

University Support for Veteran Education

By Corey Bruecker

CSU, Chico has a long and proud history of serving student veterans, dating back as far as World War II, and its efforts continue to thrive today.

Student veterans are their own diverse culture on campus and represent all genders, ages, ethnicities, and marital statuses. Larry Langwell, veteran coordinator of the Office of Veterans' Affairs, attributes the tight-knit culture to their shared identity and value, as well as the experiences they had while in the service.

"They're just like everybody else," he said. "You can't spot them in classroom, which is good because they don't want to be identified or labeled. They just want to fold back into the regular civilian society."

The office serves roughly 600 students every semester, according to Langwell, half of which are dependents of veterans, and the other half are veterans themselves. The Office of Veterans' Affairs, with the help of the University, helps these students transition back into civilian life and successfully earn their college degree.

Veterans' Village

The University's efforts to serve student veterans started after World War II, when men flocked to college campuses to finish their education with the help of their GI bills. Due to this influx of veterans, enrollment at CSU, Chico increased 38 percent from 1945 to 1946.

Many of these men were married with small children, and struggled to find affordable housing near campus. Those who did find housing often had to share with multiple families, sacrificing their privacy and room for their families to grow.

To do its part for these students, the University began construction of Veterans' Village, military-surplus housing available for student veterans and their families. These units were built on Legion Avenue where Whitney, Tehama, and Plumas halls now stand.

US Navy veteran Gil Houston and his wife, Donna, along with their two daughters, were some of the last residents to live in Veterans' Village before it was torn down to make room for Plumas Hall.

Houston and his family lived in a small apartment in Veterans' Village from 1966 to 1969, and although space was limited, they were grateful for the affordable rent and outside area for the kids to play.

"It was very inexpensive to live there," Houston said. "I think we paid a third of what a normal apartment would cost us, and all the utilities were paid for. It was nice to not have to worry about making rent."



[Row of housing in Vets' Village, circa 1946. John Nopel Photograph Location, SC 50712, Special Collections, Meriam Library, California State University Chico.](#)

University Efforts Today

By 1970, nothing of Veterans' Village remained, but the University continued to take strides to better serve student veterans, and its efforts haven't gone unnoticed.

CSU, Chico was recognized by four separate publications over the past five years for being one of the nation's top military-friendly campuses.

Langwell credits this success to a great campus support system and the University's continuing efforts toward serving veterans. The Student Veteran Organization, established in 1967, is one of the oldest in the nation, and the Veteran Educational Support Team, commonly referred to as VEST, is a unique program that ensures there is someone in every office on campus that keeps student veterans in mind when tailoring programs and services.

Through these programs, student veterans are granted priority registration, academic credit for military service, access to counseling and wellness centers, the opportunity to meet with other student veterans who may be facing similar issues, and, above all, a welcoming place to go if they need support.

Christopher Maul, president of the Student Veteran Organization, works with the VEST and the Office of Veterans' Affairs to bring the same supportive environment to campus that students had while in the military.



[Student veterans' work on homework in the Office of Veterans' Affairs](#)

His current mission is to obtain a larger and more inclusive space for the Student Veteran Center, an exclusive space for student veterans to study, relax, or just swap stories. The center provides the environment Maul has in mind, but is not currently inclusive to students with major disabilities.

“A lot of the veterans are overloaded, trying to keep up with school while also facing obstacles that they are trying to overcome,” Maul said. “We try to really think about the different disabilities that veterans may have during transition, and how we can make it easier because it’s hard enough as it is.”

Maul, a veteran of the US Army, does his best to be an advocate for veterans all over the campus. His goal is to make CSU, Chico the leader in providing services for veterans and to be able to provide students with the proper tools and services to reach graduation.

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