Your next deployment is where you want to be.
There is no higher honor than serving this country...except serving those who serve this country.

As the Director of Veterans Affairs, I have the privilege of interacting with men and women of honor every day, and I learn more from their stories—challenges and triumphs—than I could ever teach them. The 350+ military-connected students at Governors State University continually inspire and inform my efforts to advance education and services for our honored Veterans. I carry this inspiration into my role as co-chair of Illinois Joining Forces, as we advocate for over 670,000 military personnel in the State of Illinois.

That is why this magazine, our first ever, is called Honored. I cannot think of a better, stronger word to attach to these men and women. They are the best of the best, and Governors State University is proud to be named among the “Best of the Best” for serving them in the education arena, five years running (U.S. Veterans Magazine).

We are proud of the quality of education they receive—and where it takes them. Honored highlights a few of our heroes who have been recognized for their excellence—a national Air Force ROTC Scholarship winner (Vincent Senese) and Karen Grgurich, whose computer skills earned her a scholarship from Google. It also highlights how students can use federal and state military education benefits and their military experience to benefit their future—to save time and money.

We are fortunate to partner with some of the best corporations and non-profits in the area. They assist our military-connected students in preparing for and finding employment (thank you, Advocate Health Care) and allow us to offer them a quality, dedicated space to connect with fellow students in our Veterans Resource Center (thank you, Comcast).

We are also proud of the way our veteran friends and supporters wear their civilian clothes, figuratively of course, using their experience post-deployment to help their fellow Veterans and to do big things (A Donor’s Ready Impact).

Lastly, we have a very special announcement: We are now a participating partner of both Air Force and Army ROTC, so students can train to lead policy in these two branches. As you will see in these pages, Governors State University produces leaders in spades.

We are excited for you to see why we are so honored you have chosen us to be your home for military-connected education.

Kevin Smith
Director, Veterans Affairs
Cadet Vincent Senese’s path was clear from day one of Air Force Junior ROTC (JROTC) at Lincoln-Way Central High School in New Lenox. He loved everything about it, from the discipline and rigor to the pageantry and professionalism. So, when he enrolled at Governors State University (GSU) for his bachelor’s degree, he inquired about the Air Force ROTC program. GSU is a cross-town school in partnership with Illinois Institute of Technology.

“I knew I wanted to be an OSI Agent or a Security Forces Officer, and Air Force ROTC training not only prepares you with leadership skills but helps you hone your leadership style,” Cadet Senese shared. Then, he learned about the national Air Force ROTC scholarship opportunity—and won it.

Vincent Senese

Director of Operations Jason Sterr, Major, USAF shared, “Cadet Vincent Senese has been an exemplary student and prospective Officer from his first day in our program. His professionalism, dedication, and enthusiasm are as contagious among the cadets as they are to our staff. We know that in the near future Cadet Senese will not only be a wonderful representative of Governors State University, but an exceptional representative of our nation’s leaders.”

Now in his junior year at GSU in Criminal Justice—a field that has always intrigued him since his father joined the IL State Police force twenty years ago—Senese thinks he has found his leadership niche.
After field training at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, AL, he says that “it’s about knowing when to flip the switch.” He says that “he provides feedback, tips to improve and shares from personal experience on how to progress in the Air Force,” but then expects there to be some “application of learning.”

This balance, combined with his Criminal Justice degree, he hopes will give him a leg up in the Air Force. “Criminal Justice is giving me a greater understanding of legal processes and the legal system, so I will be better able to understand the military legal system.” He describes the faculty and teaching style at GSU as accessible. “I am overly impressed with how faculty focus on applied knowledge vs. just theory. Applied knowledge is easier to grasp and I’m better able to understand how this impacts that.”

That is what makes for “best of the best” leadership; coaching + real-world application.

www.govst.edu/veterans
Credit is the last thing Kevin Smith and most service men and women think about. In fact, there is a special shared quality by those who serve in our collective forces—allegiance to a cause above and beyond self. Social psychologists study the military as its own ecosystem; a place where credit is replaced with camaraderie and the greater good is dependent on the steadfastness of the individual. As such, service is a mindset shared by all who wear the uniform.

*It is also a valuable commodity.*
In the post-deployment world of opportunity, service can turn into cost savings for life-altering education pursuits. Mr. Smith, the Director of Veterans Affairs at Governors State University (GSU) knows this first-hand. He’s lived it—both in the military as well as in the twenty plus years he worked in the corporate world. Whether listening to customer needs during his days at Aflac, performing training for a General Motors Dealer Group, or in his role as a certified instructor for the military while serving in the Coast Guard; Kevin is a model of service in action. Today, he humbly serves over 350 military-connected students, ensuring seamless transitions from military to civilian education. He says, “I’m like the conductor to many wonderful musicians. It’s not me who makes them successful; I simply guide them.” He is also a Governors State University alumnus.

Thanks to prior learning assessment, a process of evaluating competencies and skills mastered, not just experienced, Mr. Smith was able to transfer 78 credit hours towards a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (IDSS). This included thirty credits from Joliet Junior College, credits from his military Joint Service transcript (JST), and three credits from taking a portfolio writing class. He also had a surprise from way back in 1981, thanks to a former military admissions advisor at GSU. He had earned six credits from a Dantes exam (DSST) for his fluency in Algebra when in the Coast Guard! All he had to do was pay $15 to get those six credits transferred. Today, those six credits would cost $1878 at $313 per credit hour for an Illinois or Indiana resident.

*Does Kevin Smith have any regrets? “I should have done more with the portfolio option.” he acknowledges.*

**Prior Learning Experience**

**IDSS – 3300 Writing a Prior Learning Portfolio** provides experience in analyzing, writing, assembling, and documenting activities that can be assessed by faculty for possible college credit if learning outcomes are met. With over twenty years of sales, training and customer service under his belt, Mr. Smith likely could have possibly earned an additional 9–15 credits.

Visit [http://www.govst.edu/PLA](http://www.govst.edu/PLA) to learn more.
GSU Recruits to Join THE FIRE BATTALION

The Army Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), as it exists today, began with President Wilson signing the National Defense Act of 1916. The Chicago ROTC Fire Battalion was established in 1947. In 1996, the Fire Battalion became the host ROTC unit for all of the Chicago area, including programs at UIC, Robert Morris University, Roosevelt University, Columbia College, Illinois Institute of Technology, University of Chicago, Chicago State University, Indiana University Northwest, and Purdue Northwest...and now Governors State University. Army ROTC is the largest officer-producing organization within the American military, having commissioned more than half a million second lieutenants since its inception.

Approximately 25 cadets go through this program annually. Governors State University is looking to add to these numbers.
Meet our New Army ROTC Instructor:
CPT Marcell D. Jackson, Logistics Corps,
U.S. Army

CPT Jackson has numerous military accolades including the Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medals with two oak leaf clusters, Army Achievement Medals with three oak leaf clusters, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Ribbon, Iraq Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and more.

Another option to join the leadership ranks at the start of your military career is to enroll at a traditional college or university with a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, as Governors State University now offers. This option gives recruits the chance to be involved in policy-making for the U.S. Army—the enlisted cadets enforce policy—a distinction many are not aware of.

Jackson found his way to the Army ROTC here in his hometown as a means of giving back to the U.S. Army—to marshal the next generation of leaders. Young Army Officers are typically responsible for hundreds of soldiers and millions of dollars in equipment; this kind of management experience can be very attractive for post-Army employers.

“I am honored to have obtained this assignment back in the Chicagoland area. I am an advocate for young adults being exposed to something greater than themselves, and traveling the world while doing it. In my 11-year career I have found the more you travel the globe, the less of an absolutist you become.”

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A DONOR’S READY IMPACT

Ready is a word that could sum up Robert W. Eickhoff’s life perspective. A Vietnam era veteran, Eickhoff served with the U.S. Army’s legendary 82nd Airborne as a paratrooper. To this day, these troops remain a strategic reserve always ready for a quick, effective deployment.

If anyone understood the impact of a swift, calculated rescue effort, he did. A parallel can be drawn to the impact he has made in his civilian life.

 Everywhere Eickhoff invests his time, there is a tangible need met – a turnaround, profit, or personal achievement. Whether in his 33 years in the newspaper industry (at The Chicago Tribune, Orlando Sentinel, and Atlanta-Journal Constitution, where his circulation and operations team contributed $100 million to the paper’s operating profit), or as President and Owner of Design Concepts of North Atlanta and Certa-Pro Painters; his experience as a veteran has served him well.

He is known as an effective communicator, leader of people, change agent and strategic thinker. At GSU, we would add “ready to rescue” to his resume.
Mr. Eickhoff, a Chicago Heights native, started his relationship with GSU in 1980, when he began his MBA program. “Reflecting back, I realize that my career and life changed the most after receiving my degree from GSU,” Eickhoff told GSU Foundation CEO Will Davis.

Now, almost thirty years later, he is eager to give back to his fellow veterans and his alma-mater—in a way that offers immediate, tangible and tactical support.

So, an Emergency Fund is being established in his name to support GSU student veterans with immediate needs, such as books, gas cards, and fees. His motivation to help student veterans is personal—remembering days when he was making ends meet living in married student housing at Northern Illinois University (where he also generously supported veteran’s initiatives). He is also willing to make an investment with his time connecting with students—a prospective relationship that GSU is excited about.

“For more information, visit http://www.govst.edu/vrc_student_info/.

“Imagine what it will be like for our student veterans to hear from a former member of the 82nd Airborne, who is also an accomplished businessman and entrepreneur,” Kevin Smith, Director of Veterans Affairs said. “We’re ready for that.”

Did you Know?
To allow the U.S. to project force quickly anywhere in the world, one of the brigade combat teams of the 82nd Airborne functions as the “ready brigade” prepared to deploy wherever needed.
~Tactical-life.com

Investment in Students
Advocate Health Care has a history of supporting veteran student success through internships in their south suburban region. Now 70,000 employees strong, Advocate Christ, South Suburban, and Trinity Hospitals have united under Advocate Aurora Health. Several of their interns become full-time employees. One that stands out is veteran Santana Gills, who received her bachelor’s in Health Administration from GSU (2016).

Cristy Gallegos, MHA, CPCS, Regional Manager, Business Development, recalls Santana’s time as an intern, “She was very disciplined in her behavior, she was punctual, and excelled in time management skills by completing tasks on time (if not beforehand).

Santana had served in the U.S. Army from 2008-2012 as an Automated Logistics Specialist, and found her deployments in Kuwait City and Iraq to be eye-opening for her future career direction. She knew that health care was her passion, but behind-the-scenes work suited her best.

Santana is now celebrating her third anniversary at Advocate Health Care, and is happily working in the corporate credentialing office.
Comcast CARES ABOUT VETERANS

The Veterans Resource Center opened in October 2018, to offer a dedicated space for our student veterans to study, share their experiences, learn about benefits and meet with military personnel.

We extend a big thank you to Comcast for its generous contribution to the space to outfit it with up-to-date technology, including two computers, a printer and video conferencing hardware. Comcast Veterans initiatives extend beyond technology support. For more information go to our web site, https://corporate.comcast.com/values/military.
The announcement from Google on its 2019 scholarship recipients read, “Here at Google, we recognize the challenges faced by students from historically underrepresented groups in the tech industry. We strive to make education more accessible by creating programs to engage students around the world. As part of our initiatives focused on expanding diversity, we offer academic scholarships and trips to Google offices to learn more about our company and culture, network with a community of fellow scholars, and participate in professional development opportunities.”

Google Picks GSU Alumnus for $10,000 SCHOLARSHIP
Karen Grgurich was one of them. A veteran student who received her bachelor’s in Information Technology from GSU in 2018, Karen was one of eight recipients awarded the Google Student Veterans of America (SVA) Scholarship (77 scholarships in total were awarded in various categories). Now attending DePaul University for her Master’s degree in Cybersecurity, Karen is proud of her start in IT at GSU.

“I transferred to GSU from U of I Champaign, where I was studying accounting, and the summer after found the Cyber Defense Student Club ran by Steve Hyzny and Richard Manprisio,” Karen shared. “Hyzny would help us enter into competitions like on social engineering and Manprisio helped me get my A+ Certification. They even ran a Net + workshop that we could come back to as alumni, which was really helpful.”

Big things are happening for Karen. Aside from winning the scholarship and being in grad school, she recently got engaged and this summer went to Google Cloud headquarters.

In addition to the monetary award, Karen was invited to attend the Google Scholar’s Retreat in Santa Clara, California. There, she connected with fellow student veterans, aspiring computer scientists and Google staff, while touring the Google campus and California sights for three days.

“Oh my gosh! It was amazing. Everyone was so nice, and there are lots of opportunities they shared with us for veterans to get hired…in software engineering and they are doing a lot with artificial intelligence (AI). Lots of opportunities for women and first-generation students—a perfect fit for Governors State University.”

When it comes to helping other student veterans, Karen does not hesitate.

www.govst.edu/veterans