



## UConn to help vets become entrepreneurs

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*Reprinted from The Stamford Advocate  
November 11, 2009*

STAMFORD -- Next school year, the University of Connecticut's School of Business is expected to become the sixth school nationally to offer a three-part program to help disabled veterans develop and operate their own businesses.

The Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans With Disabilities covers all costs, including travel, lodging and meals, for up to 25 veterans, with a range of disabilities, who participate annually at each location.

"One of the things people are starting to understand, these injuries for veterans are not just physical, they are profound, spiritual and emotional. They are life changing. They are forever," said Michael Zacchea, a lieutenant colonel in the Marines who was injured in Iraq. Now a master in business administration student at UConn-Stamford, he has been hired as a graduate assistant for the program. "They've got to have a reason to get up in the morning," he said of disabled veterans who must transition into the next phase of their lives.

"I really see this as a way to heal, maybe not the physical trauma ... but the emotional and spiritual trauma," he said.

The program begins with a four-week online component, when the veterans have an opportunity to generate ideas and get feedback from faculty, according to Kathleen Dechant, the program's director.

When that portion is complete, the veterans arrive on campus for a nine-day immersion, in which they hear from faculty and successful entrepreneurs while working on their own business plans, she said. This portion will be conducted on the Storrs campus, she said.

After the boot camp portion has finished, the veterans work with mentors for one year, she said.

UConn's program is expected to start up in August or September 2010.

Veterans with a "service-connected" disability who served on active duty after September 2001 are eligible. The disabilities can run the gamut from the loss of limbs to post-traumatic stress disorder.

"What is required is a desire, a passion that they really want to start something on their own, that they really want to be an entrepreneur, and we help them find their way," Dechant said.

The cost of putting one veteran through the program costs about \$6,000, and while there is seed money for the first year, the program will need to fundraise in the future, according to Dechant.

On Monday, President Barack Obama signed an Executive Order to promote the hiring of veterans by the Executive Branch and to create a Council on Veterans Employment.

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Business or individuals interested in making donations or serving as mentors can call 203-251-8469