

Accommodations

Many veterans returning to or entering college for the first time will have no idea how a newly acquired injury (physical or psychological health-related) may impact their learning, especially if no previous learning difficulties had been present prior to their military experience. Additionally, a veteran may be discharged from the military without realizing that she or he may experience a significant learning or memory-related impairment, since a true diagnosis of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and in some cases a mild TBI (traumatic brain injury), can occur after the service member has separated from military service. All of this is often compounded by the fact that most veterans will not identify themselves as a person with a disability. Most are probably unfamiliar with the term “reasonable accommodations” and don’t know how to access them. Therefore, it is all the more important for faculty and staff to be aware of the potential need for accommodations.

For faculty: Do not presume to know the needs of military students, nor should you assume the needs and potential accommodations needed by one student veteran will be the same for others. Consider including a statement on every course syllabus inviting students to meet with you confidentially should a need for academic adjustments or accommodations be necessary or arise at any time during the course.

For staff, including disability support service staff: Helping student veterans understand the fine distinctions between a VA disability rating and a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is an important task, as is presenting information about their rights and responsibilities should an accommodation be necessary in education or the workforce.

Unfortunately, stigma does exist, especially with regard to mental health and cognitive abilities. One participant in the ACE Veteran Success Jam stated, “Many vets see claiming disability services as a stigma that reflects negatively on their service. Pride of service sometimes conflicts with acknowledgment that some experiences may have affected their ability to concentrate/study.” Another indicated that her school changed the name of its disability office from Disability Services to Campus Access Services to reduce the stigma, not only for veterans, but also for other students with disabilities who might be reluctant to come forward and discuss their needs.

Accommodating the needs of veterans does not mean that you have to drastically change how you teach. However, being aware of the issues veterans face and being accommodating to their needs can ease their transition from military life to the civilian classroom, and improve the educational experience for all students.

<https://vetfriendlytoolkit.acenet.edu/academic-services/Pages/Accommodations.aspx>