In November of 2013, the University of Rochester formally launched the Veterans Alliance at the University of Rochester, the eighth affinity and networking group on campus. The Veterans Alliance will provide military veteran students, staff, faculty, alumni, and their families with resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education. The group seeks to address two issues among veterans: integration and resource access for military veterans on campus and better outreach to veterans interested in pursuing higher education.

In the 12 years since American troops first deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, more than 2.5 million veterans have returned home to a country largely unprepared to meet their needs. Today’s veterans often have difficulty returning to civilian life and figuring out what to do next. Higher education can be a valuable next step; however, many veterans have difficulty accessing their benefits and may end up wandering around campuses looking for someone to help them enroll in a certain program, transfer credits, register for classes, or provide career advice. Current Simon Business School student Matthew Legere went through a very similar experience and decided to do something about it. Legere was instrumental in forming the Veterans Alliance and saw the need for an organization for veteran support here at the University. “Having someone to reach out to with a similar background to ask questions of will go a long way,” Legere says. “I realized there was a void when you get out. When you’re military, there’s a very strict set of orders. You’re very aware of what you’re supposed to do and when you’re supposed to do it. Academic life has so much more freedom. It’s a pretty overwhelming thing.”

In an effort to increase veteran initiatives, a working group composed of staff from the Simon Business School, the School of Arts & Sciences, and the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid have worked together over the last seven months and launched the Veterans Alliance, created a University of Rochester Veterans Resource pamphlet, and held a training session for advisors and faculty to increase understanding of how to best help military veterans on campus. This past December, the Veterans Alliance teamed up with the local Marine Corps League for a Toys for Tots drive, and in January, they held their 2014 kickoff meeting. Future events will include further veteran training for staff and faculty, leadership lectures, Trot with the Troops 5K, collaboration with Rochester area veteran organizations, Veterans Alliance mixers, and much more. If you are interested in learning more about the Veterans Alliance and opportunities to get involved, contact the group directly at VeteransAlliance@rochester.edu.

In December, the University of Rochester was named a Top Military Friends University in Military Advanced Education’s 2014 Guide to Military-Friendly Colleges and Universities. In recent years, the University has provided increased financial resources for veterans by joining the Yellow Ribbon program and creating the Rochester Pledge Scholarship. Through the incredible support from students, faculty, staff, and senior leadership, and with the help of the Veterans Alliance, the University is now fully committed to increasing veteran recruitment and support across campus. We thank all veterans and active service members for their service and commitment to defending our freedoms.