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FALL 2025

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VETERAN-
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YELLOW RIBBON
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**Montel
Williams**

**A LIFETIME OF SERVICE
ON AND OFF THE BATTLEFIELD**



The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Leads the Way for Veteran Support on Campus

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) demonstrates what it truly means to serve those who have served. Recognized by *U.S. Veterans Magazine* as both a Top Yellow Ribbon School and a Top Veteran-Friendly School, UTC sets a national standard in higher education support for veterans, service members and their families.

This recognition isn't just a badge of honor—it's a testament to a campus-wide commitment that begins with the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs (VMA) and extends to every corner of the university. Director Sylvana Matthews, whose family is rooted in military service, arrived at UTC in 2021 and has since expanded the university's outreach by creating the Veteran and Military Affairs Student Ambassador Program. This initiative serves as a critical bridge for incoming students, offering



Sylvana Matthews and Robert Dorsett.

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peer support, academic resources and a sense of belonging from day one.

Roughly 15-20% of UTC's student body is military-connected. That demographic has helped shape a culture of camaraderie and support. Through programs like Tech for Vets, which provides practical tools such as laptops and calculators, and peer mentorship efforts, students are equipped to focus on success without unnecessary obstacles.

"Our commitment is holistic," said Matthews. "It's about removing red tape and fostering community—from financial aid to personal well-being."

The campus is also home to dedicated spaces for military-connected students, including a welcoming lounge stocked with snacks, computer access, printing and quiet areas to study or recharge. Additional private support areas and partnerships with

campus programs like Scrappy's Cupboard ensure students can access essentials like food and hygiene items. These resources are extended not only to veterans but to spouses and dependents, underscoring UTC's all-inclusive approach.

Associate Director Robert Dorsett, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, joined UTC in 2022 and completed his MBA at the university in May 2025. His firsthand understanding of the challenges veterans face in higher education informs the VMA's case management model—an individualized approach that addresses students' academic, personal and professional goals.

"UTC helped me translate my military leadership experience into a new purpose," said Dorsett. "Our job is to ensure no one navigates this journey alone."

UTC also offers college credit for military experience, further

accelerating degree paths. Veterans are guided through transcript evaluation and provided transparency on how credits apply toward their academic goals—reducing surprises and enhancing clarity.

Student ambassadors such as Durand Henderson, an Air Force veteran majoring in business administration, and Mara Doze, a military dependent and computer science graduate, play an integral role in building community. Their stories reflect the diversity and strength of the military-connected population at UTC. Henderson's wife, a Navy veteran, will soon begin her own journey at UTC—further demonstrating the university's impact on entire families.

"Being part of the ambassador program gave me purpose," Doze said. "It's about helping others feel understood and supported."

As the university looks ahead, the VMA team is focused on expanding job placement and internship opportunities while deepening community ties across Chattanooga. These strategic goals align with the university's broader mission: to support students at every stage of their academic and personal development.

UTC's motto for this community is simple but powerful: "Go Mocs! Go Vets!" It embodies both the school spirit and the pride of military service. It reminds us that whether in uniform or in a classroom, these students remain part of something greater—and at UTC, they are never alone.



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Durand Henderson