Engaging Student Veterans in the COVID-19 Cyber Environment: Developing an Effective Virtual Service Model for Veterans Resource Centers

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Presentation Outline

• Review of VRC Model Prior to Covid-19 Pandemic
• VRC as an Effective Engagement Resource
• Breakout Discussion – The Pivot
• Case Study – Mt. San Antonio College’s Veterans Resource Center
  • Initial Implementation of Online Services
  • Surveying Needs of Military-Connected Students
  • Partnering with Instruction Departments to ensure Title 38 Compliance
  • Assessment of Service and Processing Gaps
  • Implementing Virtual Service Strategies
  • Challenges and Lessons Learned
• Question and Answer
Learning Outcomes

Participants will have the opportunity to:

- Recognize the need to reform how VRCs provide programs and services in a virtual environment;
- Understand the importance of surveying student Veterans and their families;
- Use case study assessments to identify service and processing gaps on their own campus;
- Learn about successful strategies for implementing virtual services and maintaining compliance with Title 38 during the COVID-19 era.

Student Veterans at a Glance

- Nearly 1,100 student Veterans attend Mt. SAC
- On average, 650 benefit collecting student Veterans yearly
- The majority are from underrepresented groups in higher education
- Of those who have applied for Financial Aid:
  - 55% have $0 EFC
  - 82% Pell-eligible EFC
Staffing

VRC Specialist (F/T SCO)  |  Financial Aid VRC Liaison/SCO  |  VRC Academic Counselors  |  VRC Coordinator  |  ACCESS Liaison  |  VRC Manager  |  Vet Success on Campus Counselor (VSOC)  |  Office Assistance  |  Peer Mentors

Tutors  |  VRC Model Prior to Remote Work

- Specialized support services
- Monthly IN-DOCs/Orientations
- Weekly Workshops
- Emergency Loan Program
- University Tours
- Laptop/Tablet/ATS Rentals
- Campus-wide trainings
- Funding for student Travel
- 1 of 104 VSOC sites
VRC Physical Space

- 3 Private Offices
- Intake Counter (seating 3 staff)
- Kitchen (w/sink, fridge, Industrial Keurig, microwave and dishwasher)
- Peer Mentoring Space
- Lounge w/Reserve Library
- Flat Screen and Movie Library
- Study/Tutor Space
- Outdoor patio and seating area
- Access to 45 seat computer lab

VRC as an Effective Engagement Resource

- GI Bill Processing is the Draw
- Wrap-Around Services focusing on:
  - Academic Success
  - Wellness
  - Camaraderie
- 26,000+ face-to-face contacts p/semester
- Home base for military-connected students
Breakout Discussion – The Pivot

In switching modalities from face-to-face service to virtual service, please share in breakout groups the following:

*What services did you immediately deem ESSENTIAL to keep your VRC virtually open? Why?*
Remote Workshops/Info Sessions

- 50% Textbook Programs
- 40% Scholarships
- 40% Career Planning
- 40% Community Resources
- 40% Student Clubs
- 40% Veteran-Specific Activities
- 30% Personal Counseling

Ideal day/times or Events

30% Tuesday daytime
10% Monday Night
0% Tuesday-Sunday Night
What do you regret is no longer available in-person?
• 70%-VA paperwork submission
• 70%-Studying at the VRC
• 60% Computer use
• 60% Academic Counseling
• 10%-Workshops/Presentations

Best Way to Keep You Informed?
• 100%-Email
• 10%-Flyers
• 0%-Social Media
Most Useful Subjects for VRC Tutoring?

- 60% - Math
- 30% - Don't Know

Streamlining Document Submission

- Veterans Packet Online
- PDF Fillable Docs
- Online Forms
- Docu-Sign
Virtual Front Desk

• Team
  • Certifying Official, Coordinator, Financial Aid Specialist, and Supervisor in one place
• Video
  • “Happy to connect with a person!”
• Screen Share
  • Easier to guide students
• Forward to Zoom
• Calls/Emails

VRC Weekly Newsletter

• Consolidation of Emails
  • Every Monday
• Staff Introductions
• VRC Events
• Campus Events
• Outside Resources
• Direct Access to Helpful Links
• Digital Bulletin Board
• Helpful Analytics
Newsletter Stats

• 21 Newsletters with 14,949 total views

New Student Welcome Packages

• Personalized Welcome Note
• VRC Swag
• VRC Stickers/Magnets
• Campus Planner
• Folder for GI Bill Docs
• College Spiral Notebooks
Money Mondays

- FASFA Application Assistance
- Outstanding Requirements
- Change of Income Assistance
- Scholarship Application Assistance
- Scholarship Workshops

Virtual Drop-In Hours w/ACCESS Liaison

- Available Once a Week via Zoom
- Establish ACCESS services
- Accommodations Support
- Quick Questions
Virtual Drop-In Hours w/Vet Success on Campus Counselor

- Once a Week via Webex
- Help with any VA Questions
- Referrals to VA Services
- Quick Questions

Drop-in Virtual Counseling

- Available Monday - Thursday
- Morning & Evening Hours
- 15 Min Drop-In's
- Support Front Desk
Video/Phone Counseling Appointments

- All Services Offered on Campus have Transitioned Virtually
- 45 minute Appointments
- Low NO Show Rate

Virtual Events
Finals Survival Kits

Students who completed a request form via Newsletter received:

• Snacks
• Finals Supplies
• Mt. SAC VRC Swag

End of the Year Recognition Drive-Thru

• Recognition Video
• Drive-Thru Scholarship Certificates
• Drive-Thru VRC Grad Medal Pick-Up
• Drive-Thru Graduation Tent
Social Media

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Challenges:
• Engagement
• Zoom Fatigue
• Signing Docs
• Staff Morale
• High Touch vs. Quick Responses
• Finding a Work Flow
• Working in Silos

Lessons Learned:
• Engagement
• Go to Them
• Celebrate the small victories
• Engage families
• Partner with technologically advanced offices
• Work in the Gray
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Questions