

May 2016

At Home and Away

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Recommended Citation

Molitor, Megan (2012) "At Home and Away," *Seek*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1.

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AT HOME AND AWAY

University research, outreach benefit soldiers in the field and their families at home

“Military tactics are one of the pillars the land-grant philosophy was based on. This fact gives us a greater appreciation of the soldiers’ sacrifice and commitment.”

— Ron Trewyn,
vice president for research at Kansas State University





While land-grant institutions typically include teaching science, agriculture and engineering, another important component can get lost in the shuffle — the military. Researchers at Kansas State University are the exception, often combining military research with result-oriented programs that help soldiers and their families all around the world.

The university shares that commitment by focusing on research that helps soldiers and their families at all stages of their service: at home; as they prepare to deploy; and during their time overseas.

HELPING AT HOME

There may be seemingly endless programs for soldiers and their families focused on relationships, finances or trauma. But Briana Nelson Goff, director of the Institute for the Health and Security of Military Families at Kansas State University, said the questions, too, are endless.

“We have to discover if the programs are effective,” she said. “The military is starting to look at that, and we want to help answer those questions. We have to ask what we can do as a university, then provide the research.”

The institute, which is part of the university’s School of Family Studies and Human Services, addresses important questions through research related to the familial aspects of the military. Jared Anderson, assistant professor of family studies and human services, is currently conducting the study “Transition to Marriage in the U.S. Army,” an effort to understand the relationship between areas like marital risk factors and external stress to improve programming supporting Army couples.

Sonya Britt, assistant professor of family studies and human services, and Mary Bell, doctoral student in personal financial planning, are also conducting longitudinal research on financial behaviors and resilience in soldiers and spouses across the deployment cycle.

“This generation is different because they face unique demands like multiple deployments, and that has a different impact, creating wounds that have yet to be fully understood,” Goff said. “Resiliency is a big focus, and as a society we need to ask what we can do for those who aren’t so resilient. Our programs are systemic, based on family.”

CULTURAL PREPARATION

Proper preparation for deployment is crucial, often going beyond combat training. That’s where research from Kansas State University Libraries comes in. Daryl Youngman, associate professor at Hale Library, said that Kansas State University Libraries have been leaders in creating productive engagement with various elements of the Army community.

“Partnerships have been developed and are being recognized at higher levels,” he said. “There’s a realization of the mutual benefits of working together.”

Through cultural seminars, soldiers are trained to interact with other soldiers and civilians in the countries where they will deploy. At these seminars, Youngman said soldiers participate in activities like cultural meal lessons. They learn the importance of properly engaging Afghan leaders and conducting business during meals by interacting with Kansas State University students who are natives of Afghanistan.

Female U.S. soldiers also have the opportunity to work with Afghani female scholars to discuss cultural issues and the role of women in Afghan society, creating specialized engagement teams.

“These female engagement teams can then go to Afghanistan and interact with female soldiers and civilians in ways that men cannot,” he said.

EXTENDING THE REACH

It is also important not to overlook the importance of food and agriculture when preparing for deployments, Youngman said. “As a soldier, you can’t prepare to interact with a society of farmers if you don’t understand their culture.”

Kansas State University’s College of Agriculture aims to blur the boundaries between the professions by training Agribusiness Development Teams, in which soldiers learn to be semi-extension agents.

Steven Graham, assistant to the dean of agriculture/director of research and extension, said faculty members put together a crash course in agriculture, with topics ranging from pest management to soil fertility. With this training, soldiers are able to help with things like seed planting, irrigation, crop storage and growing livestock.

“We teach soldiers techniques to make farmers more profitable and to practice safety,” Graham said. “If we can take people up one step, that is a success. If a village doesn’t have clean drinking water, the soldiers can help them build a well. The projects must be sustainable once the soldiers leave, so simpler is better.”

Kansas State University researchers work to arm soldiers with knowledge to help others and themselves.