

2024 Veterans in Society Conference

Tidal Changes in the Sea of Goodwill

Call for Papers

Overview

On August 30, 2021, the United States withdrew its military forces from Afghanistan, marking the end of the longest war in American history. During the twenty-years of the Global War on Terror, between two and three million American service members engaged in post 9-11 war operations. American support for veterans and their families during this period was remarkably high. Beginning in 2010, Admiral Michael Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, referred to American public and private support for veterans as a “Sea of Goodwill.”

Much has happened since the early 2010s and particularly after the formal end of the Global War on Terrorism. Public attention diverted from veterans and towards other issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the War in Ukraine, and growing isolationist sentiment affecting all foreign policy initiatives, begs the question: Will this shifting focus lead to an evaporation of the Sea of Goodwill?

Recent events suggest that this might be the case. On April 3, 2023, the Editorial Board of the *Washington Post* published an op-ed suggesting that federal support for veterans’ benefits needs to be “pruned.”

Concurrently, and perhaps relatedly, the U.S. military is facing a recruitment crisis. In 2022, the Army missed its recruiting goal by 25% and those poor numbers are projected to continue to decline. The size of the nation’s primary land force could plummet by as much as 7% over the next two years. The implications of these declining numbers are widespread and will affect American war readiness and the experiences of veterans for years to come.

The 2024 Veterans in Society conference, *Tidal Changes in the Sea of Goodwill*, will explore whether and how changes in society mark an inflection point regarding the treatment and experiences of veterans in the U.S. and abroad. We invite scholars and policy professionals at all levels—including students and those outside of academia—to cross national, cultural, historical, and disciplinary boundaries to consider important turning points in a nation’s support for its veterans.

Conference Scope

The Veterans Studies Association believes that the category, *veteran*, must be approached critically, inclusively, and comparatively. We support critical studies covering military and former military personnel and their families of all identities, from the time they contemplate living outside the military, across their lifespans as they navigate civilian norms and lifeways. We especially encourage scholarship that highlights the experiences of marginalized people, including women, LGBTQ+ people, members of racial/ethnic/religious minority groups, refugees and immigrants, whose “veteran-ness” has been contested or obscured by dominant narratives of who counts as a veteran. We also invite work that uses the category of veteran as a way of interrogating the experiences of warriors-come-home across temporal, geographical, and cultural boundaries, including those outside the modern, Western system of nation-states and permanent, state-sponsored military establishments.

Sub-Themes

Below you will find several sub-themes to consider as ways to contribute to the larger theme of the conference. These sub-themes are designed to inspire, but not limit, possible submissions. The conference hosts and proposal review team welcome submissions on topics outside the sub-themes but relevant to the multidisciplinary field of Veterans Studies.

Tidal Changes in the Sea of Goodwill

- Empirically, what conditions have been conducive to creating and sustaining seas of good (or ill) will toward veterans, within and/or across countries or generations?
- What does a sea of goodwill *look* and *feel* like? How do concepts like *support* or *goodwill* manifest in practice among veterans, military families, civilians, and elites that shape culture and politics?
- If there is a decrease in the Sea of Goodwill, what are the anticipated impacts (physical, psychological, economic, social, etc.) on veterans and their families?
- Considering the emerging field of Veterans Studies, what pedagogical and administrative efforts are or should be utilized to sustain and grow the field through anticipated changes in the Sea of Goodwill?

Effects of Changes in a Nation's Military on its Veterans ... and vice-versa

- In what respects are civilians' attitudes and behaviors toward veterans entangled with their attitudes toward a country's military and its potential use?
- What are the consequences of being a veteran whose service was on the (perceived) losing or morally-wrong side of a conflict?
- When paradigms shift in military mission, doctrine, technology, and the makeup of the force, what effects are experienced by veterans and their families?

Veterans in the Collective Consciousness

- How do literary, media, and popular culture representations of veterans influence dynamic public opinion about veterans?
- How do memorials/monuments commemorating the military service of one era/allegiance shape civilian attitudes about veterans of other eras/allegiances? What do they teach veterans or currently serving military?
- How can emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality be harnessed to support veterans and their families? How can these technologies help raise awareness about military/veteran experiences among civilians?

Comparative Experiences of Veterans

- How do the experiences of veterans in societies across the globe compare to each other? What potential reasons are there for similarities and differences?
- What aspects of military/veteran experience can enrich understanding of the successes and challenges of marginalized veterans?

- How can a clearer understanding of veterans' experiences in previous generations provide us with lessons or insights about veterans' position in society today?
- If American veterans face a watershed moment in public and private support, what moments from past "turning points" in U.S. military history can provide value, insight, or understanding about today and the potential future?

Session Types

- Individual Presentations
 - Submit: 75-to 100-word abstract (including a title; title does not count against word count) and a 250-word proposal
- Panel Presentation (3 presenters) or Roundtables (4-or-more presenters)
 - Submit: 150- to 200-word abstract (including a title; title does not count against word count), 750-word proposal including individual presenters' topics (and titles)
- Poster
 - Submit: 75-100 word abstract (including a title; title does not count against word count) and a 250-word proposal
- Works-in-Progress (A workshop session specifically for sharing/refining early-stage research and/or engagement projects with kindred scholars and potential collaborators)
 - Submit: 500-word proposal (including a title; title does not count against word count; submissions will not undergo peer review)

Submission Guidelines

All submissions should conform to a widely accepted citation style (latest editions) that will be intelligible to an interdisciplinary audience (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago).

Submissions must be emailed to vets.in.society@gmail.com by October 1, 2023 (11:59 p.m. PT). Your title, abstract, and proposal should be in a single file. File types should be limited to .docx, .odt, .txt, or .rtf files (please no .pdf or .pages files). **Files must be formatted for blind review:** no author names, affiliations, or other personally identifiable information. Please respect word counts for desired session type (see above "session types").

More information at www.veteranology.org

Email questions to: veterans.studies.association@gmail.com

Important Dates

Submissions open: June 1, 2023

Proposal deadline: October 1, 2023

Notification of acceptance: Mid-November 2023