

Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission
University of Arizona Student Union Memorial Center, Room 404-O
1303 University Blvd, Tucson, AZ 85721
April 11, 2012

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners

Terrie Gent, Chair
George Cushing, Vice Chair
Gary Fredricks
Wayne Krula
Jeffrey Olson
Ronald Perkins
Lionel Sanchez
David Toliver, Sr.

Absent

Philip Hanson

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Joey Strickland, Director
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner/Women Vets
Mike Klier, Assistant Deputy Director –
Veterans Services

Guests

Professor Paul Bennett, U of A College of Law
Asst Prof Kris Carlson, U of A College of Law
Michelle Behan, Law Student
Cody Nichols, U of A VET Program
Dan Standage, graduate student,
first VETS program graduate
Maralynn Bernstein, U of A Vet Svc Coord.
Office of the Registrar
Ray Francesco, U of A student
Isaiah Martinez, U of A student
Glen Lacrois, U of A student, Past Pres of
Student Veterans Assn (SVA)
William Chan, U of A student-Pres SVA
Ricardo Pereyda, U of A student
John-Paul Masson, U of A student

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 9:31 a.m. by Chairperson Terrie Gent. The meeting was held in an area adjacent to the VETS Center at the University of Arizona Student Union. The VETS Center is explained below.

Communications - The commission received an invitation to participate in the Armed Forces Day Parade Saturday, on May 19th, 2012 in Flagstaff. Commissioner Lionel Sanchez moved to participate and the motion was (delete was) unanimously carried. Although some commissioners will not be able to participate, several indicated that they would. Commissioners Sanchez and Cushing will provide further details about the parade at the next meeting.

Commissioner Sanchez mentioned that he and Commissioners Cushing and Olson met with students at Northern Arizona University at an event there. He said the university has an excellent program to support veterans.

Rogers School of Law Support of Veteran Treatment Court and Legal Clinic – Assistant Professor Kris Carlson led the briefing and was joined by Clinical and Supervising Professor Paul Bennett and Law School Student Michelle Behan. The Veterans Treatment Court has served approximately 300 veterans over the past two years. Referrals for veterans come primarily from the US Dept of Veterans Affairs at the

Tucson Hospital and local VA clinics. But a mental health organization also screens veterans at the city jail. The recidivism rate is very low, which indicates that the program is successful in changing the overall behavior and mental health of the veterans in the program. Ms. Behan explained the role of law students in representing veterans before the Veteran Treatment Courts in Tucson. She said that not only does the program help veterans, but it helps veteran students gain valuable legal skills.

Professor Bennett explained by the Veteran Treatment Court is important to changing the lives of students and clients as well as his role in the program. He supervises all the law students who appear before the court and assists in the defense of veterans as well.

Professor Carlson said that law professors assist the students in preparing cases and that attorneys in private practice also help the students represent veterans. He also suggested that the VA needs a legal assistance program to help certain enrolled veterans address legal aspects of behavioral and mental health issues as well as the legal barriers to adjustment to civilian life. Commissioner Jeff Olson moved to have the commission recommend that Governor Brewer take a proposal to the national conference of governors to suggest that the US Dept of VA institute a program to provide legal services to veterans. He also recommended that the letter include information about the good work being done in Veteran Treatment Courts. The motion carried unanimously. Chairperson Gent volunteered to help Commissioner Olson prepare the letter.

During discussion of how to identify veterans in the criminal justice system, Colonel Strickland mentioned that there is newly approved state legislation that will ask the veteran status of all holders of Arizona driver licenses. He will brief the commission on collaboration between AZDVS and other state agencies to create a database of veterans who have self-identified on their licenses. The commission will continue to discuss how this information may be used by law enforcement agencies when they come into contact with a veteran who may need services.

Veterans Education Transition Support (VETS) at the University of Arizona– U of A
Graduate Student Dan Standage provided a briefing on how the University of Arizona VETS program increases the opportunity for veteran students to be more successful in adapting to university life and the rigors of academic work. The commission toured the VETS facility and met many students following the conclusion of the meeting. There are 850 student veterans in the VETS program. While they lose students through graduation and some attrition, they add approximately 50 veteran students per semester. The VA Coordinator for OEF/OIF/OND¹, William Patterson, visits the VETS facility twice a month but has not been successful in providing enrollment for students at that location. Chairperson Gent will speak with the VA CBOC Line Leader, Colonel Sally Petty, to request that Mr. Patterson enroll veterans at the University by using a laptop with “remote” capability.

A Veterans Benefits Counselor (VBC) visits the VETS facility periodically as well. Director Strickland asked which days of the week had the highest number of veteran visits. Based on that feedback, he directed Mike Klier to schedule VBC visit on Mondays or Wednesdays to ensure the most veterans could speak with a VBC.

¹ Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn

Another issue raised by Mr. Standage was the absence of a veteran on the Arizona Board of Regents. Chairperson Gent will include that as a discussion item on the next agenda.

The commission hosted an informal luncheon with student veterans from the University of Arizona and Pima Community College immediately after the commission meeting. Approximately 40 students attended. The commissioners used this informal means of learning more about the needs of student veterans at both campuses. Pima Community College veteran students indicated that while the college is making good progress in creating a VETS- like program, it is not nearly as mature as the U of A program. The students asked that the commission hold a similar outreach meeting at the PCC campus. Chairperson Gent agreed to look into the possibility of holding an outreach meeting at a PCC campus, possibly in the fall.

Chairperson Gent adjourned the meeting at 10:57 a.m. The next meeting will be held May 10, 2012 at the Phoenix State Veteran Home.

After the luncheon, the commissioners along with Col. Strickland, Ms. Forsberg, Mr. Klier, and Mr. Standage, attended an informal discussion at the Rogers College of Law. The briefing was provided by Professor Bennett and several student veterans who act as defense counsel or are preparing to act as defense counsel by observing the Veteran Treatment Court and assisting with cases. After that briefing, the commissioners traveled to the new Tucson State Veteran Home where administrator Jim Ross gave a tour.