

Heal
An Experience Report

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Abstract

For over ten years I have been learning about life with a son who experiences Post-Traumatic Stress. My experiences with both the roadblocks and the resources from my adventure into this realm of the unknown have led me down multiple and conflicting pathways. I have narrowed my energies and focus into an attempt to create a space for healing for our Veterans and their families. Through vast amounts of networking, I have realized the multitude of opportunities available for our Veterans. My goal is to share my experiences with others who may be attempting similar feats to my own and perhaps my history will help others to achieve their goals.

Keywords: transition, recognition, returning veteran university resources

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There is a quote by Theodore Roosevelt that I love, which I will slightly modify to be all inclusive. He said: “A man or woman who is good enough to shed their blood for the country is good enough to be given a square deal afterwards”.

As humans, we have the ability to comfort, hope, to dream and believe that we have the power to affect a positive impact on our society. We will never all be on the same page, with the same values, share the exact same experiences, yet in spite of these differences, humans can cooperate in a flexible manner in very large numbers without having intimate knowledge of all others in that population. This enables humans to develop sophisticated networks of communication, global exchange of ideas and systems of cooperation leading to the achievement of shared goals.

I am encouraged by the progress and cooperative culture I have seen across the country with respect to our Veterans. My Mission is for all returning Veterans to be honored and receive guidance through their transition back into civilian society, funding for vocational or college education while securing a career in an environment that is safe and healing for them and their families. In order for you to identify with my vision, I will open my heart, expose my vulnerabilities and share my journey with you on this mission. I am the son of a World War II Tail-Gunner, in the Army Air Corps. I am the father of a combat-infantry Marine of the 2004 war for Fallujah. I did not serve in the military. I am a past prosthodontist academician at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry and now Staff Prosthodontist at the Iowa City VA Dental Clinic.

When my son was deployed to Fallujah, I became obsessed with searching all forms of media for information on 1/3 Charlie Company. If I was not actively engaged with a task that required my focus, I was mentally connected with my son. I would go to spinning class each morning at 5 AM, in a dark, damp, stinky basement at Gold’s Gym. For sixty

minutes, I pushed myself to feel pain in an attempt to connect with my son. My wife and I handled his deployment quite differently. She avoided the news and trusted her instinct that he would return home alive. Her strong belief was a great comfort to me, although it was years later before I told her this. We regularly sent letters and care packages and anxiously checked our mailbox each day and hoped beyond hope for a satellite phone call, as there was no email from Fallujah in 2004.

What really brought my wife and I together in managing our son's deployment was the Stallion helicopter crash on January 26, 2005. It was my son's unit, 1/3 Charlie Company. For 24 hours, all we knew was 33 Marines were killed. This is the window when my wife lost faith. I don't know why, but I believed he was alive....and he was.

One afternoon while treating a patient, my cell phone rang. I missed the call. When I saw an unfamiliar number, I was sick to my stomach with grief. I may have missed a call from my son. I returned to my patient, set my phone on the counter and advised everyone that if the phone rings again, I will answer. A second call shortly followed and for the one minute that I listened to his voice, I was at peace.

So now, I was not only a news junkie, but was obsessed with having my phone with me 24/7. After 12 years, I still carry a bit of this obsession; feeling the need to be there should my son call. We were blessed that he did return home with no visible injuries, but I was ill prepared with what was to follow. I did not educate myself with post-deployment issues. In fact, I did possibly the worst thing, a big welcome-home party. He took it in stride, but I could tell he was not himself.

He immediately enrolled at FSU, paid out of state tuition using the GI bill and worked 40+ hours/week as a bartender while taking a heavy load of classes. At that time there were no programs to assist Veterans with their transition into civilian life or into college as non-traditional students. University faculties were not educated on PTSD, TBI, Moral Injury or how to be Veteran-Sensitive. The VA was there, but it took over a year before my son would make an appointment. It was not a positive experience. I was

fortunate that my son would talk to me occasionally about his thoughts. I'm not a Veteran and I don't speak the language of a warrior. I felt helpless and scared. He completed a B.A. in International Relations and a Masters in Human Resources. He is now a Manager of a Talent Recruitment Team that seeks Veterans to work for Amazon and his focus is connecting Veterans, especially the Enlisted Veterans, with a good job that utilizes their skills.

My mission started with raising the awareness of Veterans' Day in the University of Iowa College of Dentistry. I was disappointed, angry and ashamed when the recognition to Veterans the first year was printed on an 8 1/2 by 11" piece of paper, far removed from the view of patients, students, faculty and staff. I soon discovered that Veteran's Day was not even listed on the official University Calendar. I met with the university Registrar, a Vietnam Veteran, and he immediately corrected the oversight. We became good friends with the same mission. This was the birth of my team. We are now improving the visibility of recognition, education and engagement of the College community every year.

Our New Mission was to:

1. Create a Veterans Memorial in a prominent site on the UI campus for students and members of the community.
2. Raise funds for Veterans' Scholarships
3. Build an Independent Veterans Center

We met with the Chief Diversity Officer with the idea of a Veteran's Memorial. Following the advice given, I put together a diverse team of individuals from numerous areas campus-wide to work on this mission. Over the next four years, I met with the President of the University of Iowa, the Provost, the President of the UI Foundation, the President of the UI Alumni Association, the Director of Planning, Design and Construction, and the Chief Diversity Officer multiple times.

Always following and adhering to their suggestions, the site I proposed for the Memorial was approved, funds were committed for the initial architectural study, but somehow they disappeared. I networked with local and national business leaders, student

Veterans, non-profit organizations and with each new connection, I gained at least one additional new contact. What occurred was the building of many new relationships, friends and involvement in the mission of others.

One day it hit me that my mission is a journey with a path of many pavers, roadblocks, hills and obstacles. I started to enjoy the journey and realized there were many small achievements along the way to be celebrated and set-backs that provided opportunities to learn. Strong relationships were developed with the UI Student Veteran's Association, the College of Education, and many other organizations that shared my passion.

I longed to better understand what my son had survived in Fallujah. A couple years ago my son's Squad Leader self-published on Amazon, his chronicles of their experiences in Fallujah. *Lava Dawgs: a fight for Fallujah* helped me get a sense of the intensity of house-to-house close-quarters' combat, and finally my family and I could better understand the trauma and difficulty with societal reintegration. After reading *Lava Dawgs*, my wife said "Thank God I didn't have that book in my hands when our son was over there".

After working with a University Administrator for 4 years and multiple meetings, I was asked:

1. What is your goal?
2. What are you getting out of this personally for yourself?

This was an epiphany for me. I realized that when we believe in something strongly enough, and it is close to our hearts and souls, we believe it should be obvious and everyone should share our vision. But if two people have different agendas, sharing a vision will not happen. Sharing a vision begins with education and that can begin from the words of just one passionate person. It requires coordination of effort and persistence. Passion is the driving force for change.

I met Paul Alt, a Chicago Architect who shares my passion for Veterans and who devotes his work to using spaces to promote healing. I redefined Memorial as "Honor, Healing and Resiliency Space." The University President was stepping down/retiring and

our mission seemed in jeopardy. I decided to begin educating the community on these Veterans' issues. I met with the Superintendent of our local community school district to plan the development of a Leadership Summit for area high school student leaders. This involved a venue large enough to seat 450 educators, students, Veteran families and citizens who care. I assembled a team of many individuals and organizations. I secured speakers and my team helped raise donations for honoraria and food.

Our first Leadership Summit took place on April 15, 2015 after seven months of planning and partnering with the Colleges of Education and Dentistry, UI Student Veterans' Association, and the Veterans' Memorial Commission. It was held at the Veterans' Memorial—designed by Paul Alt—in Cedar Rapids Iowa. Taylor Morris (Afghanistan Ordnance Specialist) with his then fiancé, Danielle Kelley, and Bobby Henline (Veteran of both Afghanistan and Iraq) were secured as speakers. Additional participants included the “Remembering Our Fallen from Iowa”, the Independence Fund ‘Photos from Fallujah’, the Marine Corps Honor Guard, and area high school students singing the National Anthem a cappella. Also included were Gold Star Moms. Instructional materials developed by the College of Education were made available to high school teachers to help develop awareness and teaching strategies.

On October 29th, Nick Misiano (the author's real name of Lava Dawgs: a fight for Fallujah) and I met with the new University of Iowa President Bruce Harreld and outlined our Mission. Two weeks after our meeting, phase one of building a place of honor was announced and we now have a flagpole and the beginning of our healing space. President Harreld is from the corporate sector but has a strong military connection and passion for Veterans.

I know we will fulfill our total Mission because we have what it takes for Success: A Combined, Shared Vision, Passion and Persistence for Healing:

H—Helping Veterans and civilians to Heal
E—Every single person counts
A—All of us together make a difference
L—Leaders. It's you and it's me.

About the Author

Richard A. Williamson is both the son of a World War II Army Air Corps Tail-Gunner and the father of a combat-infantry Marine of the 2004 war for Fallujah. A prosthodontist at the Iowa City VA Dental Clinic, Dr. Williamson's primary research focuses on the development of clinical diagnostic systems and correlating diagnoses to treatment and outcomes. He lectures on prosthodontic topics by invitation, nationally and internationally to doctors, dental associations, societies and laboratory technicians on fixed, removable, and implant prosthodontics.



HEAL

AN EXPERIENCE REPORT

3rd Annual Veterans in Society Conference

Richard A. Williamson, DDS, MS, FAGP

University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics

November 13, 2015



Richard A. Williamson, DDS, MS, FACP

University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics

**has no conflict with any organization and this presentation
represents the views of the presenter and not necessarily that
of the institution**

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enough to shed their blood
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Theodore Roosevelt





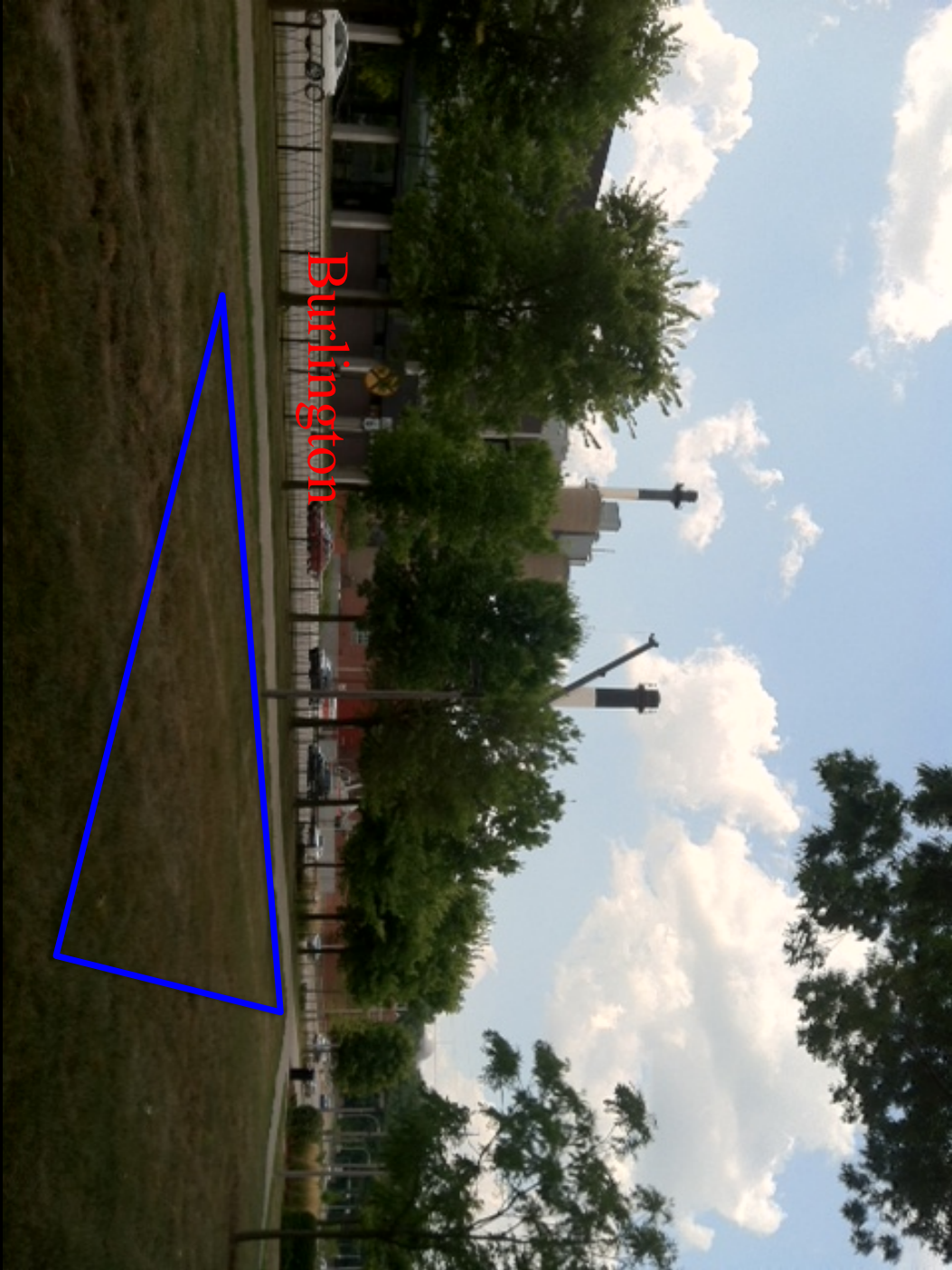
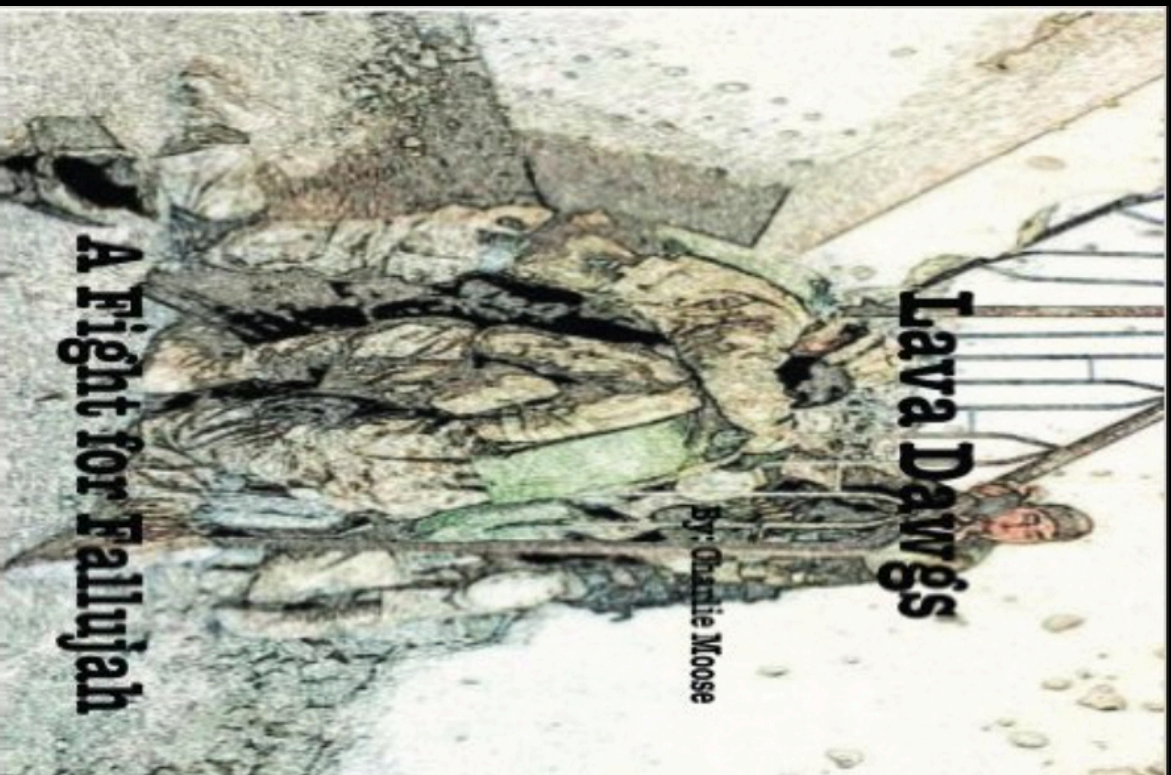
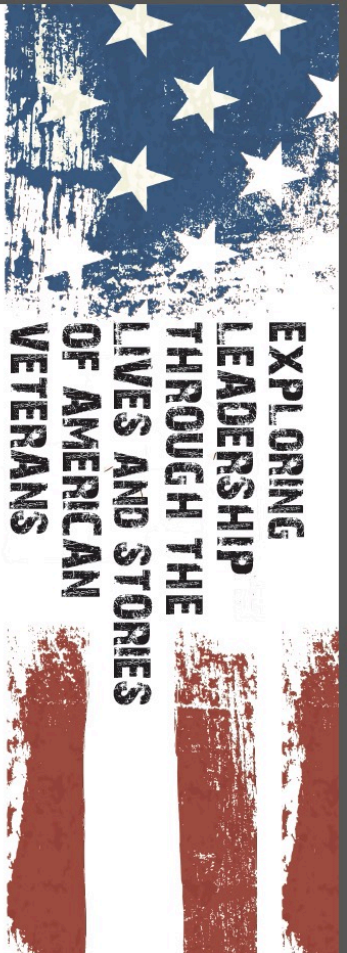


Photo from "X" toward SW

Lava Dawgs
A Fight for Fallujah
By
Charlie Moose





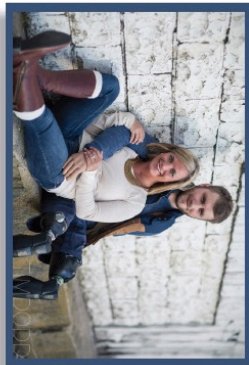
EXPLORING LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE LIVES AND STORIES OF AMERICAN VETERANS

~A Leadership Summit for Iowa High School Student Leaders~

April 15, 2015 11:00AM- 2:00PM ~ The Veterans' Memorial, 50 2nd Ave. Bridge, Cedar Rapids

The personal journeys of Taylor Morris, Danielle Kelly and Bobby Henline will challenge students to rethink how leadership is defined, what it means to lead by example and how mental attitude can overcome adversity.

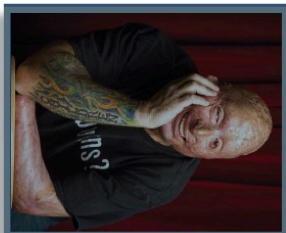
~Please register by April 15, 2015~



TAYLOR MORRIS AND DANIELLE KELLY

~CEDAR FALLS, IOWA~

Taylor is a former Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Tech who was injured by an IED in Afghanistan in 2012. He sustained injuries to all four limbs, enabling loss of both legs, left arm from the bicep down and right hand. Danielle, his girlfriend, never left his side during his recovery. They underwent two years of rehab at Walter Reed Military hospital, after which they moved back to Cedar Falls to be around family and friends. Taylor is attending the University of Northern Iowa and Danielle is getting her MBA. This will be an exciting year for them as they plan their wedding and begin building their dream home. Their story is one of commitment, inspiration and courage.



BOBBY HENLINE

~SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS~

A veteran of Desert Storm by age 19, Bobby was inspired to re-enlist in the Army after the attacks on September 11th, 2001. He deployed to Iraq three times, twice with the 82nd Airborne Division and once with the 3rd Armored Cavalry regiment. On April 7, 2007, his Humvee was hit by a roadside bomb just north of Baghdad. Of the five men in the vehicle, Bobby was the only survivor. Over 38% of his body was burned and his skull was exposed to the bone; he spent 6 months in the hospital fighting for his life, and within two years, Bobby's left hand had to be amputated. To date he has had over 40 surgeries. Bobby uses stand-up comedy to inspire people to their fullest and overcome adversity.



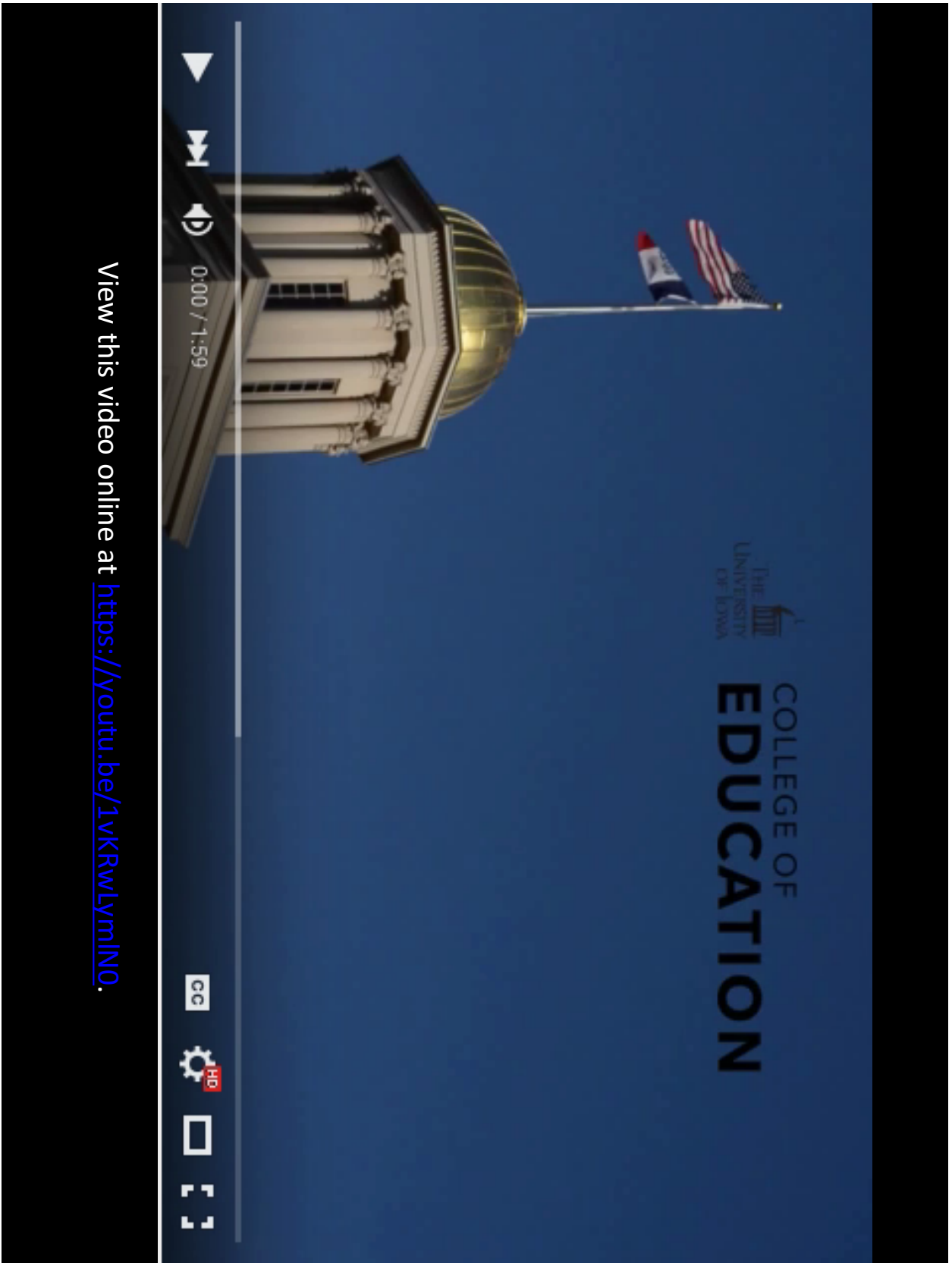
REGISTRATION:

Schools: https://iowa.qualtrics.com/SE/SSID=SV_689enowG422OOSH
 Invited Guests: https://iowa.qualtrics.com/SE/SSID=SV_0ndGHHipjTT9e9hD



Brought to you by the University of Iowa Veterans Association, the Professional Student Veterans Group and the American Dental Association, the University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Oral Health is proud to sponsor the ITR College of Dentistry Veterans' Memorial Leadership Summit. Education and Resources for Veterans and Military: <http://www.educationforveterans.edu/students/veterans>. For additional information, contact Richard Williamson at richard-williamson@uiowa.edu.





View this video online at <https://youtu.be/1vKRwLymIN0>.

News Coverage of Leadership Summit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhtiVXa3gBE>

A place to honor veterans

Outdoor garden, memorial area will be created near UI Main Library



The University of Iowa is paying homage to Armed Services veterans by creating an outdoor garden and memorial area near the Main Library in Gibson Square. The tribute includes special garden landscaping, seating, memorial plaques to each of the Armed Services Branches, and a flagpole supporting the American flag. Rendering courtesy of Facilities Management.

Combined, Shared Vision, Passion, and Persistence for Healing

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