The goal of the ISCOPES VHP Learning Community is to increase awareness of the VHP in the GW community and among our friends and families.

BACKGROUND

The Veteran’s History Project seeks to help Veterans cope and deal with the symptoms of a difficult past, and improve access to health care services, mandatory suicide prevention training, and other preventative efforts. Suicide has been strongly correlated with mental health in previous studies. Furthermore, suicide rates among military members are on the rise, with an increase in suicides by active soldiers of 15 percent in 2012. Suicide has been strongly correlated with mental health in previous studies. In addition, several reports reflect a higher incidence of depression, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among our Veterans.

PROGRESS

1.  The Veteran’s History Project (VHP) enables Veterans to share their stories through their own voices, and documents these stories in the Library of Congress to be remembered.
2.  Through conducting interviews with Veterans, the ISCOPES VHP Learning Community was able to contribute to this goal, and successfully add pieces of history from those Veterans whom we had the privilege to interview.
3.  The public screening of Honor Flight not only promoted the message and purpose of the project, but was also an opportunity to hear from the film’s Director, Dan Hayes, as well as the Director of the VHP at the Library of Congress, Bob Patrick.
4.  Members of ISCOPES VHP Learning Community were able to meet Bob at the beginning of our year with ISCOPES at the Library of Congress where we initially learned about the project.
5.  The VHP Learning Community was able to visit with and celebrate birthdays of Veterans at the VA Medical Center twice, as well as thank them for their service.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Veteran’s History Project is necessary to improve the mental health of our country’s vets. An alarming statistic is that a US military veteran commits suicide every 60 minutes, on average. Furthermore, suicide rates among vets are on the rise, with an increase in suicides by active soldiers of 15 percent in 2012. Suicide has been strongly correlated with mental health in previous studies. In addition, several reports reflect a higher incidence of depression, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among our Veterans. Moreover, social conditions that military personnel are faced with contribute to their increasingly dire outlook on life. As of September 2012, more than 25,000 veterans were reportedly living on the street, at risk of losing their homes, or living in temporary housing. Out of 1.5 million in danger of becoming homeless, only 22,000 were receiving assistance from the VA. Despite universal access to health care services, mandatory suicide prevention training, and other preventative efforts, suicide has still become one of the leading causes of death in the US military in recent years.

Veteran Interviews

• A team member volunteered to take charge for each design project after the collaborative session. Group meeting was used to share sample designs and the consensus based on the team was used.

Handmade Holiday Cards

• Reserved a classroom at RSA Hall and used all supplies from the office to make cards.
• The completed cards were sent out the holidays.

Group Meetings

• Held a double pool (very useful) to figure out the best days and times to meet. It worked out that our meeting days were Monday’s mid-afternoon.
• This time was used to collaborate on strategies, logistics and planning of the various activities hosted by the VHP Learning Community.

Honor Flight Screening Event

• A group of students set up the room with the name cards for the event which included; room reservation, flyer making, food & venue planning.
• Methods used for promotion of this event included: flyers, multiple emails via listservs and personal networks, and Facebook.
• Be sure to confirm and reconfirm media availability or reserved rooms to avoid any confusion.

Veteran Birthdays

• Coordinated with the VA to get the dates of birthdays and planned accordingly.
• Selected availability of team members and utilized available spots.
• The calendar consists of dates and days to take veteran celebrations (note: avoid sugar products as some of the vets are diabetic).
• Organized transportation (coordinate our rides and go as a group as the VA can be a little confusing to navigate.)
• After early in the day we were able to individually spread out to dialogue with them, we also had dance parties.

INTERPROFESSIONAL TEAM LEARNING

1. Get to know your teammates. Your VHP teammates may have similar interests or classes to you beyond the VHP and ISCOPES.
2. Be ready to listen. The people that you serve through the VHP have names, have family conflict, and have a history similar or distinct from yours. Be ready to enact cultural humility or be culturally responsive. You are the first person that veterans have interviewed with; many of the veterans interviewed have never spoken with their families, friends or anyone about their service experiences. Most importantly: be respectful to the population you serve and your teammates.
3. It’s okay to ask for help. Difficulties arise throughout the semester and scheduling conflicts come up. Be prepared to change times, if necessary. Call upon on your VHP teammates or the ISCOPES staff and leaders if you need help. You should be prepared to return the favor.
4. Technology is your friend but personal communication is better. Use social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), Google groups and other phone applications (e.g., WhatsApp, GroupMe) to communicate with your Learning Community, the community that you serve and others. Personal communication will always remain most effective. Be prepared to meet with your Learning Community, attend large ISCOPES events and engage in activities that help the community that you serve.
5. You learn along the way. Build upon the foundation that has already been established. Realize that each new group brings a new set of solutions, ideas and structure to the VHP. The VHP is a relatively new concept, so what may have been applicable last year may not work for VHP next year.

WITH THANKS

It has been an honor serving as ISCOPES first Veteran’s History Project learning community, and we are grateful for your hard work and dedication. Thank you to our leaders, Paul, Cameron, Angie, Donna, and Jay, for your efforts and guidance during this year. Immense thanks to Bob Patrick and the Library of Congress, for introducing the Veteran’s History Project and honoring our deserving veterans; because of you, their stories will not be forgotten.

To the veterans who gave interviews for the Veteran’s History Project, thank you for sharing your pieces of history with us. It was a privilege having Dan Hayes, the director of “Honor Flight,” attend our screening. Thank you for sharing the story of your fellow veterans and the sacrifices they made. It was important for us to hear your personal experiences and stories as well as the story of your classmates and others.

Thank you to everyone who partook in our events and community service efforts. To the veterans who gave interviews for the Veteran’s History Project, thank you for sharing your pieces of history with us. Thank you to everyone who partook in our events and community service efforts.

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