

## Mirroring Military Comradery to Empower Student Veterans Transitioning into Higher Education

**Dana Hill, MM**

Registered Nurses in Primary Care Advisor  
Davenport University  
Grand Rapids- Lettinga  
6191 Kraft Ave SE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49512  
Tel: (616) 264.6325  
Fax: (616) 871.6161  
Email: dhill60@davenport.edu

**Stephanie Wynn, DNP, RN-BC, PMHNP-BC, FNP-BC, COI**

Professor  
Samford University  
800 Lakeshore Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35229  
Tel: (205) 726.2180  
Fax: (205) 726.2219  
Email: swynn@samford.edu

### Author Note

This project was supported in part by the Nurse Education, Practice, Quality and Retention Program - Veteran's Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The opinions are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, or endorse those of HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](http://HRSA.gov). The authors have no financial conflicts of interest. All correspondence should be directed to the first author.

### Abstract

As more veterans apply to programs in higher education, educators must acknowledge that the college experience presents challenges for veterans unlike those of traditional students. Student veterans often report difficulty connecting socially with traditional students, who are less likely to have established family, social and vocational roles. In addition, evidence suggests that fewer student veterans are successful academically when compared to other students. To facilitate the integration of student veterans on university and college campuses, a national organization has suggested increasing the availability of support services, which includes assigning individual mentors. Throughout the United States, educators have developed mentoring programs, using various models, to connect incoming student veterans with peers in order to assist them in navigating college life and identifying appropriate resources on and off campus. Many

programs seek to ease the transition from the military to campus, create a safe haven and source of support, improve academic performance, and increase the student veterans' retention rate. Overall, mentors provide ongoing support of student veterans' professional and personal goals. Peer mentoring programs have been successful in assisting student veterans in transitioning from military service into the student role to graduation and beyond. This article discusses the significance of peer support in higher education between veterans.

*Keywords:* peer mentoring, veteran students, higher education, nursing

### Introduction

“Henry the Fifth was talking to his men and he said from this day to the ending of the world we and it shall be remembered. We lucky few, we band of brothers, for he who sheds his blood with me today shall be my brother.”

—C. Carwood Lipton,  
*Band of Brothers, Season 1: Points*

The day someone raises their right hand, recites the oath, and joins the ranks of our nation's military is a day that changes their life. A well-known quote written by an unknown author describes a veteran as “someone who wrote a blank check made payable to the United States of America for an amount up to and including their life.” To bear this burden alone is an insurmountable task and greatly explains the deep connection and bond formed between those in service. Bonds and relationships formed in moments of pain, struggle, determination and triumph create one cohesive unit built to protect each other in greatest moments of danger; or as Carwood Lipton put it, those who shed their blood shall be my brother. Relationships formed do not end when military service is completed; they last forever. An importance exists in maintaining those bonds and relationships as service members and veterans seek higher education. The purpose of this article is to discuss the significance of peer support in higher education between veterans.

### Veteran Culture and Camaraderie

Veteran culture is rooted deeply in the challenges and tasks that service members face. From the time an individual enters Basic Training to the completion of service, military members develop strong values and beliefs that make the military strong. The military itself has its own ethos that distinguishes the character or guiding beliefs of its members. Pride and determination to serve the United States of America instills a deep and enduring sense of loyalty and commitment to fellow service members. This is present within all service members and strengthens through each branch under which they serve. By upholding this spirit, service members maintain the strength to persevere through periods of great danger and deprivation. They protect each other from harm in combat or the wounds of psychological damage inflicted in conflict. After forming a sense of family during years of friendship and shared experiences during high times of stress, transitioning from the military to higher education can create feelings of isolation and frustration for service members (Patterson, 2019).

## Transition to Higher Education

Survey results released from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (2018) estimated that 15 percent of veterans enrolled in higher education upon completion of service. In 2015, 44% of student veterans enrolled in bachelor's degree programs (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2019). Subsequently, this significant influx of military members increased the need for research to support transitioning service members to higher education and civilian life. A study performed on mental health and wellbeing for student veterans touched on the cultural aspects that differ from them and civilians (Taylor & Francis Group, 2019). Comprised of responses from 20 student veterans, the differences in civilian and military student culture were analyzed. Results revealed that, even without a difference in the age of a veteran and a civilian student, "military service ha[d] instilled them with vastly different cultural values, which meant they experienced 'cultural shock' when going from a military environment to a college campus" (Taylor & Francis Group, para 4). Further findings indicated cultural shock was true for both combat and non-combat veterans; removing the stigma of combat makes it hard to return to civilian life. In fact, difficulties leaving the military and readjusting to civilian life come from a multitude of sources such as socioeconomic and educational problems prior to enlisting in the service (Derefinko et al., 2019). Furthermore, some topics in classroom conversations related to politics controversial to military practices were found to heighten stress. Other standards or trivial matters like exams, hygiene practices, and professionalism exacerbated differences with classmates (Taylor & Francis Group).

Several sociocultural, situation, and academic factors have been at the root of the students' anguish in higher education (Sharp & Theiler, 2018). In response to the stress of transitioning to college, service members may respond to stress by reaching out for help or becoming isolated. Isolation from other students can lead to further issues and may eventually lead to drop out. Furthermore, students enrolled in nursing programs have additional stressors, increasing the risk for psychological distress (Deasy, Coughlan, Pironom, Jourdan, & Mannix-McNamara, 2014). In efforts to decrease feelings of isolation, higher education institutions can offer a Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapter or spaces such as military lounges. These organizations or designated areas for student veterans allow them to connect with others. Issues with transition begin with the loss of camaraderie and teamwork provided by the military. Think of it in terms of the Three Musketeers, "All for one, and one for all." Military members work in highly effective and high functioning teams. This also relates back to Captain Lipton in *Band of Brothers*, "we few, we band of brothers." Service members consider teamwork as the core unit of the military's establishments and operations (Veestraeten, Kyndt., & Dochy, 2014). In higher education, this sense of team is quickly lost as grades and exams are based on solo performance. Although group work and team projects exist in higher education, grades drive performance more than working together. Group work can heighten stress and isolation for veterans as they struggle with loss of team from the "all for one mentality" to "all for one and none for all." By providing places to meet and programs to connect, student veterans are able to secure new teams early in their education.

### Meeting Veterans at the Door - Admissions

Teamwork, culture, and transition are all keywords for student veterans in higher education. The key for successful recruitment-to-graduation of veterans needs to start at the door and end on the stage. Meeting veterans in admissions or one who has successfully completed a college degree “at the door” quickly establishes trust and rapport with a potential military student.

For example, a potential military student calls admissions and speaks to an admissions representative. He notifies the representative that he served in the US Army as a 68W, Active Duty with two tours, separated as an E6 and now he is interested in nursing. To a civilian, this terminology may signify the veteran was in the Army and deployed twice. However, by switching the role of the admissions representative to someone with a military background, the statement translates as the veteran served in the Army as a medic. He deployed twice and reached mid-level leadership with higher levels of school and training. This translation automatically allows the representative to respond to the student with an understanding and continue a dialogue using military jargon. The ability to connect and speak with a student veteran in comfortable terms establishes trust and decreases the time and effort needed to relay an understanding of the terms of higher education. Initial contact with another military member introduces the newly enrolled student to their first team member at the school. Speaking with someone who has a military background creates a sense of comfort from his or her first contact with the school. Initiating a new sense of camaraderie at the start of a program in higher education aids in the student’s healing related to the transition out of the military.

### Academic Support

The idea of meeting veterans at the door and aiding them to the stage of graduation should continue with support throughout the program. Davenport University (DU) and Samford University (SU) addressed this need by developing programs like the Battle Buddy system and Alumni Mentoring Program to Enhance Diversity - Veterans (AMPED-VET). The programs connected student veterans with others during their academic journey. Funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for the Veteran Bachelor of Science and Nursing (VBSN) program provided student veterans with a dedicated academic advisor with military experience to guide them through school. Offering a dedicated academic advisor with military experience resulted in higher retention and graduation rates for VBSN students. During the VBSN program, feedback from the students revealed occasional withdrawal from faculty who held an officer rank in the military or those who held titles such as Liaison/Coordinator or Dean. When approached by faculty in leadership positions, the students answered with “yes ma’am/sir or no ma’am/sir” mentality. If students were struggling, they were not willing to ask for help and pushed through or moved forward. When an academic advisor with a lower enlisted rank joined the team, students were more willing to ask for help as rank was removed from the situation.

Over the years, lessons learned from transitioning veterans into higher education enhanced academic support for students. The dedicated veteran academic advisor developed networking opportunities for students, ranging from support resources to employment opportunities. When issues with school or stress arose, students were willing to reach out to the advisor for

help who could then direct them to the appropriate resources. In turn, the academic advisor was able to build and develop resources within the school and community outreach to support student veterans. News of the success and high retention from the VBSN program spread, causing other departments to request information to develop support programs for their student veterans. This type of connection continued the support and camaraderie at a deeper level within the higher education system; and student veterans recognized the familiar support system throughout their college experience. By having continued support from another veteran, the student veterans healed and adapted to the higher education environment more quickly.

An additional aspect of the military advisor provided support to veterans when the stress of balancing school and home life caused students to withdraw from school or notice any warning signs. Student veterans often missed family gatherings, funerals or birthdays during their service. Duty and obligation do not make it easy for service members to overcome missing these events; but the sense of family from others and their shared experiences can help. While attending school, balancing family obligations, childcare, financial requirements and overall common day-to-day tasks can become much more difficult when a life event, either positive or negative, occurs. Often, student veterans contacted the dedicated advisor when one of these events occurred. Their trust in another veteran within the school allowed a bridge in communication with staff and faculty to address the reason a student may seem distant or withdrawn when dealing with these issues. Students were more willing to express their issues and in even the most serious cases, improving the ability of the team to aid a student who was at risk due to mental health or failing grades. Year one attrition results reported 75% retention of student veterans. By year four, retention rates climbed to 90% indicating the aided efforts of VBSN staff and faculty were successful.

### **Efficacy of Mentorship Programs**

Mentoring skills are valued in the healthcare professions as they assist in influencing and shaping the careers of the next generation of providers. Mentors promote mentees' career development by providing advice and guidance while facilitating professional and personal connections. Since a mentor serves as a role model and support system, in an effort to provide motivation and foster psychosocial well-being, mentoring has been linked to stress reduction (Rush, Adamack, Gordon, Lilly, & Janke, 2013; Akinla, Hagan, & Atiomo, 2018). In several studies, the application of seniority as a criterion for being a mentor noted positive results in nursing (Chen & Lou, 2014). Effective mentoring has the ability to provide mentees with psychosocial comfort and empowerment while they transition into new territories in life.

Peer mentoring in first-year undergraduate nursing has been beneficial in the successful transition of nursing and other health professions' students (Carragher & McGaughey, 2016). The intervention has shown efficacy in promoting college student success (Yomtov, Plunkett, Efrat, & Marin, 2015; Collier, 2017), and can improve knowledge related to professionalism, values, ethics, and the health profession not learned from textbooks. Programs offering mentorship programs and other support activities tend to have lower attrition rates (Jacob, Attack, Ng, Haghiri-Vijeh, Dell'Elce, 2015). Overall mentorship programs including domains of emotional support, provision of academic subject matter, role modeling, and goal setting produced intended positive results.

### Establishment of Veteran-Centered Peer Mentoring Programs

A peer mentorship program in higher education dedicated to student veteran success should build upon the strengths developed in military service. Service members naturally understand the network system of working with another. Establishing a program for student veterans to connect early initiates the transition to higher education at the start and limits feelings of isolation. Because of grant support, the number of nursing student veterans on universities' campuses increased. DU and SU averaged two nursing student veterans annually prior to implementation of the grant. By the end of the grant, a total of 36 nursing student veterans were enrolled at both schools. Although groups of student veterans attended the same classes, a need still existed for them to have a way to connect formally with their classmates. In an answer to building a team environment, both universities used best practices (Table 1) to establish veteran-centered peer mentoring programs, focusing on the student veterans diverse needs. With DU utilizing current students and SU maintaining relationships with alumni, both programs focused on the efficacy of relationships to transition successfully student veterans in higher education.

Table 1.

Best Practices for Mentorships	
Mentors	Mentees
Get to know the mentee	Focus on achieving learning goals
Establish working agreements	Expect to drive the mentoring relationship
Focus on developing robust learning goals	Create SMART goals that contribute to development
Balance talking and listening	Be authentic, open and honest
Ask questions rather than give answers	Prepare for all mentoring meetings
Engage in meaningful and authentic conversation	Stay connected and in communication with mentor
Check out assumptions and hunches	Be willing to step out of comfort zone
Support and challenge the mentee	Ask for specific feedback
Set the expectation of two-way feedback	Focus on the future
Check in regularly to stay on track	Keep a journal
<p><i>Note.</i> Center for Mentoring Excellence. (2015). <i>Top 10 best practices for mentors</i>. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.centerformentoring.com/top-10-best-practices-for-mentors">https://www.centerformentoring.com/top-10-best-practices-for-mentors</a></p> <p>Center for Mentoring Excellence. (2015). <i>Top 10 best practices for mentees</i>. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.centerformentoring.com/top-10-best-practices-for-mentees">https://www.centerformentoring.com/top-10-best-practices-for-mentees</a></p>	

### Davenport Battle Buddy Program

As a part of the VBSN grant, the DU Nursing program welcomed student veterans with medical backgrounds into advanced standing by granting credits for military transcript experience. Through the efforts of the VBSN team, a partnership was developed. In their first semester of nursing school, VBSN students attended a Transitions course to assess their medical skills and begin their skills in nursing fundamentals. Recognizing the benefits of teamwork, all VBSN students across Davenport's four nursing campuses in the state of Michigan attended the course online. The VBSN team, comprised of all prior military service members, recruited, advised, and taught the VBSN cohorts, maintaining a military connection. Developing a team with military experience enhanced the care and knowledge of working with the VBSN cohorts.

Clashes of culture in the classroom can lead any student to withdraw or underperform. These social differences can often enhance stressors for military students. In an effort to aid the many veterans separating from the military and seeking higher education, DU developed an educational training Green Zone for faculty and staff. This program recognizes certain staff and faculty familiar with military culture, affording students an opportunity to connect with someone veteran culturally competent. In addition, a military simulation was created to enhance veteran cultural awareness on campus. Similar to another study (Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), DU's VBSN Cohort Survey revealed that military students struggled with various areas such as feeling old in class, handling time management, communicating with other students and faculty, feeling a lack of respect or support, and balancing school and life. Data from a survey conducted by the University of Syracuse Institute for Veterans and Military Families supported the results of the DU veterans. Highlights of the survey affirmed that the lived experiences of veterans from the latest generation indicate strong positive perceptions of the military experience itself (Zoli, 2015). These perceptions, based upon their service, create barriers for veterans while seeking higher education. When veteran students struggle with the transition from military service to school, barriers they face become heightened, increasing their chances to fail. Rather than forcing military students to give up the ethos and culture of the military, educational institutions that support students through embracing core elements of the military better aid the transition. Affording student veterans to connect with other service members in the same program enabled a smoother period of change.

The connection through the military quickly builds comradery common in military service. Seeing the comradery develop through the transitions course, the Battle Buddy system became apparent as a way to develop a new support system. This support system had many benefits to the VBSN students who were able to support each other and develop further bonds while attending school.

Findings of DU's VBSN Cohort Survey confirmed that student veterans struggled with issues related to military transition. In order to address student concerns from the survey and aid the transition of student veterans, the VBSN team used Green Zone training and the military simulation to train staff and faculty while creating a supportive network for student veterans. The creation of the Battle Buddy system connected DU VBSN students across the four nursing campuses, giving them an opportunity to establish a new sense of comradery and connection with others who have served. Establishing the Battle Buddy system addressed student veteran issues with time management, balancing school, work and life. Mentorship connected those who successfully transitioned in other cohorts with new cohort students. During VBSN orientation, students in all cohorts were given contact information for all VBSN students. In addition, incoming students were assigned to someone in the upperclass. Students quickly used the information to communicate with each other across campuses and the same grade level. This added a layer of support for all students. The VBSN team also noticed that much like the military, one student naturally stepped into a leadership role by communicating and advocating for the other students.

Feedback from DU VBSN students showed positive feedback results in further surveys. One student stated:

The VBSN program has many benefits that I never experienced at other colleges. We were recognized for our experiences in the military that had a direct correlation to credits

in school. Working directly with other military students in the same program made my transition easier. We all work together to study, remind each other of important deadlines, and we all know the struggle of balancing school, work, and our families. It's not that other students don't have the same obligations, it's just different knowing our shared military experiences give us a different connection from other students from the start.

The Battle Buddy system is quite simple; it gives the students contact information at orientation and assigns them someone to reach out to, yet it quickly gives incoming veterans a new team.

### *AMPED-VET Program*

The Alumni Mentoring Program to Enhance Diversity (AMPED) was developed to improve efforts to promote diversity and increase awareness and understanding of multiculturalism and diversity throughout the university. Based on the same concepts, the AMPED-VET was modified to focus on the culture and multiplicity of veterans. The main goal of the program was to motivate and support student veterans to deliver their best through learning and development opportunities. In the hopes of promoting successful mentoring relationships, the program used a model (per Figure 1 below) focused on planning, implementing new ideas, and improving motivation and communication skills. Based on literature that suggests mentoring has improved effectiveness when mentees are able to select their mentors (Taylor et al., 2013; Choudhury et al., 2014), the creation of the AMPED-VET integrated the type of peer mentoring relationships into its development. Because mentoring relationships often take time to develop as trainees acclimate to their new environment, the opportunity to participate in the mentorship program was announced during orientation to the VBSN program.



*Mentoring Model*

The delivery of the AMPED differed between schools throughout the university, and programs were adapted to meet specific institutional or departmental requirements. The AMPED-VET program was divided into three phases: Relationship Building, Transition Preparation, and Career Goals. A new VBSN graduate served as the lead mentor of the program. In this role, he or she oversaw the mentor/mentee matching process and supervised the on-going relationship. Once mentors and mentees were matched, they developed a meeting schedule that was conducive to their availability. During the first phase meeting, the discussion centered around identifying the expectations for the exchange. Topics discussed usually included the vision of the mentoring relationship and essential areas of support. In addition, mentors as well as mentees were encouraged to share their background and interest in nursing during this time. Other questions often asked by the mentor were:

1. What experiences impacted your decision to pursue a career in nurses?
2. How do you believe your learned skills in the military are beneficial in your transition to practicing in the civilian healthcare system?
3. What do you hope to achieve personally and professionally through your mentoring experience?
4. Do you have any apprehension?

Mentees often asked:

1. How can I make the most of this opportunity so that it benefits my career?
2. What are the unspoken rules in the school?
3. What can I expect when in a clinical rotation?
4. Have you faced any challenges transitioning from the military to civilian academia?

In phase two, mentees were prepared to successfully transition into civilian healthcare settings. Mentees had the opportunity to learn about the various facets of their new journey in academia. They explored how their military service history could influence many of their decisions. Emphasis was placed on the fact that training may occur in settings different from past experiences. The importance of relying on their mentors to assist in preparing for the challenges they may face was reiterated throughout this phase.

As the overall goal of the VBSN program was to launch the students into a meaningful occupation undertaking as a nurse, the last phase focused on developing a well-defined career plan. During this time, the mentor's prior experience helped guide the mentee's proposal. Mentees assisted mentors in developing portfolios, which included samples of student work as well as clinical experiences and military training. Mentors often discussed ways to leverage professional networks and develop learning opportunities. In addition, mentees were encouraged to join professional nursing associations that might provide networking and professional development opportunities as well as other resources. Having the guidance, encouragement, and support of an experienced mentor provided the mentee with a range of professional and personal benefits, ultimately leading to improved performance in the academic setting.

Given the additional work created by being a mentor, the school of nursing's intentional flexibility of the program afforded recent graduates the opportunity to serve as mentors. Qualities of the program included voluntary participation by the mentor and mentee. In

addition, limited restrictions were placed on the mentoring process to allow mentors and mentees the chance to develop a relationship that was appropriate to their exact needs. In doing so, mentors and mentees were able to determine a schedule and meeting frequencies that were favorable to each person's availability. Mentors voiced satisfaction in being able to serve without feeling overwhelmed because of the ability to modify the implementation of duties of the program while balancing other life responsibilities.

The benefits of mentoring were widespread for mentors as well. Mentoring offered mentors the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and served as a conduit for giving back to the school of nursing. The mentoring program improved relationship-building skills. Furthermore, mentoring enhanced peer recognition. The encouragement of knowledge sharing increased a mentor's feeling of self-worth. A sense of fulfillment through sharing principles was established. Through mentoring, mentors were able to practice listening and interpersonal skills while widening their understanding of the organization's infrastructure. In turn, those learned experiences were passed on to the mentee. Most of all, supporting the development of others provided the mentor personal satisfaction and an extended network.

### *Crossing the Stage - Mentorship Success Stories*

Participating veteran students offered feedback on involvement in the Battle Buddy and AMPED-VET mentoring programs. The two short stories below address the success of student veterans included in both programs. The student veterans welcomed the mentoring support to assist them with integrating on campus. By utilizing students and graduates who were familiar with the process of transitioning into higher education and nursing careers, the mentorship programs were successful in assisting with more than just the earning of a degree; the increased retention and graduation rates for veteran students was also noted.

***Veteran Story One.*** Mentoring through the Battle Buddy system aided multiple students at DU to transition successfully and graduate. As the focus of the program centers around the students working together to navigate the challenges of nursing school, there are many stories of success.

C.M. started at DU in an early cohort and experienced a long journey to graduation. Coming from a military background with an intense deployment and a high suicide rate among fellow service members post deployment, C.M. struggled with the loss of his comrades while transitioning to higher education. In order to address symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and loss, he began to teach yoga classes to deal with stress. Finding peace and balance through yoga practice, he began to teach yoga on campus for other nursing students and staff. He used his pain and struggles to mentor others in stress management. Faced with many challenges, he successfully graduated from nursing school and continues his yoga practice. The Battle Buddy system focused on working with other students to navigate school, a sign of true success is reaching outside the program to help others.

***Veteran Story Two.*** J.S. was a 25 year-old male enrolled in the VBSN pathway, transfer option. Upon entry into the Army, J.S. completed Airborne School, joining the ranks of other elite paratroopers. During his second year, he was deployed overseas. As he was trained to conduct a range of missions, from prevention and preemptive tasks, to complex high intensity war fighting, he had no idea of what to expect once his "boots touched the ground." Eventually, he returned to the United States and decided to enroll in nursing school. Though excited to start a new journey, J.S. also felt a sense of apprehension.

During the orientation to the VBSN pathway, J.S. reported that the introduction of the AMPED-VET program immediately piqued his attention. He believed developing a mentoring relationship with someone who had already completed the nursing program could aid in alleviating some of his uncertainty. As the mentor would be another veteran, this detail was of added value for his desire to participate in the mentoring program. He believed the mentoring program would provide professional socialization and personal support which would ultimately facilitate his success in academia as well as in his career.

Throughout the program, J.S. faced personal and academic challenges. However, his mentor was always available to help him handle those difficult situations whenever they arose. The quality mentoring relationship produced positive outcomes in several academic, personal, and professional situations. In the end, J.S. stated, “Having a mentor gave me the sense of knowing someone cared about me. I was not alone in dealing with the day-to-day challenges. I was not just another student. I mattered.” J.S. graduated and began his career as a nurse in a civilian setting immediately after graduation.

### **Future Implications**

As student veterans continue to transition into higher education across the nation, a need exists to connect them with mentoring relationships. In many instances, the rigid curriculum, continuous exams and assignments, and study requirements frequently cause feelings of pressure, even in traditional college students. At times, these students conclude they have made the wrong decision in attempting to further their education so they eventually drop out. Educators are encouraged to consider how interventions targeting student veterans’ transition phases such as peer mentoring can address many of these challenges. Known positive outcomes of peer mentoring include professional and personal development, stress reduction, and transitioning facilitation (Akinla, Hagan, & Atiomo, 2018). Therefore, educators are charged with linking student veterans to peers prepared to support them in acclimating to the college environment in order to overcome any and all problems that develop over time. In addition, the motivation to lower student attrition rates serves as an influencing factor in the provision of processes such as mentoring programs to assist student veterans in achieving their educational objectives. Future implications are for educators to ensure peer mentoring is available to student veterans in order to promote success in an environment of inclusion and retention.

### **Conclusion**

Dating back even to ancient times, mentoring has an illustrious history in academia. As successful mentoring programs require a span of human qualities such as commitment, trustworthiness, empathy, and psychological and emotional support (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017), the recognition and appreciation of these functions was essential to the Battle Buddy and AMPED-VET programs’ growth and sustainability. Furthermore, additional skills such as listening, motivating, questioning, challenging, and supporting were indispensable. Throughout the program, mentors provided student veteran mentees a boost of confidence and reminded them that the ultimate goal of graduation was always within reach. Because mentors had more experience than mentees, their unique positions often allowed them to offer advice on the handling of specific situations, focusing on targets, and prioritizing along the academic journey. At times, mentees desired to speak freely about their troubles,

## Articles

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feelings, emotions and fears so mentors were available just to lend an attentive ear. Although the mentoring programs were designed to last for a predetermined time, many of these professional relationships were long lasting and life changing. By way of both mentoring programs, student veterans were given the opportunity to receive a “life line” while navigating the high demands of academia. In the end, the peer mentoring programs were successful in serving as a bridge, starting when the student veterans walk through the door of the higher education institution and continuing until they crossed the graduation stage and beyond.

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