



National Association of Colleges and Employers - 2019 Inclusion Committee

Transcript: Working With Student Veterans

Greetings, I'm Patty Gochenauer, Career Counselor at Penn State Mont Alto. Today, I'd like to share with you some tips and strategies that relate to what our office is doing to meet our goals around diversity and inclusion and how that is working for us - specifically as it relates to our student-veterans, a population that is near and dear to me.

ROOM LAYOUT/ENVIRONMENT

#1. Consider the physical layout of the office space.

Based on what student veterans may have experienced, they may be naturally more at ease with their **backs against a wall** and with **the door/exit in sight**.

If it is not possible to adjust the physical layout of the office:

Pay attention to student's body language. If they appear nervous or anxious, acknowledge that and address it with them.

LANGUAGE:

#2. Remember combat veterans have lived and performed in conditions unimaginable to many of us. During these high-stress situations, they have developed coping skills and have put up emotional barriers to protect themselves.

One of those coping skills may be the use of "colorful" language individuals may normally find "offensive".

Put personal feelings aside and avoid overreacting. In these situations, they may be "testing the waters" to see how you will respond.

They want to know they will not be "judged". In many cases, you may see that language subside as they become more comfortable with their surroundings.

COACHING VS. COUNSELING MINDSET

#3. Veterans have gone through extensive training to prepare them for their duties and potential combat situations: They are very **procedural**, **matter of fact**, and **trained to follow orders**. They appreciate and will respond positively to **developing specific goals and action items**, **scheduling appointments**, and **setting deadlines**.

Therefore, time spent with these students will be more productive if you adopt more of a coaching vs. counseling mindset in your interactions.

MILITARY VS NON-MILITARY "SPEAK"

#4. During their times of service, student veterans have accomplished a great deal. They were given significant responsibilities and have many actionable achievements that appeal to employers.

But, many of our student veterans are humble or unable to explain their specific duties and accomplishments in terms those without military experience can understand. They may need assistance “translating” those experiences into language that will make them more marketable to prospective employers.

The good news is support is available! All military service members receive documentation that can be used as a reference in helping them develop their resumes, cover letters, and LinkedIn profiles.

These are important records that military service members typically retain. If you work with student veterans who struggle with describing their experiences, ask if they would be willing to share their personnel evaluations.

Documents that may be beneficial include the **DD214**, **NCOER** and **VMET**.

THANK YOU

Finally, it is **NEVER** appropriate to inquire about what veterans experienced on deployment or in combat. In many cases, they are bound by confidentiality and are unable to discuss it; in addition, many are unwilling to share those details with anyone except other veterans and service members who have “been there.”

However, it is **ALWAYS** acceptable to acknowledge their military experience and thank service members (including our student veterans) for their service.

I hope these pointers are helpful for you as you interact with student-veterans. Thank you for giving me the opportunity share my passion as it relates to supporting those who have served in our military!