

**TESTIMONY OF
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CHAIRMAN & CO-FOUNDER
WARRIOR-SCHOLAR PROJECT**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

It is an honor to be here today to express my support for the appropriations request of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for fiscal year 2015. I am the chairman and co-founder of the Warrior-Scholar Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring educational opportunity for American heroes. With a combination of support from the NEH and private sources, we host two-week-long humanities-based “academic boot camps” at America’s top universities to facilitate veterans’ transition from the military to college. Through the Warrior-Scholar Project, not only do we teach veterans the skills they will need to succeed in college, we aim to completely transform the way they view themselves as students.

The G.I. Bill and other forms of tuition assistance provide veterans with the resources to attend college, but many transitioning veterans have not used academic skills since high school and must adjust to a fundamentally different social and cultural environment. Providing tuition assistance, without more, is like giving someone a car without teaching them how to drive.

Remedial math and English skills-based courses only scratch the surface of the challenge. In order to most effectively transition into a rigorous academic program, veterans must be ruptured from their current mindset and recalibrated. They must learn how to be students again; in other words, they must *learn how to learn*. Much like boot camp transforms civilians into soldiers, we use immersion in the humanities to transform soldiers into students. Instead of using pushups and pull-ups to condition the body, we use Thucydides and Herodotus to condition the mind.

Consisting of fourteen hours per day of intensive academic seminars, workshops, discussions, and one-on-one tutoring sessions, the Warrior-Scholar Project is designed to unlock veterans’ full potential to succeed in college and become leaders on campus. Under the guidance of renowned professors, writing instructors, current student-veterans, and other mentors, participating veterans hone their analytical reading and writing skills, untangle essay arguments, learn how to frame their ideas in an academic context, and participate in mealtime discussions on topics such as emotional intelligence and campus leadership.

The Warrior-Scholar Project, first-and-foremost, is about developing confidence. The veterans are empowered when they learn on the first day of the Warrior-Scholar Project that their professor is not their drill instructor—not only are they *allowed* to engage with their professor on the ideas, they are *expected* to. Upon learning how to read actively instead of passively through analytic reading techniques that our Director of Studies, David Howell, calls “Ninja Reading,” the veterans discover that they can access classical texts that they previously thought were impenetrable. And after training in the reciprocal arts of reading and writing, no longer are they more intimidated by their four-page essay assignment than they were by their latest deployment.

Once veterans have been engaged with in an academic setting on a subject about which many of them have strong visceral patriotic feelings—the foundations of democracy—their intellectual curiosity becomes insatiable. They realize that a deeper love for one’s country is accomplished through critical appreciation than through blind veneration. In the process of evaluating how democracy has evolved, they develop critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills that they will carry with them no matter what subject they choose to pursue in college.

Today’s returning veterans are incredible assets to this nation. They have demonstrated the ability to put the well-being of their communities above their own, and we must cultivate that patriotic sentiment in ways that will improve our democracy. For returning veterans, the humanities can help elucidate the path to a virtuous civilian life; for example, by assessing how civilizations across time have conceived of the citizen-servant ideal.

After being immersed in this kind of study, the Warrior-Scholars soon begin to view their experiences carrying a rifle around the Hindu Kush Mountains for the past decade in a different light. They realize that much of what they learned in the military translates into being a successful student and that they have much to offer in an academic setting.

The benefits of immersion in the humanities reach far beyond the classroom. When transitioning from the military to college, veterans are extracted from an environment of intense camaraderie and cast into a sea of traditional freshmen who are several years their minor, which can be an isolating experience. The humanities provide veterans with something to think and talk with others about other than the war. Visitors to the Warrior-Scholar Project are taken aback when they witness these battle-hardened veterans not engaging in the normal barracks banter during smoke breaks, but instead debating the finer points of de Tocqueville with their nonveteran peers. And when the Warrior-Scholars return to their respective campuses, they are eager to engage and connect with their 18- and 19-year old freshman classmates, with whom they previously found it impossible to relate.

Departure from the military—especially premature departure—can leave a person feeling stripped of a sense of meaning and purpose. Study of the grand ideas that motivated veterans to enlist in the first place reawakens their drive to search for meaning and purpose. The veterans are forced to reflect upon what is important to them, what motivates them, why they chose to serve—to debate such questions as “is democracy *inherently* good?” and “what rights and responsibilities are implicit in citizenship?”—and it forces them to imagine new ways in which they can fulfill their sense of civic duty now that they are once again civilians.

Experiences of war often transgress the core moral and ethical beliefs that undergird our humanity. Study of the humanities may help veterans reconcile internal conflicts by providing the kind of perspective that they need to better understand their experiences as they try to make sense of a world in which they may have had to take the life of another to defend.

During our pilot year, we were surprised to have one of our students suffering from post-traumatic stress come to us on the third day to tell us that for the first time since he returned from Iraq, he had slept through the night without any nightmares. His mind was too consumed contemplating democracy and globalization. A handful of veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress have made similar claims, and we are currently working with psychologists at Yale to study the potential rehabilitative benefits of immersion in study of the humanities.

Veterans who complete the Warrior-Scholar Project have the tools to find a new mission and build a new identity after life in the military. After completing the Warrior-Scholar Project, veterans think of themselves not only as veterans, but as student-veterans, or more aptly—as Warrior-Scholars—and they are not only successful in the classroom, they are leaders on campus and in the broader civilian world.

Each veteran who has completed the Warrior-Scholar Project and started college has stayed in college. Several Warrior-Scholars have earned GPAs of 3.8 or higher at their respective universities, been elected to serve on student government, assumed various other leadership roles on campus and within the community, and transferred from community colleges to some of the nation's most selective universities.

After serving thirty-three veterans through programs at Yale in 2012 and 2013, we are expanding to ensure more veterans who start college stay and succeed. New courses in 2014 will take place at Harvard and the University of Michigan, allowing us to serve an additional forty-eight veterans. Although applications are still open, we have already received nearly three times as many applications as there are seats available in this year's programs. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the NEH staff as we scale up to meet this demand and reach more veterans while simultaneously improving upon the quality of the program.

The Warrior-Scholar Project is an ongoing experiment to discover how best to ensure that our nation's veterans get the most out of the education that they have earned by fighting on our behalf. The challenge is too big for any one organization to address alone, and we hope to share what we have learned through this experiment as broadly as possible. Without the support of organizations like the NEH, the information in our course package would not have traveled far beyond the desk of our co-founder and executive director, Chris Howell.

We are grateful that NEH has used its network in the realm of higher education to serve as a conduit of information through which we share with universities best practices for transforming today's veterans into the leaders of tomorrow. Connections made by the NEH allow us to increase our impact by hosting the Warrior-Scholar Project at new campuses and consulting with universities that wish to create their own transition programs.

Meeting the top-notch peer-review quality standards set by NEH signals to supporters, especially professors, that the Warrior-Scholar Project is a worthwhile program. When professors learn that we are working with the NEH, they cannot sign up fast enough to volunteer as instructors.

As mentioned, Yale and Harvard are among the universities where the Warrior-Scholar Project is hosted. The support of the NEH is helping us build a bridge between communities that have been at odds dating back to the Vietnam War, and that only recently have begun to make amends with the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell and the return of ROTC to those campuses. Ivy League professors who are not used to having veterans in the classroom are impressed by the perspective, discipline, insight, and practical experience of the veterans. These are the kinds of interactions that help erase the widely lamented civilian-military divide.

Members of the post-World War II "Great Generation" are remembered not just for the courage with which they fought, but for what they accomplished when they returned home. Similarly, today's returning veterans are archetypal citizen-servants whose love of country, dedication to service, and relentless pursuit of causes bigger than themselves does not end when they return from war. These are the individuals who are capable of being the catalysts of change who will reverse the rising tide of disillusionment with our political system. The protection of freedom demands not just a strong military, but an active and informed citizenry capable of distinguishing truth from mere sophistry. The humanities provide a rubric for civic-improvement in a world obsessed with self-advancement. As our citizens become more virtuous, so too will our nation.

The Warrior-Scholar Project is one of many veteran-serving humanities projects NEH supports. NEH launched on April 2nd *Standing Together*, an agency-wide commitment to connect veterans, members of the military, families, and civilians through the humanities. Through this initiative, NEH awards grants to humanities programs that further understanding and study of the experiences of American veterans, help Americans understand the experiences of service members as they return to civilian life, explore war and its aftermath through advanced research in the humanities, and promote discussion and understanding of the experiences of Americans affiliated with the armed services.

With the withdrawal from Iraq and the drawdown in Afghanistan, we need the support of NEH now more than ever to meet the growing needs of returning veterans. The strength of our democracy depends on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.