



Department of Veteran Resources
Oregon State University, B102C Kerr Administration Bldg, Corvallis, OR 97331
T 541-737-7662 | F 541-737-8123 | <http://oregonstate.edu/veterans>

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To: Oregon House of Representatives,
Veterans Affairs Committee

From: Gus L. Bedwell,
Veteran Resources Coordinator

Chair Matthews, Vice Chairs Parrish and Fagan and respected members, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address HB 4023 and my role as the Veteran Resources Coordinator at Oregon State University.

Based upon my experiences as a Campus Veteran Service Officer (VSO) with the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) and now as a Veteran Resources Coordinator with Oregon State University, I believe I can offer a unique perspective on the importance of Veterans Advocates on campus.

In September 2009, I became one of five Campus VSOs with the ODVA. As a Campus VSO, I was afforded many opportunities to support student veterans by helping them access and receive a wide range of VA benefits on top of their education benefits. All of the Campus VSOs worked hard to connect with university and community college administrators, faculty, staff, and students. We marketed ourselves as enhancers to the services already offered by the hard working and outstanding Veteran Certifying Officials. Even though some areas of the state were more successful than others, the bottom line was the Campus VSO Program as a whole changed the lives of student veterans and the way community colleges and universities viewed them. As we all know, the program came to an end in June of 2011 due to a lack of funding.

Schools like Portland State University, Portland Community College, and Oregon State University found funds to fill that void by creating Veteran Resources Coordinator positions. Fortunately, for me I was able to take my experience as a Veteran's Advocate and become OSU's first Veteran Resource Coordinator. As the Veteran Resource Coordinator, I offer a lot of the same services I did as the Campus VSO, with three clear differences.

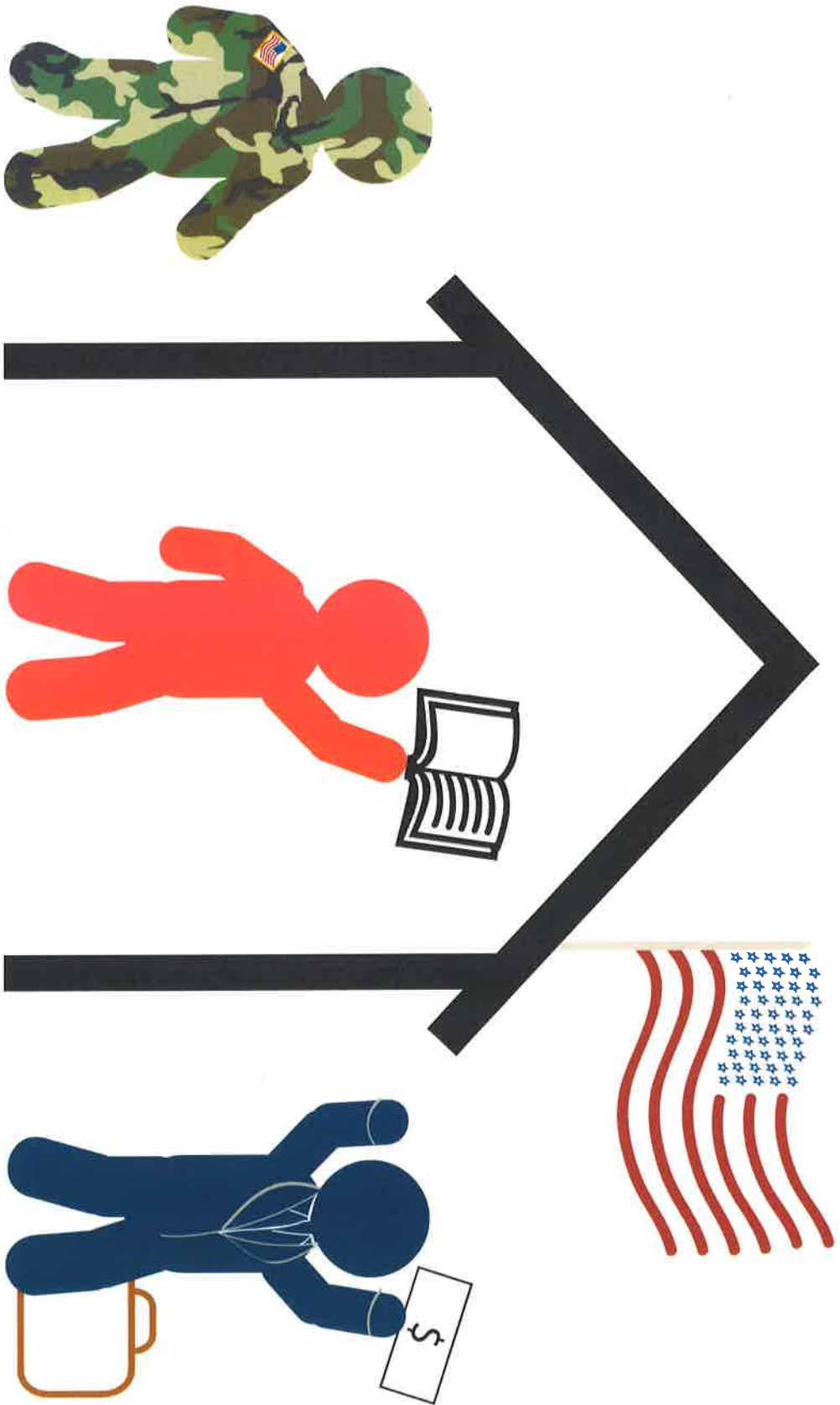
1. As a VSO with ODVA, I was an accredited Veterans Representative, meaning I could take Power of Attorney and file VA benefits claims on behalf of the Veterans and their family members. I am no longer an accredited VSO. However, because there is a County or State VSO in every county in Oregon, I can tap into them to assist my student veterans with those services.

Our Mission: To help student veterans successfully navigate the Oregon State University structure while accomplishing their education goals and maximizing their VA benefits.

2. As a VSO, I worked for ODVA. As the Veteran Resources Coordinator, I work for OSU. As an OSU employee, there are tools I have available to me now that could not be offered to me as an ODVA employee. Tools such as being a Faculty Senator with direct contact with the Faculty Senate Leadership on pertinent federal and state legislative changes. I am able to work directly with academic advising committees and workgroups, and participate on search committees for future OSU employees. I also have access to student account information and other privileges guided by state and federal laws that are unavailable to non-OSU employees.
3. As a VSO, I was responsible for multiple schools up and down the west coast and I-5 corridor. This continual moving from one place to another created some unique challenges when trying to continuously and effectively engage and stay connected with the university and community college communities. As the Veteran Resources Coordinator for OSU, I can now focus my attention on one school's student veteran population. This concentrated focus along with a dedicated team of professional faculty and students from across the university has afforded me the opportunity to see several successes for our students, such as stronger relationships with both the Portland and Roseburg VAMCs, creation of a Student Health Services Workgroup, handing out of the Military and Veteran Recognition Cords two commencements in a row, and signing of the DOD-MOU, which allowed at the time 115 TA recipient students to maintain their benefits.

Since I have had an opportunity to be on both sides of the table helping Student Veterans, I can whole heartedly tell you that being a university employee has its advantages in my ability to support Student Veterans. My success, however, is reliant on the significant support and energy provided by students and staff involved in school-based workgroups and advisory committees. These individuals amaze me on a daily basis on the work and initiatives they are willing to take on to support our Student Veterans.

In conclusion, thank you for allowing me to offer my experiences today. I hope it helps in your decision making process as you move forward your work supporting one of Oregon's greatest treasures; Veterans.



VETERAN RESOURCES