What follows is a description of the development of the VET NET Ally Program and the individual modules of the seminar itself.

The text is adapted with minimal changes (to address current practice) from Marshall Thomas’s dissertation, which is cited at the end of this document.

**VET NET Ally Program Development**

The VET NET Ally training program was developed and presented as a four-hour seminar by the Director of Veterans Affairs Services, Dr. Marshall Thomas; the former-director of Veterans Affairs Services, Mr. Patrick O’Rourke; and staff psychologist from the university office of Counseling and Psychological Services, Dr. Michael Barraza. Each member of the development and presentation team presents training modules that provide information or experience in one of four major theme areas: program purpose, policies and procedures related to veterans in higher education, military and post-military culture and transition, and personal identity issues associated with status as a service member or veteran. To make the information accessible to participants and to create a logical flow of information and experience, the training modules are organized in a manner that follows the path of veterans choosing military service, transitioning into the service, becoming acculturated to a military lifestyle, exiting the service, transitioning back to civilian life, and becoming a student. The seminar culminates in a panel of student veterans who are asked questions by the seminar presenters and participants. The following sections describe the contents of each of the training modules as they are currently presented.

**Introductions and Welcome**

VET NET Ally Program presenters are introduced to seminar participants. Each presenter’s military service is recognized, and his current position at CSULB is identified. A brief description of how the program came to be is presented.

Seminar Participants are asked to introduce themselves, identify their positions at the university, and tell why they have chosen to participate in the seminar (if they so desire). Many participants choose to reveal their own record of military service or their relationship to a veteran friend or family member.

**VET NET Ally Program Overview**

This module, which supports the theme of program purpose, provides participants with a program overview and definitions pertinent to the seminar. This module references the complete mission statement of the program (which is published in the VET NET Ally Handbook) and includes a discussion of the primary goals of the program: to educate members of the university community, to foster a supportive campus atmosphere, and to establish a network of visible Allies for student veterans. To highlight the importance of visibility of Allies, participants are introduced to the VET NET Ally decal to display on their office door or other visible location in their workspace that they are provided with at the conclusion of the seminar. The decal, designed by Dr. Thomas, consists of imagery often associated with military service: a black five pointed star on an olive drab field surrounded by a field of khaki/tan with the words VET NET ALLY emblazoned in black stenciled font (see VET NET Ally Handbook cover).
An important component of an effective ally training program is establishment of norms of behavior for confidentiality (Poynter & Tubbs, 2007), both during the training seminar and for future interactions with student veterans. To that end, participants are introduced to the complete statement of confidentiality (see VET NET Ally Handbook).

The Department of Defense publishes *The Dictionary of Military Terms*, a 768 page book that defines over ten thousand terms and acronyms in current use in the military services. To acknowledge and begin to bridge what may be a vocabulary gap between veterans and non-veteran participants of the VET NET Ally seminar, a brief set of definitions relevant to the seminar is presented.

**Who are our Veterans?**
This module provides participants with background information related to the number of veteran students attending the university, the branches they served in, the number of veterans who have indicated combat service and where they have served. To provide a snap shot of the colleges on campus where veterans might be found in greater numbers, the number of veteran students in various majors is presented.

**Why I Joined**
The first of two training modules addressing issues of personal identity, “Why I Joined,” introduces participants to many of the published reasons that people choose to join the military. A brief discussion of these reasons is conducted. The presenter then discusses his personal reasons for having joined the U.S. Army and entertains questions about the choice he made.

**Basic Training -- Military 101**
In this segment of the seminar, participants are introduced to the concept of transitioning from civilian life to military service. Cultural contrasts such as military vocabulary, military customs and courtesies, and the concept of military camaraderie are introduced. To illustrate some of the differences between military and civilian life, photos of service members engaged in service related activities are presented, as are photos of service members in uniform, the latter to illustrate the history, both personal and service specific, that each service member wears by way of a uniform, a component of culture that does not have a parallel in civilian life.

Recognizing that this cultural transition from civilian to service member requires a period of initial training, participants are shown a video-taped segment of Marine Corps boot camp. This brief video vignette, which includes scenes of boot camp and interviews of men and women being trained, highlights many of the concepts presented in other parts of the seminar. Cultural concepts such as fellow service members as “family,” physical fitness, tradition, and rite of passage are presented in the video. Beyond underscoring intangible facets of military service, the video is also used to call attention to the fact that all of the branches of service require an initial training to indoctrinate newly joined members into the culture of the service. By first looking at the power of that indoctrination and discussing the subsequent lifestyle of the service, seminar participants are provided with a base from which to compare and contrast civilian and military cultures and appreciate the effort some veterans may be required to expend when transitioning back to civilian life.
Break/Combat Equipment Hands-On Experience
During the two breaks provided during the seminar, participants are encouraged to handle and try on combat equipment borrowed from a local National Guard unit. The equipment has included body armor, Kevlar helmets, equipment harnesses, and CamelBak Hydration systems. Though heavy, participants are informed that the gear they are handling is less than half of the weight of the full combat load that service members in combat areas commonly carry. Participants are further encouraged to imagine carrying such a load in the desert heat which often hovers over one hundred degrees. No weapons or ammunition are used in this demonstration.

Challenges for Veterans
This module presents a summary view of some of the practical challenges that veterans face when transitioning from military service to the academic world. In particular, the different nature of the bureaucracies that are the Department of Defense, the Veterans Administration, and the university are discussed. The university is identified as a potential bridge between veterans’ military service and civilian employment and as an avenue of personal and professional success. The need for expanded counseling and outreach, academic alignment of service related education with university credit, healthcare support and referral, assimilation, and peer networking are also presented.

Status Exercise
The Status Exercise module is a small group discussion related to whether or not a student veteran would disclose his or her status as a veteran to various campus members. Participants are broken down into groups of four to five people and given a scenario that describes the personal background of a veteran and a situation the veteran might find himself or herself in in an academic environment. For example, would a student veteran who felt discomfort or shame about his actions in a combat zone wish to disclose his status as a veteran in a classroom environment, to friends, to a professor, or in a romantic relationship? Each group is given time to discuss the vignette they are presented with and then are asked to share their conclusions with the larger group.

CSULB Campus Initiatives
This module of the training program provides information about veteran specific services at CSULB. Special attention is paid to the functions of the Veterans Affairs Services Office and the Veterans Network Student Organization, which are the two primary means by which veterans stay connected to their benefits and to other veterans at the university. Additionally, partnerships with other on-campus and community veterans service organizations are identified.

Situational Awareness
This module, which focuses on policies and procedures, is a large group discussion centered on specific incidents that have occurred on the campus. Depending on available time, two or more brief situations are presented for discussion. Two examples that have been discussed follow. The first gives details of an unnamed student veteran who has experienced the cancellation of a class he was enrolled in making him ineligible for G.I. Bill benefits. The group of participants was asked to collectively suggest ways to assist the student regain eligibility for benefits in a timely manner. The second situation focused on a veteran’s experience in a classroom wherein an instructor discussed the political impact of the military conflict in Iraq. The veteran, who was uncomfortable discussing the subject in a public setting, was identified as a veteran by a fellow student, and was pushed to participate by the instructor who expressed negative views about U.S. military actions in Iraq. Participants were asked to discuss how the situation should have been handled. This activity is designed to provide participants an opportunity to weigh in on a veteran specific issue from their professional perspectives aided by their experiences on
the campus. Time concerns often require that this module be modified during the seminar. When that occurs, the presenter discusses a variety of actual campus-based situations, such as an anti-war rally or a student serving in the National Guard or reserves who is required to withdraw from classes due to a unit deployment.

**Student Panel**

A group of student veterans (typically four or five) is invited to discuss their service and post-military service experiences with the seminar participants. To ensure that the panel members are not influenced by any of the other materials presented, they are not present for any other portions of the seminar. Ideally, the panel should be composed of both women and men and represent a cross-section of veterans from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Air Force. Panelists and seminar participants are informed that any member of the panel may choose not to answer any question they are not comfortable with. Panelists are asked to tell their reasons for both entering and leaving the service and are asked to describe the most responsibility they had placed upon them while in the service or to describe their proudest accomplishment in the service. After these questions are answered, seminar participants are encouraged to ask questions of the panelists.

**Becoming an Ally**

The final module of the training session, titled “Becoming an Ally,” emphasizes the role that Allies should play on campus. The condensed version of the “VET NET Ally Mission Statement” (see VET NET Ally Handbook) is covered. At the end of this portion of the training seminar, members of the student panel present VET NET Ally decals to those who participated. Rules for the display of the VET NET Ally decal are established. Specifically, participants are instructed that visibility of the decal is important, but that placement of a decal should purposefully indicate the Ally status of only the person who has been a seminar participant. Participants are instructed that decals should never be placed in a space that might indicate that other non-ally persons have become allies. This instruction is drawn from several studies that suggest that non-allies, especially non-supporters, of a particular group may be offended at being associated with the group, or that students within the group might be unintentionally misled into believing that an individual has not attended the seminar is an ally, which could lead to misunderstandings.

Thomas, M.W. *A Safe Zone for veterans: Developing the VET NET Ally program to increase faculty and staff awareness and sensitivity to the needs of military veterans in higher education.* Ed.D. dissertation, California State University, Long Beach, United States -- California. Retrieved February 25, 2011, from Dissertations & Theses @ California State University, Long Beach. (Publication No. AAT 3425191).