Undergraduate Military Nursing Students in the Civilian Classroom: An Integrative Review
Catherine Wilson Cox
PhD, RN, CEN, CNE, Alumnus CCRN
Associate Professor, The George Washington University School of Nursing

Background: Civilian baccalaureate nursing programs educate 100% of undergraduate military nursing students yet many faculty are unaware of the challenges and facilitators that Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines – who are on Active Duty, in the Reserves, in the Guard, retired, or veterans – encounter when they attend a Bachelors of Science in Nursing program. Consequently, nursing faculties vary in their experience as how best to acclimatize military nursing students to the classroom.

Purpose: The purpose of this integrative review of the literature was to examine the current literature regarding military nursing students and to present best practice tips so that educators can become culturally competent to work with military undergraduates, especially when preparing veterans to transition from former military roles to health care careers.

INTEGRATIVE REVIEW
Facilitators/Challenges

Facilitators
- They are valuable assets because they convey a level of maturity and strong work ethic, are very disciplined, and bring important life experiences to the classroom.
- The strengths they bring to the classroom include: Leadership, team membership and team leadership, diversity, punctuality, flexibility and adaptability, an ability to be self-directed, possession of outstanding work habits, a commitment to excellence, a global outlook, and an investment in their communities.

Challenges
- Six barriers that military students may experience:
  - Stigma (which leads to inappropriate questions), peer classmates (without a military background), traditional nursing education (which uses customary pedagogies), personal and financial responsibilities (which results in struggles, especially when there are VA payment delays), and/or gender (whereby men may have represented the majority in the military but remain the minority in nursing).
  - They may not ask for help or will only ask questions as a last resort.
  - They may struggle with developing a self-identity outside of their respective services so it can be taxing for them to forge a relationship with peers or faculty.
  - They may feel that many faculty do not understand their specific needs.
  - Because they are accustomed to a very organized environment, military students do not respond well to inconsistent and/or capricious policies.
  - They frequently deployed in arduous conditions for long periods of time and may have been exposed to trauma, they are at risk for PTSD, behavioral health issues, and/or traumatic brain injury.
  - Many are older, have families, and/or tend to live off campus so have to commute to school.

RECOMMENDATIONS
- Faculty would benefit from formalized training focusing on areas related to military culture, common language used, deployments, rank structure, and negotiating stereotypes.
- Ideal faculty include those with prior military service because they can role model for the students by providing guidance transitioning from the service to academia as well as act as interpreters for faculty regarding military matters.
- No matter what – if any – accommodations are made for military students, faculty should always maintain high expectations so that students are successful with meeting course goals and objectives as well as program standards.
- “Thinking outside of the box” can add to student success (e.g., counting deployed clinical hours towards course requirements).
- Consider offering innovative education models that reduce redundancy for areas whereby competency has already been validated via the military.
- Many military students are global citizens so faculty are advised to take advantage of their experience.
- Faculty should provide a classroom environment that is safe by respecting a military student’s privacy and leaving it up to the student to disclose any prior service.
- Military students benefit when colleges and universities are prepared to administer to their needs (e.g., centralizing services by offering “one-stop shopping” is one way to accommodate this), provide a welcoming/friendly campus (e.g., “Veteran-friendly”), offer services for previous injuries and disabilities, connect military students with their military peers, and/or possess great communication plans.
- Schools should make military students cognizant of financial aid options that complement their VA benefits.
- Because lower perceived social support military students receive from the both the faculty and staff negatively correlates with GPAs, it is imperative to be supportive in support of these students.
- Schools need to be equipped to handle possible behavioral and/or physical health needs.

SELECT REFERENCES

*Note: The full reference list may be found via this article.


Get involved in education and research that matters: The George Washington University School of Nursing