

FAST FACTS FOR FACULTY

An educational tool for faculty on the go.

Designed to offer practical information to facilitate teaching & interacting with diverse learners, including students with disabilities.

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Did you know?

A study done by the University of Virginia hospital's Neurology Department found that 24 percent of the head injury victims who were treated there were college students. Further, the National Head Injury Foundation (NHIF) reports that 60 to 70 percent of head injury victims are between the ages of 15 and 39. (Russell & Sharratt, 1992, p. 5).

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NAVIGATING THE WORLD OF COLLEGE FOLLOWING TRAUMA

The featured topic for this issue of "Fast Facts for Faculty" is brain injury (to be referred to as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and encompasses acquired brain injuries) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Immense national higher education discussion has centered on disabilities among returning soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan; this issue aims to examine TBI and PTSD among college students who were former soldiers and those in general. Specifically, this issue will provide practical suggestions and insight to better equip professors when teaching learners who may have PTSD and/or TBI and staff members who may interact with this growing population of students in the co-curricular arena.

Q: Why is it important for SJSU Faculty and Staff to become knowledgeable about individuals with PTSD and TBI?

Given the increasing prevalence of students diagnosed with TBI and/or PTSD, this issue of Fast Facts recognizes that professors will have students in their classes grappling with the aftermath of enduring a traumatic event(s) and injury (Russell & Sharratt, 1992). As a result, professors, student affairs professionals, and others need to have research-based strategies they can employ to assist students with head injuries and PTSD succeed in their efforts to learn and interact with others.

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"People living with the effects of PTSD and injury are not always going to look 'disabled.' PTSD is extremely debilitating and an invisible barrier. There is no typical set of symptoms and the disorder is like continual mental, emotional, and physical torture. Most people with PTSD are so 'stuck' in trauma that even when someone is not in a traumatic situation, they still fear victimization." – SJSU student and veteran with PTSD.

SOME DEFINITIONS...

Post-Traumatic Brain Disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder. Stressors can be intentional human, unintentional human, or acts of nature/natural disasters (Schiraldi, 2000, p. 5). PTSD results from exposure to an overwhelmingly stressful event or series of events, such as war, rape, or abuse. "PTSD is a normal response by normal people to an abnormal situation," (Schiraldi, 2000, p. 3).

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Traumatic head injury is an "insult to the brain, not of a degenerative or congenital nature but caused by an external physical force, that may produce a diminished or altered state of consciousness, which results in impairment of cognitive abilities or physical functioning. It can also result in the disturbance of behavioral or emotional functioning. These impairments may be either temporary or permanent and cause partial or total functional disability or psychosocial maladjustment," according to the National Head Injury Foundation, 1986, (as cited in Russell & Sharratt, 1992, pp. 6-7).

Individuals with TBI may experience "difficulty in one, two, or all three major brain functions – cognitive (thinking), behavioral (social), and sensorimotor (physical)" (Russell & Sharratt, 1992, p. 7). The severity of the damage to the brain rests on the degree of injury to or trauma to the brain, where the blow or trauma occurred in the brain, and, finally, how the knowledge and skills were stored in the brain (Russell & Sharratt, 1992).

WHAT IS THE PREVALENCE OF PTSD AND TBI AMONG THE TRADITIONAL COLLEGE-AGED POPULATION?

- An estimated 5.2 million American adults ages 18 to 54 have PTSD (Schroeder & Dawe, 2007, p. xv).
- A study done by the University of Virginia hospital's Neurology Department found that 24 percent of the head injury victims who were treated there were college students. Further, the National Head Injury Foundation (NHIF) reports that 60 to 70 percent of head injury victims are between the ages of 15 and 39. (Russell & Sharratt, 1992, p. 5).

WHY DOES ATTENTION NEED TO BE GIVEN TO THIS TOPIC AND THIS POPULATION?

According to the United States Department of Education, only three percent of veterans who began a four-year program in 1995 graduated in 2001 in comparison to an overall graduation rate of 30 percent. Thus, such statistics suggest the existence of barriers to academic progress endemic among the growing population of college students who formerly served in the military.

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"Persistent demands for oral response in open classroom settings can be perceived as a threat. Stress-induced panic results in forgetfulness. This can be an extremely embarrassing experience..."

- Recent SJSU alumni with PTSD

