Cornell University Veteran’s Colleague Networking Group
Annual Report 2013

VCNG Overview
The Cornell University Veteran’s Colleague Networking Group (VCNG) was formed in 2010 and in accordance with University guidelines, the mission of the VCNG is “to raise awareness of Veteran issues here at the University, provide a forum for Veterans and their supporters to meet and discuss topics of mutual interest and concern, and to support the University’s recruitment and retention of Veterans at Cornell University”. In support of this mission, we have defined our vision principles as the following:

- "We are a leader to, and resource for, all veteran faculty, staff, students, alumni, partners, and allies at Cornell University.
- We position ourselves to support a diverse veteran community while maintaining alignment with the University's strategic goals.
- Our services partner combinations of public, private, and military resources which set the standard for supporting veterans; from new students recently completing honorable military service to faculty and staff with past honorable service.
- We improve climate for all service men and women through our military friendly events, educational lectures, networking programs, and town/gown relations."

The VCNG currently has 328 people on the veterans and military-l list serv and 16 regularly attending members. Our executive committee consists of the following:

- Current (2011-2013)
  - Bob Stundtner, Chair
  - Dan Weed, Vice Chair
  - Glenn Larratt, Historian
  - Sue Withers, Member-at-Large
  - Dennis Shaw, Co-Chair
  - Brendan Kraft, Member-at-Large
  - Dave Juers, Member-at-Large
  - Rick Roper, Member-at-Large
  - Sue Withers, Member-at-Large
  - Emily Franco, Community Service
  - Steven Headrick, Local Community Connections
  - Lynette Chappell-Williams, Executive Liaison

- Proposed slate 2013-2015
  - Emily Franco, Co-Chair
  - Dennis Shaw, Co-Chair
  - Glenn Larratt, Historian
  - Brendan Kraft, Member-at-Large
  - Dave Juers, Member-at-Large
  - Rick Roper, Member-at-Large
  - Sue Withers, Member-at-Large
  - TBD, Public Relations
  - TBD, Events Coordinator
  - TBD, Community Service
  - Steven Headrick, Local Community Connections
  - Lynette Chappell-Williams, Executive Liaison

VCNG Accomplishments
The VCNG had a remarkable year, highlighted by the establishment of a Veterans Affairs Office at 127A Humphreys Service building so that one day a week veterans can speak directly to a New York State Veterans Affairs Representative. In addition, the group participated in many veteran related events, increased our awareness of regional veteran’s issues and began to more actively promote the VCNG as a link for all veterans in the Cornell community. The addition of President Skorton’s welcome statement to veterans added personal emphasis to the improving veteran climate and anecdotaly the VCNG has become a first line of defense when veterans have questions about their benefits and aren’t getting answers.

VCNG Community events/networking/activities
- Opened an office in 127A Humphreys for NYS Veterans Affairs Representative Kevin Justian to meet with Cornellians and community members.
- Published a “Hiring Veterans at Cornell” document to outline some of the skills veterans possess and how they translate into the civilian workforce.
- Developed a Veteran’s Integration Plan to begin to address strategies around integrating students, staff and faculty recruitment and retention efforts, and making Cornell more veteran friendly.
- Hosted a January 2013 social networking event at the Chapter House for all VCNG members with approximately 25 attendees of students, retirees, faculty, and staff.
- VCNG members Bob Stundtner, Cassie Joseph, and John Quigley (a Cornell student and Physician’s Assistant, Class of ‘14 at Weill Cornell and deployed since April 2013 to Kabul) attended the Families and Work Institute Work Life Legacy Awards dinner September 2012 where Cornell was the 2012 Work Life Legacy Military Honorable Mention recipients.
- The VCNG sent three large boxes full of books, personal care items, snacks, puzzle books, and more to soldiers in Afghanistan! Donations were hand delivered by John Quigley.
- VCNG members Bob Stundtner and Dennis Shaw represented Cornell at the Army and Career Alumni Program Career Fair at Fort Drum, NY on November 1, 2012, attracting about 300 veterans and soldiers transitioning to civilian life.
- VCNG member Rick Roper marched in the Dryden Memorial Day parade.
- VCNG member Edgar Johnson and the Recruitment and Employment Center (REC) represented Cornell at the Be a Hero/Hire a Hero Veteran’s Career Expo in Philadelphia on December 7, 2012. This is the fourth year Cornell participated in this national career expo.
- Edgar Johnson, members of REC, and representatives from Cornell University Police Department attended a career fair at Fort Drum sponsored by the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) on February 7, 2013. Notably, many job seekers were Military Police soon to depart the military. Additionally, Edgar Johnson and REC attended another ACAP career fair on May 2, 2013 at Fort Drum. 200-300 military and veteran job seekers representing various disciplines and professions attended.
- The VCNG agreed to host an annual event in support of Cornell’s application to the Commemorative Partner Program honoring Vietnam Veterans.
- VCNG participated in the Rural Health Service Corps MLK Day of Service 2013 Project. We collected personal care item donations at Cornell and dropped them off at the AmeriCorps VISTA location in Whitney Point.
- VCNG helped to craft the Veterans and Military Personnel Welcome Statement issued by President Skorton.
- VCNG member Emily Franco attended the October 2012 Veteran’s Expo and Supporting Our Heroes at Work and School workshop in Utica, NY.
- VCNG members Bob Stundtner, Brian Watson, Dennis Shaw, etc. attended the Cornell Minds Matter event “Dining with Diverse Minds” with guest speaker Bryan Adams, held in Willard Straight Hall on March 1st 2013.
- VCNG members Lynette Chappell-Williams, Emily Franco, Cassie Joseph, and Bob Stundtner attended the Families and Work Institute event in New York City on June 3, 2013 with Mary George Opperman as Cornell was the recipient of the 2013 Families and Work Institute Work Life Legacy Military Award.
- VCNG members participated in the following webinars: Central/Western New York Business Leadership Network webinar “Best Practices for Hiring Wounded Warriors” in March 2013; “How Veterans Add Value to the Workplace: Strategies for Veterans and Employers” sponsored by the UVA Alumni Association February 8, 2013; “An introduction to the SERV (now called the Veteran Student Success Program) program at Cleveland State University” by Professor John Schupe.
**Guest speakers at monthly VCNG Meetings**

Lynette Chappell Williams, Toward New Destinations initiative
Sherry Scott, NYSEG, Programs to ameliorate unpaid bills
Rear Admiral James D. Kelly, retired, Transitioning from the service
Victor Yang, BU, 1 year VISTA grant
Ariana Blossom, 6 human needs that effect quality of life, and how they apply to Veterans.
Tom Keane, Dir. FASE Scholarship/Policy
Ben Margolius, STVSG, provided an update on Community Blueprint Network

**VCNG Recognition/Press**

- Cornell University was the only educational institution to win the 2013 Families and Work Institute Work Life Legacy Military Award in large part because of the work of the VCNG in recruitment and support of veterans and the establishment of a Veteran’s Affairs office on campus. Cornell Chronicle, May 2, 2013: [http://news.cornell.edu/stories/2013/05/cornell-recognized-its-support-veterans](http://news.cornell.edu/stories/2013/05/cornell-recognized-its-support-veterans).
- New Veteran’s Affairs Office Open House, Cornell Events Calendar, April 2013: [http://events.cornell.edu/event/open_house_for_the_new_york_state_division_of_veteran_affairs_at_cornell](http://events.cornell.edu/event/open_house_for_the_new_york_state_division_of_veteran_affairs_at_cornell).
- Rob Morris, Bob Stundtner and Rick Roper, VCNG members, were awarded the Steve Wright Bridge Award for Diversity and Inclusion as part of their commitment to veterans on campus, Facilities Services newsletter, June 2013: [http://www.fs.cornell.edu/file/Stundtner,%20Morris,%20Roper%20SWB%202013.pdf](http://www.fs.cornell.edu/file/Stundtner,%20Morris,%20Roper%20SWB%202013.pdf)

**VCNG Web Presence**

- Worked with HR to refine/enhance Cornell Veterans Community website.
- Expanded the Diversity website to house Cornell’s Military Community website (recruitment/retention) and have the site accessible from Cornell’s home page, by word search.
- Added a welcome letter to staff/faculty/student veterans from President Skorton.

**VCNG Future Plans/Projects/Goals**

- In conjunction with the Cornell Veterans Affairs office, develop an expanded CU veteran’s services office that will become the reference for all veteran’s issues, staffed by a Cornell employee and Cornell veterans benefits expert, either a half time or full time position.
- Increase information on the website in the areas of:
  - Education
  - Visual identity of veterans at the University (pics and stories from staff, faculty, students)
  - Jobs
  - Networking
Develop college and/or unit level training on veterans’ special opportunities/needs, transfer of resume skills, university policies affecting veterans, and other recruitment and retention issues.

- Develop a Vet2Vet volunteer mentoring program (staff-staff, staff-student, staff-OTC student, faculty-faculty?) to improve recruitment opportunity, increase staff job satisfaction and retention.
- Examine the advisability and economic benefit to increasing the number of Yellow Ribbon spots available to veterans applying for undergraduate admission at Cornell.
- Establish an honor cords program for graduating veterans, dependents of veterans, etc.

**VCNG Challenges**

The VCNG is eager to move quickly to establish a veteran’s office that will become a central point of contact and authority for veteran’s issues. Now that space has been established to house the NYS VA Rep once per week, perhaps this space (or some other designated location) could transition to supporting a ½ or full-time veteran’s staff person. However, there are still challenges associated with this move. In particular:

- Defining funding and job duties for a full or ½ time staff member to support veteran’s issues may take time and extending the use of the current veteran’s affairs office may meet with resistance. In addition, it may be difficult to get “buy-in” from other departments at Cornell that this office is the central resource for veterans.
- While the current pool of veteran students is small, the VCNG believes the University will save money by recruiting veteran students as the GI Bill benefits/Yellow Ribbon benefits should offset tuition assistance to some degree. However, it is important to proactively invest in solidifying veteran policies, communicating/understanding education benefits through the Yellow Ribbon Program and establishing a central office prior to seeing this pool of applicants grow, all of which require a resource investment in advance of any benefit.
- The VCNG anticipates having to manage the frustrations of veteran’s representatives who have worked with campus officials and received the “run-around” trying to identify who can answer what question. While this central veteran’s office should eliminate that confusion, it will also take time to transition and get the word out that the office exists and is the authority when it comes to veteran’s issues.

**Summary**

Cornell’s recognition by the Families and Work Institute points to the university’s support and dedication to developing all aspects of its veteran community but we still have far to go. In many respects the VCNG has begun their efforts with the proverbial “low hanging fruit” but efforts for the coming year will require some considered investment by the university. The VCNG believes that any investment will only reap strong rewards for the Cornell community so many of our efforts to advancing our 2013-2014 agenda will also be directed at quantifying and supporting how these goals will benefit the university and its efforts to create a truly integrated and effective veteran community.