

What not to ask student veterans:

- Did you deploy? Are you a Combat Vet?
(This possibly minimizes the service of those who have not deployed and can invoke bad memories for those who have.)
- Did you kill anyone? Did you see anyone die?
(This question is viewed as immature and unnecessary, it may also spark trauma about the event)
- Are you glad you're back?
(This is an obvious answer; there is no need to ask.)
- Did you miss your family?
(Some may still miss their families! A large number of divorces occur because of military service.)
- Do you have to go back?
(This is not something they want to think about.)
- Do you think we are winning over there?
(The veteran did not set the U.S. policy for Iraq or Afghanistan. He or she may or may not have agreed with it. Regardless, as a service member it was the veteran's duty to implement the strategies of the country's political and military leadership.)

Many of these questions might reflect your own personal bias about military service. You do not know what that person may be facing each day. Some questions are too personal, like those that indicate a mental health or physical diagnosis. Further, some questions could trigger memories for the service member when that person is in a place (i.e., the classroom) that might not be safe for coping with such strong emotions.

Other problems that some student veterans may deal with are physical and emotional disabilities.

- Musculoskeletal problems (e.g., amputations, joint pain, back pain)
- Hearing problems (e.g., hearing loss, tinnitus—"ringing" in ear)

Up to one-third of student veterans may be struggling with "invisible wounds" of war: traumatic brain injury, posttraumatic stress disorder, or major depression. These conditions can also impact school performance.

- Invisible Wounds (e.g., Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Depression and Anxiety).
 - Research from the National Center for Veteran Studies suggests that symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression are significant in student veterans. Thoughts about suicide are also a serious concern.
 - Students with TBI frequently suffer from headaches and memory challenges.
 - TBI may result in a reduced ability to filter or monitor thoughts before speaking.
- Many student veterans have a wide range of experiences from their military service, but still have to take courses they do not find challenging because the courses are a repeat of knowledge and skills the veterans have already acquired through their service.

Tips to Improve the Student Veteran Experience on Campus:

- Make an effort to understand student veterans; understand the military culture, battlefield skills, and deployment-related stressors.
- Instead of saying “Thank you for your service,” recognize that many veterans who have been deployed would rather be told, “Welcome home.”
- Be sensitive of topics discussed as some topics can be triggers for those with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Allow enough time for students to process information requested and give their verbal/written response.
 - This is important for those with brain injuries, hearing disabilities, learning disabilities, and speech impairments.
 - Also, many may not have disclosed that they have TBI.
- Ensure your classroom is accessible with desks/tables/chairs for wheelchairs and those with physical disabilities.
- See the whole student. Ask yourself “What may have happened” rather than “What is wrong with” that student.
- Be patient. See the student’s story as the student’s strength. Life experiences of veterans can be an asset to other students in the classroom.
- Offer honest feedback, connection to problem-solving resources, and encouragement.
- Be careful about your own assumptions. Veterans could regard their military experiences as positive or negative and may be exploring their sense of self as they journey through higher education.
- Help facilitate connection and support. Many service members are familiar with working in teams.
- Remember that service members are not one-size-fits-all.