



From Soldier To Student: Making the Transition

CCAPS Newsletter
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The Counseling and Mental Health Center at The University of Texas at Austin recently became aware that we needed to do more about addressing the issues and needs of returning student veterans...a group that is often overlooked and likely to increase in numbers over time. We invited the director of the Austin Vet Center and a student veteran to do some successful training for our staff since many of us had little or no military experience or understanding of military culture. In addition, with permission from the Austin Vet Center to use some of their materials, we developed a brochure tailored to this population. The following text is the content of that brochure which other universities may feel welcome to use/tailor to their community.

From Soldier To Student: Making the Transition to UT

Tips for returning veterans as they transition from military service to the home front

Counseling & Mental Health Center

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Homecoming is a Process

Homecoming is a process, not an event. Whether returning from active combat or Homeland Security missions, the return to a university atmosphere from active duty is almost always a severe shock to the system.

It may feel strange to return to school to find that others are going through their everyday motions, while you just returned from a life-altering experience. Relationships change quickly, and many old friends may have graduated or moved on when you return. Readjustment means overcoming obstacles and making small but important changes. A vital change for the returning veteran is allowing yourself

What is this?

to relax and be more patient with those around you.

Each individual will experience their own obstacles. Some of these may include:

- Combat stress reactions
- Boredom—missing the thrill or adrenaline that's not part of the usual college experience.
- Bow frustration tolerance or impatience. Rules may seem meaningless, and simple questions or comments may cause unexpected reactions.
- Frustration over missed or lost time due to length of deployment.
- Difficulty concentrating, including recurring thoughts of war experiences or anxiety around finding meaning in activities.
- High alertness—difficulty relaxing or finding safety in your current environment.
- Feeling out of place or having difficulty developing new relationships. You may find it very hard to feel close to others or connect with people who haven't gone through the same experiences as you.
- Anxiety about being redeployed.

Self-Care Checklist

- Don't take too big a course load initially. Ease into it, and try not to overwhelm yourself.
- Take notes to help you stay focused on course materials and lectures.
- Get involved in school activities as a way to break down barriers between you and your classmates.
- Take advantage of school services available to you, including academic assistance and counseling services.
- Talk to the Veterans Representative in the Office of the Registrar to utilize your veterans benefits.
- Limit exposure to traumatic information (including watching news, reading the paper, etc.).
- Talk with peers and/or professionals. Recognize that others may not agree with you or understand your service in the military.
- Take care of your physical needs. Get plenty of sleep and rest, eat a good diet (at least 3 nutritious meals a day), and get exercise (physical exercise is great in reducing stress).
- Decrease unhealthy behaviors such as using alcohol, nicotine, or illegal substances.
- Have fun! Engage in healthy, pleasurable activities.
- Focus outside of yourself and give back to the community (volunteer work, etc.).
- Seek spiritual fulfillment through prayer, meditation, fellowship, etc.
- Follow a daily schedule to help yourself stay organized.
- Set reasonable boundaries for yourself.
- Pay attention to your reaction to things that happen in ordinary life situations. Learn to recognize the physical and emotional signs of stress.
- Visit the Counseling & Mental Health Center!

Combat Stress

Combat Stress is a normal set of reactions to a trauma such as war. When feelings or issues related to the trauma are not dealt with, they can lead to problems readjusting to community life. A delayed stress reaction may surface after many years and include some or all of the following problems:

- Anger, irritability, and rage
- Feeling nervous
- Depression
- Difficulty trusting others
- Feeling guilt over acts committed or witnessed, failing to prevent certain events, or merely having survived while others did not

- Hyperalertness and startle reactions
- Feeling grief or sadness
- Having thoughts and memories that will not go away
- Isolation and alienation from others
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- Low tolerance to stress
- Problems with authority
- Problems feeling good about oneself
- Nightmares
- Substance abuse
- Trouble sleeping
- Anxiety
- Paranoia

Note: At this point in the brochure, we included a fairly extensive list of campus and community resources.