Purpose

The Think Tank Discussion: Serving Veterans at GRCC was hosted by Green River Community College (GRCC) and was partially funded by the US Department of Education as part of the *AccessCollege* project at the University of Washington in Seattle. The purpose of the event was to identify ways in which existing campus programs and services can collaborate to improve veterans' access to GRCC academic programs and support services as well as to increase faculty and staff awareness of the characteristics, interests, and needs of returning veterans, including those with disabilities.

Agenda

9:00   Welcome and Introductions

9:30   Presentation on Veterans Issues in Postsecondary Education, including at GRCC

10:00   Panel Discussion
Veterans and family members addressed the following questions:
1. What are your thoughts and experiences with college as a veteran or as a family member of a veteran?
2. What campus and academic programs, resources, and support services did you use or did your family member(s) use in the transition to campus life?
3. From your perspective, what are two or three specific gaps in services or programs that impacted your transition or the transition of your family member(s) to campus?

10:45   Group Discussion of Questions Two and Three (listed above)

11:15   Break

11:30   Introduction of Veterans Coordinating Council and Community of Practice
- Membership
- Faculty and staff professional training
- Campus connections and student groups
- Resource development and budget planning
- Outreach and marketing (technology, open communication, and the web)
- Other

12:00   Lunch

12:30   Action Planning
- Small group discussion on strategies, training, and services
- Brainstorm ideas that can be implemented in the 2008-2009 school year

1:45   Summary

Presentation on Veteran Issues
Presenters: Mark Fischer and Peter Schmidt

The content presented included

- common injuries veterans are experiencing as a result of recent wars,
- how war injuries will affect veterans upon their return to the US,
- how the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is preparing for returning veterans,
- the role of community colleges in assisting veterans with their transition to civilian and college life, and
- suggestions for support systems and other best practices.

There are a significant number of veterans experiencing mental health issues related to combat experiences that require our attention. It is important for community college faculty, staff, and administration to be aware of the symptoms and severity of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and head injuries, two common health issues of returning veterans.

A number of resources are available for veterans. However, some veterans choose not to get counseling or help after serving in the military for fear of the stigma associated with mental health issues, including being identified as unfit.

Panel Discussion
Facilitator: Al Souma

Panel: Richard Douglas, Sandra Davidson, Doug Gannon, Jeremy Grisham, Manilla, Diane Martin, and Patty Sherman

1. What are your thoughts and experiences with college as a veteran or as a family member of a veteran?

Many veterans struggle with how to transition into civilian life when they return from service and may spend months or even years disengaged from civilian life. Often it takes a relative or friend to encourage a veteran to enroll in school and determine their career interests. The Veterans Conservation Corp helps many veterans get back on track with their lives and goals. The program creates a sense of belonging and purpose. PTSD may present difficulties for veterans and may require accommodations from faculty in the classroom. Some veterans may come to college with a misperception of the student population, thinking that the students are all young, liberal, pierced, etc. The military culture is different than the classroom culture. Veterans are trained to work as one unit with a clear and distinctive mission. Once in college, many veterans must learn to relate to peers and meet faculty expectations in a new way.

College is a whole new world for veterans and provides many options and directions. Campus bureaucracy can be overwhelming for veterans who are not familiar with the various departments, policies, and procedures. There isn't a main path that veterans may follow to get to college. Some stumble into it, some are encouraged to apply by loved ones,

and others eventually find their way after spending time isolated and withdrawn from the community. It is not unusual for veterans to come from disparate populations and struggle with self-esteem issues. Veteran's military identity shifts once they leave the military.

2. **What campus and academic programs, resources, and support services did you use or did your family member(s) use in the transition to campus life?**

The most important support service for a vet is a welcoming environment. Veterans are sensitive to whether or not a school is veteran-friendly. In a non-veteran friendly school, vets may have to hunt for programs and assistance, the staff may have an uncaring and unresponsive attitude, and the atmosphere is not perceived as helpful or welcoming.

One support service that veterans may use more than other students is career services. Many veterans come to college because they are unable to do the professional work they did while serving in the military. Many do not know what they want to do in civilian life and require vocational guidance. Interest assessment tools, aptitude tests, or a career orientation class would be several possible options. Sometimes veterans also need help translating a skill they used in the military to civilian language for their resume.

3. **From your perspective, what are two or three specific gaps in services or programs that impacted your transition or the transition of your family member(s) to campus?**

Gaps in services and programs sometimes prevent a veteran from being successful on campus. Accessibility and assessment are important for closing these gaps. Veterans want colleges to have a safe entry point with accurate veteran related information available by knowledgeable staff. In the classroom, specific accommodations may be required. It is not always easy for a veteran to obtain medical documentation as quickly as required by disability support services (DSS) to receive accommodations. A vet might not tolerate standing in lines, loud noises, or a threatening environment. One best practice colleges can do is educate its staff, faculty, and administration on the after effects of war trauma and what services veterans may require. The college should be aware of issues that veterans face such as alcoholism, isolation, and transitional challenges facing the returning vet. One approach in working with a vet is to assist them in determining their career "mission" or goals.

Veterans Coordinating Council and Community of Practice Action Planning

A Veterans Coordinating Council and Community of Practice will help implement the following list of ideas, generated from the discussion. The main purpose of the council is to close the gaps that currently exist in our system, beginning by raising veteran awareness on campus. The council will focus on closing the gaps in areas that include, but are not limited to

1. faculty and staff professional training;
2. campus connections and student groups;
3. resource development and budget planning; and
4. outreach and marketing to include technology, open communication, and the web.

The following content summarizes suggestions presented by participants:

1. **Faculty and staff professional training**
   - Veteran's panel discussion (identify stakeholders who can be brought into discussions).
   - Identify faculty and staff that are veterans.
   - Post veteran safe zone and "I am a vet" flyers.
   - Talk about fears or strategies when working with veterans.
   - Offer anger management classes for students and workshops for faculty and staff on how to de-escalate an anger moment.
   - Use In-Service Day to train personnel on veteran awareness.
   - New faculty orientation materials can include a veteran awareness packet.

2. **Campus connections and student groups**
   - Establish a Veterans Club that is open to all students.
   - Host one event per quarter so that veterans can learn more about the various departments on campus.
   - Find a way to track veterans as they progress through GRCC.
   - Send information packets about what the veteran's office provides in terms of GI benefits.
   - Gator guide idea: Vet to Vet.
   - Engage with the Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC).
   - Host a Veterans Day (Nov 11) celebration.

3. **Resource development and budget planning**
   - Engage staff to address these issues.

4. **Outreach and marketing (technology, open communication, and the Web)**
   - Create a link to a veteran website on the GRCC's home page. This website will have information regarding
     - veteran events,
     - the GI Bill,
     - campus services (e.g., counseling, veterans, and DSS offices),
     - program information (e.g., eLearning, Natural Resources),
     - toll-free telephone numbers,
     - student clubs, and
     - links to MySpace and blogs.
   - Use GRCC events to extend a welcome to veterans. Upcoming events could include
     - HSP Breakfast (Nov 5) and
     - Next Step.

- Distribute marketing materials in stations, military bases, education fairs, apartments, laundry mats, community centers, churches, libraries, recovery centers, health clinics, the VFW, and community boards (e.g., Starbucks).
- Create a panel that will present at WF, DSS, and Outreach.

General ideas for implementation
- Use language that helps veterans find their mission.
- Offer priority course registration for veterans.
- Create orientation for all veterans, not just VCC members.
- Connect with military transitional programs and bring them to GRCC for events and an orientation.
- Have an assessment test available for veterans to take at the career services office.
- Assist with veterans credential evaluation for prof-tech.
- Explore ways to transfer life credit into a degree program.
- Expedite the college process.
- Share information between departments.
- Have DSS develop a best practices sheet that may be distributed to faculty and staff.
- Offer a course on PTSD.
- Introduce counseling staff to signs and symptoms of PTSD and offer CEU workshops on PTSD and war trauma stress reactions.
- Send letters to veterans about campus resources and services.
- Develop a list of all campus employees who are veterans or are dependents of veterans and create a veterans support team.
- Establish a veterans club—host a veteran information day or fair and invite veteran contractors, the VFW, and the American Legion to campus.
- Host a Veterans Day activity.
- Develop workshops on military cultural competency.
- Host a brown bag workshop and discussion panel for veterans.
- Create a GRCC veterans coin.

For further information on GRCC's Veteran's Coordinating Council, please contact Deb Casey, Ph.D. Dean of Student Services and Retention at phone number 253-833-9111 X3328

Participants
- Director, Tutoring Services
- Dean, Student Services and Retention
- Assistant Director, Athletics and Retention
- Coordinator, Recruitment and Outreach
- Coordinator, Scheduling Office
- Coordinator, Women's Programs
- Coordinator, Worker Retraining
- Counselors, GRCC
- Dean, Library and Media Services
- Director, Communications and Program Marketing
- Director, Education and Support Services
- Instructor, Natural Resources
- Interim Director, Disability Support Services
- Outreach Contractor, Higher Education for Veterans Affairs
- Outreach Specialist, Valley Cities Veterans
- Parent of a Veteran
- Program Coordinator, Kent Campus
- Program Coordinator, Veterans Services
- Program Manager, Veterans Conservation Corp.
- Purchasing Assistant, Business Office
- Specialist to the Dean, Student Services and Retention
- Students, GRCC
- Veterans, GRCC

Acknowledgment:

About GRCC

GRCC is a fully accredited two-year community college with the main campus located in Auburn, Washington. GRCC improves the lives of people within diverse communities by providing quality education and training programs. GRCC assists students in defining and achieving their goals through instructional excellence, innovative programs and responsive services.

About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

For further information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, or to request materials in an alternate format, contact:

DO-IT
Box 354842
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195-4842
doit@washington.edu
http://www.washington.edu/doit/
206-221-4171 (FAX)
206-685-DOIT (3648) (voice / TTY)
888-972-DOIT (3648) (toll free voice / TTY)
509-328-9331 (voice / TTY) Spokane
Director: Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.

Access**College**   **Green River** COMMUNITY COLLEGE

University of Washington
College of Engineering
UW Technology Services
College of Education

DO·IT

01 / 22 / 09