

CAL VETERAN SERVICES CENTER

Making the Transition From Military Service to University Life

The Cal Veteran Services Center at Berkeley has grown to a vibrant collection of services that help more than 300 students successfully transition from boots to books. Through creative use of limited resources, Berkeley has built a strong program and reputation, ranking as a “Vet Friendly Campus” by the *Military Times* and *G.I. Jobs*. Most veterans are considered nontraditional students because they are at least 25 years in age, have children, or are transfer students. These veterans bring unique experiences of leadership that enrich the campus. Two examples illustrate the types of valuable perspectives veterans offer to Berkeley:

- » Navy veteran John Ready exemplifies a focus on service, a proud hallmark of Berkeley students. Along with his doctoral studies in nuclear engineering and his responsibilities as a young father, Ready served as president of the Graduate Student Assembly (2014-15). In his first year on campus, he also took the initiative to conduct a first-ever needs assessment survey of fellow veterans at Berkeley. Of 76 respondents, 40 percent reported military service-related disabilities, and 52 percent reported one or more health and wellness challenges. The strongest unmet needs identified were career/employment, a dedicated physical space, assistance with GI benefits, and disability services.
- » Lieutenant Colonel Nina D’Amato, M.A., ’08, C.EAS ’08 earned her degrees while serving as a Reservist in the United States Marine Corps. She is now focused on a nascent program through the Alumni Association that hopes to create paid internships for student veterans — mostly with local businesses — to both increase recruitment and improve career readiness for vets at Berkeley.

Program Highlights

Berkeley leverages work with the services of the **Veterans Administration**, various community groups (such as Swords to Plowshares, a national leading nonprofit providing wrap-around services for veterans), and Berkeley campus partners including the **Cal Veterans Group**. This student organization for veterans now has a home in the Cal Veteran Services Center on Berkeley’s campus and focuses on student retention among veterans.

Ron Williams, director of re-entry student and veteran services, currently serves as chair of the planning committee for a statewide summit for California student veterans. This effort is mobilizing at the request of University of California President Janet Napolitano to assemble student leaders from California community colleges, the California State University campuses, and UC system campuses along with partners from the California Department of Veterans Affairs to forge opportunities, mentorship, and recruitment efforts for veterans to more fully engage California public higher education. This summit is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2016.



Ron Williams, director of re-entry student and veteran services

Growth and Institutionalization

The massive drawdown of troops from Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere is expected to create the largest influx of student veterans since World War II. Some 10 percent of our country's military personnel are stationed in California, offering Berkeley a unique opportunity to overcome misperceptions about access and meet crucial needs for support of military personnel in a high-level educational environment.

In the fall of 2014, the Cal Veteran Services Center received a leadership gift from **Coleman Fung '87**, an Army veteran. With his help, Berkeley has created new initiatives for outreach to current and former service members and a massive reworking of the center's website so that personnel around the world will have access to good information about the best ways to use their GI education benefits. The information vets need to make the best use of their educational resources will be spotlighted through a growing collaboration with the Code of Support Foundation to help ensure a national impact. For veterans considering or already attending Berkeley, the interactive portal will include up-to-date information about the campus, veteran benefits, career opportunities, and workshops and other events.

Through Fung's generosity, the center also has a physical home for the first time. Current accommodations are temporary, and the center anticipates a permanent home on campus within the next few years. Looking ahead, the Cal Veterans Service Center is actively pursuing additional philanthropic support to continue and expand efforts on behalf of student veterans.