Making Moves: Strategies to Increase Student Veteran Engagement

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Our Presenters

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Learning Outcomes

• **Share** information about student veteran programming at Texas A&M University

• **Discuss** strategies for engaging and improving student veteran engagement on campuses of higher education

• **Describe** challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic

• **Outline** a hypothetical program for student veteran engagement and involvement
Background

• Texas A&M opens in 1876
  — Mandatory Participation in Corps of Cadets
  — Originally named Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas

• Corps of Cadets "Keepers of Spirit"
  — Response to World War II
  — Fightin' Texas Aggie Band

• Texas A&M reformation in the 1960's
  — Admittance expanded
  — Traditions continue
Background

- ~300 student veterans enroll at Texas A&M University each academic year

- Currently, 1,274 student veterans are enrolled at TAMU

- The Don & Ellie Knauss Veteran Resource & Support Center opened in 2012
  - VetCamp
  - VALOR
  - Aggie Shields
Vet Camp

A 1-Day Extended Orientation Program for New Student Veterans

In-Person (Pre-Covid-19)

• Hosted in student union building
• Gallery walk of campus/local resources
• Keynote speaker from TAMU Veteran Community
• Provided free dinner to guests
• Fall Vet Camp 2019: 55
• Spring Vet Camp 2020: 45

Remote (Post-Covid-19)

• Hosted on Zoom
• Distributed PDF document with information from campus/local resources
• Various speakers identified from across campus & community
• Breakout Interest Sessions
• Fall Vet Camp 2020: 85
• Spring Vet Camp 2021: 58
VALOR
Veteran Aggie Leaders for Outreach & Resources

- Est. Fall 2019 - Graduate Assistant Role
- Student Development Theory:
  - Student Veteran Identity Development
  - Schlossberg's Transition Theory
  - Tinto's Model of Student Departure
- Texas A&M Transfer Student Peer Mentors
- Challenge & Support model + Facilitator Model
- Staff – Military-Affiliated Students
- Focused on the transition into the first year at Texas A&M University (Spring 2021)

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Student Veteran Engagement -Activity-

Serve Well Those Who Have Served
The Questions

• How do we define student veteran engagement?

• How do we improve student veteran engagement?

• How do we support student veterans in their transition to our campuses?

• How do we improve our services to encourage student veteran retention and academic success?

• Are we doing all we can do to support our student veterans?
The Charge

Develop a peer-advising program for newly enrolled new student veterans; similar to a first-year experience

- Focus on creating an engaging and informative environment for new student veterans and their transition onto campus
- Create a program that encourages student leader autonomy and development
- Program must lend itself to continuity and flexible for growth
- Elements of the program must focus on the 4 pillars of the office: Academic Success, Financial Literacy, Career Readiness, and Social Well-Being
- Previous iterations of peer advising programs have not been successful on your campus
Create a Program Outline

Activity
Pre-Fall 2019: VALOR Predecessor

- Vet Camp RSVP-Attended rate: <50%
- Engagement (outreach:interaction): <8%
- Declining attendance at programmatic efforts

Fall 2019-Present: VALOR

- Vet Camp RSVP-Attended rate:
  - Spring 2020: 73.77%
  - Fall 2020: 96.60%
  - Spring 2021: 91.07%
- Engagement (outreach: interaction): ~11% - 12%
- CHALLENGE: Covid-19 Pandemic
General Challenges

• Implementing a low-commitment curriculum that does not deter student veterans
• Reframing opportunities to attract student veteran engagement
• Graduate Assistant Transition – short-term supervisor role
• Proactively meeting the needs of the students EX: Providing social networks for student veterans before they feel isolated from campus community
Challenges

Covid-19 Challenges

• Low student engagement across the board
• Students and Zoom Fatigue
• Transition of Graduate Assistant/Supervisor during Covid-19 Pandemic
• How do we build community when in-person programming is unable to happen?
• Is there such a thing as too much online programming during Covid-19?
Future Plans

• Implement hybrid programming – Zoom and in-person
• Partner with other veteran programs, student organizations, and faculty
• Connecting with other campuses and learning best practices
Additional Involvement

- Student Veterans Association (SVA)
- Team Red White and Blue (Team RWB)
- Community Partners (ex: Brazos Valley Cares and American Legion)
- Aggie Women Veterans Program
Questions?

Visit us at https://aggieveterans.tamu.edu/