

## Preparing for Oral Testimony before Congressional Committee

### **Opening Statement:**

Good morning,

Thank you, Chairman Flores and Ranking member Takano for the opportunity to address the subcommittee this morning. It is an honor to come before you and to represent Baylor University.

My name is Dr. Janet Bagby, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology and the VETS Coordinator. On behalf of our President, Judge Kenneth Starr, I welcome you to our campus.

### **Testimony:**

Currently we have approximately 100 student veterans attending Baylor. I say “approximately” because we cannot identify our student veterans unless they are using VA benefits to pay for their tuition. Beginning in 2015, students will have the opportunity to check a box on the Baylor application if they are veterans. At that point, we will be able to identify all incoming Baylor student veterans not just those using GI benefits. Since Baylor is a private school, the financial benefit provided by the GI Bill covers only about one semester of Baylor’s tuition. By electing to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program, Baylor has made the financial commitment to support student veterans who choose to attend our University. While our student veteran enrollment may never match that of public universities, I am extremely proud of the services and support we are providing for those veterans who do attend.

After researching the needs of student veterans on campus, Baylor created the Veteran Educational and Transition Services (VETS) Program in the fall of 2012 to support the academic success of student veterans attending the University. The VETS office, located in the Army ROTC facility, is administratively part of the Paul L. Foster Success Center that focuses on meeting the academic and career needs of all Baylor students. The VETS Program is staffed by LaNette Thompson, the VETS Transition Coach and an Educational Psychology doctoral student. Ms. Thompson’s position has been generously funded by Baylor’s Graduate School Dean for the past two years. In addition to my teaching responsibilities in the Educational Psychology Department, I serve as the VETS Coordinator. The Provost’s office supports the VETS Program with an annual operating budget. The Baylor Veterans’ Coordinator is Ms. Jessica Alford whose full-time responsibilities include assisting our student veterans in their VA certification

needs. The VETS Program and the Veterans' Coordinator provide dual support for Baylor's student veterans.

Through the VETS Program, I serve as an advocate and mentor for student veterans on campus. Having loved my experience of being a Baylor faculty member for over 20 years, I have developed a strong passion for serving this special population.

Undergraduate student veterans, during their first semester at Baylor, take a one-hour, for-credit course to assist in their transition to college and specifically to Baylor. This class gives student veterans an opportunity to connect on campus. Coming from a highly structured environment of the military to the highly unstructured environment of a university can present challenges for incoming student veterans. Topics covered in the course include:

- Implementing study strategies
- Utilizing Baylor's technology
- Accessing support systems on campus
- Registering for classes and securing tuition assistance
- Planning a career path
- Receiving free legal assistance through Baylor's Law School

The majority of these sessions are presented by key faculty/administrators who have expertise in these areas and who demonstrate their support by personally addressing the students. One class member, an Army veteran whose husband was just deployed, leaving her to cope alone with four small children while at the same time beginning her college career, has especially appreciated the support that the class provides. As part of the course, student veterans submit a writing sample and receive individual feedback on techniques for improving their writing skills, a practice that is helping them in their other classes. For those student veterans who need extra assistance with math classes, besides options in the Paul L. Foster Success Center, the VETS Program has partnered with Air Force ROTC to offer free tutoring by the AF cadets who are fifth year Engineering majors. We are in the process of developing a similar partnership with Army ROTC to provide tutoring for the student veterans in other content areas.

Although VETS has existed for only three semesters, we are making a difference and positively impacting the lives of our student veterans. Last spring, a Baylor counselor informed me that Armando, a senior Philosophy major and an Army veteran, was in difficulty and asked if I could help. Armando had been sitting on

his motorcycle at a traffic light when a car crashed into him. His injuries were so severe that he had to take incompletes in all his classes and postpone his impending graduation. That spring, Armando worked with the professors of his six classes to satisfy requirements. However, since he was not formally registered for classes, Armando did not have access to the library or the student athletic facility. He was struggling to complete the required coursework without library resources, and without access to the fitness equipment in the Baylor health center, his physical healing suffered as well. I immediately assumed an advocacy role and shared Armando's story with the Provost's office and the Assistant Vice-President for Student Financial Services. Within several days, Armando was enrolled in our VETS course, tuition-free, and was granted access to all Baylor facilities. I am happy to report that he was able to complete all his coursework and graduated in May.

The VETS Program is currently partnering with Baylor's Career Development Department to develop or adapt career resources to specifically address the needs of our student veterans. For example:

Resume/cover letters: Tailoring military language and experience to civilian job market and skills

Interview practice: Customize specific questions veterans might encounter in interview settings

Veteran Mentor Program: Develop a mentoring program where student veterans are paired with successful alumni who are also veterans.

A VETS Advisory Board, composed of key Baylor administrators and community leaders, meets regularly to guide and support the VETS Program.

Three years ago, the Veterans of Baylor student organization was chartered with the mission of providing a community for student veterans on campus. I serve as the faculty advisor for Veterans of Baylor. With cooperation from the Provost's office, we are in the process of identifying Baylor faculty and staff who are veterans or who have immediate family members currently serving in the military.

While Baylor has a long tradition of being "military friendly," we are now dedicated to becoming a "military embracing" campus by cooperating together for the good of our students. For example, the VETS program, the Veterans of Baylor student organization, Army ROTC, and Air Force ROTC are co-sponsoring a Veterans Day Ceremony on November 11<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 PM on campus for the Baylor and Waco communities.

**Conclusion:**

Chairman Flores, Ranking member Takano this concludes my testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.