



# Vet2Vet Student Peer Success Coaching: Catalyzing Student Achievement

University of Michigan-Flint School of Nursing, Veterans Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program

John Collins, PhD, MS, RN, Project Director



## Introduction

**Background:** Nearly all student veterans are older than traditional-age college students, are working supplemental income jobs, while many are married and raising dependent children. Veteran students manage many roles; maintaining finances and housing, securing child care, supplemental work, class attendance, and homework. Also, other issues including Post Traumatic Stress or other medical conditions may impede achieving college and career goals. These challenges to program progression and persistence to graduation negatively impact student veterans.

**Theoretical Foundation:** Student veterans are in some ways like other non-traditional students, yet they possess characteristics that are uniquely different (Knapp, 2013). Social isolation is more prevalent in student veterans than civilian peers, especially at commuter campuses (Topping). Nearly 100% of student veterans at UM-Flint are commuters. Research has shown that commuting students are less likely to be socially engaged; likewise research shows that student interactions with peers and faculty are directly related to persistence and retention in college (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016). Diminished interactions and social isolation are challenges that should be addressed by university personnel to assist student veterans and help them progress and persist to graduation. Student veterans are less likely to recognize their challenges, and to seek help for them, both situations leading to increased rates of attrition.

**Purpose:** The purpose of UM-Flint's Veterans Bachelor of Science in Nursing (VBSN) peer coaching program is to support new student veterans in an accelerated BSN program guided by fellow student veterans or recent graduates. While peer tutoring engages student veterans academically, it does not address their psychosocial needs. No one truly understands the transition from military life to civilian life better than a veteran who has already been through the experience. By providing student veterans with a structured success coaching program, UM-Flint's VBSN Program is directly engaging "the whole student" as a veteran, nursing student, and often head of household, spouse, and parent (Robinson, September 25, 2014). In addition, the coaching program provides increased social interaction, thereby increasing student veterans' rates of course completion, program progression, and persistence to graduation.

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## Methodology

Student veterans experiencing difficulties need safe places to talk. Research has identified student veterans' need for a more "tight-knit veteran's circle" and opportunities to talk with those who have had similar life experiences (Jones, 2013; Robinson, September 25, 2014). UM-Flint's VBSN Team responded to this student need by implementing and facilitating the Vet2Vet Student Peer Success Coaching program. Inherent to the program, Vet2Vet also encourages student veterans to become more actively engaged university citizens. Establishment of the peer coaching relationship augments student learning and persistence in attainment of students' educational goals. The Michigan VBSN structured Vet2Vet Success Coaching Program includes:

- ❖ A minimum of one meeting or session per month on or off campus.
- ❖ On campus events may include the Coach completing introductions to university services such as the library, tutoring, student government and other student organizations. In addition, Coaches will introduce student partners to organizations within the School of Nursing such as the Student Nursing Association chapter at the university, Student Veterans of America Chapter, and other service or discipline related organizations.
- ❖ Off campus meetings will be more "off-duty" events such as simply meeting for coffee or lunch to catch up and talk, and/or include a community or social event. The requirement for structured interaction between the dyad of Coach and Student Partner promotes regular conversation and facilitates establishment of the relationship needed to begin open sharing of challenges and obstacles that may be impeding student success.



## Results

Outcomes for veteran students receiving coaching from another veteran student or recent graduate have been positive, as measured via coaching evaluation surveys. All students participating in the coaching program have progressed in their coursework. Testimonials from both Coaches and Student Partners provided below attest to the value of participating in the coaching arrangement.

### Coach Perspectives:

"We have a positive relationship that will not end after the nursing program. I told him that if he ever needed anything (advice or explanation) that he could call or text and I would help throughout the whole program, including employment after graduation."

"I wish that I had this program when I started the program. To know that I had a resource to contact for advice would have been amazing."

"I really enjoy helping others with experiences that I have already been through. This might be solidifying my passion to be a Clinical Instructor in the future"

### Student Perspectives:

"Mainly my barriers included self-doubt, and a struggle with anxiety over making good grades. I knew that I had to find types of studying techniques that would work best for me. I overcame these barriers by seeking help from my coach and the resources offered to me."

"I had asked for help...not only did I get words of encouragement, but she (coach) also gave me insight into the best studying practices that worked for her. This advice was paramount in my success for the semester, as I progressively began to increase my exam scores."

"The Vet2Vet program is another great way for programs to help veteran students with being able to navigate college courses and life. The opportunity of being able to speak with other veterans makes understanding the overall program experience much easier."

## Selected References

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