



VETERAN LAW STUDENTS: INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES TO TRANSFORM THEIR LAW SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Alison M. Nissen, JD*

I. INTRODUCTION¹

As the number of veterans who are attending college continues to grow,² veteran students will likely continue on to

* Clinical Associate Professor of Law, Rutgers School of Law – Camden, Director of Academic Success. First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge and thank all of the veteran law students for their brave service to our country and for sharing their experiences with me. Second, I wish to thank the following faculty from Rutgers – Camden for their assistance: Professor Carol Wallinger, Professor Jason Cohen, and Professor Ruth Anne Robbins, and the Clinical Faculty Scholarship group. Finally, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of my research assistant, Trevor Taniguchi.

¹ “It sounded like rain. This made no sense since I was sitting in my first Contracts class. I quickly scanned the room to try and figure out what was going on. Every one of my classmates was furiously tapping on their laptops. I looked down at my pen and legal pad and thought to myself, ‘*Okay, I can deal with this situation.*’ So I brought my laptop to class the next day. But it was so old it seemed like it took almost half the class to boot up. Not a very smooth start to my law school career. Hard to believe two weeks ago I was in Iraq.”

Interview with Anonymous, Combat Veteran, Officer, Navy SEAL, Rutgers School of Law – Camden 2012 Graduate, in Camden, N.J. (Aug. 31, 2012). This veteran law student, who is a husband and father, became an editor-in-chief of a law journal, a Student Bar Association leader, and, ultimately, graduated with honors. This graduate does not want to call attention to his military service. As he explained to me, he is very willing to help in any way that he can but does not want any individual attention. “Another quirky military concept,” he explained.

² See Libby Sander, *Colleges Venture off Campus to Bridge Military-Civilian Divide*, THE CHRON. OF HIGHER EDUC. (Sept. 17, 2012), <http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Go-Off-Campus-to/134450/?cid>; see also

graduate schools, including law schools. By acknowledging and welcoming veteran students³ with institutional programs that recognize these students as a unique population and that link these students with each other through peer-to-peer mentoring programs, law schools can help them use their unique skills to benefit the law school, themselves, and both the legal and local communities.⁴

These initiatives can provide veteran students with the tools they need to understand the key cultural differences between the military and law school. These institutional initiatives are based in part on my individual work with current and former veteran law students, including informal interviews and one-on-one conferences regarding their experiences in law school. These initiatives are also based on and supported by an extensive review of research and literature addressing the issues facing veteran students transitioning from the military to undergraduate institutions.⁵

David T. Vacchi, *Considering Student Veterans on the Twenty-First-Century College Campus*, 17 *ABOUT CAMPUS* 15 (2012).

³ For the purpose of this article, reference to veteran law student(s) is intended to include: “any student who is a current or former member of the active duty military, the National Guard, or Reserve regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI bill use.” Vacchi, *supra* note 2, at 17.

⁴ Various law schools have clinical and pro bono opportunities designed to offer legal services to veterans and members of the military in their local communities. These curricular initiatives are beyond the scope of this article but benefit the veteran and military law students as well as other law students by providing valuable engaged service learning opportunities. See VETERANS CONSORTIUM PRO BONO PROGRAM, <http://www.vetsprobono.org> (last visited Apr. 1, 2015); see also ABA Young Lawyers Division, Res. 104A, *available at* http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/house_of_delegates/resolutions/2014_hod_annual_meeting_104a.authcheckdam.pdf.

⁵ See generally FLORENCE A. HAMRICK & COREY B. RUMANN, *CALLED TO SERVE: A HANDBOOK ON STUDENT VETERANS AND HIGHER EDUCATION* (2012) (providing current research, program initiatives, and recommendations for creating policies and services for student veterans in higher education institutions).

II. OVERVIEW OF THE GENERAL VETERAN POPULATION

Before beginning a discussion about veteran law students, it is helpful to put the general veteran population in perspective. As of September 2011,⁶ there were approximately 22.7 million veterans in the United States, which is approximately seven percent of the current U.S. population.⁷ Approximately eight percent of those veterans are women,⁸ and sixty percent of all veterans live in urban areas.⁹ Veterans live in somewhat concentrated areas across the country with thirty-six percent of the total veteran population living in the following six states: California, Florida, Texas, Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio.¹⁰

Very recently, the unemployment rate for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts was reported at 20%, compared to 7.9% for a comparable cohort.¹¹ With post-9/11 G.I. Bill funding available for higher education, and some research suggesting an underuse of these benefits, one of the ways in which we can address the staggering rates of unemployment for our veteran population is to improve the rate at which they attend, persist, and graduate not only from undergraduate institutions but also from graduate schools.

⁶ U.S. DEP'T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, NATIONAL CENTER FOR VETERANS ANALYSIS AND STATISTICS: VETERAN POPULATION (2014), *available at* http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp.

⁷ *Id.*; Marta Elliott, Carlene Gonzalez & Barbara Larsen, *U.S. Military Veterans Transition to College: Combat, PTSD, and Alienation on Campus*, 48 J. STUDENT AFF. RES. & PRAC. 279, 282 (2011).

⁸ U.S. DEP'T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, *supra* note 6.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Shaila Dewan, *As Wars End, Young Return to Scant Jobs*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 18, 2011, at A1, *available at* http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/18/business/for-youngest-veterans-the-bleakest-of-job-prospects.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&.

III. POST-9/11 VETERANS EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2008

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (commonly referred to as the Post-9/11 GI Bill) provides a higher education incentive for the more than two million service members¹² who have served since September 11, 2001.¹³ The Post 9-11 GI Bill provides tuition and fee coverage, a monthly housing stipend, up to \$1,000 annually for books and supplies, and the ability to transfer benefits between one or more immediate family members.¹⁴ More than 500,000 veterans and their families have utilized Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits since 2008 when the law was enacted.¹⁵

While the last U.S. forces left Iraq in December of 2011, the 32,000 U.S. troops currently in Afghanistan are under a “new

¹² The Post 9/11 GI Bill provides financial support for education and housing to individuals with at least ninety days of aggregate service after September 10, 2001, or individuals discharged with a service-connected disability after thirty days. A service member must have received an honorable discharge to be eligible for the benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. See U.S. DEP'T OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, POST-9/11 GI BILL (2015), available at http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/post_911_gibill/index.html.

¹³ Elizabeth O'Herrin, *Enhancing Veteran Success in Higher Education*, 13 PEER REV. (2011), available at <http://209.29.151.145/publications-research/periodicals/enhancing-veteran-success-higher-education>.

¹⁴ Leigh A. Green, *Identity and Meaning Making of Student Veterans Transition to College 14* (August 2012) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University), available at <http://repositories.tdl.org/ttu-ir/bitstream/handle/2346/46921/GREEN-DISSERTATION.pdf>; HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 25-30; see generally Joseph B. Keillor, *Veterans at the Gates: Exploring the New GI Bill and Its Transformative Possibilities*, 87 WASH. U. L. REV. 175 (2009) (providing a discussion of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and its potential societal impact).

¹⁵ LESLEY MCBAIN ET AL., AM. COUNCIL ON EDUC., FROM SOLDIER TO STUDENT II: ASSESSING CAMPUS PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBERS 7 (2012), available at <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/From-Soldier-to-Student-II-Assessing-Campus-Programs.pdf>.

timetable” for withdrawal by the end of 2016.¹⁶ Experts estimate over one million members of the armed forces will leave active duty and transition back to civilian life over the next five years.¹⁷ David DiRamio and Kathryn Jarvis, relying on statistics from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, observed that in 2009, the number of veterans who were continuing or starting college was 460,000 and was expected to grow as much as thirty percent per year, depending on the operational requirements of the military.¹⁸ Based on these figures, DiRamio and Jarvis noted that at that growth rate there was a potential that students with military experience could account for nearly five percent of total college enrollment in the United States by fall 2013.¹⁹ A majority of these veteran students would have served during the periods of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁰ “This population of students is distinctive in many ways and like other underrepresented groups in American higher education.”²¹ This student population has generated a growing body of research and literature examining its persistence and degree attainment.²² President Barack Obama

¹⁶ Mark Lander, *U.S. Troops to Leave Afghanistan by End of 2016*, N.Y. TIMES, May 27, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/28/world/asia/us-to-complete-afghan-pullout-by-end-of-2016-obama-to-say.html?_r=0.

¹⁷ Greg T. Rinckey, *Go Back to School with the Post-9/11 GI Bill: A Lawyer's Story*, N.Y. L.J., Apr. 23, 2012, at S10 (citing Press Release, U.S. Dep't of Veterans Affairs, VA Budget Request Tops \$140 Billion for Veteran Programs (Feb. 13, 2012), available at <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2263>).

¹⁸ David DiRamio & Kathryn Jarvis, *Veterans in Higher Education: When Johnny and Jane Come Marching to Campus*, 37 ASHE HIGHER EDUC. REP. 21, 35-36 (2011).

¹⁹ *Id.* at 36.

²⁰ *Id.* at 36.

²¹ *Id.*

²² See generally HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, for a comprehensive look at the issues facing students transitioning from the military to college and solutions for institutions as well as an exhaustive list of references.

expanded funding for transitional programs for veteran students in his 2012 budget.²³

This article focuses on the unique challenges that adjusting to the law school culture presents to veteran law students. First, the paper will briefly look at the ultra-competiveness and individualistic culture of law school and how this environment can lead to isolation in students. Second, the unique strengths that veteran law students bring to law schools based on their military training will be discussed. It is this very military training, however, that can conflict with traditional law school culture. Thus, the final section will discuss how law schools, by providing comprehensive institutional initiatives that encourage veteran law students to self-identify, inform them about the cultural differences between law school and the military, and support them with peer mentoring, can provide their veteran law students with the tools they can use to adapt to their new environment.

IV. LAW SCHOOL CULTURE'S CUTTHROAT REPUTATION

The competitive and cutthroat reputation of law schools is well established in literature, history and pop-culture,²⁴ and is addressed in the Carnegie Report.²⁵ “Recent studies have shown that many law students see their campus environments as not only challenging, but also unfriendly, and, sometimes, even hostile.”²⁶

²³ Leigh Green & Ryan Van Dusen, *Welcome Home: Understanding and Serving Veteran Transition and Identity Development in College*, 1 VISTAS ONLINE (2012), http://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/vistas/vistas_2012_article_4.pdf?sfvrsn=9.

²⁴ Nancy J. Soonpaa, *Stress in Law Students: A Comparative Study of First-Year, Second-Year, and Third-Year Students*, 36 CONN. L. REV. 353, 353 (2004) (referring to popular media images of law students leading stressful lives that still resonates today from *The Paper Chase*, *One L*, and *Legally Blonde*).

²⁵ WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN ET AL., EDUCATING LAWYERS: PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSION OF LAW 165-67 (2007).

²⁶ Meera E. Deo & Kimberly A. Griffin, *The Social Capital Benefits of Peer-Mentoring Relationships in Law School*, 38 OHIO N.U. L. REV. 305, 306 (2011).

In fact, law school culture seems to be universally identified by its competitive nature.²⁷ “[C]ompetition between classmates, [exams] graded on a curve,²⁸ and teaching pedagogy driven by the Socratic Method”²⁹ are all factors that contribute to the competitive and aggressive nature of law school.³⁰ This atmosphere affects each individual student differently, but the research and literature suggests that law school creates stress and anxiety in many students,³¹ particularly non-traditional students.³²

Additionally, there is well-documented research regarding psychological distress caused by law school, particularly among first-year students.³³ The research indicates that many law students, and to a larger extent, non-traditional students, feel isolated during their first year of law school.³⁴ Unfortunately, the

²⁷ *Id.* at 305.

²⁸ Susan Grover, *Personal Integration and Outsider Status as Factors in Law Student Well-Being*, 47 WASHBURN L.J. 419, 427 (2008).

²⁹ Rebecca Flanagan, *Lucifer Goes to Law School: Towards Explaining and Minimizing Law Student Peer-to-Peer Harassment and Intimidation*, 47 WASHBURN L.J. 453, 462 (2008); Paula Lustbader, *You Are Not in Kansas Anymore: Orientation Programs Can Help Students Fly Over the Rainbow*, 47 WASHBURN L.J. 327, 344 (2008); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity in Legal Education*, 70 U. CHI. L. REV. 265, 272-73 (2003).

³⁰ See Deo & Griffin, *supra* note 26, at 307 (noting the aggressive nature of legal education may make close relationships with peers challenging to form and maintain).

³¹ See generally Kennon M. Sheldon & Lawrence S. Krieger, *Understanding the Negative Effects of Legal Education on Law Students: A Longitudinal Test of Self-Determination Theory*, 33 PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. BULL. 883 (2007); Cathaleen A. Roach, *A River Runs Through It: Tapping into the Informational Stream to Move Students from Isolation to Autonomy*, 36 ARIZ. L. REV. 667 (1994).

³² Roach, *supra* note 31, at 668.

³³ *Id.* at 670.

³⁴ *Id.* at 669.

feelings of “isolation” can result in uneven testing and an imbalance in grade distribution among all students.³⁵

While other graduate and professional schools have long since adopted more modern teaching methods, including mandatory clinical or field training,³⁶ law schools are finally recognizing the need for curricular change. These changes come in light of the American Bar Association’s recent adoption of learning outcomes in its law school accreditation standards,³⁷ recent law firm hiring trends,³⁸ and law school admissions projections.³⁹ The numerous studies of the Humanizing Legal Education (HLE) scholars that document the adverse effects and negative impact of law school culture and pedagogy on some students may help law

³⁵ *Id.* at 677; see also Jonah Cunningham, *Veterans’ Post-Secondary Education: Keeping the Promise to Those Who Serve*, 13 HINCKLEY J. POL. 14, 16 (2012) (discussing how some veteran students may experience culture shock upon transitioning directly from a military base to an undergraduate campus which can often lead to veteran students feeling isolated).

³⁶ Jason M. Dolin, *Opportunity Lost: How Law School Disappoints Law Students, the Public, and the Legal Profession*, 44 CAL. W. L. REV. 219, 223 (2008).

³⁷ DONALD J. POLDEN, STANDARDS REV. COMM., ABA, STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES OF ACCREDITATION AND FUNDAMENTAL GOALS OF A SOUND PROGRAM OF LEGAL EDUCATION (2009), available at http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/migrated/2011_build/legal_education/committees/standards_review_documents/principles_and_goals_accreditation_5_6_09.authcheckdam.pdf; COMM. ON LEGAL EDUC. & ADMISSIONS TO THE BAR, ABA, ABA STANDARDS AND RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL OF LAW SCHOOLS 2013-2014 (2013), available at http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/misc/legal_education/Standards/2013_2014_final_aba_standards_and_rules_of_procedure_for_approval_of_law_schools_body.authcheckdam.pdf.

³⁸ See generally Catherine Rampell, *Employment of Recent Law Grads at an Ebb*, N.Y. TIMES (June 8, 2012, 5:16 PM), <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/08/employment-of-recent-law-grads-at-an-ebb/> (providing statistics regarding the employment rate for law school graduates).

³⁹ See generally Catherine Rampell, *Law School Admission Testing Plunges*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 21, 2012, 2:30 PM), <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/21/law-school-admission-testing-plunges/> (providing statistics regarding the number of people taking the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) has reached its lowest level since 1999).

schools likewise appreciate the impact transitioning to law school may have on some veteran law students.⁴⁰

V. STRENGTHS THAT VETERAN STUDENTS CARRY WITH THEM TO LAW SCHOOL

Veteran law students are a unique subset of an already non-traditional older student population.⁴¹ They enter law school either having already completed successful military careers or while they are traditional members of the National Guard or the Army Reserve.⁴² These students' careers can vary widely in terms of duration and the range of training and experiences to which these students have been exposed.⁴³ However, they all have certain strengths due to their military training and background. At the undergraduate level, veteran students indicated having "the focus, discipline and drive to overcome obstacles, to improvise as

⁴⁰ For a brief summary of scholarship on the humanizing legal education movement, see generally Flanagan, *supra* note 29; B.A. Glesner, *Fear and Loathing in the Law Schools*, 23 CONN. L. REV. 627 (1991); Michael Hunter Schwartz, *Humanizing Legal Education: An Introduction to a Symposium Whose Time Came*, 47 WASHBURN L.J. 235 (2008); Kennon M. Sheldon & Lawrence S. Kreiger, *Does Legal Education Have Undermining Effects on Law Students? Evaluating Changes in Motivation, Values, and Well-Being*, 22 BEHAV. SCI. & L. 261 (2004).

⁴¹ HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 74 (citing ALEXANDRIA WALTON RADFORD & JOLENE WUN, NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATISTICS, U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., ISSUE TABLES: A PROFILE OF MILITARY SERVICEMEMBERS AND VETERANS ENROLLED IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN 2007-08 (2009), *available at* <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009182.pdf>) (stating that "[o]n average, student veterans and service members are likely to be male, white, over the age of 24 and married"); see Ryan L. Van Dusen, *A Quantitative Study of Student Veterans' Intent to Persist* (May 2011) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University), *available at* <http://repositories.tdl.org/ttu-ir/bitstream/handle/2346/ETD-TTU-2011-05-1318/VAN-DUSEN-DISSERTATION.pdf>.

⁴² See generally Mark Bauman, *The Mobilization and Return of Undergraduate Students Serving in the National Guard and Reserves Creating a Veteran-Friendly Campus*, 126 NEW DIRECTIONS FOR STUDENT SERVS. 15 (2009).

⁴³ Vacchi, *supra* note 2, at 17.

needed, and to succeed in an academic setting” as skills that will help them in their transition⁴⁴ to an academic environment.⁴⁵

As a result of their training and experience, veteran students have a keen sense of integrity⁴⁶ and not only are mature,⁴⁷ but also have a sense of goal commitment.⁴⁸ Some veteran law students may have served overseas and may have traveled extensively due to their military service. They have leadership skills and work well both in groups and individually. Veteran law students can handle pressure and have developed time management skills.

Additionally, veteran law students bring a unique and diverse perspective to the law school environment.⁴⁹ Their perspective includes a greater awareness and appreciation for cultural diversity.⁵⁰ From the outset of their training, racial or societal barriers are broken down by drill instructors to help new recruits learn to work as a team.⁵¹ Perhaps due in part to their own experiences as objects of negative stereotyping, veteran students

⁴⁴ HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 75 (citing JENNIFER L. STEELE, NICHOLAS SALCEDO & JAMES COLEY, AM. COUNCIL ON EDUC., SERVICE MEMBERS IN SCHOOL: MILITARY VETERANS’ EXPERIENCES USING THE POST-9/11 GI BILL AND PURSUING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION 35 (2010), *available at* http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1083.pdf).

⁴⁵ *See* Keillor, *supra* note 14, at 195.

⁴⁶ U.S. DEP’T OF THE AIR FORCE, UNITED STATES AIR FORCE CORE VALUES (1997), *available at* <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-070906-003.pdf>.

⁴⁷ DiRamio & Jarvis, *supra* note 18, at 40.

⁴⁸ Van Dusen, *supra* note 41, at 113.

⁴⁹ HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 74-75.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ KATHY ROTH-DOUQUET & FRANK SCHAEFFER, AWOL THE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE OF AMERICA’S UPPER CLASSES FROM THE MILITARY – AND HOW IT HURTS OUR COUNTRY 180 (2006).

quickly “recognize[] changes in their perceptions of people representing other cultures and/or socioeconomic statuses”⁵²

One of the key character traits or strengths that veteran students develop during their military service is the ability to adapt to ever-changing environments and circumstances.⁵³ These students have trained vigorously to develop the ability to exercise good judgment no matter what circumstances they face.⁵⁴

Yet, the transition to law school culture can be challenging for any student, and particularly for non-traditional students.⁵⁵ Veteran law students seem to experience law school culture differently than both “traditional” law students, those who are coming directly from an undergraduate institution, and “non-traditional” students, who come from other careers, are older, or who might have families. These differences seem to be largely based on the veteran law students’ specific military training and background.⁵⁶ If veteran law students are informed about the differences between military and law school cultures and how these differences may impact their law school experience, they can adapt their skills accordingly and increase their likelihood of success.

⁵² Corey B. Rumann & Florence A. Hamrick, *Student Veterans in Transition: Re-enrolling After War Zone Deployments*, 81 J. HIGHER EDUC. 431, 451 (2010).

⁵³ Vacchi, *supra* note 2, at 18-19.

⁵⁴ See DEP’T OF THE ARMY, TRAINING FOR FULL SPECTRUM OPERATIONS (2008), available at <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/Repository/FM70/FM7-0.pdf>.

⁵⁵ For a definition of “non-traditional” student, see EDWARD P. ST. JOHN & TINA J. TUTTLE, THE EDUC. RES. INST., FINANCIAL AID AND POSTSECONDARY OPPORTUNITY FOR NONTRADITIONAL AGE, PRE-COLLEGE STUDENTS: THE ROLES OF INFORMATION AND THE EDUCATION DELIVERY SYSTEMS 2 (2004) (providing the following definition: anyone who did not “go to college within two years after high school”). St. John and Tuttle categorize non-traditional students as follows: low income/low socioeconomic status, low income women, single parents, high school non-completers, military servicemen, former foster youth, unemployed, and African American men. *Id.* at 6; see also Van Dusen, *supra* note 41, at 10.

⁵⁶ See HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 79-80 (discussing the cultural differences between military culture and academic culture in reference to undergraduate education); see also Cunningham, *supra* note 35, at 16 (referring to veteran students’ arrival on undergraduate campuses as “culture shock”).

A. SEAN'S STORY

No one was volunteering. Again. Our Civil Procedure professor was asking for volunteers before he called on someone. No one raised their hand. Even though I was sure I did not know the answers to the professor's questions, I raised my hand to prevent the professor from calling on one of my classmates who wasn't prepared. I wasn't even aware that this is what I was doing or that this wasn't "acceptable" behavior in law school. I just did it without thinking.⁵⁷

Informal interviews and conferences with other current and former veteran law students confirm similar feelings of conflict without knowing exactly why.⁵⁸ Later, Sean expressed that it was a lack of understanding about the difference between how he was "trained" in the military and "law school" that may have gotten him in "trouble" in Civil Procedure for volunteering when he did not know the answers to the professor's questions.⁵⁹ He stated that he did it for the good of the group without realizing that it was hurting him as an individual student in the eyes of the professor.⁶⁰

Furthermore, this student did not realize that his behavior may have led his classmates to have negative impressions about him, deriving from the competitive law school culture. While his intent was to "help the group," the group, by and large, may have been thinking that he was a "gunner."⁶¹ In other words, he may have been perceived by his classmates as trying to impress the

⁵⁷ Interview with Sean Doyle, Army, Air Force, and Army Reserve Veteran, Rutgers School of Law – Camden 2013 Graduate, in Camden, N.J. (Fall 2012).

⁵⁸ See, e.g., *id.*; Interview with Anonymous, *supra* note 1.

⁵⁹ Interview with Sean Doyle, *supra* note 57.

⁶⁰ *Id.*; see also Cunningham, *supra* note 35, at 16 (discussing how veteran students have difficulty transitioning directly from a military base to an undergraduate campus because "military life prioritizes certain goals into a soldiers' head, like unit cohesion, placing the mission first, and discipline").

⁶¹ Flanagan, *supra* note 29, at 454.

professor by volunteering in class. While Sean was trying to generate a sense of group cohesion and group identity in his Civil Procedure class because it came naturally to him due to his military training, without realizing it, he may have been causing the exact opposite.⁶² His fellow classmates may have been withdrawing from him,⁶³ and he was becoming isolated from his classmates without understanding what was happening.⁶⁴

Sean's instinctive behavior seems to make sense, however, when you consider that prior to coming to law school, Sean served in the Army for two years, then in the Air Force for two years, and then as an Army Guard in the Army Reserve for two years.⁶⁵ Sean recounts another time he took action for the good of the group:

In another 1L class, a professor was going after the classmate who was sitting in front of me. He was tearing her up with his questions. So I raised my hand and basically interrupted the professor, so that he would start asking me the questions. I didn't know that you didn't "interrupt" a professor when he was questioning another student. After class, my classmate thanked me for 'getting him (the professor) off of her.' I didn't really think about it at the time, I just reacted. Now, as a 3L, when there is lots of silence in class and I raise my hand, I know why I am doing it.⁶⁶

⁶² See Cunningham, *supra* note 35, at 16.

⁶³ Flanagan, *supra* note 29, at 454 (providing an in-depth discussion of bullying in the law school classroom).

⁶⁴ Interview with Sean Doyle, *supra* note 57.

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

VI. MILITARY CULTURE

A. GROUP STRENGTH: “YOU ARE ONLY AS STRONG AS YOUR WEAKEST MEMBER”

A critical component of military culture, which provides insight into veteran law students’ transition into the law school community, is the fact that the strength of the group governs military culture.⁶⁷ Their training emphasizes that the group comes first, and the individual comes last.⁶⁸ One student related that you are only as strong as your weakest group member, and that if you had a weak member in your group, all the members of the group worked together to compensate for him or her.⁶⁹

“Group cohesion is promoted within the military.”⁷⁰ As a result, social support between service members and within units tends to be considerable during military service and beyond.⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, members of the military often describe their fellow soldiers as “like family.”⁷² Military society or culture is highly

⁶⁷ HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 58-59.

⁶⁸ DiRamio & Jarvis, *supra* note 18, at 53.

⁶⁹ Interview with Sean Doyle, *supra* note 57.

⁷⁰ Elliot, Gonzalez & Larsen, *supra* note 7, at 282 (citing Guy L. Siebold, *The Essence of Military Group Cohesion*, 33 ARMED FORCES & SOC’Y 286 (2007)); see also HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 49 (discussing military social cohesion in the context of immersive deployment experience and how this factor reinforces a veteran or military students’ military identity); Vacchi, *supra* note 2, at 18.

⁷¹ Elliot, Gonzalez & Larsen, *supra* note 7, at 282 (citing Jessica A. Barber et al., *Monitoring the Dissemination of Peer Support in the VA Healthcare System*, 44 COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH J. 433 (2008); Charlene Laffaye et al., *Relationships Among PTSD Symptoms, Social Support, and Support Source in Veterans with Chronic PTSD*, 21 J. TRAUMATIC STRESS 394 (2008)).

⁷² *Id.* (citing Torsten Ove, *In National Guard, a Sense of Duty Bonds Comrades*, PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE, June 20, 2010, <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/nation/2010/06/20/In-National-Guard-a-sense-of-duty-bonds-comrades/stories/201006200191>).

structured, disciplined, and team-based compared to an academic environment.⁷³

Veteran students' identities are tied to this sense of belonging to the group: "Identity links the past, the present, and the social world into a narrative that makes sense. It embodies both change and continuity."⁷⁴ In the military environment, the individual's identity becomes secondary to the identity of the group.⁷⁵ The idea of belonging to the group becomes so strong that it becomes an important part of the veteran students' identity.⁷⁶ The military cultural phenomenon involves strong group allegiance by individuals,⁷⁷ with the group exerting social control over individual members.⁷⁸ The issue of what happens to this sense of culture of belonging for veteran students when their service has ended has been studied with respect to veteran undergraduate students, and is relevant to veteran law students as well.⁷⁹

⁷³ Vacchi, *supra* note 2, at 18.

⁷⁴ DiRamio & Jarvis, *supra* note 18, at 53 (citing RUTHELLEN JOSSELYN, *REVISING HERSELF: THE STORY OF WOMEN'S IDENTITY FROM COLLEGE TO MIDLIFE* 29 (1996)).

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ *Id.* (citing Donna Winslow, *Misplaced Loyalties: The Role of Military Culture in the Breakdown of Discipline in Peace Operations*, 35 *CAN. REV. SOC. & ANTHROPOLOGY* 345 (1998)) (providing that group allegiance is seen to be essential to combat effectiveness. Strong affective ties bind soldiers into a fighting unit in which they are willing to sacrifice their lives for each other).

⁷⁸ *Id.* (describing that military culture emphasizes "belonging" or *Gemeinschaft*, which refers to culture in which belonging is pervasive).

⁷⁹ *Id.*

VII. INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES

The Post 9/11 G.I. Bill was enacted in 2008 and the distribution of benefits began in 2009.⁸⁰ Since then, various studies⁸¹ have identified the following factors that contribute to student veterans' academic success at the undergraduate level: connecting with peers (other veteran students), blending in, having an informed faculty, working with the campus veterans' office, being able to resolve financial concerns, as well as addressing disability and mental health issues, particularly, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.⁸²

Addressing these issues requires institutional initiatives that acknowledge veteran law students from the outset of their law school experience and encourage them to self-identify by signaling a welcoming environment. Next, by offering a veteran-specific orientation session, law schools can provide vital information about the cultural differences that this population may experience. Finally, by establishing a peer-to-peer mentoring program for veteran law students, institutions can provide them with tools to adapt their skills to their new environment.

A. PROVIDE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR VETERAN LAW STUDENTS THROUGH POST-ADMISSIONS PROGRAMS

“Rather than the acquisition of abstract knowledge, learning is best conceived as a process of enculturation.”⁸³ A welcoming

⁸⁰ HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 25-27.

⁸¹ See Green, *supra* note 14; Van Dusen, *supra* note 41; Wade Goodwin Livingston, *Discovering the Academic and Social Transitions of Re-enrolling Student Veterans at One Institution: A Grounded Theory* (May 2009) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Clemson University), *available at* <http://vets.arizona.edu/clearinghouse/documents/livingston.pdf>; John F. Scott II, *Combat Veterans: Resiliency in Postsecondary Education Attainment* (May 2012) (unpublished M.S.W. thesis, California State University, Long Beach), *available at* <http://gradworks.umi.com/1517787.pdf>.

⁸² David DiRamio, Robert Ackerman & Regina L. Mitchell, *From Combat to Campus: Voices of Student Veterans*, 45 *NASPA J.* 73, 80 (2008).

⁸³ Brook K. Baker, *Learning to Fish, Fishing to Learn: Guided Participation in the Interpersonal Ecology of Practice*, 6 *CLINICAL L. REV.* 1, 24-25 n.91 (citing John

academic environment begins with the administration's acknowledgement of the veteran students' service to our country and provision of veteran-specific programming that will support the students' decision to self-identify their military identity. Individual veteran law students have different needs depending on their individual veteran and/or military status. An informed and cohesive institutional approach to creating initiatives will provide veteran law students with the tools they may need to adapt to the law school culture.

To make sure veteran law students' needs are met, law schools first need to know who its veteran law students are. However, institutions may find it difficult to identify their own veteran student population, because even if an institution includes questions about military service on its admissions documents, not all veteran law students will choose to disclose their military status.⁸⁴ The decision to self-identify or remain "invisible" can vary among each individual veteran student and may change depending upon the circumstances.⁸⁵ One of the primary reasons students may choose to keep their military identity to themselves is they simply do not know how they will be received by the institution, faculty, and fellow classmates. They may have concerns about an unwelcoming sentiment among faculty and classmates.⁸⁶

Seely Brown, Allan Collins & Paul Duguid, *Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning*, 18 EDUC. RESEARCHER 32, 33 (1989)) (emphasizing situated learning within a cognitive apprenticeship and exposure to vicarious lessons).

⁸⁴ DiRamio & Jarvis, *supra* note 18, at 28.

⁸⁵ See, e.g., Livingston, *supra* note 81, at 116. "Selective identity refers to two concepts which contributed to student veterans' invisibility. The first concept is student veterans' limited disclosure of their veteran status. The second concept is participants' conceptualization of their identity as veterans." *Id.*; see also Vacchi, *supra* note 2, at 18 (discussing veteran students' reasons for not self-identifying as avoiding being a burden to others).

⁸⁶ For Dennis Jacobs', Chief Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, opinion regarding a refusal to acknowledge and value the contributions of veterans and service members by the legal establishment, including law schools, big firms, bar associations, and public interest institutions, see his remarks to Cornell Law School on October 28, 2009. Dennis Jacobs, Special Comment, *The Military and the Law Elite*, 19 CORNELL J.L. & PUB. POL'Y 205 (2009).

Some students are also simply ambivalent about whether they want to self-identify their military status.⁸⁷ During individual conferences, veteran law students expressed ambivalence about self-identification of their military status. They express that they are proud they have served their country, their service is part of their identity,⁸⁸ and that they want the institution to acknowledge them and be supportive. Yet, later in the same conversations, they may express feelings of wanting to “blend in” with the other law students and not stand out because of their military service.⁸⁹ One student advised that he did not want to be “the go to student” in class every time the issue of guns or war came up, as if he were the “expert on call.”⁹⁰ These students also expressed reluctance at having to answer insensitive questions from their “younger” and “inexperienced” classmates.⁹¹ “They just don’t know what I have been through and ask horrible questions. I am better off not revealing that I was in the military.”⁹²

1. Who Are Your Veteran and Military Students, What Is Their Specific Military Status, and Why Does This Information Matter?

Veteran law students’ resistance toward self-identification makes it difficult to structure programs and provide services. “From an administrative standpoint, it is difficult to support a

⁸⁷ See Wade G. Livingston et al., *Social Camouflage: Interpreting Male Veterans’ Behavior for Residence Life Professionals*, 39 J. C. & U. STUDENT HOUSING 176, 178-79 (2012).

⁸⁸ Interview with Anonymous, *supra* note 1.

⁸⁹ Some veteran law students appear to have the same type of feelings as undergraduate veteran students with respect to self-identification issues. See Livingston, *supra* note 81, at 116 (his research revealed that undergraduate veteran participants, in addition to selectively notifying their campus community about their veteran status, wanted to blend in within the campus community).

⁹⁰ Interview with Anonymous, *supra* note 1.

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² *Id.*

population which is not visible and, in some cases, does not want to be noticed.”⁹³ In addition to understanding the raw numbers involved, the status of the individual students can impact the services they may need during law school.

For example, at Rutgers School of Law – Camden, during one particular academic year, there were thirteen veteran law students who were using their Veteran Affairs (VA) benefits⁹⁴ to help pay for their law school education. There were a number of other veteran law students who were not using their VA benefits⁹⁵ and, therefore, did not appear on any official list from the University registrar. There were at least two students who were traditional members of the National Guard, one student who was a traditional member of the Army Reserve, and one student who recently finished his obligation with the Army Reserve. There was some overlap between the students who were receiving VA benefits and those on active duty.⁹⁶ There was one student who completed Marine Officer Candidate School prior to his second year of law school for the Marine Corps JAG program.⁹⁷

⁹³ Van Dusen, *supra* note 41, at 69 (citing Livingston, *supra* note 81, at 125).

⁹⁴ This information is on-file with the author. *See also* HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 26-27.

⁹⁵ This information is on-file with the author. *See also id.*

⁹⁶ This information is on-file with the author. *See also id.* at 41-68. (explaining that:

[t]he long-term nature of current foreign interventions and the smaller size of the U.S. armed forces mean that many service members who are also enrolled students at colleges and universities have been, or are likely to be, deployed more than once to a combat theater. Even one deployment can present transitional challenges, but multiple deployments create situations in which student service members must face additional rounds of transitions that may affect them personally, socially, and academically.)

⁹⁷ This student is currently in the Inactive Ready Reserves as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. The Marine Corp JAG division is the Marine Corp.’s judicial arm and is comprised of military attorneys. The military attorneys are called judge advocates who support the Corps staff judge advocate. The staff judge advocate provides legal counsel and special assistance to the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), the highest-ranking officer.

Thus, the combined group of veteran and active duty military law students known either through the University registrar or self-identification to various faculty and administrative members⁹⁸ would have filled a small seminar class. If the institution demonstrates through organized and cohesive programming that it acknowledges its veteran students and that the institution understands the strengths they bring to the institution, the students may be more likely to self-identify their military status.

After Superstorm Sandy ravaged the East Coast in 2012, at least one of the National Guard students at Rutgers School of Law – Camden was notified that he could be deployed for active duty at a moment's notice.⁹⁹ It was the tenth week of the semester, and he expressed concern, not about being deployed, but about how the institution would respond to his absence.¹⁰⁰ It was important that he knew he had someone in the law school he could discuss his concerns with and who would make sure his professors understood his situation and work with him so that he could complete his semester.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Another way in which a law school may be able to identify veteran or military students is through their Office of Career Services. Students may include their military service information on their resumes.

⁹⁹ Interview with Anonymous, First Lieutenant, New Jersey Air National Guard, 177th Fighter Wing, Rutgers School of Law – Camden/Rutgers School of Business 2014 Graduate, in Camden, N.J. (Fall 2012).

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* This student, was, in his own words “[N]o stranger to activations and [he] was well aware of how they could impact [his] education.” *Id.* The following is a list of his activations:

September 11, 2001: Activated for two straight years under Operation Noble Eagle during the first semester of his bachelor's degree. He did not return to college until 2003 upon release from active duty; 2004, deployed under Operation Iraqi Freedom while working on his bachelor's degree; August 2011, activated because of Hurricane Irene to aid evacuated New Jersey residents during his 2L year of the Rutgers JD/MBA program; Fall 2011, took leave of absence from JD/MBA program during 2L year fall semester to attend AF Officer Training School, where he received his commission to 2nd Lieutenant. *Id.*

¹⁰¹ *Id.* This student's unit was activated in support of Superstorm Sandy relief efforts. Many of the airmen in the unit were activated for over a month. This student was not activated. If he had been activated, he indicated that he would

The possibility of deployment at any time during the academic year of those students who are engaged in active duty while attending law school demonstrates the importance of self-identification. Any veteran law student who is still engaged in active duty during law school may be deployed to active duty during the course of his or her law school career. The timing of the mobilization of the Reserve and National Guard personnel is often “unpredictable and the duration of their active duty may not be known when they are deployed”¹⁰² During their deployment, the law school should have internal policies and programs in place to maintain a connection with the mobilized student.¹⁰³ Finally, the institution should also have policies in place to make sure that a military law student returning from a deployment (whether that deployment lasts a few weeks, a semester, or a year) will be met with coordinated assistance to transition back into the law school community.¹⁰⁴

Below is a discussion of institutional initiatives that law schools can implement to acknowledge their veteran law students’ strengths and provide them with insight into the differences between military and law school culture.

B. PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MILITARY AND LAW CULTURES THROUGH A VETERAN-SPECIFIC ORIENTATION SESSION

Some veteran law students are coming to law school directly from service, some have completed their military service years ago and spent some time in the workforce, and some are still on active

have had to withdraw from that semester, which would have delayed his graduation until 2015. Despite his leave of absence in 2011, he was able to complete the JD/MBA program on time, in a total of three and a half years rather than the usual four. *Id.*

¹⁰² Bauman, *supra* note 42 (citing Roy R. Parker, Jefferson D. Parker & Deborah J. Konkle-Parker, *War-Related Mental Health Problems of Today’s Veterans*, 35 *PSYCHIATRIC ANNALS* 930, 932 (2005)).

¹⁰³ *Id.* at 20.

¹⁰⁴ *Id.* at 21.

duty. Law schools should provide these veteran law students with insight into the differences between certain aspects of military and law school cultures they may experience so they may leverage their skills on behalf of themselves, the institution, and the community.¹⁰⁵ A veteran-specific orientation session can provide valuable information regarding differences some veteran law students may experience between the military and law school culture: “Orientation and graduation are potentially the most significant times in students’ academic experience. Orientation is the first experience in law school and often the first introduction to the profession.”¹⁰⁶

At the undergraduate level, research has revealed that quite often veteran students’ first introduction to the university is an orientation program.¹⁰⁷ These programs are designed mainly for single college students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, who are claimed as dependents by their parents.¹⁰⁸ Veteran students do not fit into the traditional roles of college students because they are older and often more mature than their younger peers. Few undergraduate orientation programs are designed to display what the institution can offer specifically to veteran students, and, instead, “focus on the amenities applicable to traditional students.”¹⁰⁹

Likewise, while law school orientation programs typically take into account an even more diverse student population, including an older demographic if the institution provides a part-

¹⁰⁵ Patricia A. Brown & Charles Gross, *Serving Those Who Have Served – Managing Veteran and Military Student Best Practices*, 59 J. CONTINUING HIGHER EDUC. 45, 48 (2011) (finding “[s]uccessful management of military students brings benefits to the student, the academic institution and the community. Typically, these are serious, motivated, goal-oriented students. They tend to focus on achieving career goals. Their success as students is influenced by their military background: they have worked within a disciplined job environment, established a proven work ethic, and developed tested leadership skills”).

¹⁰⁶ Lustbader, *supra* note 29, at 330-31.

¹⁰⁷ Cunningham, *supra* note 35, at 16.

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

time program, the majority of the programming is still geared to the full-time students who have recently completed their undergraduate degrees and are enrolled full-time in law school.¹¹⁰ Law school orientation programs should strive to establish “a solid foundation for students’ experience and expectations in law school, acculturate them to the profession, provide ongoing support, facilitate community building,”¹¹¹ and promote students’ overall emotional well-being. In addition to these goals of a general orientation session, law schools need to provide veteran and military law students with a breakout or specialized orientation session that acknowledges that they are a unique and diverse student population that has its particular transitional issues.¹¹²

If a law school only has a small number of veteran students enrolling for a particular year, then a veteran student orientation program could be “[p]artnered within non-traditional or transfer student orientation sessions.”¹¹³ Programming that could provide the new veteran law students with the opportunity to develop an

¹¹⁰ See generally Lustbader, *supra* note 29, at 331-32 (stating that most schools have formal orientation programs for first-year students; noting that some orientation programs start before school officially begins and, thus, may exclude students who are working or have not yet moved to attend school if the program is optional).

¹¹¹ *Id.* at 331.

¹¹² See *id.* at 361 (citing EARLE SILBER ET AL., HELPING STUDENTS ADAPT TO GRADUATE SCHOOL: MAKING THE GRADE 2 (2000) (“Orientation programs should help graduate students feel a sense of belonging and a sense of self worth..”)).

¹¹³ Van Dusen, *supra* note 41, at 119. In addition to the standard law school orientation material provided to students, institutions could develop and provide a “Welcome Aboard Package” for their veteran students by taking the same orientation information and re-formatting it into a document and layout the veteran students recognize. One of our former veteran law students shared these thoughts with me about a welcome aboard package:

In the military you get “welcome aboard packages” everywhere you go. You can be in Norfolk, Virginia and transferred to Japan and be handed your “welcome aboard package” and you know everything – where to go, what to wear . . . but when you get to law school it seems like you don’t know anything.

Interview with Anonymous, *supra* note 1.

informal peer network of student veterans could include providing a panel presentation that includes upper-level veteran law students, staff, and faculty members who might be veterans and calling on alumni veteran graduates to return to sit on the panel and provide orientation advice for the new arrivals.¹¹⁴ These programs also educate the new students (and continuing veteran law students, faculty, and staff) on the mutually beneficial relationship between the veteran students and the institution. Programs such as these also inform the new veteran students about the services and programs that are available within the institution and in the community. These programs provide veteran alumni with the opportunity to become involved and stay engaged with individual veteran law students at the very beginning of their legal careers. These programs can also connect the veteran students with the undergraduate student veteran affairs offices. In many instances, these offices can provide information and resources beyond what the law school may be able to offer.¹¹⁵

“Orientation should facilitate students’ transition into their new world. It should introduce students to the mission of the school . . . Orientation is a critical juncture that can create a sense of inclusion and belonging, or repeat patterns of alienation that

¹¹⁴ See Van Dusen, *supra* note 41, at 119, for a discussion on peer mentoring in the context of a veteran-friendly environment.

¹¹⁵ See HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 168, 175-181 (providing an in-depth description of the mission and role of Offices of Veterans and Military Services (OVMS) on university campuses, as well as a thorough description of all of the various services these offices can provide not only to the veteran and military students but also to the university faculty and staff). For example, prior to his retirement on March 31, 2015, I worked closely with Col. (Ret.) Stephen G. Abel, U.S. Army, the former Director for the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Col. Abel was “the principal advocate for student veterans on Rutgers’ three regional campuses. He ensure[d] the quality of policies, programs, activities, and services designated to enhance [veteran students’] educational experiences and serve[d] as the university’s liaison with outside agencies and offices whose work affects the lives of veteran students.” *Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services*, RUTGERS, <https://veterans.rutgers.edu/administration> (last visited Apr. 1, 2015). In 2014, Rutgers was ranked fourth among approximately 300 traditional, four-year institutions in *Military Times* magazine’s annual Best for Vets survey. *Best for Vets: Colleges 2014*, MILITARY TIMES, <http://bestforvets.militarytimes.com/2014/colleges/4-year/> (last visited Apr. 1, 2015).

plague students who have been historically excluded from higher education.”¹¹⁶ It is important to remember that some veteran law students might be ambivalent about even identifying themselves as veterans or current service members. A breakout or veteran-specific orientation session signals to these students that the institution acknowledges their service to our country and their identity as veterans and military service members. Such a session can create the sense of belonging and inclusion that veteran and military law students are familiar with as a result of their military background.¹¹⁷ Combined with the next initiative, peer-to-peer mentoring, these institutional initiatives are designed to allow veteran law students to adapt their strengths to their new environment.

C. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO ADAPT TO THE LAW SCHOOL CULTURE, SEEK FEEDBACK, AND CONNECT WITH OTHER VETERAN STUDENTS BY DEVELOPING A PEER-TO-PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

Another way law schools can provide veteran law students with the tools to navigate the cultural differences between the military and law school is by providing them with a peer-to-peer mentoring program.¹¹⁸ There is a continued need to provide some level of mentoring to military students transitioning from the service or post-military careers into the academic world.¹¹⁹ At the undergraduate level, mentoring programs are identified as one of the many ways undergraduate institutions can provide opportunities for veteran students to connect with their peers.¹²⁰ Based on mentoring research, research about isolation among non-traditional students and learning theory, as well as interviews

¹¹⁶ Lustbader, *supra* note 29, at 331.

¹¹⁷ Cunningham, *supra* note 35, at 16; *see also* Vacchi, *supra* note 2, at 18.

¹¹⁸ *See generally* Scott, *supra* note 81.

¹¹⁹ HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 153-54.

¹²⁰ BRYAN J. COOK & YOUNG KIM, FROM SOLDIER TO STUDENT: EASING THE TRANSITION OF SERVICE MEMBERS ON CAMPUS 19 (2009).

with current and former veteran law students, a well-developed mentoring program is an essential element to a successful veterans program.

“Traditional mentoring relationships have been found to hold great value for both graduate and undergraduate students.”¹²¹ While there are few studies available on mentoring and support in law school, one such study suggests that some law students reported that their law school classmates provided strong support.¹²² Seeking peer support broadly and engaging in specific peer-mentoring relationships can lead to increased professional success.¹²³ In the legal profession context, studies revealed that mentoring relationships have been helpful in providing associates with “access to social capital, including the information and resource that can be helpful in the development of legal careers.”¹²⁴

As with the legal profession, where mentorship can produce positive outcomes by providing increased access to knowledge and competencies that may be organization and institution specific, peer-mentoring in law school can provide information and knowledge that is specific to veteran law students when they are in times of transition. Peer mentoring relationships have the “potential to provide resources to students in times of need and facilitate transitions in a safe and nurturing environment.”¹²⁵ This

¹²¹ Deo & Griffin, *supra* note 26, at 308 (citing HOWARD G. ADAMS, NAT’L CTR. FOR GRADUATE EDUC. FOR MINORITIES, MENTORING: AN ESSENTIAL FACTOR IN THE DOCTORIAL PROCESS FOR MINORITY STUDENTS 7 (1992); ALEXANDER ASTIN, WHAT MATTERS IN COLLEGE? FOUR CRITICAL YEARS REVISITED 383-84 (1993); Shalonda Kelly & John H. Schweitzer, *Mentoring Within a Graduate School Setting*, 33 C. STUDENT J. 130, 130 (1999); Jennifer H. Waldeck et al., *Graduate Student/Faculty Mentoring Relationships: Who Gets Mentored, How It Happens, and to What End*, 45 COMM. Q. 93, 93 (1997)).

¹²² Deo & Griffin, *supra* note 26, at 308 (citing Meera E. Deo et al., *Struggles and Support: Diversity in U.S. Law Schools*, 23 NAT’L BLACK L.J. 71, 86-87 (2010)).

¹²³ *Id.* at 308 (citing Kathy E. Kram & Lynn A. Isabella, *Mentoring Alternatives: The Role of Peer Relationships in Career Development*, 28 ACAD. MGMT. J. 110, 129 (1985)).

¹²⁴ *Id.* at 310.

¹²⁵ *Id.* at 311.

information and knowledge about the institutional norms and culture from the perspective of another veteran law student, who can explain the differences between the cultures to the mentee, is extremely valuable.

According to Deo and Griffin, peer mentoring in law school goes beyond just assisting with the mentee's academic skills. This "second form" of peer mentoring provides an understanding of academic norms.¹²⁶ It appears that the timing of the mentoring relationship is vital in assessing its value. By taking place during the first semester of law school, the relationship becomes a form of "social capital" as the new law student/mentees are able to rely on the peer mentor during a time of transition and need.¹²⁷

Peer mentoring relationships may take on even a greater level of psycho-social importance for students who are often underrepresented in law school, like women and students of color, who "can be especially likely to experience the environment as uncomfortable and unwelcoming."¹²⁸ Veteran law students are an underrepresented and non-traditional student population — it is up to the institution to reduce the likelihood that they will experience an uncomfortable or unwelcoming environment.

Peer-to-peer mentoring for veteran law students may help reduce feelings of isolation. In addition to expressing a preference for associating with other veteran law students, they have indicated that on occasion they have feelings of being all alone and having no one to talk to at the law school. They routinely expressed feelings that no one but other veteran law students would understand what they have gone through in the military.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *Id.* at 328.

¹²⁷ *Id.*

¹²⁸ *Id.* at 328-29 (citing Carole J. Buckner, *Realizing Grutter v. Bolinger's "Compelling Educational Benefits of Diversity" – Transforming Aspirational Rhetoric into Experience*, 72 UMKC L. REV. 877, 892-93 (2004)).

¹²⁹ *See, e.g.*, Interview with Anonymous, *supra* note 1; Interview with April Nees, Rutgers School of Law – Camden 2013 Graduate, in Camden, N.J. (Spring 2013).

These informal reports are supported by the undergraduate research.¹³⁰

A peer-to-peer mentoring program will link veteran law students with other veteran law students as they begin their law school experience. Veteran students selectively associated more with military personnel and other veterans than with non-veterans.¹³¹ Veteran students “selectively disclosed their experiences to individuals from whom they anticipated supportive or accepting reactions. Although some support remained constant, such as longstanding friends, sources of support for veteran students tended to fluctuate during the transition period, and student veterans consciously and strategically sought supportive environments and people.”¹³² At least one study exploring veteran students’ resiliency in attaining postsecondary degrees reported that the veteran students noted: (1) that they were more likely to talk to their veteran peers than their own family; (2) that the bond formed between fellow service members in a combat zone is stronger than the biological bonds shared by immediate family members; and (3) that this bond led to a propensity for veterans to confide in each other as opposed to their own family.¹³³ Additionally, it has been reported that veteran students reported communications with family members to be very low or non-existent¹³⁴ at even the undergraduate level. It is even more important to establish a peer-to-peer mentoring program in law school where it has been documented that the workload itself makes it difficult for many students to maintain relationships with friends and family.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Green, *supra* note 14, at 23 (citing Patricia A. Brown & Charles Gross, *Serving Those Who Have Served – Managing Veteran and Military Student Best Practices*, 59 J. CONTINUING HIGHER EDUC. 45, 48 (2011)); DiRamio, Ackerman & Mitchell, *supra* note 82; HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5).

¹³¹ Rumann & Hamrick, *supra* note 52, at 451 (citing DiRamio, Ackerman & Mitchell, *supra* note 82).

¹³² *Id.* at 451-52.

¹³³ *See generally* Scott, *supra* note 81.

¹³⁴ *Id.* at 55.

¹³⁵ Flanagan, *supra* note 29, at 467-68.

Veteran law students echo the results of the undergraduate studies.¹³⁶ They have expressed feelings of being comfortable around other veteran law students, trusting and understanding each other, and wanting to help other veteran law students.¹³⁷ Likewise, they have indicated that they are not always as comfortable with other non-veteran law students, even those considered “non-traditional” like themselves.¹³⁸

Additionally, veteran law students have been trained in peer-to-peer mentoring in the military. Whether it was watching out for their “buddy”¹³⁹ or the formal Marine Corps mentoring program,¹⁴⁰ they have participated in some form of mentoring prior to law school. This type of hierarchy and structure will be familiar to them.¹⁴¹ Veteran law students also will respond to the “chain of command” framework for a peer-to-peer mentoring program because it is familiar to them.

An organized peer-to-peer mentoring program with scheduled sessions structured around the guided interview model, that the veteran law students are familiar with from their military training, will provide guidance for the veteran students and can provide guidance with respect to seeking assistance. Under the guided interview model, the mentor and mentee have regularly scheduled meetings. During these meetings, there are suggested

¹³⁶ HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 228.

¹³⁷ Interview with Anonymous, *supra* note 1.

¹³⁸ *Id.*

¹³⁹ See DEP’T OF THE NAVY, MARINE CORPS MENTORING PROGRAM (MCMP) GUIDEBOOK 12 (2006), available at <http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/NAVMC%20DIR%201500.58.pdf> (detailing the Buddy System: “In addition to your role as a mentor and a Marine mentee, you have a responsibility to your fellow Marines. This is typically described as the ‘Buddy System.’ The Buddy System is a practice which enhances our ‘Marines take care of their own’ ethos.”).

¹⁴⁰ See generally *id.*

¹⁴¹ DiRamio & Jarvis, *supra* note 18, at 28 (“Hierarchy and homogeneity in the military peer network are time honored and respected. This teamwork and affiliation are essential keys to physical and emotional survival in the military.”).

questions regarding academics, social, and personal health. The mentor can use this series of questions to help the mentee establish future goals. This type of structured mentoring program will not only be familiar to the veteran law students, but also will provide the veteran students with the sense of belonging and community they need to adapt to the law school environment.

1. Lack of Feedback and Knowing When to Seek Assistance in Law School

Another specific reason for offering veteran law students a peer-to-peer mentoring program is to help compensate for the lack of feedback in law school. Veteran law students are used to receiving evaluations and feedback in the military.¹⁴² Law school is dramatically different from the military in this respect and can result in significant consequences for those students who do not adapt. A peer mentor can make sure that a new veteran law student will understand that there is likely to be a lack of feedback during the semester and that it is up to each individual student to create his or her own feedback opportunities.¹⁴³

During interactions with veteran law students, some have expressed that they were very unwilling to take advantage of their professors' office hours, because they saw their professors in a sense as "superior officers" and did not want to "bother" them.¹⁴⁴ Peer mentors can inform them that their professors are there to provide assistance and feedback during the course of the semester and advise a new veteran law student that he or she needs to take advantage of these opportunities. Peer mentors can also instruct their peer mentees to join study groups in order to study the

¹⁴² DEP'T OF THE ARMY, *supra* note 54, at 4-38 ("Training conducted without evaluation is a waste of time and resources.").

¹⁴³ Jay Feinman & Marc Feldman, *Pedagogy and Politics*, 73 GEO. L.J. 875, 899 (1985).

¹⁴⁴ HAMRICK & RUMANN, *supra* note 5, at 76 (discussing research which suggests that veteran undergraduate students are less likely than non-veterans to talk with faculty members or participate in out-of-class activities. Research conclusions seemed to make sense based on differences between veteran undergraduate student culture and non-veteran undergraduate student culture).

material with other students and obtain feedback on how they are doing relative to other students in their classes.

Peer mentors can also advise veteran students about seeking assistance when it is needed. Failing to seek help when it was needed developed as a theme in a study of undergraduate degree attainment of combat veterans.¹⁴⁵ One undergraduate veteran student felt that her inability to ask for help early in her first semester had a negative impact on subsequent semesters. “I’m not sure why I couldn’t ask for help, I just couldn’t. I was struggling in Pre-Calculus and rather than get the help I needed, I tried to finish the course on my own and ended up having to take the course again the following semester.”¹⁴⁶ Likewise a Marine Corps veteran reported that he did not listen to his advisors who told him not to take a winter intercession Algebra class because he had not taken any math classes for seven years. He got lost in the first two weeks, never asked for help or tutoring, and ended up failing the class.¹⁴⁷

Another way to understand this concept and its lasting impact on veteran law students is to understand that military training and culture is designed to develop leadership and initiative from the beginning of military service.¹⁴⁸ “Duty is marked by high levels of discipline and teamwork.”¹⁴⁹ Importantly, “no military member, or veteran, wants to be seen as the weak link on a team” or to have to ask for help.¹⁵⁰ These students often perceive asking for help from professors or campus

¹⁴⁵ Scott, *supra* note 81, at 44.

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*

¹⁴⁷ *Id.*

¹⁴⁸ Vacchi, *supra* note 2, at 18.

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*

¹⁵⁰ *Id.*

administrators as a burden on others.¹⁵¹ In these students' minds, failure is not an option.¹⁵²

VIII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Law schools are in a unique position to develop comprehensive institutional strategies to make sure veteran law students can adapt to the law school environment and benefit their legal and local communities. Veteran law students provide law schools with unique and diverse strengths and perspectives. Law schools in return need to provide veteran students with institutional programs such as a veteran-specific orientation and peer-to-peer mentoring that recognize and acknowledge these students as a unique student population.

This article is simply a starting point to encourage research about veteran law students and to demonstrate what our institutions can do to inform them about the cultural differences between the military and law school so that they can adapt their significant skills to be even more successful in law school. These students bring diverse perspectives and enormous strengths to law schools. Future possibilities on behalf of veteran and military law students could include: student-faculty events welcoming veteran students; Veterans Day events; speaker series featuring veteran alumni; Continuing Legal Education (CLE) classes featuring veteran law topics; working with local and state legislative bodies on public policy issues impacting the veteran community; developing veteran pro bono projects and legal clinics; and offering veteran and military law courses. While it is recognized that these strategies are ambitious, our veteran law students' contributions to our law schools and communities at large, as well as their service to our country, warrant our investment to transform their law school experience.

¹⁵¹ *Id.*

¹⁵² *Id.* Vacchi goes on to argue that this is why so many cases of posttraumatic stress, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug addiction, and medical issues go undiagnosed and untreated: veterans do not want campus community members to view them as weak or dependent upon anyone for assistance. *Id.*