Comprehensive Program Review Report

Program Review - Veterans

Program Summary

2023-2024

Prepared by: Ashley Martinez

What are the strengths of your area?: The Veterans Resource Center works within it mission to assist veterans and other military connected students (activey 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 2022-2023 year:

1. Veteran students had an overall success rate of 80.5%, including EW Grades, which is 8.6% higher than non Veteran Students and 1.3% higher than the previous year.

2. Veteran Students had a higher math success rate of 67.8%, including EW Grades which was 17.5% higher than the rest of the district which was at 56.9%.

3. Veteran Students has a higher English success rate of 77.8% including EW grades which was 23.4% higher than the rest of the district which was at 61.5%.

4. The average GPA of our associate degree earners was 3.52 which is 7% higher than the District average GPA of 3.28 among associate degree earners.

What improvements are needed?: Staffing:

The VRC relies primarily 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 technician, would 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 be 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. Due to a lack of appropriate staffing we hired a temp clerical assistant in fiscal year 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 year to assist us in providing the continuity of care that veteran students and their dependents deserve. Even with a part time clerical temp there were 3 times this year that the office had to be completely closed due to no staffing, 10 Instances when the office had to close early due to no coverage, 13 instances when student workers had minimal supervision due to both counselor and coordinator being out and 3 instances of the counselor/coordinator/Dean or other dept providing front desk coverage due to no staffing.

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 the coordinator has to submit 2 certifications for each student. For example I certified 133 students in Spring 23 so I had to

submit a total of 266 certifications for the term, this does not include any additional amendments that were made to account for student schedul changes. Submitting these certifications is a time consuming process to ensure accuracy of the submission as well as the student record in case of audit. 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 and maintaining compliance. It is imperative that these programs are administered 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 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.

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.: Data is becoming an ever increasing necessity to drive decision making and funding so it is imperative that data be accurate, timely and easily acceessible. One area for improvement is to ensure that the data elements we need to complete our work in a timely, accurate manner is up to date. The chancellor's office has made it clear that they will be moving towards MIS data as the metric to determine our on-going VRC funding so we need to work closely with our technology services team to fine tune those reports and have a clear understanding of where those metrics are being pulled from and make any adjustments as necessary to ensure accurate data.
Overall SAO Achievement: We met our target of increasing veteran student success rates and hope we will continue to see improvements in our metrics as we strive to meet the needs of our in lab students as well as provide equitable services across the district.
Changes Based on SAO Achievement: We plan to implement customer service metrics into future SAO's to meet district wide goals of providing excellent customer service.
Outcome cycle evaluation: We continue to align our program goals with District Strategic plan goals #2 & #3.

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

Leave Blank:
Implementation Timeline: 2022 - 2023, 2023 - 2024
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Identify related course/program outcomes:
Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Ashley Martinez, Elise Garcia
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

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External Mandate: No
Safety/Mandate Explanation:

Update on Action

Updates

Update Year: 2023 - 2024   08/25/2023
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. We rely on100% 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.

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

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.

Action: 2023-2024 System to Track Lab Usage

The VRC purchased a subscription and plans to implement Accudemia, a cloud based center management system, as a means of tracking our student lab/lounge usage. We will explore how best to utilize this system to track lab/lounge usage in hopes to better identify trends/patterns of usage. This system will also allow me to generate reports for use in future planning for the services and programs the center offers. We currently have a check in device so we will work on utilizing the current device to integrate new system and if needed purchase additional accessories such as a card reader to encourage student usage of the tracking system.

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Implementation Timeline: 2023 - 2024
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Identify related course/program outcomes:
Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Ashley Martinez, Student Workers
Rationale (With supporting data):
Priority: High
Safety Issue: No
External Mandate: No
Safety/Mandate Explanation:

Action: 2023-2024 Increase equitable application of CPL for Veteran Students

Learn as much as possible about CPL and its application for military students in accordance with Vision 2030 which is seeking to have all 116 community college campuses utilizing the MAP platform. Attend trainings and work with CTE Dean, Academic senate and other necessary constituancy groups to gain buy in necessary to increase CPL acceptance. Work to update policies and procedures, if deemed necessary, utilizing district governance structures.

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Implementation Timeline: 2023 - 2024
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Identify related course/program outcomes:
Person(s) Responsible (Name and Position): Ashley Martinez, Elise Garcia, Jennie Garcia,
Rationale (With supporting data): In 2020 Title V of the California ED code was updated and required community colleges, by December of 2020 to adopt and implement updated policies for Credit for Prior Learning. One part of the updated legislation expanded CPL to include military experience and asked colleges to review this training to determine if equivalent credit could be granted to meet GE and/or Major requirements. While COS adopted a policy not much progress has been made in terms of getting military courses approved for CPL or implementing a way to track what CPL credit has been granted to ensure equal application of our CPL policies. Increasing acceptance of CPL accross our district aligns with the Chancellor's Office Visions 2030 Goal 1-Equity in Success (and completion) and Goal 3 Equity in support as well as actions layed out in the Vision 2030 Strategic Directions. Increasing CPL across the district also aligns with District Goals 1, 2 & 3 as increased accedptace of CPL will help with the stated objectives within each goal.
Priority: High
Safety Issue: No
External Mandate: Yes
Safety/Mandate Explanation: Reviewing prior learning experiences to determine if credit can be granted is required by Title V.