

AHEAD-VETERAN NEWSFEED

A tri-annual newsletter brought to you by the AHEAD—Veteran Special Interest Group

VOL. 1, ISSUE 3

OCTOBER 2017

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OCTOBER 2017 - NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

National Disability Awareness Month

A National Disability Employment Awareness Month is set aside each year as a way of informing and educating individuals, schools, employers and organizations to highlight the accomplishments of individuals with disabilities and at the same time provide information on various topics aimed at removing barriers that exist to create access.

With that being said, the AHEAD - Veterans Special Interest Group has chosen this moment to share information about the accomplishments of veterans with disabilities as well as those who work with veterans and the challenges that may still exist in the educational landscape that prevent access.

DISABILITY SERVICES LIAISON IN PILOT MODE THIS FALL



The Disability Services Liaison (DSL) program began operating in a pilot mode this fall. Proof of concept has been established and campuses with are encouraged to implement the program beginning this January. The Spring 2018 semester marks the inception of phase two and scales nationally. The development of Disability Services Liaison (DSL) positions was the brain child of Dan Standage, a former college student and a veteran who was keenly aware of the multi-layered challenges veterans face in accessing disability-related services on campus. DSL is about connecting student veterans to an important, but underused service on campus — the disability service office.

Each position is funded by the VA Workstudy program, so there's no cost to the school. As a benefit under the GI Bill, veterans may be employed on campus and paid through the VA Workstudy program. Through DSL, a student veteran gains practical knowledge of the process for disclosing a disability, as well as requesting and receiving accommodations on their particular campus. This is valuable information they can share with their student veteran organization and other veterans and military-connected students on campus. Through DSL, staff in the disability service office also gain cultural competency on how to best work with veterans.

Depending on the research you are looking at, all current data indicates that anywhere from 20% to nearly 60% of all returning veterans may have a disability-related condition. These numbers far exceed the general student population on college campuses who may have a disability. The DSL program was designed as a means to create knowledge while normalizing the help-seeking behavior of student veterans with disabilities.

Since student veterans are generally not a student with a disability and do not have an IEP or 504 Plan during high school, they typically lack knowledge of the requirements for receiving disability-related services on campus, including self-disclosure and the process for requesting academic accommodations. As a result, the lack of knowledge about disability-related services combined with the cultural divide between veterans and the disability community will likely continue to discourage honest efforts to get veterans registered. However, with that being said, veterans are known to respond extremely well to influence by peer mentors, and other veterans can assist by serving in this manner. This where the DSL position has become a valuable tool.

Once an initiative to build a DSL program has been identified on a campus, two strategic elements are needed — a site supervisor and a student veteran. Next, the student veteran will submit a VA Workstudy application to the Veterans Administration (VA). Then, a position description and some semester goals are outlined. A DSL Toolkit that provides templates and ideas to serve as a starting point is available to assist campuses on how to build the program. Current operating DSLs at other campuses are also great resources. Their staff and veterans within the program can serve as a mentor to the DSL on your campus.

It is essential that DSLs make warm introductions and referrals to staff in your office. This ensures a veteran makes it to your office and feels comfortable disclosing a disability. An important step in the process of building a successful DSL to identify the climate of disability on your campus. This includes the procedures specific to your office, including an overview of FERPA and HIPAA to ensure the DSL position understands the importance of protecting privacy. This information will help the DSL to understand eligibility requirements for registering as a student with a disability so they may assist peers by guiding them to the appropriate web information or documentation procedures before they are introduced to your office. A basic understanding of common disability-related services and accommodations by a DSL is key. This insight provides an opportunity for a DSL to offer examples once a conversation starts.

Once the DSL program reaches phase two and scales nationally in Spring 2018, campuses with a Student Veterans of America (SVA) Chapter will be given priority. You can visit the VA web information to learn more about the VA Workstudy <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/workstudy.asp>. You can check the SVA Chapter directory to see if your campus is listed by visiting <http://studentveterans.org/chapter/directory>. If you have questions, need more information on how to establish a DSL on your campus or would like to have a working draft of the DSL toolkit contact Dan Standage, co-chair for the AHEAD-Veterans SIG at dan.standage@studentveterans.org.

GET TO KNOW A DSL:



Rey Marinas
DSL at: Pima Community College - East Campus
Major: Human Services, Minor: Psychology
Branch: U.S. Army
Rank: E-4 Specialist

Rank: E-4 Specialist

How have you benefitted from being a part of the DSL program?

I benefitted from the DSL program by getting the help I need to be successful in my studies and in return I became the Lead DSL for my school and my team and I went from 0% to 12% in less than 5 weeks.

How has being a part of DSL been a part of your college experience?

It has made it great. I get to connect with many other vets on a personal level and find out what programs are out there to help them. It has also made my personal schooling better as I take advantage of the programs as well. I was always taught to lead from the front, so me being a part of all this shows that this is program or this place is safe when I take other veterans into these programs.

Has DSL led to your growth as a student leader? Or your personal growth outside of the classroom?

For me it has helped my growth in both areas!! Other vets pass me in the hallways and stop me and tell me how they are doing or if they have other problems to see how I can help them. Along with being the Lead DSL next year I'll be the Head DSL and take us to a level that we have not seen on our campus yet due to all the contacts I'm making from being a part of this program.

What has been the most rewarding part of being a DSL student leader?

The biggest reward of being a DSL is when other vets come up and thank you. Most vets don't know about all the programs and all the help out there for them. So, when we get them into these programs, they come up and tell me now they don't feel alone or now they feel like they can make it!! It's the best feeling in the world knowing that you helped a brother or sister get on the path to success.

VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES: ELIMINATING BARRIERS AND FACILITATING CHANGE FOR EQUITY AND ACCESS IN POST-SECONDARY ED

Presented by Sandi Patton of Nevada State College at the 2017 Conference of AHEAD



Sandi Patton had the opportunity to present to approximately 50 AHEAD attendees on the topic of serving student veterans with disabilities within the post-secondary environment in July, 2017.

The presentation noted that most student veterans arrive on campus with no prior history, use, or knowledge of the accommodations and resources available to students with disabilities. For student veterans with disabilities, such dynamics can pose a challenge. They create an even greater obstacle for veterans who remain at home with disabling conditions and believe war wounds prevent them from accessing their educational benefits.

Data was shared regarding the SVA's recent survey of veterans attending post-secondary education. Of the student veterans surveyed, more than 50% reported that they either had a disability or were in the process of filing disability claims through the VA. 78% noted that the disability had an impact on their educational endeavors. 79% reported that stress related to the disability impacted their educational endeavors.

Clearly, this data indicates a need for post-secondary institutions to be prepared to identify and serve veterans with disabilities. This presentation provided information on a number of strategies to help make institutions more "Veteran Friendly". Additionally, specific suggestions for promoting accessibility within an institution were also discussed.

At the close of the session, a dynamic group discussion occurred. Individuals from various organizations and institutions shared ideas and practices from their own organization, as well as resources that are available. A number of veterans shared their stories of accessibility and post-secondary education. Based upon the response of this session's attendees, there is clearly a need for further discussion on this topic at a national and state level.

LIME CONNECT:



A common character description of a veteran with a disability is that they are a victim of their service. That is an outdated narrative constructed for eliciting an emotional response. Some organizations have used it as a pulpit for leverage and money at the expense of the entire population. However, there are some individuals that are doing things differently.

Lime Connect is rebranding disability for all individuals through achievement, and is expanding that scope to include veterans. We wanted to briefly mention them here, as you will likely see the name pop up from time to time. You can find more info at <https://www.limeconnect.com/>. Students with disabilities and professionals who work with individuals with disabilities can join the Lime Network, and anyone can get updates through Friends of Lime.

We are always looking for articles or information of interest pertaining to supporting student veterans with disabilities in the higher education landscape. If you are interested in submitting information for publication in the AHEAD-Veteran Newsfeed please contact:

Jorja Waybrant at waybrantj@uncsa.edu.

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