Military and Veterans Services on Veterans Day and Beyond

A dive into the history and ambitions of UNH’s Military and Veteran Services in honor of Veterans Day.

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University of New Hampshire (UNH) students enjoyed a three-day weekend due to Veterans Day being observed last Friday. Celebrated on Nov. 11 each year, it is beneficial to look at who this day celebrates. UNH’s Military and Veteran Services (MVS) has been providing its services since the founding of the university.

UNH and the military have always been closely connected since the late 19th century when the U.S. established public state universities to compete with Harvard and Yale to refocus the traditional college experience. These public universities were to teach three specific things: industrial-based training, agriculture and military science.

Military Science was required at the time because the U.S. had just come out of the Civil War and wanted to make sure they were preparing young adults in case of future conflict. Because of this, military sciences were always taught at UNH. This program ultimately became the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, or ROTC, the program that is in place today.

Veteran Services itself started after World War II when the U.S. put the GI Bill in place. It is a federal law that helps veterans (and active/reserve duty) pay for college. From that point forward, there has always been some version of a veteran coordinator/veteran services at UNH. MVS has not only helped the student veterans directly but has also done a lot of community-based assistance with the veterans of New Hampshire and connecting them with the students.

The official UNH’s MVS office was put together in the 1980s after being revamped by Veteran Affairs (VA) and their handling of the GI Bill. Up until that point, the Veteran Services Coordinator worked in the Registrar’s office before separating in 2014. After the Student Senate pushed for its own independent center on campus, MVS moved into Hood House in 2018 which has remained its headquarters ever since.

Andrew Pincince, a senior at UNH, serves in the Force Support Squadron at the 157 Air Refueling Wing at Pease Air National Guard Base.
The primary focus of MVS is helping our student veterans; anyone who comes to UNH who has previously served, as well as the military-connected students that may be currently serving or dependents of those that are. The three main areas they deal with are education benefit-related, the socialization between students and referrals to UNH and Community Resources.

MVS is run by Kalyn Ryll and Penny Watson; Ryll herself is not a veteran, however, Watson served in the U.S. Marine Corps. Ryll has just started her third academic year at UNH and is working to get MVS more outward-facing about the work that they do, creating a greater awareness on campus. On Wednesday, Nov 8., Dr. Larry French, a Marine Corps veteran, gave a talk called the Collective Emotions of War; this marked one of the first events that was open and available to the greater UNH Community and not just the veterans themselves.

“We probably have more [veterans] than people realize, with just over 400 students that we are helping out this semester,” said Ryll. MVS has around 200 Veterans, 100 dependents and 100 National Guard students that they are providing services for. Moving forward, MVS is looking into doing something around this time of the year moving forward as it is important for them to support and celebrate their students.

“I would love to have a discussion to make sure that there’s an understanding out there. People join the military for a lot of different reasons and I don’t want to see people making an assumption about those who have joined. They deserve to be celebrated just as the rest,” said Ryll.