With the new 9/11 GI Bill, its nuances, and amenities, colleges and universities around the country are designing programs, workshops and professional associations to assist the transition of the returning OEF / OIF veterans as they prepare for their journey into higher education. Disability Resources at the University of Arizona invited 25 higher education professionals in veteran affairs from various colleges and universities around the country to participate in the "Veterans in Higher Education Professionals' Roundtable" in Tucson, Arizona, September 22-25, 2009. The University of Houston’s own Director of the Veterans’ Services Office was invited to this experience which was fully funded by a congressionally-directed grant entitled "The Disabled Veterans Reintegration and Education Project.” The roundtable brought together professionals who were working to change the climate for all student-veterans. At the three-day event, we identified and discussed issues facing veterans in higher education, shared resources, identified best practices, and developed strategies to create a network of pioneers, advocates, and professionals who can work together to improve the collegiate experience for veterans. Another modified roundtable occurs in the spring of 2010 to engage in an intensive work schedule and fully develop a transition model. The University of Arizona, along with several other colleges and universities, plans to develop and host the Veterans in Higher Education National Clearinghouse. They believe they can offer a comprehensive program for student-veterans and be a resource for higher education. This is a great concept, and I am hopeful that the University of Houston will stay and be an integral part of the process as it develops. As the University of Houston moves ever so carefully toward considering the One-Stop concept, the challenge is getting Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to work together more efficiently in order to steer to success and serve this non-traditional population.
As always, honor takes its presence when sharing the trials and victories with a fellow veteran. In other instances, it is an unrecognized distinction to hear the often silent efforts of civilians who dedicate their time and energy to make sure military members are given the appreciation they deserve. This was the case with Mrs. Diane Slaughter, a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and civic volunteer, who commits her attention to providing care packages for troops stationed overseas. Beginning with sending cards to hospital patients and military members in her church, through a friend’s son who was in the military deployed overseas, Diane shifted her concentration to focus on mailing care packages to the men and women who were deployed. Since November of 2004, Diane has continued to provide troops with more than the usual toiletry articles, also sending off items for leisure time enjoyment such as horse shoes, volleyballs with nets, board games, DVDs, non-perishable snacks, as well as toys and coloring books for the children of the area. She spent as much as four hundred and fifty dollars for one shipment alone and throughout the years an estimated total of ten thousand dollars on items purchased combined with shipping costs. Through her efforts, Diane was able to meet with nine of the soldiers to whom she shipped items. In addition, she received countless pictures, newsletter updates, and a sergeant’s coin, along with an American flag flown over a deployed location on September 11, 2007. But, perhaps her most distinct honor is the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge Award, a national award bestowed on those citizens whose projects, words or deeds reflect the best of the American spirit of volunteerism and community service. Her countless efforts to give back to the community and veterans truly do embody the American spirit of giving back and help us to realize our service does not go unnoticed. It is individuals like Mrs. Diane Slaughter that help us appreciate the freedom we defend.

In the summer of 2009, I sat down with Miss Olivia Bush, Executive Director and Founder of the Bush Cares Project, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization, and discussed how we could raise money for scholarships for student-veterans. We came up with a lot of ideas, some realized but others impossible in this downturn of the American economy. The failures, however, were lessons learned. One of those ideas, the “Laptops for Heroes” scholarship, came out of the need we saw with the returning veterans not having enough finances and tools to continue their education. We decided to try to put a laptop in the hands of every veteran attending a college, university or technical institute. Well with this in mind, we began to hunt for donations. There was a lead on a Walmart contact for community outreach whom we decided to call and get the process of how to apply. She was very helpful in giving us the right information. Lo and behold, we were awarded a donation in the amount of $1,000.00. As you can see, we have a check signed by them. When we picked up the check, employees gathered that morning to see the check presented. I learned something about Walmart that made me appreciate them. Many Walmart employees are veterans. I accepted the check with pride in our accomplishment of getting our first donation. As the check was handed over to me, a loud applause roared through the facility, and a tear formed in my left eye.

As you see me in this picture, my dramatization of the check-giving ceremony is to make others realize how important it is to donate. However, it is more important for the student-veteran to apply for this scholarship. This check was given by veterans for veterans, and our slogan for the Veterans’ Services Office and the Veterans’ Collegiate Society has always been “Veterans Helping Veterans.” From that day I actually felt the meaning of our slogan.

I encourage all to go to the Bush Cares Project at www.bushcares.org and donate to this worthy cause.
One of the largest and fastest growing entrepreneurship programs in the nation, the Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship (WCE), ranked first in the top 25 undergraduate entrepreneurship programs in the U.S. by Entrepreneur Magazine and The Princeton Review in 2008. The Veterans Collegiate Society, in conjunction with the Veterans’ Services Office and various other sponsors, recently hosted a seminar on entrepreneurship called Veterans Business Seminar: Entrepreneurship and the 21st Century Veteran. Even though this was my first experience putting such a program together from start to finish, the event was a great success. It included speakers from the Houston area, many of whom are responsible for several successful start-up businesses. The amount of expertise at the event was amazing, and every attendee mentioned that the value of the presentations surpassed all expectations.

The veterans program at the University of Houston (UH) is now an affiliate of the lustrous WCE program. While proclaiming his veteran status, Bill Sherrill stated, “No single course of study is more perfectly suited for people with military experience than entrepreneurship.” Bill Sherrill, founder of the entrepreneurship program at UH Bauer College of Business, is a former U.S. Marine Corp Line Sergeant who was wounded at Iwo Jima and earned a Purple Heart. After putting this seminar together and reflecting on its success, I realize the wonderful thing about the event is that it provides veterans with the opportunity to create success in the midst of the worst recession in decades. In fact, many of the currently successful corporations were entrepreneurial ventures born during a recession. During the hard times that many currently find themselves in, where jobs are often scarce, this event gives veterans the knowledge to create their own opportunity, instead of waiting for the recession to end.

Because of the success of this recent event, the Veterans Collegiate Society and the Veterans’ Services Office have decided to host another Veterans Business Seminar in April of 2010. The intent is to make this event even better than the last and to give veterans the tools and resources necessary to create their own success.
WHAT WE OFFER OUR UH VETERANS

- Referrals for credit evaluation of military training
- Referrals for VA health benefits.
- Assistance with transition and adjustment to civilian life
- Unlimited, free access to computers, local telephone calls, and facsimile transmittals
- 200 photocopies or computer print-outs per month
- A quiet study room

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"Veterans Helping Veterans"

Season’s Greetings, Happy Holidays
Merry Christmas
and
Happy New Year
From Your Friends at the
Veterans’ Services Office

Emergency Assistance
http://www.hrc.hctx.net/emergencyfinancial.htm
http://www.hrc.hctx.net/pdf/EMERGENCY%20ASSISTANCE%20List%202011-09.pdf