



**Annual Assessment Report Template: Learning**  
Academic Year: 2016-2017

**Date of Report Submission:** July 7, 2017

**Name of Department:** Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs

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**Part I: Follow-Up on Last Year's Assessment Report Recommendations**

Last year's assessment report resided within a larger Federal Grant called the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit. That toolkit consisted of an institutional self-assessment, demographic data gathering, a survey and focus group, and recommendations from an assembled Task Force at DePaul that guided our local work through this project. That report ended with 16 recommendations ranging from large-scale university-wide changes like Child Care to departmental recommendations like a resource website.

In focusing on the department's aspects to update, seven recommendations named Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs (AVCSA) as responsible lead for movement on those recommendations. Of those, four are completed and others have made progress. Specifically completed items include:

- Establishment of a Students with Children resource page on the "For Special Populations" section of the Student Affairs site.
- Encourage other departments to utilize offering of affordable child-care at events through Ray Mayer Fitness Center. This occurred with numerous other events this year including notably several events from the Center for Identity Inclusion and Social Change.
- Establish programming on days in which parents already have to navigate alternative child-care or miss classes (i.e. CPS in-service days, etc.). A pilot of this occurred with the annual Conference for Students with Children moving to a CPS in-service day.
- Increase family-friendly events by encouraging and working with organizers of appropriate events to find methods (on-site child-care, children activities) of making more family friendly. Some events that occurred which have a university-wide focus with a new child presence: Family Weekend, Dance Marathon, Vinny Fest, and Vincentian Community Service Day.

Some items are in progress:

- Increase communication on Title IX legal requirements for accommodation for pregnant and parenting students to students via a resource website and information on at least pages of Dean of Students, Title IX, and Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs. More information is currently located on Title IX pages and better inclusion of pregnant and parenting status as non-discrimination

item (as Federally required) is occurring but notable areas and non-discrimination clauses still omit these items.

- Consider Pregnant and Parenting Student Policy which aligns with already required laws under Title IX. Several meetings between Academic Affairs, Legal Council, Center for Students with Disabilities and AVCSA occurred, but no such policy has moved forward to date.
- Encourage more programming and supports for this population (Such as time management programs, events with the faculty-staff support group for parentings, Counseling Center support groups for parents, etc.). This is an on-going effort that continues. AVCSA added more programming to this population, but more exploration on effective programs of interest must be done.

## **Part II: Report on This Year's Assessment Project**

### **I. Abstract**

AVCSA's assessment project studies veteran students on campus and their learning about resources to aid them in success. We aimed to proactively intervene with veteran students in jeopardy of being on academic probation by conducting an intentional advising session focused on resources. Follow-up interviews and assessment of students' improvement in GPA and credit accumulation combine to show if students utilized resources and how they feel such resources contribute to success or not. To broaden the study and analyze resource learning for students not at-risk, we conducted another aspect of this project with students that visited the Veteran office to find out if their interaction taught them about a resource or service and if follow-up occurred. Between both studies, surveys were distributed to students who stopped by the office and interviews conducted with the students that were in jeopardy of being on academic probation as a triangulation technique of finding the learning from these two methods. The conclusion is that students gained from the office tangible learning about new resources available to them here at DePaul. Follow-up showed that 40% of at-risk students improved after fall quarter.

### **II. Assessment Question**

Did veteran students who interacted with the staff in the Veterans Affairs Office learn about resources to aid their academic success?

### **III. Introduction & Context Project Overview**

We gauged the effectiveness of the Veterans Affairs office in assisting our student veterans learn (or not learn) about the different resources that were available to them on campus. We further did a more intensive intervention with those at-risk of academic probation and aimed to gather the effectiveness of that intervention both in student perception and in student's success based on increased GPA's and matriculation into the next quarter. We used a mixed methods approach, including surveys and interviews, to gauge the success of the interactions in relation to students' learning about resources.

### **Learning Outcomes Assessed**

- **What was the primary program level learning outcome(s) you assessed?** Students who participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs Advocacy Programs will be able to identify and articulate their needs. Students who participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs Advocacy Programs will learn how to navigate systems and institutions to access needed resources.
- **What was the primary department level learning outcome(s) mapped to the above program level learning outcome(s)?** Students who participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs Programs will learn to self-advocate and utilize appropriate resources when needs arise

### **Context for This Year's Report**

DePaul has a wealth of resources that aid in student success. AVCSA is committed to ensuring veteran students are successful academically by utilizing the resources that the office has to offer them as well as helping them navigate and learn about the other available resources that other departments offer. This study sought to confirm that students are learning to clearly articulate needs and conduct self-advocacy to do necessary navigation and follow-up to utilize such resources.

By conducting surveys with students who visited the office the goal was to find out what, if anything, they learned by their visit to the office. More specifically, what was the purpose of the visit and what resources did they gain exposure to? When reaching out one-on-one to the at risk students, we aimed to find out if the one-on-one interactions were helpful and contributed to their success in the following quarter. These goals were based on our program and departmental learning outcome that states students who participate in our advocacy programs learn how to navigate systems and institutions to access needed resources.

Significant research has been conducted on barriers that veterans face that prevent them from success on campus. In the spring of 2016, National University reported that of their nearly 30,000, 24% were veteran students, and 4% of those veterans were facing academic probation or at risk of being placed on probation (Olsen, Badger & McCuddy, 2016). Colleges throughout the country have started to pay closer attention to veterans on campus and have aimed to answer the question of what actually attributes to veterans retention and success on campus.

So often, the media perceives all veterans as wounded and broken, but here at DePaul we find that our veteran students traditionally rank amongst the national averages for graduation and retention of a traditional student (Comparison Tool, GI Bill website 2016). While we know that veterans at DePaul traditionally do well, we aim to target assistance to help those students who are not getting the help that they need to succeed. In an article by the U.S. Army Medical Department Journal, researchers found that financial stress, social interactions, and role differences are the three major barriers that veteran

students face while in college which cause them to drop out of school (Olsen, Badger & McCuddy, 2014). The retention initiative we have set up for this upcoming year will provide further insight into the barriers that our veteran students face during their time at DePaul as well as results of this assessment project.

#### **Resources**

Olsen, T., Badger, K., & McCuddy, M. D. (2014). Understanding the Student Veterans' College Experience: An exploratory study. *U.S. Army Medical Department Journal*, pp. 101-108.

M.L.T. "Veteran Student Academic Intervention Program." *University Business* 19.4 25.

Veterans Administration. "GI Bill Comparison Tool." Retrieved from <https://www.vets.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool>. 14 Sept. 2016.

## **IV. Data Collection & Methodology**

### **Population and Sample**

- The population of students that we targeted for this project was the veteran students on campus. That includes veteran students on campus from undergraduate as well as graduate and law students. All are encouraged to visit the office and any that visited during the course of Fall, Winter or Spring Quarter was surveyed.
- The sample comprised specific veterans that interacted the office because of stopping into the office to ask a question or students that showed on the quarterly report that Megan Burda, Assistant Director of AVCSA, receives stating specific veteran students are in jeopardy of being on academic probation. The report that Megan receives is federally required, however, the intervention is not.
  - a. The rationale to survey the students that visited the office was because we studied what purpose and learning occurred from the office visit. The rationale for reaching out to students in jeopardy of being on academic probation was to positively affect student success and increase our retention rate with our veteran students at DePaul. Even though we have a great retention rate currently (83% according to the Veterans Administration GI Bill Comparison Tool), we always aim that every student is successful during their time at DePaul.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through two online surveys and in-person individual interviews. One online survey was sent to at-risk veteran students who were then invited to an in-person interview. Another online survey was sent to veteran students who visited the office unsolicited, seeking support. There was a total of 50 surveys that were sent out to visitors during Winter Quarter. In addition, all interviews that were conducted happened after the quarters were finished when the reports showing low GPA came through. The interviews were based on student and staff availability. Note, two different samples and two different collection methods (Survey for office visit and interview for at-risk intervention).

- The surveys were created by AVCSA to ensure the questions that were asked of those students were helpful to assess the learning outcome that the student received from their time in the Veterans Affairs Office. This survey was designed

specifically for this assessment project. We sent the surveys out to students at near the end of winter quarter to any students who had visited the office that quarter for whom we had collected information.

- For the interviews, we reached out to the designated population of at risk veterans that Megan received on her quarterly report. We encouraged the students to conduct an advising and resource focused meeting with Megan that aims to increase their success and analyze if there were resources available they could use moving forward. We gave them the option to meet with Megan one-on-one and participate in a 30-60 minute interview. Of the 53 total students contacted, 5 participated, 3 in Fall quarter and 2 in Spring quarter. This option was made available to students in light of the assessment project and data needed to assess learning.

### **Data Analysis**

- We were able to analyze our data by pulling the results from the surveys and the interviews together in comparison to find out if there were any trends or areas of concern that needed to be addressed such as resources frequently needed or issues without resources. Additionally, analysis occurred if the students recalled resources mentioned or further utilized such resources. We defined “learned during interaction with our office” by reviewing all the survey results and interviews to look for items directly related to stated learning outcomes in this study. Specifically looking to identify: naming and articulating a need(s), learning about a resource(s) to contact, learning how to contact that resource or utilize it, and finally conducting follow-up on that resource(s).
- An additional beneficial aspect of this study, while not directly related to learning, occurred with the interviews with at-risk students. We were able to measure if the students that had an interview with Megan were on the academic probation report the following quarter. Importantly, we ultimately aimed for success by noting the students who were on the fall report but fell an at-risk list due to improvement for subsequent quarters. That stat cannot be attributed only to our intervention and could be a result of a few different options we touch on later in the report in our key findings section.

### **Participant Consent**

Since our surveys were voluntary, consent was obtained when the students voluntarily agreed to fill out the surveys that were emailed to them after their office visit. For the students in jeopardy of being on academic probation, Megan is required by law to reach out to those students and monitor their progress because of the benefits these students receive from the Veterans Administration. The interview follow-up was voluntary in participation and students understood the research purpose by verbal consent.

## **V. Data & Findings**

### **Response Rate and Demographics**

- a. Survey

- a. 50 students visited the AVCSA office during Winter quarter seeking resources were included. Of the 50 students invited to participate in the follow-up survey, 16 responded, which is a 32% response rate.
- b. Interviews
- c. Total students in jeopardy of being on probation: 53 (23 from fall, 16 for winter, 14 for spring).
  - i. All 53 students were invited to have an advising session and interview with Megan to go over available resources at DePaul that would help them be more successful for future quarters
  - ii. A total of 5 follow-up interviews were conducted.

### **Key Findings**

- All 5 students interviewed did better the following quarter and no longer showed on the quarterly reports. All articulated utilizing resources and services via knowledge gained in the interview.
- Of the 16 surveys that were answered, 81% of the students indicated that they had learned about a resource available to them here at DePaul from their interaction with the office. For example, where the writing center is located, how to register with the Center for Students with Disabilities, etc. This demonstrates clearly all aspects of the learning outcomes:
  - Naming and articulating a need
  - Learning to navigate that resource
  - Self-advocacy skills to utilize that resource
- 100% of students took the resources provided by Megan and then did better the following quarter academically. All attributed a specific named resource to that improvement which demonstrates the above. Some examples of barriers these students were experiencing are as follows:
  - Time management issues was something nearly all 5 students interviewed talked about during that time with Megan
  - Transitions to DePaul being harder than expected
  - Getting used to the 10 week quarter system
  - Stress management issues
  - Learning to prepare for class better
- Important results from surveys distributed:
  - Community Building Resources
    - Student Veteran Union and needing to make the club (or other veteran clubs) are stronger was mentioned a few times throughout the surveys
    - 89% of students responded stating that they think veteran connected events that support vets and community building on campus are important for students' success.
  - Appropriate resource referral
    - When asked, "What were you looking for when you visited the Office?" and then the follow up question of, "Was your question answered during your visit?" we were able to see that 2/3 students indicated that their question was answered helping them to learn a new resource available and able to name it later on the survey.

- Stop Outs or breaks in study.
  - When asked if students needed to take time off from DePaul because of learning barriers they faced. Of the eleven students who replied, 2 students indicated they had to take time off.
- Transition Support needs further analysis
  - When asked if students thought DePaul made their transition successful to college, 58% (7) of the responses stated that DePaul was not the most helpful.
  - 30% (4) of the responses indicated that DePaul did make the transition more successful.
- Specific resources utilized and referred
  - When asked about specific resources students learned about, could name and had utilized, the following resources were identified:
    - Seven students answered CSD is a useful department for Veterans to register with to help them be successful at DePaul
    - Nine students answered The Veterans Affairs office helped them learn about their veteran's benefits so they made sure to utilize them properly during their time at DePaul.
    - Eight students answered the financial aid office was a helpful and useful resource for questions about additional aid outside of their veterans benefits.
    - Five students suggested further sharing about tutoring stipends available through the VA.
  - 66% (8) of students know where to go on campus when asked if they were able to navigate the university resources.
- During fall quarter 23 students were identified as at-risk of academic probation. Megan reached out to each of those students individually to help them learn about resources and offered one-on-one interview follow-up.
  - Three students during Fall Quarter conducted the assessment interview with Megan and two conducted their interview during Spring Quarter. From those interviews common themes that were discussed were:
    - Time management issues was something nearly all 5 students interviewed talked about during that time with Megan
    - Transitions to DePaul being harder than expected
    - Getting used to the 10 week quarter system
    - Stress management issues
    - Learning to prepare for class better

<b>Program Level Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Department Level Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Number of Students Assessed</b>	<b>Number of Students with Acceptable or Better Performance</b>
Students who participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs Programs will learn to self-advocate and utilize appropriate resources when needs arise	Students who participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs Advocacy Programs will learn how to navigate systems and institutions to access needed resources.	21	17

*\*\*\*17 is based on the 5 interviews that were successful as well as the 12 survey questions that were measured successful as mentioned above in the data analysis section\*\*\**

## **VI. Discussion & Interpretation of Findings**

When assessing our learning outcome that students who participate in Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs Advocacy Programs will learn how to navigate systems and institutions to access needed resources survey results showed that over 2/3 of students indicated that their question or need was answered that assisted them in learning about a new resource available to them. This demonstration of knowing a need and gaining a resource addresses the learning outcome related to identifying and articulating needs. These students were able to name that resource at a later time on a survey or follow-up interview which is important for further utilization of that resource which address's the second portion of the learning outcome: self-advocacy to utilize appropriate resources when needed. For example, students named Org Sync or CSD as addressing the original purpose of their visit.

A major discovery from this assessment is that most of our interactions with our students, whether it was by visiting the office or by having a one-on-one intervention with a student, were informative to learning about resources. Combined results indicate that 81% (17) of students learned about a specific resource via their interaction with the Office of Veterans Affairs and could name it later.

One area that we now recognize that needs improvement from our office and university is attention to the transition into college for the veteran students. This was a barrier mentioned in all of Megan's one-on-one interviews. Veteran students have particular needs and analysis should be done on best practices and methods to better conduct this transition since over half, 7 responses, indicated a less satisfactory response to the transition process.

Some challenges that we faced were the lack of responses from the interviews as well as the surveys. If done over, the assessment survey should have included more demographic fields such as college or class year so we could focus on a more specific population and see if the findings gave us clearer results. This could potentially allow tailored promotion and communication of resources to certain specific groups at the time needed.

By conducting this assessment of our veteran students we feel that we are ready to start implementing changes that can help these veterans be even more successful on campus. Our retention rates are good in comparison to the national average (82% according to the GI Bill Comparison Tool put together by the Veterans Administration), so we know that we do a good job retaining our students. Now we want to improve our interactions even more to help these students be even more successful. A goal is that we would aim to have a 90% retention rate in the future.

## **VII. Recommendations and Plans for Action**

### **Recommendations**

- One recommendation is ensuring academic advisors and other resources are aware and counseling their veteran advisees to know that they are tutoring services here on campus that the Veteran Administration will pay for to use. This is helpful for all veteran students but especially those that are having trouble in certain areas and as a result are possibly facing academic probation.
- Some recommendations that we have in our office would be to make sure we are doing a better job of helping the veteran's transition into college easier. This can be done by working on not only what our office can do for the students and analyzing best practices nationally, but also by working more closely with the admissions office and New Student and Family Engagement to develop some excellent ways to tighten up the transition processes for these students.
- We also plan to work with our Student Veterans Union to help build their organization for the veterans. This work is important for new veterans transition into college and starting to get involved as it equips them with a strong community-focused club to be a part of that can help them with the camaraderie that veterans too often express that they miss after getting out of the military. Community building needs were mentioned in interview and survey.

### **Action Plan**

- Starting in the fall of 2017 our office plans to start implementing a few new initiatives to help veteran students be more successful and learn about resources available on campus:
  1. Launching in August, we will be starting to make our "Success Map" available to all veteran students in BlueStar which will be a road map to success they can follow throughout their time here at DePaul. This map will include ways to get involved, when a good time is to meet with their advisors as well as how to navigate some of the events and resources on campus that they would enjoy attending.
  2. Beginning in the new academic year, we will start giving our veteran liaisons a designated population of veteran students that they will be in charge of in

terms of outreach and resource help throughout the student's time at DePaul. This will help establish a closer relationship with our staff and students. The hope is that by having a designated person they can contact directly, they will feel more involved in our office and be more willing to attend events, workshops, etc. that can help them learn and navigate the office better.

3. Launching in August, we will start stop-out intervention program that will be a very personalized email sent to students who end up taking a quarter off. The email will be coming directly from Megan or James, and it will go over multiple ways that the student can come back to the University and graduate with their degree. The email links to a resource tool full of common reasons for stop-outs or breaks and resources to address many of those reasons.
4. The SVU Student organization has all new leadership that started Spring 2017 quarter. They have already worked to become a member of the national Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapter which has helped them to start to become stronger to the veteran community here at DePaul. This will help to build that sense of community and camaraderie that the students often times state they miss when leaving the military and transitioning to college.
5. Beginning in Fall Quarter, VA VITAL is a national program through the Veteran Affairs administration to have on-site clinical psychologists to assist students in addressing issues in addition to providing therapy. It is planned that psychologists will be on site at DePaul one or two days per week beginning in Fall.
6. Meet with DAAN advisors to ensure knowledge about Tutoring services.

### **Sharing the results**

We plan to share the results of the assessment with our staff as well as other staff and faculty during our quarterly workshops that we have for faculty and staff on veteran issues.

We plan to share the results with the participants by following up sometime this summer to let them know what their information was able to help us implement several new initiatives next year.

Some key stakeholders will be our sister offices in the Division of Student Affairs. We plan to continue and keep them all updated on what we were able to collect and how we plan to make our office better based on those findings.