

Veterans Affairs Program

2012-2013

Area 1 – Division or Program Overview

- 1.1 The mission of the Veterans Affairs Program is to provide assistance through education, certification and guidance to military veterans and their dependents in achieving their educational objectives and to effectively promote the retention, graduation and transfer of military veteran students and their dependents.
- 1.2 The Veterans Affairs Program understands the importance of a well- rounded veteran student. As such, these Institutional Learning Outcomes are most frequently reviewed by the veterans on campus; Solve problems using oral and written communication, critical thinking and listening skills, planning and decision-making skills, information literacy, and a variety of technologies; Demonstrate good citizenship and teamwork through respect, tolerance, cultural awareness, and the role of diversity in modern society; and, Value and apply lifelong learning skills required for employment, basic skills, transfer education, and personal development.
- 1.3 The Veterans Affairs Program has an outstanding track record with the veteran students on campus with an average of 450 veterans using one form of the GI Bill or another. The certification and on-time VA payment ratio is 98% according to VA online data. In addition, the local veterans community contacts this office on a consistent basis for referrals to or leads to veterans and the resources that are needed for veterans to be successful, not just in college, but in life.

Strengths

- Community contacts and student referrals
- Communication and guidance to veteran students that take advantage of the services offered
- Assists in the re-adjustment process to the civilian life in school
- Helps with having a comfortable environment in the office
- Information provided to veterans and their dependents
- Assists with the financial aid process
- Helps to establish priority registration

Weaknesses

- Lack of proper equipment in the office
- Lack of a space for students
- Not enough access for work studies to assist in the establishment and update of veteran student files
- Perception of discrimination by other clubs on campus (think veterans get special treatment)
- Need access to tools and information to assist veterans who come in the office as a student worker.

Improvements Needed

- Need a sitting area, more chairs and a table
- Need a few computer stations for veterans students
- Need a station for the work study in the office
- Wifi connection would be beneficial for the Veterans Service Center

1.4 Edward Arndt, Program Coordinator and lead writer of Program Review

1.5 The following members were an integral part in developing this Program Review; LaDonna Trimble-Dean, Michelle Hernandez-Director, Kim Covell-Tech Analyst, Armando Loza-student, Stephanie Fontilara-student, Magdalena Vargas-student

Area 2 – Data Analysis

2.1 Many of the current trends affecting so many other programs do not impact the veterans student population as significantly due in large part to the fact that each veteran student is provided with a priority registration date that allots for a semester to semester schedule which allows for the veteran student to stay on schedule and on target in their efforts to complete a certificate, degree program or in fulfilling their transfer requirements.

2.2 When the class offerings are reduced to a significant level due to budget constraints based on course offerings, faculty ratios and efficiency the Veterans Affairs Program (VAP) students are impacted. Courses that may be needed but are unavailable or are not offered at a time conducive to a student's availability adversely affects their ability to successfully navigate through the college in a timely manner.

2.3 Student achievement: success, retention and term to term persistence – The VAP students have one of the highest retention and term to term persistence rates in the college at 74% as per Institutional Research and Effectiveness.

2.4 Based on the current statistics within the veterans population the most significant impact to this population has come from the financial responsibility and integrity of the

Department of Veterans Affairs. The monthly payment a veteran receives from the Veterans Administration has steadily declined over the past 4 years which has caused a slight decline in the college's veteran population.

2.5 N/A

2.6 N/A

2.7 Many of the current veteran students are pursuing vocational certificate programs or degree programs that have the most direct impact on employment (i.e. Airframe and Power plant, Aircraft Fabrication and Assembly, and Air Conditioning and Refrigeration).

2.8 The Veterans Affairs Program offers a variety of services to the veteran student population that consists of certifying on a semester basis the courses being taken by each veteran. In addition, this program acts as a conduit to other veteran services in the community. Other service needs any veteran student may need can and will be addressed through this program when it is directly affecting a veteran student.

Area 3 – Outcomes

3.1 The SLO for the Veterans Affairs Program is that students will learn to find registration appointments online and register using myAVC. The statistics show that this SLO is being met at a 96% success rate. The current PLO is that students will be able to successfully navigate through the enrollment process utilizing the various Enrollment Services' activities and programs for student success.

3.2 N/A

Area 4 – Stakeholder Assessment

4.1 The Veterans Affairs Program has an outstanding track record with the veteran students on campus in serving over 450 veterans using one form of the GI Bill or another. The certification and on-time VA payment ratio is 98% as per VA online data. In addition, the local veterans community contacts this office on a consistent basis for referrals to or leads to veterans and the resources that are needed for veterans to be successful, not just in college, but in life.

The Catalyst Foundation, which is a veterans advocacy group that assists veterans with counseling, financial needs and guidance, placed a worker in the office on a weekly basis through the summer for a couple hours because over 64% of their veterans' clientele was being referred by the AVC Veterans Affairs Program. In addition, the Employment Development Department of California in Lancaster also had an employee

come to the campus on a consistent basis throughout the previous few years in order to better service the veterans population.

Area 5 – Goals and Objectives

5.1 The establishment of a Veterans Service Center was one of the primary goals in the previous comprehensive self-study. This goal has been addressed and the Board of Trustees for AVC approved the creation of the Veterans Service Center in the spring 2012 semester. The actual development and implementation of the Veterans Service Center is currently a work in progress with a floor plan layout and the essential technology to be put in place at a later date.

The need for a designated counselor to ensure the Education Plan requirement for all veteran students is met has not been implemented.

This program office is still being maintained by one Program Coordinator. The recommendation was for a part-time support staff worker and eventually the position would increase to full-time, then a second coordinator would be added.

A Veterans Advisory Committee was established and has met each academic year since 2009-2010. Prior Meeting Agendas and Minutes are available online or by request from the Veterans Affairs Program office.

5.2 The VAP has one approved Student Learning Outcome (SLO) since 2009 which is as follows; Students will learn to find registration appointments online and register using myAVC. 255 veteran students were asked in a survey during the 2008-09 academic year about how they planned to register for classes, 88% planned to use myAVC and register online, while 12% stated they would continue to register in-person because they felt they still needed further training in the use of myAVC. The VAP will continue to strive for 100% online registration through myAVC by all veteran students. Currently, the success rate during the 2011-2012 academic year was 96%.

In addition, the establishment of a fully functional Veterans Service Center is an immediate primary goal that should be accomplished in the very near future. With the approval by the Board and a space already in place the only obstacle is getting the location ready to meet the demands the Veterans Service Center will put forth.

Another immediate goal is to create a separate account for VA funding and other grants and endowments to be placed specifically for the Veterans Affairs Program and the Veterans Service Center. The separation of the funds specific to veterans-related student issues will allow for the program to become more autonomous.

A short-term to long-term goal is getting a part-time support staff worker in place to assist the Program Coordinator in the day-to-day operations. On average, the VAP

office receives about 24 students for various reasons (certifications, advising, correspondence, pay inquiries, new students, and documentation drop-off), but during peak times (registration periods for upcoming semesters and changes in VA benefits) there can be in excess of 60 veteran students coming through the office in a day.

Since the VA requires all veterans files have an Education Plan, another immediate to short-term goal is for the Veterans Service Center and/or Veterans Affairs Program have a designated adjunct counselor, or a full-time counselor on a part-time basis, available to ensure that all active veterans' files, an average of 450 during the fall and spring, meet the VA audit requirements.

5.3 N/A

Area 6 – Resource Planning

6.1 In the near term (up to 3 years), the VAP needs a designated fax machine, fax-line and adequate copy machine with scanning capabilities. During peak periods the VAP office faxes on average 20 pages a day to the VA and receives from the VA about 5 pages a day. The VAP also needs a part-time clerical support staff member because the office receives approximately 25 calls a day, but on peak periods calls can be in excess of 50 calls. As mentioned above, the VAP receives on average 24 students in the office per day, but during peak times the number can be in excess of 60 veteran students, which the part-time clerical support staff member could help to control the activity. Each current and new veteran student must have a physical file created with many different documents (DD214, Education Plan, transcripts, certificates of eligibility). With more than 450 active veteran student files and an additional 1,200 or 1,300 inactive veteran files that need to be maintained for at least three years after the veteran leaves, a part-time clerical support staff member would greatly benefit the VAP.

Overall, the current office location is satisfactory in every area with the exception of sufficient privacy when conversing with current and prospective veteran students. Every veteran student should be allowed to share their issues privately with the Program Coordinator. Not every student needs to speak privately while in the VAP office, but it should be available if needed. The Program Coordinator averages about 24 to 60 conversations a day with veteran students varying from a few minutes to an hour. Some conversations are very private and should be discussed in confidence.

The short-term personnel needs of the VAP are to add an additional full-time Program Coordinator and increase the clerical staff from part-time to full-time and add an additional full-time or part-time clerical support member. In 2008, 260 veterans were certified for the fall semester. In 2009, there were 350 veterans certified. In 2010 and 2011 the numbers grew to 420 and 440 respectively.

So, within a four year time span the number of veterans certified in the fall semesters has nearly doubled. The VAP office creates nearly 1200 certifications for veterans to get their GI Bill payments each year. Many times during peak periods of registration there are nearly 100 files pending certifications that must wait just because there isn't enough time in the day to complete them all. A back log can take nearly two weeks to be satisfied because school registration and VA certifications are correlated. Also, the peak registration hours will bring in as many as 60 veterans to the office in a day.

6.2 Initially, a designated fax machine, fax-line and copier/scanner are needed for the Veterans Service Center and for the VAP. About 20 pages are faxed on average during peak operating periods and about 5 pages are received from the VA. Leaving the office to fax or receive a fax takes away from the Program Coordinator's availability because the office has to be emptied and closed while the coordinator retrieves or makes a fax run. Now, the VA is asking for many documents to be scanned and emailed, which will minimize some of the faxing. A separate desktop scanner for the Program Coordinator will benefit the office greatly.

6.3 Finalizing the established office should be of the utmost importance. The location is sufficient for the VAP and the Veterans Service Center in SSV 126 and 127. The current location needs to be renovated to sufficiently provide a wide range of services to the veteran population.

6.4 The proper allocation of VA funds provided needs to be established. The VAP and the Veterans Service Center needs appropriate and adequate continuous funding to provide mandated services and programs to be in compliance with federal initiatives.

6.5 Traveling to regional veterans' education events is beneficial for the Program Coordinator and the student population as a whole. The VA Memorandum of Understanding with AVC mandates that training be accessed. Regional events like the Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists (WAVES) held in July each year and the nationwide events from the National Association of Veterans Professionals (NAVPA) held in October each year need to be attended in order to have to most up-to-date information available to the schools from the VA and other veterans organizations that attend these events.

Area 7 – Recommendations and Comments

7.1 The Educational Master Plan is consistent and accurate with the Veterans Affairs Program's needs at this time. No changes are necessary from the prior update.

7.2 Currently, I don't have any recommendations or comments towards the process with the exception that I feel this review was much more efficient and streamline then the previous review in 2008-2009.