



Warrior Scholar Project CEO Ryan Pavel speaks at a WSP alumni conference.

PHOTO: ZHENG RENTHEZPHOTO

## Warrior-Scholar Project Empowers Veterans to Pursue Education

RYAN PAVEL LEADS A NONPROFIT THAT ENSURES VETERANS SUCCEED IN THE TRANSITION FROM SERVICE TO SCHOOL

EVERY YEAR, 200,000 men and women separate from their duties in the military, heading home to face a changed life. Of those, 115,000 veterans have a desire to pursue the higher education they tabled for military service, but face uncertainty as to how to get started, and how to jump-start their study skills and confidence.

At 17, Ryan Pavel, now CEO of the non-profit Warrior-Scholar Project, enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. A 2005 Barrington High School graduate, Pavel applied to the University of Illinois and learned that his application was not accepted. "It was a shock to my system," he said. "And I was not a first-generation college student." He knew

that reaching his full potential was a goal, so the recruiting calls from the Marine Corps made an impression, and he enlisted. He completed two non-combat deployments to Iraq, serving as an Arabic translator.

After his service, Pavel earned his B.A. from the University of Michigan and J.D. from the University of Virginia School of Law, leading Student Veterans of America chapters at both. He has taught with Teach for America in inner-city Detroit and worked for a variety of legal aid organizations. Having personally experienced the transition from military service to college, Pavel channels his passion for fellow veterans through Warrior-Scholar Project to help them find a path to college and be

successful in obtaining their degrees.

"I hold a core belief that enlisted veterans have unlimited capacity for impact and helping them leverage their unique opportunities and experience through higher education is squarely in our national interest," Pavel says.

### BRIDGING SERVICE TO SCHOOL

You might think that American service men and women would be well-equipped to make the move from the rigors of their military training and experiences to enter college. But Pavel says it's not a relatable, seamless process, and in fact, it can be daunting. "Military training is structured so that you do not ask 'Why,' because you are being trained as part of a group, for life-and-death





Ryan Pavel joins Warrior Scholar Project Alumni Julian Ortiz, Eric Villareal, and Kaedy Puckett-Molley.



Allen Lynch is a Medal of Honor recipient and the founder of the Allen J. Lynch Medal of Honor Veterans Foundation, which is a strong supporter of WSP.



Military veterans attend an academic boot camp. The boot camps are rigorous one- and two-week college preparatory programs in Humanities, STEM, and Business and Entrepreneurship. They are available at several partner colleges and universities across the United States.

situations, and you must develop this fixed mindset,” he said. “When our veterans come home and desire a college education—this mindset is not conducive to knowing how to get into college, what discipline to study, and how to channel their current skills in the classroom. It’s not easy to ask questions, to ask *why*.” He adds that the challenge for veterans is that they are not traditional students, that they forewent the traditional route and now face social and academic barriers. They don’t have existing networks to leverage and may feel

that they “missed the boat.”

Yet, Pavel is quick to say that our military veterans can bring valuable insights and contributions to their college or university cohort. “There are so many advantages that veterans can bring to the classroom, and their future employers. They carry a mission-accomplished, goal-oriented mindset. Skills of resiliency, maturity, and camaraderie can add depth and perspectives in dialogue with their classmates,” he said.

## ACADEMIC BOOT CAMPS

For veterans who want to attend college, there are few if any government services to assist with educational counseling and the general military-to-civilian life transition. Warrior-Scholar Project has seen remarkable success with its academic boot camps. One hundred percent of veterans who have participated in any one of the camps—humanities, business and entrepreneurship, or STEM—report that they would recommend them to others. A total of 98% of participants reported in 2022 that they were more confident that they will complete a bachelor’s degree.

The boot camps are the cornerstone service of Warrior-Scholar Project, in addition to the alumni network that provides hands-on leadership to veterans. The boot camps are held at top universities such as the University of Chicago, University of Illinois, Notre Dame, and MIT. These rigorous one- and two-week college prep programs provide advantageous skills needed for the application process, learning fast-track study skills, forming and identity, and making new friends.

We spoke with three veterans who offered to share some of their experiences. We wish them continued success and encourage you to learn more about Warrior-Scholar Project.

.....  
 For more information, visit online at [warrior-scholar.org](http://warrior-scholar.org). To give online, visit [warrior-scholar.org/donate](http://warrior-scholar.org/donate). To reach Ryan Pavel, Chief Executive Officer, call 202-977-3906, or email: [rpavel@warrior-scholar.org](mailto:rpavel@warrior-scholar.org).



# WSP Boot Camp Alumni Share Their Experiences



U. S. Marine Corps veteran Eric Villareal attended a 2019 humanities boot camp at the University of Chicago.

## ERIC VILLAREAL

*Eric Villareal followed a family tradition of Marine Corps service and left for basic training after graduating from high school in 1998. Over his 21-year career, Eric served in various roles ranging from operation planning and community relations to recruiting throughout the United States and Asia. Eric also served deployments to East Timor, Indonesia, and Bahrain.*

*He participated in a WSP 2019 humanities boot camp at the University of Chicago and currently works for the City of Chicago as deputy director of public safety at the Public Safety Training Center. Eric Villareal received an MS in Threat and Response Management in 2022 from the University of Chicago and earned his BAA from DePaul in 2020.*

“I appreciated the style of coaching and feedback I received throughout the WSP program. The coaching is continuous. WSP put on coffee talks and information sessions that are critical to development beyond the program. Being able to ask the NFL commissioner questions about leadership through uncertain times was a big help as I prepared to lead a new team at work. Also, the feedback from mentors and professors always left me a bit uncertain if they approved of my response or didn’t want to tell me I was wrong. Instead, they offered more reading and gave me the opportunity to re-evaluate with additional perspective. That took away the professor-student pressure and I experienced that many times over when I attended the University of Chicago a few years later.

In four years, a young service member becomes part of a tribe, a technically proficient contributor to a team, learns a little bit about life, and then must restart over. Their first time taking on a life-changing challenge, they learned just enough to survive with a few bumps, a new tattoo, and a few passport stamps. WSP is the guide they can use with their experience to have another go at starting a new challenge. They are a bit savvier than the first time, smarter, ready to contribute again, and will have a strong educational background to be very good when they transition into their career. To me, that is a lot of maturing, learning, and preparation to be in a very good place to take on the rest of their lives.”



U.S. Navy veteran Kaedy Puckett-Molley attended a humanities boot camp at Syracuse University in 2017 and is a graduate of the University of Chicago.

## KAEDY PUCKETT MOLLEY

*Kaedy Puckett Molley served for 10 years as a cryptologic linguist and aircrewman in the U.S. Navy, deploying to Afghanistan and the Mediterranean before becoming a training instructor at Great Lakes Naval Station.*

“I would say I am particularly grateful for how Warrior-Scholar Project taught me to embrace more aspects of my identity than just ‘veteran’ as I ventured into higher education. Specifically, WSP taught me that some of the most valuable lessons we can learn in the classroom are from our fellow students. Therefore, when we engage in intellectual discussion, it is just as important to consider the perspectives of others as it is to share our own perspective. This lesson proved invaluable to me as a non-traditional undergrad at a rigorous university. WSP is an organization that has drastically shaped my trajectory.

I am also passionate about how WSP has built an incredible network of like-minded, intellectually curious student veterans, many of whom—myself included— give back to WSP by serving as Fellows. Knowing there are others who share some of your veteran identity and experiences helps to bolster one’s confidence in the classroom, and seeing what other vets are or have been capable of inspires aspiration beyond what one might have previously imagined for themselves.”



U.S. Navy veteran Julian Ortiz, who attended a boot camp, is now a second-year student at the University of Chicago.

### JULIAN ORTIZ


After dropping out of high school and giving community college a try, Julian Ortiz's path took a turn after he wrecked his grandmother's car in front of a Navy recruiting station. The Houston native ended up enlisting and lived in Japan for four years, traveling all over the South China Sea and Southeast Asia while conducting Freedom of Navigation operations, before volunteering for a Navy recruiter tour in New England.

He attended the WSP humanities boot camp at Columbia University in 2019 and is now a second-year student at the University of Chicago majoring in business economics.

"To make the story a bit more ironic, I had just left a different branch's recruiting station on the other side of town. Trying to join the military in 2012 with a GED was quite difficult, and I left that other recruiting station feeling defeated. I consider it a blessing that I wrecked my grandmother's car and met my recruiter, Steve, in the process. He took the time to invest in me and helped shape the rest of my life. He is one of my closest friends to this day.

Honestly, I don't know where I would have ended up if I hadn't met Steve that evening. Public service is a family business. I attempted to pursue the firefighter/EMT route, but ran into a few difficulties along the way. Fortunately, the United States Navy gave me a shot, and I never looked back.

I reported to Navy Recruiting District New England in 2018. I started researching universities with veteran programs and stumbled upon the Warrior-Scholar Project (WSP) on Columbia University's website. I immediately signed up for the upcoming boot camp at Columbia, and the rest is history.

WSP does a fantastic job of simulating finals week at a rigorous institution. The stakes are low, but the pressure is high, which helps build muscle memory that is extremely valuable come finals week. WSP teaches veterans how to tap into the soft skills acquired in the military and use them to their advantage in the classroom. I was also introduced to an abundance of resources that have made being a father of two while attending school much more manageable. Most importantly, WSP gave me the confidence I needed to position myself to pursue excellence." 

## ARE YOU FEELING OUT OF RUNWAY?

Are you a parent, mental health practitioner, or an individual who has tried everything possible to find the right help—but are not seeing the results you desperately need to end the suffering?

### Treating the Toughest Cases

There is a significant number of people who seek treatment for brain health related problems (depression, disabling and chronic pain syndromes, traumatic and non-traumatic brain injuries, consequences of Lyme Disease, panic disorder, addiction, and more) but find conditions are too complex for accurate diagnosis and treatment; are treatment-resistant; or have found that trial-and-error protocols are not working.

### Don't Live With the Pain!

At The Neuroscience Center, we have more than 50 years of experience in accurately diagnosing these conditions and providing innovative clinical, multi-modal treatments to help our patients recover and get back to life.

### We Are the Most Experienced rTMS Provider in the U.S. With Over 25 Years Experience

One of our tools is a ground-breaking interventional Combination Therapy which utilizes the synergistic effects of TMS co-administered with intravenous ketamine therapy, resulting in a more effective overall treatment of mood and chronic pain disorders. Our SPECT (brain testing) and other diagnostic tools assure an accurate diagnosis and help us define the right treatment plan. And most important—our clinic is properly staffed with highly trained medical staff who are onsite at all times during consultations and treatments.

**There is help. Give us a call.**

**The Neuroscience Center**  
*Practical Approach. Cutting Edge Therapies.*

440 Lake Cook Road, Deerfield, IL  
**847-236-9310**

Email us at [schedule@neuroscience.md](mailto:schedule@neuroscience.md)