A New Generation of WAVES:

Writers **A**dapting to **V**eteran **E**ducational **S**tatus

D. Alexis Hart
Allegheny College

Student veterans have been giving researchers "a consistent message… that they [hope] faculty members [will] acknowledge their veteran status and **attempt to understand them as a student population**."
—DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell, 2008

"Veterans who sense that academia regards them as broken, willfully nonconformist, or unworkable in the college environment will react with understandable frustration, which puts them **at risk for attrition**."
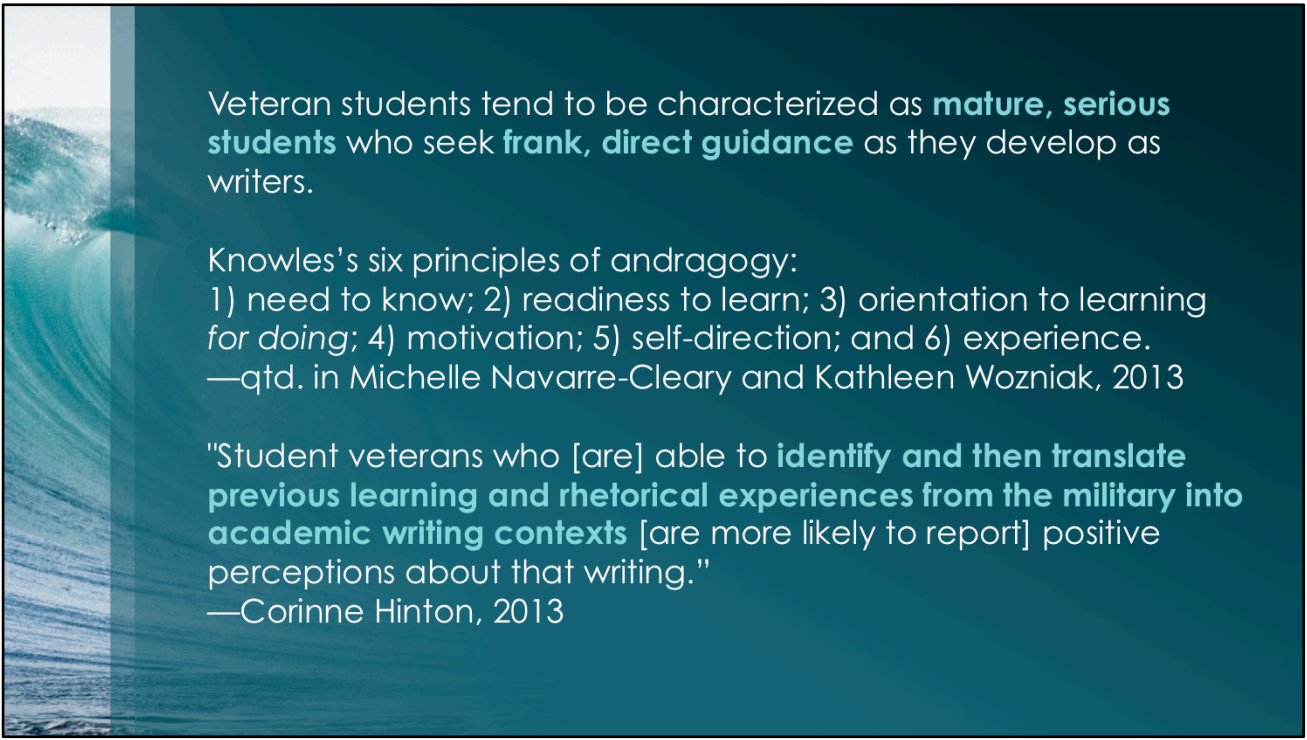—Sarah Gann, 2012

"Psychological invisibility can be defined as a syndrome created by the perception of an individual who may feel **depersonalized and overshadowed by stereotypical assumptions and prejudices** — which often plagues our veteran population with subjugation of stigmas such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), military sexual trauma and traumatic brain injury. "
—Jose Coll, 2013

As is the case with other minority student populations, the scope of veteran experiences is substantial.

Research on current student veterans has revealed that many veterans feel as if college professors lack an understanding of the diversity of the veteran student population. As one young veteran remarked, "Most professors would claim to embrace diversity among the student population, but some would like to exclude veterans from the multiplicity list due to our war service" (qtd. in Elliott, Gonzalez, and Larsen 287). Daniel Byman, Senior Fellow for Foreign Policy at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, has also observed that "many professors harbor stereotypes about the military, not recognizing the diversity of opinion within military circles on many issues and the remarkable minds of many young soldiers." However, as Mark Bauman explains, "learning about the military, war and combat, and servicemembers' experiences [can actually] complement a campus's broader commitment to diversity and social understanding" (31).

Veteran students tend to be characterized as **mature, serious students** who seek **frank, direct guidance** as they develop as writers.

Knowles's six principles of andragogy:
1) need to know; 2) readiness to learn; 3) orientation to learning *for doing*; 4) motivation; 5) self-direction; and 6) experience.
—qtd. in Michelle Navarre-Cleary and Kathleen Wozniak, 2013

"Student veterans who [are] able to **identify and then translate previous learning and rhetorical experiences from the military into academic writing contexts** [are more likely to report] positive perceptions about that writing."
—Corinne Hinton, 2013

Many returning veterans are still likely to "experience culture shock resulting from the stark contrast between the military world and civilian institutions such as higher education" (Zinger and Cohen 39). As they transition from their military commands to college campuses, student veterans are leaving a world in which "authority is absolute, responsibility for actions lies in the hands of superiors and… the rules are clear" (Zinger and Cohen 39-40). Therefore, for many veterans, the relative autonomy of life as a college student requires significant adjustments.

In the military, rules are well documented and orders are absolute. In civilian life in general, in academic settings, and in youth cultures, the rules may change from day to day, there may be "unwritten rules" that everyone is supposed to "just know," and there may be unspoken distinctions between the rules that everyone has to follow and those that one can get away with not following. For service members and veterans, whose success and survival have often depended on structure and discipline, this can be very frustrating.

As Rosalind Loring and her colleagues discovered when developing a program in the 1970s to prepare Vietnam veterans for college courses at UCLA, "[They want] to be respected for their experience and accomplishments in the service, but at the same time they [lack] self-confidence in academic skills." Consequently, they often request that their professors provide them with "specific assignments, explicit standards, and stated expectations for behavior" (Starr 246).

Candid and accurate feedback—even when negative—from someone they trust.

Clear end-goals and rationales for assignments and grading criteria. Concrete and

"Believing war is beyond words is an abrogation of responsibility — it lets civilians off the hook from trying to understand, and veterans off the hook from needing to explain.
We can do better. "
—Phil Klay, 2014

"[W]hat if individuals decide to describe traumatic events? In what manner do we respond on paper, or in person? I have always espoused that **we are not trained therapists**; however, we do have **an ethical obligation to react responsibly**."
—Marilyn Valentino, 2010

"The subject of war and its effects can easily tip over into a dramatic focus on the negative or a stereotypical portrait of service members and veterans as dangerous, unstable, or objects of sympathy. The best focus will emphasize respect for these individuals, appreciation for their service, welcome within the civilian community and academic community, and belief in their strength and potential."—Woll, "Teaching America's Best"

Trigger Warnings

"Since triggers are a contagious phenomenon, there will never be enough trigger warnings to keep up with them. It should not be the job of college educators to foster this process.

It would be **much more useful for faculty members and students to be trained how to respond if they are concerned that a student or peer has suffered trauma.** Giving members of the college community the tools to guide them to the help they need would be more valuable than trying to insulate them from triggers."

—Sarah Roff, 2014

Trigger warnings:
"I have enormous sympathy for students who arrive on college campuses suffering from the aftereffects of childhood trauma as well as for returning veterans trying to go back to school burdened by symptoms of PTSD. The solution is not to help these students dig themselves further into a life of fear and avoidance by allowing them to keep away from upsetting material.
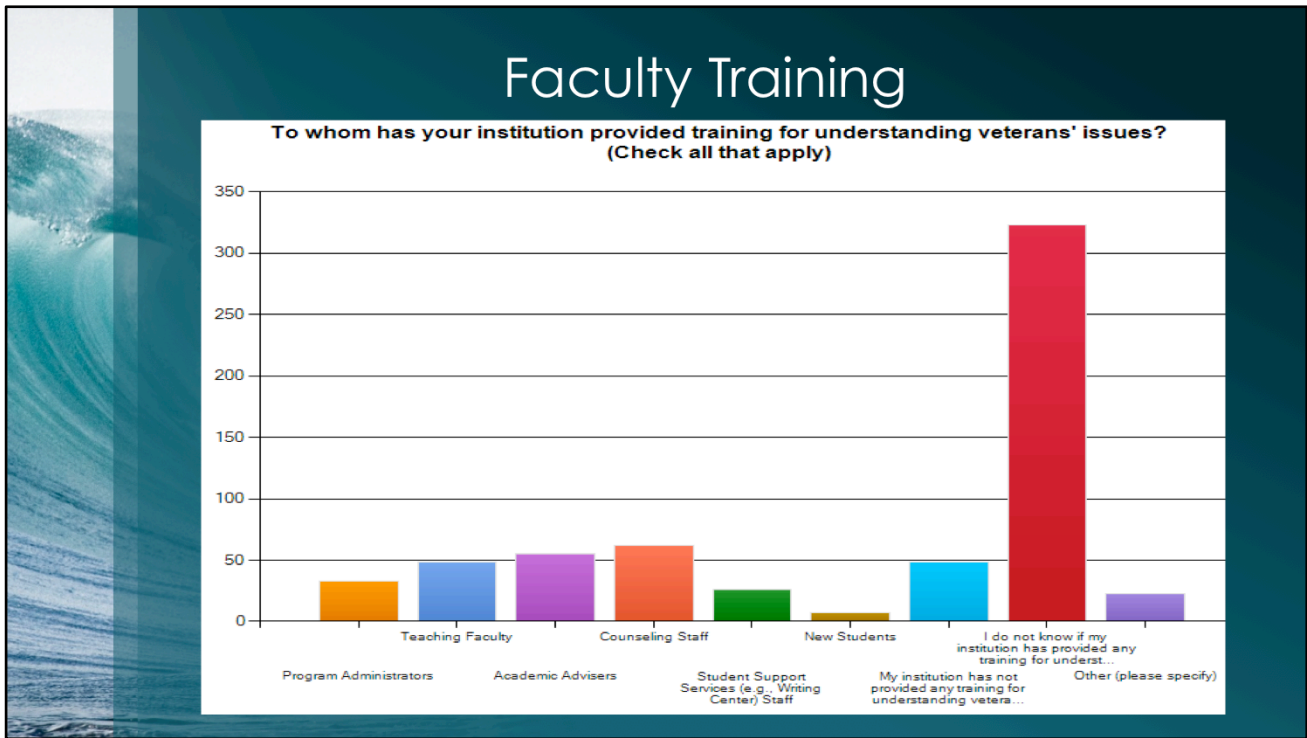I am also skeptical that labeling sensitive material with trigger warnings will prevent distress. The scientific literature about trauma teaches us that it seeps into people's lives by networks of association. Since triggers are a contagious phenomenon, there will never be enough trigger warnings to keep up with them. It should not be the job of college educators to foster this process."—Roff

Syllabus Statement

"I recognize the complexities of being a student veteran. If you are a student veteran, please inform me if you need special accommodations. Drill schedules, calls to active duty, complications with GI Bill disbursement, and other unforeseen military and veteran-related developments can complicate your academic life. If you make me aware of a complication, I will do everything I can to assist you or put you in contact with university staff who are trained to assist you."

— Katt Blackwell-Starnes

Faculty Training

To whom has your institution provided training for understanding veterans' issues? (Check all that apply)

A bar chart with y-axis values from 0 to 350 (in increments of 50). Categories along the x-axis: Program Administrators, Teaching Faculty, Academic Advisers, Counseling Staff, Student Support Services (e.g., Writing Center) Staff, New Students, My institution has not provided any training for understanding vetera…, I do not know if my institution has provided any training for underst…, Other (please specify). The "I do not know if my institution has provided any training" bar is by far the tallest, reaching approximately 320.

Hart and Thompson's 2011 survey of 450 WPAs and writing instructors revealed that **92%** of respondents **had received no training for understanding veterans' issues in the writing classroom**, and 70% of the respondents' departments or programs had not discussed in a formal way the effect of veterans in the writing classroom, despite the fact that 45% of respondents indicated that they had specifically noticed an increase in student veterans in their classes.

A follow-up survey conducted by the CCCC's Task Force on Student Veterans in 2013 showed that **85%** of respondents **still had received no training on veterans' issues.**

Faculty Training

Area of Training Results for 2012-2013 AY					
Mental health issues associated with military service		Physical health issues resulting from military service		Student transition from military life to civilian life	
Offered	Mandatory	Offered	Mandatory	Offered	Mandatory
21%	11%	14%	8%	21%	6%

—U.S. Department of Education, 2014

"Institutions that enrolled military service members, veterans, or dependents reported offering training for faculty or staff in mental health issues associated with military service (21 percent), physical health issues resulting from military service (14 percent), and student transition from military life to civilian life (21 percent)

Questionnaires were mailed to approximately 1,650 public and private Title IV eligible, degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The cover letter indicated that the survey was designed to be completed by the person(s) most knowledgeable about services and support programs for military service members and veterans at the institution. Respondents were offered the option of completing the survey via the Web. The unweighted survey response rate was 93 percent and the weighted response rate using the initial base weights was 90 percent. "
DOE

Veteran-to-Veteran Tutoring

Veterans' Writing Groups

Works Cited

Bauman, Mark "The Mobilization and Return of Undergraduate Students Serving in the National Guard and Reserves." *Creating A Veteran Friendly Campus: Strategies for Transition and Success.* Ed. Robert Ackerman and David DiRamio. San Francisco: Wiley Periodicals, 2009. 15-24. Print.

Byman, Daniel L. "Veterans and Colleges Have a Lot to Offer Each Other." *The Chronicle Review*. 2007. Web.

Caplan, Paula. *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home: How All of Us Can Help Veterans*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011. Print.

Coll, Jose. "Psychological Invisibility: Veterans in Higher Education." *The Evolllution* 29. Sep 2013. Web.

DiRamio, David, Robert Ackerman, and Regina L. Garza Mitchell. "From Combat to Campus: Voices of Student-veterans." *NASPA Journal*, 45.1, 2008: 73-102. Print.

Elliott, M., C. Gonzalez and B. Larsen. "U.S. Military Veterans Transition to College: Combat, PTSD, and Alienation on Campus." *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 48.3, 2011: 279-296. Print.

Gann, Sarah. "There is a Lot of Self-Reliance." *JME* 2.1 (2012): 211-228. Web.

Hart, D. Alexis, and Roger Thompson. "'An Ethical Obligation': Promising Practices for Student Veterans in College Writing Classrooms." National Council of Teachers of English. June 2013. Web.

Hinton, Corinne. "How Student Veterans Complicate the Novice-to-Expert Continuum. *Composition Forum* 28 (Fall 2013). Web.

Klay, Phil. "After War, a Failure of the Imagination." *NYT*. 8 Feb 2014. Web.

Leonhardy, Galen. "Transformations: Working with Veterans in the Composition Classroom." *TETYC* 36.4 (May 2009): 339-52. Print.

Navarre-Cleary, Michelle and Kathleen Wozniak. "Veterans as Adult Learners in Composition Courses." *Composition Forum* 28 (Fall 2013). Web.

Roff, Sarah. "Treatment, Not Trigger Warnings." *CHE*. 23 May 2014. Web.

Sander, Libby. "When Support Services Exist, Veterans Fare Well in Class, Report Says." *CHE*. 21 Nov 2013. Web.

Starr, Paul J. *The Discarded Army*. New York: Charterhouse, 1973. Print.

U.S. Department of Education. "Services and Support Programs for Military Service Members and Veterans at Postsecondary Institutions, 2012–13." February 2014. Web.

Woll, Pamela. "Teaching America's Best Preparing Your Classrooms to Welcome Returning Veterans and Service Members." 2010. Web.

Zinger, Lana and Andrea Cohen. "Veterans Returning From War Into The Classroom: How Can Colleges Be Better Prepared to Meet Their Needs." *Contemporary Issues in Education Research* (Jan 2010): 39-51. Print.