

**National Service Academy Pilot Project
Findings and Recommendations
Global Justice Think Tank
Spring 2010**

Tasks assigned:

1. Research best practices for creating a more “veteran-friendly” campus
2. Explore the Honors College as a model for recruiting and educating veterans
3. Lay groundwork for NSA curriculum to prepare veterans for a variety of jobs fulfilling development, diplomacy and defense requirements (in both the public and private sectors) at local, state and national levels

Veteran-friendly aspects of the University of Utah

- Salt Lake City is diverse enough to be interesting, conservative enough to be military-friendly
- Close proximity to VA Hospital, Hill AFB, and other veteran resources
- State and local governments are nearby, offering good employment opportunities
- U of U already offers huge selection of courses that relate to NSA competencies
- Nearby and inexpensive outdoor recreation opportunities
- Relatively cheap cost-of-living

How to become more veteran-friendly

Three essential areas:

1. *Recognize* and support the particular needs that veterans have at every stage (pre-admission, orientation, during education, post-graduation employment)
2. *Provide* robust services to assist veterans in accessing federal benefits, e.g., GI Bill benefits
3. *Create* a National Service Academy curriculum that enhance veterans’ skill sets into employment skills in a variety of fields

Veterans’ needs – Pre-admission

- Many will want or need to apply to school while deployed
- May not be aware of opportunities
- May not be able to plan as far ahead as other students
- Deadlines may be difficult to meet
- Some requirements (e.g., high school transcripts) may be difficult to provide
- Money is always a concern
- Test scores and grades from high school may not reflect true potential

Meeting pre-admission needs

- Waive or relax application deadlines for veterans who are overseas
- Market aggressively using military resources, Internet
- Develop easy-to-use website that answers questions that veterans will have (include points of contact)
- Waive application fees for all veterans
- Allow veterans to complete entire application process online
- Relax application requirements for veterans who are deployed
- Consider separate admission evaluation process for veterans using more subjective criteria (e.g., recommendations from superiors)

Veterans' needs – Orientation

- Recognition that they stand on different ground than your average 18-year-old freshman
- Vets will often resent being herded around or treated like youngsters
- Recently-deployed vets will face readjustment to civilian life in addition to new school environment
- Vets have an array of concerns (such as access to federal benefits) that are unique

Meeting veterans' orientation needs

- Consider a separate orientation process for incoming veterans
- Use a buddy system – link incoming veterans with upper-class veterans
- Provide an immediate support system – face-to-face meeting with counselor who can answer questions
- First impressions are key – consider special events to acknowledge veteran service

Veterans' needs during education

- Affordable housing
- Avoid putting vets with freshmen
- Consider a “Veteran House”
- Link vets with other vets
- Reduce cost through in-state tuition from day one

Special support for veterans

- Provide advocates who can assist with VA
- Make counseling/therapy services for PTSD, TBI readily available
- Help vets take advantage of freebies and discounts

Veterans' needs during education

- Recognize that vet families are also different!
- Replicate the family support system offered by the military (family events, info sessions, etc), encourage military family members to also pursue the NSA curricula

Curriculum

- Develop a National Service Academy program that allows vets to make the most of unique skills, share experiences with non-veteran students, and broaden their professional horizons
- Develop NSA-specific core courses to be taken by all NSA students to assist with reintegration, networking, acquiring needed competencies and skill sets
- Flexibility is key – allow vets to use credits earned elsewhere; relaxed timeframe for graduation

Veterans' needs – Post-graduation

- Help finding jobs
- Consider special career-development counselors to work with vets
- Develop partnerships with corporations and agencies interested in hiring vets
- Assist vets in finding internships, fellowships, etc
- Help vets understand hiring preferences that exist at federal, state and local agencies

Honors College as the model for the NSA portal

- Existing program open to incoming students with outstanding high school performance
- Enables students to take certain core classes with other Honors students
- Special upper-level courses emphasizing leadership and advanced studies
- Provides supportive community and recognition of exceptional achievement
- Could easily serve as a model for incoming veterans

Employing National Service Academy graduates

- What unique skills do vets already have?
 - Accomplish difficult tasks in complex environments
 - Strategic and critical thinking
 - Leadership and team-building
 - Experience with challenging multi-cultural environments
- The challenge: many employers do not recognize the value in these “military” skills.
- The goal: provide an NSA curriculum that enhances veterans' skills, broadens the applicability of those skills, and prepares graduates for employment in the public and private sectors

Developing the National Service Academy curriculum

- Step One: use existing NSA-relevant courses (over 500 courses) (*see* Geography courses)
 - Anthropology
 - Architecture and planning
 - Business management and finance
 - Communication
 - Economics
 - Education
 - Engineering
 - Environmental studies
 - Family and consumer studies
 - Gender and ethnic studies
 - Geography
 - Government and political science
 - Health and Medicine
 - History
 - Honors College
 - Law
 - Language
 - Linguistics
 - Mathematics, natural sciences, physics
 - Middle East and area studies
 - Nursing
 - Philosophy
 - Psychology
 - Public administration
 - Social and behavioral science
 - Sociology
 - Social work
 - Teaching
 - Urban planning
- Step Two: create a special NSA degree or certificate
 - One possibility: allow vets to major in anything and earn NSA concentration
 - Alternate: same, but offer NSA certification, especially for NSA core courses

- Step Three: create partnerships
 - Other schools, government agencies, and employers offer internships and provide job opportunities, and also could supplement our NSA curriculum
 - State agencies
 - Federal agencies, e.g., Agriculture, Commerce, DOD, DOJ, DOS, FEMA, Interior, USAID, VA
 - NGOs such as the International Red Cross, inSTEDD, InterAction, Center for Global Development, etc
 - Other colleges and universities (e.g., Oklahoma State veterans' entrepreneurship)
 - Online/distance education programs

Conclusions

- Many “veteran-friendly” best practices can be started quickly, easily, and cheaply, whereas others (such as special housing) will take more time and require more funds
- Honors College an excellent model for the NSA portal to the U of U
- Can implement the NSA pilot quickly by using existing NSA-relevant courses
- NSA core courses can be developed through partnerships and collaboration

GEOGRAPHY

- GEOG 1000 Earth Environments and Global Change (3)
- GEOG 1001 Energy Resources in a Sustainable World (3)
- GEOG 1100 Exploring the World Through Google Earth (3)
- GEOG 1300 World Regional Geography (3)
- GEOG 1400 Human Geography (3)
- GEOG 3210 Global Climate Change (3)
- GEOG 3320 Geography of Terrorism and Homeland Security (3)
- GEOG 3340 Geography of Disasters and Emergency Management (3)
- GEOG 3341 Technological Hazards (3)
- GEOG 3350 Resource Conservation and Environmental Management (3)
- GEOG 3360 Ocean Environments (3)
- GEOG 3400 Population Geography (4)
- GEOG 3420 Political Geography (3)
- GEOG 3440 Global Economic Geography (3)
- GEOG 3460 Military Geography (3)
- GEOG 3480 Urban Geography (3)
- GEOG 3640 Geography of China and Asia (3)
- GEOG 3650 Geography of the Middle East (3) GEOG 3670 Geography of Latin America (3)
- GEOG 5210 Global Climate Change (3)
- GEOG 5230 Pyeogeography Fire, Humans, and the Environment (3)
- GEOG 5275 Vegetation and Climate Change (3)
- GEOG 5320 Geography of Terrorism and Homeland Security (3)
- GEOG 5340 Geography of Disasters and Emergency Management (3)