

Veteran Resource Center

Student Affairs

Step 1: Performance Outcome

Student veterans will receive quality support that assists in their successful transition into CSUF

Step 2: Methods and Measures

The Veterans Ambassador Program launched in fall 2017 to ease student veterans and other military-connected individuals' transition into CSUF. The program visits Orange County community colleges, participates in educational access events on military installations (i.e. Camp Pendleton), hosts a Welcome Dinner for incoming student veterans, and facilitates the Peer Transition Leader Program, which provides peer support for transitioning student veterans.

Indirect Assessment: The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) sent an end-of-year questionnaire to every student who utilized the VRC to certify VA Educational Benefits in fall 2017 or spring 2018. The questionnaire collected data on the following:

1. Was the respondent's first CSUF semester fall 2017 or spring 2018? Only respondents who began attending CSUF during fall 2017 or spring 2018 provided transition responses in order to yield data relevant to the Ambassador Program that launched in fall 2017.
2. Did a student veteran peer contact the respondent prior to the start of their first CSUF semester? The questionnaire logic only asked if respondents were contacted by a peer if they identified as a veteran, or if they utilized VA educational benefits (i.e. as a dependent). This is because the VRC does not currently provide programmatic transition services to nonveterans, or veterans who do not self-identify on their CSU application.
3. Was the respondent invited to the Veterans Welcome Dinner prior to the start of their first CSUF semester?
4. Did the respondent attend the Veterans Welcome Dinner prior to the start of their first CSUF semester?
5. The degree in which respondents "agree" or "disagree" that the VRC provided services and support that assisted in their successful transition into CSUF.

Direct Assessment: The VRC also examined internal Ambassador Program data from the 2017-2018 academic year. The data included:

1. The number of working relationships that the Ambassador Program fostered with local community colleges and other community resources during the 2017-2018 academic year.
2. The number of working relationships that the Ambassador Program fostered with campus partners during the 2017-2018 academic year.

Step 3: Criteria for Success

Indirect:

- 80% (whose first semester was fall 2017 or spring 2018) indicate that they were contacted by a student veteran peer before their first semester
- 80% (whose first semester was fall 2017 or spring 2018) indicate that they were invited to the Veterans Welcome Dinner before their first semester
- 40% (whose first semester was fall 2017 or spring 2018) indicate that they attended the Veterans Welcome Dinner before beginning their first semester
- 80% agree or strongly agree that the VRC staff provided services and support that assisted their successful transition into CSUF

Direct:

- The Ambassador Program fostered working relationships with three (3) local community colleges and other community resources during the 2017-2018 academic year
- The Ambassador Program fostered working relationships with five (5) campus partners during the 2017-2018 academic year

Step 4: Results

Indirect: 31% (55 of 176 respondents) indicated that they were a veteran whose first semester was fall 2017 or spring 2018, and subsequently provided transition data. Of those surveyed:

- 55% (30 of 55) were contacted by a student veteran peer before their first semester
- 73% (40 of 55) were invited to the Veterans Welcome Dinner before their first semester
- 33% (18 of 55) attended the Veterans Welcome Dinner before their first semester
- 82% (45 of 55) agreed or strongly agreed the VRC staff provided services and support that assisted in their successful transition into CSUF

Direct: The Ambassador Program fostered working relationships with twelve (12) local community colleges and other community resources during the 2017-2018 academic year; Fullerton College; Irvine Valley College; Mt. San Antonio College; Long Beach City College; Cerritos Community College; Santa Ana Community College; Golden West College; Coastline College; Santiago Canyon College; Rio Hondo College; Orange Coast Community College; Tierney Center.

The Educational Access Coordinator fostered working relationships with nine (9) campus partners during the 2017-2018 academic year; Diversity Inclusion Resource Center, Disability Support Services; Mihaylo Advising; Health Advising; Male Success

Initiative; Student Recreation Center; Woman & Adult Reentry Center; Titan Bookstore; Financial Aid.

Step 5: Improvement Actions

In addition to the data analysis above, the questionnaire also allowed respondents to provide qualitative responses for how to improve the VRC's transition support. Based on all of the data available, the following improvement actions have been identified:

Increase Welcome Dinner Outreach through a number of strategies including;

- Host an additional welcome event at a different time (i.e. weekday dinner, weekend lunch). Historically, student veterans have indicated time as a major challenge to their campus participation. Overall attendance may be increased by providing opportunities during different times
- Identify and follow up with students who do not attend
- Utilize beginning-of-semester events to provide supplementary transition assistance for those who were unable to attend before the semester
- Provide Childcare or Child-Friendly Support in partnership with the Student Veterans Association (SVA). Historically, student veteran parents have indicated that knowing their children are welcome is a primary influence on whether they attend campus events
- Create Webinars consisting of all pertinent information from the Welcome Dinner for those who cannot attend in person
- Provide all pertinent information from the Welcome Dinner on the VRC website

Identify and Support Our Military-Connected Population

As a VRC that strives to serve a diverse “military-connected” population, it is necessary to develop a means to identify these individuals. The general definition of military-connected (i.e. any non-veteran who supports veterans or the community) creates challenges for identifying the entire population. Despite these challenges, the VRC can increase its ability to support military-connected individuals a number of ways, including:

- Identify dependents who are utilizing VA education benefits or CalVet Fee Waivers
- Promote and host welcome dinners and transition services similar to those for student-veterans, but specific to the military-connected population. Similarly, this may include creating webinars and sections on the VRC website that are specific to the military-connected population

Provide Access to Additional Resources

The most common transition-focused theme from the qualitative responses is to provide access to additional campus and veteran resources. Examples of resources include;

- “On-campus Vocational Rehabilitation counselors”
- “The Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise”

Implement a Comprehensive Communication Plan

One theme overwhelmingly emerged across all four questions: the VRC could benefit most from keeping students better informed. The VRC may benefit from creating a comprehensive communication plan that includes timelines and strategies for informing the entire population of the center’s many events, opportunities, and resources. A well-developed communication plan will provide students with adequate time to plan.

Potential strategies to better communicate the VRC’s transition services include:

- Identify and develop key messages, such as: “The CSUF VRC values diversity, inclusion, and respect”, “check your campus email”, etc.
- Utilize a wide range of communication tools (i.e., email, text messaging, the VRC website, social media, VRC lounge TV/event board, SVA meetings, etc.)
- Be timely when advertising events and opportunities to ensure students are given enough time to plan
- Create a transition-focused handout with commonly used resources. The transition team could have a short orientation handout at the VRC for the new students. The handout could indicate some of the more commonly used campus resources and a campus map, which can be available both online and in print at the VRC

Maintain Our Commitment to Inclusivity

Another predominant theme across the questionnaire’s qualitative responses was ensuring a commitment to inclusivity. Transition-focused qualitative improvement recommendations include ensuring post-baccalaureate student veterans and military-connected individuals feel welcome in the center. The comprehensive communication plan should develop effective strategies that encourage everyone to recognize and embrace the center’s culture of inclusivity.