

# Comprehensive Program Review Report



## Program Review - Veterans

### Program Summary

#### 2021-2022

**Prepared by:** Ashley Martinez

**What are the strengths of your area?:** The Veterans Resource Center works within its mission to assist veterans and other military connected students (active duty & dependents) in reaching their educational goals by providing services that address the academic, social and physical needs to support retention and student success. The VRC is staffed by two full time staff, the veterans coordinator and veterans counselor who provide these wrap around services for veteran/military connected students.

We believe the results of working within our mission can be seen in the positive outcomes of our students specifically in the area of student success. Below are some student success indicators from the 2020-2021 year:

1. Veteran students had an overall 75% success rate, including EW grades, which was approx. 8% higher than non Veteran Students.  
When disaggregated female veterans had a 76.3% success rate (8% higher than non veteran female students) and male veterans had a 74.9% success rate (8% higher than non veteran male students).
2. 39 veteran students graduated with at least one associates degree which is a 33% increase over the previous year (28 graduates)
3. 80 degrees and 1 certificate were awarded to veteran students which is a 32% increase over the previous year of 58 degrees awarded. 19 students earned two or more degrees which is a 37% increase over the previous year (13 students earned two or more degrees)
4. The average GPA of our associate degree earners was 3.41 which is 3% higher than the District average GPA of 3.31 among associate degree earners.

Innovations:

COVID presented many challenges in providing the same level of services that we offered pre-pandemic but the VRC successfully adapted by utilizing other available modalities including:

1. Canvas- In Fall 2020 the Veterans Coordinator created/launched a canvas shell to provide students with access to information regarding campus services, community resources related to veterans services as well as general basic needs. We also provided updates and announcements for various campus events and deadlines and information regarding benefits.
  - 323 individual invitations were accepted by students to access VRC information via canvas (126 in Fall 2020, 197 in Spring 2021)
  - There were 14,065 total page views for the 2020-2021 School year
  - There were an average of 270 page views each week for the 2020-2021 school year
2. Website-At the Start of COVID the Veterans Coordinator adjusted the website to reflect contact information for the VRC google voice number as well as contact information for the GI Bill but the website was lacking substantial information regarding other programs and services related to veterans. The veterans coordinator developed content and published a new webpage to give prospective and current students access to a wider range of information regarding benefits and services.
3. Digital Forms-Prior to COVID all our office forms were completed via paper which required students to either print forms or pick up forms in person for processing. Going into the summer and Fall of 2020 students struggled to fill out our forms electronically and we often got forms returned to us that were blank or otherwise incomplete which caused frustration for many

of our students as this caused delays in getting their benefits processed. The VRC adopted DocuSign to mitigate student issues, improve workflow.

**What improvements are needed?:** Chancellor's Office Standards:

We continue to receive funding from the Chancellors office to work towards meeting minimum standards. It was our hope to increase mental health services for veterans but our vehicle for getting that done, signing an MOU with the VA to bring the VITAL program onto campus, took much longer than anticipated. The MOU was signed in March 2021 by both the VA and COS but there was additional legal work that had to be done so all work with the VITAL program was completed to have Dr. Pasion begin working in the VRC for Fall 2021.

**Staffing:**

COVID continues to highlight the need for additional support staff in the Veterans Resource Center. Once classified staff were allowed to return to campus there was a time when student workers were still not able to come back on campus which presented challenges for workload that student workers usually assist with. During time we were working from home, the VRC still had student workers to support the work of the VRC but due to technological limitations all calls for the VRC were fielded by the veterans coordinator so she was completing her typical duties as well as answering all the calls that came in to the VRC. During this cycle the Veterans Coordinator had 1,194 individual phone contacts with students including 308 placed calls, 472 received calls, 138 text messages, as well as 276 VM messages that were fielded (as extracted from google voice). Another large concern for staffing is that we rely on student workers to staff the VRC front desk. When student schedules are inconsistent and there is not enough coverage there are times when the veterans coordinator has to go between completing work in her office and providing front desk coverage. There are also times that we have be forced to close the center for all or part of a day if the veterans coordinator is out for illness or any other reason.

In addition the passage of federal/ State legislation pertaining to COVID, doubled the reporting required of School Certifying Officials. Though some of this legislation is no longer in effect, President Trump signed the Isakson and Roe Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (PL 116-315) in January of 2021 which included 32 provisions that affect how Veterans Benefits are certified and what schools must do to remain in compliance and eligible to continue administering the GI Bill. One such provision requires certifying officials to complete a "dual certification" which means that if we certify 200 students in a term we must submit a second confirmatory certification in order for benefits to continue being received by the student, essentially doubling the number of certifications that must be completed in a term on top of the reporting of any and all changes to enrollment status. The Veterans Coordinator Administers 12 benefits program (6 GI Bills, 5 types of Tuition Assistance & 1 fee waiver program) that all have different requirements for processing. It is imperative that these programs are done correctly and that the college remains in compliance as it ensures that the nearly 200 student veterans who utilize benefits each year receive an estimated 2 million dollars in GI Bill funds. In the 2020-2021 fiscal year the various GI bill and other education programs (tuition assistance and the dependent college fee waiver) brought the college approx. \$89,000 in revenue which is likely lower than previous years due to COVID as evidenced by the fact that in the 18-19 year we received \$83, 444 from just the fee waiver alone and in the 19-20 year we received \$68,356 in fee waiver funding alone. With all the different pieces related to compliance and timely certifications to the VA there is also an issue with staffing as the veterans coordinator is currently the only one on campus equipped with the knowledge and the ability to ensure that students continue to receive their payments. If the veteran's coordinator is out for any reason these functions cease to take place which can leave our students in a financial hardship or cause the district to fall out of compliance with federal regulations. If the VRC were to be able to hire a staff person to assist with the process of completing certification and compliance processes this would not only ensure that an employees absence doesn't cause a complete halt to processing it would provide the coordinator with more freedom to plan and execute other programming within the VRC.

**Describe any external opportunities or challenges.:** COVID continues to present challenges to the VRC. Many of our students struggles with the transition to online courses and we have seen a slight decrease in the number of students utilizing their benefits at this time. However we anticipate that students will begin to return as in person instruction resumes. We also had a hard time getting students to engage with the VRC in an online format. The VRC hosted multiple workshops and drop in lounge hours to provide students with a chance to interact with VRC in an informal manner which would only average between 1-10 student participants.

**Overall SAO Achievement:** We met and exceeded the target set to provide additional outreach events to all veteran students regardless of their benefits status. Canvas also provided an an opportunity to have more frequent meaningful contact with our students then was anticipated when the SAO was written.

**Changes Based on SAO Achievement:** Our SAO will continue through 2021-2022 year in hope that the district will return to

more normal operations and we are able to offer equitable services across all three district sites.

**Outcome cycle evaluation:** The VRC has been successful in regularly assessing and updating SAO's in an effort to best meet the needs of the students we serve however an every other year cycle might provide additional time to assess effectiveness.

## Action: 2021-2022 Peer Mentoring

Develop Peer Mentoring Program utilizing VA student workers

**Leave Blank:**

**Implementation Timeline:** 2020 - 2021, 2021 - 2022

**Leave Blank:**

**Leave Blank:**

**Identify related course/program outcomes:** District Objective 3.2: Increase the course success rate by 10% for each disproportionately impacted student group in their transfer level Quantitative Reasoning and English courses by the end of their first year from 2021-2025.

**Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position):** Ashley Martinez-Veterans Counselor

**Rationale (With supporting data):** The Chancellors office has put forth a set of minimum standards that must be worked towards or accomplished in order to continue receiving ongoing categorical funding for veteran specific mental health services on campus. At this time the VRC currently meets 18 of the 19 minimum standards with Peer Mentoring being the only standard we do not have in place.

**Priority:** Medium

**Safety Issue:** No

**External Mandate:** No

**Safety/Mandate Explanation:**

### Update on Action

#### Updates

**Update Year:** 2021-2022

09/10/2021

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

Due to continued competing priorities with new compliance requirements from the VA this program was tabled. Have moved forward with initial planning by requesting designated email accounts for peer mentor activities. Working with Dr. Pasion-Gonzales to begin building peer mentor program.

**Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required):**

**Update Year:** 2020 - 2021

10/15/2020

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

Due to competing priorities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic we were not able to get this program up and running. We will continue to work on ways to implement this program while we continue in a remote instruction environment.

**Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required):**

### Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021

**District Objective 1.1** - The District will increase FTES by 1.75% over the three years

**District Objective 2.1** - Increase the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and Non-CTE) by 5 percentage points over three years

**District Objective 2.2** - Increase the number of students who transfer to a four-year institution by 10 percent over three years

**District Objective 4.2** - Improve organizational effectiveness by strengthening operations of and communication between District departments, divisions, and constituents

District Objectives: 2021-2025

**District Objective 1.1** - The District will increase FTES 2% from 2021 to 2025.

**District Objective 2.1** - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and non-CTE) by 5%

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from 2021-2025.

**District Objective 3.1** - Reduce equity gaps in course success rates across all departments by 40% from 2021-2025.

## Action: 2020-2021 VA Mental Health

Work with the Fresno VA to develop an MOU to offer mental health services in the VRC to Veteran Students

**Leave Blank:**

**Implementation Timeline:** 2020 - 2021

**Leave Blank:**

**Leave Blank:**

**Identify related course/program outcomes:** Veteran Students will Complete, Persist, & graduate at rates similar to the district as a whole

**Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position):** Ashley Martinez-Coordinator

**Rationale (With supporting data):** The Chancellors office has put forth a set of minimum standards that must be worked towards or accomplished in order to continue receiving ongoing categorical funding for veteran specific mental health services on campus.

**Priority:** Medium

**Safety Issue:** No

**External Mandate:** No

**Safety/Mandate Explanation:**

### Update on Action

#### Updates

**Update Year:** 2021-2022

09/10/2021

**Status:** Action Completed

MOU was signed in March 2021 and Dr. Pasion-Gonzales began working on campus in September 2021.

**Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required):**

**Update Year:** 2020 - 2021

10/15/2020

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

In March 2020 Dr. Paul Pasion contacted the VRC to say that he was starting the VITAL program in tulare county and wanted to work with us to set a schedule for him to come on campus and serve veterans through individual therapy ad outreach. We began the process of creating a new MOU with the VA. Currently we are waiting on the VA to sign the MOU before the college is able to sign the MOU and move forward with this partnership.

**Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required):**

## Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021

**District Objective 1.1** - The District will increase FTES by 1.75% over the three years

**District Objective 2.1** - Increase the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and Non-CTE) by 5 percentage points over three years

**District Objective 2.2** - Increase the number of students who transfer to a four-year institution by 10 percent over three years

**District Objective 4.2** - Improve organizational effectiveness by strengthening operations of and communication between District departments, divisions, and constituents

## Action: 2021-2022 Veterans Specialist

Improve Service Delivery and Support for Veteran Students in an effort to meet Chancellor's office minimum standards as a high functioning Veterans Resource Center.

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**Leave Blank:**

**Implementation Timeline:** 2020 - 2021, 2021 - 2022

**Leave Blank:**

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**Identify related course/program outcomes:** District Objective 1.1-The District will increase FTES 2% from 2021 to 2025

District Objective 2.1: Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and non-CTE) by 5% from 2021-2025.

District Objective 3.2: Increase the course success rate by 10% for each disproportionately impacted student group in their transfer level Quantitative Reasoning and English courses by the end of their first year from 2021-2025.

District Objective 4.2: Improve communication practices needed to support organizational effectiveness and continuous improvement across all District units and constituents from 2021-2025.

**Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position):** Ashley Martinez-Veterans Coordinator, Jenny Saechao-Dean of Student Services

**Rationale (With supporting data):** COVID continues to highlight the need for additional support staff in the Veterans Resource Center. Once classified staff were allowed to return to campus there was a time when student workers were still not able to come back on campus which presented challenges for workload that student workers usually assist with. During time we were working from home, the VRC still had student workers to support the work of the VRC but due to technological limitations all calls for the VRC were fielded by the veterans coordinator so she was completing her typical duties as well as answering all the calls that came in to the VRC. During this cycle the Veterans Coordinator had 1,194 individual phone contacts with students including 308 placed calls, 472 received calls, 138 text messages, as well as 276 VM messages that were fielded. Another large concern for staffing is that we rely on student workers to staff the VRC front desk. When student schedules are inconsistent and there is not enough coverage there are times when the veterans coordinator has to go between completing work in her office and providing front desk coverage. There are also times that we have been forced to close the center for all or part of a day if the veterans coordinator is out for illness or any other reason.

In addition the passage of federal/ State legislation pertaining to COVID, doubled the reporting required of School Certifying Officials. Though some of this legislation is no longer in effect, President Trump signed the Isakson and Roe Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (PL 116-315) in January of 2021 which included 32 provisions that affect how Veterans Benefits are certified and what schools must do to remain in compliance and eligible to continue administering the GI Bill. Once such provision requires certifying officials to complete a "dual certification" which means that if we certify 200 students in a term we must submit a second confirmatory certification in order for benefits to continue being received by the student, essentially doubling the number of certifications that must be completed in a term on top of the reporting of any and all changes to enrollment status. The Veterans Coordinator Administers 12 benefits program (6 GI Bills, 5 types of Tuition Assistance & 1 fee waiver program) that all have different requirements for processing. It is imperative that these programs are done correctly and that the college remains in compliance as it ensures that the nearly 200 student veterans who utilize benefits each year receive an estimated 2 million dollars in GI Bill funds. In the 2020-2021 fiscal year the various GI bill and other education programs (tuition assistance and the dependent college fee waiver) brought the college approx. \$89,000 in revenue which is likely lower than previous years due to COVID as evidenced by the fact that in the 18-19 year we received \$83, 444 from just the fee waiver alone and in the 19-20 year we received \$68,356 in fee waiver funding alone. With all the different pieces related to compliance and timely certifications to the VA there is also an issue with staffing as the veterans coordinator is currently the only one on campus equipped with the knowledge and the ability to ensure that students continue to receive their payments. If the veteran's coordinator is out for any reason these functions cease to take place which can leave our students in a financial hardship or cause the district to fall out of compliance with federal regulations. If the VRC were to be able to hire a staff person to assist with the process of completing certification and compliance processes this would not only ensure that an employee's absence doesn't cause a complete halt to processing it would provide the coordinator with more freedom to plan and execute other programming within the VRC.

This additional staff member would also assist the VRC with supporting the following district objectives:

District Objective 1.1: The District will increase FTES 2% from 2021-2025 over the three years.

Often the Veterans Resource Center is a Veteran or military connected students first contact with College of the Sequoias and we typically help guide students through the matriculation process from application to enrollment. Having a high turnover of student staff means that student workers, though trained are not always confident in addressing all the concerns that brand new and returning students may have. Having a consistent and well-trained staff can ensure that our veteran and military connected students are guided through the matriculation process in a way makes them feel confident in their decision to attend COS. We believe this can contribute to the district's plan to reduce attrition rates from application to enrollment for our veteran students.

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District Objective 2.1 Increase the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and non-CTE) by 55 from 2021-2025.

If we are able to hire a veteran's specialist it will allow us to ensure that we can limit the amount of interruptions to students access of the Veterans Resource Center services. Specifically, this person would be able to cover the front desk, assist with the certification process and other necessary functions to ensure there is never a lapse in these services. Student access to our computer lab, printing services, supply closet and other resources play a role in their overall success. The VRC not only provides access to physical and material resources, we also provide veteran students with assistance in completing financial aid applications and appeals, resolving residency issues and with understanding district policies and procedures. All these things contribute to a student's overall success and ability to complete their associate degree or certificate goals. If we can reduce barriers to accessing our services, it can have a positive impact on student success and completion.

District Objective 4.2: Improve communication practices needed to support organizational effectiveness and continuous improvement across all District units and constituents from 2021-2025.

Hiring a veterans specialist will allow the VRC to improve its overall effectiveness and strengthen operational capacity of our department. With the Passage of Isakson and Roe Legislation the veteran's coordinator has had to shift the bulk of her focus to maintaining compliance with the new legal requirements and there has been an increase in the workload required to maintain compliance. Bringing on a veterans specialist will free up the coordinators time and allow her to continue to provide high quality programming without falling behind on regulatory requirements. In addition, even though our student workers receive intensive training on the services we provide and the benefits we administer there is no way for them to be content experts. The VRC administers 6 GI Bill programs, tuition assistance programs for each individual branch of the military and a fee waiver program. Having a veterans specialist who can be a trained content expert will allow the VRC to improve communication regarding benefits eligibility between our department and the students we serve. This will also improve effectiveness as the coordinator will not have to spend as much time retraining or directing the work of the front desk staff and can focus on other administrative responsibilities.

**Priority:** High

**Safety Issue:** Yes

**External Mandate:** No

**Safety/Mandate Explanation:**

## Update on Action

### Updates

**Update Year:** 2021-2022

09/10/2021

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

Clerical assistant was requested through program but it was not funded . Will request again for current cycle (21-22) or request position using categorical funds

**Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required):**

**Update Year:** 2020 - 2021

09/29/2020

**Status:** Continue Action Next Year

Funding was requested through the appropriate district governance process. Funding was not approved.

**Impact on District Objectives/Unit Outcomes (Not Required):**

## Resources Description

**Personnel - Classified/Confidential - Full time veterans specialist (Active)**

**Why is this resource required for this action?:** The VRC does not have consistent Front Desk Support/Coverage to provide the highest level of service to our student veterans. In addition, there is no back up support for certification or invoicing of benefits for veteran and active duty students and due to the continuing increase in the amount of work that is required to remain in compliance the veterans coordinator has had to shift her focus to certification and compliance. Hiring a veterans specialist would allow the VRC to provide consistent high quality service to veteran and other military students

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while also allowing the coordinator to focus on other programming within the Veterans Resource Center.

Hiring this additional staff can mitigate student barriers to accessing services and support while decreasing inefficiencies which supports District Objectives 1.1, 2.1 and 4.2. When we are able to provide students with accurate and timely access to information it allows them to make informed decisions about their education which can help reduce veteran student attrition from application to enrollment (District Objective 1.1) and help increase a students likelihood of persisting to completion of their Associates Degree or CTE program (District Objective 2.1). An additional personnel will assist the VRC in strengthening our operational capacity (District Objective 4.2).

**Notes (optional):**

**Cost of Request (Nothing will be funded over the amount listed.):** 83000

**Related Documents:**

[SARS 18-19.PDF](#)

## Link Actions to District Objectives

District Objectives: 2018-2021
<b>District Objective 1.1</b> - The District will increase FTES by 1.75% over the three years
<b>District Objective 2.1</b> - Increase the percentage of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and Non-CTE) by 5 percentage points over three years
<b>District Objective 4.2</b> - Improve organizational effectiveness by strengthening operations of and communication between District departments, divisions, and constituents

District Objectives: 2021-2025
<b>District Objective 1.1</b> - The District will increase FTES 2% from 2021 to 2025.
<b>District Objective 2.1</b> - Increase the number of students who earn an associate degree or certificate (CTE and non-CTE) by 5% from 2021-2025.
<b>District Objective 4.2</b> - Improve communication practices needed to support organizational effectiveness and continuous improvement across all District units and constituents from 2021-2025.