



From the Editor

Journal:	Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education
Article Title:	Engaging the Next Generation of Veteran Services Providers in Professional Development Through an Elective Course
Author(s):	Katherine Selber, Nancy Chavkin, Mary Jo Garcia Biggins, Dean Shaffer, Katherine Hall
Volume and Issue Number:	<i>Vol.19 No.2</i>
Manuscript ID:	192054
Page Number:	54
Year:	2016

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is a refereed journal concerned with publishing scholarly and relevant articles on continuing education, professional development, and training in the field of social welfare. The aims of the journal are to advance the science of professional development and continuing social work education, to foster understanding among educators, practitioners, and researchers, and to promote discussion that represents a broad spectrum of interests in the field. The opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work.

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is published two times a year (Spring and Winter) by the school of Social Work at 1925 San Jacinto, D3500 Austin, TX 78712. Our website at www.profdevjournal.org contains additional information regarding submission of publications and subscriptions.

Copyright © by The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

ISSN: 1097-4911

URL: www.profdevjournal.org

Email: www.profdevjournal.org/contact

Engaging the Next Generation of Veteran Services Providers in Professional Development Through an Elective Course

*Katherine Selber, Nancy Chavkin, Mary Jo Garcia Biggins,
Dean Shaffer & Katherine Hall*

Abstract

This article reports on an effort by one school of social work to introduce social work students to professional development content about working with the military, veterans, and their families through an interdisciplinary elective course about veterans. The course, Helping Veterans Transition, introduces students to the veteran population, the culture, the needs, and the services. The course emphasizes a service learning project which is a first step in engaging those who will work with veterans in the future in their own professional development. The article describes the social work course developed and taught over the past six years, the service learning projects that helped students begin the first steps in professional development, the results of a follow-up survey, and lessons learned. The article concludes with a discussion of implications for social work education and professional development about working with veterans.

Engaging the Next Generation of Veteran Services Providers in Professional Development through an Elective Course

It is essential that social work educators respond to the needs of returning veterans, especially our most recent veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts (Rubin, 2012). There is a well-documented and an increasing demand for services to meet the needs of our returning veterans (Dao, 2012; Franklin, 2009; Selber, 2015). One of the most important steps to enhancing the quality and amount of services for our returning veterans is to increase the number of culturally competent professionals who work with

veterans (Coll & Weiss 2013; Luby, 2012). We have learned from past conflicts that the need for services can last decades after deployment, and thus the need for increasing professional development about working with veterans will remain a relevant and pressing issue (Franklin, 2009).

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2010) has developed a list of advanced practice standards for military social work, adding coursework and making changes to address the needs of military personnel, veterans, and their families (Newell, 2012; Petrovich, 2012; Rubin, 2012; Savitsky, Illingworth, & DuLaney, 2009; Whitworth, Herzog, & Scott, 2012). In 2010, more than 30 schools reported some type of coursework in military social work (CSWE, 2010). The 2012 CSWE statistics reported that 21 programs offered a concentration or specialty in military social work representing 10.3% of the institutions responding (CSWE, 2012). This was up from the 2011 program statistics that reported 15 programs or 9% of those responding offered the military social work specialty (CSWE, 2011). The social work literature is beginning to evaluate these training efforts and to consistently report on the needs of military personnel, veterans, and their families (Rubin, Weiss & Coll, 2013). As Johnson and Johnson (2013) report, much more needs to be done to meet this educational challenge. Although social work education has made some excellent progress by creating field placements and developing specializations, social work educators must continue to expand the capability of schools of social work to prepare the next generation of veteran service providers

Katherine Selber, PhD, is a Professor in the School of Social Work at Texas State University.

Nancy Chavkin, PhD, is a Professor at Texas State University.

Mary Jo Garcia Biggins, PhD, is an Associate Professor at Texas State University.

Dean Shaffer, MSW, is apart of the Arapahoe Douglas Mental Health Network.

Katherine Hall, LMSW, is the Project Facilitator with the Veterans Institute.

(Flynn & Hassan, 2010; Franklin, 2009; Martin, 2009; Simmons & DeCoster, 2007). Many social work education programs do not have the faculty, staff, resources, or time to add a military social work specialty or concentration or to increase field placements for working with veterans. Masters of Social Work (MSW) students may not want to devote an entire concentration to a specific population and the Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) curriculum does not have concentrations or specializations. There are many social work graduates who will be working with veterans in social service agencies that work with broad populations and do not specialize in working with veterans only. Thus there is a critical need for professional development content that can be delivered by elective courses or modules.

This article reports on an effort by one school of social work to introduce BSW and MSW students to professional development content about working with the military, veterans, and their families through an interdisciplinary elective course about veterans. The course, *Helping Veterans Transition*, was not intended to be a substitute for a military concentration or for the full preparation a student would receive during field practicum. The elective course was intended to fill the gap for the many practitioners who will work with veterans in other settings. It also provided crucial foundation materials for those who may go further in their studies and work in traditional settings such as the VA. The course was intended to introduce students to the veteran population, the culture, the needs, and the services. The course emphasized a service learning project which was a first step in engaging those who will work with veterans in the future in their own professional development. Although many of these students are expected to work with the general population, most will have contact with veterans. The article describes the social work course developed and taught over the past six years, the service learning projects that helped students begin the first steps in professional development, the results of a follow-up survey on the impact of the course, and reflections on lessons learned from a veteran who took the course, a non-veteran who took the

course, and the instructor of the course. The article concludes with a discussion of implications for social work education and professional development about working with veterans.

Developing Resources for Trainings

Because of the uniqueness of the military as a culture and its far-reaching impact on its members, establishing cultural competence to work with veterans and their families is essential. The military culture has its own beliefs, language, roles and expectations. Since the military population represents less than 1% of the nation's population, its challenges are often unfamiliar to the civilian world. The tempo and dangerous demands of training, deployments with life and death decisions in far flung places of the globe, frequent permanent change of duty stations, and living within a military base environment are some of the challenges that civilians are usually not familiar with. In addition, the military culture can follow its members out of the military into civilian life. Veterans are often reluctant to ask for help because they perceive themselves as independent problem solvers, rely on each other for help, and often believe that receiving services will negatively impact their jobs. Establishing this material on the uniqueness of the military culture, its stressors, and positive aspects within this course is essential for the professional development of those who will work with this population (Coll & Weiss, 2013; Demers, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 2013).

Background: The Veterans Initiative for Serving Student Veterans

The course discussed in this article forms part of the overall professional development for students working with veterans at a four-year university located in a military corridor with major military installations and National Guard units in the area. The university has an enrollment of over 38,000 students with more than 2,900 student veterans and dependents, making it one of the higher enrollments of full-time student veterans and dependents of four-year universities in the state.

In 2008, due to the continued and rapid increase in veterans entering the university, the primary author assisted the university in launching a comprehensive and coordinated approach to serving student veterans called the Veterans Initiative. Drawing on the psychosocial model of adult development theories by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) and adapted by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008, 2009), the model emphasizes a continuum of coordinated, short term transitional services across career and leadership, academic supports, and health and behavioral health services. The model uses peer-to-peer approaches and active outreach and follow up to enhance wrap around services for student veterans. Rooted in comprehensive needs assessments over time, the university gears its service development to data driven approaches. Although a school does not have to have a Veterans Initiative in order to have a course, this initiative provided background and support for the course offering.

The Veterans Services Social Work Course: Curriculum and Structure

The course is an initial primary method of training the students who want to serve veterans upon graduation from the Bachelor and Masters of Social Work programs. The course has been offered since 2009 each semester, with an online version added in 2011. The course aims to provide a foundational learning experience in working within the area of veteran services. Since many social work students will encounter veterans in varied practice settings upon graduation, this is a crucial knowledge and skill set. The overarching framework for the course is to provide students with a basic knowledge base and a service learning project that engages them in developing skills so that learners are not just reading about veterans but serving them as well. The service learning project is the beginning of a student's professional development in working with veterans. The course is discussed below in greater detail:

Course Logistics

This social work elective course has been offered on campus each fall and spring semester since 2009 and to date has trained over 450

students. The course has been offered a total of 16 times in the face-to-face campus format and is also now being offered in an online version as well. The course has been spearheaded and taught by a military family member who understands the impact of having a family member deployed multiple times over many years. The course is a stacked course, meaning that it is open to both upper division undergraduate and graduate students; enrollments vary but usually range from 25-40 students each semester. Although the course is considered an elective course, students interested in working with veterans in their field experience are highly encouraged to take the course for critical foundational material.

Course Demographics

Using the information form completed by students on the first class day the following demographics have been collected during the first three years of course offerings: Student enrollment is split evenly between undergraduate students and graduate students. The majority of students are from social work, with 68% of them being BSWs or MSWs. In rank order, the other students are from the following majors: psychology, family and consumer science, sociology, therapeutic recreational sports, education, and other academic majors. Roughly 14% of the class members have been veterans and about 75% have some affiliation with the military such as military family members, spouses, and significant others. About 11% have no military affiliation. In addition, students stated the following reasons for why they were motivated to take the course from most to least stated: to gain more information and knowledge; to be prepared to work with veterans; for personal reasons; and to meet requirements for programs of studies. The fact that so many students took the course for personal reasons suggests that these individuals have been personally impacted by their loved one's service. Most students who stated this reason for taking the course were military family members-- spouses, siblings, parents, and friends-- who had loved ones who had served. The vast majority of these family members had served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Course Objectives and Content

The course's objectives emphasize information on military organization and culture, systems of care inside and outside of the military, treatment issues such as post traumatic stress, mild traumatic brain injury, and depression, and a range of special needs populations. Individual, group, and macro level views and topics are included in the course. Readings in the course include short books written by veterans and family members, traditional academic journal articles, documentaries, and a rich review of web-based videos, webinars, and links to practice information and services.

Course Methodologies

A number of methodologies are used in the course. Guest speakers from the practice community are extensively used to bring current practice expertise into the course and these are chosen from an interdisciplinary perspective. Documentaries, panel veteran presentations, and online resources bring practice cases and veteran service systems into focus. Team-based projects provide hands-on service learning experiences all focused on helping veterans and families primarily on campus but also in the community. These team-based projects are the heart of engaging the next generation of veteran service providers.

An online version of the course that includes audio and video recordings of guest speakers and others as well as the professor are also available. Both Adobe Connect and Camtasia Relay are used to connect students in this version of the course. Course objectives, readings, and assignments remain the same as the on-campus format and are supplemented with team conference calls for project supervision and weekly forum postings.

Course Assignments

To increase student learning about veterans the course requires that all students attend a minimum of three veteran serving events on campus or in the community. Examples of these events (workshops, trainings, celebrations, awareness days) include "Improving Care for Veterans Facing Illness and Death"; "Combat Stigma"; "HIV/AIDS and Veterans"; and "Veteran Quad Day." Objective tests are also given that cover readings, guest speakers, and class discussions.

The two core assignments, the veteran interview and the service learning project, are the activities that truly engage the students.

The first core assignment is interviewing a veteran, with preference given to interviewing an on-campus student veteran. The interview is not clinical but informational and has a focus on the veteran's background and transition in the university. Some students have never spoken with a veteran, so this is a crucial assignment. As well, this assignment helps collect information that might be useful as program development data for the campus Veterans Initiative.

The second core assignment and the major assignment for the course is a service learning project coupled with a literature review. This service learning project not only brings more interaction with veterans, it is a catalyst for truly engaging the students in their own professional development. The service learning project is a critical step in the student's beginning professional development as a provider of services to veterans. At the end of the course, students complete and present a multimedia presentation on their projects, and these are shared with the university community. Examples of these service learning assignments include working with military widows, developing the Veteran Mentor program, preparing troop care packages, developing Project Graduation for Veterans, supporting recreational activities for student veterans (5K run, Warrior Olympics, Annual Golf Scholarship fundraiser), training student organizations on campus about "Who are our Student Veterans?," implementing campus wide Veterans Day celebration events, assisting in benchmarking studies with Disability Services about student veterans, and developing a Veterans Writing Retreat. We describe the American Widow Project and the Warrior Olympics service-learning projects in more detail below.

A Service Learning Project for Military Widows

Several service-learning projects have been completed that benefit the American Widow Project (AWP, 2013). The AWP is a non-profit organization whose founder and executive director is a 26 year-old military widow. In 2008,

shortly after losing her husband to an improvised explosive device in Iraq, she created the organization and a documentary to reach out to this generation of military widows. The mission of AWP is to provide support to help military widows rekindle their love of life while honoring their lost hero’s legacy. The organization provides a supportive hotline, special widow retreats around the country to help widows connect to each other and to their passions for life, and a creative website to promote outreach and sharing. Run entirely by widows, it is an excellent example of a peer-to-peer model of services and support. The AWP has been a long-standing partner for our campus Veterans Initiative and the partnership has grown to include a number of events and types of activities.

Teams of students have volunteered to help make the widow retreats special. These service learning projects have included helping organize and plan widow retreats around the country and making special keepsake albums and memorabilia for each widow who participates in a retreat. The teams have not only learned about these widows and their unique challenges but also about how nonprofits operate and how specifically peer-to-peer efforts

can be an important part of service delivery. Students who complete the literature review on military widows also learn about evidence-based practice issues. In addition, this knowledge is shared with their classmates and is

followed-up by a guest lecture by the founder of the organization. This content becomes even more essential when there are military widows on campus and some taking the course.

A Service Learning Project for Warrior Olympics

The service learning project Warrior Olympics created as a partnership with Camp Gladiator (an award winning adult fitness boot camp organization). Students involved with the project provided support and assistance, from start to finish, including overall participation in the event. They worked closely with the campus student veteran organization by helping with participant recruitment efforts and setting up a registry booth, fee station, shade tent, and banner. A Camp Gladiator coach helped them organize different types of relay stations, including a log-haul, sand bag toss, tire push, zigzag race, and a relay race using tennis balls.

The student volunteers participated as contestants and with help from the Camp Gladiator coach began warming up the group with short exercises. The teams consisted of five people which would compete against each other.

Table 1: Survey Ratings of Student Perceived Usefulness/Helpfulness

Content/Topic	Very useful/helpful	Somewhat useful/helpful	Not Very Useful/Helpful	Not at All Useful/Helpful
Military Culture	84%	16%	0%	0%
The Impact of Combat on Troops and Families	88%	12%	0%	0%
Post-Traumatic Stress	96%	4%	0%	0%
Mild Traumatic Brain Injury	92%	8%	0%	0%
Student Veteran Issues	80%	20%	0%	0%
Women Veteran Issues	60%	40%	0%	0%
Systems of Care	72%	28%	0%	0%
Military Family Issues	84%	16%	0%	0%
Military Widows	80%	20%	0%	0%
Troop and Veteran Needs	92%	8%	0%	0%
Sleep Issues	92%	8%	0%	0%
Treatment Tools & Techniques	92%	8%	0%	0%
Challenges such as Substance Abuse, Depression, & Homelessness	88%	12%	0%	0%

The last civilian team standing would go against a team compiled completely of veterans. The veterans consisted of campus veterans, and the group encouraged each other, as well as the civilians, to do the best of their ability through each relay. Although the student veteran group was favored to win, it was surprising to witness the civilians take home the victory. The winning group won the grand prize of a week of training with Camp Gladiator. After it was finished, all the members helped with cleanup of the field area, and some team members went out to dinner and socialized with the veterans. The entire event provided a chance to celebrate camaraderie and keeping physically active. All the groups left voicing an appreciation for the student veteran group and giving positive feedback for the experience. Students involved in the Warrior Olympics not only helped with the event, but they encouraged and cheered on people taking part in the race. They explained that prior to the Warrior Olympics, they had not heard of the Wounded Warrior Project, a non-profit that encourages community involvement with veterans returning home. Students explained that the Wounded Warrior Project allows for activities like obstacle courses and fun runs to take place in the community.

The Warrior Olympics provided a supportive outlet to help the transition of veterans and civilians to educate each other. Students reported having a great time meeting the student veteran group members at the dinner afterwards and felt that the physical challenge activity encouraged more members to participate and believed the next year would be more successful than the current year. The students in the class who participated in this service learning project were truly engaged in learning about the culture of the veteran students.

Lessons Learned: Course Survey

A survey of two semesters of the course offerings provided some important lessons to consider. The survey covered course offerings in fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters. A total of 59 students were sent an email through the web-based course site with a link to the on-line survey. A total of 25 students responded for a response rate of 43%. The survey contained a total of 20 items that collected information about the background of

students, why they took the course, previous military experience, interests in working with the population, usefulness of course content, and how to improve the course. The majority of respondents came from a social work background, were MSWs, female, and had some connection to the military with 20% being veterans and 56% being from a military family.

Respondents reported high interest in the course content. 72% reported being very interested in the population after taking the course and 84% reported that the population is very important to social work education and professional practice. Interestingly respondents stated the following reasons in order of importance for why they took the course: Interested in the population (64%); knew would encounter this regardless of employment in the field (56%); personal reasons-had family/friends and wanted to know more (36%); wanted to work with population (32%); wanted to do an internship with the population (32%); and the course offering was convenient time (6%). Clearly many students are dedicated to this population. Also, it is interesting to see that more than a third of the students in the course were there to help understand family or friends who had served. This suggests the impact of the decade long war on family and friends.

The survey also indicates that the course had an impact on students. 71% reported that the course changed their view of working with the population and 96% stated they were better prepared to work with the population after taking the course. One student, for example, stated that, "as a veteran I was very unaware of the issues that affect me." In terms of comparing the course to others in their program of study, 72% reported that the course ranked as one of the most significant learning experiences of their program of studies.

Table 1 lists the course content and its usefulness as perceived by the respondents. As can be seen, all content was considered very useful/helpful or somewhat useful/helpful. Highest percentages for usefulness were found in post-traumatic stress, mild traumatic brain injury, veteran needs, sleep issues, and treatment tools. Lowest percentages were reported in women's issues (60% very useful and 40% somewhat useful) and systems of care (72% very useful, 28% somewhat useful). When asked what were the

Engaging the Next Generation of Veteran Services Providers

most important things learned the three most often mentioned were about military culture, interventions and treatment, and transition challenges. For example, one student stated, “I learned there were shared/common experiences, thoughts, and emotions among veterans even though they often would not openly disclose them, but at the same time, each was unique and should be treated as such.” The respondents also stated they wanted more in-depth information about resources in the community and more information on post-traumatic stress disorder.

Lessons Learned: A Student Veteran Perspective

Being a student veteran in class was an interesting experience, as the course is both about you and not about you. Given the time constraint of a single semester and the limited expertise of any one person, it is tempting to build this type of course around a stereotyped veteran displaying either the most common or most severe post-separation difficulties. Of course, such a narrow focus ignores the great diversity of experience among veterans and may leave students with an unnecessarily shallow and skewed perception of this population. This was avoided in this course by using an assortment of guest speakers, readings, videos, and veterans themselves to provide a survey of the experiences and challenges of contemporary veterans. The popular topic of treatment for PTSD among combat veterans was addressed in detail by a representative from a nearby Vet Center and a therapist specializing in eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. Lesser known issues were also addressed, such as the challenges faced by veterans transitioning into post-secondary education. In fact, the rarely noted topic of sleep disorders among veterans is likely some of the most valuable information I take with me into my day-to-day practice.

Course readings were highly inclusive, as the perspectives of individuals of differing rank, gender, physical ability, and military occupation were explored, thus allowing students to engage in diverse perspective taking. Early lectures and readings familiarized students with military life and culture, and this understanding was later expanded and personalized through an interactive veteran panel discussion and a one-on-one interview with a veteran on campus. Interview questions included why the person chose to join the military, what their

service experience was like, and how they have adapted to civilian life following separation. This assignment was certainly instructive to students with little connection to the military, as it afforded them an opportunity to become personally acquainted with a veteran. As a veteran enrolled in the course, I found the similarities and differences between my military experience and that of the veteran I interviewed to be remarkably enlightening.

The diversity of topics covered ensures that student veterans will have experience in some areas and limited knowledge in others. Veterans are therefore able to not only contribute to the course, but also draw much from it. This was best exemplified by the topic of military family members. Readings such as *Minefields of the Heart: A Mother's Stories of a Son at War* (Diaz, 2010) and the impassioned guest speaker from the American Widow Project served as a vivid reminder to veterans and traditional students alike that soldiers are not the only people impacted by military service. One student veteran expressed disbelief at how little consideration he had previously given to this topic and to his family while serving. During many of the other course topics, the real world experience of veterans provided an added level of depth to discussions about course content. As a veteran, I (DS) felt that we were treated as a valuable class resource, something all too rarely seen in a traditional academic setting. Not only did this invite me to share my experiences more readily, it instilled in me a sense of responsibility to help the class better understand veterans.

The high point of the course for me was the service learning component. Our group was tasked with assisting relevant campus departments with planning the Veterans Graduation Reception. The university has recently begun a tradition of having a more intimate gathering to recognize its graduating student veterans prior to their formal commencement ceremony. These veterans, and their invited guests, are treated to dinner and entertainment and presented with red, white, and blue graduation cords that can be worn during the university's commencement ceremony. Planning for the event began several months in advance and required careful budgeting and coordination with several agencies on and off campus. To promote the ceremony, our group sent invitation and reminder emails to graduating veterans, posted flyers around

campus, and made follow up phone calls the week before registration for the event closed. Our efforts were rewarded with a turnout far exceeding our expectations. On the day of the ceremony, our group was involved in nearly all aspects of the event, from setup and decoration to serving food and post-event cleanup. Afterwards, I (DS) felt remarkably proud to have been involved with the event and of what our group had accomplished; this sentiment was echoed by other group members as well.

Lessons Learned: A Non-Veteran Perspective

Attending the first 'Helping Veterans Transition' class was quite intimidating. I (KH) was one of the few non-veterans taking this course with no personal military experience or immediate family in the military. I (KH) entered the class with an all-assuming civilian attitude that all veterans are the same: angry, awkward, and always serious. I (KH) was unfamiliar with the military and rarely engaged with veterans. My paternal grandfather and two of my uncles were in the army, but their experiences were never spoken of, just barely acknowledged and then masked with generations of alcoholism and nicotine addictions. This elective course opened my eyes to a delicate population that has desperately needed our attention for decades upon decades.

I (KH) enjoyed many parts of the course: the guest speakers, the readings from 'Downrange,' viewing the documentary, 'Restrepo,' and meeting Taryn Davis from American Widow Project.' The student veteran panel and the one-on-one student veteran interview were the breakthroughs to my personal learning. These two assignments gave me an entirely new perspective on war and the military. I (KH) learned that no two veterans are the same. There are no stereotypes for veterans because the spectrum is too wide and diverse. I (KH) also learned that the military world is very structured, black and white; where the civilian world has many shades of gray, which can be aggravating and confusing for veterans. I (KH) learned that veterans are always transitioning. The transition from combat to civilian life is a shock to the body: psychologically, socially, and physically. One student described it as: "One minute you're in combat, and then like cold turkey, you're in Walmart staring at packets of Rice-A Roni."

Creating a military-friendly on-campus environment and training the next generation of veteran service providers is vital for this population. Lastly, I (KH) learned that veterans bring a lot to the table: they are highly motivated to be successful. They are disciplined, they have leadership experience, are timely, organized, attentive and prepared. Being in a university can be very conducive to highlighting upon these strengths and healing because veterans are not alone on campus. A wide array of resources and competently trained service providers are at their disposal.

As mentioned earlier, this course was divided into the educational component, and the service learning component. For the service learning component, I (KH) participated in the 5K and Warrior Olympics. Adventure therapy groups help decrease veterans' isolation and teach them how to deal with their anger in a healthier approach. I (KH) chose these two projects because I wanted to find ways to give veterans a new mission, or to 're-mission' their energy and skills. There is a tremendous disconnect and loss of identity during transition. Through adventure therapy groups, such as the Warrior Olympics, the sense of brotherhood/sisterhood, comradery, competition and group culture, which were instilled in them in the military, are renewed.

Taking this course was very formative for my social work career. It increased my military cultural competency and contributed to my development and growth as a civilian. It took me out of my sheltered world. How impressive and brave our veterans are. They know the meaning of sacrifice for the common good because they have truly lived it. It is vital it is that our service providers are properly trained to ease their transition.

Lessons Learned: An Instructor Perspective

After six years of teaching the course, a number of lessons have been learned that may be helpful to other universities considering this type of course. In addition to the content described above, there are a number of management issues that I (KS) believe need to be considered.

The background and commitment of the instructor makes a difference. The instructor for the course needs to have background in military and veteran issues so that credibility in cultural competence is already established. A veteran or military family member is ideal or someone with working experience with the population. The

Engaging the Next Generation of Veteran Services Providers

instructor needs to make a commitment to teaching the course for the long haul. I (KS) developed the course over several semesters and it took time to gather resources and community connections. This course is structured to provide maximum interaction with the community service providers many of whom are veterans or family members like I (KS) am.

I (KS) learned that classroom management is imperative in this course, especially keeping political opinions out of the course. Veterans are from diverse perspectives and care in remaining focused on knowledge and skills and not on political opinions is important. Also, managing the impact of topics such as death, combat, and other sensitive factors that are part of the military culture ensures a learning focus and not one on too much self-disclosure.

Guest speakers from the community who are experts in specific practice issues are crucial and help keep the course innovative and current. My connections with community providers and university resources proved invaluable. The service learning projects require time from the instructor, and they should already be connected to on-campus overall efforts to support student veterans or a veteran service organization in the community. Supervising these projects requires using weekly progress reports and occasional meetings with the student teams. In addition, leaving 15-20 minutes at the end of each class period for team meetings is important and helps team members communicate and coordinate. Also having an identified point of contact and student team coordinator is important for keeping the team on track.

Having veterans in the course is beneficial both to themselves and to other students. When veterans tell their stories, it allows for their sacrifices to be honored, and also gives necessary insight to the non-veteran students. It is also useful to have students from other disciplines in the course. Having psychologists, sociologists, and physical therapist helps bring an interdisciplinary focus.

Discussion and Implications

BSW and MSW students need to be better prepared to address the needs of military personnel, veterans, and their families. Indeed, both BSW and MSW social work graduates will engage veterans and their families in many types of practice settings and should be prepared to help provide quality services for this population. Many BSWs will need

this content when they enter the workforce and work with veterans in collateral settings such as assisted living settings. Other BSWs will continue into graduate programs where they, along with other MSWs, will seek military field placements and post graduate employment in this area. MSWs must have this knowledge in order to be competitive in placements and jobs which serve veterans. The course detailed in this article represents a first step in professional development to meet the need for more trained veteran service providers that are skilled and culturally competent. The course fits particularly with the new emphasis on competencies in the new EPAS (CSWE, 2015) because the service learning component provides an opportunity to engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities before their final field placement.

The course is designed as an elective social work course to serve social work students and students from other helping professions. This diversity in the classroom is both a challenge and a positive aspect of the course. The different educational backgrounds of students from other helping professions challenges all of the students to see issues from divergent perspectives. This interdisciplinary perspective brings richness to the course and actually mirrors what happens in service systems and professional development training in the real world. The course's interdisciplinary focus covers a range of challenges for returning service members and their families which includes: health, legal, educational, mental health, financial, and social issues. These topics are approached using materials and guest speakers from backgrounds such as social work, respiratory care, psychology, vocational rehabilitation, and nursing to help prepare students for practice with a range of veteran service providers.

Course evaluations reveal that all students found the materials helpful and a large percentage thought the course was among the most important social work courses in their programs of study. Although the sample size was small and response rate was somewhat limited, the data indicate that the course holds promise for increasing professional development about working with veterans. This course may be an excellent first step for many universities. Many students requested more coursework on veterans and asked for additional course offerings such as a trauma-based course or a more advanced follow-up course to the present one.

Students reported that no other content on military social work was shared in other courses, and this points to the need to integrate the material across other courses in the curriculum. This may prove to be important because in the years ahead military populations will continue to be a part of many other service systems in the health, behavioral health, and other fields. Most students regardless of field of practice will need this information to function effectively in mental health, aging, community-based youth services, and other fields.

There is also a need for more research on the impact of a veteran services course. One topic of interest is the affect this course has on veterans who take it. Additionally, veterans continue to comment that the course is almost therapeutic in nature. This is likely related to the veteran exploring topics related to his or her experiences and feeling that their stories have been heard and understood.

Military personnel, veterans, and their families will continue to seek services for many years to come. Our troops have spent over a decade fighting, and we know that long after wars end, our military and military families continue to carry the burden of what we have asked them to do. This leads to the question: How will we engage this next generation of veteran service providers? How will we develop existing service providers who need knowledge and skills?

Social work's commitment to preparing more trained social workers as veteran service providers must be strengthened by professional development with service learning components. This kind of course is not a replacement for more in-depth coursework on these topics or a formal internship or field placement; rather, it is an additional opportunity for more social workers to learn about work with veterans and their families. Social work educators must step up and be leaders in preparing the next generation of social workers to serve these military personnel, veterans, and their families. The nation has learned from the Vietnam conflict that we must care for our returning troops, because it does not go well for our nation when we do not. Part of this promise of caring for "those who have borne the battle" is committing to develop the best-trained personnel who will serve them. There is a saying in the wounded warrior

community that the real tragedy is not the wounds of war but in being forgotten. Will social work education remember this?

References

- American Widow Project (2013). American Widow Project Mission and Services. Retrieved from <http://americanwidowproject.org>.
- Coll, J. & Weiss, E. (2013). In Rubin, A, Weiss, E., & Coll, J. (Eds.) *Handbook of military social work. Transitioning veterans into civilian life* (pp.281-297). New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (2012). 2012 statistics on social work education in the United States, Washington, D.C.: CSWE. Retrieved from <http://www.cswe.org/CentersInitiatives/DataStatistics/ProgramData/68987.aspx>.
- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (2011). 2011 statistics on social work education in the United States, Washington, D.C.: CSWE. Retrieved from <http://www.cswe.org/CentersInitiatives/DataStatistics/ProgramData/62008.aspx>.
- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (2015). 2015 Educational Policy Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs. Retrieved from: <http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=81660>
- Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (2010). *Advanced social work practice in military social work*. Washington, DC: CSWE Press. Retrieved from <http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=42466>.
- Dao, J. (2012). Veterans Department to increase mental health staffing. *New York Times*, April 19, 2012. Accessed online at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/19/us/veterans-affairs-dept-to-increase-mental-health-staffing.html?_r=0.
- Demers, A. (2011). When veterans return: The role of community in reintegration, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 16, 160-179.
- Diaz, Susan (2010). *Minefields of the heart*. Potomac Books: Washington, D.C.
- DiRamio, D., Ackerman, R., & Mitchell, R. L. (2008). From combat to campus: Voices of student-veterans. *NASPA Journal (National Association of Student Personnel)*

Engaging the Next Generation of Veteran Services Providers

- Administrators, Inc.*, 45 (1), 73-102.
- DiRamio, D., Ackerman, R., & Mitchell, R. L. (2009). Transitions: Combat veterans as college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 126, 5-14.
- Flynn, M. & Hassan, A. (2010). Unique challenges of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46 (2), 169-173.
- Franklin, E. (2009). The emerging needs of veterans: A call to action for the social work profession. *Health & Social Work*, 34 (3), 163-167.
- Johnson, O. & Johnson, I. (2013). Traumatic grief among African American soldiers exposed to combat: Implications for social work education. *Journal of Human Behavior and the Social Environment*, 23, 726-736.
- Luby, C. (2012). Promoting military cultural awareness in an off-post community of behavioral health and social support service providers. *Advances in Social Work*, 13 (1), 67-82.
- Martin, I. (2009). Warriors and healers: Preparing for returning veterans. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 79, 464-470.
- Newell, J. (2012). Addressing the needs of veterans and military families: A generalist approach. *The Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, 17, 53-68.
- Petrovich, J. (2012). Culturally competent social work practice with veterans: An overview of the U.S. Military. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 22, 863-874.
- Rubin, A. (2012). Civilian social work with veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan: A call to action. *Social Work*, 57 (4), 293-296.
- Rubin, A., Weiss, E. & Coll, J. (Eds.) (2013). *Handbook of Military Social Work*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Savitsky, L., Illingworth, M., & DuLaney, M. (2009). Civilian social work: Serving the military and veteran populations. *Social Work*, 54 (4), 327-339.
- Schlossberg, N.K., Waters, E.B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counseling adults in transition* (2nd ed.). New York: Springer.
- Selber, K. (2015). A model for serving this generation of student veterans: Blending supportive services and educational missions. In Jose Coll & Eugenia Weiss (Eds.) *Student Veterans in Human Services Programs: A Primer for Administrators, Faculty and Academic Advisors (133-159)*. Chicago: Lyceum Books.
- Simmons, C. & DeCoster, V. (2007). Military social workers at war: Their experiences and the educational content that helped them. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 43 (3), 497-512.
- Whitworth J., Herzog, J., Scott, D. (2012). Problem-based learning strategies for teaching military social work practice behavior: Review and evaluation. *Advances in Social Work*, 13 (1), 112-131.