

UC San Diego Welcomes Student Veterans with New Initiatives

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UC San Diego has initiated several new programs designed to help student veterans as the campus gears up for an expected increase in the number of students who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The university currently has about 200 undergraduate students who have served in the military. UC San Diego's new initiatives include a student veteran orientation, early enrollment privileges, and outreach efforts to local community colleges and military bases.

"I've noticed an increased interest from veterans who want to seek out educational opportunities at UC San Diego," Jed Schlueter, student affairs officer said. "More current military members have also been calling, or have approached me at college fairs."

On Wednesday, Nov. 12, from noon to 1:30 p.m. UC San Diego will hold its ninth annual Veterans Association Recognition Ceremony, which will honor veterans and men and women currently serving in our Armed Forces. The campus-wide event, which is open to the public, will take place in the Natural Sciences Building's first floor conference room.

In September, UC San Diego hosted its first orientation for student veterans to educate them on the opportunities available to them. The event featured guest speakers from student affairs, financial aid and counseling and psychological services.

"It's essential we support our veteran students and help them find their niche on our campus," Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Penny Rue said. "Many of our students are right out of high school, but veterans typically have much more life experience so it's important we recognize their service and help them make the transition to UC San Diego."

Schlueter and Assistant Director of Transfer Student Services Timothy Borch both serve on the Veterans Services Workgroup which was formed last spring to address the needs of student veterans. "We do a lot to connect veterans with one-another," Borch said. "Many veterans are transfer students and we want to hear from them to learn how best we can support them."

The workgroup includes staff from transfer services, student affairs, financial aid, the colleges, and student veterans. One of the initiatives the workgroup helped implement was priority course registration for student veterans, which officially begins the winter 2009 quarter.

In addition, Counseling and Physiological Services recently created a student veterans support group. "We want to help veterans and give them a place at UC San Diego where they can learn some wellness enhancing skills and experience emotional support from fellow vets," said John Sexton, a psychologist with Counseling and Psychological Services.

Financial Aid is continuing to offer support by counseling student veterans and processing their education benefits. "Our campus is very welcoming to student veterans," said Ann Klein, director of the Office of Financial

Aid. "We are always here to help student veterans and we encourage them to come visit our offices to learn about their benefit options."

Klein added that there are five types of federal veteran's aid available to students through her office, including the Montgomery GI Bill.

Last year the first student-run veteran's organization at UC San Diego was created to engage the student veteran community on campus, said Borch, who serves as an advisor to the student organization.

Students Erik Matson and Kenyon Ralph co-founded the Student Veteran Organization last year to encourage current students who have served in the armed forces to help incoming students find their niche on campus. The student organization meets regularly and has been actively recruiting members.

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