

## Disability Services Liaison (DSL) Toolkit

### VA Workstudy

Review [VA workstudy](#) information at this link, download, and complete the fillable [application](#) at the bottom of the page. Note: the workstudy site is more current than page 2 of the application. Some campuses require applicants to submit a cover letter and resume, in addition to an interview to ensure competitiveness amongst an applicant pool.

### Position Description

The following position description can be used to establish and advertise the DSL position. This template is meant to be modified to fit the needs and climate of your campus.

*The Disability Services Liaison (DSL) workstudy position works within the Disability Services Office at their approved campus. The DSL provides support to student veterans, and provides cultural competency to Disability Services staff and school personnel. The following are within the scope of this position:*

- Clerical duties, such as making and placing phone calls, directing student veterans on campus and over the phone, sending and receiving emails, and answering questions to walk-in's.*
- Assist student veterans with general inquiries about veteran benefits they can receive on and off campus, veteran's activities, and directing students to other student support service locations on campus*
- Assist and participate in campus orientation and other events to educate student veterans on disability identity, self-disclosure, accommodations, and related support services.*
- Collect, compile, and track data in support of student veterans with disabilities.*
- Perform basic data analysis and generate reports.*
- Maintain and organize workspace, ensuring open/close duties have been completed daily.*
- Assist with website development.*
- Maintaining positive relationships with student support service departments, in order to facilitate services to students receiving veterans' related educational entitlements.*
- Assist with the development and distribution of accurate and current Veterans' Affairs publications to relevant constituencies (brochures, flyers, posters and web content).*
- Assist with maintaining regulatory, information security and confidentiality compliance in accordance with federal, state and school guidelines*

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- *Maintain most current information and updates by attending training to support student veterans with disabilities and Disability Services staff.*
- *Establish contact with student government, student regent, campus diversity council, faculty senate, veterans' resource center, career services, graduate college, local VA Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, and the campus state certifying official for awareness and advocacy purposes.*
- *Coordinate with the campus Green Zone training program to ensure disability in education for veterans is properly represented.*
- *Establish contact with disability and veterans' services offices of nearby schools to facilitate transitioning veterans.*

*Any interested students may apply by submitting a Department of Veteran Affairs Application for Work-Study Allowance ([VA Form 22-8691](#)). Forms must be submitted to the school's VA workstudy site supervisor (cover letter and resume are at the supervisor's discretion).*

### Disability Services

Arrange a meeting with DS to discuss roles and identify your site supervisor. Your campus may have an established workstudy supervisor, such as a certifying official or veteran resource center director. Some campus require a position description (PD). An example PD can be found on the last page of this document. Modify this template to meet the specific needs of your campus as needed.

Contact the head of DS by email. Depending on the size of your school, DS can be a department or just an office. This means the person in charge may be a director, manager, or some level of dean. In almost all cases, you can locate this information using "disability [xxxx.edu]" (i.e. disability [arizona.edu](#)), then locating "Our Staff" or similar. Your email will give the head of DS a chance to understand what you want to accomplish, while also giving you a record of the communication. The head has the latitude to approve and support certain things. This means that his or her support will require the staff to support you as well. Below is a draft you can use in the body of your email. Feel free to modify as you see fit.

*Dear Mr/Ms/Dr last name,*

*My name is preferred first & last name. I am a student veteran attending school name. I would like to arrange a meeting with you to discuss how we can work together to better serve student veterans with disabilities. Due to the nature of military service, veterans have little to no experience with special education prior to graduating high school. A little over 50% of GI Bill users acquired a service-connected disability, but are unaware of the self-disclosure requirements in higher education. Worse yet, veteran culture creates a negative stereotype around*

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*disability, causing many to avoid seeking assistance and jeopardizing their academic goals. I have a solution to this issue using the transformative power of education and peer-based support.*

*As part of my Veterans' Affairs (VA) education benefits, I am eligible to receive VA workstudy funding to support the success of veterans. The VA workstudy program provides me an opportunity to show work experience on my resume and there's no cost to our school. I have the support of Student Veterans of America (SVA) for ongoing training. An added benefit to my proposal is assisting you and your staff with veteran cultural competency and providing updates on related trends.*

*I look forward to working with you. Feel free to email or call me at your phone number if you have any questions.*

*Respectfully  
your name*

### Physician's Documentation

Step-by-step directions for getting documentation from eBenefits. eBenefits is currently migrating to [VETS.gov](http://VETS.gov).

- Difference between processes of traditional students, nontraditional students with adventitious disabilities, and veterans.
- What is the basic requirements for paperwork needed to satisfy the documentation requirement at your school? [AHEAD](#) and [OCR](#) have standard definitions as a reference.
- List of other schools who have or are implementing a DS liaison. DS Liaisons are asked to connect on the Facebook forum as a temporary solution. A more comprehensive directory is forthcoming.
- Does your school offer temporary or interim services to veterans who have filed a VA claim, but the VA has not made a determination yet? What does that process look like.

### Facebook forum

Share the group with student veterans, DS personnel, local VA Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, Veterans Success on Campus (VSOC) representative-if your campus has one, and your Chapter advisor. This forum provides a way to share relevant information on the topic and will help others become culturally competent. Sharing your experience and expertise will help others looking to do the same on their campus. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/diesv/>

### Student Loan Discharge for the Totally and Permanently Disabled (TPD)

Please share this to empower others. If you have a student loan and the VA has determined that your disability is total and permanent, you might be eligible for a TPD discharge of your student loans. VA and Dept of Education is automating the identification process. Below is some info that you may find useful.

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- CFPB press release: <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/newsroom/cfpb-sues-nations-largest-student-loan-company-navient-failing-borrowers-every-stage-repayment/>
- TPD guidelines: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/disability-discharge>
- TPD application: <https://www.disabilitydischarge.com>
- Goto [eBenefits.va.gov](http://eBenefits.va.gov) and follow the links to the the Letter Generator—>Benefit Summary-Veteran Benefits to determine if your disability rating is considered total and permanent.

### Syllabus Statement

Offer a syllabi statement to faculty for student veterans on how to connect with vital resources on campus. This aids from both an advising and a disability perspective. A sentence could be inserted into the existing ADA statement or as a standalone. The statement would seed the concept that disability culture in the veteran space needs special attention. The desired goal would be to alter the culture of veterans and ultimately remove the statement. There's zero cost, but the benefits would be measurable. An example of the statement could be: "If you are a current or former member of the US military, contact xxx (URL, phone, etc) at xxx (VRC, DS, etc) for additional information."

### Cultural Competency

#### **OVERVIEW**

Veterans enter the military in good health. This means they likely won't have any experience with special education and the IEP process in elementary and high school. Veterans are often nontraditional students, starting out at a community college, and bypassing freshman orientation as a transfer student. It's common for veterans to have been recruited directly from high school. This means that there's a high likelihood that their first job was military service. No need for job searching, resume-building, interview skills, or how to navigate the college system. A test (ASVAB), criminal/health screening (MEPS), high school diploma, and a sworn oath is all that's required.

90% of veterans using the GI Bill were enlisted and two-thirds are first generation college students. They were recruited for their health, clean record, and vocational potential. In return, veterans are offered education benefits and a living stipend for upward mobility beyond the military. In nearly all instances, veterans acquire their disabilities, either in service or afterwards, and sometimes as a result of an improperly diagnosed condition. Veterans often use their GI Bill benefits as a transition tool, incurring no tuition while receiving a monthly stipend adjusted for locality. These elements make higher education a plausible and attractive option.

If a veteran experienced an injury or illness, the VA claim determination and appeals process may take several months to adjudicate. The situation becomes critical if the disability prevents continued work in an occupation the veteran received training. The complicated part isn't finding a college and enrolling, it's accepting help. Unless a peer, mentor, or person they trust tells them about the self-disclosure requirement of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the odds are very low that they won't

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understand what disability services is and why it's important. Put simply, veterans don't know what questions to ask. This is why mentorship is familiar and effective.

Veterans are taught to think tribally. This means prioritizing the mission and putting the needs of the team ahead of the individual. When a veteran is ill or injured, a person in the chain of command orders the individual to get treatment. This mindset is often perceived as learned helplessness, which is linked to depression. This concept is part of the indoctrination training, but is not extinguished when separating from the military. Veterans accept authority without question. Requirements aren't negotiable. This includes class start times, assignment due dates, and job descriptions. Veterans self-regulate, so any deviation to the curriculum is viewed as being weak. Therefore, disability in the veteran culture is often equated with weakness and being the weak link on the team. A common acknowledged feeling by veterans is that asking for help is akin to being on one's knees and begging.

While VA benefits are administered uniformly, healthcare can vary drastically by location. In general, the healthcare system is geriatric-based and focuses on injuries and illness related to age. In nature, the care is reactive, not proactive, and medications are often prescribed to older veterans who no longer drink or consume alcohol in large quantities. Young veterans with a very active lifestyle that includes raising children, work, recreation, and school, may be given a lower priority for care. This is especially true when a student veteran is requesting documentation for a disability from their healthcare provider. Very often, the VA practitioner can't print records and will advise the veteran to request their records from the Release of Information (ROI) office. Depending on several variables, ROI may not be able to provide the records in a timely manner, the necessary records to satisfy the school's documentation requirement, or any records at all.

### **SELF-ADVOCACY**

The culture outside of the military is sometimes dysfunctional. Unless there's intervention, the tribal mentality is a directive for decision-making. An example of this occurs after a veteran receives accommodations. DS and faculty are regarded as authorities. Veterans don't question things, so if a professor and DS don't communicate with one another, and the veteran doesn't mention the accommodations, the veteran will wait. After some time, the veteran may contact DS to enforce, instead of advocating for themselves. Veterans need to be coached on the process, which should include some "if-then" scenarios to aid in problem-solving and independence skills.

Some coaching suggestions to implement are: explain the whole process, so they understand the larger picture. Professors should be contacted ahead of class through email. The email will serve to document the communication. When the veteran arrives in class, he or she should introduce themselves to the professor to create an association with the email. If the professor overlooks an accommodation, it's the veteran's responsibility to readdress the issue immediately or before leaving the class. If the professor refuses to acknowledge the accommodation after the above steps, an email should be sent to both the professor and DS as soon as possible. Your campus

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may have this process outlined differently. Every campus has a different climate, so it's important that veterans understand the process.

### **SERVICE ANIMALS**

Service animals are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, therapy and emotional support animals are not. Leash laws in every locality require animals to be in control by their handlers, except when the animal is performing the service they were trained. Leash laws are meant to protect others who may have been mauled by an animal or who have severe allergies. Handlers are required to maintain the animal's hygiene, pick up any waste or vomit, and enforce proper behavior. Common offensive behaviors include barking, biting, whining, unwanted social interactions, rooting or grazing for food, flatulence, excessive scratching, and free-roaming. These offensive behaviors can be incredibly disruptive in a classroom or in a testing environment. Veterans with service animals should be briefed, according to your campus policy. The ADA will not protect the animal or handler in instances where health and safety are compromised.

### **ORIENTATION**

New campus orientation is a great way to connect with veterans and provide an overview of DS. Orientation is also a great time for veterans to meet a friendly face, before they are absorbed into campus life. Coordination with admissions will help to identify incoming student veterans. Your campus Admissions may be able to push out your contact info and a brief message. Your school's GI Bill certifying official may be able to do the same for veterans already on campus. Furthermore, community colleges are often feeders for larger institutions. Community colleges sometimes offer a transition course, spreading matriculation over a semester. If your campus has a veteran resource center (VRC) and it participates in an orientation session, be sure to coordinate for seamless integration.

### **DIVERSITY COUNCIL**

Many institutions have a diversity council to inform the administration on a variety of issues, such as how policies affect different identity groups. Disability is commonly represented, but veterans are often overlooked. Student Affairs normally hosts this council, can provide more information on current members, and assist in becoming a representative. Some institutions require council members to be staff or faculty. Establishing contact with a veteran or disability representative will allow you to communicate through them.

### **STUDENT REGENT**

The governor of each State has a Board of Regents (BOR) to represent all state-funded schools under their jurisdiction. Some BORs have a student regent that serves to inform the BOR as an advisor or ambassador. Establishing contact with the student regent provides a powerful communication channel. Some SVA Chapter members have been successful in being appointed as the student regent.

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### **STUDENT GOVERNMENT**

Schools collect fees to fund a variety of programs and services. The student life fee may be called something different on your campus. Student government manages the account and represents the student body through recognized clubs and identity groups. Student government often looks for ways to represent specific topics. Establishing contact with a student senator or council member provides a powerful communication channel. Providing routine updates and showing student government representatives the work your doing is empowering.

### **GRADUATE COLLEGE**

Historically, the number of students with disabilities (SwD) registered with DS drops sharply in graduate school. Some research shows a lower enrollment rate amongst SwD and other research indicates the individual graduate programs are providing accommodations directly, making DS unnecessary. Establishing contact with your campus' graduate college may provide some insight specific to your campus. At a minimum, your contact will bring awareness.

### Resources

#### **COALITION TO SALUTE AMERICA'S HEROES**

A great organization that provides financial support to veterans. This resource is only available to OIF/OEF veterans with a VA rating of 30% or more. Application is online.

#### **COHEN VETERANS NETWORK**

Student veterans may not leave campus for counseling, due to trust issues with the VA or time and cost concerns. Student veterans may perceive Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at campus health as not appropriate. A local Vet Center may be an option. An alternative option is Cohen Veterans Network (CVN). CVN provides remote counseling for veterans and their families at no cost.

#### **SVA SPOTLIGHT BRIEFS**

Spotlight briefs are current demographics of student veterans in an easy-to-read format. The stats are updated routinely, as surveys and data is collected and analyzed. This information is great for speaking points and creating a baseline for further research.

#### **VIRTUAL FAIRS**

CareerEco is a platform designed to bring students and employers together for internship and job opportunities. There's no cost for students and eliminates the overhead of attending an in-person event. In addition to career fairs, they offer grad school fairs, that pay for all or part of the cost to attend graduate school.

#### **Claims Appeals**

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The John Marshall Law School does pro bono work for veterans who need help with the VA claims appeal process. Much more information can be found on the Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic landing page.

**More to come...**