

VALOR

VETERAN ★ ALLIANCE

January 2021

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Colleagues and friends,

It is said that a new year offers the promise of new beginnings. Mostly, those new beginnings are promises we make to ourselves to eat less, exercise more, be healthier, explore the world, pursue new dreams, etc. The list can be as expansive as our imagination and as promising as the ambition we devote to it.



The power of a fresh new year to bring about a sense of promise has such an allure that we almost forget that we possess the power to start anew on any given day in small and big ways. The ability to pivot in life - whether in regard to simple choices, careers, or worldview - is one of the most magical things about being a human being. We have the power to write and rewrite our own script as we see fit.

Alas, 2020 didn't really feel all that magical and the wellbeing of the many either removed or dictated choices that we normally relish as part of our independence and free will. But here we are in a new year with vaccine distribution beginning and a sense that there is a light at the end of this seemingly endless tunnel - hallelujah! Going back to some semblance of normal in six months (or so) now seems viable and sparks hope.

My wish for all of you as you contemplate what your 2021 will look like is that you remember the lessons learned in 2020 and remain vigilant until vaccinations are widely available. We will experience more loss, illness, fear, and struggles in the months to come. Let's all try to get to the other side of this pandemic with patience, compassion, and sensibility. In the meantime, reflect upon how you will tell the story of 2020 to future generations. We have lived this history and we will be the ones who frame the telling of our individual and collective experiences.

I, for one, have found the resilience and kindness of NDSU students, staff, faculty, and administrators to be heartening. For me, it has been all the little things that have made the big things more bearable. I dare say that being able to see smiling faces in Zoom classes and meetings brings me joy. Who would have thought? I surmise that will be part of the oral history I share some day. Have a good semester and stay safe.

Carol Cwiak, J.D., Ph.D.
VALOR Faculty Liaison

Did You Know...

- There is a social media site for current and former military - [RallyPoint.com](https://www.RallyPoint.com).
- Trivia buffs can brush up on military trivia and sign up for a daily military trivia challenge [here](#).
- You can volunteer with the Fargo VA Health Care System - see their [volunteer page](#).



VCO Update
Jim Stoddard

You can visit Jim on campus at the Veterans Educational Training Office in Ceres 329; or by phone at 701-231-9706; or by email at james.stoddard@ndsu.edu.



January is National Blood Donor Month

Blood donors help save millions of American lives each year.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted blood donations.

The Red Cross has implemented safety protocols designed to keep donors safe while still meeting the ongoing need for blood donations. Read more about donating safely [here](#).

As we head into a new semester and new year, I thought I'd just pull some raw data and see if this prompts any thoughts or discussions. As I write this on Dec 24th, NDSU has only 355 GI Bill students registered for spring 2021 term, which is down by over 100 from fall 2020! Just 12 of those are new to NDSU this term (10 undergrads, and 2 graduate students). Here's the current distribution of those military-connected students by College:

- Engineering: 93
- Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences: 65
- Health Professions: 42
- Science and Mathematics: 42
- Business: 39
- Agriculture, Food Systems, and Natural Resources: 35
- Human Sciences and Education: 31
- Undeclared or Non-degree: 6
- Graduate School: *2



* There are 26 military students working on advanced degrees within Colleges other than the Graduate School.

I was curious about Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, the second-most popular College for our military students, because that covers a lot of ground. Breaking that down a bit, over half (39 of 65) are majoring in one of only three programs: Criminal Justice (22), Architecture (10), and Emergency Management (7). Similarly, digging into the College of Science and Mathematics, the vast majority (32 of 42) fall into one of two disciplines: Psychology (16), and Biological Sciences (16).

So, what can this data tell us about NDSU's military students' education and career goals? Are we putting our support resources and efforts in the right places here at NDSU? All food for thought.

As soon as in-person gatherings are allowed, I'd like to resume our military community lunchtime get-togethers. In the meantime, I plan to be hosting some Zoom sessions, probably twice a month, to have a chance for students to meet with each other, and to chat informally with faculty and staff allies. The first meeting will be Wednesday, Jan 13th (the first week of classes) from 11:30 – 12:30 here: <https://ndsu.zoom.us/j/96244525563?pwd=SnlVeTJZWxJsQlJnaUhwQ0FRaHVEEdz09>. To keep it simple, we'll meet the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month. If anyone is able to co-host once in a while, please let me know!

There's no VITAL webinar in January; the spring semester webinars should be in February and March 2021. The exact dates and topics are not yet announced, but I'll send meeting info when I have it. We believe the future webinars will also be recorded, so should be more available to those with scheduling conflicts. "VITAL" (Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership) is a VA program that supports mental health of student veterans on college campuses, and includes education of faculty and staff.

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." ~ John F. Kennedy



Veteran's Voice

Craig Schwinden

VALOR Student Veteran Representative

Welcome back to the new semester. The fact that the year has changed gives me hope and makes me feel so much better about our future regarding the coronavirus. Vaccines are now starting to be delivered and administered. We will be seating a new Congress shortly in addition to a new president. Our democracy works. Thank you for all that you did or still do to make that all possible. Don't worry if people don't recognize that; you and your comrades know it. As I write this, there is a NDAA bill that includes many good things to protect and improve the education benefit programs for student veterans. Unfortunately, it was vetoed by the president. We will see what happens with this bill as it is one of the better bills to come out for us. At the time of this writing, Congress was attempting to override the veto. This

bill has sweeping reforms in it that will radically change how the Veterans Administration's hospitals treat and deliver care to our women veterans. This part of the legislation has been in the works for almost four years now and was long overdue. It also protects student veterans from losing their G. I. Bill benefits in case a school closes due to the coronavirus. The legislation makes changes in educational benefits regarding the Montgomery G.I. Bill (Chapter 30), which has been in existence since 1984. This program has been largely taken over by the Post 9-11 G.I. Bill, which is more generous. There is more information about the NDAA bill here: [Congress finalizes sweeping veterans policy bill with new protections for women, students.](#)

Here on campus, we continue to confront the virus while preparing for the new semester. From what I've seen our virus numbers look pretty good. The mask wearing and the social distancing (especially the fact that most students made the decision to stay in their dorms after the first 3-4 weeks) appear to be largely successful. The testing program seems to be working as well. I have personally tested twice now at the SHAC and the process is very

smooth. Let's lead the way for our fellow students and continue the charge. I hope everyone that was here during the Fall semester is still with us for the Spring. If you are struggling with the decision to stay or not, I suggest you talk to one or both of the below helpful NDSU sources of support.

[NDSU Career Advising Center - https://career-advising.ndsu.edu/](https://career-advising.ndsu.edu/)

[NDSU Counseling Center - https://www.ndsu.edu/counseling/](https://www.ndsu.edu/counseling/)

Lastly, make sure to check out our great articles in this month's newsletter. First, VALOR awarded our Ally of the Year award this past month to Jim Stoddard. Jim is a retired Air Force major and works in the Veterans Educational Training office. It is hard to estimate all the things Jim has done for student veterans here on campus. He has helped our NDSU student veteran serving organizations (VALOR & BSV) through thick and thin times. Please thank Jim when you see him on campus. Next, please don't forget to check out his month's Student Veteran of the Month, Devon Patton. Devon comes to us after a 5-year stint in the U.S. Marine Corps. He is from Finley, N.D. and is studying Electrical Engineering. Semper Fi, Devon!

Check It Out!



More than 2.2 million U.S. service members served during the era and an estimated 694,550 deployed to the Gulf. An estimated 1.68 million Veterans from that era are still alive. During January 2021, VA will profile these Veterans in a series of stories for Desert Storm's 30th anniversary. Learn more [here](#).

Borne the Battle has produced over 200 podcasts featuring a wide variety of veterans' stories. If you haven't tuned in before, now is the time to check out their [most popular interviews of 2020](#). Their podcasts are free and available across a variety of platforms.



"If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday." ~Pearl S. Buck



Name: Devon Patton

Major/Minor: Electrical Engineering

Originally from: Finley, ND

Current city: West Fargo, ND

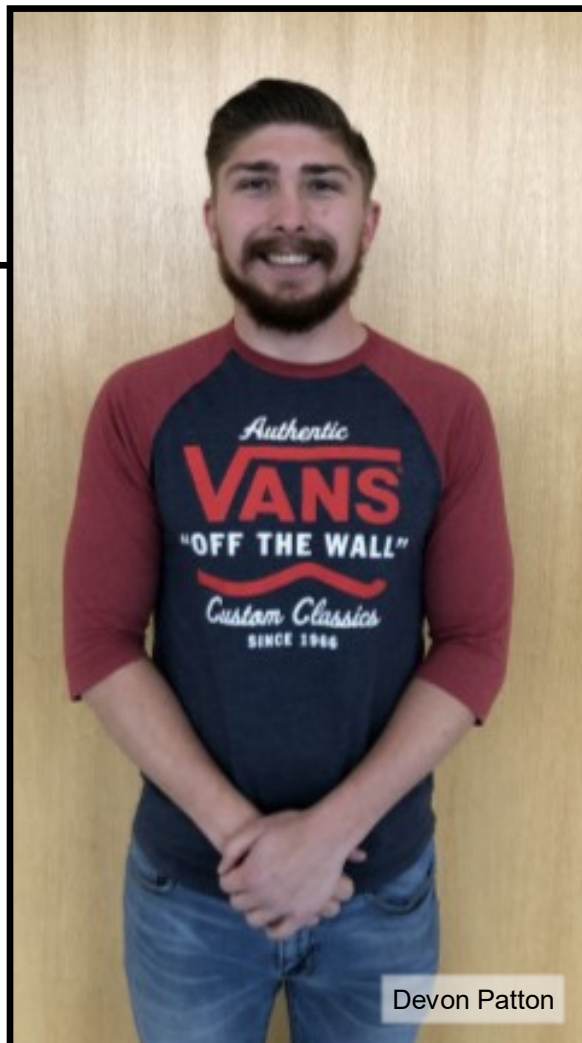
Career plans after college: Work in industry with electric motors on cars, motorcycles, snowmobiles, etc.

Military service/awards: United States Marine Corps 2015-2020 ; deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in support of Operation Inherent Resolve; 2-time Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal recipient; Operation Inherent Resolve Campaign Medal with one star

NDSU activities/engagement: Member - Bison Student Veterans

An interesting tidbit about the veteran: Had only three weeks between active duty to full time student.

Favorite experience/memories/etc. at NDSU: Studying and doing homework into the night with friends in the STEM building sums up my experience with NDSU so far. You get out what you put in.



Devon Patton

CALL TO ACTION:

HOMELESS VETERANS

The pandemic has significantly impacted the economy and has exacerbated homelessness among veterans. The VA is making a concerted effort to ensure that no veteran is without a home via a three-prong approach: 1) Conducting coordinated outreach to proactively seek out veterans in need of assistance; 2) Connecting homeless and at-risk veterans with [housing solutions](#), [health care](#), [community employment services](#) and other required supports; and, 3) Collaborating with federal, state and local agencies, employers, housing providers, faith-based and community non-profits, and others to expand employment and affordable housing options for veterans exiting homelessness.



The National Call Center for Homeless Veterans is designed to provide help to veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Veterans, their family members, friends, or supporters, and agencies that serve veterans can call or [chat online](#) confidentially with trained counselors to seek help. The Call Center counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Their goal is to get the veteran connected to the nearest VA staff person who can help them address the challenges they are facing.

Check on the veterans you know during these tough times and make sure that they are not at-risk of homelessness or in need of other essential services. Do not assume that every veteran is aware of all the resources available to them at the federal, state, and local level. Your effort could make all the difference in where a veteran sleeps tonight.



Also see the [NDSU Student Emergency Fund](#)



valor.veteran.alliance.organization/

The Drop Zone: Delivering BSV news “on-time, on-target”

Chase Tozer, BSV Vice President

Wow. What a semester. As students, we have gone through many changes and transitions. As student military members and veterans, so many more. But I am personally honored to study and serve next to NDSU’s best and every problem solved is humbling, learning more about our resilience every day. We will have many more obstacles to face in the Spring, but it is important to note that the Bison Student Veterans is here to serve you! We will commiserate a little bit longer and finally celebrate together. Maintain a good diet through the winter months, get exercise, and help one another out. Congratulations, graduates, on your accomplishments; your legacy will go on.



December is always a quick month. It seems after Thanksgiving break, things move at the speed of sound. We started off the month with our first meeting where we presented our advisor, Jim Stoddard, with his honorary coin. He was also fittingly awarded VALOR’s Ally of the Year for his patience, hard work, and care towards the student-veterans here at NDSU. Congratulations, Jim! We were also happy to award Carol Cwiak with her much-deserved honorary coin as well for her continuous support for the BSV and handling things at a higher level. We are more than appreciative, Carol!

This coming semester, we are starting strong, working on a new budget and expanding our public relations with PRSSA. We are planning on another fundraiser to make more money for upcoming events. An important thing to note- we are still selling coins! These coins have been a big hit and we have already ordered more. Get yours today! The cost is \$5 (BSV members) and \$10 (non-members). If you would like to get a coin (or more), email us at bisonveterans.ndsu@outlook.com. The last mentionable item is the 2021 SVA NatCon. This is an annual event that will be held virtually this year on February 19-20. As far as we know, we are the only SVA chapter in the surrounding area attending; let’s make some noise! Have a safe break and we are excited to come back in the Spring.



Chase Tozer

COMING UP

January

New Year’s Day	January 1
Martin Luther King Jr.’s Birthday	January 18
Presidential Inauguration Day	January 20

February

Four Chaplains Day	February 3
USO Birthday	February 4
National Salute to Veteran Patients	Week of February 14
President’s Day	February 17
Coast Guard Reserve Birthday	February 19

March

Navy Reserve Birthday	March 3
Hug a GI Day	March 4
Seabee Birthday	March 5
K9 Veterans Day	March 13
American Legion Birthday	March 15
Rosie The Riveter Day	March 21
Medal of Honor Day	March 25
National Vietnam War Veterans Day	March 29



VALOR recognizes Ally of the Year

NDSU's Veteran Alliance Organization, known as VALOR, has presented its 2020 Ally of the Year Award to Jim Stoddard, assistant director for veterans educational training in the NDSU Student Success Programs. Stoddard was recognized on Dec. 7.

Stoddard is the veteran coordinating officer regarding VALOR efforts. He joined the NDSU staff in 2016 after serving 24 years of active duty in the U.S. Air Force. He earned his bachelor's degree from Union College in Schenectady, New York, and his master's degree in national security studies from American Military University in Charles Town, West Virginia.

"Receiving this peer-nominated award means a lot to me because we have such an outstanding team of advocates for our student veterans at NDSU. I'm happy to know that the initiatives I've been coordinating in support of NDSU's military students have been well received," Stoddard said. "Our military veteran students face a lot of challenges returning to school to complete their education, or to balance college with the heavy responsibilities while serving in the National Guard. But they are extremely capable and motivated; they have a lot to contribute to NDSU and have potential for great success if we just help them make that leap from the military environment to the academic world."

VALOR faculty liaison Carol Cwiak, associate professor of emergency management, said, "Jim is the beating heart of veteran services on the NDSU campus. He has consistently met the needs of student veterans both at an individual level and as a student cohort. I can say unequivocally that NDSU is the veteran-friendly institution it is in large part because of Jim."

VALOR's mission is to improve the campus climate for student veterans and enhance their success. Student veterans include veterans, active-duty service members, reservists and members of the National Guard. (<https://www.ndsu.edu/news/view/detail/60578/>)



Jim Stoddard, VALOR 2020 Ally of the Year shown here with VALOR Student Veteran Representative Craig Schwinden

A message about Student Veteran Support Partnership (SVSP):

As you know, we are in unprecedented times. College is stressful, especially for non-traditional students, even when we aren't in the middle of a pandemic. The uncertainty of the pandemic increases anxiety and stress that can affect our wellbeing, productivity, and success.

Maintaining connection with others is essential to our ability to deal with the many challenges the pandemic presents. VALOR is committed to helping you build and maintain connections at NDSU and in the community within the veteran network. The Student Veteran Support Partnership (SVSP) initiative is designed to connect student veterans with other veterans, military-connected staff and faculty, and community organizations for the purpose of guidance, support, mentoring, and friendship.

If you would like to participate in the SVSP initiative (to be a connection, seek a connection, or both), please complete the confidential SVSP initiative form (find the form here: https://ndstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b10NMPvW4VuHgdD). The SVSP will create pairings on a rolling basis as requests come in. If you have an urgent need to connect with a veteran or VALOR resources - call Jim Stoddard at 701-231-9706 or Carol Cwiak at 701-231-5847 or 701-261-8025. Let's help get each other through this - connect today.

A special message from Bison Student Veterans



Dear student veterans and allies of NDSU,

The year 2020 will be remembered to many by words such as “lockdown,” “quarantine,” and “virtual.” The pandemic affected families, friends, and our way of life. As students, we had to adapt to changes in curriculum, class setting, and the new virtual environment. In some ways, university students were set up for success, as college is a time of constant transition and learning. The year was filled with positives and negatives, some more prominent than others. One thing we know for sure is that every one of us has learned about our own personal resilience and perseverance through tough times. Whether student-veteran issues were on the forefront or not, the members of Bison Student Veterans and VALOR along with many other supporters around campus, have worked hard to continue the progress and success of students who are currently serving or who have already served their commitment.

As the officers of BSV, we wished to write you a letter to show our support for YOU. With so many new opportunities for the organization this year, our time slowly gets taken up. Nevertheless, this does not overshadow the most important reasons for being here: your success and experience. There are many reasons to disconnect and abandon hope for the Spring 2021 semester, but we will get through this together. As service members and veterans, we are not ones to shy away from a tough situation or challenge, but rather face it head on, accomplish the task, and make the situation better than how we found it. In the upcoming months, North Dakota State University will be faced with a lot of challenges, both on and off campus. Use your academic goals to drive you and maintain your focus.

Lastly, we have one request: don't give up! We are proud of your accomplishments as service members and as students. In discussion with NDSU staff and faculty and being fellow students, we are honored to call you our colleagues and friends. Through the negativity, your role at NDSU is what makes this university a constant in many individual lives and carries the pride of what it means to be a Bison.

The officers of Bison Student Veterans and VALOR are here to support you. As always, we welcome your questions and support. Stay strong, stay focused, and make North Dakota State University YOUR home.

Sincerely,

*Mikhail Wicker, BSV President
Chase Tozer, BSV Vice President
Jacob Ludke-White, BSV Treasurer
Jim Stoddard, BSV Advisor*