Greetings!

First, I want to thank you for taking the time to read this guide. It includes a variety of information to help you understand our military Service Members (SMs), and how to help them overcome their unique obstacles and reach their educational goals.

Our SMs and veterans swore an oath to support and defend our Constitution, and they did so for many reasons: patriotism, economic opportunity, personal growth, among others. Whichever the reason, these individuals dedicated a great part of their lives in service to their country.

Military life is all-encompassing. When their service ends, our SM’s are left having gained the pride and discipline that is often contrasted with a sense of ennui and uncertainty towards their futures. Many of them struggle for years to “transition,” or re-adapt themselves, to their new surroundings and new environment. Generally speaking, they do not want sympathy or a hand-out. What they want is our understanding and support as they move from one phase of their lives to the next.

The SMs you are likely to meet here at S&T are taking the steps to build a new life and a new future for themselves and their families. That task is not easy. Part of our job is to educate and support those who come to us. Our student SMs are working towards the same goals as our traditional students, however, they generally possess a different mindset towards education. On average, SMs are older, they may have families, and they have a plethora of life experiences most traditional students cannot imagine. We, the faculty and staff of S&T, can help them reach their goals.

This guide provides information to help you reach out to our Student Veterans and SMs. It will benefit everyone to learn how to tailor our programs and practices to better support this growing demographic. Helping them succeed will reflect back brightly upon ourselves.

Garrett Coffey
Student Veteran Advisor, August 2017
Goals:
• To ensure our faculty and staff have a general understanding of military and veteran culture.
• To educate our faculty and staff on common issues and struggles facing our Service Members and Veterans.
• To understand the tools and resources available to help our student veterans.
• To be able to guide student veterans so that they can make educated and beneficial decisions pertaining to their academic success.

Outcomes:
• Increased empathy and understanding towards our student service members.
• Increased awareness of appropriate resources available on campus.
• A welcoming and healthy atmosphere for all students.

Reminder, you are not expected to be:
• a counselor
• an expert on VA issues
• an expert on military practices

Table of Contents:
p. 1 - Greetings!
p. 2 - Goals & Outcomes
p. 3 - Understanding Veterans
p. 5 - Common Issues
p. 7 - General Educational Concerns
p. 8 - Disabilities
p. 9 - Transition: What is it?
p. 10 - SMs in the classroom
p. 13 - Useful Information
p. 14 - Campus Resources
Understanding Veterans

Please note, this information is provided as a generalization of our SMs and veteran culture. Each individual has their own views, needs, and experiences.

Military Culture

- **Not Uniform:** There are differences between officers, enlisted, age, gender, and branch of service.
- **Team-focused:** The mission is primary, and we never leave a fallen comrade. Individual units can be almost tribal in their views towards other units; all in good fun.
- **Strong Hierarchy:** SMs are used to obeying orders immediately and/or making snap decisions with immediate ramifications.
- **Concrete Mind-set:** "How do we use what we have learned? What are its real-world effects?"

Deployments

- **Bases:** Span the globe. Iraq and Afghanistan have been our biggest and most recent conflicts.
- **Experiences:** They will differ between SMs; some have been in combat, some have not. It is best not to assume either way.
- **Disabilities:** SMs may or may not have any disabilities - physical or mental. It is best not to inquire, unless they choose to bring it up first.
- **Re-adjustment:** They have been away from home for long periods of time, which requires re-adjustment when they return. It takes time to settle back into a “normal” life.

Skills and Traits Developed

- **Grit:** SMs have discipline, a work ethic, and they know how to “embrace the pain.”
- **Teamwork:** They understand organizational dynamics, can perform under pressure, and often have a global perspective.
- **Job Skills:** They learned what was necessary for their “job” in the Service, which can range from being infantry, to intelligence, technical support, admin, and more.
- **Outlook:** They often have a “darker” sense of humor and can be self-effacing, but they will not tolerate disrespect.
Transition

- **Re-adaptation:** Transition is the name of the time period through which a SM re-acclimates to civilian society. It can be months, or in some cases, years.
- **Change:** It is often a time-period of growth, soul-searching, and loneliness.
- **Supportive Organizations:** There have been several private organizations founded to assist returning SMs with their transition in various ways, such as Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion, and the Student Veterans of America (SVA, of which there is a chapter at S&T), among others.

S&T and Veterans Statistics

- **Numbers:** There are approximately 298 students using GI Bill benefits at S&T, as of 2017.
- **Growth:** Our population of those using military benefits has blossomed by 50% in 3 years.
- **Benefits:** There are additional veterans and SMs on campus who are using other educational benefits, such as Tuition Assistance, savings, etc.
- **SVRC:** Opened its doors Spring 2016 and has been seeing a constant increase in utilization.

National Stats

- **Degrees:** The degrees veterans are pursuing break down into approximately: 27% business; 14% STEM. *NVEST Report*, by Student Veterans of America
- **Injuries:** 21% have reported some kind of disability, compared to 11% of traditional students.

Over 500 flags were placed during our Heroes Field Event, Nov. 8 -10, 2016. Many from the campus and community attended to show their support.
Common Issues

Transfer Credits

The military often claims that their training will easily transfer over to higher education. Unfortunately, that is not realistic in many cases.

Educational institutions are only required to accept what is mandated through the Service-Members Opportunity Colleges agreement (SOC), and what is evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE). Those guidelines determine what credit is accepted.

S&T falls under both of those agreements, and is proficient at following them and accepting as much credit as is reasonable. A common SM concern is that when we do “accept” military credit, it may only count as “general credit” and not count towards a degree. This is understandable, however our programs are very specific in their requirements. As we all know, it is to support our end goal, which is to teach all of our students what they need to know to be successful. Sometimes our students may need a gentle reminder of that fact.

GI Bill and Tuition Assistance

The GI Bill (both Post-9/11 and Montgomery versions) and Tuition Assistance (TA) are some of the core benefits many SMs hope to earn through their service. These benefits are generous and can go a long way towards paying for a degree, but they are also limited and have stipulations. As such, our veterans tend to take their education - and the time it takes to complete a degree - very seriously.

Receiving educational benefits also requires both the student and the university to wade through many regulations. Thus, it is possible that it may take time (months, in some cases) for both the school and the SM to see these benefits. That delay can often result in extra stress and aggravation for the student.

If you hear that SMs are having difficulty, please guide them either to the Registrar’s office, or to the Student Veterans Resource Center. The Registrar’s can look into their paperwork, and we at the SVRC have an emergency fund, the Seeds of Hope, that can provide temporary relief if necessary.
Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

The VA is the federal department in charge of administering aid and benefits to our veterans and SMs after their time in service has ended. It often receives both praise and criticism for how it manages its duties.

- **Educational Benefits:** The VA provides their earned benefits for schooling, such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill, and Vocational Rehabilitation. There are different benefits and requirements for each, but in general they will pay a proportion (up to 100%) of their tuition.

- **Healthcare:** VA healthcare offers care and support to our SMs who have been injured during their time of service. However, to SMs, problems may arise since the VA is often overburdened which can sometimes result in long wait times, difficulty finding treatment, or a struggle in having an injury declared “service-connected.”

- **Appointments:** If at all possible, please be understanding if a SM must leave class for an appointment. With the way the VA manages making appointments, they must often be scheduled months in advance, and to cancel or reschedule can then take months longer. As such, for many SMs with health issues, finding another time may not be an option.

- **Referrals:** If the SMs you know are having issues, please refer them to the Registrar’s office’s VA Certifying Official, S&T’s Case Manager, or the SVRC, and we can assist.

Meeting inside the SVRC
General Educational Concerns

This is not a comprehensive list, and not every (or any) SM will deal with some (or any) or these, but it can offer some insight into common questions.

- **Goal Setting:** Especially understanding which goals to set, which ones will be of greatest benefit to them at S&T.
- **Time Management:** Understanding the demands their studies will place on them.
- **School Bureaucracy:** Knowing where to go for any of a plethora of issues or questions.
- **Working with Professors and Teaching Assistants:** To know that they should ask questions, and talk to their professors during office hours, and so forth.
- **Where to find study help:** Study groups, tutoring, quiet spaces, and when they should begin seeking study help.
- **Involvement:** Finding ways to have fun, but also to use extracurriculars to boost their job prospects.
- **Health Concerns (Physical and Mental):** Disabilities may impact studies. They may require the SM to work more to obtain a level of knowledge equivalent to traditional students, or their treatment may keep them away from class for a time.
Disabilities

Disabilities are a sensitive topic. They may be physical or mental, obvious or hidden, being managed or being endured. As always, your understanding and respect are appreciated and can go a long way to making our students feel welcome. Below are some common issues that you may encounter.

• **TBI:** Traumatic Brain Injury, which can be caused by concussions, heavy impacts, and explosions, and repeated contacts with all of the above. Symptoms of which can include difficulty focusing, anxiety, test-taking issues, and more.

• **PTSD:** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a hidden disability that can even manifest years after the traumatic event. It affects people differently, but has several common characteristics both internally and externally. Internal affects are beyond the scope of this guide, but externally:
  • In mild cases, a veteran may exhibit hyper-vigilance. They will wish to sit with their back to a wall while being able to observe the majority of a room.
  • In worse cases, this hyper-vigilance may have them “scan” the room for threats. They might be startled by sudden sounds /movement, be jumpy, or lose focus easily.

• **Physical:** In many cases, these can be easily recognized, in others not so much. Some common issues can include hearing or back problems, so please be patient if they ask you to repeat something or need to sit down.

• **Avoid Stigma:** There is a stigma in the military regarding seeking help for disabilities and other mental issues. In many cases, letting them know you’re there for them can make a huge impact. Yet, it is also best not to generalize or “call-out” anyone; if they bring up an issue, you can inquire further. If they seem suicidal, overly depressed, or have other significant problems, please pull them aside and suggest they go to the CDSW (Counseling, Disability Support, and Student Wellness) Office, or walk them there yourself if able. There is also the Wellness Check with the Campus Police.

*Reference the contact info in the back of this guide for helpful resources.*
Transition: What is it?

Our veterans have a great deal of life experience and responsibility, but also ingrained habits and modes of thinking based around military success. Taking their positive experiences and yet re-learning what is required to be successful in a civilian setting is called a “transition.” SMs are moving from a job that is structured, concrete, and team-focused, one in which they made rapid decisions, to a classroom where it’s most important to be self-reliant, think critically, and to stay focused on abstract topics. These two worlds are not always compatible.

Fortunately, campus now has our Student Veterans Resource Center (SVRC) and a Student Veterans Association (SVA) that can help with this transition. This help can take the form of learning to navigate the campus bureaucracy and finding peer-support on campus. Some SMs are able to jump in and excel - taking the discipline they built and applying it to their education. Other SMs may need some time to adapt. It will vary from person to person.

This experience is contrasted with that of our “traditional students,” who are coming directly from an academic background and are now moving forward into another. Generally, they have their Residence Hall friends and their peers to assist them as they acclimate to campus. Due to the fact that SMs are often bereft of a support network that for many was the difference between life and death, their transition is often a period of isolation and loneliness. Our SMs require some different types of outreach, so that we can assist them in becoming a greater part of our campus community. Encouraging them to get involved, seek like-minded peers, and find something fun to do on campus can be a great way to combat this.
SMs in the Classroom

Adults in Higher Education

- **Older Students:** SMs, because they are generally older, will fall into this category. They are here to learn from our faculty, get a degree, and improve themselves and their prospects. Obtaining the typical “college experience” many traditional students desire is not necessarily within their aims.

- **Experienced:** Generally, they do not appreciate being treated like a child; they may already have years of practical experience making life-or-death decisions. They do not need the level of “enforcement” a traditional student might need.

- **Job:** They have a tendency to view schooling as a “job.” They will arrive at 9 am to attend class, they will study in the afternoon, and leave for home by 5 pm.

- **Learning:** They do learn differently from younger students; it’s possible they’ve been removed from a “formalized” educational setting for years or even decades. The necessity of having to re-learn how to learn and to be an effective student can be another burden that they must overcome through their Transition.

- **Work-Life Balance:** In many cases, a SM may have family obligations, outside work requirements, and more that may compete for their time and effort. Your understanding of these commitments (within reason) is greatly appreciated.
Veteran Culture as it can relate to the classroom

- **Communication:** There are no uniform approaches that will solve all problems, but seeking and facilitating communication can go a long way.

- **Anomie:** There is an unfortunate thread of isolation with SMs going through transition. They can feel separate and outside of the culture they fought to defend. Try not to be offended if they seem reticent at first, but some encouragement could help them participate more.

- **Differences:** As stated previously, there are some differences even within veterans and SMs culture.
  - Older, “retired,” veterans are very focused and no nonsense in class. They do not appreciate younger students’ immaturity; they often choose to avoid it. They probably gave orders as well as received them, and as such are more self-sufficient.
  - Younger, “separated,” veterans are still often focused, but a bit more laid back. They tolerate younger students, and may want to experience a more comprehensive collegiate life. They are used to the structured military, so they may have time-management or goal-setting issues.

- **Group Work:** If possible, when working in groups it may be best to incorporate them into groups with more mature students.

- **Benefits:** Veterans had to earn their educational benefits, and as such often desire to avoid “wasting time” on the college “experience,” and tend to focus exclusively on getting through their classes.

- **Involvement:** SMs might benefit from some encouragement to participate in an RSO (Registered Student Organization) on campus, a design team, or even to find an internship or Coop. They tend to be so focused that there is a high chance they could miss out on some great opportunities.
SMs in the Classroom - Final

Faculty - Student Interaction: SMs often have some great insights to share that are based upon their life experiences. In general, they will be more apt to share if they feel a rapport with the instructor in the class. It’s best to avoid making too many assumptions about their service, their political views, or their experiences, but allow them to share as they feel comfortable.

Disability Issues: It is possible that there may be TBI or PTSD issues, and these may or may not be disclosed to DSS. If you suspect a problem and it is causing issues, contact the case manager or DSS. If the problem is concerning, contact the University Committee for Assistance, Response, and Evaluation (UCARE). There may be some minor behavioral tics that seem strange - but they are harmless. It is nothing personal as they are still adapting. It may be beneficial to the SM to be around peers who may understand what they’re going through, so please consider guiding them to the SVRC.
Useful Information

Student Veterans Resource Center

• Provides a space for our student veterans and SMs to connect with peers, find resources, and study.
• The Student Veterans Advisor can offer guidance and support, and act as a concierge as they seek resources and support on campus.
• Provides access to tutoring and development of other academic skills to facilitate success.
• Has information on federal, state, and VA benefits that can affect our SMs.
• Periodically puts on programs to connect our SMs to useful resources and contacts, as well as to solve problems and facilitate collegiate success.
• Free coffee!

Acronym dictionary
SM - service member
SVRC - Student Veterans Resource Center
Vet - veterans
VA - Department of Veterans Affairs
RSO - Registered Student Organization
TBI - Traumatic Brain Injury
PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
DSS - Disability Support Services
CDSW - Counseling, Disability Support, and Student Wellness

Campus Resources

**Student Veterans Resource Center Information**
610 W. 10th St., Ground Floor, BSU, Rolla
svrc@mst.edu | 573-341-6117 | svrc.mst.edu

**Student Health Services**
910 W. 10th St., Rolla, MO 65401
mstshs@mst.edu | 573-341-4284 | studenthealth.mst.edu

**Student Disability Services**
203 Norwood Hall
dss@mst.edu | 573-341-6655 | dss.mst.edu

**Counseling Services**
204 Norwood Hall
counsel@mst.edu | 573-341-4211 | counsel.mst.edu

**S&T Care Coordinator**
Krista Morris-Lehman, MA
morrislehmank@mst.edu | 573-341-6179 | cc@mst.edu
carecoordination.mst.edu

**UCARE** -
University Committe for Assistance, Response, and Evaluation
stuaff@mst.edu or ucare@mst.edu
573-341-6333
stuaff.mst.edu/ucare

**Edumine Contact Group**
edumine-grp@mst.edu
Grand Opening of the SVRC.
From left to right: Steve Tupper, Ben Hill,
Garrett Coffey, Dr. Kent Wray, Chris Burton,
Representative Jason Chipman, Patty Frisbee