



Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement

TRANSPARENCY REPORT 2021



Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs

THE MAXWELL SCHOOL OF CITIZENSHIP AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS is Syracuse University's home for innovative, interdisciplinary teaching and research across the social sciences, public policy, public administration, and international relations.

Undergraduates who major or minor in the social sciences benefit from the same faculty who earn Maxwell its high rankings in research and graduate education. They teach undergraduate programs in anthropology, economics, environmental policy, geography, history, international relations, political science, and sociology, and in the policy- and skills-oriented policy studies program. Maxwell's rich, defining interest in democratic citizenship is served by the team-taught interdisciplinary MAX Courses and by the School's signature major in citizenship and civic engagement (CCE).

As the leading graduate school of public affairs in the United States, Maxwell also offers highly regarded professional degrees alongside advanced scholarly degrees in the social sciences. Its top-ranked masters degrees in public administration and international relations provide campus-based cohort learning experiences. Midcareer degrees in these fields are available for full- or part-time study, on-campus, online, and at Maxwell's D.C.-based headquarters. The school also offers MA and PhD programs in the social sciences plus an innovative Social Science PhD program for students with unique, cross-disciplinary interests.

No major graduate school of public affairs mixes these diverse elements the way Maxwell does. It is one reason why the Master of Public Administration program is consistently ranked one of the nation's top MPA programs by U.S. News & World Report. Maxwell scholars and students conduct wide-ranging research through interdisciplinary centers, each focused on a topical area within public affairs, such as social and economic policy, conflict and collaboration, public wellness, aging, energy and environment, national security, and regional studies, among others.

The Maxwell School is one of 13 schools and colleges of Syracuse University, a private, international research university located in the geographic heart of New York State, offering a choice of more than 200 majors and 100 minors. The University's global footprint includes nearly 15,000 undergraduates and 5,000 graduate students; more than a quarter of a million alumni in 160 countries; and a student population from all 50 U.S. states and 123 countries.

For more information, please visit www.maxwell.syr.edu.



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF) is the first national institute in higher education singularly focused on advancing the lives of the nation's military, veterans and their families. Through its professional staff and experts, and with the support of founding partner JPMorgan Chase Co., the IVMF delivers leading programs in career and entrepreneurship education and training, while also conducting actionable research, policy analysis, and program evaluations. The IVMF also supports veterans and their families, once they transition back into civilian life, as they navigate the maze of social services in their communities, enhancing access to this care working side-by-side with local providers across the country. The Institute is committed to advancing the post-service lives of those who have served in America's armed forces and their families. For more information, please visit ivmf.syracuse.edu.

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J. MICHAEL HAYNIE, PH.D.

Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Innovation; IVMF Founder and Executive Director; Barnes Professor of Entrepreneurship

“The Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement was created to acknowledge that for our nation’s military families, service to country and community is a lifelong commitment. At Syracuse University, we understand the sense of duty and obligation that veterans and their spouses have to their communities, because we experience it every day. Our veteran and military-connected students enrich our campus community, and diversify and enhance our academic experience. I’m extraordinarily proud of the partnership between the IVMF and the Maxwell School that gave rise to the Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement, because acting together we are uniquely positioned to offer military families the opportunity to develop and apply the resilience, leadership, and selflessness learned through military service, to now serving our country as civilians and citizens engaged in our democratic process.”



DAVID M. VAN SLYKE, PH.D.

Dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs; Louis A. Bantle Chair in Business-Government Policy

“The Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement is an exciting learning opportunity that brings diverse voices and perspectives together among those with an interest in continuing their service through elected office. Because of their shared experiences serving our nation in uniform and supporting those who have served, there is a trust and legitimacy among the participants even among those with differing views. Their shared commitment to improving communities and creating opportunities for all residents enables them to build bridges, set goals, and work together to strengthen democratic governance while building a mutually reinforcing support network. In this way, the program holistically prepares participants for success. And, we will be the beneficiaries of their success as democratically elected officials.”



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement (VPPCE) is an intensive, non-partisan training program for veterans and military spouses with an interest in pursuing careers in politics. Launched in 2019, the program is a collaboration between Syracuse University’s Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) and the top-ranked Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. The curriculum is tailored to help participants explore careers in politics, prepare them to run a campaign, and succeed thereafter. Most importantly, the program facilitates those who previously served in our nation’s defense to continue a second career in public service.

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THE NEED

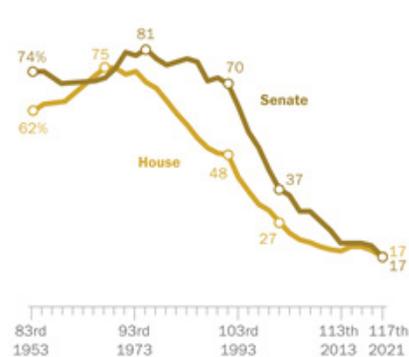
Veteran representation in political offices across the United States has been on a sharp decline for the last four decades. Today, less than one in six (17%) members of Congress are veterans, the lowest point since World War II, and down from a peak in the early 1970s when three in four elected had prior military service.¹ A similar decline follows in state legislatures, where fewer than one in eight seats in either chamber (12%) are filled by a veteran.² Nevertheless, the last several election cycles saw a marked increase in veterans running for office at all levels, particularly women veterans.³

Despite the decline in veteran officeholders, there remains a clear demand among military-connected individuals to continue their public service, including political leadership at all levels of government. This should be no surprise as veterans and military spouses have already demonstrated an inclination toward public service and civic engagement. Research shows that veterans continue to exhibit higher levels of civic engagement well after completing military service.⁴ The same holds true for military family members.⁵ Most importantly, research on Congressional legislative activity shows that elected U.S. military veterans have historically demonstrated more bi-partisan behavior than their non-veteran peers.⁶

THE OPPORTUNITY

Our politics today are hindered by hyper-partisanship and public distrust. At the same time, trust of the military remains highest of all public institutions.⁷ VPPCE fills a critical demand for specialized training for individuals with high levels of public service motivation, public trust, leadership experience, and proven commitment to the U.S. Constitution. By leveraging these core strengths, the Maxwell School and IVMF create a best-in-class training experience positioned to retain, re-channel, and propel this vital class of public servants, into all levels of government.

Fewer veterans in Congress
% of members with previous military service



Note: Data does not include nonvoting delegates or commissioners. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of data from Military Times, Congressional Research Service, Brookings Institution and House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. (PEW RESEARCH CENTER)

Figure 1. Image from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/10/the-changing-face-of-congress/>

WORLD-CLASS, REAL-WORLD INSTRUCTION

Program instruction is anchored by esteemed faculty from the Maxwell School—the nation’s #1-ranked graduate school in public affairs—and further enhanced by a distinguished bench of current and former elected officials, veterans with first-hand experience running for office, and established experts and political consultants.

FEATURED INSTRUCTORS



GRANT REEHER is director of the Campbell Public Affairs Institute and a professor of political science at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Grant is creator, host, and producer of “The Campbell Conversations” on WRVO Public Media, a weekly regional National Public Radio public affairs show featuring extended in-depth interviews with regional and national writers, politicians, activists, public officials, and business professionals.



PAMELA HUNTER is a U.S. Army veteran and New York State Assemblymember (District 128). She is the only female veteran in the state legislature, giving her unique insight into working to expand opportunities for women veterans. Prior to her election to the NYS Assembly in 2015, Member Hunter served on the Syracuse Common Council for three years and chaired the Public Safety Committee.



JOHN ROGERS is Co-Founder of Torchlight Strategies, a political consulting firm focused on ad-making and public affairs services. Prior to this, John spent more than a decade running campaigns, and another eight years rising through the ranks of the National Republican Congressional Committee to ultimately serving as its Executive Director.



Instructors and Speakers (Selected)

Elected Officials

Julie Abbott-Kenan, Onondaga County Legislator
Matthew Collier, Fmr. Mayor, Flint, MI
Anne Marie Buerkle, Former U.S. Representative (NY-25)
Joseph Fahey, Former Judge, Onondaga County Court
Stephen Hagerty, Mayor, Evanston, IL
Pamela Hunter, Assemblymember, NY State Assembly
David Knapp, Chairman, Onondaga County Legislature
Andrew Lewis, Rep., PA House of Representatives
Joanie Mahoney, Fmr. County Executive, Onondaga County
Rachel May, NY State Senator
Ryan McMahon, County Executive, Onondaga County
Michael Nutter, Fmr. Mayor, Philadelphia, PA
Adrian Perkins, Mayor, Shreveport, LA
Al Stirpe, Assemblymember, NY State Assembly
Ben Walsh, Mayor, Syracuse, NY

Political Experts

Martin Brennan, State Director to U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer (NY)
Dustin Czarny, Commissioner, Onondaga County Board of Elections
William Galston, Brookings Institution
Nancy Jacobson, Founder and CEO, No Labels
Antonia Koch, Campaign Finance Advisor at EMILY's List
Patrick McGuigan, Office of U.S. Senator John Boozman
Christopher Meek, Co-founder and Chairman, SoldierStrong; Senior Director, S&P Global
John Rogers, Fmr. Executive Director, National Republican Congressional Committee
Ford Rowan, Consultant, R&B Associates
John Zogby, Founder and Senior Partner, John Zogby Strategies

Faculty

Grant Reeher (Faculty Lead), Maxwell, Syracuse University
Kristi Andersen, Maxwell, Syracuse University
Catherine Gerard, Maxwell, Syracuse University
Margaret Hermann, Maxwell, Syracuse University
Tom Keck, Maxwell, Syracuse University
Michael Meath, Newhouse, Syracuse University
Tina Nabatchi, Maxwell, Syracuse University
Kendall Phillips, Penn State University
Jennifer Stromer-Galley, Information Studies, Syracuse University



#1 in the Nation for Public Affairs

Specialty Rankings:

- #1 Public Management & Leadership
- #2 Non-Profit Management
- #2 Public Finance & Budgeting
- #2 Information Technology Management
- #4 Local Government Management
- #7 Public Policy Analysis
- #7 International Global Policy & Administration
- #11 Environmental Policy & Management
- #13 Urban Policy
- #16 Social Policy



TAILORED PROGRAM OFFERINGS

VPPCE offers tailored training and support for participants exploring and launching careers in politics. The program is designed to help veterans and military spouses gain a better understanding of politics as a career field, manage and win campaigns, and effectively navigate and lead in the public sector.

Program instruction is specially designed for adult-learners and practical application through a combination of online and on-campus learning experiences. The program meets participants where they are in their political or civic engagement journey through specialized tracks—from ideation through campaign launch. In addition, program leadership are actively evaluating the potential for future specialized training and professional development offerings for active and newly elected candidates and their teams.

Program Tracks	Overview	Costs
Ideation	<p>Delivery: Online instruction</p> <p>Aims: Develops basic understanding of available resources, what it takes to run for office, and refines participant’s political interests through meaningful dialogue facilitated by Maxwell faculty and written coursework.</p>	No cost to participants thanks to philanthropic support.
Signature Campaign Planning	<p>Delivery: Hybrid (on-line w/ campus residency)</p> <p>Aims: Prepares participants to run for office. Course topics include basic campaign management, political communications, engaging social and traditional media, political leadership, and getting on the ballot, among other campaign topics.</p>	No cost; Travel to/from campus residency at participants’ expense

TOPICS

Through a combination of online and on-campus learning experiences, instructors cover a range of topics including the mechanics and management of campaigning, fundraising strategies, platform building, public communications, and more.

- Building Successful Campaign Organizations
- Ethical Challenges
- Political Communication
- Campaign Fundraising
- Realities of U.S. Political Systems
- Lessons from Starting Local
- Polling Data
- Effective Citizen Engagement
- Political Institutions that Need Fixing
- Media Strategy
- Public Speaking
- Dark Arts of Political Campaigns



2020 PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS: BY THE NUMBERS

SINCE INCEPTION

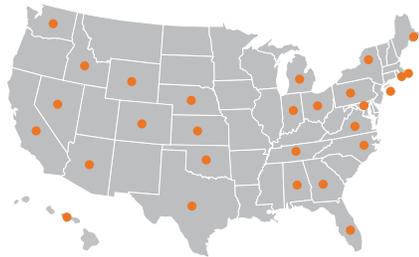
73 veterans and spouses have participated in VPPCE

There is no one typical applicant or candidate. VPPCE participants come from all over the United States, and represent all branches of military service, political affiliation, rank, gender, race, and ethnicity.

The 2020 cohort more than doubled in size from our first, inaugural year, with 53 participants joining from 26 states. Political affiliation was nearly evenly balanced, and 35 percent were women—more than double the representation of women veterans overall.

The 2020 VPPCE participants are from

26 U.S. States
spanning coast to coast



53 TOTAL PARTICIPANTS 2020

Gender

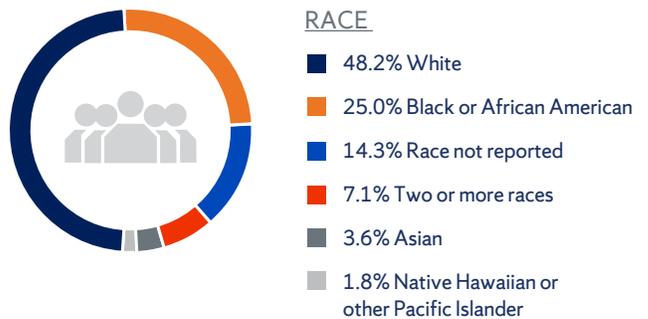
MALE 65%

FEMALE 35%

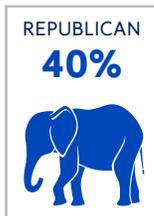
Age Groups



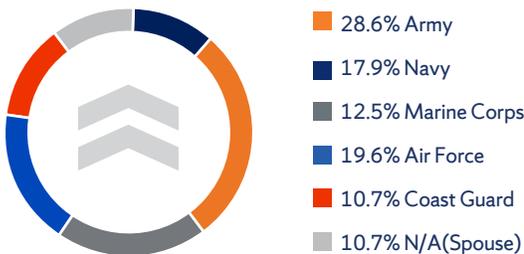
Race & Ethnicity



Political Party



Service Branch



50.0% Enlisted | 39.3% Officer | 1.8% Warrant Officer

ETHNICITY



PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND EXPERIENCE

A principal, though not exclusive, goal of VPPCE is to increase the number of veterans and military spouses running for elected office, by helping them leverage political and networking resources, and to provide continued support to assist in future political success. Central to the program is our pre- and post-program evaluation intended to drive program quality improvement and monitor program outcomes over time. Program staff survey admitted participants prior to starting the program, immediately upon completion of the signature campaign track, and annually thereafter, on a range of questions related to program experience and satisfaction (e.g., content, delivery, instructor quality), confidence levels in running for office, and long-term political intentions and activities.

SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN TRACK SATISFACTION

NET PROMOTOR SCORE*

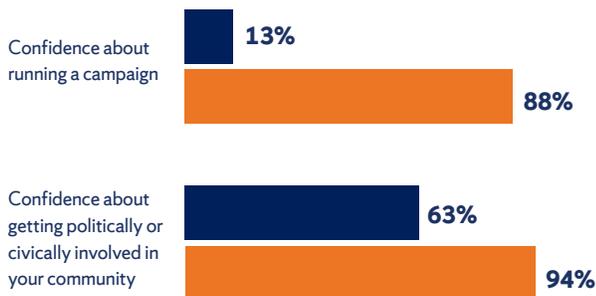


*Likelihood of recommending program to a peer.

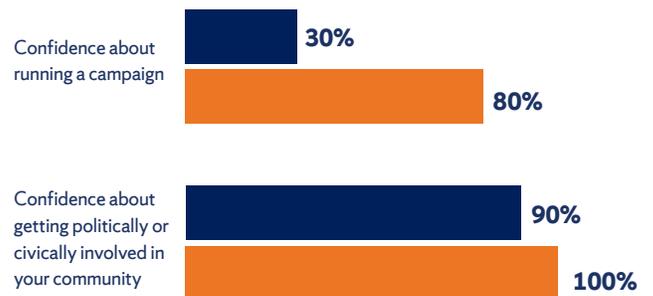
PRE/POST PROGRAM CONFIDENCE LEVELS (2019-2020)



Participant Confidence 2019



Participant Confidence 2020



15 EXPECTED TO RUN 

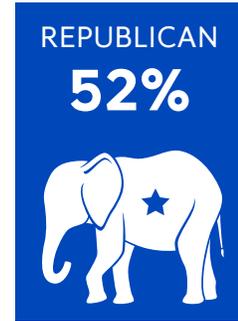
6 RAN FOR OFFICE



OF THESE 6

5 WERE ELECTED

POLITICAL AFFILIATION



LEVEL OF OFFICE

National	4	County	2
State	10	City/Town	5



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT LEVELS OF SELECTED ACTIVITIES (2019 COHORT)



15+
HOURS PER WEEK



Reported average hours/week VPPCE participants spend on civic engagement.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT LEVELS—2019 COHORT (HOURS PER WEEK)



■ Pre-Program
■ Post Program Annual Follow-up (reported during COVID-19 pandemic)

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

In the spirit of service-connected bipartisanship, another long-term goal of VPPCE is to grow a network of alumni of all political stripes who share not only the bonds of military service, but also an affinity to Syracuse University, the Best Place for Veterans™. All participants who complete the VPPCE program requirements are considered an alum and a part of an ever-growing network of Syracuse University, IVMF, and Maxwell program alumni across the globe that can be leveraged throughout their professional and political journey.

Strong affinity networks are built over time through regular engagement opportunities. Leveraging the IVMF VETNET YouTube Channel, the VPPCE team hosts quarterly webinars and guest panel discussions on contemporary topics related to political activism and campaigning for general audiences as well as select, invitation-only sessions for program alumni. As restrictions ease from the COVID-19 pandemic, we will be looking to host future alumni receptions—on campus and in select locations nationally—to further this aim.



FEATURED ALUMNI AND GUEST SPEAKERS



Mayor Larry Wallace Jr., Ph.D.
Mayor, City of Manor, TX
U.S. Army (Ret.); VPPCE, 2019



Louis Luba Jr.
Senior Asst. State Attorney, CT
Councilman, Town of Tolland, CT
USCG (Ret.); SU JD/MPA '93; VPPCE, 2019



2020 PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS

MOLLY MAE POTTER



Molly Mae Potter was a flight test engineer in the U.S. Air Force. She planned on a long career. Then in 2010, she was wounded in Afghanistan and no longer able to fly. The day she was honorably discharged, she felt lost. “I quite literally didn’t know what to do with the rest of my day. I didn’t know what to do with my life. And I just froze. And froze about 20 feet from the outside of the gate. I was like, what does this mean?”

Potter had a skillset in the military that she didn’t think translated to civilian employment. “I tested airplanes and I was very narrow on that. I didn’t see the value of the other core competencies that I had gained in the military and how they could relate into my civilian life,” she says. Dell technologies did finally see the value in her experience and hired her. “They gave me the confidence to reach out and to do more with it.” Now in a better place professionally and mentally, Potter says she feels like she may openly talk about struggles of transitioning veterans. Like mental health, healthcare, and unemployment. “There’s a lot of things that I experienced getting out of the military and transitioning, that directly relate to national policy right now.”

Though Potter has always been interested in government, that interest wasn’t necessarily rooted in running for politics. Before VPPCE, she connected with the veteran’s community in Austin, Texas because it felt like it was a tangible connection to her previous role in the military. She was determined to help create policies that would improve the post-service lives for veterans like her. Potter said if it wasn’t for her family and friends, she would have been homeless during her transition. She ended up working at a running shoe store part-time making \$11.00 an hour. “That’s the only employment I could find. And here I was like a test pilot school graduate, an engineer with a master’s degree and I couldn’t find employment,” she says.

She got involved with local veteran politics and served on the veteran’s commission for Austin, becoming an active member. That led to more involvement with local politics. She also participated in a program called Ms. Veteran America, a national platform that advocates for women veterans experiencing homelessness and to advocate on their behalf. She won the title.

As Ms. Veteran America, she spent a year working with communities, nonprofits, and people that drive policy for homelessness and veteran’s affairs. “I realized after that I had a voice—that people would listen,” she says. “I also realized that most people that were making the policy related to women veterans were not veterans and not women. And I felt like I wanted to start having a seat at the table.”

Potter says VPPCE has given her the foundation to take that seat at the table. “I had no idea what it meant to run for office or to be a

part of policymaking at an official level,” says Potter. Participants work with other veterans with first-hand experience running for office, experts in the field, and faculty from the Maxwell School to deliver instruction throughout our programs. Potter says the program brings likeminded veterans together, and in doing so can bring unity to the divisive politics that exists currently in the United States. “I didn’t even know you needed a campaign plan beforehand,” says Potter. “And by the end I’m feeling like, ‘Oh man, maybe I can do this. Here’s how I can do it,’” Potter says. Potter created a campaign plan and a winning pitch. “I thought to myself, maybe this just became real.”

Today, Potter isn’t committed to a single vision of what her work in politics will look like. “I feel service will take you wherever your heart pulls you. The Air Force pulled on my heart after college, and that’s where I went,” she says. “There’s a lot that pulls at the heartstrings here in Austin.”

ALEX GOFF



Alex Goff didn’t vote until after leaving the Marine Corps. He felt

disconnected from his home community in Mississippi and didn’t feel like he had a voice. However, after his eight year service in the Marine Corps, he learned more about politics and paid closer attention to pertinent issues. After leaving the military, he joined a local union in 2015 and participated in a demonstration at his state’s legislature. “I felt so out of place, like I didn’t belong,” says Goff. His apprehension about politics lessened as he continued to be active. “I began to find my voice and find my presence. And I realized that it was important for me to advocate because of my life experience,” he says. “The number one thing that the Marine Corps taught me is that things can look challenging at the outset, but if you come in with a good plan and a good strategy, you can do amazing things.”

Goff recently participated in the VPPCE program. Goff especially liked guest speaker Michael Nutter, former mayor of Philadelphia, “I was really engaged with what he was presenting and some of the ideas and concepts specifically around leadership,” he said. Goff appreciated being able to work with other veterans and members of military families in a non-partisan environment. Goff

“And, ultimately politics is about relationships as well. The opportunity just to meet new people and talk to different people and see what’s happening across the country, I think that’s important. I would definitely recommend this program to veterans across the country.”

says while there are several programs throughout the country that train people to run for political office, the experience of being in a course with veterans could not be matched. Goff thought the non-partisan discussion of different veteran experiences, perspectives and opportunities facilitated creative problem solving and interesting connections. “And, ultimately politics is about relationships as well. The opportunity just to meet new people and talk to different people and see what’s happening across the country, I think that’s important. I would definitely recommend this program to veterans across the country.”

Today, he has been appointed by his state’s governor to serve as an advisor to the vocational rehabilitation commission. His office works with individuals who have mental and physical disabilities to find employment. He also serves on his city neighborhood advisory board, which incorporates community feedback into upcoming projects like housing, potential businesses, and road construction. He feels like his experience makes him an effective advocate.

Politics allows Goff to be an emphatic leader and apply lessons he learned serving and transitioning from active duty. While he served, Goff said Marines could count on their allowances for housing, food, even uniforms. Outside of the military, veterans must learn how to budget, something Goff says he struggled with after leaving the military. Though a challenge, one of the first bills Goff worked on (in 2017) was a bill about individuals disclosing conflicts of interest before allowing people to invest. “I thought about all the military veterans who come out with some money,” said Goff. He feels a sense of accomplishment when taking care his community. Goff says, “Being able to collaborate and lift other people up is oftentimes what I find most rewarding.”



JENNIFER KAAOUSH

Veteran and military spouse Jennifer Kaaoush served on active duty in the U.S. Army. Kaaoush is also from a family legacy of military service. She was born in Korea while her parents were enlisted and lived in Germany as a child.

Her global sensibility has served her well over the past few years, as her family was assigned to U.S. embassies in Jordan and Qatar. At the embassy, Kaaoush took a position as a community liaison. The community liaison’s job is to support and advocate for the service member’s families at the embassies. It demanded being knowledgeable and helping institute policy changes if family members needs weren’t being met. This experience helped her develop a sense of intuition and emotional intelligence. She learned to be aware when people struggled to vocalize their challenges. Kaaoush learned to ask questions and dig deeper, having candid conversations while maintaining confidentiality.

Her experience in other cultures and advocating on behalf of others led her to exploring the possibility of running for office.

Now that she has returned stateside, she recently completed the VPPCE.

“I just have always had a [service mindset]. Certainly, some of it came from the military,” says Kaaoush. “I have always wanted to help people and somewhere along the way, I figured out that people who make legislation [for] their communities can really do a lot to help people,” she says. “My dad was a first sergeant and he always was in a command position. You take care of your people around you. And in politics, you can take care of a lot more people. It seems like a really great way to do the most good.”

One of the biggest takeaways [from VPPCE] for Kaaoush was there is a large toolbox for someone looking to run. “We had an assignment at the end to do a presentation on like a mock campaign. I think they really did it perfectly because it forced me to really think about my campaign that I would run, and what things I needed specifically for my situation.” Kaaoush credits the program for helping improve how she communicates ideas and making the idea of running for office less conceptual.

Kaaoush sees a future where she runs for political office, and in a best-case scenario can see herself running for U.S. Senate. Combined with her experience living abroad in a military family, VPPCE has given her skills to take the next steps toward a meaningful career in politics, no matter what office she decides to run for. “I have clear values and an understanding of how these are things that I stand for. I know how to speak about them, especially if I am in a situation where the person I might be running against does not agree. It took something that was an idea and made it tangible.”



JONATHAN SYM

Jonathan Sym is a commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve. He’s served in the Navy for 22 years. His most recent deployment was in 2018 where he served as chief of staff in special operations

command while operating in North and West Africa. “It was an amazing tour, the best tour I have ever had.” In Africa he served with Army Rangers, Marine Raiders, and Navy Seals. This was not the first time he’s served in a joint operation. His first deployment also involved service members from multiple branches. “And to this day, I’m still friends and chatting, giving people a hard time about their service still today after 22 years.” Sym says these relationships are a testament to the kinds of bonds and mutual respect people gain

“We had an assignment at the end to do a presentation on like a mock campaign. I think they really did it perfectly because it forced me to really think about my campaign that I would run, and what things I needed specifically for my situation.”

VPPCE has given Sym a new level of confidence going into his first political race. Sym says the IVMF and Maxwell program was intense enough to deliver the core elements of what people need to understand when they're running for any type of office. "These fundamentals were invaluable. I'm a big fan of the program, a big supporter of the program, and I recommend VPPCE to anybody that's even thinking about running."

Wong told Sym he should apply if he ever decided to run for office. "Though we are on opposite sides of the political fence, we always have amazing discussions about things," says Sym.

Taking Wong's advice, Sym completed VPPCE with the intention to learn everything he could for a potential future race. "I am just a frustrated average Joe," says Sym. "As a small business owner, a Navy reservist, and as a father of two young kids in public schools, I see what 2020 has done." Sym said he found himself feeling powerless and simply venting to like-minded friends wasn't enough. "They didn't change policy, they didn't change legislation."

When Sym was recently contacted about exploring the possibility of running for a local county race, he felt like he needed to act. "I just couldn't stay on the sidelines anymore," he says. "The timing of completing this course and candidacy was serendipitous," says Sym. "I'm leaning in now a lot on those lessons learned, I'm going back checking my notes," says Sym. He combs his notes for what he calls "nuggets of gold," helping him recall the "ah-ha" moments he had in VPPCE and using it in his campaign.

The same sense of mutual respect and admiration Sym described about members of other branches also extended to veteran participants with different political affiliations. "I don't know if it's bipartisan or nonpartisan, but it was helpful for everyone," says Sym. He looks forward to connecting with other members of his VPPCE cohort and assisting them in situations they need from an outside perspective. For example, a Democrat or Republican can connect with people across the aisle running in a deeply red or blue area. He felt the lecturers and guest speakers, were insightful and accessible

through serving together. "You get into these difficult situations with people in the military and they become lifelong friends."

Sym's camaraderie with other branches in part led him to the Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement (VPPCE). Sym's neighbor and retired U.S. Army officer Raymond Wong recently participated in this collaboration between Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Wong told him about VPPCE's overview and actionable strategies for running for political office.

regardless of where people land on the political spectrum. "I wish it didn't have to end quite frankly," he says.

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ELIZABETH HALLGREN



Elizabeth Hallgren was actively involved in her military community supporting other military spouses and families over the course of her husband's 30-year military career. She lived in nine different military posts including two assignments in Germany. After Hallgren's husband retired from the U.S. Air Force, she missed working to improve her community and looked for new ways to be involved civically.

VPPCE empowers veterans and military spouses like Hallgren by explaining the basics of running for and holding political office. It covers the basic frameworks of an election and how to do a self-assessment in preparation for a career in politics. "I thought the program was really informative," Hallgren said. "They had a wide range of speakers that looked at all the different ways you could be engaged. I learned a lot about the background of politics that I didn't know before," she said.

Hallgren said VPPCE gave her the tools to evaluate, manage, and run for an elected office. "What it did for me is it introduced me to what I don't know, so that I could dive deeper on those areas," Hallgren says. "Whether that was the individual faculty itself or resources that were talked about in the sessions, I feel like I now have clearly identified areas that I know that I need to learn more about. It felt like it was a really good overview and a place to start."

Now finally rooted in her family's adopted hometown of Omaha, she is using what she learned in VPPCE to be engaged in her new community. Hallgren now serves on a governor's committee for women's health and is involved with her local Rotary Club. "I've always felt like I had a responsibility to make wherever I was living better. I wanted to equip myself with tools to make that community better. And I felt like this program gets that," says Hallgren.

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Hallgren says VPPCE helped her think more carefully on the timing of when to run and what office to run for. It also inspired her to branch out. “I volunteered to be on the governor’s legislative committee whereas before I might’ve been chosen to be on the education committee,” she says. “Because now I am able to advocate for different legislation going through the state unicameral. That’s one of the outcomes that I’ve had from this.” Hallgren plans to use her experience in the legislative committee as an example she can then point back to if she decides to run in the future. “This experience will say I’ve worked on bipartisan committees to impact legislation. And that’s not something that I would have thought about without the VPPCE program.”

DEVIN WINKLOSKY



Originally from Pittsburgh, U.S. Naval Academy graduate Devin Winklosky served 21 years in the U.S. Marine Corps before retiring in 2014. Over the course of his two decades of service, he could deal with challenges in the military because he could rely on a team of people he trusted. “They’re not easy challenges. They come in all shapes and

sizes and they involve life and death decisions,” said Winklosky. “It means a lot to have people you can trust and who are trained the same way you are. And in a lot of ways, think the same way you do about service to your country.”

In many ways, his transition from the military back to civilian life was like starting over again and relearning things from the beginning. Winklosky felt stable and comfortable in the military’s highly structured lifestyle, and the routines he adopted as a Marine that were not applicable post service. He said he estimates it took around two years to feel comfortable being outside the military. Since then, he’s been motivated to find an opportunity to continue being of service to others. He considered a role in politics to continue service to his country but wasn’t sure how to approach it in a constructive way.

Winklosky noted that the program being tailored to both veterans and military spouses was another strength. “Being married to someone in the military in my mind is the same as being in the military in so many ways. This program understood that.”



“There was a lot of motivation, but not a lot of direction.”

Winklosky now has the direction he was looking for after attending Syracuse University’s Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement (VPPCE). VPPCE empowers veterans with actionable strategies related to communicating, fundraising, and building a cohesive political campaign. Winklosky says his natural inclination is to avoid self-promotion for example, a habit he thinks many veterans also share. “It is the credit that doesn’t go to any one person. It is always a team effort, and everyone contributes,” he says. “But with politics, you have to get used to talking about and promoting yourself.” Along with learning the importance of self-promotion, he liked that the course allowed him to work with other veterans from across the political spectrum to imagine what the group could accomplish collectively.

Participants discussed how to amplify and express their ideas and values in a way that could help them all move forward together. “I think that is something that comes out of military service as well. We are each individuals, but we’re able to set aside things to move forward and overcome challenges together, which was a very nice aspect of this course as well.” Winklosky noted that the program being tailored to both veterans and military spouses was another strength. “Being married to someone in the military in my mind is the same as being in the military in so many ways. This program understood that.”

After completing VPPCE, Winklosky feels like his goal to continue serving his country is less of a concept and more of an attainable goal. “This program really helped sort of put those two things together, a motivation, some skillset, and then a direction.”

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FOUNDING SUPPORTERS

We are especially grateful to our founding supporters who helped launch the Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement. Because of their generosity, the program is offered at no cost to selected participants.



“Syracuse University has brought together two premier institutions to deliver this program—the Maxwell School and IVMF—and their commitment aligns perfectly with our mission at JPMorgan Chase to ensure that all veterans fulfill their post-military potential. Veterans and their families are an incredibly valuable asset to the public service sector and we’re proud to support the Veterans Program for Politics and Civic Engagement to help develop the next generation of political leaders.”

— **Mark Elliott**

Managing Director and Global Head of Military and Veterans Affairs,
JPMorgan Chase & Co.

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STEVEN LUX



Steven Lux is the Director of Executive Education at the Maxwell School, responsible for overseeing the School’s mid-career graduate degree programs and developing and managing executive management trainings for domestic and international audiences. Steve also teaches graduate level courses at the Maxwell School on subjects related to non-governmental organizations and civil society. Prior to his work with the Maxwell School, Steve spent 12 years designing and managing development programs in South East Asia across a range of topics including public health and rural development. Steve’s last assignment before returning to Syracuse University full-time in 2004 was as Regional Director of a Thai NGO, the Population and Community Development Association. Steve holds an AB degree in Economics from Harvard College (1989) and a MPA from the Maxwell School at Syracuse University (1997).

NICHOLAS J. ARMSTRONG, PH.D.



Nicholas J. Armstrong, Ph.D. is Managing Director for Research and Data at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University. A member of the IVMF executive team, Armstrong leads the IVMF’s research agenda as well as its enterprise-wide data governance and analytics. He oversees an interdisciplinary insights team of more than two dozen applied social scientists, evaluators, and data engineers. Prior to IVMF, Armstrong was a research fellow with the Institute for Security Policy and Law where he oversaw projects on security assistance, wartime contracting, and post-conflict reconstruction. Nick is a U.S. Army veteran with overseas service in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bosnia. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (B.S.) and the Maxwell School of Syracuse University (Ph.D., M.P.A.).

ENDNOTES

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NATIONAL VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER (NVRC)



The National Veterans Resource Center (NVRC) at the Daniel and Gayle D’Aniello Building is home to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) and the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs. The NVRC represents an unprecedented commitment by Syracuse University to cultivate and lead innovative academic, government, and community collaborations positioned to empower those who have served in defense of the nation.

We the People

insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common Defence
and our Posterity; We ordain and establish this Constitution

Article 1

STAY IN TOUCH



p 315.443.0141
f 315.443.0312
e vets@syr.edu
w vets.syr.edu



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