



The Office Of The Principal and Vice-Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

WELCOMING ADDRESS AT THE OPENING CEREMONY FOR THE

MILITARY VETERANS EDUCATION PROGRAMME

THE UNISA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS LEADERSHIP CAMPUS, MIDRAND

18 FEBRUARY 2019

- Minister of Public Service and Administration, Honourable Minister Ayanda Dlodlo;
- Deputy Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Honourable Deputy Minister Thabang Makwetla;
- Director-General of Military Veterans;
- Senior Generals of the National Defence Force;
- Acting Executive Dean, Prof Thabani Mpofu and Management Team of the SBL; and,
- Our esteemed staff members and students.

Programme Director, I will not claim to know much about the military. I however want to share with you a story, perhaps the only thing I have heard about the military.

It is said that at the orientation of military cadets a Major stood up to begin proceedings. It is my understanding that Majors oversee the day to day training at various military training bases.

The Major stood up to introduce a Brigadier-General responsible for that particular base to address the cadets. The General did that and thereafter left.

Now, there apparently was a bit of a ‘tiff’ between the General and the Major, as it would happen in any workplace. So, immediately after the General had left the Major said the following to the students, in his usual booming and commanding voice: “Cadets, now that you have heard about the general things, let us now get straight into the major things!”

Allow me to get straight into the nub of my address.

One of the best attributes that any nation can develop is to never forget those who served it. Such remembering is more noble when done while those who served the nation are still alive. In that, the honours are genuine, rather than simply ritualistic.

The efforts made by the government in assisting military veterans to receive skills which they can use beyond their years of service should be commended by all of us. In doing so we join the host of other nations which re-skill their veterans after surviving.

We are therefore greatly honoured to have been chosen as a strategic partner for this important programme. It is also my distinct honour and privilege to be here with you today as we mark this milestone and as I welcome you to one of our shining beacons, the School of Business Leadership.

On behalf of the Council, Senate and the entire Unisa community, I wish to say to you all: Welcome.

Minister, Deputy Minister and your Military Command, the programme that you have embarked upon is critical.

Indeed, the rapid development of some of the major nations after World War II can be attributed to the absorption of former soldiers into university systems. The very concept of Recognition of Prior Learning is in fact a direct positive consequence of decisions to absorb veterans into the university and college systems.

The understanding was that their training and high levels of discipline would enable them to do well in their studies.

Because of their sense of organisation, focus and discipline, graduate military veterans went on to become great leaders in society.

Programme Director, I would like to submit that while as a country and State we may have many justifiable reservations about the conduct of the USA government, both historically and current, we should not be shy to learn a lesson or two from them.

As the Second World War was about to end the American Legion pushed through Congress what came to be popularly known as the G.I. Bill, or more formerly the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. The Bill made provision for, amongst others, absorption into and support for veterans to pursue higher education.

It is estimated that 450 000 engineers, 238 000 teachers, 91 000 scientists, 67 000 medical doctors, and 22 dentists graduated as part of the programme.¹

Unfortunately, and reflecting on the painful history of the USA, just like ours, the G.I Bill discriminated against black veterans. In our times we need to be vigilant that our initiatives do not discriminate against women, gays and lesbians. I will touch on this later.

It was pleasing when preparing for this brief address to learn that the Department of Military Veterans has been doing a lot of work in supporting veterans and their dependents to access education opportunities. I read that this programme started to pick up pace in 2013, with over 5800 veterans and the dependents benefitting.²

¹ McBain, L (2008) When Johnny (or Janelle) comes marching home: National, state and institutional efforts in support of veteran's education, referenced by Mitcham, M (2013) *Academic Recognition of Military Experience in STEM Education*. American Council on Education. Accessed on 17 February 2019 from <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Academic-Recognition-of-Military-Experience-in-STEM-Education.pdf>

² Anon (2017) Educational Supports for Military Veterans, Dependents (11 January 2017). Accessed on 16 February 2019, from <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/educational-support-military-veterans-dependents>

What is more pleasing is to learn that in 2017 about 1600 veterans and their dependents received R115 million in bursaries and loans from NSFAS.³

These efforts are commendable and need to be taken to higher levels. As it is always the case, public funds are finite and never enough for the expansive needs. This has therefore led the Department, by September last year, having to spend R145 million against an initial R26, 4 million budgeted.⁴

Programme Director, I am mentioning these figures to illustrate the point that, while they may not be adequately reported in the media, there are serious and commendable strides that are being achieved by the State to support our veterans.

I am also proud that Unisa is one of the institutions that has taken many of the NSFAS beneficiaries that I have just referred to.⁵ What this says to

³ Anon (2017) Fees for military vets to be fast-tracked (23 March 2017). Accessed on 16 February 2019, from <https://www.skillsportal.co.za/content/fees-military-vets-be-fast-tracked>

⁴ Anon (2018) Military Veterans depts seeks solutions to continue education benefits (10 September 2018). Accessed on 16 February 2018, from <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/military-veterans-dept-seeks-solutions-continue-education-benefits>

⁵ Anon (2017) Fees for military vets to be fast-tracked (23 March 2017). Accessed on 16 February 2019, from <https://www.skillsportal.co.za/content/fees-military-vets-be-fast-tracked>

us, and about us as a university, is that we continue to expand the contours of opportunity.

We continue to open the doors of learning for many in our society who would ordinarily not have had the kind of opportunities that open other avenues for career building and growth. Thus, we are proud as a university to be of service to humanity.

In an academic paper exploring some of the opportunities that should be explored to assist veterans who may not qualify for university study Mbunuza de Heer Menlah proposes that the Department should also consider partnering with TVET Colleges.⁶ I am not sure if that is being done.

I am mentioning this because the university has entered into agreements with several TVET Colleges which entails these colleges offering tuition for some of the Unisa courses. These courses are:

- the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Development);
- Higher Certificate in Accounting Sciences;

⁶ Mbunuza de Heer Menlah, NMM (2013) Averting the Plight of Military Veterans through Colleges of Further Education and Training. *The Anthropologist*, Volume 15, Issue 3, pp 343-351

- Higher Certificate in Banking;
- Higher Certificate in Economic and Management Sciences;
- Higher Certificate in Tourism Management; and,
- Higher Certificate in Adult Basic Education and Training.

These courses have been approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training.

What is exciting is that students who attain good grades for these certificate courses may apply and register for degree courses. I would therefore like to invite you Minister Dlodlo, and Deputy Minister Makwetla and the Department of Military Veterans to explore these additional options and find out which colleges are accredited to offer tuition, and for which certificates. This with a view to giving further practical effect to our MoA.

Programme Director, it may be that I have taken a long route to come to the reason why we have gathered here today and talked about other things. But I did so deliberately to demonstrate the fact that ours is a relationship that should not be focused solely on the programmes offered by the School of Business Leadership. Obviously, Prof Noel

Ngwenya continues to be our link with your good selves on all these programmes.

We should stretch the MoA that we entered into last year to many other areas that can be of mutual benefit.

I also spoke about other matters in order that we may locate this relationship within a specific historical and developmental trajectory, which enables us to realise the dynamic relationship that should be expanded between the State and institutions of higher learning, and Unisa and the Department of Military Veterans in particular.

It is therefore with great pride that we will be proceeding to engage 320 students through this partnership, in the four courses that we will be focusing on this year:

- the MDP in Safety and Security;
- the EDP in Safety and Security;
- the Post Graduate Diploma; and,
- the Master of Business Leadership.

These programmes, as we know, will be offered here at the SBL Campus, and in Durban, East London and Cape Town. We will surely expand to other regions where facilities permit.

The spread of campuses and regional centres is a demonstration of the versatility of the Unisa model. Through this model we can maintain a presence in all the provinces and be accessible to our students. We must certainly aim to be of service to our veterans throughout the country.

Programme Director, I have outlined the historical evolution of the educational assistance to military veterans, focusing on the American model for reasons provided. I have also appreciated the commendable efforts of the State, particularly the Department of Military Veterans. Lastly, I have acknowledged the MoA that Unisa entered into with the Military and its practical manifestation which is evidenced by this gathering and the programme that will be rolled out during the forthcoming days.

I now wish to turn to some lessons that have been gathered over the years. This I do in order to contribute to a strategic approach that we must take in developing this programme further, especially as it is led by our academic facilitators.

How should we, as both an institution of higher learning and the national Department of Military Veterans and therefore the State in general, understand and approach the issue of veterans' education?

Elizabeth O'Herrin provides a useful overview of the state of veterans and the benefits that the nation and institutions of higher learning can extract from their experience. She observes:

Veterans can bring with them a wealth of knowledge about living abroad, as well as deep personal experience with innovation, accountability, and responsibility. The influx of veterans into our institutions provides new opportunities for the enrichment of classroom discussions and the enhancement of campus diversity.⁷

There can be no doubt that, with their experiences and approach to life, especially task orientation and discipline, the veterans will bring into our academic space lessons that we will benefit from.

⁷ O'Herrim, E (2011) Enhancing Veteran Success in Higher Education. *Peer Review; Washington*, Volume 13, Issue 1 (Winter 2011), pp 15-18

What is particularly exciting for me are the case studies which the SBL, as a business school, may develop resulting from this programme. It is a well-known fact that many business schools all over the world use lessons from the military to articulate what may be best practices for the business world.

In addition to the experiences that they bring into the academy, veterans have their own unique expectations and approaches to the opportunities that are afforded to them. This is shaped by the character that veterans may bring with. Again, O'Herrin makes an important observation:

Veterans are, by definition, nontraditional students. They are typically older, and many are technically considered transfer students because they often bring with them credit earned through college courses they completed while in the military. While some veterans view college as an obligatory box to be checked to enhance prospects for gainful employment after military service, other veterans embrace the opportunity to immerse themselves in the traditional college experience.⁸

⁸ Ibid

It is important, therefore, that we should not assume that all veterans take up university education solely as a step towards post-service career prospects.

Some may well be on a path to turn a new leaf and open themselves up to the world of broad knowledge and exploration.

This is a challenge to the academic facilitators. That they should not limit the veteran students during classroom activities and in their assignments and projects, by simply limiting the discussions and examples used to facilitate such, to only those relating to the military. It may well be that some would still wish to carry those experiences forward. It may also be that some may wish to turn a new leaf and learn about and discuss something completely different.

Michael J. Kirchner has made observations where some veterans be integrated in classrooms with other ordinary students; that they may wish to leave out their experiences or discuss them. He observes:

Veterans may not be interested in talking about their military experience or may struggle with being the lone representative from the armed forces. In this case, educators can recognize a safe

classroom environment consists of respecting the soldier's privacy, unless the veteran chooses to disclose his or her experience.⁹

Specifically, Kirchner calls for sensitivity when engaging with veterans. He makes the following important point, which I would like our academic facilitators to consider:

Adult educators should also consider the comments made by non-military students about wars, government, and the military. Specifically, people need to know there is etiquette when asking or talking about military service.¹⁰

This is indeed true for many of our faculty, given the history of our country, where young white men were conscripted, while most young black men hated the established military. On the other hand, not all of us who were involved in the liberation struggle received military training, whether in exile or inside the country. We may therefore not have any form of military background and should avoid treading into grounds that we may not fully understand.

⁹ Kirchner, M.J (2015) Supporting Student Veteran Transition to College and Academic Success. *Adult Learning*, Volume 26, Issue 3 (August 2015), pp 116-123

¹⁰ Ibid. Kirchner references Hermann, Hopkins, Wilson and Allen (2011)

As Corey B. Rumann and Florence A. Hamrick observes:

Contemporary administrators and faculty members are less likely than earlier generations to have personally experienced military or wartime service. Consequently, campus personnel should initiate partnerships with veterans' organizations and local military representatives in order to design and offer transitional services. Moreover, offering educational programs can build awareness of soldiers' experiences and assist campus administrators in being proactive in serving student veterans.¹¹

Equally, those of our academics who may have had military training should be aware that they may have had that during the previous dispensation, while the majority of the on-coming veterans may have formerly come from the liberation movement. There might therefore be a serious clash of cultures which must be handled with care.

Another important factor which I would like our academic facilitators to be highly conscious about concerns the different culture that the

¹¹ Rumann, C.R and Hamrick, F.A (2009) Supporting Student Veterans in Transition. *New Directions for Student Support*, Issue 126 (Summer 2009), pp 25-34

veterans come from. Patricia A. Brown and Charles Gross offer us a valuable advice when they write:

Veterans returning to civilian life are often challenged by the adjustment in moving from a command and control environment to the openness of a college campus. They often feel isolated as one among many. Since they are no longer in uniform, they are not readily identified as military members. They lack a coherent social network and may flounder as they struggle to adapt to new expectations.¹²

Conscious efforts must therefore be made to ensure easy integration into campus life. Whereas the veterans might have been used to military bureaucracy, they may find themselves lost with campus bureaucracy. To mitigate this, it is good that there is an elaborate orientation that will follow this formal part.

In addition, there must be a contact office for the veterans, so that they may be assisted in navigating what might be daunting spaces.

Going back to what Brown and Gross say, let me add that by nature the military is a regimented environment. Veterans must be assisted to

¹² Brown, P.B and Gross, C (2011) Serving Those Who Have Served – Managing Veteran and Military Student Best Practices. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, Volume 59, Issue 1, pp 45-49

transition from this environment to one where a lecturer might not mind being called by the first name, instead of Professor or Doctor.

We must not, as the university, take some of these things lightly. For instance, you may wish to insist not to be called by your title but by your first name. You must however understand that some of the student veterans may struggle and never come around calling you by your first name. Please don't push them. Exercise understanding.

The final point that I wish to make is around how we treat our women student veterans.

One of the focal areas in our Institutional Strategy on Transformation, which Council adopted last year, is to fight against all manifestations of sexism and gender-based violence against women. We must, therefore, be sensitive to and attend to the specific needs of women student veterans.

Reflecting on this, Margaret Baechtold argues that: "Working with women students who are veterans ideally involves an understanding of both gender identity issues and the transitions associated with moving

from the role of active military member to that of a civilian college student.”¹³

She goes further to say that “understanding the specific issues associated with female veterans requires student affairs personnel to be aware of the multiple dimensions of identity development.”¹⁴

The challenge therefore for us as academic facilitators and administrators, is to be able to differentiate the specific needs of women student veterans and being sensitive to their lived experiences. This should be done without patronising them, or doing so in a condescending manner.

Programme Director, it is my hope that these observations, drawn from those jurisdictions which have had many years of experimentations with the integration of veterans into the higher education system, will assist and equip us as we embark on this journey.

¹³ Baechtold, M (2009) Meeting the Needs of Women Veterans. *New Directions for Student Services*, Issue 126 (Summer 2009), pp 35-43

¹⁴ Ibid

It is my hope also that we will exert ourselves as academic facilitators and administrators and put in every effort into making sure that our veterans receive the best service that we can offer.

I would like to equally challenge the Department and the veterans themselves to commit to working very hard, knowing that the standards of all the programmes on offer are quite high.

I am saying this with my eye on the need to have a high throughput rate. As the university we commit to ensuring high throughput rates. Equally, the veterans must commit to work hard to achieve that.

The Department is investing a lot of money into the initiative. Let us spend these public funds well, and respect the men and women of our country who pay their taxes so that we may offer and receive quality higher education.

With these many words I once again wish to welcome all of you, Minister Dlodlo and Deputy Minister Makwetla, Generals and Senior Managers, Senior Officers and all our Veterans.

My colleagues, thanks for the hard work.

You are all welcome!