Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Annual Assessment Report Template: Needs or Benchmarking
Academic Year: 2018-2019

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Name of Department: Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs
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Type of Assessment: Benchmarking

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

The 2016-2017 report indicated several items of action to increase veteran student success and knowledge of resources on campus.

1. Launch a Success Map to indicate and catalog resources on campus – This was done in Blue Star in Fall 2017 for all veteran and adult students and continues.
2. Assign veteran liaisons to a designated population within veteran students – This occurred in the first year as a communication tool and grew into the veteran student coaching program described below which began in Fall 2018.
3. Stop Out outreach – An outreach to any veteran or adult student taking a quarter off began in Fall 2017.
4. Student Veteran Union leveraging – New leadership in SVU has proven beneficial in re-invigorating the club and their leveraging of resources on campus. The club was especially active in 2018-19 and the addition of the veteran lounge has further increased opportunities to market resources in informal manners.
5. VA Vital launching – The VA VITAL program to provide psychotherapy on campus and resource referral within the Federal FA launched in Spring 2018.
6. Meeting with DAAN Advisors – Turnover in DAAN leadership has made consistency on this recommendation difficult; however, it is still attempted to occur.

Part II: Report on This Year's Assessment Project

I. Abstract

Intentional benchmarking in necessary to understand other institutions' coaching programs' goals, metrics, staffing, and success measures is needed to inform student coaching initiatives in our department and the broader university. This exercise can provide important information in further program design and comparison metrics. This benchmarking study received responses from 6 institutions to measure, via interview or survey, their responses to questions about their coaching programs overall goals, populations, targeting, metrics, and outcome measures. Ultimately, the data was highly varied, but it did provide important considerations for overall program goals, desired outcomes associated with a goal, and staffing. Programs which are highly targeted, such as to first-generation or those on academic probation,

seem to engage proportionally more students and have better defined purpose and goals than general programs for all students. Overall, this calls for a reevaluation of the goals of AVCSA's relatively new coaching program using information gathered here.

II. Assessment Question

What are successful metrics and practices among leading and peer institutions with specialized student coaching programs?

III. Introduction & Context
Project Overview

DePaul University Adult, Veteran and Commuter Student Affairs launched a student coaching program targeting veterans in 2018-2019. This benchmarking allowed opportunity to gather data on goals, metrics, staffing, and outcomes from other coaching programs, especially those targeting specific populations.

Context for This Year's Report

DePaul University and Student Affairs is focused on retention and student success. These projects relate to the Divisional Core Function 1. Veteran students have recently retained at levels slightly lower than other transfer students while still higher than broader adult student populations.

Coaching is an intentional curriculum designed to impact success for the coached student by focusing on desired outcomes and providing peer encouragement, support, advice and guidance. A statistical analysis of coaching conducted at 8 instructions and over 8,000 students found a 9% increase in retention among coached groups and a 15% increase in persistence when controlled for GPA, on or off campus, Pell eligibility, and math/English remediation (Bettinger & Baker, 2014). A recent dissertation on coaching found most frequent issues for which goals were addressed were: Study Skills, Academic Recovery, Academic Planning, Personal Concerns, Engagement, Career, and Stress in that order (Robinson, 2015). Metrics from Inside Track, a for-profit company that offers coaching for military-connected students, report a 91.7% implementation rate, and 12.4% increase in retention for students that elect to receive coaching vs. do not (Inside Track, 2018).

Coaching differs from mentorship and other peer-leader roles. Coaching is explicitly about goal setting, accountability, encouragement, problem solving, resource referral, and celebrating successes. Coaching emerges from positive psychology. Coaching can occur on any topic someone wants to set as a goal.

IV. Data Collection & Methodology
Population and Sample

Coaching is still emerging as a practice on campuses for student success. Because of the relatively few campuses with these programs, assembling a large group of schools to benchmark was most challenging. Further, programs that narrow on specific populations, especially veterans, are very low in number. Because of this challenge, programs that also focus on other special populations, such as first generation or minority students, were included.

Institutions contacted were selected by two overarching rationales. First, an attempt to identify best practice coaching programs at universities. These universities were selected because of presence in past conferences, journal articles, or webinars as example institutions. The other groups of institutions were contacted specifically because of their program servicing a special population as an audience and not all students. This was especially true of veteran coaching programs to include that segment in representation. A total number of schools providing a coaching program is not known nor centrally counted anywhere. In the end, 12 schools were approached and 6 replied. All that replied were included in sample for the study.

Data Collection

Institutions were contacted via email and reminder emails about the opportunity to engage in this benchmarking study. After identifying coaching programs for student success in an institution, an attempt to contact the most senior staff person in the department was made. When not possible, generic account or department emails were contacted.

The outreach email offered an interview or a link to the survey. In the end, 4 institutions participated in the interview and 2 conducted the survey. The survey was made by the Primary Investigator to address items needed to collect information related to the research question. The survey was piloted with a separate staff person who oversees the Veteran Coaching program at DePaul to ensure clarity and gather those responses.

The interview, if selected, followed the survey questions with only exceptions occurring when one question answer also contained the response for another separate question or when follow-up questions occurred. Diligent interview notes and select transcription of quotes occurred to allow data analysis. The survey questions are in the appendix. For surveys responses a qualitative analysis of their text response was coded and themed, when appropriate.

DePaul's data on the veteran coaching program was obtained by the Primary Investigator having the Assistant Director directly in charge of that program complete on behalf of DePaul.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred by the Primary Investigator. Notes and Survey responses were analyzed. Numerical answers were compared by calculating descriptive statistics that included ratios, percentages participating, etc. Responses to open-ended

questions relating to goals or program outcomes were analyzed using qualitative methods to find codes and themes related to answers. After initial coding of responses, a separate analysis found themes of these responses. Because of the small amount of research on coaching, a quasi-Grounded Theory method was utilized. Grounded Theory allows for simultaneous collection of data and theming. This is also an iterative process where later developed themes may be applied to previously coded data and back and forth. All transcripts and survey responses were analyzed multiple times to arrive at final themes and coding to answers appropriate for that analysis.

Participant Consent
Consent was given and explained in introductory email offering participation in the benchmark. Survey and interviews also included an introductory statement that institution names would be made anonymous to encourage more sharing. Institutions therefore are assigned Pseudonyms below.

V. **Data & Findings**
Response Rate and Demographics
Six of the 12 institutions invited to participate provided information for this project, resulting in a 50% response rate. The list below describes the institutions that participated. It includes pseudonym names, institution type (Public/Private), approximate student body size, coaching program population, and size of that audience.

- 6 of 7 instutiions were private schools, including DePaul University

- 4 of 7 institutions enroll more than 10,000 students, including DePaul University

- 4 of 7 have coaching programs that highly target specific students such as veterans, students of color, or low performing students

- 2 of 7 coaching programs target less than 100 students per year

- 4 of 7 coaching programs are explicitly open to all students

Key Findings
The benchmarking of schools coaching programs was enlightening and informative, in often unexpected areas. The following themes emerged as key findings:
- Educational goal vs retention intervention goal – Of the six benchmarked schools, two have very clearly educational goals without explicit goals of impacting retention. An educational goal was themed as primary desire to impact a learning

outcome rather than academic measure outcome. Three other programs had more explicit goals or began with clear mission of impacting retention or student success. One program articulated highly working to both goals. DePaul's veteran program certainly has both education and retention goals, so this would be classified as both.

- Population served – Four of the institutions were quite vague about population served with responses along the lines of all students in end coding. Three (one school has two programs) were very specific about population served (veteran, minority identity, 1st generation, etc.)

- Size of population – Institutions that serve all students often did not even know that number off the top of their head in many instances. Institutions that target populations often knew exact or approximate number in total potential population with more confidence and specificity.

- Measurements – Institutions measurement metrics, or lack thereof, was the most inconsistent which resulted in little ability to create concrete themes. From the interviews, two could be categorized as seemingly not taking measurements or not willing to share. The others are highly varied with responses and many provided multiple responses. Those responses are categorized with counts of responding programs: measuring session counts (4), having different outcomes depending on different coaching need (1), GPA Improvement (2), removal of academic probation status(1), event/workshop attendance (1), online surveys on outcomes with student self-reporting (1), satisfaction (1), retention rates(3), trends in coaching visit purpose (3), and communication counts (2). DePaul's veteran coaching program is still evaluating metrics of interest for the coaching program.

- Engagement metrics – Engagement data represented the widest possible responses from 40 to 60 students at one institution to 5,000 at another. Institutions reported the following engagement:
  - 550 sessions
  - 55-65 students per year
  - 5,000 students – no elaboration in survey on if this represents sessions, communication, etc.
  - 70-90 students
  - No response
  - DePaul's metric of evaluation would be engagement with 35 students in veteran student coaching; however, it also has one of the smaller potential populations.

- Staffing – Institutions had mixtures of professional staff, student staff, and other to produce their coaching programs:
  - 8 staff coaches (4 recent graduates, 4 grad students)
  - 22 Coaches (Peer students)
  - 1 staff person coach
  - 1 Full time, 1 Graduate Assistant, delegated faculty/staff "champions' that also conduct specialized sessions
  - 25 student staff coaches
  - 4 to 8 student staff coaches
  - DePaul has 6 veteran coaches for that population.

- Satisfaction – All measure satisfaction in some form, usually online. One institution conducts paper at end of sessions.

VI. Discussion & Interpretation of Findings

Ultimately, there is great variety in student coaching programs across the institutions which worked with this study.

Often delineating what is meant by a 'coaching' program and its differentiation from mentoring and other roles provides its own challenge with students and colleagues. It was expected some variety in meaning would be found in benchmarking. All programs which responded are similar in what is meant by coaching overall. They are programs that work on goals, problem solving, accountability, and encouragement. They operated with different frameworks and goals, but it was helpful to see the overall tool being similar.

The overall purpose or mission of the coaching programs at institutions started shining light on overall differences then in who is served, metrics tracked, etc. For instance, the program at West Coast Ocean University is explicitly strength-based. In this strengths mindset, Gallup Strengths Quest is infused in curriculum and learning takes an overall purpose. Associated metrics and goals then mirror being about learning and utilization of gained skills associated to that topic. This is classified as a Educational goal in the above findings.

Other programs were very retention and academic success focused. The coaching program at the University of the Sea is for academic at-risk and probation students. Their retention to next term and GPA improvement are overall of most concern. Overall more programs (4 and DePaul) fit retention or academic success as the overall goal of the coaching program. As with the others, metrics like retention, GPA, etc. mirror their goal.

Staffing was the most highly varied and did not seem to be associated with with size of populations and/or associated engagement. Perhaps the intensity or frequency of sessions or meetings differ highly. Some institutions were self-reporting 100:1 ratios like DePaul's Veteran coaching while others had staffing which would seem to indicate 20 students to a coach. Perhaps these programs have more frequent contact and more intensive coaching. If this study were done again, some further investigation on rationales and process to explain staffing is needed.

As with staffing, engagement data was highly varied. A pattern does seem to indicate that students were more engaged with programs which targeted populations when ratios of engagement are concerned. This is discerned from looking at responses to potential population and cross referencing with engagement response. This is not a surprising result. Highly targeted programs to veterans, minority students, first generation or students on academic probation can more accurately define exactly what their program aims are and provide examples quite relevant to that population.

There are several limitations with this study. First, it was an imperfect sample and recruitment to identified institutions were difficult. It would be more desirable to only compare to other coaching programs with veterans, but given only few were found and one responded, that was not possible. Student veterans do bring their own unique attributes which make comparisons to coaching programs for first years or others difficult.

This data does provide interesting information applicable to the development of our program and the other coaching program for first-year students at DePaul. Thinking about the strong foundation of programs with educational purpose and how to infuse their outcomes into a retention focused program could highlight the best of both. Further, almost all staffing levels were higher than DePaul's which indicates a potential for increased resources in that area with our coaching efforts.

VII. Recommendations and Plans for Action
Recommendations

The AVCSA Coaching program for veterans really grew organically in redefining the role of the veteran liaison student staff. In essence, existing positions were modified to add this component. Overall taking a step back and redefining goals, especially in light of some information gathered in this survey, could be helpful.

One opportunity is to take the best of the highly tailored coaching programs, for instance for those on academic probation at one institution, and launch this program within the current AVCSA coaching. All students would be offered coaching, but a student on academic probation would be offered coaching that takes into account their probation status and provides only that as an option for topic. The metric associated with those students would be then removing the probation status. These 'micro' coaching goals or subgroups within overall veteran coaching could benefit students more and improve the overall program.

A helpful framework could be better incorporating an educational purpose to the coaching. In the interviews certainly those with educational purposes still see the impact on retention. However, their primary purpose is to increase a learning outcome on a specific topic, such as strengths. This becomes a framework and curriculum then to tackle topics, whether academic or personal. Exploration of the learning outside of problem solving and of resources for the coaching program should occur.

Student Veteran coaching at DePaul did not see high engagement in its first year.   . Only one other school benchmarked is for veterans specifically. They also did not have high ratio of engagement. Further study of a name or how to market and best execute to veterans could benefit the program.

Action Plan

The following actions should occur as a result of this report:
- Evaluate purpose and goals associated with the purpose for the coaching program.

- Formalize the learning objectives of the coaching program and how this form foundation to the purpose.

Evaluate marketing, including communication of name and purpose of coaching
- Share data as indicated below
- Better develop tracking methods to adhere and support measuring goals decided upon.

Sharing the results
The data will be shared with all staff in AVCSA including the Assistant Director who oversees coaching and student coaches. Further, responses which maintain anonymity of institutions, will be shared with all those that participated in either the interview or survey.

Appendix – Questionnaire

Question	Scoring considerations					AVCSA DePaul answer
1. Describe your coaching program.	Mostly overview question, listen for answers to questions below.					Veteran student coaches provide structured guidance and goal setting assistance on transition, career, financial and engagement objectives.
2. What population (s) does your program target?	Possible answers: Veterans	Adults	1st Year	Transfers	"At Risk"	All veteran students
3. What is the size of that population at your school?	# or approximate					Approximately 590 (differs slightly by quarter)
4. How do you measure engagement in coaching? Session attendance? Messaging responses? Etc.	Listen for definition and methods of tracking.					Session attendance
5. What portion of this population engages in coaching?	Depending on measure of engagement, how many or what portion engages.					TBD
6. How many coaches do you have?	#					6
7. What is the goal of the overall coaching program?	Retention, GPA, engagement, learning outcomes, combination, etc.					Retention

8. What metrics do you collect, if any, to measure this success?	Depending on measure above, how do they gauge movement (increase in GPA, retention; coached vs. non-coached students, etc.)	Session attendance, retention and GPA of those vs other veterans.
9. Do you measure student satisfaction? If so, how?	Survey, informal method, repeat session attendance, etc.	Not at this time.