

Tulane University forms veteran affinity group for faculty, staff members

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Military veterans turned Tulane faculty and staff members (left to right) David Bankston, Jeremy Brewer, Rebecca Rouse and Michael Wallace were the driving force behind the formation of the new Tulane Veterans Faculty and Staff Affinity Group. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Tulane University has long been a destination school for veterans, either as students or in professional roles as faculty or staff members. This fall, the university has taken crucial steps to further enhance its support of veterans by establishing a pair of new groups, including the Tulane Veterans Faculty and Staff Affinity Group.

One of the central missions of the new faculty and staff group will be to assist and support the recently formed Tulane Student Veterans of America (Tulane SVA) chapter, which will serve as a central space for students with military backgrounds.

The idea for a veterans faculty and staff group came up during a meeting last February between Michael Wallace, a Navy veteran and director of the School of Professional Advancement's (SoPA) Emergency and Security Studies Program, David Bankston, an Army veteran and director of community and veteran engagement for the Tulane University Center for Brain Health (TUCBH) and Jeremy Brewer, a veteran of the Marine Corps and clinical navigator for the TUCBH.

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- Michael Wallace

The trio enlisted the help of Rebecca Rouse, an Army veteran and associate program director of SoPA's Emergency and Security Studies Program, and worked with Anneliese Singh, associate provost for faculty development and diversity/chief diversity officer, to turn the idea into a reality.

"The Tulane Veterans Faculty and Staff Affinity Group is an important one because the leaders - Mike Wallace, Becky Rouse and David Bankston - are creating a more formal space for Tulane employees who are veterans to gather and connect in deep and meaningful ways," said Singh. "These leaders are committed not only to building community with one another as veterans, faculty and staff, but they have also been very active in supporting our student veterans in founding the new Tulane Student Veterans Association Chapter."

"I'm excited and very grateful to Tulane for the support of our veteran faculty and staff members with this new affinity group," said Bankston. "This is an opportunity for people like Becky, Mike and me, and all the student veterans, to continue to help other veterans succeed. Our goal is to make Tulane the best place it can be for veterans, and we thought organizing a faculty and staff group for veterans would be a good first step."

Wallace, Bankston and Rouse are the tri-chairs of the new faculty and staff group. The first official gathering took place on Veterans Day 2021 at the Navy Building.

“What veterans bring to the classroom is that life experience that introduces them to what their futures may be engaged in, whether it’s as a student or a member of the faculty or staff,” said Rouse. “Anneliese has been an amazing force of nature, if you will, with the idea for this group and program manager Shelby Norman truly brought the vision to life. They didn’t need to be convinced that this group was sort of left out of many conversations. Both understood instantly and helped make the formation of this group a reality.”

In addition to student and employee veterans, Tulane also has a rich and proud history of supporting three Reserve Officers Training Corps, including the Air Force, Army and Navy, founded between 1938 and 1950.

“Tulane is a very welcoming place for veterans, and our group’s mission is to educate, advocate and serve as an important resource for veteran students, faculty and staff,” said Wallace. “The military is probably the most diverse organization in the country, and the best support system for veterans seems to be other veterans. Veterans have proven they are bright, motivated, talented and successful in all aspects of higher education. They have unique world experience and leadership abilities that are beneficial to everyone, whether they are students or faculty or staff members.”

The new group’s focus will be to educate and advocate for all veterans on campus, including students, and create an atmosphere where veterans can have companionable experiences. The group will work to improve the overall veteran experience on campus and support and assist the university in veteran-related messaging.

One of the group’s ultimate goals is to acquire a physical space for all veterans on campus to meet and help one another, whether it’s information on Veterans Affairs resources, a small library of donated textbooks or information on mental health, healthcare, academics or tutoring. A new center would also allow the group to host open houses, events or initiatives.

“Honestly, I think it is worthwhile for any organization to have a veteran affinity group,” said Brewer. “Affinity groups are a way to support the veterans in an organization and harness those veterans’ experience, leadership and values. At

Tulane, there are veterans at all levels: faculty, staff, supporters/donors and students and while I think it is incumbent upon us to support these veterans, the university has much to gain by tapping into the asset that is the military veteran.”

For more information on the new Tulane Veterans Faculty and Staff Affinity Group, please contact: tuveterans@tulane.edu.