St. Louis Veterans Pre-Collegiate Fellowship

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University of Missouri-St. Louis
St. Louis Community College
St. Louis University
Washington U. in St. Louis – Univ. College

Department of Veterans Affairs, VSOC program
Student Veterans of St. Louis

*Illustration courtesy of Joe Lai
Background

Veterans that attend college graduate at a 51% rate (in 10 years!). Of the 49% that start college but don’t graduate, over ½ leave college for good before their 3rd full-time semester.

Reasons: (4 F’s and a Ph)

Failure to connect (with other students and faculty)
“Forgot how to study”
Family (or job) stress
Financial instability
Physical or cognitive injuries

Sources:
SVA Million Record Project 2014; Ackerman & DiRamio 2011; Vacchi 2012; UMSL office of Institutional Research 2014; UMSL Veterans Center Survey 2014
This problem is fixable!

Failure to connect (with other students and faculty)
  Connect veteran students to each other and their school before the first semester
“Forgot how to study”
  Refresh basic concepts and practice study skills
Family (or job) stress
  Identify stressors and teach resilience strategies
Financial instability
  Teach basic financial literacy
Physical or cognitive injuries
  Highlight available support organizations, programs and services
Our solution

The research is unequivocal. Veteran students who are connected to other veterans, connected to their university and enabled with strategies for successfully navigating the undergraduate experience are more likely to remain in college and succeed academically.

The **St. Louis Veterans Pre-Collegiate Fellowship** will build foundational academic skills for new veterans students, before they start classes, in order to equip them with the competencies they will need to succeed in at the undergraduate level.

Sources: Ackerman & DiRamio 2009; Vacchi 2012
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Fellowship Description:
Designed for the student veteran who is new to college, this 5-day intensive program will survey the essential tools for academic success. It will familiarize students with the relationship between their education and their career and personal goals. It will also expose students to campus and veteran-specific support services. **Most importantly, this fellowship will provide a venue for veterans to connect with other veterans (on campus and across the metro area) who are facing a similar transition.**

Fellowship Objectives:
- To provide students with an introduction to the skills, practices and strategies they will need to thrive in an academic environment
- To empower veterans students to successfully transition from the military to academia by highlighting their inherent strengths (discipline, focus and mission accomplishment)
- To inspire new student veterans to connect with the burgeoning network of current student veterans in the St. Louis area for the betterment of all
What do Student/Fellows get?

- Free (or very low cost) collegiate preparatory course
- Critical academic refresher and tools to succeed
- Connection to veteran network and support structures
- Connection to veteran-supportive business and networks
- College-level writing instruction and a quality personal writing sample
- College-level mathematics instruction and completion of university required math placement tests
- Starter library of important veteran focused books
- Volunteer/service opportunities and connections
Program methodology

- 5-day, intensive course / approx. 35 academic hours
- 1-2 hours of homework each night
- Very low or no cost for student veterans
- Completed within one month before matriculation
- Assigned mentors for each student-veteran
- Includes a service-learning component
- Focused work on academic fundamentals
  - Reading comprehension and academic writing
  - College-level mathematics (including placement testing)
- Working lunch or seminars covering critical topics and skills
  - VA and other veteran resources available
  - Libraries and other on-campus resources
  - Balancing school, life and work
  - Coping with stress and resilience strategies
  - Connecting academic choices and career goals
  - Effective networking in the business community
### Example daily schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30-10:00am</td>
<td>College math 2</td>
<td>Re-introduction to algebraic concepts</td>
<td>Math Success Center Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:30am</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-12:00pm</td>
<td>Reading and Writing 2</td>
<td>Understanding Academic Writing as a way to think and to solve problems</td>
<td>Writing Center Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-1:30pm</td>
<td>Working Lunch:</td>
<td>College course planning: having an effective advisor meeting</td>
<td>Academic Advisor Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30-3:00pm</td>
<td>Success on Campus 1</td>
<td>Answering the questions: How do I learn? How do I fit into a campus?</td>
<td>Center for Student Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00-3:30pm</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30-5:00pm</td>
<td>Success on Campus 2</td>
<td>How to effectively use a university library</td>
<td>Research Librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Assignment #3 (dissect a topical journal article)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Assignment #1 (personal reflection from article)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Math Assignment #1 (review of algebraic concepts)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other fellowship highlights

- Networking opportunities
  - Student Veterans of St. Louis
  - Campus faculty and staff who are veterans
  - Local VSOs (VFW, Am Legion, TMC, Team RWB, etc)
  - Local veteran supportive companies
  - Program sponsors / funders
  - Social media programs (LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook)

- Completion lunch attended by Deans, successful student vets, faculty members and other key on-campus personnel.

- Mid-week group service project

- Take-away library for each student (examples below)
  - Missouri Veteran’s Commission Handbook
  - Cass, *The Strategic Student Veteran*
  - Osborne and Arndt, *Life During College: The Veteran’s Guide to Success*
  - Sufka, *The A Game*
  - Relevant / Topical Non-Fiction Book (ex Finkel, *Thank You For Your Service*)
  - Relevant / Topical Fiction Book (ex Klay, *Redeployment*)