



Journal of Veterans Studies

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Journal of Veterans Studies

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Thank you for your interest and engagement in this, the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Veterans Studies (JVS)*. This journal is intended to provide a forum in which we can share ways to integrate veterans studies in our teaching, communicate about ongoing research and advocacy for veterans and their families, and learn about programs, studies, and individuals who are spearheading efforts in veterans issues across the country. *JVS* was created in order to sustain interest in veterans studies and provide a forum for the multiple stakeholders and experts of veterans studies to share their insights and learn from others.

While some of you might find the term “veterans studies” new and ambiguous, others (e.g., scholars and institutions) have embraced the term as commonplace (University of [Missouri-St. Louis](#), [Eastern Kentucky](#) University, The University of [Utah](#), SUNY / [Empire State College](#)).

We at *JVS* understand veterans studies as an interdisciplinary and therefore multi-faceted, scholarly investigation of military veterans and their families. Topics within that exploration may include, but are not limited to combat exposure, reintegration challenges, and the complex systems that shape the veteran experience. Veterans studies, by its very nature, may analyze experiences closely tied to military studies, but the emphasis of veterans studies is the “veteran experience,” i.e., what happens *after* the service member departs the armed forces.

Cohorts of veterans studies scholars, of which we are presently aware, have arisen from:

1) The Conference on College Composition and Communication ([CCCC](#)): Most formally with the 2009 formation of the [Special Interest Group](#) (SIG) on Writing at the Military Service Academies, which morphed into the current standing group (SG) “Writing with Current, Former, and Future Members of the Military.” An important offshoot from the SIG and SG is the CCCC Task Force on Student Veterans, who developed the 2015 [CCCC Position Statement](#) “Student Veterans in the College Composition Classroom: Realizing Their Strengths and Assessing Their Needs”

2) Virginia Tech’s: [Veterans in Society Conferences](#) (2013, 2014, and 2015), and their 2016 NEH [Summer Institute](#) “American Veterans in Society.”

Of course, we assume (and hope) other professional, nonprofit, and grassroots organizations (and their members) formally and informally exist and are performing and promoting the work of veterans studies. We hope to hear from you—the citizens,

veterans, civilians, teachers, researchers, military dependents, administrators, staff, artists, activists, historians, and many others who are considering the very questions and concerns we seek to explore here—only some of which include:

1. How can we narrow gaps between:
 - a) Cultures (e.g., U.S military and civilian society)
 - b) Institutions (e.g., military and postsecondary education or the military and the private sector)
 - c) Experiences (e.g., military service, academic advising, or trauma)
 - d) Knowledge (of military norms and customs, (military and civilian) legal policy, institutional procedure, etc.)
 - e) and Understanding in light of our differences?
2. What are “best practices” for narrowing gaps and resolving issues?
3. What approaches should we avoid when working with veterans and their families?
4. How have our efforts changed over time? Given cultural shifts, military eras, interest, or sources of support?
5. How do veterans and their family members react to “our study of them?”
6. Who are the veterans that are “most” underserved, misunderstood, misrepresented? How can their voices be heard and their contributions recognized?
7. What forms of media—i.e., print, digital, visual, aural, etc.—aid in our study and/or advocacy for veterans?
8. What forms of media complicate or threaten our efforts in advocating for veterans and/or in veterans’ agency?
9. What types of infrastructures are necessary for narrowing gap and fostering positive change? If none are appropriate, how do we work with veterans to create our own?
10. Will individuals in positions of power (administrators, government officials) be open to bettering conditions for veterans and their families and in narrowing the “military-civilian gap”? What is the role of the teacher-scholar, grassroots activist, student, or artist in establishing and maintaining interest and support for veterans?
11. How does the current cultural climate of ongoing military conflicts, frequent terrorist attacks, and gun violence influence (both positively and negatively) the study of veterans’ issues?
12. How can we sustain interest in veterans studies?
13. What steps are businesses, the government, and nonprofits taking that will affect our efforts in the next five, ten, or twenty years?

These, along with others too numerous to list, are the questions we will focus on in the *Journal of Veterans Studies*.

When the open call for the inaugural issue was shared in December 2015, the editorial board sought to discover the diversity of stakeholders' backgrounds and the range of their interest in veterans' issues. Thanks to the overwhelming response we received to our invitation to contribute (a response so great that we were unfortunately unable to include many fine manuscripts). We were able to present eight full articles and four reviews in the present issue. We will publish additional works received for the inaugural call in our next issue.

At a glance, the authors whose articles comprise this inaugural issue indicate veterans studies preoccupation with veterans' processes of *transition*. Indeed, two common veterans' transitions can be seen in the eight articles published here: (1) veterans and servicemembers transition from the military to college, and (2) their transition from military culture to civilian society, which includes (re)integration into one's local community and family unit. This issue begins with four articles on veterans and servicemembers transition into college and is followed by four articles on veterans' transitions to the home front and the community.

Alexis Nicolle Petri, Ronda Jenson, Arden Day, and George Gotto's "Transition and the Troubled Giant: Opportunities for Colleges and Universities to Invest in Veterans" details the authors' innovative study of student veterans and servicemembers' experiences and perceptions pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) degrees and careers. While the authors provide new information about student veterans' transition processes from the military to the college classroom and the kinds of supports these students need, what readers will find truly innovative is their interactive research methods. As opposed to popular and traditional interviews with student veterans, which is characteristic of published scholarship on student veterans in the post 9/11 era, **Petri et al.** explain their method of engaging participants in data collection by drawing cognitive maps illustrative of the resources and supports most important for these students to reach their educational and professional goals. According to the authors the data collection method of "Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping" is particularly relevant for those interested in learning from student veterans and servicemembers with developmental (e.g., PTSD) and cognitive disabilities (e.g., TBI and learning disabilities).

Next, **Rebecca McMenamain and Krysta Kurzynski** explore (as their title suggests) "How are Institutions of Higher Education Implementing First-Year Transition Courses for Veterans?" In their analysis, a pilot study of first-year transition courses for student veterans offered at five postsecondary institutions, the authors offer best practices and practical applications for institutions and their administrators looking to initiate or reconfigure a first-year seminar for student veterans transitioning from the military into higher education. Among their findings the authors call for early and ongoing academic / career advising for student veterans, a topic explored in the third article of the issue: **Leland Spencer's** "Faculty Advising and Student Veterans: Adventures in Applying Research and Training."

By critically reflecting on his experiences academically advising undergraduate student veterans, Spencer poses five suggestions that readers—who are teachers, administrators, and staff who work with student veterans in postsecondary educational settings—will find valuable. Some readers may find Spencer’s tone to strike a familiar chord, as he is as quick to admit to what he doesn’t know as he is to providing answers. While Spencer’s commitment to supporting student veterans and the individuals in higher education that serve them is admirable, it is his insatiable exigency to *understand* that readers will likely applaud and find thematic of all the contributing authors in this issue.

Such is admittedly the case for the next author, **Glenn Allen Phillips**, who sheds light on an under-researched population of student veterans—those pursuing graduate degrees and certificates—in his article “The Other, Other Students: Understanding the Experiences of Graduate Student Veterans.” Not only does Phillips present long excerpts from his interviews with eleven graduate student veterans, but he also situates his findings, that is, the perceptions and experiences of his participants as they negotiate graduate studies and their shifting social positions within five key areas. Veterans studies scholars may notice similarities between Phillips’ participants’ responses and existing research on undergraduate student veterans’ perceptions. But as he points out, his research is a first of its kind in its focus on the mechanisms of support advanced degree seeking student veterans desperately need.

The next four articles in the issue move our focus on veterans’ transitions from postsecondary institutions into the home and the community—beginning with **Briana S. Nelson Goff, Kathryn Hartman, Devon Perkins, Kali Summers, Laura Walker, and J. Kale Monk’s** “Talk to Me: Disclosure of Past Trauma Experiences to Spouses in Veteran Couples.” Their article, as the title indicates, reveals findings and implications for veterans studies scholars on the role trauma disclosure plays in the interpersonal relationships of heterosexual couples. Readers unlearned in Marriage and Family Therapy will find takeaways and correlations to discussions of veterans’ processes of reintegration, as well as the role family members play in their effectiveness of that transition. Scholars of writing studies will find the author’s handling of veterans’ trauma disclosure both familiar and distinct.

Whereas **Goff et al.** discuss more formal interventions for veterans’ reintegration and renegotiation of relationships post-deployment, **Jeanne Flora, David M. Boje, Grace Ann Rosile, and Kenneth Hacker’s** “A Theoretical and Applied Review of Embodied Restorying for Post-Deployment Family Reintegration” introduces the theory and application of a secondary intervention designed to promote military family reintegration. The authors thoroughly explain the process of Embodied Restorying Practices (ERPs), which utilize storytelling as a way to reframe and recreate narratives held by veterans and their family members. Moreover, the authors position ERP with equine-assisted programs because as they explain, both are considered secondary prevention efforts to more formal efforts like talk therapy. Compellingly, the authors substantiate the importance of storytelling and the role family members play in the veteran's process of reintegration post-deployment—As Sebastian Junger has

recently articulated in his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (2016)—(re)building and sustaining relationships is integral to the veterans' quality of life post-military service. However, as the authors indicate, oftentimes these bonds are formed through revisiting and revising difficult narratives.

It is on the act of enacting social connections, or rather, “preventing [veterans'] social isolation” that **Christopher Brown, Karen Besterman-Dahan, Margeaux Chavez, Eni Njoh, and William Smith** focus in “It gave me an excuse to get out into society again’: Decreasing Veteran Isolation through a Community Agricultural Peer Support Model.” While the authors discuss an innovative model to peer support through their community agriculture initiative and nonprofit, Growing Veterans (GV), based in Washington State, the authors locate GV’s methods within a thorough review of other peer support models for veterans. Additionally, the authors share methods and findings from their case study of GV and its participants, which substantiate the fact that there are many worthwhile paths for veterans as they transition and / or reintegrate.

In “The Mission Continues: A Conceptual Framework and Selected Brief Screening Measures for Evaluating Civic Service and Health Outcomes Among Returning U.S. Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan” **Monica Matthieu** also suggests a path of community building via civic engagement for post 9/11 era veterans. In her evaluation of the Mission Continues Fellowship Program, Matthieu presents the standardized measures employed by nonprofit and civic service / leadership program. In addition to sharing her research design and findings, she also identifies relevant implications for veterans studies scholars; in short, Matthieu points to open access publishing (where *JVS* falls) as helpful to nonprofits and grassroots organizers of military veteran initiatives.

In our first new media review, **Krysta Kurzynski** reviews the “Virtual Wall of Faces,” curated by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF). Aside from providing explanation and evaluation of the digital archive of fallen military members, Kurzynski also supplies readers with ideas for taking action related to the virtual wall and in support of VVMF.

For the first of our two book reviews **Guy Biederman** reviews Bill McCausland’s novel *In The Mouth Of The Wolf*, which details the reintegration processes of three men and after serving in Vietnam. Biederman applauds McCausland for the unique storylines of his characters and use of Spanish language, which inspired the novel’s title.

Finally, **Elise Dixon** provides a thorough and engaging review of Mary Roach’s new book *Grunt: A Curious Science of Humans and War*. According to Dixon, *Grunt* is both witty and informative—a must read for the seasoned and unfamiliar reader of military operations.

I thank the contributors, readers, and supporters of the *Journal of Veterans Studies* for helping articulate desires, develop theories, share strategies, and sculpt research that will lead to the approaches and understandings shaping this interdisciplinary interest of veterans studies. In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to make three calls that I encourage all interested readers to act upon:

(1) Submit articles, announcements, book or media reviews, interviews, and program or organizational profiles to the journal for publication. We can only succeed in sharing information if people take time to send us their ideas.

(2) Answer the call to record and submit a short video answering the question “What does veterans studies mean to you?” Read the full call on the announcements page on the journal’s website or in the calls section at the end of this issue.

(3) Encourage your friends to subscribe and contribute.

We look forward to facilitating and sustaining robust discussions of veterans studies.

Mariana Grohowski
Editor