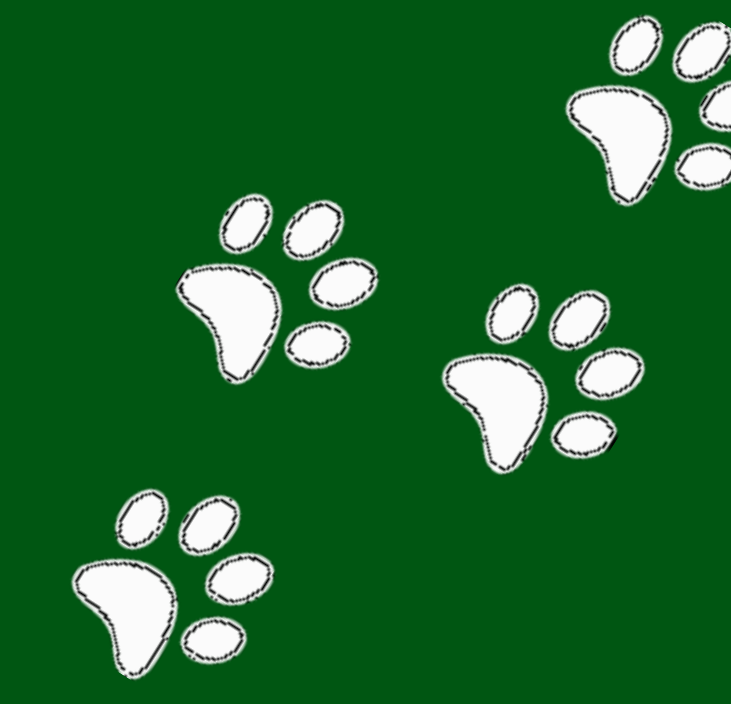




# The Value of Service Dogs for Student Veterans

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To explore the value of service dogs in relation to student veterans' occupational participation, health, and wellbeing.

**Method:** A systematic review of peer-reviewed articles from EBSCOhost, MEDLINE Complete, and Google Scholar.

**Results:** Three themes emerged: (1) the benefits of service dogs, (2) the challenges related to service dogs, and (3) the challenges veterans face when transitioning to college.

**Impact to OT:** OT practitioners are ideal for helping veterans with disabilities acquire service dogs. OT practitioners must have an awareness of the impact that service dogs have on veterans, both positive and negative, so that they can provide the necessary support.

## BACKGROUND

- Student veterans often suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) as a result of combat (Yarborough et al., 2018).
- PTSD and TBI may lead to veteran suicide, which is a growing issue in the U.S. (Stop Soldier Suicide, n.d.).
- Increased support is essential for student veterans to successfully transition to higher education.
- Service dogs can help student veterans improve occupational performance despite challenges (Morris et al., 2019; Scotland-Coogan, 2019a; Yarborough et al., 2018).
- There is a lack of information available to student veterans and university faculty on the benefits of service dogs, so this valuable resource is often underutilized.

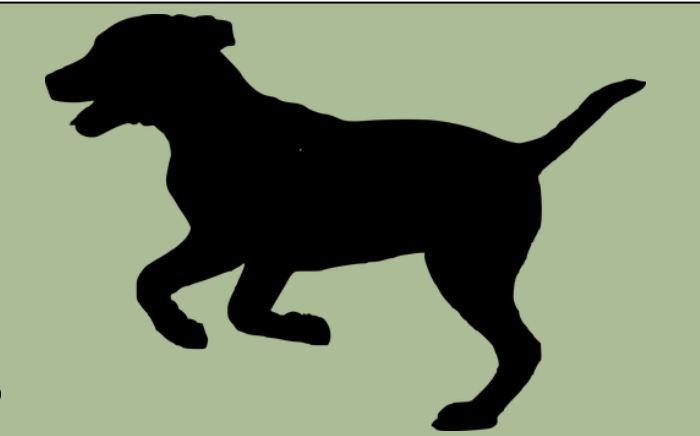
## METHODS

- **Systematic literature review**
- **Databases used**
  - EBSCOhost
  - MEDLINE Complete
  - Google Scholar
- **Search terms**
  - Veterans AND education, Veterans AND higher education, Veterans AND college, Veterans AND university, Veterans AND service dogs, Veterans AND service animals, Military AND service dogs, Military AND service animals, Military AND PTSD, Student veterans AND PTSD, Student veterans AND service dogs, and Student veterans AND service animals
- **Inclusion Criteria**
  - Peer-reviewed
  - Written in the English language
  - Published 2010 or later
  - Included any of the following: veterans, PTSD, college, service dogs
- **Exclusion Criteria**
  - Not peer-reviewed
  - Not written in the English language
  - Published before 2010
  - Did not include: veterans, PTSD, college, service dogs



## RESULTS

- 285 articles resulted from literature search
- 11 articles matched inclusion criteria
- Six Level II studies and Five Level III studies



### Three themes emerged:

#### 1. Challenges Transitioning to College (Elliott et al., 2011; Gregg et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2019; Plach & Sells, 2013; Scotland-Coogan, 2019a; Scotland-Coogan, 2019b)

Alienation on campus

Occupational performance problems

Alcohol problems

Anxiety

Physical and psychological injuries

Sleep disturbances

Strains in relationships

Hypervigilance

Physical and verbal abuse toward others

Difficulties with emotional regulation

#### 2. Benefits of Service Dogs (Crowe & Nguyen, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Scotland-Coogan, 2019a; Scotland-Coogan, 2019b; Yarborough et al., 2018)

Improve occupational performance

Reduce PTSD episodes

Reduce hypervigilance

Improve relationships

Provide physical safety and peace of mind

Improve sleep

Wake from nightmares

Support healthy behaviors

Facilitate reconnections with humans

Help with managing anger, violence, and anxiety

#### 3. Challenges Related to Service Dogs (Crowe & Nguyen, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2018; Scotland-Coogan, 2019b; Yarborough et al., 2018)

Veterans underestimate how prepared they must be

Training is time-consuming and challenging

Caregivers have trouble allowing the service dog to assist

Veterans may be overwhelmed bringing their dog in public

## CONCLUSION

- Service dogs can help veterans gain occupational independence by reducing anxiety and hypervigilance, improving social connections, sleep quality, and focus.

(Crowe & Nguyen, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Scotland-Coogan, 2019a; Scotland-Coogan, 2019b; Yarborough et al., 2018).

## PIO QUESTION

1. Does implementing an education-based program on the benefits of service dogs improve knowledge and awareness of service dogs' value in the occupational participation, health, and wellbeing of student veterans?
2. Does implementing an education-based program on the benefits of service dogs improve knowledge and awareness among university faculty on service dogs' value in occupational participation, health, and wellbeing?

## SIGNIFICANCE TO OT

- OT practitioners must be well equipped to advocate for and assist veterans with service dogs to get the most out of their partnership.
- OT practitioners are ideal for helping veterans with disabilities acquire service dogs. OT's holistic approach and expertise in evaluating strengths and limitations can help determine whether a service dog is the right choice for a client (Winkle et al., 2019).