the years to come."

### **4. Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families**

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families at [Syracuse](#) offers the [Veterans Career Transition Program](#) to help veterans translate their military skills and education into successful careers. They focus on helping veterans overcome the challenges of developing the soft skills necessary for a civilian corporate or government environment and help them communicate how their military training can make them more competitive in the labor market. To this end, the program awards a certificate for completing training in writing resumes and cover letters and executing company research. They have access to advisors who help guide them through the entire process.

For those who prefer a more independent study environment, they have the option to enroll in their "Independent Study Track," which gives veterans 6 months' access to classes and lets them design

their own programs. There are industry certifications that come along with these programs. For example, veteran students can enlist in the “tech track” that gives them industry specific skills and teaches them how to navigate the tech job search process.

## 5. Montclair University

At Montclair University's [Office of Veteran and Military Services](#), veterans receive attentive guidance as they transition back into civilian life. Denise Rodak, Office of Veteran and Military Services coordinator and winner of an academic advisor award from the National Academic Advising Association, said that “what sets us apart is that our program is heavily based on academic advising. I serve them from the time they arrive to the time they graduate.” Veterans get help deciding what major they should pursue, assessing different career paths, and receiving support along through out their entire college education. Veterans also get help determining how make the most of their benefits, which is a tricky process to navigate post-military service.

Additionally, Montclair has a transition course for their first-year veteran students that teaches effective time management skills as applying this in an academic setting is vastly different than that of the military. Overall, the university sees a very high value in investing in their veterans and will go above and beyond to help them be successful.

## **Notable Programs with Veteran Focused Student Community Organizations and Housing – community is important, especially for veterans, as they don't always identify with the average college student. The following universities have great programs to facilitate community building.**

### 1. San Diego State University's Joan and Art Barron Veteran's Center

At San Diego State University, the [Joan and Art Barron Veteran's Center](#) supports approximately 1,200 veteran, active duty military and reservist students as well as military dependents. The Center, which is the first of its kind in the California system, has drawn national recognition for its services especially dedicated for college veterans. The center has helped students like Timothy Ortega, 27, a communications senior at SDSU, build camaraderie and community among other veterans on campus. “The SDSU Veteran Center is a one stop shop on campus for all veteran related issues,” Ortega said. “They help with anything and everything a veterans need to take care of from helping vets to set up and maintain their education benefits as well as assisting us with registering for classes so we graduate on time.”

Student veterans face the challenge of not identifying with the average student. Having roommates who can relate to their combat experiences provide an instant support system. The SDSU Veteran Center includes several unique amenities for its students including common living and study rooms as well as on-site academic advisors and counselors.

## **2. University of Michigan's Veterans Community Program**

To build community among veterans at the [University of Michigan](#) the [PAVE \(Peer Advisors for Veteran Education\)](#) program was launched. It is a nationwide peer-to-peer program and partnership between target schools and the University of Michigan Depression Center. They train current student veterans that serve as peer advisors and match them with incoming students who are also veterans. Peer advisors do not only learn the basic college prep skills like studying, time management, and resource utilization but they also learn essential communication skills that help with mentoring students who might have PTSD or another service health related issue. No one knows the experience of a military service member better than a peer military service member, so this program is cultivating amazing community circles where veterans can prosper in a safe zone.

All in all, this great program is dedicated to help their student military service members overcome the stigma of asking for help and making the most of their college experience. Additionally, they are guided through the process of leveraging available resources to increase their quality of life in the areas of education, health, legal help, and employment.

## **3. University of Missouri's Mizzou-Student Veterans Association**

The [Mizzou-Student Veterans Association](#) seeks to build community with fellow college veterans at the [University of Missouri](#). Here, some can be paired with a peer-mentor whom with they can share their college experience. Connections from study partners to coping buddies are formed for those who have a peer mentor. This students' association undoubtedly has helped veterans transition back into academic work, sharpens their leadership skills, and helps them navigate the ins and outs of the college experience. John Quade, President of the Mizzou Student Veterans Association said, "When veterans register to use their benefits at the Veterans Center, we are then able to immediately assist them with any registration issues, tell them about the free on-campus tutoring, [and] explain how their benefits work."

In addition to community building, the association ultimately seeks to advance veterans' higher education. They point out programs like the SALUTE Honor Society for veterans with a GPA higher than a 3.0 and scholarship opportunities.

## **4. University of Idaho's Uldaho Club**

The [Veterans at Uldaho Club](#) seeks to ensure that their student veterans succeed by providing peer-to-peer mentoring, support groups, and tutoring. They also serve the community together to make sure that they are always serving each other and their country.

With such a strong community of veterans, it is no surprise that the [University of Idaho](#) is ranked one of the top [50](#) colleges for veterans in the nation.

**Counseling and Wellness Programs for Veterans - These excellent programs make sure there are expert counselors available to help vets make their transitions easier.**

#### **1. The Ohio State University's Office of Military and Student Affairs**

[Ohio State University](#) has a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and counselors who work to establish a safe space where veterans can come and deal with personal concerns.

The [counseling center](#) has resources for suicide prevention and helps vets identify when counseling can come in handy in their resources [here](#).

Students can even meet counselors with their families to work out any issues. As Ohio State put it, "You served us, now let us serve you." Programs like this one go a very long way for student veterans as they "help veterans identify, prioritize, and implement strategies to address their specific concerns and challenges."

#### **2. University of Washington Veteran's Center**

To make the transition into college and civilian life a lot easier, the [University of Washington Veteran's Center](#) provides personal and counseling center to help manage stress, relationships, and enhance coping skills. Additionally, their health and wellness center helps veterans deal with financial, intellectual, and financial challenges with assimilating back into civilian life.

In addition, they make it easier for student veterans to take advantage of their Hall Health Primary and Special Health Clinics which promotes mental and physical wellness.