



"Stories Deployed: The Veteran Chronicles"

Proposed Motions: *Directed Recruiting*
Sponsor: *ASVP for Diversity, Mayra Guizar*
Persons of Contact: *Jesse Atkins, Matt Smith*
Guest Speaker: *Jesse Atkins*
Date: *April 8, 2014*

Attached Documents Announcement to the veteran population to ask for volunteers.
Outline for the writing workshop which will be co-hosted by Jesse Atkins (VOC Coordinator) and Kate Trueblood (English Dept. Faculty).

Background & Context

This proposal is for the approval of directed recruitment of speakers for the Veterans' Outreach Center's Stories Deployed: The Veteran Chronicles event.

Summary of Proposal

This event will be designed for veterans to share their stories to an audience. The event is planned for May 16th as the kickoff event for Patriot Week which will be May 19-23. The actual event will be open to the public and is tentatively planned to be held in Fraser 4.

The aim of this event is two-fold. In one aspect it will be a cathartic experience for the participating veterans as a form of expression for their own personal stories. Secondly, it is a means to present the veteran population to the public as a strong community that has faced many adversities but that they are not "damaged goods". Thus helping to remove the stigma that the veteran population is not held down by PTS, TBI, or any other mental and physical illness.

I believe that both goals of the event are highly useful and are needed in order to help continue supporting and advancing the veteran population on campus. Ultimately I would like to see this event repeated in the following years and also expanding the opportunity to veteran students attending other local institutions.

Furthermore this is a type of event that other offices within the ROP have held and continue to hold annually and this format of an event has not been used within the VOC in recent years.

Lastly, it is imperative that the speakers in the event be veterans. The goal and aim of the event is to share the stories these students have experienced while serving in the armed forces.

Fiscally

The event being held on May 16th has numerous fiscal implications to the FXXVOC budget. These are to include event services, university dining, copy services, and the Publicity Center. The FXXVOC budget has adequate funds to cover these expenses. However, the scope of this proposal has no fiscal implication to the FXXVOC budget, as this is a proposal for the directed recruitment of volunteers to speak at the event and this will be conducted through listservs of the VOC and the Veteran Services Office.

Rationale

As mentioned above the goal of this event is to benefit both the speakers and the public who attend the event. Thus it is of utmost importance that the speakers of the event are veterans and have experienced life in the military from the role of the active duty member and not from a dependent stand point.

This type of event that is designed for the directed recruitment of veterans for the execution of the event is meeting the requirement:

*Provide educational, social, and community building opportunities to the campus community by:
Coordinating at least one event each year that provides the opportunity for student Veterans to share their experiences (for example, the Soldier's Stories and Soldiers after War panels).
This is a direct copy of one of the Veteran Outreach Center responsibilities in the VOC Coordinator job description.*

**THE BENEFITS OF WRITING:
A Workshop Sponsored by the AS Veterans Outreach Center
at Western Washington University**

"I am the only one who can tell the story of my life and say what it means." Dorothy Allison

Welcome. By coming here today, you are joining a national storytelling movement among vets that includes The Telling Project, Warriors Write, and the Veterans Writing Project, among others. (Web sites listed at the end of this document.)

Know that this writing environment is a safe one. No one will criticize you for how you write or what you write, and you will not be asked to write about anything that you don't want to or to share anything that you don't want to.

The most powerful aspect of the writing process results from listening to yourself and others.

You may not have been able to control the events in your past life, but you do control how the story is told now, which is empowering.

Improved health comes from the release you get from disclosure and the insights you gain from examining the impact of events. Both aspects help bring about resolution.

A journal can become a place to put powerful memories. A journal can become a container for the overflow of thoughts & emotions.

THE PROCESS:

Start a writing practice and set aside the time. Research shows benefits from writing as little as twenty minutes a day for just four days. It's best to have a simple journal (a composition book is fine) and a place you can keep it where it will remain private.

This writing is about process, not product. Try not to worry about how a sentence sounds, and whether grammar and spelling are correct. Expect to repeat words, phrases, and ideas.

If you choose to write about a trauma experience, consider breaking it down into small increments so you won't feel overwhelmed. You might also want to answer these questions (from *Writing as a Way of Healing* by Louise DeSalvo):

- 1) *What happened?*
- 2) *How did you feel at the time and why did you feel that way?*
- 3) *How do you feel about it now?*

Expect to re-experience the emotions as you go through the process.

Some people may feel worse before they feel better, but ultimately, as you craft your story, you gain perspective on it. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud was the first to describe the healing effect for his patients of constructing a narrative after they had experienced the extreme loss of control that trauma entails, but really this has been true for as long as people have gathered to share stories.

As you write about what happened, bring in the details that give your story the most meaning to you. Describe physical details, conversations, and actions. Be sure that you get to Step Three and describe how you feel about the event now; this step will help provide you with distance and insight.

If you choose to tackle a painful memory, make sure you have at least one supportive person whom you can find quickly. Sometimes it helps to talk about what happened and how you feel writing about it; or you might feel better if you read what you've written to someone who can listen empathetically.

Resources:

1. Counseling Center: 650-3164
2. disAbility Resources Center: Anna Talvi-Blick, OM 110, 650-3083, Anna.Talvi@wwu.edu
3. Veterans Outreach Center, 650-6115
4. WWU Vet Corps Navigator, 650-6124
5. Associated Students Veterans Club: western.veteran.community@gmail.com
6. Bellingham Vet Center: 733-9226

Writing:

A few sites for those interested in writing about war and being part of a creative community:

1. The Warrior Writers Project: <http://www.warriorwriters.org/about.html>
2. Veterans Writing Project: <http://veteranswriting.org/> and <http://o-dark-thirty.org/> (their literary journal),
3. Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience (an 80 minute documentary)
4. Also <http://www.soldiersheart.net/resources/books.shtml>.

Locally: <http://growingveterans.org/the-horn/>

STORIES DEPLOYED: THE VETERANS' CHRONICLES A NO COST WORKSHOP

Come and join a memoir workshop for veterans being offered by the Veterans Outreach Center. No experience necessary, and no need to write about combat. You choose what aspect of your story you want to write about. This workshop will be an accepting place of mutual trust and respect.

I am the only one who can tell the story of my life and say what it means."
— Dorothy Allison

Why is it important to give voice to your experience?

--Your stories provide the historical record of our times. American literature has a long and distinguished tradition of writers rendering the wartime experience who were themselves vets including Walt Whitman, Ernest Hemingway, and Kurt Vonnegut, to name a few. At the end of this workshop, you will be invited to submit your memoir piece to the National Historical Record at the Library of Congress.

— You may find a way to write about your experience that you didn't know was possible. We will sample some contemporary veteran writers who question the very assumptions of narrative and who are inventing new styles and structures to convey what can't be told through the conventional stories.

—You may find that starting a writing practice becomes a form of self-care that improves emotional and physical health. Freud knew that for trauma survivors, the first step in healing was telling their stories because even though they did not have control over the traumatic event, they now had control over the narrative. A writing practice offers a good way of coping with intense feelings; it has been proven to be therapeutic.

— You can help to close the gap between Main Street and the Military by choosing to take part in a dramatic reading at the end of this workshop to be held on Friday, May 30th, though this part is optional. By telling your story on campus, you help to break down stereotypes and misunderstandings. Come and be part of a national story telling movement among vets that started with *Operation Homecoming* and continues with the Telling Project, Warrior Writers, and the Veterans Writing Project.

*The workshop will be team-led by Jesse Atkins, AS Veterans Outreach Center Coordinator, and Kate Trueblood, WWU faculty member who teaches Creative Writing, 1960s Literature, and the Literature of War.

When: Spring Quarter for 8 weeks starting April 10th on Thursday afternoons, 4:00 – 5:30. Sign up is encouraged, but drop-in's are welcome.

Where: **HU 108**

Contact Jesse Atkins/ 360-650-6115/ as.voc@wwu.edu