



# Focus *Forward* Fellowship

A Model For Building Women Student Veteran Portfolios



Military Family Research Institute

# Audience Interaction

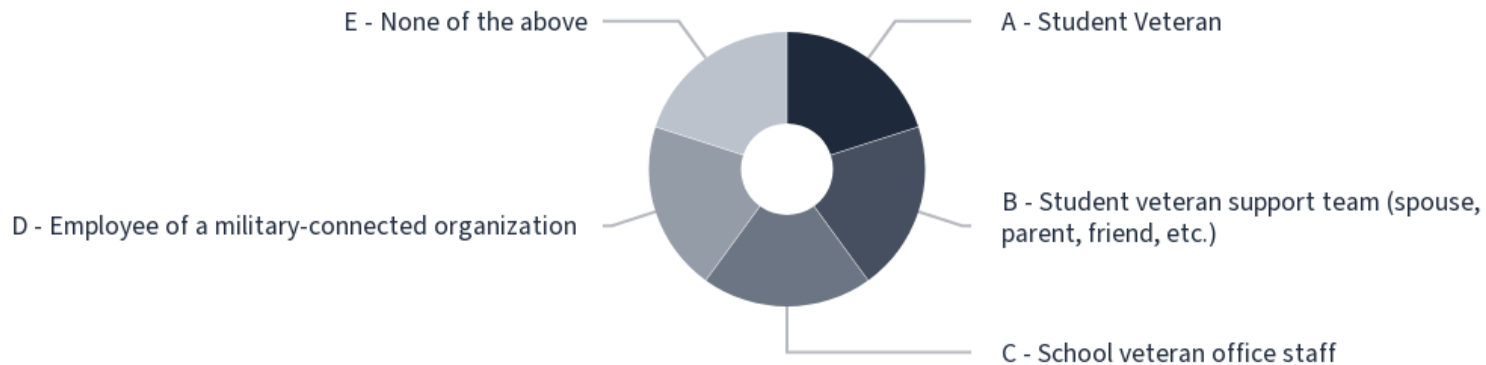
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# How would you best describe your attendee role today?



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# MFRI Mission

Created in 2000 by Purdue's Center for Families, the Military Family Research Institute:

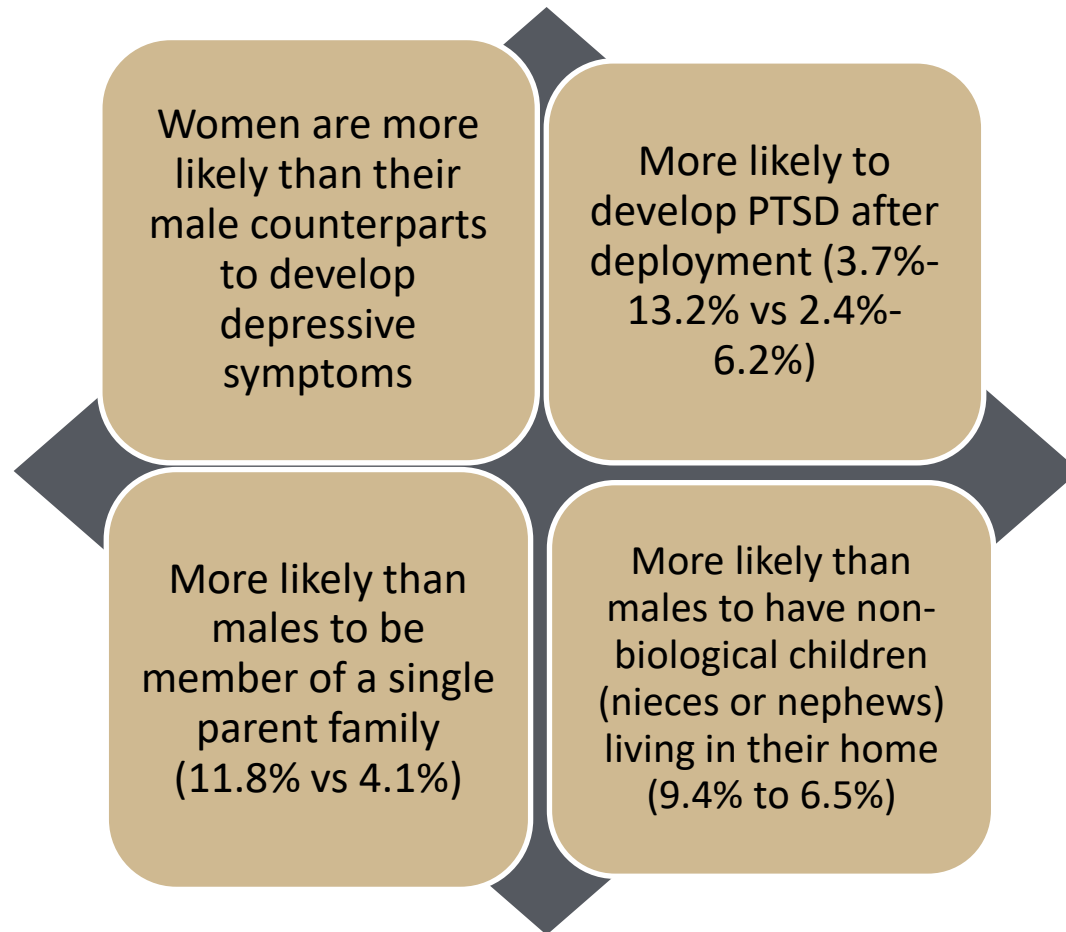
- Conducts research and outreach for communities and professionals who serve military and veteran families.
- Collaborates to help shape policies, programs and practices that improve their overall well-being.
- Helps communities and organizations use research and best practices to achieve their goals within the military and veteran space.

# MFRI Strategic Vision

We are guided by five strategic goals:

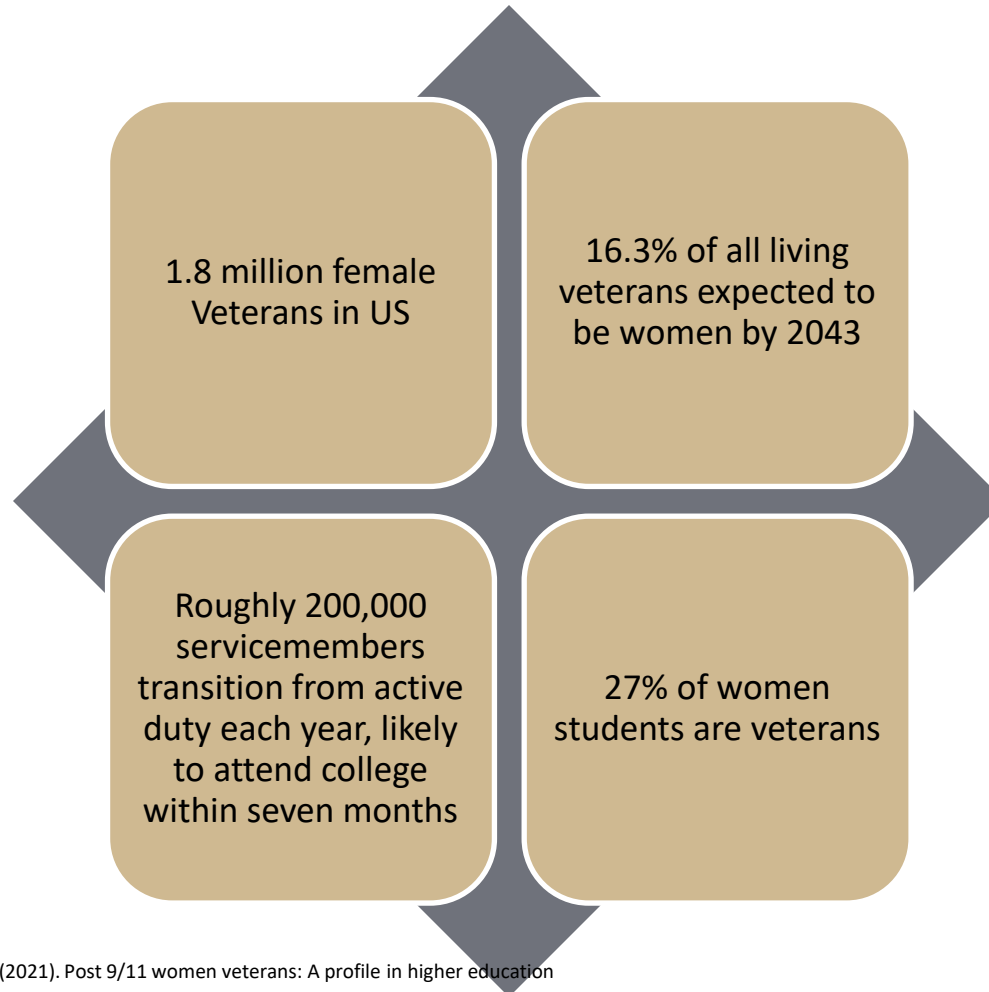
- **Support** the military infrastructure that supports families.
- **Strengthen** the motivation and capacity of civilian communities to support military and veteran families.
- **Generate** important new knowledge about military and veteran families.
- **Influence** policies, programs and practices supporting military and veteran families.
- **Sustain** a vibrant learning organization.

# Unique Lives of Female Veterans



The Many Faces of Military Families: Unique Features of the Lives of Female Service Members, 2016

# Veterans in College



Veterans Education Project. (2021). Post 9/11 women veterans: A profile in higher education

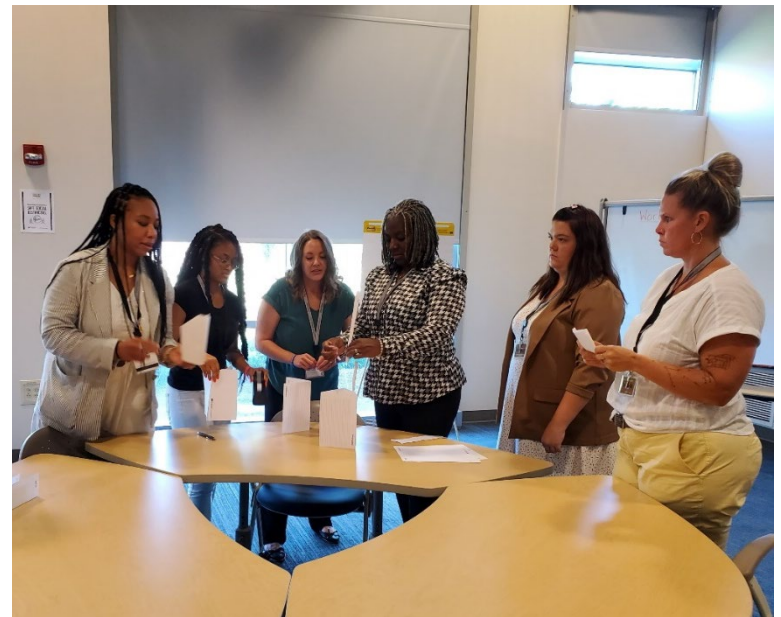
# Women Student Veteran Needs

- 2016 Disabled American Veterans report identified education as a serious gap in current systems for support of women veterans
- Women student veterans share characteristics of non-traditional students
  - 79% 25 or older compared to 14% of nonveteran student population
  - 62% first generation students, compared to 43% (Lauff & Ingels, 2014)
  - 33% members of ethnic minority group (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2018)
  - 12% are single parents (Patten & Parker, 2011)
  - 41% survivors of military sexual trauma (Barth et al., 2016)



# Women Student Veteran Needs

- 54% of female veterans did not feel prepared to navigate their community resources
- Transition challenges:
  - 59% of female veterans report a loss of connection with military community
  - 56% of female veterans report a loss of sense of purpose/camaraderie



IVMF, 2020

**What is the most important need for women student veterans on campus, in your opinion?**

# Women Student Veterans

## Academic Challenges

- Less engagement with professors
- Less positive undergraduate experiences overall

## Professional Challenges

- Fewer mentoring experiences

## Social Challenges

- Less emotional support

Goldrich, 2015

# Focus Forward Fellowship

## National mentoring program

- Build a sense of community among veteran and active duty peers
- Access to career mentors to promote professional growth
- Understand individual strengths and ways to maximize
- Identify strategies and resources to increase connections and their campus experience
- Gain confidence in problem solving
- Develop skills to help foster academic and career goals
- First cohort in 2016

# Program Delivery

## In-person residency

- Four-day intensive workshops on Purdue University campus
- Meet with fellow veterans, career and coaching mentors, Fellowship faculty
- Sessions to build skills to fill gaps identified

## Online Community

- Held online through academic year
- Currently delivered via Facebook

# Lessons Learned and Preliminary Evidence from the Focus Forward Fellowship

A program designed by the Military Family Research Institute specifically for women student veterans in higher education

## The Focus Forward Fellowship:

A four-day retreat followed by a year-long online community offered to women student service members and veterans (Fellows).

Program goals included:

1. Promoting social connectedness
2. Increasing understanding of one's strengths and identities
3. Developing professional skills

19 Fellows provided data at baseline, 6-month, and 12-month measurement points.

Fellows reported **statistically significant gains** in their:



Identity integration



Knowledge and use of personal strengths



Networking skills



Resume preparation

They had **positive reactions** to the program:



Fellows said in-person activities were engaging and effective



Fellows participated often in the year-long online community

Evaluation data showed that the Focus Forward Fellowship was feasible to implement, well-received by participants, and effective in achieving program goals

**Source:** Kenona Southwell, Dave Topp, Christine McCall, Keara Ludiker, Lauren Runco, & Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth (2022). Focus Forward Fellowship: Evaluation of a program for women student service members and veterans. *Evaluation and Program Planning*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2022.102156>



Military Family Research Institute

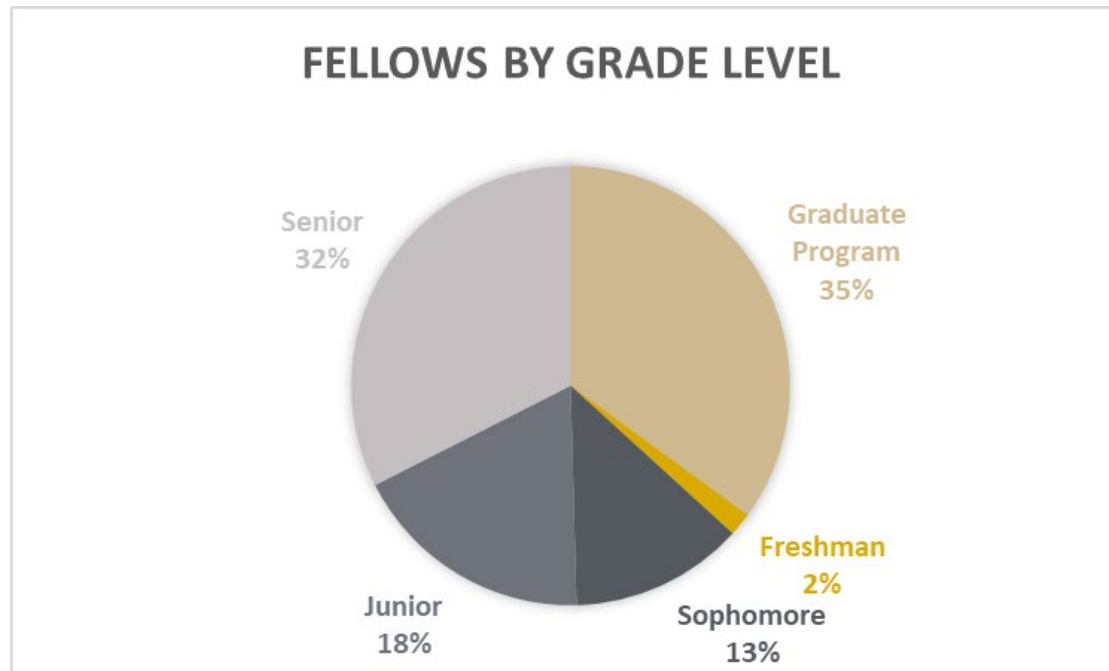
# Where are the Fellows from?

- 133 women
- 8 cohorts
- 80 schools
- 33 states and Washington, D.C.
- 5 branches of military



# What do the Fellows study?

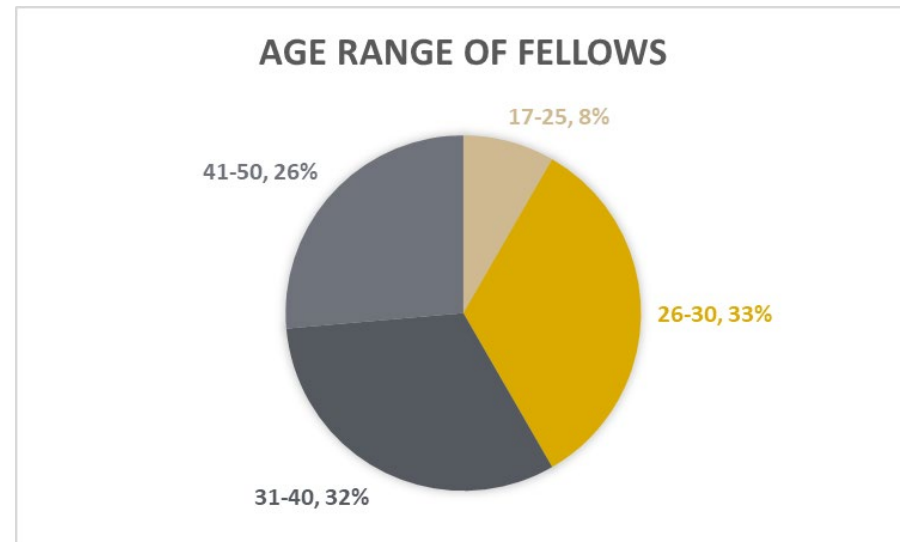
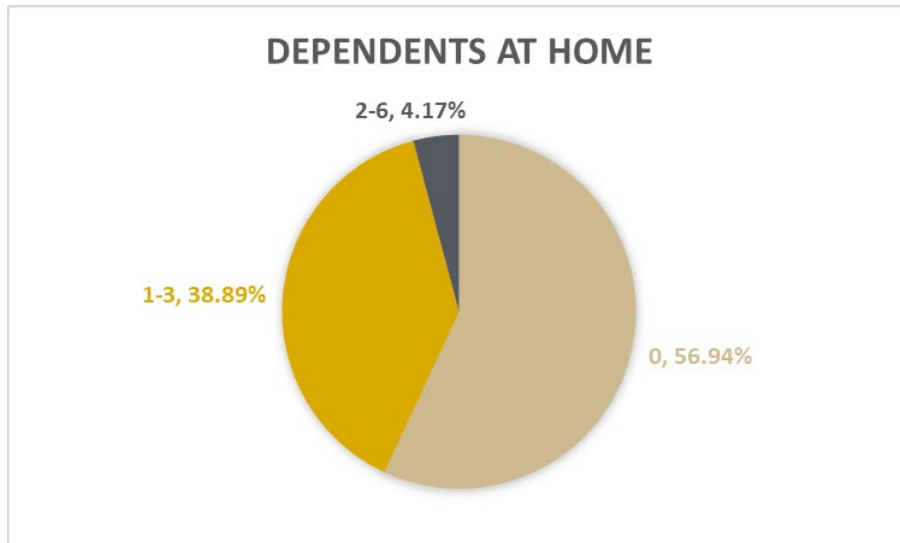
- 65% undergraduate students
- 24% STEM, 21% business programs





# Who are the Fellows?

- 43% of Fellows have dependents at home
- 70% self-disclosed military related injury or disability
- 58% over the age of 30; Fellows from 20-50



# Focus Forward Fellowship Academic Outcomes

- Academic Impact
  - 91.3% of respondents to 2022 alumni survey completed the program they were enrolled in, compared to just 31% of non-traditional students nationally
  - 39% of Fellows began an additional program
  - 13% began, and graduated from an additional program
  - Average GPA of 3.59



# Reaching New Heights



- Jeni Brett
  - 2018 Fellow
  - 2019-2020  
Coaching Mentor

# Focus Forward Fellowship Professional Outcomes

- Professional Impact
  - 77% of Fellows currently working in a field related to their educational program
  - 65% of Fellows began a new position or have been promoted since the Fellowship



# Landing the Dream Job

- Alyson Chmielewski
  - 2021 Fellow
  - 2022 Coaching Mentor



# Focus Forward Fellowship Social Outcomes

## Social Impact

- 39% of Fellows have some connection with a Mentor, and an additional 13% have regular contact with their Mentor
- 78% of women have developed connections with other women veterans





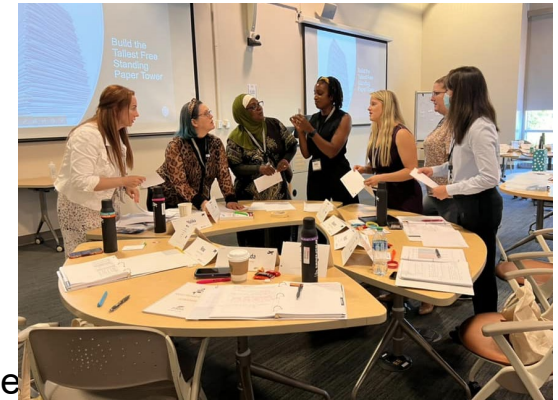
# 2022 Focus Forward Fellowship

## Highlights:

- Fellows learning about their own strengths and that of others
- Fellows developed communication skills to use in their school and professional careers
- Spent time considering and crafting goals to work on in coming year
- Received professional headshot for use on social media and professionally
- Fellows connected with at least two mentors
  - Career Mentor in their field (all women)
  - Coaching Mentor who was a former Fellow
- Online community with monthly themes for continued learning and growing

# 2023 Focus Forward Fellowship

- Applications are currently open through January 31, 2023
- Info sessions available for you or potential Fellows to attend for more information
- Information available here and at SVA Campus
- 2023 Fellowship Residency
  - 4 day intensive, week of July 17
  - Purdue, West Lafayette campus
- 2023 Online Community
  - Begins immediate before residency and continues through academic year
  - Continued learning from residency
  - Further connections which began during residency
- All costs covered thanks to generous donors





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# How many women student veterans do you know that could benefit from additional academic, professional, and/or social support?

5 or more  
3-4  
2  
1  
None, yet

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# How Can Women Become Fellows?

## Submit application

- Applications closed for 2023, but 2024 applications will open in the fall

## Eligibility requirements

- Attending higher education institution during 2023-24 academic school year
- Honorably discharged from armed forces or current active duty, National Guard or Reserves
- 2.0 or higher cumulative GPA

Selection  
decisions  
announced in  
spring

# Want to Know the Latest

Sign up for the Focus  
Forward Fellowship  
mailing list



# Questions?

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