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Arranging Education Opportunities for Military Veterans in the Safety, Health and Environmental Field

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A dilemma confronting college/university safety, health and environmental educators is the recruitment of qualified students into the profession. Many of us in higher education are perplexed that more students are not selecting a career path in the field; especially when we have observed first hand the private and public sector jobs available and the salaries that these jobs are offering. This opinion piece is not intended to provide a riveting and comprehensive solution to this problem; but what it does is provide a suggestion to consider, think over and perhaps set in motion a desire for developing a compelling strategy and structure for recruiting students. So consider this > what can we as a group do to recruit returning military personnel to consider our profession as a viable alternative? The notion of recruiting returning military personnel to attend school is not a new idea. Higher education institutions in the United States have always had a sizeable number of students who have been in the military and are accessing The Active Duty & Reserve GI Bill in order to enhance their career paths. However, what is surprising is that we in safety, health and environmental field are not aggressively formulating a marketing strategy for recruiting these individuals into our graduate and undergraduate degree programs. There should be no denying that returning military personnel possess the capability to become excellent safety, health and environmental practitioners. As a result of their military training they possess the wherewithal and resourcefulness, that if combined with an education in safety, health and environmental management, would provide an excellent bridge in their reentry to civilian life. It would strategically place them in a career building track and support the critical employment requirements of both private and public organizations. The management of safety, health and environmental issues is part of every serviceman's training and experience during war and peacetime. They are attuned to confronting and managing risk, danger, and loss situations and circumstances that will translate well in the classroom and in work settings. We as educators have an obligation to this special population of our society who has been affected so deeply by our country's involvement in war. We should consider creative ways of alerting these veterans, actively recruit, and enroll them. We need to consider what it will take to provide them with the necessary support and encouragement while on our campuses, while providing to them the most compelling learning experience possible. Teaching, research and service are the critical activities in higher education and is the heart and soul of the safety, health and environmental profession. ASSE's Strategic Goal #5, "Gather, encourage and participate in development of the body of knowledge relevant to the profession," prompts us to take action. In addition to the obvious stated goal, there is an implicit understanding that causes all college and university educators to be accountable for nurturing future generations of professionals.