



# HOME OF THE BRAVE

## EVMS is putting out the welcome mat for the region's military

Since its founding in 1973, EVMS has had strong ties to the military. That's no surprise considering the city that EVMS calls home is also home to the world's largest naval base and other armed forces.

But in recent years, this relationship between the school and the military has intensified. Instead of the connections being an accidental byproduct of the school's

location, they're being measured, fostered and expanded with more intention, according to Mekbib Gemeda, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion.

"Our goal is to be the most community-oriented school of medicine and health professions in the country," Mr. Gemeda says. "Our community happens to have one of the country's largest concentrations of military

personnel and families, so a military focus makes sense."

For EVMS, the strength of its military presence in its faculty, staff and student body has enriched the school's culture.

"The military is a diverse institution with individuals who come from varied socioeconomic, ethnic and racial backgrounds," Mr. Gemeda says. "So

connecting with the military helps us bring in students, faculty, staff and employees of all kinds with rich attributes and experiences, which is exactly what we want to build."

### Valuing veterans

To that end, EVMS recently earned accreditation by Virginia Values Veterans, or 3V, an organization dedicated to "bringing

veterans and employers together across the commonwealth." As a partner organization, EVMS lists job opportunities on the 3V website and participates in job fairs to reach out to veterans.

Matthew Schenk, Director of EVMS Human Resources, explains that acquiring 3V designation included training on adapting job ads and listings that reach out to

veterans. Mr. Schenk says 3V organizations also have to pledge to hire a certain number of qualified veterans.

"This was a good proposition for EVMS," Mr. Schenk says, "because you're talking about a skilled and disciplined group that received excellent training in the military, so they generally make very good employees." Mr. Gemeda, who was also instrumental in





securing the 3V designation, says EVMS is looking at how the military experience relates to its positions.

As EVMS ramps up efforts to hire qualified veterans, connections are being cultivated for students as well.

“We’re working to recruit military students for the MD program and the health-professions programs,” Mr. Gameda says. “We’re looking for and getting veterans who have the training and experience that can be retooled through these programs.”

Thomas Parish, DHSc, PA-C, Associate Professor in the School of Health Professions, is Director of the Physician Assistant (PA) program. “We often recruit military corpsmen and medics who have decided to advance their training and become PAs,” Dr. Parish says.

“The PA program is intense,” says Karen Olmo, MPA Class of 2016. Ms. Olmo entered the program because she wanted to remain in health care after a 20-year medical career in the Army. “It’s probably the hardest training I’ve ever received, and I’ve had extensive training in the military.”

In fact, as Dr. Parish points out, the PA profession got its start in the military. In the 1960s, a looming shortage of health-care professionals inspired the creation of the physician-assistant role.

Dr. Parish sees many ways that EVMS tries to make it easier for military applicants, such as pursuing federal grants that pay veterans up to \$22,000 while they are in

PA training and accepting equivalent military courses for credit.

## Raising awareness

EVMS also strives to inform students what the military has to offer, both in terms of scholarships to pay for their education and career opportunities when they graduate.

“It’s the best deal out there,” says Austin May, MD Class of 2017, president of the Military Medicine Club. “It’s incredible to me that each year the military often has slots left open that nobody takes advantage of.”

That “best deal” is the military’s Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP). Students accepted into the program have their tuitions and books paid for and receive monthly stipends to help cover living expenses.

In return, the military requires five weeks of officer training, typically done the summer after the student’s first year. Upon graduation, HPSP students are commissioned as officers. Their military-service commitment equals the number of years they took advantage of the scholarship program. This service brings opportunities for rewarding medical assignments and military careers.

These opportunities aren’t unique to EVMS. What is unique, however, is the amount of support provided to participants, much of it provided through the Military Medicine Club.

## Serving military students

The Military Medicine Club at EVMS — MILMED for short — reaches out to students interested in learning about military opportunities. It also provides information and support for students who already have made a military commitment.

“At our first meeting,” Mr. May says, “we’ll bring in fourth-year students who are scholarship holders. The younger students can ask about everything from how to get reimbursed for books to what it’s like trying to get residencies, which is different than in the civilian world.”

One of the club’s major events, Military Alumni Support for Students (MASS), is coordinated by EVMS Alumni Relations in conjunction with EVMS Careers in Medicine. The annual event brings in alumni who are military veterans to share their experiences, answer questions and help club members expand their networks.

As last year’s president of the Military Medicine Club, McHuy McCoy, MD Class of 2016, helped establish the MASS event. He says alumni enjoy interacting with the next generation of military doctors and health professionals and are glad to help however they can. “Just having them there to say, ‘Here are some things I wish I knew when I was in your shoes,’ is a great thing,” Mr. McCoy says.

Mr. McCoy also is proud of the “I Served”

program he helped initiate, which made EVMS one of the nation’s only medical schools that waives the medical-school application fee for military students. “It’s a way of letting people know that we’re a military-friendly school,” he says.

In addition, EVMS’ location provides opportunities for military students that few other schools can match. The proximity of Naval Medical Center Portsmouth and Hampton’s Veteran Affairs Medical Center offers outstanding training opportunities for residents and students. “It’s possible for EVMS students to do all their rotations in a military-medical setting if they want to,” Mr. May says, “which pretty much separates us from all other medical schools.”

And then there’s the military commissioning

and recognition ceremony. “No other medical school has access to the Battleship Wisconsin,” says Melissa Lang, Director of Alumni Relations, referring to the decommissioned battleship on which the ceremony is conducted.

“I think everyone feels the gravity of the situation,” she says. “These young people are taking on both service to their fellow man and service to their country, and it’s huge. And the dramatic setting certainly adds to that feeling.”

In this area, perhaps more than anywhere else, connecting with the community implies connecting with the military, Mr. Gameda emphasizes. Every link fostered, every relationship established brings EVMS closer to our school’s vision: being recognized as the most community-oriented school of medicine and health professions in the nation. □

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MELISSA LANG,  
DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI RELATIONS



Read about a military veteran who’s pursuing his medical degree at EVMS at [evms.edu/magazine](http://evms.edu/magazine).

