



Jefferies



Ogorek

From Soldier to Student

Student veterans supported when making transition from military to college life

Three years ago, Thomas Sprague was a combat engineer in the U.S. Army National Guard taking cover from mortar attacks in Afghanistan. Today, he is a student at Daemen College, taking classes toward a degree in business marketing, while he continues to serve as a sergeant in the New York National Guard, based at the Connecticut Street Armory in Buffalo.

Sprague (below) is one of approximately 80 student veterans enrolled at Daemen who have returned to college following military careers. Like most of these former service members, Sprague agrees that there can be challenges in the transition from soldier to student. These include everything from adjusting to the campus culture compared to life on a military base, to connecting with younger students who may not be able to relate to a veteran's military experience.



For student veterans, there is a significant transition from a military environment with a long-standing, built-in structure to a more self-directed, flexible campus environment. "Entering the college atmosphere from the Army is like jumping from a fish tank into a pond," says Sprague, a native of Georgia. "In the military, my supervisor told me what to do

and when to do it, but in college my education is my responsibility. I've adjusted well to the change but every veteran transitions differently to college life. It's good to know there is a strong support structure in place at Daemen to help veterans adjust successfully to being a college student after serving in the military."

Typically, student veterans are older than their freshmen peers enrolling in college for the first time. Most joined the military before their 21st birthday and their years of service constitute a career in itself. Some student veterans have families and children. Others hold down jobs while attending classes.

Knowing this, helping student veterans enroll in college and complete their degree to pursue their career choice is an ongoing focus at Daemen. What follows is a glimpse into the lives of today's student veterans and what Daemen is doing to help put them at ease and be successful in college.

A Proud Tradition

Tens of thousands of veterans are expected to return to the workforce and college in the United States over the next few years as the U.S. military downsizes after wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and defense budgets are reduced. Therefore, colleges and universities

can expect their student veteran population to keep growing. Daemen is well prepared.

Daemen has had a longstanding commitment to provide resources and support to help its student veterans achieve their goal of earning a college degree. At the college's Center for Veterans and Veteran Family Services, staff members can assist with federal and state veteran services agencies, county veterans groups, VA hospitals, and community groups. Staff can also point student veterans toward assistance with academic issues if necessary.

Complementing these services are the addition of a veterans admissions counselor position and the opening of the newly refurbished Nancy Haberman Gacioch Center for Veterans, which replaces space originally housed in the Business Building.

A couple of recent recognitions provide further evidence that Daemen means business in supporting its veterans. First, Daemen was selected by Victory Media for the Military Friendly Schools list, a designation awarded to only the top 15 percent of colleges in the country. These are schools that have demonstrated a commitment to supporting student veterans on campus and in their careers. Daemen made the list for the sixth consecutive year.

In addition, Daemen has been selected as a Top School in the 2015 Military Advanced Education's Guide to Colleges and Universities, the fourth time the college has received this national designation. The guide offers student veterans information about colleges and universities that go out of their way to give back to men and women in uniform. Selection for the guide is based on military culture, financial aid, flexibility, on-campus support, and online support services.

For Tolbert Jefferies, the military-friendly designations received by Daemen were important when researching colleges for his post-military life. He served as a sergeant in the U.S. Air Force as part of a Military Working Dog (MWD) team and was deployed to Iraq where he worked with the U.S. Army in searching for explosives, weapons caches and other targets. While still on assignment in England, the native of Tennessee began researching colleges in anticipation of becoming a physical therapist.

"I knew I wanted to do something through which I could contribute to helping veterans and I looked at a couple of universities in England," he recalls. "In my research on colleges, I came across Daemen and found it had a lot to offer — a strong reputation for physical therapy and a designation as Military Friendly. Now that I am here, I see how Daemen really does support student veterans."

Strategic Thinking

To best address the needs of student veterans in integrating into college life, Dr. Patricia Brown, vice president for enrollment management, explains, "We looked to the American Council on Education's recommendations for student veterans in a non-traditional education format, which considers student veterans to be transfer

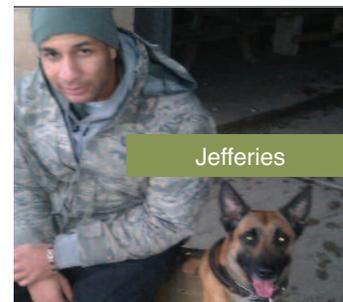


students. We then developed a strategy for how we can better serve student veterans, helping them establish academic credentials based on skills learned in the military and guiding them through what is essentially a transfer process."

Part of that strategy was hiring Kevin Fricano as the office's transfer and veteran admissions counselor. He has a strong background in higher education, having earned a master's degree in library science from the University at Buffalo, served as a professor at a public university in Chile, and later returned to Buffalo to serve as an instructor and academic advisor at Bryant & Stratton College. Equally important, he is a U.S. Army veteran.

Fricano served as a network switching operator in the Army for nearly five years, including a one-year tour of duty in Iraq in 2004. A native of Farnham, N.Y., he joined the Army right out of high school and then learned what it was like to return to college after his service. He says his own experience is a great advantage in assisting student veterans at Daemen.

"I don't necessarily bring up my service when talking to student veterans, but I may touch on the subject to let them know I have more of a natural understanding of where they are coming from," Fricano explains. "Most of them want to be recognized for their military service but they don't want to be treated differently."

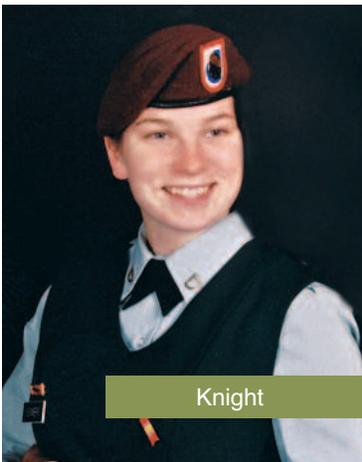




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Fricano’s duties include helping guide student veterans through the admissions process, assisting with financial aid through the government G.I. Bill, and setting up class schedules, among other responsibilities.

“From day one, the Daemen admissions office and its staff were there for me with a guided process to help me meet my goals as a student at Daemen,” says Jessica Knight, a U.S. Army veteran and former logistics specialist from Manchester, N.H., who is studying history and political science. “Those at Daemen who assist veterans are a big part of the reason I chose the college.”



Knight

Knight, who served at a number of Army bases across the United States, added that as a single mother with three children, the support she finds as a student veteran at Daemen is even more important. “I have great time management skills that I learned in the military, which has made the transition back to school easier,” she explains. “However, with three kids, my time is often stretched – that’s where services for student veterans are very helpful, particularly when faculty and staff are flexible in accommodating our schedules.”

A New Base of Operations

Audrey Ogorek served as a corporal in the U.S. Marines, with tours in Okinawa, Japan and a number of areas in Afghanistan. A native of Buffalo, she returned to school to study physical therapy at Daemen, following in the footsteps of her mother who is a physical therapist and also graduated from the college. With some college days lasting as long as 12 hours, the former Marine often finds respite in the Nancy Haberman Gacioch Center for Veterans on the Daemen campus.

“The center is like an oasis for student veterans,” she says. “We can come in here to study, use the computers, relax and talk with others who have had similar experiences in the military. I am in here nearly every day I have classes.”

The newly renovated center, which is named in honor of an alumna, long-time supporter and friend of the college, Nancy Haberman Gacioch, opened in fall 2014. Created on the second floor of the Duns Scotus building, the center provides a welcoming space exclusively for student veterans where they can go to study, use the computers, connect with other veterans, or simply take a break from the busy campus. There are a number of desks with computer workstations, as well as a comfortable seating area, a refrigerator, and other resources in the center.

Strengthening an Alliance

The Daemen Student Veterans Alliance (SVA), a chapter of Student Veterans of America, has been in existence for years, but recently underwent a sort of resurgence with the addition of new members and the opening of the new center, where meetings are held. Fricano serves as SVA’s moderator and the go-between for the college and the chapter.



Knight

Currently led by Army Sergeant Thomas Sprague as its president, the SVA brings together student veterans from various branches of the military to not only support one another but also to share ideas and initiatives with the college and other students on supporting all veterans. Air Force veteran Tolbert Jefferies serves as vice president, and former Army specialist Jessica Knight is the veteran liaison for the group. The SVA president notes that while the group is there to help veterans it also is an integral part of the overall student population.

“The amount of effort SVA members put into making the group bigger and even better in support of veterans is amazing,” reports Sprague. “We work as a team in leading the SVA, serving our fellow student veterans and sharing our experience with others at Daemen so they better understand what we do and how we can work together.”

Sprague mentions a recent listening circle as an example. Daemen administrators, faculty, staff and students were invited to sit in on a listening circle at the center to better understand how the SVA can work with other groups on campus on charity events, programs and other functions.

The SVA members also keep up with current issues related to U.S. veterans and seek to get their chapter involved in programs nationally and locally such as Western New York Heroes, an online resource for area veterans, Wounded Warriors and other programs.

Enriching the Campus

Daemen student veterans are a true asset to the college and serve as positive role models. Characteristically, by way of their military experience, they are goal-oriented and experienced leaders who bring a unique perspective to the classroom and academic life. Their world travels and experiences with other countries and cultures add to the global education model at Daemen.

While members of the Daemen community oftentimes express their appreciation to student veterans for their military service, there is equal appreciation they have chosen to attend the college.

“As a veteran, I understand how important it is to our student veterans to further their education, and I see how serious they are about their decision,” concludes Fricano. “It is very fulfilling professionally and personally to help veterans make the transition to college and to play a role in them becoming an important part of the Daemen community.”

By Martin Haumesser

Martin Haumesser is a freelance writer who resides in Amherst, N.Y.

Daemen, formerly Rosary Hill College, first initiated admissions policies for veterans as early as 1971.

Daemen Student Veteran Profiles

• Tolbert Jefferies

Hometown: Memphis, Tenn.

Military Branch: United States Air Force

Rank: Staff Sergeant, Security Operations, Military Working Dogs

Overseas Assignment: Iraq

Academic Major: Physical Therapy

Daemen Student Veteran Alliance: Vice President

Career Goal: Physical Therapist

• Jessica Knight

Hometown: Manchester, N.H.

Military Branch: United States Army

Rank: E-4 Logistics Specialist, Aerial Drop Supply Unit

Assignments: Fort Jackson, Fort Lee, Fort Benning and Fort Bragg

Academic Major: History and Political Science,
Minor in Adolescent Education

Daemen Student Veteran Alliance: Veteran Liaison

Career Goal: High school teacher

• Audrey Ogorek

Hometown: Buffalo, N.Y.

Military Branch: United States Marines

Rank: E-4 Corporal

Overseas Assignment: Okinawa, Japan; Afghanistan

Academic Major: Physical Therapy

Daemen Student Veteran Alliance: Member

Career Goal: Physical Therapist

• Thomas Sprague

Hometown: Augusta, Ga.

Military Branch: United States Army

Rank: Sergeant, Electronic Warfare Specialist

Overseas Assignment: Afghanistan

Currently: Sergeant, New York National Guard

Academic Major: Business Marketing

Daemen Student Veteran Alliance: President

Career Goal: Business within medical field to assist veterans

