

House Committee on Veterans Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Field Hearing

Best Practices in Veterans Education and Transition to Civilian Life

Texas Tech University

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Witness Statement

Ikaika (Kai) Iuta

Student Veteran – Texas Tech University

Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member O'Rourke, and Members of the House Veterans Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Ikaika Iuta, but everyone calls me Kai. I am from Hawaii. After graduating high school, I attended a junior college in California for one year. I couldn't afford to go back to that school the following year. This led me to enlist in the U.S. Army in 2010. I was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat team as a Motor Transportation Operator in Fort Lewis, WA. From 2011-2012, I was deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan attached to the 10th Mountain & 82nd Airborne Divisions. In 2013, my unit was assigned in a joint operation as the Global Response Force with the 82nd Airborne. I got out of the military in February of 2014. That same year I continued my education at Green River Community College in Auburn, Washington earning my Associate of Arts degree. In 2015, I enrolled at Texas Tech University. I am currently studying Psychology and graduating in December.

My transition out of the military was okay but not perfect. During the Army Career & Alumni Program or A.C.A.P, I was equipped with many resources but no knowledge on how to access them or how these things can apply to my particular situation. For example, ACAP helped me create a resume and get a job but I didn't know where I was going to live or what kind of services were offered for housing or help in getting housing. If it wasn't for the kindness of friends, I would have been homeless coming out of the military and another statistic to the veteran demographic. ACAP also helped me with information about the GI bill but it was unclear on how it worked. For example, during this time, the Post 9/11 GI bill only covered in-state tuition and veterans who were out of state would have to pay out of state tuition. This means the GI bill would only cover the in-state tuition part leaving the veteran to pay for the rest. However, there were certain states that gave in-state waivers for veterans. I was lucky enough to live in a

state that offered this. During my time at Green River Community College, I felt awkward and out of place. My identity as a soldier was slowly stripped away and my service seemed like it was a different lifetime. My daily rituals consisted of going to school and work. I made no friends and wasn't connected to the campus or community. In August 2015, I transferred to Texas Tech University hoping to finish my degree and make new friends. I chose Texas Tech University because during that time it was ranked in the top 10 for military friendly universities.

Upon my arrival to campus, I was culture-shocked because I had never been this far east of the United States and I had never been to the south. My first stop on campus was the Texas Tech Military Veterans Program where I was given a lot of information and resources for veterans. They also encouraged me to sign up for the veteran student organization on campus which is called Veterans at Texas Tech or VATT. This organization was a great help because I connected with a lot of veterans and they shared their experiences as a student at Texas Tech. MVP also hosted a welcome event where new student veterans came together and veteran Lubbock organizations were there for information. The following semester I signed up for the veteran orientation program also known as Tech Vet Boot Camp. The program gave me an in depth training to the resources offered for veterans at Texas Tech. For example, I learned that Student Counseling Services offers 6 free counseling sessions to any student. I also learned that when you graduate from Texas Tech you are awarded a military stole. This may not seem to mean much or that significant but this little thing speaks volumes to me because this shows the school recognizes that veterans who are students at Texas Tech, are a part of a distinct important demographic of the student population. Since being here at Texas Tech I have been able to find community and I don't feel as isolated as I was at my other school.

I think the most important thing to help service members who want to come back school is recognizing who they are and reaching out to them. Providing a resource such as the Military Veterans Program at Texas Tech allows veterans to get connected and help them with their educational needs. Sitting in a classroom with kids 10 years younger than you can make you feel out of place and isolated. However, providing a support system that recognizes veterans and their distinct situations will make them feel a part of something.

I will graduate in December and look forward to receiving my graduation Texas Tech stole. My future plans is to go on to graduate school and study Industrial/Organizational Psychology. My future plans is to go on to graduate school and study Industrial/Organizational Psychology.

Thank you for time today. I look forward to your questions.