

Fall 2014

# Expanding Commitment to Those Who Served

Francesca Parise

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/vlac>

 Part of the [Other Law Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Parise, Francesca, "Expanding Commitment to Those Who Served" (2014). *Veterans Legal Advocacy Center*. Paper 2.  
<http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/vlac/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Centers & Programs at GGU Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Veterans Legal Advocacy Center by an authorized administrator of GGU Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jfischer@ggu.edu](mailto:jfischer@ggu.edu).

# The Magazine of Golden Gate University

---

FEATURE

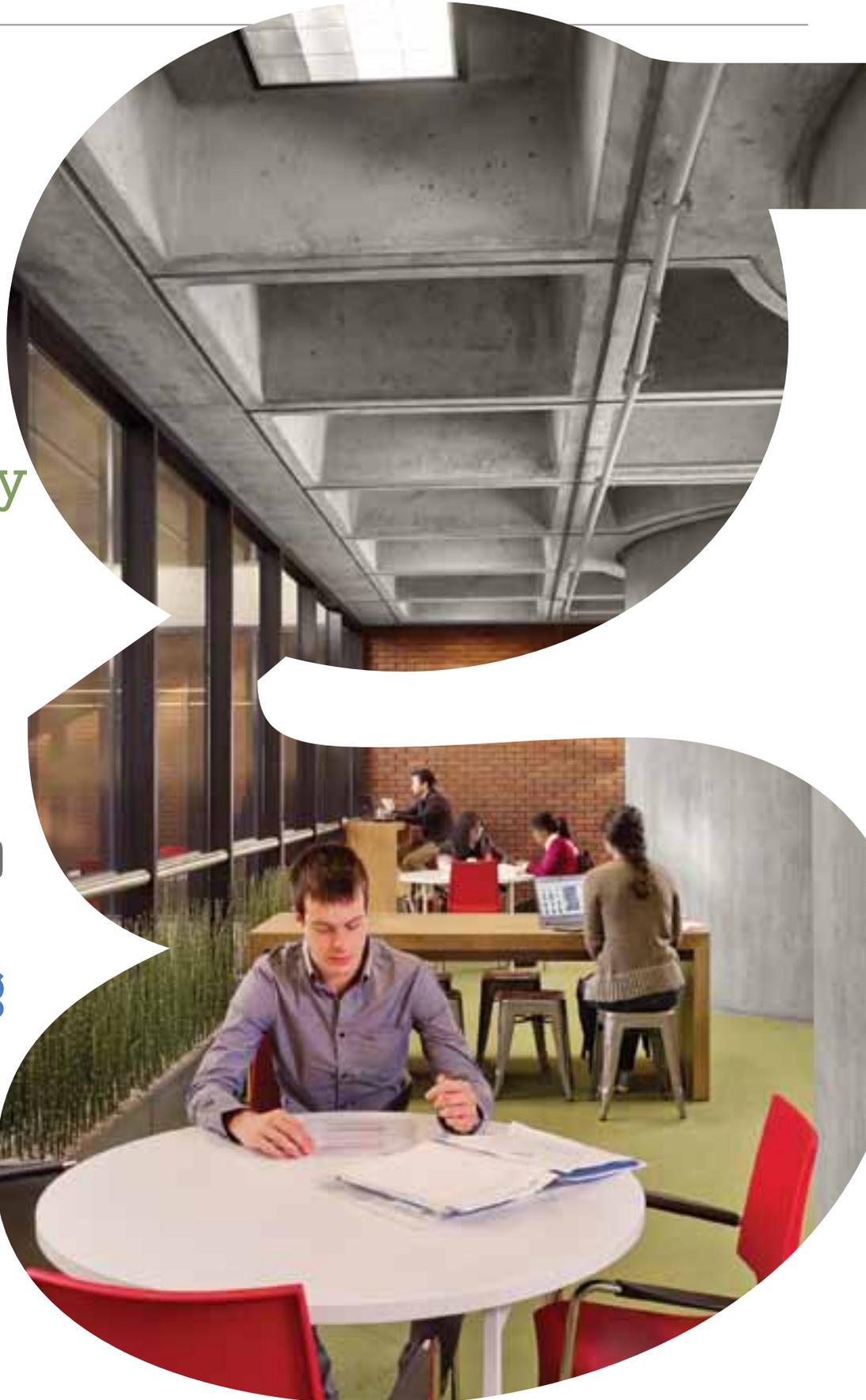
## Our Military Heritage

A TRIBUTE TO  
OUR VETERANS

EXPANDING  
COMMITMENT TO  
THOSE WHO SERVED

Renovating  
Education  
for the 21st  
Century

fall 2014



# Expanding Commitment to Those Who Served

By Francesca Parise



Photo by Morgan Dodge

The opening of Golden Gate University School of Law's Veterans Legal Advocacy Center (VLAC) this fall represents a major stride in the university's commitment to serve military veterans by helping some with their legal issues and by supporting others who wish to join the legal profession — while also offering GGU Law students an opportunity to assist with veterans' legal needs.

GGU recently earned the Military Friendly® School designation for its sixth consecutive year by offering programs and services designed to help students who are active-duty or veterans. GGU has a longstanding history of "championing the academic success of service members." The VLAC reflects GGU Law's leadership in educating students about veterans legal advocacy through practical, firsthand experience working with veteran clients on their disability claims and discharge upgrades.

From L - R  
Professor Dan Devoy, Dean Rachel Van Cleave and Kate Baldridge

## Noble Beginnings

The idea for the VLAC began at a memorial service for Ambassador Chris Stevens, who died in an attack on the US Embassy in Benghazi, Libya. Rachel Van Cleave, dean of GGU School of Law — and a classmate and friend of Stevens — spoke at the service held at their alma mater, Hastings College of the Law. Following the memorial, Van Cleave struck up a conversation with Hastings students who happened to be military veterans. They told her, "People here just don't get us." She wondered if students at GGU Law felt the same way.

"So, I asked to meet with veteran students," Van Cleave explains. "I asked them what we can do to better support them, and they gave us ideas. Lots of ideas." The first

set of initiatives focused on present students' needs. Van Cleave helped streamline scheduling issues to accommodate students who had to leave for military duties. Additionally, the school enhanced wellness programs to help veterans in their transition to civilian life.

Van Cleave also focused on the needs of veterans as future students. "We admitted two dozen veterans. I contacted all of them personally," says Van Cleave. "I explained what we had to offer. Nine of them matriculated." Participation in the Yellow Ribbon program is part of what GGU offers veteran students. Through this program, the Veterans Administration agrees to match whatever funds the university will contribute toward tuition, allowing qualified veterans to get up to 100 percent of their tuition costs covered, in some cases.

In addition to the Veteran Law Student Association at GGU Law, a coalition was formed with other Northern California law schools. "The different student groups are able to learn from each other," Van Cleave says. They also work together on an annual conference devoted to veteran legal issues.

## Serving Veterans

In their meeting with Van Cleave, the students expressed an interest in helping veterans with legal issues. To that end, the dean reached out to San Francisco attorney Dan Devoy, a veteran who had served in Iraq, graduated from GGU Law, and was already actively helping veterans with a variety of issues.

"Dean Van Cleave came up with an idea for an externship course," explains Devoy, "where the students came into my law office for a certain number of hours per week to

practice military veterans law." The students interviewed veteran clients, investigated their claims, and compiled evidence to present to the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Van Cleave also charged graduate fellow Kate Baldrige with investigating how a Veterans Legal Advocacy Center would work at GGU School of Law. "I can't overemphasize Kate's contribution," Devoy says. "It was her mission to research how this center could work. She worked tirelessly behind the scenes to get this going."

Devoy's externs moved from his office back to the law school, and with Devoy still in charge, the VLAC was born. The students take a seminar course in veterans law and work up to 16 hours a week on veteran clients' cases, primarily handling disability payments or upgrading of discharges.

Other schools in the coalition don't offer their students a course in veterans law, so Devoy teaches a one-credit course to help them, among other things, start their own veterans advocacy centers. "It's a great example of how law schools can work together for the benefit of the students," says Van Cleave.

## Serving Students

Byron Suarez, a third-year law student and president of the Veteran Law Student Association, enjoys the real-world training of the center. "We get guidance on how we will handle a case," he says. "We get the evidence we need to argue a case in front of the VA."

Though Suarez is a veteran of the Navy and was deployed as a medic with a Marine battalion in Iraq, he points out that most of the students in the Center are actually not veterans. "There are a lot of

people who care about veterans and veteran issues," he says. "It is very encouraging and makes me feel proud of my service."

Students will be going to Veterans Court, which handles first-time offender veterans. "Students can see how the criminal legal system deals with veterans and what veterans are going through," says Suarez.

"One of the things that GGU, and particularly the law school, are known for is ensuring that our students get practical training in addition to the theoretical learning," Van Cleave explains. "We believe that hands-on training reinforces the substance that students are learning in the classroom. We think it's critical for their awareness of community service and trying to bridge the justice gap."

The law school is exploring more opportunities for students to reach out to veterans, including helping in other areas of the law and providing legal services directly at the VA. Students are also going into the county jail to assist veterans with disability benefits and discharge upgrades.

Preliminary plans are underway to develop a website that will help veterans with their questions. Veterans will be able to go online and have their questions addressed directly by law students, under the supervision of law faculty.

Suarez explains how he had wanted to be a lawyer when he was young but "let the dream fade away." His fellow soldiers in Iraq encouraged him to take it up again. "We lost some of our guys out there. And because of their injuries, some won't be able to do what they dreamed," Suarez says. "I realized that I could still pursue my dream and maybe live their dreams through mine."



Veterans Law Conference panelists with Dean Van Cleave. From left to right: COL John Haramalis, Keith Boylan, Dean Rachel Van Cleave, Mary Wright, Keith Armstrong, Doctor Robert Owen.



**FRONT:** (from L to R) Nicole Suraci-Nguyen, GGU Law; Julie Cummings, GGU Law; Richard Sobrero, GGU Law; Byron Suarez, GGU Law; Nicholas Lansdown, UC Hastings Law. **BACK:** (from L to R) Dean Rachel Van Cleave, GGU Law; Professor Dan Devoy, Director of the Veterans' Legal Advocacy Center, GGU Law; Vincent Townsend, USF Law; Byron Lam, GGU Business School; Rick Leslie-Schoonover, UC Hastings Law; Erik Christensen, Director of Communications and Media Relations, GGU Law.

"[The VLAC] worked on my claim and succeeded in doing what I could not in forty years: they got the VA to finally acknowledge my service-connected injuries and grant me VA healthcare."

— *David Jackson, Navy veteran*

# A tribute to our veterans

By Francesca Parise



Free Lecture for Vets 1945 | Photos from the GGU archives

Golden Gate University has had a long and mutually beneficial history with the US armed forces, starting with its military base degree programs in the 1960s through 1990s and continuing today with its online degree programs and participation in the Yellow Ribbon Program.

We spoke to three notable alumni who earned their degrees through GGU's on-base programs: San Francisco native George J. Sakaldasis completed Squadron Office School as a distinguished graduate before enrolling in Golden Gate University's public administration master's program; Richard M. Chávez also earned his MPA from GGU while serving; and Chip Fulghum earned an MBA in management from GGU during his time on base. All three have since gone on to lead highly

successful careers.

GGU began offering degree programs on US military bases in 1967, expanding to more than thirty locations by the early 1990s. Because military personnel are rarely in one place for long, these programs were set up to enable a student to begin his or her education on one base and complete it on another. About half of GGU's military base degree programs were offered in California, while the rest were spread throughout the country, with the exception of one short-lived program at the military base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

GGU's military base degree programs differed from base to base but featured two schools at each location: the School of Business and Public Administration and the School of General Studies,

as they were known at that time.

Undergraduates were encouraged to choose both a major and a minor, one from each school, and choices ranged from American studies to computer science. Master's degree programs were also offered and at Vandenberg Air Force Base in Santa Barbara students could even pursue a doctorate degree program in public administration.

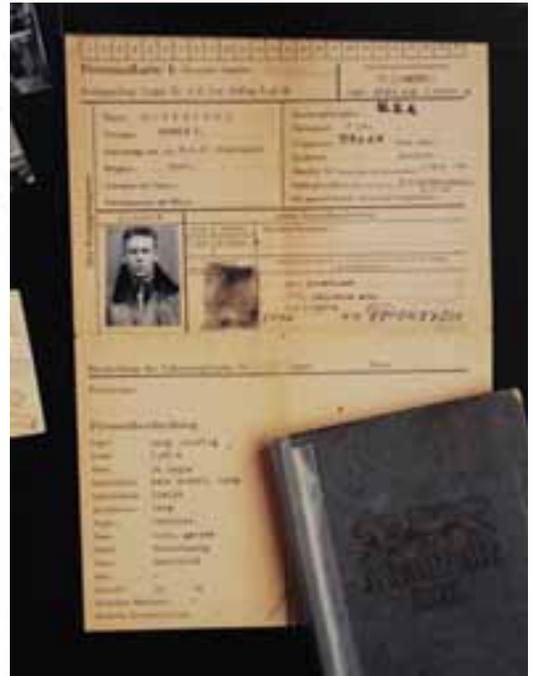
GGU was often not the only university offering degree programs on any given base, but it was the clear choice for students like George Sakaldasis, who earned his MPA at Castle Air Force Base in 1975. "I wanted to get my master's from Golden Gate University because it had a very good reputation, especially among the military officers," Sakaldasis says.

He recalls the camaraderie

“I wanted to get my master’s from Golden Gate University because it had a very good reputation, especially among the military officers.”



Howard K Moorehouse (Class of '51) with his prisoner-of-war identification sheet and photos of his wife



among his fellow students, many of whom were Air Force pilots, and how they would look out for each other, taking extensive notes when a classmate had to skip class to fly a mission.

“The instructors were first class,” says Sakaldasis. “Our main instructor, the President of the Merced County Association of Governments, taught his classes the way you would to a set of professionals, because even though we were officers rather than academics or working in city governments, he saw us as professionals with degrees and important jobs in the military.

“Being treated as a professional is probably one of the key benefits of Golden Gate University.”

Today Mr. Sakaldasis is the Deputy Director for Military and Nuclear Affairs in the National Security Office at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Reflecting on his time at Castle Air Force Base’s GGU program, Sakaldasis says, “Golden Gate University allowed me to become a better Air Force Officer and a steward of the taxpayers’ dollars.”

Rich Chávez, Director of the Office of Operations Coordination and Planning at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Chip

Fulghum, Chief Financial Officer at the DHS, also graduated from GGU’s Air Force Base degree programs. Both Fulghum and Chávez drew valuable perspective from their GGU courses.

“When you’re in the military, you look at everything from a military perspective,” recalls Mr. Chávez, who graduated with his MPA in 1990, “but it’s uniquely different from the civilian public administration side of the world that we deal with on a daily basis.” GGU’s military base courses, frequently taught by working professionals, provided students with current, practical insights

## Feature Story: Our Military Heritage



1972 Graduation, Mather Air Force Base, Sacramento

into the civilian work environment. The fact that on-base classes were often attended by local civilians added another dimension to the learning experience.

When asked to identify the biggest benefit of earning his MBA from GGU's Air Force Base degree program, Mr. Fulghum replies, "Not only did you have professors who brought a tremendous amount of learning to the table, but the other folks in the room also made it a unique learning



opportunity because of their diverse backgrounds. Whenever we did case studies, for example, students invariably could draw on their actual, real-world experience, which made the classroom that much more realistic." Although the military base program no longer exists, GGU continues to serve members of the military through online and on-campus programs and its participation in the Yellow Ribbon Program. Additionally, Golden Gate University provides counseling and career planning

services to students, regardless of military background, and specifically offers the help of a veteran services coordinator who, according to Dean of Student Affairs Kayla Krupnick Walsh, "is a point-person for our veteran students and helps connect them with the various resources that are available to them."

Dr. Jay Gonzalez, Chair of the Department of Public Administration at GGU, explains that encryption allows active-duty service members deployed overseas to earn their degrees from bases around the world, even from undisclosed locations in Afghanistan and Iraq. "You could be in the battlefield and at the same time finishing

GGU Students Mather Air Force Base 1972



your classes,” says Gonzalez. “Some students are in education centers onboard battleships or aircraft carriers.”

Veterans may be eligible for the Yellow Ribbon Program, which GGU has been involved in since its inception in 2009. The Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits provide eligible Veterans with up to \$20,235.02 a year to pay for tuition and fees, once those funds have been utilized, the Yellow Ribbon program becomes available, which Golden Gate University contributes up to \$13,000 each semester towards tuition and fees, and the Veterans Benefits Administration will match it. Students participating in the program are not limited to receiving veterans’ benefits; they may also apply

for student loans, financial aid, or grants. The Yellow Ribbon Program is available to cover both in-person and online degree programs for veterans, including open-enrollment students, and has aided over 450 veteran students since 2009.

According to Kathi Kelly, Associate Director of Scholarships, Financial Aid and VA Benefits at GGU, “The Yellow Ribbon agreement offers the opportunity for a qualified student to get up to 100% of their tuition paid — nothing out of pocket for them, including at the law school.” **It’s no wonder that Golden Gate University has qualified for the Military Friendly® School designation six years in a row!**

Norfolk Virginia Naval Base Graduation, 1989

