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— Serving Those Who Served —



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# Meet our Veterans Student Specialist

*The Cuyamaca Veterans Center Special Highlight e-Newsletter*

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## Allan Estrada, MS



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### TO CONTACT ALLAN;

[allan.estrada@gcccd.edu](mailto:allan.estrada@gcccd.edu)

It is with great honor that the Veterans Center introduces Allan Estrada, our Veterans Student Specialist. Allan served proudly in the U.S. Army during Operation Enduring Freedom. After a three year tour on an infantry contract, including a year in Afghanistan, Allan returned home and began his transition to civilian life. That transition began with a year of traumatic brain injury (TBI) treatment after an encounter with an improvised explosive device (IED) in Afghanistan. Allan suffered from a stutter, severe vertigo and memory problems but he states that going to college helped in his recovery. After treatment, Allan found himself at Cuyamaca College in 2014 where he continued to serve as a Veterans Services work study student while earning his Associates Degree in Sociology. After graduating from Cuyamaca in 2016, Allan transferred to SDSU where he earned his Bachelors of Science Degree in Sociology. Utilizing his chapter 31 Voc Rehab education benefit, he then went on to complete his Masters Degree in Counseling.

Allan spearheaded a program at Cuyamaca College unlike any other found in our region. His dedication to the job isn't just about helping students through their academic journey, he is improving the quality of life for our students outside of Cuyamaca College. In this e-Newsletter we will be highlighting how Allan can help you maximize your VA disability benefits.



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# VA Disability Rating Assistance

Students can meet virtually with Allan for VA Disability Rating assistance. Before you meet with him, please complete the following checklist to ensure that your meeting is as efficient as possible:

## Filing a New Claim

Filing a new claim means that you have never received VA disability benefits or compensation. Before your appointment with Allan, please complete the following:

- Apply for VA Health Care. If you know you are not eligible for VA Health Care, please apply for it anyway; this may not get you benefits but it will create an account for you. For eligibility requirements and to apply, please visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/>
- Register for an eBenefits Premium account. This is the portal through which you will submit your claim, and where you can check your application status. To register for eBenefits, please visit <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>
- Make sure to have a copy of your DD214. If you need to request a copy of your DD214, please visit <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records>

## Re-examining Existing Claims

If you are currently receiving VA Disability compensation but would like to file for an increase of rating or add an additional disability, please complete the following:

- Register for an eBenefits Premium account. This is the portal through which you will submit your claim, and where you can check your application status. To register for eBenefits, please visit <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>
- Gather all relevant evidence of a worsening or new disability. This could mean requesting medical records from a private doctor or VA doctor.

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To make an appointment with Allan, please visit

<https://web4.gcccd.edu/ccsars/Veterans/eSARS.asp?WCI=Init&WCE=Settings>

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# Education Benefits

## Vocational Rehabilitation

If you are currently rated for at least 20% VA Disability, please complete the following:

- Register for an eBenefits Premium account
  - Obtain a list of your VA rated disabilities, with individual ratings and overall rating
  - Apply for Voc Rehab via eBenefits. After applying for Voc Rehab, VA will send you an appointment letter for an orientation which is how they determine eligibility.

If you are not currently rated and receiving compensation from VA Disability, please complete the steps listed on the previous page to file for a new claim.

## Social Services

### Housing

If you are in need of housing assistance (i.e. experiencing homelessness, couch surfing, trouble paying rent) email [cuyamaca.veterans@gcccd.edu](mailto:cuyamaca.veterans@gcccd.edu) or make an appointment with Allan. We will be asking you for the following information to better serve you:

- Age
- Disability status
- Discharge designation
- Length of time you have been housing insecure
- Number of dependents
- Employment status
- Branch of Service

### Mental Health

There are resources, on and off campus, for veterans in need of mental health assistance.

- Cuyamaca Cares has free personal counseling available via phone calls or zoom for all students. These sessions are free. To schedule an appointment with a Cuyamaca personal counselor, please visit <https://www.cuyamaca.edu/student-support/health-and-wellness-center/mental-health-counseling.php>
- To find a mental health counselor off campus, please make an appointment with Allan.
- If you need immediate assistance, please call the Access and Crisis Line at 1-888-724-7240. The toll-free call is available 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. Or text "Home" or "COURAGE" to 741741.

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# A Message from our Dean of Counseling:

*Although there is much uncertainty that lies ahead, the one thing you can always depend on is our Veterans Center staff. We make the impossible, possible. The last few months have been tough in many ways. The global COVID-19 pandemic, an impending financial crisis and the social cry to eradicate racism in the world have all been more than many can handle and comprehend. Yet here we are, one month into the fall 2020 semester. In spite of these extraordinary challenges, the Veterans Center team has spent the last several months preparing to make this fall the best semester ever.*



*I can imagine that the transition to remote learning has not been easy for many of you. However, you will weather this storm and emerge victorious, getting closer to your goal of becoming a Cuyamaca graduate. Whether you are seeking a degree, certificate or taking courses for a career transition, we've got your 6. You have my word.*

*Please continue to believe in yourself and support one another. Now more than ever, we need compassion, empathy and camaraderie. Inside this newsletter you will find important updates and resources to help you navigate this virtual environment. Although we cannot spend time together and relax in our beautiful center, remember that a building only carries as much significance as the people who are within it. We are the Veterans Center, even in this virtual environment. For every step you take in your Cuyamaca journey, we have your back.*

*Have a great fall 2020!*

*Sincerely,*

*Nicole Jones*

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## Have questions or concerns?

Please feel free to email [cuyamaca.veterans@gcccd.edu](mailto:cuyamaca.veterans@gcccd.edu)

Monday - Friday: 8:00am - 5:00pm