

CU Boulder program connects student veterans to industry professionals

Developing mentoring, training program as 'mark of excellence'

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The University Memorial Center on the University of Colorado campus. (Cliff Grassmick / Staff Photographer)

Lloyd Thrall, University of Colorado alum and Army veteran, enlisted the help of local technology and business experts to draft a program intended to elevate veteran assistance beyond platitudes about past service and a handshake, he said.

Thrall struck a partnership between CU and the Department of [Defense's Technology Accelerator](#) to connect veteran students with the real-world skills they'll need to get a job after graduation.

"I came out of CU and had a wonderful education," said Thrall, who graduated in 2007 after studying international relations and religious studies. "I could have told you why the Crimean war mattered, but I didn't know enough about practical connections about how to find a job and be effective in this environment."

Now working as the director of the Rocky Mountain Regions' National Security Technology Accelerator, otherwise known as MD5, Thrall established the kind of program he would have benefitted from as a student.

After a rigorous application process, 34 CU student veterans were selected this year to attend evenings of mentoring and skills training next week from industry professionals in fields like the technology sector and national security.

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"We want to change or adapt the narrative on veterans from where the American public generally associates them with PTSD and folks whose service is done," Thrall said. "We want to highlight that these are people who can lead and serve in new capacities and focus on what lies in front of them. We're not rewarding past service, we're investing in future capability."

Ashley DeCurtis, a former police officer in Florida now pursuing an MBA in business administration at CU, is one of the 34 students in the program.

"This mission is really awesome," DeCurtis said. "It's filling a gap in the community where people who have interest in defense and national security and intelligence can go to learn specific tactical skills and can network."

DeCurtis hopes to make connections next week that bridge her interests in business, technology and her time in law enforcement.

"I know I don't consider myself a veteran in the same sense of some of the other students in this program, but I feel very privileged to be here," DeCurtis said.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the selected students will meet on campus with leaders in tech, aerospace and business communities for one-on-one talks and seminars. Three students will receive \$1,5000 scholarships. The program culminates with a reception at the local telecommunications firm Zayo Group on Thursday.

Participating companies include: Google, Microsoft, Techstars, Zayo Group, Lockheed Martin, Ball and more.

For students who want to learn more about the program, Thrall said to find more information at the Student Veterans Association and Office of Veteran Services.

"As we develop this program, we really want it to be a mark of excellence," Thrall said. "We want it others to know if you're an MD5 vet innovator, you're looking at someone who is excellent human capital."

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