Creating employment pathway for student vets

Sacramento State’s surging Student Veteran Orientation exceeded expectations this year, attracting more than 150 new students on Thursday, June 5, to the University Union Ballroom and introducing an innovative training program to a standing-room audience in nearby Hinde Auditorium.

The number of program participants represented an impressive 23 percent increase over last year, solidifying Sac State’s position as the campus with the second-largest veterans program in the California State University system.

President Alexander Gonzalez welcomed the veterans and presented them with “challenge coins.” The ceremonial tradition began last year, replicating medallions given to active-duty military personnel who have achieved specific milestones during the course of their service.

The president, an Air Force veteran who went to college on the G.I. Bill, thanked the veterans for choosing Sac State and assured them that all campus divisions and departments are committed to helping student veterans succeed. He also praised Sac State’s nationally recognized Veterans Success Center (VSC) for its comprehensive commitment to providing even greater services to student veterans and their dependents.

This year’s orientation introduced Veterans Career Pathways, a new program to help ensure that veterans who earn college degrees can get well-paying jobs upon graduation. Thanks to a $75,000 grant from Wells Fargo, the VSC will select a cohort of 80 new and current students to undergo a phased training program to make them more employable. It will emphasize interviewing skills, resume writing and tips on choosing a career to their liking and making them especially attractive to employers.

The pilot program will be overseen by VSC Director Jeff Weston and graduate students Monica Daniel and Brad Zivov, who are specializing in career counseling and have created the program’s new website. Daniel, the dependent of a disabled Navy veteran, wants to give something back to the men and women who have served their country. Zivov is committed to that cause as well and has published a paper citing the need for veteran-specific counselors.
Veterans Career Pathways is a work in progress, and though Weston still has to work out the details, he is determined to provide veterans with the two things they want when coming to Sac State: an education and a shot at getting a good job. He wants to ultimately select 20 or so vets for internships that will lead to employment. Virtually all the grant money will go toward scholarships and stipends, and will be carefully scrutinized by Weston as well as Ed Mills, interim vice president of Student Affairs, who attended the coin presentation to personally welcome the new students.

“I believe that our pilot program is unique to California,” Weston says.

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Alan Miller

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