

Comprehensive Program Review Report



Program Review - Veterans

Program Summary

2022-2023

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 2021-2022 year:

1. Veteran students had an overall 78.5% success rate, including EW grades, which was 9.7% higher than non Veteran Students and 3.5% higher than the previous year.
When disaggregated female veterans had a 81.3% success rate, which was a 5.2% increase over the previous year and 12.8% higher than non veteran female students. Male veterans had a 76.2% success rate which was 1.3% higher than the previous year and 6.6% higher than non veteran male students.
2. 49 veteran students graduated with at least one associates degree which is a 25% increase over the previous year (39 graduates)
3. 64 degrees and 10 certificates were awarded to veteran students.
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.

Program Successes

We were able to get the VA VITAL program going in Fall 2021. Two areas of the program that we have seen particular success in are in outreach and engagement with the VITAL program. We have been able to enroll 12 students that were not previously enrolled in VA healthcare and connected students for direct clinical care with Dr. Pasion, our VITAL psychologist. Other ways students have engaged with Dr. Pasion is through workshops. We hosted a Stress Management workshop in Fall 2021. We had 6 students attend the workshop and from this workshop we were able to enroll 1 student in VA healthcare and in recurring clinical care with Dr. Pasion.

We have also continued to leverage our Canvas shell to provide timely and pertinent information to our Veteran and other military connected students. We have had 37,527 individual page views with a majority of student interactions being with our announcements page. We use announcements to deliver time sensitive information to students regarding campus events and important deadlines. This also provides another avenue for students to be able to interact with the coordinator and the counselor as students regularly message us through canvas.

We have also continued to work with other campus partners to provide services to students on our two other campuses. In addition to our veterans day event on the Visalia campus we were able to host an event at the Hanford Campus where we got to engage with 9 veteran and Active Duty Students at the Hanford Campus. We did not provide an event on the Tulare campus as we did not have students sign up for an event on that campus. We also continued to provide counseling support to both

campuses however. The Veterans Counselor had 5 half days scheduled for the Tulare Campus where she saw 2 veterans students during that time. She was also scheduled to be out in Hanford for 5 full day and during that time she saw 10 veteran students for appointments. She has a much higher need and utilization in Hanford than Tulare.

What improvements are needed?: Staffing:

COVID highlighted the need for additional support staff in the Veterans Resource Center. During the pandemic when the coordinator was working from home we were unable to utilize student workers in the same capacity due to limited access. The VRC relies 100% on student workers to staff the VRC front desk. While we provide extensive and ongoing training our student workers we feel that having, at minimum, a part time employee will assist with providing a more consistent experience for veteran students who utilize our services. Student schedules are not consistent from semester to semester and there is not always enough coverage for the entire day so there are times when the veterans coordinator has to go between completing work in her office and providing front desk coverage. If the coordinator is out and the veterans counselor is available she has also provided coverage for the front desk. There are also times that we have been forced to close the center for all or part of a day if the veterans coordinator and/or counselor are out for illness or any other reason such as travel/conference attendance.

In addition the passage of VA regulations has doubled the reporting required of School Certifying Officials. The Isakson and Roe Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (PL 116-315) which was signed in January of 2021, 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. 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.

Hiring an additional staff member would help in closing gaps in coverage as well as ensure that other vital tasks such as certification and compliance do not fall behind due to lack of qualified staffing.

Describe any external opportunities or challenges.: Some students are still enrolling in a majority of online courses so we do not have the same level of in person engagement we had with students pre-pandemic. In addition our enrollments are lower than they were pre-pandemic. This has allowed us to provide increased support to the students we are serving via book vouchers and laptop lending but we would like to see our number start trending back to pre-pandemic numbers.

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

Changes Based on SAO Achievement: Our SAO will continue through 2022-2023 year in hope that we will be able to see an continued increase in student success as well as an increase in outreach opportunities now that we are back to fully in person operations.

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

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Implementation Timeline: 2020 - 2021, 2021 - 2022

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Program Review - Veterans

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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):

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% from 2021-2025.

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

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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Implementation Timeline: 2020 - 2021, 2021 - 2022

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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.

Program Review - Veterans

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 highlighted the need for additional support staff in the Veterans Resource Center.

During the pandemic when the coordinator was working from home we were unable to utilize student workers in the same capacity due to limited access. The VRC relies 100% on student workers to staff the VRC front desk. While we provide extensive and ongoing training our student workers we feel that having, at minimum, a part time employee will assist with providing a more consistent experience for veteran students who utilize our services. Student schedules are not consistent from semester to semester and there is not always enough coverage for the entire day so there are times when the veterans coordinator has to go between completing work in her office and providing front desk coverage. If the coordinator is out and the veterans counselor is available she has also provided coverage for the front desk. There are also times that we have been forced to close the center for all or part of a day if the veterans coordinator and/or counselor are out for illness or any other reason such as travel/conference attendance.

In addition the passage of VA regulations has doubled the reporting required of School Certifying Officials. The Isakson and Roe Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (PL 116-315) which was signed in January of 2021, 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. 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.

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.

Program Review - Veterans

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: No

External Mandate: No

Safety/Mandate Explanation:

Update on Action

Updates

Update Year: 2022 - 2023

10/04/2022

Status: Action Discontinued

We were not funded to hire a staff member due through the program review process. We are still looking at ways to improve service delivery to veteran students. We will revise actions for the next review cycle

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

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):

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 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).

Program Review - Veterans

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

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 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% 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.

Action: 2022-2023 Reduce access gaps for veteran and military connected students

Provide consistent front desk support through hiring of a part time Veterans Technician

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Implementation Timeline: 2022 - 2023

Leave Blank:

Leave Blank:

Identify related course/program outcomes:

Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Ashley Martinez, Jenny Saechao

Rationale (With supporting data): 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 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).

Priority: High

Safety Issue: No

External Mandate: No

Safety/Mandate Explanation:

Resources Description

Personnel - Classified/Confidential - Full Time Veterans Technician (Active)

Program Review - Veterans

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. We rely on 100% on student workers to staff the front desk; if there is a gap in student schedules and the veterans coordinator is out for any reason there is no one available to run the front desk or check in student appointments which requires us to try to find coverage from other areas or close our center. 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 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 student's 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.): 90000

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

District Objective 4.3 - College of the Sequoias Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, and staff will engage in best practices and staff development to sustain effective operational systems for institutional assessment and continuous improvement.