HELPING VETERANS
transition to college life

Public-relations students in two courses raise awareness about the number of veterans on university campuses and the challenges they face.

BY LANE STAFFORD

While it’s well known the transition to civilian life can be a struggle for veterans, many people might be surprised by the number of former service members making this transition on college campuses.

With approximately 1,040 veterans attending classes at The University of Alabama, one in 35 students is a former military member.

Tyler Hohbach, a student veteran and treasurer of the UA Campus Veterans Association, says coming back to school at age 24 was not easy.

“I felt like I had made a mistake coming here without knowing anyone, and had I not already signed a lease and turned in my military paperwork to leave active duty, I might have decided to just stay in the military and continue with online classes,” Hohbach says. “Finally, I got

“The In the Chair campaign invited students, faculty and staff members to sit in the campaign chair and tell how the military has affected their lives.

“I am fortunate to attend college because my father chose to serve in our country’s time of need. Now my brother stands on the front lines having taken his oath, and I plan to do the same soon.”

– STUDENT DEVIN STEVENS
an email about the Campus Veterans Association, and from that day forward my transition was much better from a social perspective. I still struggled with many of the other transitional challenges: adapting to college culture, learning that my priorities didn’t always line up with traditional students’ priorities while in group projects, moving away from military lingo and verbiage and dealing with shortfalls in the GI Bill.

In 2016, a group of public-relations students realized many people in the University community were not aware of the Campus Veterans Association, the significant size of many people in the University community were not aware of the Campus Veterans Association, the significant size of the population it serves and the resources it provides.

As part of two courses – APR 433 Public Relations Campaigns and MC 495 Capstone Agency Experiential Learning – these students teamed up with the Campus Veterans Association and created the “In the Chair” campaign to draw attention to student veterans and their needs. Torrie Miers, a member of the campaign team from Milton, Ga., who graduated in 2016, says she’s thankful for the skills she gained as well. “I learned how to work together with a team of completely different people, to think creatively and outside the box and to organize and implement a campaign,” she says.

Hobbach worked closely with the Bateman Team during the campaign. “Bateman has been absolutely incredible,” he says. “I cannot even describe how much they have helped the Campus Veterans Association.”

Teri Henley, faculty advisor for the Bateman Competition Team and instructor of APR 433 Public Relations Campaigns and MC 495 Capstone Agency Experiential Learning, says she is proud of the group’s accomplishments. “This is a huge national honor,” Henley says of the team’s performance in the competition. “One of the best outcomes is that we plan to continue to partner with CVA through Capstone Agency because the campaign was such a success.” Capstone Agency is the UA-student-run communications firm.

In April 2016, Henley received a $2,000 grant from the UA Center for Community Based Partnerships. Capstone Agency is using this grant, in part, to create informative materials informing the University community about student veterans and the Campus Veterans Association. For Veteran’s Day, the agency sent an infographic about veterans at UA to every faculty and staff mailbox.

Both Coleman and Vlahos attribute the campaign’s achievements to its straightforward yet powerful message.

I think the In the Chair campaign was successful because it started with a very simple concept: get to know the person sitting next to you,” Coleman says. “This simple statement means so much, though, and can transcend any college campus across the United States.”

APR 433 Public Relations Campaigns gives students the opportunity to plan, execute and present a complete public-relations campaign for a local, regional, national or international client. Working in teams, students apply both theoretical and practical knowledge acquired in their previous coursework. The course is offered in the fall and spring semesters.

MC 495 Capstone Agency Experiential Learning focuses on application of the communications process through real-world experiences with Capstone Agency clients. The Bateman competition team is considered a Capstone Agency client each Spring semester.

For more information about APR 433 or MC 495, contact Teri Henley at henley@apr.ua.edu or 205-348-0365.