

ASU launches new training to strengthen support for military-connected students

Faculty and staff can take advocacy training online

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
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Arizona State University has long been recognized as a national leader in supporting military-connected learners, and this year the university is taking another major step forward.

With new statewide legislation encouraging higher education institutions to deepen their commitment to veterans, ASU is expanding the training opportunities available to faculty and staff who work with this growing student population. At the center of that effort is a new online course designed by the [Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement](#) (OVMAE), offering faculty and staff a flexible way to better understand the lived experiences of military-connected students.

The course, titled “ASU Veteran and Military Advocacy Training,” arrives at a pivotal moment. As ASU continues to grow its online and hybrid programs, the university is seeing an increasing number of student veterans and active-duty learners whose academic journeys look very different from the traditional undergraduate path. Many of these students are older, working full-time, supporting families or transitioning directly from military service, bringing with them a unique set of strengths, challenges and expectations. Ensuring that faculty and staff are equipped to engage and support them is critical to their success.

For [Wanda Wright](#), director of OVMAE and a teaching professor in the [College of Integrative Sciences and Arts](#), that responsibility feels both professional and personal. A retired Air Force colonel and former director of the Arizona Department of Veterans’ Services, Wright has spent her career advocating for service members and veterans. She

Take the training

Faculty and staff interested in completing the ASU Veteran and Military Advocacy Training can [enroll through Canvas](#).

The online course is flexible, self-paced and designed to be completed in 60-90 minutes. Participants will gain practical strategies to support military-connected students, earn a certificate of completion and help ASU continue as a leading military-supportive campus.

understands the gap that can exist between military and civilian cultures, particularly inside a university setting, and she sees education as a bridge.

Wright's new training course aims to do more than meet a legislative requirement. She says it seeks to build a genuine understanding of who ASU's military-connected students are, what motivates them and why their experiences can enrich a classroom. Her team's curriculum also dispels common misconceptions about veterans, replacing stereotypes with a more nuanced picture of students who are disciplined, collaborative, mission-driven and deeply committed to finishing their degrees.

The course is now available and open for all faculty and staff to enroll immediately.

Wright spoke with ASU News about the inspiration behind the new course, the misconceptions she hopes to correct and her vision for how ASU can set a national standard for military-supportive higher education.

Note: Answers have been edited for length and/or clarity.

Question: What inspired you and your team to develop this new course for ASU faculty and staff, and how did you identify the need for it?

Answer: Arizona has enacted legislation allowing participating universities and higher education institutions to earn the designation of "[Veteran Supportive Campus](#)." To qualify for this designation, a specified percentage of faculty and staff must complete training related to military-connected students. To meet this requirement, the [Pat Tillman Veterans Center](#) offers "Proving Grounds," an in-person training program. Because ASU has a significant number of remote faculty members, I thought we should provide a comparable training option for those who are not able to attend in person.

My research on engaging online students indicates that the faculty-student relationship is one of the primary barriers to connection as perceived by students. We aim to provide faculty and staff with a deeper understanding of military-connected students so they can cultivate an environment that is respectful of, and responsive to, the students' lived experiences.

Completing the course will help faculty and staff build stronger connections with military-connected students, improve classroom engagement and better support student retention and success. The course is self-paced and can be completed in approximately 60–90 minutes. Faculty and staff who complete the training will receive a certificate of completion and a badge, which can be included in professional portfolios and course syllabi.

Q: What are some of the biggest misconceptions about student veterans that you hope this course will address?

A: In my experience, society and especially the media often portray veterans as either heroes or individuals who are struggling. In reality, most of us fall somewhere in between.

As students, many veterans are older, balancing family responsibilities, employment and academic commitments simultaneously. Their primary goal is to complete their degrees and transition successfully into the workforce. I think military-connected students want to be treated with respect that reflects their commitments, their service and the depth of their life experience. They have one

mission, and that is to graduate!

Q: The course highlights the leadership and teamwork skills veterans bring to campus — how do you see those qualities enriching the ASU community?

A: Veteran students' leadership and teamwork skills enrich the ASU community by elevating the level of collaboration, accountability and purpose in classroom settings and on campus. They often model effective communication and problem-solving, which strengthens classroom dynamics and encourages their peers to rise to the same standard. In many ways, they help anchor the community with a sense of service, responsibility and mutual support. You will often find military-connected students leading group work or speaking to their experience while in classroom discussions, elevating the conversation.

The course also includes modules that discuss military experience, military-affiliated students, creating a supportive academic environment, and critical and general resources. This course also includes a scenario-based exercise through our Sentinel Bot where participants practice responding to common challenges military-connected students face in the classroom. The content of this course is practical, accessible and truly enjoyable to take. Early participants consistently share how much they learned and how valuable the training is for their work.

Q: As both a retired Air Force colonel and former director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, how does your background influence the way you approach supporting military-connected students?

A: My background shapes everything about how I support military-connected students. I understand firsthand the responsibility, sacrifice and resilience that come with military service, and I've also seen at a statewide level the diverse needs and strengths veterans bring with them when they transition into higher education.

That combination helps me approach students with both respect and precision by respecting the depth of their experience while ensuring they receive the right resources, advocacy and opportunities to succeed. I'm always focused on meeting them where they are, recognizing their leadership potential and creating systems that honor their service while supporting their academic and personal goals. I feel honored to assist our students in whatever they might need.

Q: Looking ahead, how do you envision this program evolving?

A: I'd love to see this program evolve into a national model. My hope is that we can share this training with other universities, knowing they may need to adapt the branding, but the core content is strong and would benefit any higher education institution.

Before we expand outward, though, my first priority is right here at ASU. I would love to see at least 90% of our faculty and staff complete the VMAT training. That level of participation would ensure that military-connected students are understood, supported and valued across every corner of the university, and it would demonstrate ASU's commitment to truly being the most military-supportive campus in the country.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Pat Tillman Veterans Center. Photo by Tom Story/ASU

Text image(s)



Wanda Wright is the director of Office for Veteran and Military Academic Engagement at ASU.
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