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Review of "An Instructor's Guide to Teaching Military Students: Simple Steps to Integrate the Military Learner into your Classroom" by Suzane L. Bricker

James R. Cantafio

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Suzane L. Bricker. *An Instructor's Guide to Teaching Military Students: Simple Steps to Integrate the Military Learner into your Classroom*. New York and London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. Pp. 155.

Motivation and engagement can serve as important factors in determining success or failure for students. When it comes to addressing student needs, a logical question is whether all students are the same. How does student background and experience influence the learning experience? Are certain populations within the greater society different compared with others in terms of their ability to integrate within the post-secondary educational experience? What if students are current or former military members? Does that fact make a difference? Suzane Bricker's *An Instructor's Guide to Teaching Military Students* addresses these very questions. Bricker argues that, due to general and shared experiences, students who are serving or have served in the military have different needs compared with the traditional student and these needs have changed over time. The author suggests that if college and university professors want to help ensure student success, they need to better understand military culture, experiences, and approaches to learning.

This informative book serves as a valuable reference for understanding the unique needs and attributes associated with the military student. The book presents a structured framework that may serve as a guideline to understanding military identify and its impact on the learning experience. For instance, the author explains how students serving in the army or navy may have a different approach to learning compared to those serving in the air force as each element or branch of service teaches differently. This text also provides insight into the values, beliefs, and attitudes associated with military culture and their impacts on traditional classroom and distance learning environments. Bricker presents logical and practical steps to best integrate, motivate and engage current military members and veterans in the classroom.

Presented in fourteen chapters, the book covers a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities of teaching current and former serving members of the American Armed Forces. Each chapter is presented as an objective and then is further broken down into tasks. This highly structured format is supposed to reflect military order and discipline by presenting the material in a logical,

sequential flow. Individual chapters cover topics such as defining the military student, designing curriculum, challenges and barriers to learning, and the needs of online learners within the context of each of the four main branches of the United States military. Unfortunately, there is no summary chapter to summarise key arguments at the close of the book. Adding a summary chapter would have provided an opportunity for the author to solidify the main argument that the needs of military students are different compared with the traditional student. However, the book concludes with a chapter presenting statements by select subject matter experts concerning their opinions on the past, present, and future state of education within the military context.

From an historical perspective, Bricker presents a strong case for defining how military learning and the military student have changed over the last century. In the forward of the book, the author explains how education, including access to education, has progressed over the years. Following the close of the First World War, veterans marched and gathered in Washington, D.C. to demand financial and educational support to reintegrate into general society. Learning from the experiences of the First World War, the United States government recognised the importance of providing access to education as a means of transition from military to civilian life. Consequently, during the Second World War, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, or the *GI Bill of Rights*, came into effect. This important piece of legislation paved the way towards providing a whole generation of veterans with educational opportunities needed to become productive citizens. In general, the *GI Bill of Rights* provided a policy and framework for military members to seek financial support to pursue education during and upon release from military service. Specifically, the legislation provided an opportunity for advancement, retention, and motivation for serving and former military members. Accordingly, both former service members and the American economy benefitted from this investment in education. Presently, current and former members of the military continue to receive government financial incentives and benefits to pursue education.

Bricker effectively examines how the military student is different compared with the traditional student from a number of perspectives. First, the military student may have different expectations when it comes to learning, authority and direction. For instance, the military student may present their views in a direct, concise, and focused

approach. Consequently, this approach or attitude may present challenges for "fitting in" with other non-military students who may be more passive (p. 16). Second, military students may be hesitant to participate in group discussions. Fear of judgment regarding their current or past engagement in controversial combat or deployed operations may prevent the military student from offering opinions or reasoned arguments in group settings. This can lead to challenges for the military student in terms of acceptance and inclusion. Finally, the military student may have more life experience and practical skills as a result of specialised training compared with other students. The uniqueness associated with the military culture and environment can contribute to diversity in both virtual and traditional classroom settings. Bricker alludes throughout the book to the importance of strong communication between student and professor to overcome the challenges associated with teaching military students.

Although the book provides some sage advice to teaching professionals on how to best incorporate current and former military members into the classroom, the book is written from a very specific vantage point. It would appear that the word "American" is missing in the title of the book and the book would be more aptly titled *An Instructor's Guide to Teaching American Military Students*. While generalities may be drawn from the book on how the American military environment and experience have shaped and continue to shape the learning experience, the book misses an opportunity to include alternative perspectives, cultures, and military experiences. For instance, the stereotypes of soldiers and officers presented in the book only reflect American history, values, and beliefs, and not necessarily those of other societies and militaries. Supporting references are largely drawn from American sources, including U.S.-based government departments, veterans groups, academic institutions, and public organisations. Consequently, this presents a challenge in applying the recommendations presented in the book towards other militaries, including Canadian.

Views towards education and the military have evolved over time. From the American and historical perspectives, access to education has served as a vehicle to progress current serving military members and to assist veterans with the transition from military to civilian life. Bricker does achieve the aim of recognising the military student as being different from the traditional student because of their common military identity. For the professional instructor, teacher, or

curriculum designer, this book serves as a good introduction, if not a foundation, for better understanding the general needs of the military learner, provided that the reader is aware that it is directed towards an American audience.

JAMES R. CANTAFIO, INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER