Military Social Work

School of Social Work’s Military-related Initiatives

THERE ARE ABOUT 600,000 MILITARY VETERANS IN COMMUNITIES across Missouri accounting for approximately 14% of the state’s 18 and older population. The majority of these men and women are between 18 and 64 years old; however, 37% are over the age of 65. Research suggests that many of these veterans experience more behavioral risks, psychosocial health problems and risk of chronic disease than their civilian counterparts.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan represent America’s longest continuous combat engagement. “We’re only beginning to understand economic, health, mental health and societal effects these wars have on returning veterans, their families and their communities,” said David L. Albright, a U.S. Army veteran and assistant professor in the School of Social Work who leads its military-related initiatives. “There’s an urgent need to understand and engage with military personnel, veterans, their families and communities, and the organizations that serve them,” Albright said.

The School of Social Work began offering a graduate certificate in Military Social Work during 2011-12. Albright described the certificate program as designed to expand the pool of professionals who are qualified to work in settings with military personnel, veterans and their families. He says that 11 students have graduated with a certificate in Military Social Work with 19 more currently pursuing the certificate.

According to Albright, the School intends to build upon the success of the certificate and expand it to a certificate in Veterans Studies that will be multi-disciplinary in nature and open to all University of Missouri students. This expanded certificate will allow students to learn about military structure and culture, the psychological and physiological changes that stem from military exposure and the reintegation challenges veterans face from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Albright hopes the certificate will encourage students to engage with issues important to military personnel, veterans and their families at the same time serving as a point of pride for the University of Missouri, which is already highly regarded as a veteran-friendly university.

In addition to educating inside the School of Social Work, Albright has helped to develop the Center for Education and Research for Veterans and Military Families (CERV). Albright says that CERV’s focus is on Missouri communities and its mission is dedicated to improving policy and decision making through education and collaborative research and analysis. Last year, CERV co-hosted a program with the Military Child Education Coalition to develop state-specific action plans to support children of military families. CERV has also facilitated multiple presentations or workshops around the state on a variety of topics ranging from military sexual assault to needs of military families to veteran treatment courts.

CERV also plans to work with other university entities to help connect veterans to small businesses looking for skilled, reliable employees. “Getting these veterans back in the workforce is smart business and good for the bottom line of many companies. It’s also the right thing to do for these men and women who sacrifice so much for what many of us take for granted,” Albright said. “Potential employers need to understand and acknowledge the mental health stigma surrounding these veterans and then work to change these beliefs, which is where CERV can help.”

If you’re interested in learning more about the School of Social Work’s military-related initiatives, bringing speakers to your organization or how you might contribute, contact David L. Albright at albrightd@missouri.edu.