Championing Veterans in Admissions: Coaching for a Seamless Transition

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Disclaimer

- This presentation reflects the opinions of the speakers and not that of the Department of Defense, Department of Veteran Affairs, Veteran Benefit Administration, The George Washington University, or our employers

- Every effort was made to make this presentation evidence-based. That said, information presented today is meant to serve as informational and not as medical advice

Disclosures

- I have no financial disclosures to report

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- Experienced PA program Admissions Committee Member at multiple institutions
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Educational Objectives

- 1.) Explore unique experiences and challenges Veterans face in graduate admissions for health professions programs
- 2.) Identify best practices for supporting Veterans' transition from military service to academia.
- 3.) Describe approaches for translating transferable military skills to civilian terms

Setting the Stage

- 2.7% of respondents served or were serving (Down from 5.2% in 2019)

- Military respondents had 6.54 years of active-duty service

Image Source: https://unsplash.com/photos/people-studying-at-tables-in-a-large-library-qSaloP67DCA

The Veteran Experience in Transition

- **Common challenges:**
  - Navigating loss of structure, rank, and identity
  - Translating MOS to civilian relevance
  - Managing VA/disability logistics alongside academics
  - Financial and family reintegration pressures

The Veteran Experience in Transition

- **Assets Veterans Bring:**
  - Leadership
  - Discipline
  - Teamwork
  - Crisis management
  - Mission Focused

Image Source: https://unsplash.com/photos/gray-and-brown-camouflage-nutshell-helmet-on-table-IprD0z0zqss

The Veteran Experience in Transition

- Post-9/11 Veterans are the most racially and ethnically diverse group across the service periods
- Who we let into PA school ultimately becomes the face of the profession
- The Department of Veteran Affairs continues to remain the largest employer of PAs in the country
- Increasing the number of Veteran providers allows for better continuity of care for military-related medical conditions

Admissions Barriers

- **Systemic barriers:** limited understanding of military records, undervaluing nontraditional paths.
- **Procedural barriers:** GPA weighting, prerequisite recency, limited recognition of ACE credits.
- **Cultural barriers:** implicit bias, misunderstanding of military communication style.

MILITARY LINGO	CIVILIAN LANGUAGE
Led 12-person combat medic team through 4 successful missions	Managed 12-person team in a fast-paced environment while meeting all organizational goals.
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer. Earned position of authority via strict promotion standards charged with giving lawful orders.
Combat Lifesaver	Non-medical personnel trained in high-yield lifesaving interventions.
MOS	Military Occupational Speciality. Their job while in uniform.
Briefed the company on medical strategy	Conducted team meetings on medical strategy to minimize loss and maximize success.

Multiple Previous Schools Attended

- Veteran candidates have often attended multiple institutions of higher learning due to the fast tempo of military training and deployments

- Veterans may have received extensive formal education in the military without having been granted college credit for their effort

Coaching Framework

- Introduce Coaching as a Mindset (active listening, reflection, empowerment)
- Model: Educational Alliance + Coaching Approach
- **Practical methods:**
  - Ask before advising
  - Use motivational interviewing in admissions/advising
  - Validate identity shifts

Image Source: https://unsplash.com/photos/person-holding-compass-facing-towards-green-pine-trees-_94HLr_QXo8

Translating Military Skills

- **Techniques for articulation:**
  - “Operationalized leadership” → “Team management under pressure.”
  - “Mission planning” → “Strategic goal setting.”
- **Tools:**
  - DoD COOL, O*NET Crosswalks, LinkedIn Military Translator.

Exercise Prompt:

- Pair up with a neighbor
- Discuss a military role you may have previously held or have knowledge about (e.g., Infantry, Supply, Medic).
- **Question Prompts:**
    - How would you coach an applicant to translate that role into civilian language?
    - What are some important considerations you would recommend the applicant highlight in their application and interview?

Building a Culture of Belonging

- Shift from “accommodating Veterans” to “leveraging Veteran strengths.”
- Use storytelling and narrative interviews in admissions.
- Promote interprofessional Veteran affinity networks.

Image Source: https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/military-operation-at-sunrise-gm1317950512-405232014?utm_source=pexels&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_campaign=sponsored_photo&utm_content=srp_inline_media&utm_term=us%20military

Call To Action

- Veterans are assets to health professions programs
- Coaching enhances transitions and retention
- Translating skills requires intentional advocacy

Image Source: https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-standing-on-stage-facing-an-american-flag-1340504/

With Sincere Gratitude

Thank you for attending today's session

I'd love to keep the dialogue going!

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