Are Faculty and Staff Ready to Support Student Veterans?

A Survey of 14,673 Faculty and Staff at 20 Colleges and Universities

Co-Authored by

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INTRODUCTION

Veterans and military service members represent an important portion of the higher-education population, with over one million veterans using their education benefits since 20081.

While student veterans share attributes with other nontraditional student populations such as being adult learners or being a married student, their experiences make them distinctive from both traditional and nontraditional students. For example, many student veterans and military service members bring a wealth of unique military experiences to the classroom due to their interactions with foreign cultures and the ensuing world perspective that can lead to more robust classroom discussions2. In addition, soft skills developed through military service, such as goal setting, time management, and discipline can aid student veterans in their studying and academic performance. However, student veterans may also carry the negative aftereffects of their combat experiences with them on campus, in the form of post-traumatic stress (PTS), depression, and thoughts of suicide, as reported in the larger post-9/11 veteran population3-5.

Preliminary studies on the prevalence of psychological distress suggest that over 40% of student veterans screen positive for post-traumatic stress disorder, 24% screen positive for depression, and 8% endorse past-month suicide ideation6-7. The rates of PTS among student veteran and post-9/11 veteran populations are higher than the rates found in college students generally (9.0%)8. The depression rate among post-9/11 veterans is nearly even with the reported college student prevalence of depression of 12.1%, but the rate among student veterans appears to be much higher than college students in general.

A study from the National Center for Veterans Studies at the University of Utah found that depression severity, in particular, is associated with significantly lower grade

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point average among student veterans, especially in the presence of elevated PTS symptoms\textsuperscript{10}. This same study found that depression, but not PTS, was also significantly associated with turning in assignments late, failing exams, and skipping classes. Relatedly, Ackerman\textsuperscript{2} found that student veterans with PTS reported more difficulty with concentration and focus, thus affecting their academic performance.

Alternatively, faculty and campus-wide staff have more contact with student veterans and can provide referrals to on-campus support services for them, yet many colleges and universities do not provide training on veteran or military culture for their faculty or staff\textsuperscript{11}, thereby limiting the ability of faculty and staff to provide help and referrals to student veterans and hindering student veterans’ use of potentially beneficial campus support services.

\textbf{THE SURVEY}

Between September 2012 and April of 2017, Kognito surveyed 14,673 faculty and staff members from 20 geographically dispersed U.S. colleges and universities. Respondents were asked to complete the brief online survey as the first step in completing Kognito’s evidence-based interactive military competency and mental health simulation entitled “Veterans on Campus for Faculty and Staff” which was purchased by their institution for purposes of professional development.

- No participants were required to take the survey or compensated for their participation.
- Participants’ average age was 43 (SD = 13.7).
- Average years working in education was 9.66 (SD = 8.75).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Gender of respondents & Race of respondents & Role of respondents \\
\hline
64.7% FEMALE & WHITE, NON-HISPANIC & STAFF MEMBER \textsuperscript{50.5}\% & 69.2% & 10.4% & \textbf{5.0}\% & \textbf{5.0}\% & \textbf{5.0}\% & \textbf{5.0}\% \\
32.5% MALE & BLACK, NON-HISPANIC & FULL-TIME FACULTY \textsuperscript{25.9}\% & 14.6% & 0.5% & \textbf{3.3}\% & \textbf{3.3}\% & \textbf{3.3}\% & \textbf{3.3}\% \\
0.3% TRANSGENDER & HISPANIC & ADJUNCT FACULTY \textsuperscript{14.8}\% & & & ASIAN \textsuperscript{0.1}\% & \textbf{0.1}\% & \textbf{0.1}\% & \textbf{0.1}\% \\
& AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE & OTHER \textsuperscript{5.0}\% & & & NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER & \textbf{1.9}\% & \textbf{1.9}\% & \textbf{1.9}\% \\
& MULTIPLE ETHNICITIES & RESIDENT ASSISTANT/STUDENT LEADER & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Demographic information of respondents.}
\end{table}


In conclusion, the survey strongly suggests that faculty and staff want to create a supportive environment for student veterans, and want to connect students experiencing psychological distress with support as part of their role. Still, a vast majority report not having the skills, knowledge, and self-confidence to follow through on these critical tasks. Institutions of higher education should tap into this motivated user group and engage them in effective learning experiences to build military cultural competency and mental health skills. With the right preparation, faculty and staff can become active participants in supporting student veterans as they pursue their academic degree and future career growth.
AUTHOR BIOS

Glenn Albright, Ph.D.
Co-Founder and Director of Research, Kognito

Dr. Glenn Albright is a clinical psychologist and former chair of the Department of Psychology at Baruch College, City University of New York. He is also co-founder and director of research at Kognito where his research evaluates the efficacy of game-based health simulations designed to bring about changes in health and mental health behaviors and can cost-effectively impact large numbers of geographically dispersed people that would benefit the most from such training. In his spare time, Dr. Albright volunteers his time running an equine psychotherapy practice for veterans with PTSD.

Craig J. Bryan, Psy.D.
Executive Director, National Center for Veterans Studies at The University of Utah

Dr. Craig J. Bryan, PsyD, ABPP, is a board-certified clinical psychologist in cognitive behavioral psychology, and is currently the Executive Director of the National Center for Veterans Studies at The University of Utah. Dr. Bryan previously served on active duty in the U.S. Air Force and deployed to Iraq in 2009. He has published over 150 scientific articles and several books, and is considered a leading national expert in military and veteran suicide prevention. For these accomplishments, he has received numerous professional and university awards.

About Kognito

Kognito is a developer of role-play simulations designed to prepare people to lead conversations in real life that result in measurable improvements in social, emotional, and physical health. Kognito’s suite of mental health simulations for PK-12, higher education, primary care, and acute care settings has been utilized by over 500 organizations. Its higher education programs are also listed in the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices.

Learn more at kognito.com.

For Questions about the Survey:

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About the National Center for Veterans Studies at The University of Utah

The National Center for Veterans Studies, based at the University of Utah, engages in research, education, outreach, and advocacy to improve the lives of veterans, and better position these skilled, experienced and well-trained veterans for continued service that further advances American values, prosperity, and security.

Learn more at veterans.utah.edu.
# Appendix

## #1: How would you rate your preparedness to... (N=14,673)

A. Recognize when a student veteran’s behavior is a sign of psychological distress

- Very Low, Low, Medium: 70.07%
- High, Very High: 29.92%

B. Discuss with a student veteran your concerns about the signs of psychological distress they are exhibiting

- Very Low, Low, Medium: 75.06%
- High, Very High: 24.93%

C. Recommend mental health support services (e.g. counseling center) to a student veteran exhibiting signs of psychological distress

- Very Low, Low, Medium: 62.25%
- High, Very High: 37.75%

## #2: How likely are you to discuss with a student veteran your concern about the signs of psychological distress they are exhibiting (N=14,190)

A. Very Unlikely

- 5.38%

B. Unlikely

- 24.71%

C. Likely

- 52.05%

D. Very Unlikely

- 17.85%

## #3: How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements (N=13,882)

A. I am knowledgeable about the common challenges facing the student veteran population

- Very Low, Low, Medium: 43.66%
- High, Very High: 56.34%

B. I feel prepared to manage a classroom discussion around a veteran sensitive issue

- Very Low, Low, Medium: 57.96%
- High, Very High: 42.03%

C. Part of the role of faculty, staff and administrators is to help create a supportive environment for the student veteran population

- Very Low, Low, Medium: 3.23%
- High, Very High: 96.76%

D. Part of the role of faculty, staff and administrators is to connect student veterans experiencing psychological distress with mental health services

- Very Low, Low, Medium: 5.51%
- High, Very High: 94.48%

E. All faculty, staff and administrators in my academic institution should take a course on military competency and veterans’ mental health

- Very Low, Low, Medium: 6.11%
- High, Very High: 93.89%