



Veteran's Resource Center (VRC) Program Review CAS Self-Assessment Final Report Fall 2021

Part 1: MISSION

- 1.1 Program and Services Mission – Rating: Partly Meets (1)
- 1.2 Mission Statement – Rating: Partly Meets (1)

The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) provides comprehensive services and resources to meet the unique needs of our student veterans and other military-connected students. The VRC team is committed to supporting our students through a strengths-based approach, in an effort to assist them in achieving their academic goals.

Finding(s):

The VRC mission is posted on its website and was developed by the Dean of Student Equity & Success in spring 2020. The former mission was deficit-focused, and overly spoke to mental health needs of Veteran students. There was intention for the department to review the mission in March 2020 during a retreat, however the retreat was cancelled and the review did not take place. The current mission is based on fulfillment of Administrative Procedures that guide the work of the VRC, and it has not been reviewed against the institutional mission. Alignment of the mission is pending a department review or retreat.

Discussion by the review team found that improvements can be made to the mission, to make sure it addresses everything the VRC aims to do for the students, and to ensure alignment with policy, procedure, and institutional mission. The review team also discussed how to distribute the mission more broadly, and be seen as a leader on veteran issues on campus. The mission will be added to presentations and other materials to ensure it is distributed widely.

Recommendation(s) & Timeframe:

- Conduct department review of mission statement, and recommend revisions. Continue this with an annual review of the mission statement by institutionalizing the practice in a meeting or retreat.
 - June 2022

Part 2: PROGRAM AND SERVICES

- 2.1 Program and Services Goals – Rating: Meets (2)
- 2.2 Program Information and Services - Rating: Partly Meets (1.5)
- 2.3 Program Structure and Framework – Rating: Meets (2)
- 2.4 Program Design – Rating: Meets (2)

Finding(s):

VRC has written goals that are documented in the VRC Unit Plan (annual program review), VRC Student Learning Outcome (SLO) 3-year plan, and VRC Student Equity Goals. The goals are documented in the annual program review process and software, allowing them to be tracked and updated. The goals were developed by the Dean and reviewed by the VRC team. The work of the department is closely tied to AP 5170 Veterans Affairs, which defines the programs and services required of the department, which are further defined by state and federal laws surrounding educational benefits for veteran students and their survivors and dependents.

Since the services of the VRC are clearly defined by law and policy, documentation of services provided is strong. The VRC provides students with orientation materials, information on determining their benefits eligibility, workshops tailored to the veteran population, and strong educational support services that include academic counseling, referral to mental health counseling, a dedicated Student Accessibility Services counselor, a certifying official, and a recently added program facilitator to increase outreach, in-reach, and connection to VRC and campus-wide programs and services.

The VRC also assists students who are deployed on active duty, or are planning a leave to or return from active duty. Evidence was provide that shows the support offered from the department when advocating for student rights with faculty. The Dean is also working with the Office of Diversity, Compliance, and Title IX on ways to better inform students and faculty about accommodations for students call to active duty or report for duty related to reserve units.

The VRC strongly encourages students to meet with the VRC Counselor at least once or twice a semester, and the department is considering modeling their program similar to the EOPS process. This is to ensure students understand the impact of dropping a class from the VA perspective, and the associated financial repercussions it may have, and also the impact of academic progress probation on receiving benefits. Because student's financial resources are closely tied to academic progress, it is even more critical for this student population to be fully aware of procedures. The VRC is taking steps to address this by partnering with Financial Aid on a SLO effort aimed at increasing understanding and awareness requirements and processes.

An area for focus related to program information and services is growing the number of student veterans/military-connected students served by the program. The team discussed that the number of students served has been declining each year, and was at 200 FTE students in 2020-2021, down from a high of 477 students in 2014-2015. The VCR does not currently conduct active outreach strategies to identify and encourage military-connected students to enroll at Cerritos. Team members have some memory of outreach being done in the past, by visiting veteran's fairs, schools, and other activities. Increasing these activities will become a focus for the incoming Program Facilitator.

In the development of services there is room for growth through the planned initiation of a Veteran Students Advisory Group. The group would include the VRC team, along with campus and community partners, and students. This will allow for increased awareness of veteran issues with campus partners, building a community with local veteran organizations and resources, and expanding the recruitment efforts of the VRC.

Currently the VRC assists the VetNet Ally program, which is housed under Human Resources and facilitated by a faculty and staff member (not housed in VRC), by providing student veterans for a panel section of the training. The VetNet Ally program is the predominant source of awareness-raising on student veteran issues among campus employees. There is room to increase the participation of the VRC in this effort, and to take on a leadership role within it.

A strength of the department is the program structure and design of the VRC. Previously the two dedicated full-time employees of the VRC reported to different managers. Beginning in spring 2020 the Dean of Student Equity & Success was established, bringing oversight of the team together, and in Fall 2021 a program facilitator position was hired, rounding out the team. The current alignment of an academic counselor, certifying official, and program facilitator dedicated to military-connected students provides a strong base of support for this student population.

Recommendation(s) & Timeframe:

- Increase collaboration with VetNet Ally program.
 - Summer 2022
- Record the VRC New Student Welcome and Info Sessions to post on the website.
 - Fall 2022
- Develop an outreach & recruitment plan to increase the number of military-connected students attending Cerritos College.
 - Fall 2022

- Develop Administrative Procedure, Standard Operating Procedure, and/or student resource form to explain process and student rights related to issues of deployment or call up for students in National Guard and Reserve Units.
 - Fall 2023

Part 3: STUDENT LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUCCESS

3.1 Program Contribution to Student Learning, Development, and Success – Rating: Meets (2)

3.2 Student Learning and Development Domains and Dimensions– Rating: Partly Meets (0.5)

3.3 Assessment of Student Learning and Development – Rating: Meets (2)

Finding(s):

VRC has initiated defining and measuring student learning outcomes (SLO's) as part of a Student Services area review that initiated in Fall 2019. As part of this initiative, drafts of SLO's have been developed and are being implemented and assessed. The SLO assessment efforts include a mid-year report and annual report, and capture the actions taken toward meeting the SLO and data related to outcomes. The SLO's under review are:

- 1: Military connected students will understand the eligibility requirements, how to apply, and how to process their educational benefits with the VA and Cal Vet.
- 2: Military connected students will identify how to access and utilize VRC's services that include tutoring and counseling

The VRC is accomplishing these SLO's through efforts that include welcome sessions, regular communication, and a single-sheet resource document for students. The SLO's are measured through an annual survey to VRC students. These efforts provide evidence that the VRC contributes to completion of goals – which is critical to this student population maintaining benefit eligibility.

An area for further development is exploring the alignment of VRC SSLO's with CAS learning outcomes or other recognized student learning and development models. In a hierarchy of needs it is most critical that students meet and maintain eligibility requirements, so it is understandable why the initial focus is on the 'basic needs' of meeting population requirements. There is opportunity to explore related learning domains and their inclusion and tie-in to the current SLO process.

Recommendation(s) & Timeframe:

- Continue the SLO process that is underway.
- Review SLO's for student learning and development outcomes that are based in recognized student learning and development models, such as the CAS domains, and include in SLO process
 - Spring 2023

Part 4: ASSESSMENT

4.1 Establishing a Culture of Assessment – Rating: Meets (2)

4.2 Program Goals, Outcomes, and Objectives – Rating: Meets (2)

4.3 Assessment Plan and Process – Rating: Partly Meets (1.5)

4.4 Gathering Evidence – Rating: Meets (2)

4.5 Review and Interpret Findings – Rating: Meets (2)

4.6 Reporting Results and Implementing Improvement – Rating: Meets (2)

Finding(s):

In recent years the VRC has established a strong culture of assessment. The VRC utilizes the VRC Unit Plan, VRC Student Survey, VRC SLO 3-year Plan, Student Equity Inventory and 2017-2022 Division Data resources to assess

the success of the department and student population. The Student Equity Division worked to connect student success by making data available, and the Dean works regularly with Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning (IERP) to gather information the department needs, and explore further ways to identify data points related to student veterans.

As an area of growth, the Assessment Plan and Process indicator was marked as 'Partly Meets' since there is room to align and consolidate the multiple assessment efforts the department participates in. This alignment something the Student Services area is exploring, since reporting currently includes the unit plan, SLO plan, equity goals, and Cerritos Cares goals.

The department further expressed that additional assessment is needed in the area of equity beyond veteran status. There is opportunity to explore intersectionality of military-connected students, to area such as race, gender, sexual orientation, etc, and how that influences the student experience.

Finally, a missing component to the VRC program that impacts assessment and planning is facilitating an active advisory group for the VRC. This has been mentioned as an action item under Section 2: Program and Services, and initiation of this group will also provide a sounding board for assessment efforts, and a way to gather additional data.

Recommendation(s) and Timeframe:

- Align assessment efforts into a consolidated annual plan
 - Summer 2022
- Initiate the VRC Advisory Group.
 - Fall 2022
- Increase resources and activities related to military-connected student intersectionality, and document goals/deliverables in annual unit plan.
 - Spring 2023

Part 5: ACCESS, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

5.1 Inclusive and Equitable Educational and Work Environments – Rating: Partly Meets (1)

5.2 Organizational Aspects of Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion – Rating: Partly Meets (1.5)

5.3 Advocating for Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion – Rating: Partly Meets (1.5)

5.4 Implementing Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion – Rating: Partly Meets (1)

Finding(s):

The indicators in this section generally show opportunities for growth, and formalizing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. The VRC provides an equitable experience for students in the center, and posts clear expectations of behavior for those that utilize the Center. The department has also recently added a Program Facilitator role that will greatly expand the capacity of the department to engage in equity work and outreach, that may be beyond the day-to-day scope of the Counselor and Certifying Official.

Areas of strength

- VRC Code of Conduct
- Collaboration to host LA Regional Food Bank Distribution in Spring 2020
- Facilitation of annual Veteran's Week events, which engage the campus community
- Participation in military-connected student conferences: WAVES and NAVPA

Areas of growth:

- Standardizing training for the VA Work Study students, whom are not employees of the College and are not necessarily students at the College. Because of their unique status on campus, a specialized training and development plan is needed to ensure they are aware of campus policy and procedures, and culture related to DEI efforts.

- Increase training for employees on DEI topics, and review of the campus DEI statement and related policies and procedures.
- Document when training occurs for employees. There was not record who what training/development was attended, by whom, and if the topics were related to DEI.
- Re-engage the Student Veteran’s Club, which ceased in spring 2020 related to COVID and lesser interest in remote engagement
- Increase resources and activities related to military-connected student intersectionality, and document goals/deliverables in annual unit plan.

Recommendation(s) & Timeframe:

- Standardizing training for the VA Work Study students, to include DEI information.
 - Fall 2022
- The Program Facilitator will seek to renew the Student Veteran’s Club.
 - Fall 2022
- Increase training for employees on DEI topics, and review of the campus DEI statement and related policies and procedures.
 - Spring 2023
- Document when training occurs for employees.
 - Spring 2023
- Increase resources and activities related to military-connected student intersectionality, and document goals/deliverables in annual unit plan.
 - Spring 2023

Part 7: HUMAN RESOURCES

- 7.1 Staffing and Support – Rating: Meets (2)
- 7.2 Employment Practices - Rating: Meets (2)
- 7.3 Personnel Training and Development – Rating: Meets (2)
- 7.4 Paraprofessional Personnel – Rating: Insufficient Evidence/Unable to Rate

Finding(s):

A strength of the VRC is the staffing and support available to meet program objectives and student needs. The program is lead by the Dean of Student Equity and Success, and supported fulltime by a dedicated academic Counselor, Veteran’s Specialist (certifying official), and Program Facilitator. Additional support is provided by part-time VA Workstudy Students, and identified liaisons within Student Accessibility Services and Student Health Services (for mental heath support and resources). The VRC has a centrally-located physical space on campus, and serves as a single point of contact to coordinate veteran’s services. There is also ongoing collaboration with the VetNet Ally program, which promotes veteran student awareness to College employees through a professional development certification process.

The VRC team is an incredible asset to the College and military-connected students. They each exhibit a strong commitment to serving this student population, and are well-versed in each other’s responsibilities so that effective referrals are made when working with students. The team is passionate about serving this population, and that was evident in the review process and array of services and supports available to students.

The VRC follows all District requirements for hiring, training, and evaluating employees. The Dean meets regularly with team members, and provides department meetings that allow for updates, discussing present issues, and reviewing data and goals. District policies, procedures, and announcements were used as evidence to support meeting this indicator.

Related to personnel training and development, the VRC team is active in local, state and federal conferences that provide updates and best practices in serving the military-connected population. The team attends/participates in WAVES (Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists) and NAVPA (National Association of Veteran's Program Administrators) conferences and professional development opportunities. In addition the Veteran Specialist participates in the monthly VA Virtual Training hosted by the Veteran's Administration. The department is also familiar with and regularly consults the School Certifying Official Training and available online resources. Finally, the department participates in Region 8 meetings for Veteran's Programs within the local California Community College area.

As was referenced in an earlier section, and area to explore further is better documenting when staff attend professional development activities. There was also discussion related to expanding development areas, such as attending or participating in CAPED (California Association for Postsecondary Education and Disability).

After much discussion, indicator 7.4 Paraprofessional Personnel was deemed unable to Rate/Insufficient Evidence. Initial discussion surrounded applying the indicator to the VA Work study Students, however the unique nature of this role did not fit well to the indicators. The VA Work study students are assigned to Cerritos College by the VA, and are not College employees. While they must be students in order to receive VA Work study, they do not necessarily need to be Cerritos College students. This is an area for action, to better define the role of the VA Work study position at the college. Most of the review of this role was conducted using indicators 7.1-7.3.

Part 8: COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

8.1 Collaboration – Rating: Meets (2)

8.2 Communication – Rating: Meets (2)

8.3 Procedures & Guidelines – Rating: Meets (2)

Finding(s):

VRC was found collaboration and communication with varied institutional partners and community agencies. Examples of collaboration on campus include the VetNet Ally program, Student Veteran's Club, Counseling department, Financial Aid department, Administration of Justice department, Student Health Services, and Student Accessibility Services. External connections exist with the Veteran's Affairs Region 8 Meetings (CA Community Colleges), CalVet, the Hawaiian Gardens VFW, Norwalk Coordinating Council, and veteran resources with LA County.

The VRC Team collaborates with departments to serve student needs, and address challenging situations. The VRC has a dedicated academic counselor, as well as liaisons with Student Accessibility Services and Student Health Services. The Dean also works with the Office of Diversity, Compliance, and Title IX to support student's rights when facing deployment. Partnering with that office, the Dean provides faculty information on accommodations needed for students leaving for active duty, and ensuring the student can continue or complete their courses.

Related to communication, most communication is via the VRC website. When the pandemic began the website was reviewed and has been updated regularly, as it is the main point of contact for students while in a remote/hybrid environment. The website is well-organized and intuitive, with highlighted areas for requesting certification of benefits, and for making counseling appointments. Information of information for military-connected students can be found or linked from the main page, and the hours and services are easily located.

While the department met the indicators, an area of improvement discussed was creating an SOP for student who need units evaluated between home institutions and institutions providing education to military members serving on active duty. The Counselor keeps information from courses at common institutions on file showing what has been approved in the past, however because this is an issue more common with military/veteran students it would be beneficial to have a set SOP.

Recommendation(s) & Timeframe:

- Create an SOP between A&R and VRC for process to have units evaluated.
 - Fall 2022

Part 9: ETHICS, LAW AND POLICY

9.1 Ethical Statements – Rating: Meets (2)

9.2 Ethical Practice – Rating: Meets (2)

9.3 Legal Obligations and Responsibilities – Rating: Meets (2)

9.4 Policies and Procedures – Rating: Meets (2)

9.5 Communication of Ethical and Legal Obligations – Rating: Meets (2)

9.6 Addressing Harassment and Hostile Environments – Rating: Meets (2)

Finding(s):

The VRC must follow ethical standards and policies defined by the campus, as well as the Department of Defense (DoD). Within District policy the department follows the code of ethics (BP/AP 3050), conflict of interest (BP/AP 7050), nepotism (BP/AP 7310), prohibition of harassment (AP 3434, 3433, 3435) and student records/privacy (BP/AP 5040). From the DoD the department adheres to the Principles of Excellence Guide, and must submit a DoD Self-Assessment which is reviewed by the agency. The DoD Self-Assessment is a self-audit, however if it is inaccurate the agency will notify the VRC and corrections are required.

The VRC meets indicators for ethical practice, and the VRC team is aware of policies and procedures related to ethical professional behavior. Particular to the VRC is awareness and prohibition of high-pressure recruitment tactics, and the department has created an SOP on outreach and recruitment that reflects this value.

The team members of the VRC receive regular updates and training on laws, regulations, and policies related to serving veteran students. This includes participating in the VA Virtual Training, WAVES conference, and NAVPA. NAVPA provides an annual legislative agenda update that delivers important updates to those serving military connected students in higher education. Because provision of veteran benefits is a highly-regulated area, all members of the team can identify circumstances that warrant referral and who to connect the student with.

Part 10: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

10.1 Funding – Rating: Meets (2)

10.2 Financial Planning – Rating: Meets (2)

Finding(s):

The VRC program utilizes the annual unit plan to review the needs of the unit, ability of the unit to meet it's goals, and create resource requests to address unmet need. The VRC reports that current funding levels are sufficient to meet student need based on current enrollment and modality. With the recent addition of the Program Facilitator to the office, all unmet needs have been met. This new position will close gaps that

existed related to student outreach and recruitment, daily operational functions, and creating more opportunities to engage veteran students on campus. The VRC manages all funds in accordance with District policy and procedure, and demonstrates responsible stewardship and use of the funds based on budget summaries provided.

Part 11: TECHNOLOGY

11.1 Systems Management – Rating: Meets (2)

11.2 User Engagement – Rating: Partly Meets (2)

11.3 Compliance and Information Security – Rating: Meets (2)

11.4 Communication – Rating: Meets (3)

Finding(s):

The VRC meets all indicators under the Technology area. The VRC offers students online services, such as virtual academic counseling appointments, certification request, and tutoring. Most of the resources utilized by the VRC to support students are based online, such as VA services, school certifying official resources, and messaging in PeopleSoft.

The VRC was also used as a pilot group as the campus implemented EAB Navigate, a communication and tracking software that connects various departments to students. As was mentioned earlier, other communication methods include regular updates to the website, and use of Zoom for meetings and events.