

II. In-Class Behavior

The loss of friendship, purpose, identity, structure, and income is enough to push most people to their limits. Throw in an unfamiliar social system...no clear chain of command... and students and faculty who can't even imagine the student veterans' experience, and you have a deeply alienating environment for many of them. --Alison Lighthall via (A Model for Vet Success: Best Practices Vilma Patterson, Michael Bates, Eric Wheeler)



Three top learning goals:

- 1) Differentiate and classify tension and conflict as standard classroom misbehavior, PTSD, or as warning signs of student veterans in crisis;
- 2) Defuse in class situations related to student veteran issues before they escalate;
- 3) Apply just-in-time strategies to smooth over incidents (conflict, triggered PTSD, etc) for least disruption

ABSTRACT:

Live in the class: Triggered PTSD, angry public challenge to instructor, conflict with non-veteran students while in group or discussion settings – these situations can/need to be defused. Learn strategies and approaches for faculty to handle these situations and behaviors toward best outcomes for all involved, keeping decorum in the class while hopefully not losing the student veteran.

BRIEFINGS:

Examine various common scenarios of tension, conflict and disruption related to student veteran issues that can occur live in a classroom, including triggered PTSD, angry public challenge to instructor, and conflict with non veteran students in group or discussion settings. Learn strategies and approaches for faculty to defuse these situations and behaviors toward best outcomes for all involved

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Faculty TIP 1): Expectations of authority figures. Student Veterans are “Slow to trust non veterans” and quick to lose respect of faculty who don’t practice what they expect to see in an authority figure. Student veterans may also be: hypervigilant, notice everything, especially inconsistencies in applying policy or ‘favorites’. Teachers who are constantly late or casually late will lose respect from vet students. So will those that do not carry out consequences against violations against policies, especially things perceived as disrespectful such as texting in the middle of class. Couching a political point of view that makes a student veteran’s idea seem us “versus them” or exhibiting what a student veteran perceives as one sided ‘activism’ in the classroom will also create a sense of antagonism. This can be countered easily by 1) playing devil’s advocate and/or 2) setting rules about presenting a view point vs what constitutes a rant.

Student veterans, from dealing with bureaucracy and its forms in military and other countries, have a highly attuned BS detector: Be direct, don’t over-promise, and be positive but realistic about possible outcomes. For example, “It may not be the solution you are looking for, but want to give you the facts straight” is more effective than a promise to solve a problem.

Faculty TIP 2): Behaviors in class may signal student veterans having transition trouble (one shot or ongoing). make on the spot judgement calls: “As contrasted in “Understanding and Supporting Student Veterans,” from Flathead Valley Community College: [HOMEMIND as reaction or ‘end’ to positives of battlemind, the chart lists some of the more common sources of in class behavior issues]: “Withdrawal, controlling of others, inappropriate aggression, hypervigilance ...angry, secretive, guilt, too familiar with others (let’s have a drink after class’). If you look out for these behaviors in student veterans in class(or examine scenarios below), you’ll have an eye towards what the problems could look like.

Faculty TIP 3): Faculty should have at least two quick remedy strategies ready for ‘on the spot’ student veteran reaction situations in class. Student veterans often feel superior or estranged (from having ‘more’ life experiences) to ‘13th graders,’ and yet get embarrassed when they have a vet-related physical or non physical reaction in class (eg, PTSD reaction, Bell’s Palsy, etc). The fact that war affects their former unit members daily whiles students are concerned about television shows and video games is often alienating. Student veterans can also have a strong **reaction** to ironic, slogan, or ‘unearned’ clothing worn by other students – a shirt that

says “AmeriKKKa,” a cap with an upside down flag, for example, can create alienation or confrontation.

1) Faculty should consider pausing for **‘teachable moments’ discussions** about freedoms of expression and safe space for all opinions, to defuse ‘us vs them’ situations such as above, on the spot when they happen -- if, before, they escalate;

2) Faculty should allow student veterans (who have identified on first day, as requested in syllabus), who have reaction or triggered behaviors in class, know from first day that they **can/should ‘take a moment’ to leave a rough class or incident situation**, to regroup in a safe space (SVO, Veteran’s lounge, walk outside of class, etc) should they need it – just take the moment, then explain to instructor in private why, later.

Faculty TIP 4): Instructor needs to understand **classmate behaviors will subtly or not so subtly be influenced by the knowledge there is a student veteran in class.** Some student veterans can appear reserved and quiet when returning w/injuries, particularly burns, scars, missing limbs. Some students may also not socialize with the former for these reasons. A student veteran’s threatening manner can be intention or unintention and cast a pallor over the rest of the class. A student veteran who reveals in an assignment or in casual conversation about being in treatment, or writes about homicidal thoughts, will activate stereotypes and fears in class in some and probing questions from others. Regardless of which, the class dynamics will change unless the faculty member runs the show and clearly focuses the class on content and everyone’s role as student – first and with primacy.

Faculty TIP 5): **Negative changes in behavior can be one shot sometimes.** Things happen during or just before class: news of buddies shot, breakups, different holidays outside the US, anniversaries of battles or unit actions. “some days when you just have to be home” or times of ‘taking a moment’ may happen but may not be symptomatic. If the off behavior continues, make contact or referral. A quick email to counseling (who can at least check if the student veteran is tracking for issues or problems or treatment) or a ‘no names’ discussion with student veteran services can help clarify a simple bad day from a start of a need for deeper referral and help.

Faculty TIP 6): **Three (anecdotal) quick body language poses to improve communication effectiveness:** Military training often equates authority (follow orders) with the spirit of this quote : “Leadership is a matter of having people look at you and gain confidence, seeing how you react; if you are in control then they are in control.” (Coach Tom Landry). Body language can help get this effect, get things done. Three common starter poses include: sitting forward, with arms folded, listening and showing care (like a Chaplain); enforcing authority by eye contact with arms folded, fingers at the waist, when giving orders or calling attention (sergeant); when reviewing a request or going to provide an answer that isn’t easy to take or isn’t what the student veteran is hoping to hear, a pause, then speaking directly with arms behind the back (officer). Like any body language put to purpose, consider these each one shot with a group or individual: use them too often and the effect is reversed/becomes parody.

14 Sample SCENARIOS* relevant for In-Class Behavior

for instructions on how to use Sample Scenarios, go to HOW TO USE TOOLKIT chapter/module and read: “How to use SCENARIOS: Teachable Moments strategy or as Faculty Development exercises”

SCENARIO 1:	issue of non respect to other students (despite syllabus w/keystones or classroom etiquette)
SCENARIO 2:	issue of non respect w/teachers

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SCENARIO 3:	issue of not respect w/ethnicity
SCENARIO 4:	Asks for non participation because of subject matter
SCENARIO 5:	non participation at all in a course that requires participation
SCENARIO 6:	Threatening behavior happens in class – out of the blue – from a typically quiet or cooperative student veteran
SCENARIO 7:	Dropped or disciplined (intimidating or angry reaction to being dropped) student vet waits outside of class for friends, inadvertently (?) creating tension with faculty or other students.
SCENARIO 8:	In middle of heated discussion, student vet uses inappropriate or salty language. Shows/doesn't show regret when realizes not appropriate language in academic 'safe space.'
SCENARIO 9:	Student vet disappears during/after topic, story or discussion in class, about rape, torture or imprisonment.
SCENARIO 10:	Student vet behaves inappropriately or too attentively to someone in class of a specific gender or ethnicity or underaged.
SCENARIO 11:	Student veteran is constantly late to class and that lateness is disrupting the class flow.
SCENARIO 12:	Other students (in group or general class population) report to you student veteran seemed drunk or high in class
SCENARIO 13:	Other students (in group or general class population) tell you student veteran had in backpack, bag, etc, possible contraband (alcohol, pillboxes, a gun).
SCENARIO 14:	Student veterans in class are doing non-verbal passive acts of intimidation (looking back in tandem, dismissively at students with a particular opinion, murmuring together or declaring their viewpoint stupid, etc). Other student are obviously taking note of this.

***Where are the solutions?** *There are too many different ways to 'solve' each, agreeing and disagreeing, similar and dissenting, so instead you have 1)the scenario 2)suggested steps in Chapter ["HOW to USE Toolkit"](#) to find your own localized solutions. **Forcing people to start discussions - active learning -- rather than reading/skimming what I thought/found worked in MY location/culture is the key to action and owning the problem and approaches.** Only homegrown solutions SOLVE WITH PURPOSE*