Fraternity provides support, helps veterans stay in school

By Bill Tilley
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Students at Ohio State who have served in the military have a fraternity they can join that is comprised of mostly veterans.

The National Veterans Fraternity was founded at Purdue University in 1990. Epsilon Tau Sigma became an official chapter at OSU in 1994. The fraternity was formed out of the Student Veterans Organization, which was founded at OSU in 1992.

The Student Veterans Organization was formed independently of Epsilon Tau Sigma, but when it was discovered how similar the goals of the two were, it made sense to join, said John Welday, president of Epsilon Tau Sigma.

"Their goal was to help student veterans with the changes that result from leaving the military and entering college. That was our focus too," Welday said.

Welday, a junior in business, said the fraternity was formed to address student veteran issues on campus and provide a social environment specifically for them.

"Our focus is to help keep veterans in school by helping them with the university process and to have fun. However, we feel we could do more if more student veterans knew we existed," Welday said.

Tim Coffey, housing chair of Epsilon Tau Sigma and a junior in hospitality management, said the nontraditional status of its members means they cannot get the same assistance with college issues that students right out of high school can.

"Our big push is financial aid. Many veterans are ineligible for scholarships because they have to be applied for right after high school, so getting money to go to school is a problem," he said.

Coffey said another problem student veterans face is getting their classes they have taken in the military to transfer to college credit at OSU.

"Ohio State doesn't recognize a lot of our core transfer credits, which gives us college credit. So we wind up taking over a lot of things we've already done," he said.

Epsilon Tau Sigma's formation at OSU has helped veterans voice their concerns more effectively, Coffey said.

"In a university with 60,000 students nobody hears you as an individual. But as a group, they listen," he said.

Welday said one of the biggest misconceptions about the fraternity is only veterans are allowed to join.

"You don't have to be a veteran to be a member. You only have to be interested in veterans affairs," Welday said.

Welday said student veterans are automatically members once they pay their dues. He said the dues are lower than most fraternities on campus and there is no initiation.

"If you went to boot camp you've been hazed all you need to," he said.

There are about 1,000 students and about 2,000 faculty and staff who are veterans at OSU, yet membership numbers are a big problem in the group.

"We have about 20 active members here at OSU out of around 1,000 student veterans. It's hard to get new members because most people on campus don't know we're here," Welday said. Retention of members is also a problem because most of them don't find out about the fraternity until their junior or senior year. They join and then they graduate, he said.

"We really need to get some fresh new and sophomores involved," Welday said.

"I enjoy being with people my own age who've had the same (military) experiences I have. It gives us a common background even though we may have served in different services. The bond you have to develop with people who become your close friends is already there," he said.