



**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY STANISLAUS**  
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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## **Student Veterans Find the Support They Need On Campus**

*Already Recognized Nationally for Military Friendliness,  
CSU Stanislaus Plans Expanded Efforts to Target Women Veterans.*

Raul Orozco felt more at home in a war zone than at school when he first transferred to CSU Stanislaus in August 2012.

“I felt kind of like a vagabond, just wandering,” said the senior social sciences major.

Orozco joined the Marine Corps after graduating high school in 2003. During the Iraq War, he and his unit were deployed twice to help stabilize the country. He returned to his hometown of Los Banos in 2007, but had a difficult time adjusting to civilian and student life.

“School was a challenge at first, especially not having anybody to relate to, so I kept to myself,” Orozco admitted.

As a Marine, he was trained to be vigilant at all times, making it tough for him to concentrate on studying in the library when he was constantly looking over his shoulder. That changed when Orozco discovered the resources CSU Stanislaus offers to veterans like him.

The Student Veteran Center became his refuge. That’s where he became friends with Matt Tieman, a fellow veteran, and finally found another student who understood him. As work-study students for the Veterans Affairs Office, Orozco and Tieman helped develop the center from a mere table in the Student Services building to a lounge with a refrigerator, microwave, TV, computer and study area. Tieman now serves as the Student Veterans Club president, with Orozco as his vice president.

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“We’re slowly trying to change the way veterans approach school,” Orozco said. “School and homework are hard, especially after coming from a lifestyle where everything’s so structured. But with the help of others, you can start enjoying college life, because you’re getting help from other veterans and students.”

This semester, the university’s Veterans Affairs Office reports 170 veterans and 134 dependents receiving educational benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. That number has increased steadily in the past few years — as the military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down, more service members are coming home and going back to school.

To help them transition, the CSU Stanislaus Veterans Affairs Office and Advising Resource Center provide new student orientations geared towards veterans, plus an academic and career advisor. The Troops to College committee helps support the center and the club, as well as a Women Warrior Program to provide resources specific to female veterans.

Additionally, the university honors veterans with a veteran commencement ceremony in May and a “Thank a Veteran” event in November, for Veterans Day. In the future, the Veterans Affairs Office also hopes to provide childcare and a program to build stronger connections between student veterans and faculty.

“You have people who are here looking out for you and your best interest,” Orozco said. “I’m thankful and proud to be a student veteran here.”

### **Military Friendly School Recognition**

Two media companies with publications for the military audience — [Victory Media](#) and [KMI Media Group](#) — have recently recognized CSU Stanislaus as a military friendly school for the third consecutive year for embracing military service members, veterans and their spouses as students and ensuring their success on campus.

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“Seeing our office and programs grow over the years to outreach worldwide and meet the needs of our veterans has been very exciting,” said Nadine Kent, veterans affairs coordinator for the university. “It’s an honor for CSU Stanislaus to be nationally recognized as a military friendly school.”

CSU Stanislaus has also caught the attention of Swords to Plowshares, a not-for-profit veteran service organization that awarded the university a \$35,000 grant last summer to develop resources for women veterans on campus and throughout the region. The grant will fund a designated space for women in the Student Veterans Center, along with counseling, professional trainings and the first annual Women Warrior Wellness Conference on February 20, 2014.

Jennifer Grigoriou, the Women Warrior Program coordinator, said women veterans need the additional services and outreach because they often feel marginalized in the military.

“Women veterans are one of the hardest segments of the veteran population to target, because they don’t identify themselves as veterans,” Grigoriou said. “The stress and the drive to compete in this male-dominated environment cause many of these women to believe they must do everything on their own.”

CSU Stanislaus junior Matha Lane can relate. She’s a former soldier in the Army National Guard but doesn’t tell many people she’s a veteran. When she was deployed in Baghdad during the Iraq War, she was warned to always have a female buddy with her. Her first sergeant, a woman, was nearly assaulted by male soldiers while going to the bathroom.

“It’s sad to say, but you can’t necessarily trust your own male soldiers out there,” Lane said. “If you’re the woman who ‘caused trouble,’ there’s a really good chance you’ll be targeted or discriminated against by both males and females.”

When Lane became pregnant with her and her husband’s first child, she left the military, making her ineligible to use educational benefits to pay for tuition. But she is grateful for the other veteran services she receives at CSU Stanislaus.

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“I feel really appreciated because they’re willing to provide a variety of resources for us that we probably don’t even know we need,” Lane said. “Often times, we don’t know what we need until we face it.”

The CSU Stanislaus Veterans Affairs Office continues to seek support, partnerships and student veterans. For information, call (209) 667-3081.