MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

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As part of the comprehensive support services offered through Wayland's Virtual Center of Excellence for Veteran Student Success, the Mental Health & Performance program is designed to address the unique transition challenges that are common among military-affiliated students through accessible and adaptable services.

These services are offered free of charge to verified military-affiliated students and are accessible worldwide.
While military and civilian students face similar challenges adjusting to academic life, there are a few unique challenges military-affiliated students may face. These challenges include:

- Transitioning between high-structure and low-structure environments
- Impact of diagnosed and undiagnosed invisible wounds (such as PTSD)
- Navigating bureaucratic agencies (VA)
- Understanding nuances between VA disability, ADA and Section 504
- Difficulty accepting the impact of chronic stress from military service
- Difficulty relating to those who do not understand military service or experiences
BARRIERS TO CARE

Availability
Getting timely appointments for mental health and performance through the VA often proves difficult with limited accessibility.

Stigma
Leaving an environment that frowned upon perceived weakness and emphasized "getting the job done" at all costs. Not wanting to be judged or looked down upon.

Bureaucracy
Navigating and accessing appropriate services through the VA.

Confidence
Concerns over the privacy, safety, and security of seeking counseling.

Our Solution
1. Services provided by a licensed professional with military experience
2. No connection or reporting requirements to the VA or any military institution
3. World-wide accessibility to services with appointments readily available
4. Only 2 requirements to access services - enrollment at Wayland and a military connection
SERVICES OFFERED

Mental Health & Performance services ensure the academic success of military and veteran students through optimizing mental health and human psychological performance. Topics and issues addressed through services include, but are not limited to, performance enhancement, preventative services, and recovery management.

01 Personal Counseling, Consultation, and Coaching
One-on-one counseling and consultation sessions designed to assist students with a wide range of situations to include obtaining appropriate academic accommodations where needed.

02 Community Referrals
Referrals to appropriate agencies for students in need of evaluation or care beyond the scope of services provided by the MH&P counselor.

03 Support Groups
Group counseling for a variety of issues pertinent to the veteran population
SUPPORT GROUPS

**Moral Injury Psychoeducation:** Four-week educational course to introduce concepts related to moral injury.

**Veterans Wellness Group:** Ongoing psychoeducational group based on the science of well-being.

**Stress Less – Relaxation Enhancement Group:** Four-week psychoeducational group to implement a comprehensive relaxation enhancement protocol.

**Courage Group:** Twelve-week therapy group for Veterans who have experienced military sexual trauma.

**Anxiety and Depression Recovery Group:** Informed approach to treating stress disorders by focusing on co-occurring anxiety and depression.

**Individual Resiliency Program:** Psychoeducation group focused on enhancing skills such as planning, focus, self-control, awareness, and flexibility.

**Multi-Setting Peaceful Mind Group:** Psychoeducational group focused on addressing anxiety in veterans with mild-to-moderate memory impairment.
Making an individual appointment for an initial consultation, check out the resources in Blackboard or sign up for a group! 

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"I used to be able to just knock things out at work but lately I just don't seem to finish anything. And I completely blanked out a doctor's appointment. I NEVER do that! I don't know how I could be so careless! I don't know why I can't just get it together. And my house is a mess! It's embarrassing! I want to take care of it but when I get home I just lay on the couch and don't want to move. I don't want anyone to come over and think I'm a lazy slob...but that's what I am! There's nothing wrong with my life so why does it feel like I am just...existing out here at the bare minimum! What's wrong with me????"

**There's something funny going on with management.**
The executive functions of our brain consist of working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibition control. These functions manage our daily choices and behaviors.

Working memory manages information about whatever we are currently doing in the here and now. It allows us to quickly remember the 5-digit code sent to our phone that we need to type into the webpage to access a secure site and then completely dump that information once we are in.

Cognitive flexibility allows us to shift and move from one thing to another so we can adapt and react to unexpected situations. It also allows us to imagine and be creative. This function allows us to think "on our feet" and switch tasks at will.

Inhibition control gives us the ability to direct or manage our thoughts, emotions, and actions. This is what keeps us from flipping the table at a doctor's office because the nurse just "doesn't get it" because we know that flipping tables is frowned upon in our society. It also involves interference control. Like when we are trying to do public math in our head and a child keeps demonstrating how they can count to 100. Inhibition control allows us to suppress the information the child is spouting in order to focus on the calculations in our head.
We are living in a house of cards!
Executive functions are the foundation that allows us to accomplish higher-level functions such as:

- Planning - mentally mapping out a series of actions towards a goal
- Reasoning - applying critical thinking skills, building on stored knowledge to think outside of the box and break down complicated tasks into more manageable pieces
- Problem-solving - puts all the functions together to apply what you know and how you think to overcome obstacles

When these functions are not working properly (called executive dysfunction) it can lead to:

- **Trouble focusing on just one thing** (Oooo I have to do the dishes. Ok here we go. Oh hold on, I forgot to put the cereal box away. Ewe this shelf is dusty. Let me grab my duster from under the sink. Oh yeah the dishes. Let me soak them. Hmmm, where is my sponge? Oh, I forgot that I need to pick that up from the store. Let me make a list....)

- **Focusing TOO much on just one thing** (you fall into a rabbit hole and don't realize 4 hours have gone by and you haven't eaten dinner...also you suddenly have to go to the bathroom. How long have you been holding it for?)

- **Daydreaming or "spacing out" when you should be paying attention** (like when someone says to you "HELLOOOOO!!!! I asked you a question. Wait. Are you even listening to me???? Your eyes look glazed over. Where did you go?" and all you can say is "sorry, I just spaced out.....I’m just tired?")

- **Trouble planning or carrying out a task** (you can't seem to visualize the finishing product or goal. You almost draw a blank if someone questions you on the task. Maybe you were supposed to clean out your garage. You can't even envision the clean garage. Do you have shelves? If you keep the bikes, are they on a wall or something? If you can't envision the product, you can't organize or plan the tasks. You are just all over the place grasping at straws.

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• **Difficulty motivating yourself to start a task** (sometimes doing a task takes an enormous amount of mental fortitude and our brain just says "nah." We might even catch ourselves saying "I need to message my doctor about my medication. SO I need to get on my laptop. (space out for 5 minutes)...sigh... I really should just message my doc...(space out for 30 minutes)...oh yeah, I need to message my doctor...(doom scroll for another 3 hours)...ok let me just do it...(logs on to computer and gets hungry)...I need to eat....(leaves computer and makes snack)...FOUR MONTHS LATER.........I really need to message my doctor about my medication....ugh....why am I not just doing it!!!!!!!)

• **Struggling to move from one task to another** (you start on a project that is due at the end of the semester when you receive a pop up that a quiz is due before the end of the day but continue to spend hours on the project)

• **Getting distracted or interrupted and losing your train of thought** (you leave your keys in the refrigerator because you wanted a snack, but your hands were full, so you put your keys down inside the refrigerator and forgot about them. Now you are tearing your entire house apart and yelling at your kids because the flipping keys are missing and you can't fathom where they might have gone. As if some mystical creature, probably the same one that steals all the left socks out of your dryer, has broken into your house and stolen your keys. I mean where else could they be? What might have happened to them? This is ludicrous! I WANT MY KEYS!)

• **Problems with impulse control** (like when you mindlessly snack even though you're supposed to be fasting for a blood draw or pressing a button you were told two seconds ago not to press...but everything inside of me is saying press that button!)

• **Struggling with thinking before you talk** (you blurt out the first thing that pops into your head. Boss says "why are we losing our top level managers?" You blurt out "because the pay here sucks!" instead of "Well I noticed other companies offering more pay for the same work."

• **Having trouble explaining your thought process** (you might catch yourself saying something like "Hmmm. So why did I choose XYZ? Well, I mean I know there is a reason. I can see it in my head. I just...I don't know how to explain it. But there's a reason. And it's good. And I know it. I can feel it. I just can't find the words right now. But it's there.")
Executive dysfunction sounds terrible! What are the possible causes?
Certain mental health conditions can impact the way the brain works such as depression, addictions, ADD/ADHD, etc.

Certain degenerative diseases can impact the way the brain works such as toxins, infections, TBIs, brain tumors, epilepsy, seizures, etc.

Sounds like procrastination and laziness actually.
If you are choosing not to do something and you can control it, then it makes sense to call it procrastination or laziness. However, executive dysfunction is an issue with parts of your brain. This makes it something that is not easily controlled, if at all. It is like asking someone who is waking up from anesthesia to give a briefing on quantum physics. Regardless of how much they know about quantum physics or how much they want to deliver the speech, it is not going to happen until they come completely out of anesthesia and those effects are gone. Executive dysfunction is like an anesthetized brain.
TBI

Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs) can result from any blow or jolt to your head.

Symptoms:
- Headaches
- Blurred vision
- Hearing problems
- Difficulty speaking
- Dizziness
- Changes in your sense of taste or smell
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things
- Repeating yourself
- Becoming easily angry or frustrated

PTSD

PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by witnessing or experiencing an event that puts us in an emotional state that signals a threat to life or well-being.

Symptoms:
- Intrusive memories - recurrent, unwanted memories, flashbacks, upsetting dreams, severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you of the trauma
- Avoidance - trying to avoid thinking or talking about it, avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of it
- Negative changes in thinking and mood - negative thoughts about yourself and the world, hopelessness, memory problems, difficulty maintaining relationships, feeling detached from others, lack of interest in activities, difficulty experiencing positive emotions, and/or feeling emotionally numb
- Changes in physical and emotional reactions - easily startles or frightened, always on guard, self-destructive behavior, trouble sleeping, trouble concentrating, irritability, and/or overwhelming guilt or shame
ANXIETY

Anxiety is a normal emotion that helps to motivate us when appropriate such as when needing to study for an important exam or when presented with a problem to motive us towards finding a solution. Anxiety becomes an issue when we are unable to stop or control worrying to the point where it interferes with day-to-day activities.

Symptoms:
- Feeling restless, jumpy, or on edge
- Excessive worrying about everyday decisions
- Difficulty concentrating
- Racing heart or cold, clammy hands
- Trembling or twitching
- Having trouble catching your breath
- Feeling dizzy, nauseous, or lightheaded
- Difficulty sleeping

DEPRESSION

Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness, loss of interest and motivation.

Symptoms:
- Feelings of sadness, tearfulness emptiness or hopelessness
- Angry outbursts, irritability or frustration
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most or all activities
- Sleep disturbances (too much or too little)
- Tiredness and lack of energy
- Appetite changes
- Slowed thinking, speaking or movement
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, fixating on past failures
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things
- Frequent or recurrent thoughts of death
- Unexplained physical problems (back pain, headaches, etc)