

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

## BACKGROUND

The [Veterans History Project](#) is an initiative set forth 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, conducted 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 Veterans History Project volunteers. Besides participating in the Veterans History Project, our team is also privileged to celebrate the monthly birthdays of our elderly Vets 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 ISCOPE S VHP.



## 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 ISCOPE S 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 this 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 ISCOPE S VHP Learning Community were able to meet Bob at the beginning of our year with ISCOPE S 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 become involved in, which is overall what the VHP Learning Community achieved.

## INTERPROFESSIONAL TEAM LEARNING

1. Get to know your teammates. Your VHP teammates may have similar interests or classes to you beyond the VHP and ISCOPE S.
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 ISCOPE S 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 ISCOPE S 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 community, so what may have been applicable last year may not work for VHP next year.

## 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 80 minutes, on average<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, suicide rates among vets are on the rise, with an increase in suicides by active soldiers of 15 percent in 2012<sup>1</sup>. Suicide has been strongly correlated with mental health in previous studies<sup>2</sup> In addition, several reports reflect a higher incidence of depression, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among our Veterans<sup>3</sup>. 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<sup>1</sup>. Out of 1.5 million in danger of becoming homeless, only 22,000 were receiving assistance from the VA<sup>1</sup>. 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<sup>2</sup>. 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:  
 1. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/marked-increase-in-us-military-suicides/5345552>  
 2. <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1724276>  
 3. <http://www.vsws.org/en/articles/2013/08/09/suic-a09.html>



### Veteran Interviews

- Email correspondence was used to set-up a time and date and also send necessary pre-interview forms in preparation for the interview day with the veteran.
- Two members participated in each interview (one person to man the video camera while the other conducts the interview).
- Videos were shared on the VHP site among members to also help aid other interviews by other members.



### Website Launch

- Discussed template, design and content for both the website
- A team member volunteered to take charge for each design project after the collaborative session.
- Google Doc was used to share sample designs and the consensus based on the team was used.

### Veteran Birthdays

- Corresponded with the VA to get the dates of birthdays and planned accordingly.
- Solicited availabilities of team members and utilized available members.
- Bought cake, cookies, drinks and veggie dips to take to veteran celebration (note: avoid sugar products as some of the vets are diabetic).
- Organized transportation (coordinate car rides and go as a group as the VA can be a little confusing to navigate.)
- Arrived early to set-up, served the veterans and also individually spread-out to dialogue with them; we also had dance parties.

### Handmade Holiday Cards

- Reserved a classroom at Ross Hall and used the supplies from the office to make cards.
- The completed cards were sent out for the holidays.

### Group Meetings

- Made a doodle 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

- Each member took lead on various tasks for the event which included: room reservation, flyer design, food & event promotion.
- Methods used for promotion of this event include: flyers, multiple emails via listservs and personal networks, and Facebook.
- Be sure to confirm and reconfirm media availabilities at reserved rooms to avoid any confusion.
- Best place for food for event: Costco—we purchased sandwich platters, fruit platters, veggie platters, salads under a hundred dollars.

## WITH THANKS

It has been an honor serving as ISCOPE S' first Veteran's History Project learning community, and we are grateful for having had this experience. Thank you to our leaders, Paul, Cameron, Angie, Donna, and Jay, for your effort and guidance during this year.

Innumerable thanks to Bob Patrick and the Library of Congress, for launching the Veteran's History Project and honoring our deserving veterans; because of you, their stories will not be forgotten.

We are grateful to the staff of the VA Medical Center for allowing us to share your veterans' special days and for the care and dignity in which they carry out their duties.

It was a privilege having Dan Hayes, the director of "Honor Flight," attend our screening. Thank you for sharing the story with us.

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.

Last but not least, we express our deepest, most sincere gratitude for our nation's veterans, past and present. Your embodiment of bravery and honor built this country; your selfless sacrifices hold the present and build the future. Thank you so much.

