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 (VHP) enables Veterans to share their personal accounts of American armed forces service with the country and the world. The VHP was established in 2000 by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to collect personal accounts of American armed forces veterans to preserve for future generations. These stories, collected in audio or video format, are an integral part of American history. Multiple state chapters have been established since its creation, and veterans from World Wars I and II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War, and Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts have voluntarily been interviewed by Veteran’s History Project volunteers. Besides participating in the Veteran’s History Project, our team is also privileged to celebrate the monthly birthdays of our elderly Veterans at the Washington D.C. VA Medical Center. We also share the holidays with the troops abroad by making cards for the annual Red Cross holiday card collection event. In the future, we hope to build a stronger relationship between the student veterans at GW and ISCOPES VHP.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The Veteran’s History Project is necessary to improve the mental health of our country’s veterans. An alarming statistic is that a US military veteran commits suicide every 60 minutes, on average. Furthermore, suicide rates among veterans 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. The Veteran’s History Project seeks to help Veterans cope with their prior experiences in service while allowing their story to be archived and appreciated by generations of US citizens in the future. The power of storytelling and value of empathy can go a long way toward improving mental health.

**REFERENCES**


**PROGRESS**

- 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.
- 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.
- The public screening of Honor Flight not only promoted the message and purpose of our 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Measuring our success should be focused on raising awareness of VHP as a mission that everyone can be involved in, which is overall what the VHP Learning Community achieved.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

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.
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.

**VETERAN INTERVIEW**

- Haley Brightman, Regina DeSantis, Cristal Magana, Linda Nguye, Onize Oniwon, Matt Shupler, Patrick Zornow

**WITH THANKS**

It has been an honor serving as ISCOPES’ first Veteran’s History Project learning community, and we are grateful for the support and encouragement we received from Bob Patrick and the ISCOPES/VA staff.

Honor Flight was a wonderful event with all of our friends and families, and it was a joy to see so many people come together to support our veterans, past and present. Your selfless sacrifice has held the present and built the future. Thank you so much.