

# ASU preps America's veterans for what's next

## Pat Tillman Veterans Center serves as entry point, guiding force for ASU's military students

By Jerry Gonzalez, ASU News

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Every year, over 200,000 active-duty military members trade their uniforms for civilian attire as they embark on the next chapter of their lives filled with both promise and uncertainty.

The shift from military to civilian life can be daunting as veterans face the challenge of redefining their purpose while navigating an unfamiliar landscape.

That's where Arizona State University's [Pat Tillman Veterans Center](#) steps in — serving as a beacon of support and guidance for military members throughout the U.S. who dedicated their lives to serving their country and now seek higher education.

“The Pat Tillman Veterans Center continues to see a yearly increase in the number of military-connected students choosing ASU,” said [Shawn Banzhaf](#), the center's executive director. “At the core of ASU's principles and charter is the belief in the American dream, and at the center we strive to help each veteran achieve it by finding their career post military to provide for themselves and their families.

“And, they know they will be well equipped to give back to their communities as well.”

In 2024, the Tillman Center supported a record 22,342 military-affiliated students, including active-duty service members, veterans, Guard, Reserves and military dependents using G.I. Bill benefits.

Over the past decade, ASU has built one of the nation's largest military student populations, now making up 12% of the university's total enrollment. Through [ASU Online](#), the university extends its impact nationwide and across the globe, reaching students stationed in Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

The top degree programs by enrollment are electrical engineering, information technology, organizational management, mechanical engineering and computer science, Banzhaf said.

The Tillman Center is holistic in approaching veteran support, and that sets it apart from others, said [Michelle Loposky](#), center director of development and strategic partnerships.

“It’s not only about processing Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense paperwork,” Loposky said. “That’s an important core function, of course, but we also provide a suite of programs to take care of veterans throughout their time at ASU, with the goal of ensuring they achieve their educational goals and start their careers.”

The center offers a range of programs to support student veterans, including [Treks for Vets](#), a collaboration with the [Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement](#), which takes veterans on a multiday outdoor excursion to promote mental wellness; the [Veterans Scholar Program](#), a leadership and professional development initiative; Pat Tillman Veterans Center [Futures Night](#), an event educating military-connected learners on the job market and linking them with employers; and Tillman TIME, which connects students to major companies throughout the year.

Attuned to the needs of women veterans, the Tillman Center sponsors the yearly [Women Veterans and Military-Connected Students RISE Conference](#). The event stands as a symbol of support and unity for women in the military service, or who have ties, and serves as a unique networking opportunity.

Tillman Center staff are dedicated to helping military-affiliated students succeed in academics and beyond. Many are veterans themselves.

“Serving 21 years in this great nation’s military, it instilled in me a need to always give back,” said Banzhaf, who retired from the Army National Guard in Nebraska. “To look at our country and find ways to make a difference for my neighbors. It’s why I came to ASU. I saw it as an institution that really cares about Arizona and its residents, and it sees the bigger picture about using the university’s resources to bring about great things for state and country.”

More than 3,500 military-affiliated students nationwide graduated in the 2023–24 academic year, including Marine veteran Daniel Melendez. A Warrenton, Virginia, native, Melendez graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in history with a secondary education concentration. He now teaches middle schoolers in the Phoenix metro.

“ASU is a great educational institution that helped me with my transition from the military back to civilian life,” Melendez said. “The academics also helped prepare me for my career as an educator, while the Pat Tillman Veterans Center was key in getting my G.I. Bill benefits to work for me.”

Melendez and eight fellow Marines who all served in the same unit while on active duty at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, California, [chose ASU after serving](#). All have since graduated and launched their careers in Arizona.

As a veteran, Melendez realizes the importance not only of service but the role of education in society.

“Educated and informed civilians are vital to a democracy, and ASU helps produce such citizens for the United States,” he said.

Named after ASU Sun Devil football legend Pat Tillman, the veterans center embodies his commitment to excellence, leadership and service. Tillman left a promising NFL career with the Arizona Cardinals to enlist in the Army after 9/11, becoming an Army ranger. Though he tragically lost his life in Afghanistan in 2004, his legacy of dedication, courage and selfless service continues to inspire generations of service members and students.

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## Main image



## Text image(s)







Daniel Melendez, seated in the front row left corner, and eight fellow Marines who all served in the same unit at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, California, chose ASU after serving. All have since graduated and launched their careers in Arizona.



David Lucier, past president of ASU Veterans Alumni Chapter, presents U.S. Army Corporal Haley Espinoza with her honor stole at the Veterans Honor Stole Ceremony on Dec. 10, 2022, at Desert Financial Arena at the Tempe campus.



Veterans walk in the processional during undergraduate commencement at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe on Dec. 16, 2024.