

2020-2023 Comprehensive Program Review

Veterans Success Center

Section 1: Program Information

A. Members: List all staff in your department or program.

1. Maria Buffo, veterans success center director
2. Rita Barber, veteran services technician

B. Organization Chart

- Veterans Success Center Director (1 – 100%)
- Veteran Service Technician (1 – 100%)
- Academic Counselor (1-100%)*
- Veterans Success on Campus Counselor (1-40%)**
- Work-Study Student (5-25%)

*Report to Dean of Counseling

**Reports to the Department of Veterans Affairs

C. Briefly describe your program, including program components and function.

The Veterans Success Center (VSC) provides a central location for student veterans to access various services including: 1) Government Issue (GI) Bill educational benefits and support services; 2) certification of benefits eligibility; 3) benefits processing; 4) verification of coursework; 5) academic counseling; 6) priority registration; and 7) advocacy on behalf of student veterans. Staff members also assist with referrals to outside agencies for housing, job placement, internships and other resources as needed. Student veterans also receive information about various services including veteran-specific workshops, Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation services, community resources, the Veterans Club, and information regarding a three-unit transferable counseling course (COUN 161) designed to help student veterans transition from military to civilian life.

D. Describe how your program interacts or collaborates with other on- and off-campus programs.

The Veterans Success Center has a presence in the community and on campus. The VSC participates in the following community events annually:

- Supervisor Kathryn Barger's Annual Tribute to Veterans and Military Families
- Annual Veterans Expo, sponsored by U.S. Congresswomen Grace Napolitano & Judy Chu
- Glendora Rotary Field of Heroes
- Azusa Rotary Field of Glory
- Region VIII Veteran Program Directors Consortium

Collaborations include:

- Vet Ally and Women's History in the Military (Student Life and Leadership Development event)
- Welcome Day (Outreach and Engagement event)
- Grad Fest (Student Services event)
- Resource Fair and Career Panel (joint effort with the Career and Transfer Center)
- Present the Veteran Ally Training as part of the Student Affairs Ally Series

Additionally, the VSC collaborates closely with Fiscal Services to facilitate the payment of veteran benefits. It also partners with the Counseling and Advising division to ensure the provision of counseling services for students. Furthermore, the VSC works with multiple student service offices to address matters related to financial aid, registration and residency.

E. How is your program funded?

The Veterans Success Center director position is funded by the Student Equity and Achievement Program (SEAP) funds. The veteran services technician position is funded by two different sources, 35% is funded from the district budget and 65% from on-going categorical funding. The VSC also receives an annual \$5,360 supply budget. The Foundation has been effective in providing funds to support various VSC activities and programs.

Section 2: Mission

A. Citrus College Mission Statement

Citrus College provides students with quality educational experiences and support services that lead to the successful completion of degrees, transfer, certificates, career/technical education, and basic skills proficiency. The college fosters academic and career success through the development of critical thinking, effective communication, creativity, and cultural awareness in a safe, accessible, and affordable learning environment. In meeting the needs of our demographically diverse student population, we embrace equity and accountability through measurable learning outcomes, ethical data-driven decisions and student achievement.

B. Provide your program's mission statement and purpose.

The mission of the Veterans Success Center is to assist student veterans in achieving their educational and professional goals by removing barriers they may face when transitioning to civilian life, student life, or acclimating to academic culture. The center also strives to empower student veterans and provide them with the skills necessary to compete globally.

C. How does your mission statement and purpose align with Citrus College's mission?

The Veterans Success Center supports the college's mission of providing student support services that lead to the successful completion of degrees, transfer, career/technical education and basic skills proficiency. The Veterans Success Center assists student veterans in achieving their educational and professional goals by removing barriers they may face when acclimating to academics, student life, and/or civilian life. The center also strives to empower student veterans and provide them with the skills necessary to compete globally.

Section 3: Student Experience

A. Summarize the survey results from the SSPR Survey (see Appendix A). Please focus on trends and address student feedback/comments.

The Veterans Success Center survey was distributed to 67 students. A total of 18 students participated in the survey, with 8 opting for the online survey questionnaire and 10 completing the paper version, resulting in a survey response rate of 27%. The survey was intended for distribution to veteran students who received benefits at Citrus College. The results were outstanding, with five of the eight areas polled receiving a 100%

positive rating. Data collected indicated student veterans' satisfaction with the services provided by the VSC. The respondents provided feedback as to what VSC services provided were most helpful to them. The top three responses were counseling services, financial assistance (e.g., gas gift cards, snacks/drinks, school supplies), and a quiet study space. Respondents also provided feedback as to what the VSC could do to help them be successful. Twenty-three percent of respondents stated that they would like access to the college gym or be provided gym equipment at the VSC. Other suggestions were quiet study space and tutoring at the VSC.

B. Compare these survey results with results from previous program review.

Not applicable, first time survey is being administered.

Section 4: Program Analysis and Planning

A. Describe the population you serve and analyze the trends in enrollment, success, retention, etc.

Based on the data below, the student veteran population maintains success and retention rate of 80%, which is 6% higher than the college's rate of 74%. Student veterans make up between 1.4 – 1.7% of enrolled students.

2020-21	Enrollment Count	Retention Count	Success Count	Retention Rate	Success Rate
Military (Active Duty, Active Reserve, National Guard)	82	77	68	94%	83%
Veteran	1208	1109	960	92%	79%
Total Military and Veteran	1290	1186	1028	92%	80%
Citrus College Total	75208	67523	55895	90%	74%

2021-2022	Enrollment Count	Retention Count	Success Count	Retention Rate	Success Rate
Military (Active Duty, Active Reserve, National Guard)	64	60	48	94%	75%
Veteran	939	871	731	93%	78%
Total Military and Veteran	1003	931	779	93%	78%
Citrus College Total	63052	56614	46358	90%	74%

2022-2023	Enrollment Count	Retention Count	Success Count	Retention Rate	Success Rate
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Military (Active Duty, Active Reserve, National Guard)	53	49	43	92%	81%
Veteran	897	837	702	93%	78%
Total Military and Veteran	950	886	745	93%	78%
Citrus College Total	65396	59306	48846	91%	75%

B. Based on your analysis, what is the future plan for your program?

As of 2022-2023 the enrollment count for student veterans is 950. The evidence shows that student veterans' retention and success rates maintain a steady percentage above Citrus College general student population. To continue this trend, it is necessary to maintain academic support when serving this student population. Included in the structure of support already established for student veterans, the VSC plans to increase student participation in tutoring, study groups and special programs on campus. Programs such as the Honors Transfer Program, STEM Trio, and the Transfer Admission Guaranteed program can increase the student veteran retention and completion rate.

C. PLO/SLO Assessment: Describe how your program has assessed program learning outcomes and student learning outcomes over the last three years and what you found from these assessments. Attach any relevant reports or other evidence to substantiate your narrative analysis. Include reflections and recommendations based on your analysis of the findings.

VSC – SLO 1: The Veterans Success Center will provide support and contribute to the academic success of student veterans to gain the tools and knowledge to pursue their educational and vocational goals.

In the last 3 years, the VSC has offered students' academic counseling, an onsite counselor from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and a dedicated veteran services technician. The most recent addition of student support services for veterans includes mental health services, online support services, free school supplies and materials, and streamlined the certification of GI Bill education benefits.

In 2019, Citrus College signed a Memorandum of Understanding with U.S. Vets to provide mental health services free of charge to student veterans and dependents. A mental health intern maintains office hours at the VSC 1-2 days a week for individual sessions, group sessions, and mental health workshops. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic the VSC adapted its services to online support, which included utilizing Canvas as a platform to post announcements for student veterans, virtual lobbies office hours, and virtual workshops.

The VSC utilized funding to support student veterans by providing them with free school supplies, adding textbooks to the lending library and hosting activities geared toward the student veteran population. Donations from the Citrus College Foundation help to replenish some of these services.

The biggest change in the last three years has been the elimination of paper files and the replacement with an electronic filing system. The VSC utilized SmartSheets to gather and maintain student veteran documents and submit request for the certification of GI Bill education benefits. This process has made it possible for students

to upload all documents online, obtain a submission receipt and provide staff with updates to student schedule changes.

VSC – SLO 2: The Veterans Success Center will empower student veterans by providing them with the skills necessary to be successful as they transition to civilian life.

The VSC has hosted a veteran's career panel annually for the past three years. This panel consists of veterans that have completed their academic goals and are in their respective careers. The career panel provides students with the opportunity to ask questions about each panelist's academic journey, request advice, and network.

The VSC has also maintained a robust schedule throughout the semesters that includes workshops and activities for student veterans. The workshops provided cover topics related to veterans benefits in California, VA benefits, job fairs and placement, and university transfer preparation.

D. Document accomplishments and/or improvements since your last program review.

The VSC accomplished many significant milestones over the past three years. These achievements include:

- Signing an MOU with U.S Vets for the provision of mental health services.
- New furniture for the VSC including lounge chairs, a microwave, and a refrigerator.
- Named 2023-2024 Military Friendly Schools (12th consecutive year), Top Ten category (3rd consecutive year).
- Named 2023-2024 Military Spouse Friendly School Designation (4th consecutive year).
- Named 2023 Military Times: Best for Vets Colleges (3rd consecutive year).
- Applied and awarded a \$26,500 donation to support the program in 2021.

E. Document program challenges/obstacles since your last program review.

The challenges faced in the last three years have been the decrease in student veteran enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the slow increase in student enrollment since the return to campus in the fall semester of 2021. Although the student veteran count is low, the services that are provided by the VSC have increased. Funds that are used to support the function of the VSC are categorical funds. This type of funding is based on the number of students veterans and veteran dependents that are using GI Bill education benefits. The VSC offers support services to all military affiliated students. This includes veterans not using GI Bill education benefits, active military, vetted veteran's dependents, and dependents using veteran state benefits. The funding model does not provide support for the additional military affiliated students that the center serves. This is a problem throughout the state and the VSC director is working with the California Community College Chancellors Office (CCCCO) to develop a new funding formula that will help support the increase of categorical funding.

The VSC director plays a critical role for supporting student veterans and sets Citrus College apart from other colleges. Of the 114 community colleges in the state, Citrus College is one of only seven colleges that has a dedicated director of veteran services. Having a full-time veteran services technician and director allows the flexibility for coordinating workshops, attending fundraising events, and participating in workgroups such as the CCCCCO funding formula workgroup. The Citrus College Veterans Success Center director's position is currently classified as a professional expert and has been for more than 10 years. The professional expert position is renewed annually and can be eliminated at any time. A permanent director position will ensure the

continued success of the VSC and the services that are provided to student veterans at Citrus College. The position does not receive cost of living adjustments or the regular step increases that are afforded to managers and supervisors.

F. Summary of Past Recommendations and Goals: Describe the progress made on your recommendations and goals from the last comprehensive program review.

VSC Goal 1: Increase student veteran enrollment by 5% per year.

In March 2020, the world entered the COVID-19 pandemic. Citrus College closed for in person classes and services. Because of the closure the spring of 2020 semester saw an increase in student withdrawal from courses. The following summer and fall semesters student veteran enrollment decreased and remained low for the next two years. In the last year, the number of student veteran enrollment has slowly increased. Based on the unforeseen pandemic, this goal was not reached.

VSC Goal 2: Improve the GI Bill benefits certification process online.

- a. Introduce a secure system to send and receive forms and petitions through the student portal.
- b. Improve communication with students through the student portal, phone calls, and email.
- c. Scan student veteran DD214 forms directly into Application Xtender document management software.

The process for improving the GI Bill benefit certification process began in the fall of 2019. The VSC maintained paper files for several years but after the COVID-19 pandemic, it transitioned to using the Smartsheet platform.

During the pandemic, the VSC staff improved and developed various means of communication with students. Emails, phone calls, virtual lobby time, and messenger on Canvas helped keep the lines of communication open between student veterans and staff.

VSC Goal 3: Develop a promise program for student veterans that funds college tuition and fees that are not covered by the GI Bill education benefits (e.g. supplies, books, parking).

The VSC has been able to budget for student support by purchasing and maintaining school supplies and added new books to the textbook loan program. With the support of the college and Campus Safety, the VSC was able to cover the cost of parking for the fall 2023 semester. The VSC is committed to maintaining a budget for school supplies books, and parking for student veterans.

VSC Goal 4: Improve the academic success of student veterans by adopting the Guided Pathways model.

- a. Introduce a math boot camp to help student veterans refresh their math skills.
- b. Develop a student veteran tracking system to support academic progress (track GPA, course failure, transfer ready) and provide interventions to promote success and completion.
- c. Encourage the completion of first year English and math courses.
- d. Participate on the advising team for the career and academic pathways (CAPs)

Developing various modalities to support student veterans in a guided pathways framework posed challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Student veteran enrollment declined, and amid remote learning, the provision of additional screen time workshops, trainings, and support services became challenging. To address this, the VSC collaborated with TeCS to create Argos files for tracking and reporting students' academic success, challenges, and shortcomings. Those reports are used to monitor veterans and provide the right intervention when needed to make the program successful.

Section 5: Ensuring Equity and a Commitment to DEIA+ in Student Services

A. Describe how your program addresses the needs of underrepresented student populations and delivers equitable student services.

The Veterans Success Center has worked to ensure that all veterans feel welcomed and safe at the center and on-campus. The VSC has worked with several departments to include veterans in clubs, and programs. In 2019, student veterans were active participants in Associated Students of Citrus College, (ASCC) and the planning of campus events. The VSC work with the Disabled Student Programs and Support Services (DSPS) to provide an overview of the services that veterans can use to support their academic success. The DSPS office also provided office hours in the VSC. As part of the ally workshops series, the VSC provided an awareness workshop for staff and faculty to ensure that student veterans special needs are known. The VSC worked with the Career and Transfer Center to develop a resume writing pamphlet specific to veterans' military experience and how to translate it to civilian life.

The VSC took on a monthly commitment to display the military's diversity at the center. A wall display was updated each month to capture the various diversity groups that served in the military. The display included a picture of the servicemember, and short bio of their military accomplishments. The VSC provided in-house sensitivity training for work-study students' regarding being mindful and respectful of a person's pronouns. Currently, the VSC is working of other forms of diversity representation in the military.

B. How do you serve students regardless of service location or delivery method?

Since 2020, the Veterans Success Center launched a Canvas shell to post announcements of upcoming events, host virtual mental health lounges, provide DSPS services, and host drop-in visits with a Veteran Affairs representative. The Canvas shell is also used to reach student veterans that may be online-only students or evening students with limited access to the center.

Additionally, Bookings software is being utilized to schedule in-person or remote appointments with the director or veterans' services technician.

Section 6: New Program Goals

A. List 2-4 program goals you wish to accomplish during the next three years. Please connect each goal to at least one campus initiative/plan (Strategic Plan, EFMP, SEAP 2.0, Guided Pathways, Technology Plan, Sustainability Plan, Transfer Plan, Other: _____).

VSC Goal #1:

The Veterans Success Center will promote study groups among student veterans and will provide space for students in the same core classes to study together. Students will be encouraged to attend study sessions and report the benefits of their attendance. Students who participated in study groups will be given a survey at the end of the semester.

Strategic Plan 5.1: Provide an equitable student support service environment that is proactive and responsive to student needs and perspectives.

VSC Goal #2:

Increase student veteran enrollment by 5% per year. The VSC will work on promotion, workshops and open house events to capture the interest of veterans and dependents attending college.

Strategic Plan 5.2: Promote access and awareness of student support services to increase student participation.

VSC Goal #3:

The Veterans Success Center will commit to maintaining a program that supports student veterans' enrollment and transition to civilian life while maintaining a healthy budget to support needs.

Strategy 2.2 Ensure that college enrollment processes are equitable and efficient in meeting student needs.

VSC Goal #4:

The Veterans Success Center will make the VA education benefits process accessible to student veterans, helping to maximize their use of college and VA resources.

Strategy 2.1 Promote student-centered scheduling that decreases time to completion, maximizes college resources and aligns with Guided Pathways.

Section 7: Budget Planning

Describe the resources (staffing, facilities, technology and equipment, and professional development) you anticipate needing over the next three years to accomplish the goals for your department. Ideally, this will inform the resource requests in the annual updates for each of the next three years.

The Veterans Success Center director is currently advocating statewide to revise the funding formula used for all veterans including active military, vetted veteran's dependents, and dependents using veteran state benefits. If the changes are approved, the VSC will likely have sufficient funding to meet the needs of all student veterans for the next few years.

In addition, the VSC is recommending a budget for a permanent full-time director. The Veterans Success Center is a program that has been part of Citrus College for 14 years. The professional expert may have fit 14 years ago but it no longer fits the definition of professional expert.

Citrus College Measure Y funding is being used to plan and build a new STEM building and replace the Language Arts and Integrated Services Center, where the VSC is housed. The STEM/Science Building project began its planning stages in early 2023. The new VSC will maintain the same square footage, however, new furniture and equipment will be needed. A total cost estimate is to be determined as the planning is still in progress.

Section 8: Program Review Involvement

List the names of faculty and staff who participated in the review process.

Maria Buffo, veterans success center director

Rita Barber, veteran services technician

David Rodriguez, academic counseling faculty

Describe the involvement of faculty and staff in the program review process.

The Veterans Success Center Director Maria Buffo, worked extensively on gathering data, and putting together this comprehensive program review.

Rita Barber provided input on goals for the VSC and the progress of the last three years. She also provided feedback of the overall comprehensive review, identifying items that were not included and making suggestion on goals regarding serving student veterans.

Over the last three years (2020-2023), Academic Counselor David Rodriguez provided extensive input, feedback, and recommendations regarding many of the goals, challenges, activities, and accomplishments listed in this document.

The Dean of Students Dr. Maryann Tolano-Leveque proofread the document and provided a significant amount of feedback.

APPENDIX A

Program: Veterans Success Center

The Veterans Success Center (VSC) survey was distributed to 67 students. A total of 18 students participated in the survey, with 8 opting for the online survey questionnaire and 10 completing the paper version. The survey was intended for distribution to veteran students who received benefits at Citrus College. The collection of response data spanned from 9/19/2023 to 11/9/2023, resulting in a survey response rate of 27%.

