

# Re-Imagining Support Services for Military Related Students using Veteran Critical Theory (VCT)

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# VMS Mission

**Veterans and Military Services (VMS)** at UCSB provides comprehensive support to UCSB's military-related student community. As the military community's first-stop and strongest advocate, VMS promotes a positive educational experience for military-related students, supports their transition to and through the academic community, and provides access to training, services, and resources to facilitate degree completion and student success.

# Overview

- *How Did We Get Here?* Reviewing the Last Decade
- Introducing Veteran Critical Theory
- *What's Next?* Critical Examination and Assessment



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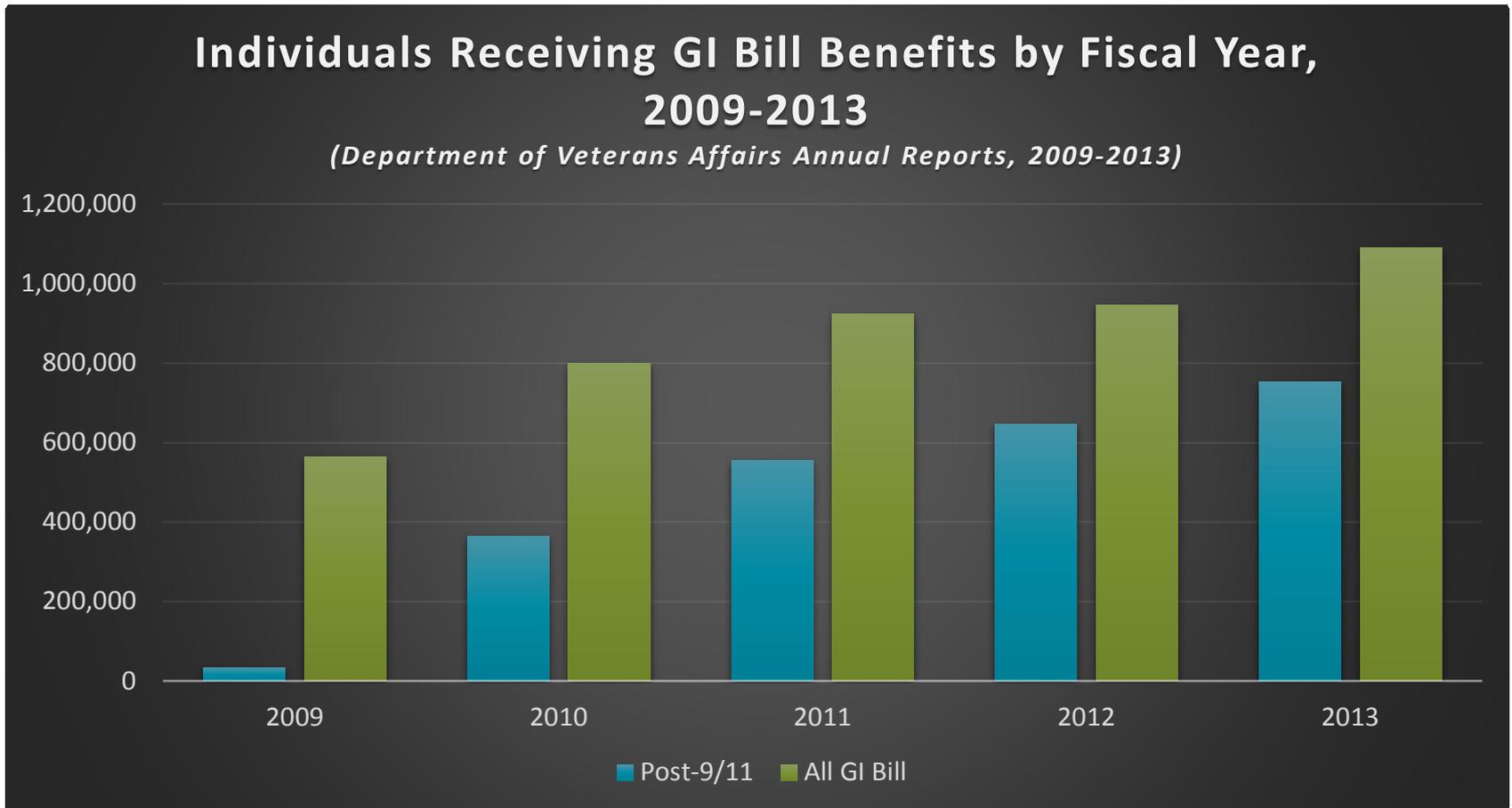
# *How Did We Get Here?* Reviewing the Last Decade

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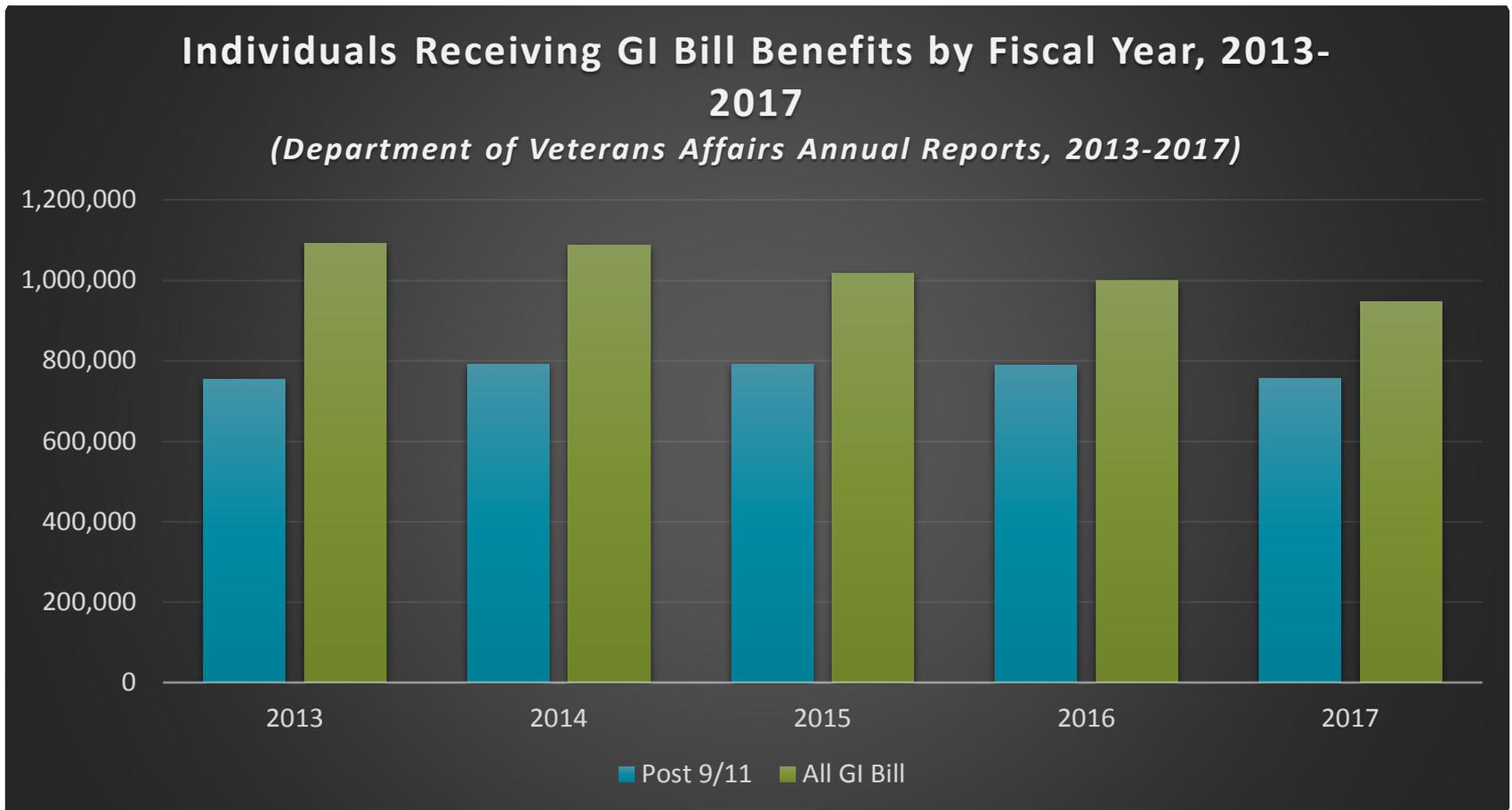
# How Did We Get Here?

- 1944-Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944
- Made permanent in 1984
- Updated again in 2009 with Post-9/11 GI Bill
  - ...and again in 2017 with "Forever GI Bill"
- In FY-2009, 34,393 individuals used Post-9/11 benefits

# Where We Started...



# ...and Where We're Headed



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# Why the (Beginning of) Decline?

- Natural Attrition

- Graduation
- Transfer
- Find employment/Leave for employment
- Exhaust benefits

- Implications

- Practices in 2009 were invalid in 2012, and are more invalid today
- “If university administrators continue to myopically read a checklist of veteran services as a blueprint for student veteran success, student veterans will eventually become an institutional concern second to the establishment, funding, and marketing of veteran services and programs” (Phillips and Lincoln, 2017).

# Introducing Veteran Critical Theory (VCT)

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# Veteran Critical Theory (Phillips and Lincoln, 2017)

- Created by Glenn Phillips in 2017
- Eleven tenets
- Three specific goals:
  - Questioning Status Quo
  - Make an Immediate Impact
  - Understand Issues from Different Perspectives

# Applicable Tenets of VCT

## Higher Education privileges civilians over veterans

- Civilian structure vs. Military structure
- How many veterans are *true* policy makers? Faculty?
- What student is the focus of recruiting and admissions?
- Who do policies support?

## Student veterans can be marginalized/experience microaggressions

- Being forced to tell “their story”
- Assuming “brokenness”
- Elevating individual sense of importance
- Assuming the need for constant help
- Segregating from campus community

# Applicable Tenets of VCT

Constructs and measures of civilian education may be biased against student veterans (“deficit thinking”)

- Are ‘deficits’ really deficiencies?
- **Veterans are “written” by civilians, often as deviant characters.**
  - ‘Crazy veteran’ stereotype

Student veterans are most appropriately positioned to inform decisions that affect them

- Is your SVA at the table when policies or decisions are made:
  - *At your institution?*
  - *At your military center?*
  - *About their club?*

# Applicable Tenets of VCT

Efforts to “serve veterans” can be more of a service to civilian interests

- How do we know our services are effective to our students?
- How does what our institutions want align with what our population wants?
- Which takes the higher priority, and which should?

Military values of respect, honor, and trust can be overtly AND covertly assaulted on campus

- How is our “respect for service” demonstrated in policy?
- Do our policies and procedures undermine these values?

# *What's Next?* Critical Examination and Assessment

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# Critical Examination

## Case Studies

- Read the case study
- Consider VCT goals and tenets

## Goals of VCT

- Questioning Status Quo
- Make an Immediate Impact
- Understand Issues from Different Perspectives

## Tenets of VCT

- Higher education privileges civilians over veterans
- Student veterans can be marginalized/experience microaggressions
- Constructs and measures of civilian education may be biased against student veterans (“deficit thinking”)
- Veterans are “written” by civilians, often as deviant characters
- Student veterans are most appropriately positioned to inform decisions that affect them
- Efforts to “serve veterans” can be more of a service to civilian interests
- Military values of respect, honor, and trust can be overtly AND covertly assaulted on campus

# Case Study #1

A college opened its Veterans Lounge in 2015. The lounge is located in the basement of the student center, next a support space for undocumented students.

Over the last three years, the lounge has averaged 3-4 visitors a day.

## Critical Questions

- Was the college's SVA/SVO consulted in locating and designing the lounge?
- If the lounge is in a location that houses a vulnerable population, what message does that send?

## Case Study #2

An institution has been rated as one of the top 10 “Best for Vets” schools in the nation. The institution prides itself as a leader in retaining and attracting student veterans.

The individual who is in charge of the institution’s veterans programs is also the lead for disability services.

A recent internal assessment of the institution’s programs showed that more than half of the student veteran population “would not recommend” their institution to other student veterans.

### Critical Questions

- Does placing veterans services with disability services send an appropriate message to student veterans?
- Is the “Best for Vets” designation reflective of the student experience?

# Case Study #3

A Gold Star spouse is attending her history class, where a discussion of the Iraq War is ongoing.

The professor asks if anyone served or had a family member who served in the conflict; two people-the spouse and a veteran-raise their hands.

The professor stops his discussion and asks them to lead the rest of the class, saying, "it's better if you tell the class what it was really like."

## Critical Questions

- Does any individual have the "right" to a veteran or family member's story?
- How can trust between professor and student be broken?
- How is it broken between the students and their classmates?

# Future Assessment and Research

- While third-party surveys look good...
  - Do they truly reflect the student experience?
- Is there a need for a formal, evidence- and theory-based assessment of services for military-related students?
- How do we begin to shift our focus from traditional student/academic affairs metrics to evaluating our effectiveness to our student population?

# Assessment Link and Contact

- Introducing Veteran Critical Theory (Phillips and Lincoln, 2017):  
<https://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09518398.2017.1309586>
- Assessment link:  
[https://qtrial2019q1az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_00Ub2xcXWKLcwHb](https://qtrial2019q1az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_00Ub2xcXWKLcwHb)
- My email: cobydillard@ucsb.edu

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