

Good morning, I'm Christine Schwartz and I am the CEO of Service to School a veteran service organization that works with transitioning servicemembers and veterans to ensure they have the access and ability to attend our country's best colleges and grad schools. My connection to the military runs deep. As a fifth generation Army Officer, I served five years on active duty and an additional two in the Army Reserves, I am the spouse of an Active Duty green beret, and I believe in service to our nation as well as supporting the servicemembers and veterans that willingly choose to do so.

In pursuit of that support I have the privilege of running an organization that ensures our country's veterans have the opportunity to attend colleges that place them on a pathway for continued success. Through our work the veterans we work with go on to enroll at colleges with high graduation rates, great career services, and alumni networks that will support them throughout their life. These are colleges like Yale, Stanford, Amherst, UC-Berkley, UT-Austin, Virginia Tech, University of Michigan, Princeton and the list goes on. This is great news for veterans who are often taken advantage of by for-profit universities or less than reputable colleges and we at Service to School have worked hard to create success for veterans in higher-ed.

However, I would be wrong if I led you to believe that we serve male and female servicemembers at equal rates. In fact last year, only 14% of the veterans we assisted were women. This statistic does not align with the national average that 24% of student veterans are women. So if a quarter of users of the GI Bill are women, then why aren't they signing up with Service to School whose reputation is to get you into the best college possible and ideally your dream school. If you are using the GI bill wouldn't you want to use it at your dream school? Why are 86% of the veterans that apply and then enroll at quote unquote elite colleges male?

I cannot provide all the answers but I'll offer a glimpse into why women veterans are struggling to enroll at similar colleges and grad programs as their male counterparts.

Ashley is an Army Captain who served in the Special Operations community and was denied admittance to almost all of the MBA programs she applied to. When Ashley asked the admissions committee's feedback on why she wasn't offered admission they cited her GMAT score which was reasonably in range with the other military members who applied to similar programs. In talking with Ashley, she felt that her applications were viewed differently than her male counterparts and there was a disbelief that her work in the special operations community was comparable to her male peers, and therefore her service was not as prestigious as theirs and could not be valued as highly. So while Ashley held the same rank, position, and went through the same training as her male peers, her service was undervalued because admissions committees could not understand it in the same context as a male.

This story aligns with research from the Service Women's Action Group that found the majority of active duty and veteran women face respect issues and a lack of recognition of their service from the public.

Then there's Janine, an Air Force NCO who received her bachelors degree from UMUC while on Active Duty. Janine dreamed of going back to grad school and specifically researched and networked with MBA programs where she was met with the disappointing news that since she had received her undergrad degree online, it was highly unlikely she would be accepted to one of her choice MBA programs. Janine is a single mom balancing two young children and a job and when I first met her she was working numerous jobs to make ends meet. I can guarantee you, if anyone could handle the workload of an MBA program, it would be her. Interestingly enough, I met a male Air Force NCO this past winter. He too received his bachelors degree online while in the Air Force; assumption would say that he like Janine wouldn't be able to get into a top MBA program, seeing as his degree was online. But here is the interesting part, Caleb got into and is now attending the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business. Undoubtedly, one of the best Business schools in the world and Janine has yet to go back to grad school.

University's just like many systems are creating barriers for these female veterans by failing to understand, appreciate, and accommodate for female military service and have continued to perpetuate our "invisible service".

Thank you.