

RIT/NTID Welcomes Veterans with Hearing Loss

by Susan L. Murad

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that more than 78,000 veterans will return from Iraq and Afghanistan with some form of hearing loss.

In response, RIT/NTID has launched the Veterans with Hearing Loss Project. Veterans can earn bachelor's or graduate-level degrees at RIT and receive access services, including real-time captioning and notetaking services, and benefit from NTID's fully staffed audiological services department.

"When we learned of the number of military personnel who will be transitioning to civilian life with adult-onset hearing loss, we felt it was our duty to develop a program to help," says Dr. Gerard Buckley, NTID assistant vice president for college advancement. "We put together a core team of professionals on campus and appropriate personnel from veteran service organizations, and others, to ensure we developed a program that would meet the needs of these veterans."

Buckley then tapped Allen Ford, assistant professor in NTID's Business Studies Department, as the project coordinator. A former second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, Ford retired from military service after experiencing hearing loss.

"Allen is uniquely qualified to serve as the coordinator of this project, since he has a firsthand understanding of the needs of military personnel with hearing loss who are adjusting to life outside of the military," says Buckley.

Ford has been meeting with military and veteran service organizations across the country, and has presented at national conferences to spread the word about the project.

"We want vets to know that we're here, that we understand their needs, and that we can help," says Ford. "RIT/NTID has more to offer these



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veterans than any other college in the country."

RIT/NTID also has partnered with the Hearing Loss Association of America to provide additional services to veterans. The college plans to partner with still more national organizations to broaden the types of opportunities available to veterans.

U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq have been in combat longer than troops who have served in any other U.S. military conflict. The Department of Veterans Affairs notes that hearing damage is the most common disability for veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Along with traumatic brain injury, it is considered one of the top two "signature" injuries of these conflicts.

RIT recently announced it has been designated as a "Yellow Ribbon" university by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which will allow RIT to work with the VA to cover any difference

between GI Bill benefits and the cost of tuition. As many as 10 veterans could be admitted to the Veterans with Hearing Loss program each year, growing to up to 50 veterans over time. The same standard academic requirements for admission to RIT/NTID will be applied to veterans.

"It makes sense for RIT/NTID to welcome the men and women serving our country who will benefit from the education and access services we offer," says Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, NTID president and RIT vice president and dean for NTID. "Our faculty and staff have experience working with those who have experienced a sudden hearing loss. RIT/NTID is a perfect option for veterans seeking to continue their education. We are proud to serve the men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country."

For information about the Veterans with Hearing Loss Project, visit www.rit.edu/ntid/veterans.