

Designing a National Service Academy

by Professor James R. Holbrook¹

What is a National Service Academy?

CAPT Wayne Porter,² the co-author of the National Strategic Narrative,³ conceived the idea of a National Service Academy (NSA) as an institution of higher learning dedicated to educating and preparing military veterans for continued national service following their separation from the military. The NSA is the subject of an op-ed piece in *The Washington Times*, entitled “Putting Our Veterans Back to Work – The Case for a National Service Academy” which was written by CAPT Porter and Hiram Chodosh.⁴

CAPT Porter’s initial conception of the NSA was as a single, national, civilian, stand-alone service academy similar to our nation’s military academies. Because it is unlikely that Congress will create and fund such an institution any time soon, and because of the ever-increasing number of veterans who are separating from military service, the National Center for Veterans Studies⁵ (NCVS) at the University of Utah in 2010 launched a National Service Academy Pilot Project (NSA PP). As part of the NSA PP, Professor James Holbrook at the University of Utah’s S.J. Quinney College of Law⁶ taught a seminar in 2010 about designing a NSA. Professor Holbrook’s NSA Seminar created the following template for national service academies that can be located at colleges and universities across the country.

Why do we need National Service Academies?

As Chair of Systemic Strategy and Complexity at the Naval Postgraduate School, CAPT Porter is developing a Masters of Public Administration degree program in Strategic and Operational Planning (MPA Program) for veterans and employees of federal inter-agency departments. The MPA Program will focus on collaborative, systemic problem solving in a complex strategic environment. The objective of the MPA Program is to begin to transition the burden of

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² CAPT Wayne Porter, USN, served as a Special Assistant for Strategy to ADM Mike Mullen, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. CAPT Porter is now Chair of Systemic Strategy and Complexity at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

³ <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20National%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/mar/30/putting-our-veterans-back-to-work/>

⁵ <http://www.veterans.utah.edu/about.html>

⁶ <http://www.law.utah.edu/>

reconstruction and stabilization, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and countering the effects of transnational crime from the U.S. military (where it has been centered for the last two decades) to U.S. Government inter-agency departments whose competencies are better suited to this purpose. This critically important objective also can be supported by civilian national service academies located at colleges and universities, as described below.

In addition, our nation's military veterans are a proven corps of mature, service-oriented, and talented professionals, many of whom will pursue civilian opportunities to serve their nation again doing meaningful work in the public and private sectors. The NSA Seminar views veterans as a valuable national resource willing and able to prepare through higher education to continue to contribute to "smart growth" at home and "smart power" abroad.

There are nearly a thousand student veterans enrolled at the University of Utah and more are expected as the war in Afghanistan winds down and the number of Army and Marine brigades decreases. These student veterans receive the same high-quality education and degrees as every other student at the University, while at the same time they address unique issues of reintegration from military into civilian life. The University's Veterans Support Center⁷ helps student veterans deal with the academic, personal, and family-related challenges that many veterans face when they separate from service (Reintegration Issues), including GI Bill education-benefit problems, academic and career counseling, tutoring and remedial education, classroom and learning-needs accommodations, PTSD, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), depression, service-related disabilities, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, family and relationship communication difficulties, and anger management issues.

What is the mission of a National Service Academy?

The mission of a NSA is to:

- recognize, acknowledge, and build on our veterans' valuable military training and service experience;
- recruit veterans into higher education as undergraduate and graduate students;
- support student veterans' reintegration from "combat to campus;"
- assist student veterans with mitigation of psychological health issues, physical disabilities, and family reintegration needs;

⁷ <http://veteranscenter.utah.edu/>

- assist female student veterans with mitigation of their unique psychological health issues, e.g., issues caused by sexual trauma experienced during military service; and
- prepare student-veteran graduates for and help place them in meaningful employment in the public and private sectors, including for continued national service at home and abroad, if they so choose.

The NSA Seminar concluded that a NSA should recruit veterans (but should not be limited just to veterans) through a staffed office and dedicated website (NSA portal). The NSA Seminar analogized the NSA portal to the Honors College⁸ at the University of Utah. Once admitted through a NSA portal to a college or university (Host School), a student veteran can pursue any undergraduate or graduate degree awarded by the Host School. Student veterans also take several core courses together in subjects related to core competencies determined by the NSA (e.g., in conflict resolution, strategic planning, and project management). Their work together helps them support their Reintegration Issues and provides them with an academically-relevant, professionally-useful, collaborative, and interdisciplinary educational experience. In addition to the academic degree awarded by the Host School, a NSA graduate receives recognition as a NSA Fellow, as well as employment counseling and placement assistance with public and private sector employers upon graduation.

How does a National Service Academy recruit veterans?

The Host School's NSA portal is responsible for marketing the NSA primarily on the Internet to veterans and to active duty military, Reserve, and National Guard personnel. The NSA portal must be able to provide accurate and useful information about:

- “triaging” veteran student applicants into those to be admitted into the Host School, those to be referred to local community colleges, and those to be referred to local vocational education programs;
- whether the Host School awards academic credit for military education, training, or experience and, if so, how much;
- whether the Host School provides courses online and, if so, how students' online performance is evaluated; and

⁸ <http://honors.utah.edu/>

- what happens (e.g., is tuition refunded?) if an active duty military, Reserve, or National Guard student is deployed part way through a semester while enrolled at the Host School.

The NSA Seminar identified several veterans' pre-admission concerns. Many military service members will need to apply to the Host School before they separate from service and while they are still deployed. Because they are deployed, they may not be able to plan as far ahead as civilian applicants. Application deadlines may be difficult to meet. Recommendation letters may be difficult to obtain. Some application documents (e.g., high school transcripts) may be difficult to obtain. High school test scores and GPAs from the past may not reflect their current maturity or their potential to be successful students today.

To address veterans' pre-admission concerns, the NSA Seminar recommended that Host Schools:

- waive or relax application deadlines for service members who are deployed overseas;
- develop a user-friendly NSA website that answers veterans' frequently asked questions;
- waive application fees for all veterans;
- allow veterans to complete the entire application process online; and
- consider using unique admission-evaluation criteria for veterans, e.g., by obtaining relevant information about them in recommendation letters from commanders.

The NSA Seminar identified, but did not attempt to quantify, the funding requirements for staffing the NSA portal, recruiting veterans, assisting their reintegration, counseling and tutoring them academically, teaching the NSA core courses, and placing student-veteran graduates in meaningful employment. The NSA Seminar recommended that Host Schools should liberally award academic credit for formal military education. The NSA Seminar recommended that public Host Schools should charge student veterans at the in-state tuition rate (which may require state legislative action).

The NSA Seminar did not identify viable ongoing funding sources for a NSA. Ideally, adequate federal funds should be appropriated by Congress and distributed to Host Schools either through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) or the U.S. Department of Education. The NSA Seminar predicted that federal investment in the higher education of military veterans through NSAs in Host Schools will increase veterans' earning power, generate lifetime tax revenues greater than the cost of the federal investment in NSAs, and help mitigate the symptoms and cost of care of Reintegration Issues such as PTSD.

What infrastructure is necessary at a Host School to support a National Service Academy?

The NSA Seminar determined that necessary infrastructure must exist at the Host School to ensure the successful operation of a NSA. The Host School must be a “veteran-friendly” institution and have a “veteran-friendly” campus. The Host School’s NSA portal must be user-friendly and staffed by people who are knowledgeable about military service and veterans’ Reintegration Issues. The Host School must have a robust student-veterans support center (Veterans Support Center) which is responsible for the following services to student veterans:

- The Veterans Support Center is a “one-stop shop” for student veterans to help them “find their fit” in the Host School and help them find and achieve their academic goals.
- The Veterans Support Center has a “veteran-centric” staff who understands student veterans and their Reintegration Issues, asks what they want, helps them get what they need, and supports them and their families.
- The Veterans Support Center is a comfortable and convenient place for student veterans to hang out and network with other student veterans.
- The Veterans Support Center either provides or coordinates Host School services in veterans’ education benefits (including benefits through the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Yellow Ribbon program for tuition-differential payments), veterans’ housing on and off campus, academic counseling, tutoring for student veterans who need remedial assistance, and on-campus psychological counseling.
- The Veterans Support Center either provides or coordinates access to expertise for support of student veterans who are physically disabled or psychologically injured, including for female veteran students who experienced sexual trauma while serving in the military.
- Because some NSA student may be active-duty military personnel or serving in the National Guard or Reserves, they may be subject to activation, call-up, and deployment while they are enrolled at the Host School. Therefore, the Veterans Support Center should provide pre-deployment support, deployment communications, and post-deployment assistance to them and their families. Unique deployment issues include how a student veteran can complete enrolled courses and take exams (e.g., take exams online), or else be permitted to withdraw from enrolled courses and have tuition refunded.

- The Veterans Support Center should provide referrals to local private psychological and family counseling services and to legal-support programs, such as a veterans' legal clinic, pro bono legal assistance, or a veterans' court.
- The Veterans Support Center must have a close working relationship with the Host School's admissions office, financial aid office, registrar's office, student housing office, on-campus student-veterans' organizations, ROTC programs, and on-campus counseling services.
- The Veterans Support Center provides information to faculty members and staff employees at the Host School about military service, the service experiences of student veterans, and their Reintegration Issues, so that faculty members and staff employees understand that student veterans are very different from typical young college students who have never served in the military.
- The Veterans Support Center coordinates support for student veterans obtained from the nearest USDVA Center and its programs for: psychological counseling and therapy including treatment for PTSD, substance abuse, depression, suicidal ideation, anger management, and sexual trauma; therapy and rehabilitation for TBI and other service-related disabilities; and family counseling.
- The Veterans Support Center should have a close working relationship with TAP programs at nearby military bases, national veterans support organizations (such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars organization), the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service, nearby community colleges (e.g., for referral of veterans who are not yet ready for higher education at the Host School), and local vocational education programs (e.g., for referral of veterans who just want training in a skilled trade).
- Student veterans very have little in common with typical 18-year-old freshmen students. Therefore, the Veterans Support Center should provide an orientation program for entering student veterans which is separate from or at least supplemental to the orientation program provided by the Host School to entering students who are not veterans.
- The Veterans Support Center should provide student veterans with on-campus student mentors and arrange for community mentors (e.g., Vietnam-era alumni veterans).

What core competencies are relevant for continued national service?

The NSA Seminar identified core competencies needed by public, private, and NGO employers that are relevant to continued national service at home and abroad. A NSA should encourage student veterans who are interested in continued national service to develop these core competencies while they are enrolled at the Host School:

1. Independent thinking and moral courage
2. Understanding the nature of “wicked problems”
3. Strategic planning and decision making
4. Planning and implementing complex operations
5. Risk communication
6. Conflict communication and dispute resolution
7. Rule-of-Law (ROL) issues and ROL assistance and training, including about:
 - a. Individual rights
 - b. Political and civil rights
 - c. Religious rights
 - d. Ethnic and racial minority rights
 - e. Personal status rights (e.g., as determined by application of Shi’a, Sunni, Christian, or Jewish family laws)
 - f. Women’s rights
 - g. Refugee rights
 - h. LGBT rights
8. Property rights, including about:
 - a. Private property ownership and recorded titles
 - b. Real estate mortgages
 - c. Banking, lending, checking accounts, credit cards, etc.
 - d. Contractual rights
 - e. Foreign ownership rights for real property
 - f. Intellectual property rights
 - g. Enforcement mechanisms for property rights violations
 - h. Dispute resolution mechanisms for property rights disputes
 - i. International commercial arbitration and mediation
9. Criminal and civil procedure
10. Courts and judges, including:
 - a. Judicial education and training
 - b. Compensation
 - c. Anti-corruption measures and enforcement mechanisms
 - d. Judicial independence
 - e. Specialized courts for enforcement of international commercial arbitral awards

11. Intercultural team building
12. Education and teaching
13. Economic development
14. Local infrastructure development (e.g., of clean water, sewers and sewage disposal, electricity generation, roads, mass transportation, railroads, airports, health care institutions, schools, etc.)
15. Anti-corruption international treaties, national laws, public education, and enforcement mechanisms
16. Foreign-assistance program donors, including the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and other U.S. inter-agency departments; the United Nations Development Programme and other UN agencies; the European Commission; the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; NGOs; private foundations; and multi-national corporations
17. Knowledge of U.S. foreign assistance provided through federal inter-agency departments, including knowledge about:
 - a. Government contracting
 - b. Grant writing
 - c. Grant and contract compliance and reporting requirements
 - d. Effective use of translators, interpreters, and host-country and third-party-national employees
 - e. U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act requirements
 - f. Personal security issues (e.g., avoidance of terrorist bombings, kidnappings for ransom, criminal violence, etc.)
 - g. Force protection policies and measures
 - h. Training host-country military and police
 - i. Training host-country criminal investigators, prosecutors, and judges
 - j. Training about operating jails and prisons
 - k. Training about voting laws, political parties, electoral finance, elections, and the investigation and resolution of electoral disputes
 - l. Host-country travel, visa, and badging issues
 - m. Life support assistance (e.g., for water, electricity, food, lodging, personal security, telephone communications, Internet access, local transportation, etc.)
 - n. Policies and regulations about payment of government-authorized overhead, compensation, healthcare, insurance, and travel expenses
 - o. Accurate useful information about host countries (e.g., CIA country fact-books)
 - p. Effective military/civilian interface in conflict and post-conflict host countries
 - q. U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy issues, and the role of U.S. embassies
 - r. Foreign language competence, especially in national security-related languages (e.g., Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Hebrew, Korean, Pashto, etc.)
 - s. Familiarity with local cultures and customs in host countries

The NSA Seminar recommended that a NSA should conduct a survey of courses offered by the Host School and identify existing courses that are relevant to developing these core competencies. The NSA Seminar identified over 400 courses offered at the University of Utah that are relevant to developing core competencies for continued national service (e.g., the NSA Seminar identified 24 such courses offered by the University's Geography Department). A NSA should encourage student veterans to elect to take core-competency-related courses offered by the Host School, in addition to relevant summer short-courses and internships (at home and abroad).

Why and how should a National Service Academy help student veterans find employment?

The NSA Seminar determined that employment counseling and placement are crucial for the success of a NSA. Veterans are unlikely to apply to or complete their graduation requirements at a Host School which does not help them find meaningful employment upon graduation. A NSA should ascertain the skill sets needed by specific public, private, and NGO employers. A NSA should help student veterans "translate" their military skills and experience into marketable civilian skills (similar to the Army's ACAP program⁹). A NSA should cultivate relationships with specific public, private, and NGO employers and arrange for summer internships and on-campus interviews conducted by them.

A NSA should provide student veterans with placement assistance concerning:

- writing effective, targeted resumes;
- providing relevant information about specific public, private, and NGO employers;
- reviewing and editing personal statements and correspondence with prospective employers;
- arranging on-campus interviews with prospective employers; and
- coaching and practicing a student veteran's interviewing skills.

⁹ <http://www.acap.army.mil/veterans/veterans.cfm>

Conclusion

Many veterans want to continue serving our country through civilian employment in the public and private sectors. Well-designed, sufficiently-financed, and competently-administered NSAs will recruit these veterans into Host Schools, support them in their Reintegration Issues, ensure they achieve their higher education goals, and assist them in finding meaningful employment upon graduation. A grateful nation will thereby develop veterans as our valuable national resource for “smart growth” at home and “smart power” abroad.