Why Only One Day A Year to Celebrate Our Veterans?

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Traditionally, we honor the sacrifices made by the women and men who served in the Army, Airforce, Navy, and Marines on November 11th each year. Veterans Day originated as “Armistice Day” on Nov. 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the end of World War I. Congress passed a resolution in 1926 for an annual observance, and later Nov. 11th became a national holiday beginning in 1938. So for almost a hundred years, we pack a year’s worth of gratitude into just one day. But what are we grateful for and how can we show that gratitude?

The hidden minority on campuses around the country continues to grow, and A&M Commerce is no exception as we near an enrollment of one thousand veterans. They arrive on our campuses to change the trajectory of their lives. These women and men have sacrificed years of their lives, many have seen horrific scenes of war; and some have lost the capacity to “unsee” the effects of war. They don’t want special attention, and they don’t want our pity.

Not all veterans suffer with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or missing limbs. Many do suffer from the stress of working full time, carrying a full academic load, and are renegotiating a new way of being with their spouses and children. Most of us cannot comprehend the toll that multiple deployments, battle fatigue, tragic loss of fellow soldiers, with months and years of absence from their families can take on these warrior students.

Returning warriors often hear “well, you volunteered for it, so don’t expect any sympathy from me!” Yes, those words have been spoken to a soldier on this campus by a fellow student. Those volunteer soldiers keep us all safe, protect and defend our homeland, and go willingly into dangerous situations that most of us would flee from on any given day. They did choose to serve, and without their sacrifice we wouldn’t be able to order an expensive coffee at Starbucks, sit outside the library and procrastinate from the homework we know is due tomorrow while complaining about the weather, a friend, or a professor we think is too demanding.

From my role as a veteran who is also a counselor, I propose we celebrate Veteran’s Day each and every day of the year. To you our veterans, I say “Thank you for your service, and especially, thank you for all that you have sacrificed!” You deserve many days of special gratitude for your service. And if the transition from warrior to student becomes challenging, please consider the following:

Recognize transition for what it is.
Accept that adjustment to civilian life may take some time.
Recognize when things are out of control.
Reach out for help from friends or professionals.
Celebrate your service as a noble calling.
Be open to accepting the gratitude that you deserve.