

Veteran shines light on military mental health needs

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Recently retired Air Force social worker Lisa Sayegh has more than 25 years of experience with active duty military and veterans, and she is bringing that experience to the Tulane School of Social Work with a new military social work elective.



Lisa Sayegh, left, a retired Air Force social worker, welcomes students in a new elective course that examines issues of concern to veterans when they come to visit a social worker. (Photo by Guillermo Cabrera-Rojo)

The elective, “Clinical-Community Approaches to Working With Military Populations,” is a first-time offering in [social work](#) at Tulane that contributes to a rapidly growing field of study and practice.

“I decided to develop it to teach social workers to better serve the military and veteran population,” Sayegh says. “When you consider that less than 1 percent of the U.S. population serves in the military, most people have no clue about it. My

goal is to diminish that 'deer in the headlight look' so that the client will feel like they're understood. There is a huge need for mental health services with returning vets.”

Sayegh, who also taught at Colorado State and the Air Force Academy, said the course is based on her own experiences as a social worker helping not only military personnel, but also other social workers. The class starts by defining what the military is and the unique stresses and challenges facing military members, veterans, and their family members. The course also introduces post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans and some of the treatment approaches that have been approved by the military.

“My goal is do what we can to prepare the civilian therapeutic population to help as much as possible,” she says. “We talk about the culture of the military, both good and bad. We also talk about the issues a veteran might be concerned about when they come to visit a social worker.”

Sayegh says she hopes to offer more classes in the future and possibly expand to include a certificate or concentration program in military social work.

Joseph Halm is marketing/communications coordinator for the Tulane School of Social Work.