



UCLA Veterans Initiatives & Partnerships January Newsletter

Congratulations to our 2024 Veteran of the Year: Stephanie Simon!

Simon earns VoTY title through Veteran engagement, health

Stephanie Simon, a Greater Los Angeles Veterans Affairs recreation therapist, was selected as the 2024 UCLA Veteran of the Year.

Simon earned the honor through her tireless work with Veterans, her engagement with UCLA Recreation and Athletics, and the respect and love shown her by Veterans in her recreational therapy program.



Simon began her Veteran's journey right out of high school in 1999. She became a petroleum supply specialist and moved from active duty to what is now Joint Forces Training Base - Los Alamitos, where she spent most of her career as a reservist.

After four years, she left the service in 2003 without fanfare or any guidance on transitioning from the service; **a common problem experienced by separating Veterans**. Because of this, Simon didn't feel like her status as a Veteran was acceptable in some ways.

"It felt like a phase of my life that was just over," she explained. "I was a new mom and that change, plus just being kind of let go; it just didn't seem like something I could identify with."

It would take more than a decade for Simon to reconnect with her identity as a Veteran. She spent that time raising two kids, living with her parents off and on, working two jobs and going to night school. After a final push working and going to school full time, she obtained her bachelors in Kinesiology and her certification as a

recreational therapist in 2015.

Her work as a rec therapist in a large hospital brought her in contact with many Veterans, and she felt a kinship with them.

"I saw a different way of thinking Veterans had, and I wanted to learn more," she said.



Stephanie Simon joins with UCLA and fellow Veterans for a softball game in 2024.

Shortly afterwards, she began her master's in Military Psychology and started volunteering with **Team RWB**. She obtained her degree in 2017.

Seeing her opportunities for career advancement fade away, Simon began looking elsewhere for employment. After building a resume as a rec therapist, volunteering with Team RWB, and earning master's in Military Psychology, she was a perfect fit to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

She started in 2020 and has been integral to the VA/UCLA relationship since. Simon ensured Veterans in the **Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans Program** took advantage of what UCLA offered. She and her team worked with UCLA Veterans Initiatives & Partnerships and UCLA Recreation to schedule monthly events like rock climbing, ropes courses, and kayaking; all free for the Veterans.

Additionally, she took time to get Veterans to the monthly games offered by UCLA Athletics and distribute information relentlessly. Finally, she stepped outside of her role as a rec therapist to help interested Veterans learn more about **VetJET**, a new educational program hosted by UCLA VIP through UCLA Extension.



Stephanie Simon and another Veteran participate in a confidence and team building rope exercise at the UCLA Challenge Course in 2024.

Now, Simon looks again to move up in her career; she has accepted a new position at Veterans Affairs Long Beach Health Care starting this month.

UCLA VIP gives our sincerest thank you to Stephanie for setting the example of a great partnership between UCLA and the VA. We wish her the best in her new role and once again congratulate her as the 2025 UCLA Veteran of the Year!

Check out What's Happening!



ALUMNI GAME

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 2025 // 2:00 PM
JACKIE ROBINSON STADIUM

FREE ADMISSION

**FIRST CHANCE TO SEE THE 2025
BRUIN BASEBALL TEAM IN ACTION
AS THEY FACE BRUIN ALUMNI.**

**SCAN HERE TO RSVP
OR VISIT
UCLABRUINS.COM/VETERANEVENTS**



UCLA

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

UCLA vs. **OHIO STATE**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2025 // 6:30 PM
PAULEY PAVILION PRESENTED BY WESCOM

UCLA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TAKES ON OHIO STATE.

TICKETS PROVIDED

PLEASE PROVIDE PROOF OF VETERAN STATUS

**BUS FROM LOT 7
BUS DEPARTS AT 5:30PM**

**SCAN HERE TO RSVP
OR VISIT
UCLABRUINS.COM/VETERANEVENTS**





vs ARIZONA STATE

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 26, 2025 // 2:00 PM

JACKIE ROBINSON STADIUM

EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCE FOR WEST LA VETERANS

PLEASE PROVIDE PROOF OF VETERAN STATUS

**JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL MID-WEEK
AFTERNOON BASEBALL GAME**

FOOD PROVIDED

**SCAN HERE TO RSVP
OR VISIT
UCLABRUINS.COM/VETERANEVENTS**



Take advantage of everything UCLA has to offer

UCLA Veteran Family Wellbeing Center



The Veteran Family Wellbeing Center (VFWC) provides evidenced-based resilience building services to Veterans, Guard and Reserve members of all eras (regardless of discharge status) and their family members residing in California. Located on the West LA VA campus, appointments are available both in person and remotely using a computer or laptop.



The VFWC services help individuals, couples and families:

- Improve communication
- Express and respond to emotions
- Feel closer to loved ones
- Solve problems
- Plan for the future
- Increase overall wellbeing
- Overcome challenges of all kinds, including marital difficulties, parent-child relationships, grief and loss, reintegration, caregiving, feelings of isolation and many others

Services are free, confidential and offered regardless of military discharge status. Whether you have served or supported someone who has, we look forward to helping you achieve your wellbeing and relationship goals.

Location:

**VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System
West Los Angeles Medical Center
11301 Wilshire Boulevard
Building 220, 3rd Floor Room 316
Los Angeles, CA 90073**

Appointments available

**Monday-Friday 8:30am-7:00pm
and Saturday mornings.**



Veteran Family
Wellbeing Center



U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs

**For more information, contact our Family Services Coordinator
310.478.3711 ext 42793 | info@vfwc.ucla.edu | vfwc.ucla.edu**

UCLA Veterans Legal Clinic

Need legal advice?

What types of legal issues do we handle?

Veterans Benefits: Pension and service-connected compensation benefits.

Citations & Traffic Infractions:
Violations in traffic court, not DUIs.

Criminal Record Clearing:

Expungements and 290 removals

Housing: Assistance for tenants in disputes with their landlord.

(424) 248-9783



**INTAKES at B218, Tuesdays
8 a.m. - 12 p.m., 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.**

Located at Building 218, ground floor Room 5A.

Any person who served in the U.S. military, regardless of discharge status, length of service, or era of service may be eligible for services. **The service is for low-income, Los Angeles-area Veterans.** Additional criteria apply. Services are not guaranteed. Referrals are available.



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