Veterans Enrich Pima

(male announcer) Welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives, a look on how education enriches our community. And now, here’s your host, Nina Trasoff.

(Nina Trasoff) Hello, and thank you so much for joining us for Pima Community College Perspectives. My guests today are Chancellor Roy Flores and Michael Tulino, who is the Registrar and Admissions Director at Pima Community College. Now, Dr. Flores, in last week, in our first program, we talked about the role Pima Community College plays in the community an—and your responsibilities and your mission. Today’s topic is looking at how veterans enrich Pima Community College. But I’d really like to know, what is Pima’s role in enriching the lives of the veterans who have come back from serving us abroad?

(Dr. Flores) Well, of course, veterans are an important, uh, an important constituency to Pima Community College and important members of the community. Our role as a community college is to reach out and provide educational services and other support services to everybody, including 18-year olds fresh out of high school, as well as people who are retired and want to continue learning.

Now I, I think we have a special obligation to veterans, because of the contributions they make to their country; they, uh, many times, these are individuals who interrupt their lives in order to provide service. They have, uh, their own jobs, their own families and, uh, they go off, in this case, to the Middle East. Uh, as a veteran myself, I remember the importance of the G.I. Bill and the importance of going to college. I started college when I was 24, and without the G.I. Bill and the services that, in this case, Indiana state provided, I would not have graduated from college. So, I—I think that this is what Pima can do for people.

(Ms. Trasoff) It—it must make a profound difference in the lives of the veterans, of all students you serve, but especially the veterans, at this time, in—in our community, because we are a military city in so many ways.

(Dr. Flores) We are. And let’s not forget that, that, uh, one could argue that—that returning veterans transformed America in the last half of the 20th century. Those coming from World War II and subsequently, Korea and Vietnam, uh, came back and went to college, and they’ve become our national leaders. So this is the next generation of leaders, and we’re privileged to help them, uh, get a leg up.

(Ms. Trasoff) I like that, that—that’s a wonderful way to say it. I mean, this is our next generation, and you look back at, what they call the “Greatest Generation,” and the difference that they made, my parents’ generation made, um, it really is extraordinary, the opportunity. And I think people lose sight because these are younger people coming back, for the most part, that
this is our next generation of leadership, and they’ve already proven themselves capable of leadership.

(Dr. Flores) Uh, indeed. I think, if you look at where America has drawn its pool of talent, in the early part of the 20th century, it was primarily from, uh, from the upper class and Ivy League universities and so on. But it was the G.I. Bill and returning veterans that, that really broadened the, uh, the impact of the average American; now they are, they are, are judges and lawyers and members of Congress and Presidents and so on. So we’re very proud to participate in helping the next generation define America.

(Ms. Trasoff) And Pima does play an important role. And Michael, turning to you for a moment, because you look at the admissions and who is coming into Pima. Um, has—there is, um, a bill that might be like the G.I. Bill, but the next boost for it, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, which is called "Chapter 33", or known as "Chapter 33", and that’s been in effect just over a year now. What kind of impact has that had on enrollment at Pima, and why do you think that bill may be important for this next generation?

(Michael Tulino) Uh, yeah, that bill has had a large impact on the enrollment at—at Pima and with, and with other colleges across the nation. Um, Pima had just under 1700 veterans in the, in the year constituting from July 1st to June 30 from ’09 to ’10, and we’ve increased, uh, about 600-700 students from the previous few years. Uh, we do think that that Chapter 33 Bill has had a large part to play in that. Um, we’re currently enrolled, enrolling about 1450 veterans this coming fall, so we’re even up from, from our numbers from last year. Uh, about 270 of those students are under the Chapter 33 Bill. And that bill is really important to allow the veteran to attend, to really have their pick of the university or community college that they’d like to attend. Um, there’s additional resources, in terms of books, uh, stipends, and housing allowance for those veterans under that bill, um, which is different from the previous G.I. Bill. So, uh, the opportunities for the veterans, uh, have expanded with that bill, and—and we’re happy to play a part in that.

(Ms. Trasoff) I would imagine that Pima plays an important role, or is an important option for a lot of veterans, because many of them are coming back and reuniting with families, and they are earning a living while they’re also coming back to school. So you offer a kind of flexibility that perhaps is not available anywhere else.

(Dr. Flores) Indeed. The, uh, most of the students at Pima Community College are going part-time, and they have full-time jobs. And so, for those veterans who, who, um, have the opportunity to go to school full-time, they can go directly to the University of Arizona, and I know they also have a fine veteran support program. But for the many other veterans who, who have families and jobs and, and need to go to school part-time, or who simply want to concentrate on, on, uh, going through one of our many occupational and technical programs, then Pima would be the place for them.

(Ms. Trasoff) Michael, what are some of the resources that you’re offering? I mean, you have vast resources for all students, but there are some particular programs that you have, that are geared to vets. Could you talk about those?
Sure. So our number one goal, um, at Pima, is to make the process easy for the veteran. Um, the biggest thing we want, we want to do is make sure we’re—we’re thanking them and—and showing the respect for their service and, again, making things simple when they get to—to enroll in our school. Um, the federal process, sometimes, can be a little daunting; there are a number of documents that they need to collect as a veteran, um, to—to, um, enlist their benefits, and what we want to do is kind of facilitate that process, first and foremost. Um, it’s important, again, for that veteran student to be able to come in and—and deal with the least number of barriers as possible, and we need to make things easy.

Um, so we’ve done that in—in terms of our operations and our processes. We have a number of, of folks available across all of our campuses, um, to facilitate that process. We have, um, what we consider advisors, and also counselors, to meet with the veterans if we need to. Um, we also have, uh, a vibrant Vet Club that has started at Downtown Campus and now is expanding to the West Campus. We have a number of other, uh, Student Life opportunities for the veterans. We also offer work-study opportunities, so if they’re, they’re looking to, to get in, uh, to get some employment situation resolved, we can, we can offer that as well. And we do have a number of initiatives that we’re, um, looking at, in terms of technology, to expand our, our reach and our contact with veterans.

Uh, again, as Dr. Flores said, the flexibility of their lives, with—with full-time jobs and families; we want to make sure we can reach them essentially, 24-hours/ 7-days a week. Um, so we’re going to put forward kind of a "virtual vet resource area" where they can access information about their certification; they have links to local resources, just in terms of, uh, veterans’ organizations. Um, we have links to, again, the documentation that’s necessary. We also have some, some news feeds, local news feeds, as well as national news feeds, to come in and give a good perspective for that veteran. Again, to reach them 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, wherever they may be.

And you also, among your faculty, you have a large number of veterans on faculty, starting with Dr. Flores.

We—we do. We have over 60 full-time faculty that are veterans; again, our Chancellor, being a veteran, has a very keen perspective, a very good interest in, in, um, in the activities of veterans and their educational, uh, uh, goals. So—so we definitely have a large, um, constituency that’s, that’s, uh, able to serve as even just a peer or a mentor in a lot of situations. Um, and we’re, and we’re very happy, again, about the club that has started to, to kind of facilitate and to bridge that, uh, between our faculty, our administrators, our staff, and our students.

One of the issues that we hear a great—I mean, vet, vets have particular needs. We’ve already talked about, you know, coming back from service, getting integrated back into our community and their family life. But a lot of them are also coming back with issues of, uh, post-traumatic stress, something that the community is aware of, and we know so much more about now than we did in the Vietnam era or the World War II era. You—you mentioned counseling and special resources. Are there special needs that, I’m not saying every vet, but
many vets do need? And what are the resources that you do have to encourage them and help them succeed?

(Mr. Tulino) Sure. Um, they—veteran students have needs that are, in a lot of cases, similar to our other students, and in a lot of cases, they may be slightly different. Um, we do have—a large counseling corps that is available at any campus, um, where the veteran student, or any student, can make appointments with and talk about a number of issues. Um, those folks have been trained and are, um, are well-versed in the issues that veterans face, and so they can address some of those concerns as veterans come to them with, with some of their questions or—or, uh, issues.

Um, we also want to make sure that we, we enable the, the staff at the campuses to recognize certain signs. Um, a lot of times, the veteran may not, the veteran student may not approach somebody with—with an issue, but we do talk about that, in terms of recognizing signs in the classroom, from the faculty, um, to our staff, and again, with the peer situations that we’ve set up with the club and other, uh, staff and, uh, administrators. We want to make sure that there’s always a resource there for the veteran to turn to if, if they have a time that they need to discuss some things.

(Ms. Trasoff) That—that’s wonderful. We’ve talked for the last several minutes about what Pima is offering the veterans. Dr. Flores, what do the veterans offer the student body and the Pima Community? Um, what—what special gifts do they bring to the classroom that might add to the, to the dimension of the education for every student?

(Dr. Flores) Well, I think they bring quite a bit. Um, they have experiences that, to share, that, uh, that are im—important, that the average student doesn’t, uh, uh, hasn’t experienced, or the average faculty member, or the average staff person. And I’m not necessarily talking about recounting, uh, particular, uh, incidents of battle or anything such as that. Just the idea of meeting different cultures, uh, serving in, in a military organization, which is a different way of life. I mean, I—I recall the first, first day in the military. I knew my life was totally different; it was nothing like what I had experienced before.

And they bring a certain discipline and—and, uh, uh, maturity, I think, that helps students, uh, who—who would naturally be younger, because many of them are, are younger, right out of high school; all these young men and women are coming, uh, after high school, they go to the military. But, but even for the older student, the—they are, uh, uh, I—I think, uh, natural leaders, because of these experiences, so that we can all learn from, uh, from that, whether it’s the Chancellor or a faculty member or another student.

(Ms. Trasoff) One of the things you were talking about was the many campuses that you have, and that has to also make it easier, because the veterans are spread throughout the community. So that has to ease some pressure, both in terms of location, but also, the size of your classes might be more compatible for people coming back into a learning situation for the first time in a while after having been out in the community or in the world. So what is the advantage of, I mean, there are obvious advantages to smaller class sizes, but how do you think that plays with the veterans in particular?
(Mr. Tulino) Oh, I think, uh, it makes their situation and their transition, um, easier and—and makes them more comfortable. In a lot of situations, um, jumping into a class that has a smaller number of students, um, again, they’re not feeling overwhelmed, they’re not feeling that—that, that daunting kind of pressure of, of a larger, um, environment; they’re—they’re able to kind of make it, make it an intimate feel with their education. And that’s important too, is to keep, is to keep the veteran student, and also, all students, comfortable in their—in their, um, academic settings.

(Ms. Trasoff) They’re coming, also, off of a military background, obviously. Um, what programs do you have, I mean, are there a lot of majors at Pima? I know there are a few I can think of that are just a natural segue for veterans; they want to come in and find really meaningful work that they can do in their community. I’m thinking the Law Enforcement training that you do and other things.

(Michael Tulino) Sure.

(Ms. Trasoff) Can you give me ideas of that?

(Dr. Flores) Well, I think, uh, there are some, some programs where the transition and the military, where the military training and knowledge that, that they receive in the military would, would be a more direct benefit, perhaps. You mentioned law enforcement, firefighting, but there, there are many others. I think, Nina, the most important thing that they bring is a sense of purpose and maturity, and that, uh, they—they’re able to understand that they can, uh, they can learn new things, they can, they can succeed and master things, so that they probably would approach the College without limits, or fewer limits, than the average student.

(Ms. Trasoff) And do you find a lot of them use Pima as a jumping-off point, then, to—to go on to a full bachelor’s degree?

(Dr. Flores) That’s the plan for most of them. Michael?

(Mr. Tulino) Yeah, we do. Um, again, it’s a—it’s a nice place to transition from, from that military life to, to either a full-blown university or another type of institution; we—we provide that bridge. And we’re happy and—and very proud of the transfer students that we’re able to send to the University of Arizona, or any other state university, or any university for that matter. Um, it—it’s a nice transition for those students.

(Ms. Trasoff) And—and, and they’re—the College, we’ll be talking about this in future weeks when Dr. Shelton’s one of our guests, the partnership the College has established with the U of A, as well as other state universities, is phenomenal, of just trying to make everything easier for people to segue from one level—one part of their learning process on to the next. Um, final question, Michael, for you, um, what are we doing to attract veterans to Pima, to let them know about the amazing resources that are available for them here?

(Mr. Tulino) Well, we’ve done a number of things, um, at the campuses, just in terms of—of the student services that we offer. Um, we’re making, um, some, some pieces available at the campuses to let the veteran students know that they have resources, so once they do, um,
come to a campus, they can see that they’re welcomed, and they can see the resources and the benefits of being a student at Pima in terms of being a veteran. Um, we’re also, um partnering with the University of Arizona in—in a few weeks on—a conference that they’re hosting for a few days. Um, it’s called the “Veterans in Higher Education 2010,” and we’re looking forward to inviting all—all of the student veterans or any interested, uh, community members, administrators, faculty, staff, to—to attend that conference and really network and dialogue and, and share good information. And—and the nice thing about that is it’s free for the students and the veterans, so—so we encourage people to—to come to that.

(Ms. Trasoff) What a great resource. Well, thank you very much. We are going to take a break right now. And you are listening to Pima Community College Perspectives right here on The Jolt! And after the break, we’re going to come back and talk with a vet who is very active in the Vets for Vets group and is also an active student at Pima Community College. We’ll be right back.

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(male speaker) For more than 40 years, Pima Community College has helped prepare the citizens of Tucson and Pima County for good jobs and better lives for themselves and their families. We don’t do it alone. We appreciate your ongoing investment in education, especially during these extraordinarily tough times. Your tax dollars, combined with student tuition, make it possible for thousands of Southern Arizonans to get a jump-start before transferring to a university, to get the training they need to stay competitive at work, and to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow. Many of our students are seeking to restart their careers after losing their jobs, and some, their homes, during the recession.

All of our students know, as you do, that the more you learn, the more you earn. We know that today’s students are often juggling work and family, as well as school. That’s why Pima offers classes at night and on weekends at six campuses, more than 180 other locations, and over the Internet. Our programs deliver education how you want it and gives you the opportunity to achieve your goals at your pace. Today’s Pima Community College students will be tomorrow’s firefighters, nurses, police, teachers, and small business owners, the backbone of a safe, healthy, prosperous Tucson and Pima County. Thank you for your support as we continue to help you and your family build a better tomorrow. For more information, contact us at 206-4500 or visit us on the Web at pima.edu. Pima Community College, Developing our Community Through Learning.

[music]

(Ms. Trasoff) Welcome back to Pima Community College Perspectives. Um, I’m Nina Trasoff, and I’m delighted that you’re joining us to learn more about Pima Community College, and our topic today is looking at the veterans who attend, the services provided. And at the end of the last segment, um, Registrar Michael Tulino was talking about a conference at the U of A. That’s from September 15th through 17th at the U of A. If you’d like to know more about it, please go to www.pima.edu, Pima’s homepage, and right there, there’ll be a spotlight which you can click on and get all the information you need about that conference.
Dr. Roy Flores, Chancellor of Pima Community College, is still with me, and we’ve been joined by Abel Moreno. And he is the Deputy Community Development and Media Director of the local—local chapter of Vets for Vets, which is a veteran’s advocacy group, and he’s also a student here at Pima Community College. Welcome, Abel.

(Abel Moreno) Thank you.

(Ms. Trasoff) I’m so glad that you could join us. Tell us a little bit about your service. You, as I understand it, were in the Army’s Airborne Division.

(Mr. Moreno) I was in the 82nd Airborne Division; uh, I served in the 82nd Airborne Division for 7 years. I never went anywhere else, and, um, it was, uh, definitely an experience, I have to say that.

(Ms. Trasoff) Tell me about your deployments.

(Mr. Moreno) Uh, from ’02 to ’03, I was deployed to Afghanistan, um, and, uh, I went with the 82nd. What my job was, specifically, was with Light Engineer Equipment, and I was, I was in a combat engineer battalion. Um, and we covered a lot of different areas, along those aspects of being able to make sure that we had a secure runway for supplies. I then got transferred to another unit. When I was in Afghanistan, I worked with some of the U.S. Special Forces, uh, the 505th Parachute Infantry, uh, Regiment, um...

(Ms. Trasoff) Did that include jumping out of planes for you?

(Mr. Moreno) Uh, well, we didn’t get to jump into Afghanistan or Iraq, but, um, being a paratrooper, uh, you jump regularly, uh, every month. So you’re lucky if you jump once; if you jump twice, you weren’t lucky, so [both laugh] you know, that was a part of it. You’re on “jump status,” as they say, so...

(Ms. Trasoff) That’s, we won’t even go there. Uh, because I really want to stay focused on you and the roles that veterans play and that Pima plays in helping veterans. Um, but I want to mention one thing that you’re probably too modest to mention, that you did receive a Combat Action Badge, three Army Commendation Medals, and two Army Achievement Medals. And I think you’re to be congratulated for excellence of service.

(Mr. Moreno) Oh, thank you.

(Ms. Trasoff) Um, but you’re a graduate of Cholla High School.

(Mr. Moreno) Yes, ma’am.

(Ms. Trasoff) And you’ve come back, and now you’re a Pima student. Tell me why you chose Pima.

(Mr. Moreno) Um, to be perfectly honest with you, um, and especially with what’s going on with the equalization of the G.I. Bill, I specifically chose Pima Community College to, um, bring together the community of veterans within Pima Community College. At my behest, I could
have gone to the U of A, or gone to any college. Um, by virtue of me being from Tucson, Arizona, by virtue of me, um, working with veterans and understanding that there are more veterans attending Pima Community College, I specifically chose Pima Community College to organize, uh, and put together a collective of veterans who are going to be able to strengthen the community.

Um, and that is a hub for Tucson’s local veterans. Um, we have veterans who are utilizing the G.I. Bill who are going to the U of A, and that is excellent. Um, and that’s a—that’s a faction. We—we have a larger group attending Pima, you know, and—and my thing was, just like the starfish thing— you know, you see starfishes come up— one veteran at a time, we interact with, you know? And that’s—that’s the specific reason why I went to Pima Community College. I—I grew up in Tucson; I had grown up in South Tucson. Um, I wanted to be able to make myself available for the veterans in my community.

(Ms. Trasoff) In the first segment, we talked a lot about the special programs that Pima has in place and some of the counseling and some of the efforts to make it easier for veterans, but talk about what the outreach group that you are part of. What role does it play? Because there are specialized needs that many veterans, if not all, have.

(Mr. Moreno) Um, what—what, and it’s been a hit or miss, and I gotta really be honest about that, because here we are, we’re veterans, we recognize the, the—the strong need for certain, uh, areas of, whether it be improvement, or what we can do. Here we were, veterans, um, sitting down, saying, “Okay, how do we help our veterans in the community college area or the aspect?” And you know, it was, it was really trial by fire, you know? It was a lot of understanding as being a student and being a veteran. Um, it was a lot of, um, you know, our main—one of my main officers, uh, Rob Cavarra, he really looked at the in, in-processing, uh, aspect of being a veteran trying to get into school and making those key connections with some of the counselors there and saying, “Okay, what can we do to trim off at little fat here? What can we do to make it a little bit comprehensive?” We’re dealing with veterans who are coming in with PTSD; some of them are dealing with physical, uh, ailments or trauma, TBI, uh, various—“How do we cut this down and trim the fat?”

And at the same time, recognize, because we understand, and we understand the faculty and the administration are put at a very crux of a situation when we look at a special-needs population. No one can really say what’s a “special-needs population” in the community college environment. To some degree, as us being veterans, we feel, may not be special population, but there are special needs, and—and, and we, like I said, it’s one veteran at a time, one idea at a time; we’re all veterans, and we’re students at that, so our ideas go as far as our next semester sometimes. So that’s—that’s, that’s the bigger idea.

(Ms. Trasoff) But it’s a partnership. Dr. Flores, I know, as a veteran yourself, you can appreciate the fact that there are specialized needs which you encountered when you enrolled.

(Dr. Flores) The—indeed, there are, and—and, to me, it was a comfort to be able to talk with other students who had the same experiences. Uh, I think veterans are a very special population, and—and, uh, that they enrich the College a—an—and the community, to be sure.
But I would like to ask Abel if, um-- the veterans, during the Vietnam era were mostly, mostly men, young men at that, but, and there were some women, to be sure, but now I—I sense that the deployment includes more women. Are their needs a little different? First of all, are the proportions greater now than in the past, as far as women serving? And are their needs a little bit different, maybe?

(Mr. Moreno) Well, extremely. I think one of the things that we want to highlight, as a club, was being able to identify those needs, um, and have a women's representative. One of the biggest things in, in working with women’s population in doing what I’ve done, you know, in my—my, my other work, um, is having that representative, okay? Um, someone who understands the ins and outs of what’s going on; as far as trauma in the women’s veterans’ section would—would be MST, military sexual trauma. Um, um, when there, they’re women who’ve seen combat, been in combat roles and combat environments, okay? So now we’re dealing with a more modern war, um, with women suffering from PTSD, women who have been, uh, nurses, uh, in the, in the—the combat theater and who have gone through these things. And then, on the understanding, then we have the other aspect of the cultural understanding of, okay, this is, uh, pri—like you said, predominately a man’s environment, and they’re trying to adjust to being a woman in a men’s environment. So we need that representative, number one, okay?

(Ms. Trasoff) Well, I think, just acknowledging that it exists. Um, are there any final thoughts that either of you would, in the last ten seconds or so, are there any final thoughts that you would like to share about the unique position of vets at Pima?

(Mr. Moreno) Yeah. I think, in—in, in, like I got to have the face-to-face with the Chancellor. I think, what I’m proud to say, thus far, as going to Pima, is that with faculty, with administration, with the strong stringent needs of the community, not just within the community college, but the community in which we live in, we have a big chance to change a lot of things, and they’re in a very, very monumental, how can I say it, role to do this, so...

(Ms. Trasoff) That’s wonderful. Abel, thank you for joining us. Dr. Flores, always a pleasure. And earlier, Michael Turlino. Next week, on Monday at 6 pm, um, when we will be talking about the role Pima plays in the economic development of Tucson with Joe Snell of TREO. And if you have missed any portion of this program, tune in Sunday morning at 11 here on The Jolt!, and you’ll be able to hear it. Thank you so much for listening in. We will be here every Monday at 6 and Sunday mornings at 11. On The Jolt!, I’m Nina Trasoff for Pima Community College Perspectives. Thank you.