

- Needing assistance to negotiate complex benefits and financial aid process
- Understanding different standards for granting educational credit for military service and experience

Transitional

- Developing an identity and sense of community on campus
- Managing the shift from a regimented military environment to an independent university lifestyle
- Coping with apprehension about being singled out due to military service

Personal

- Overcoming reluctance to ask for help
- Recognizing their limits
- Seeking support for physical limitations and/or mental health needs

These challenges resonate with those identified in other literature, and jibes with some of the findings in COM's *Veteran, Military and Family Member Student Survey, 2014*. Respondents to COM's *Veteran, Military and Family Member Student Survey, 2014*, agreed or strongly agreed that staff and faculty "are understanding and considerate of my needs." However, Only 30% agreed or strongly agreed that "faculty are prepared to meet my needs as a student affiliated with the military." Only 27% felt similarly positive with regards to staff on this question. A few quotes from respondents to the survey are also illuminating:

- *"The school's services for veterans seem to be about on par with veterans services that exist elsewhere in the world. They are uncoordinated and disjointed, but they exist, though sometimes you have to really dig for the information to find out they do."*
- *"I understand that it will take some time to obtain a more suitable room for the student Veterans, but I highly recommend facilitating a more appropriate room to be a top agenda for the school administration. This will significantly increase the safety and mental health of student Veterans."*
- *"Aside from obtaining a more suitable space for Veterans, bringing a qualified paid staff to run the center will not only help student veterans in their educational pursuits, but it will also reassure aspiring Veterans looking to enroll at COM."*

COM's Veteran, Military and Family Member Student Survey, 2014

Note: In preparing the survey it was learned that COM does not have a consistent record of capturing applicants' responses to veteran related demographic questions on the admission application. What was captured previously was not transferred when Banner SIS was implemented unless a student was certified for benefits. Currently a student is not coded if they are not certified for benefits, though this is stored in tables.

Approximately 205 students who enrolled either fall or spring 2014 and identified in their application as military, veteran or dependent of either were identified to be surveyed.

The survey introduction included the following message: "Veterans, active duty military personnel and their families are an important and growing population at the College of Marin. If you are a member of this population, your participation in this online survey will be enormously helpful in aiding the College in the identification and development of campus services, activities and supports that would improve the experience of current and future students..."

30 responses were received.

- 81% were male
- 74% were White or Caucasian; 0% identified as Black or African American
- Age was close to evenly distributed in decades from 25 to 34, 35-44, 45-54 and 55 to 64

- d) 51% were currently part-time students; 10% were not attending during spring 2014
- e) 82% were veterans; 11% were spouses, partners or dependents of veterans, active duty or reservists; 7% were reservists
- f) 38% were from the Army branch; 35% Navy
- g) 42% had been involved in combat abroad
- h) Only 23% were using military related educational benefits
- i) Half are currently employed, most outside COM and most at least half to full time
- j) 38% expressed an interest in COM student employment

Academic counseling and GI Bill / Veteran Benefits assistance were the services respondents reported they would be most likely to use through a dedicated office for veteran and military services. **90%** identified it as extremely or very important for COM to offer a single office or point of contact specifically to assist veterans, military and family members. 79% identified it as extremely or very important for COM to offer a licensed counselor or psychologist, and 78% affirmed the importance of a support group for veterans with disabilities.

“Whenever possible, the school should try to have a counselor/specialist who is not only trained to address the needs of veterans...but who, in fact, ‘is’ a veteran. Veterans are far more willing to trust other veterans than we are to trust civilians... And trust is the primary foundation for counseling.”

78% identified as extremely important a Veterans office for counseling, advising and other veteran related issues; 74% noted this level of importance with regards to college staff and instructors being knowledgeable about challenges that face military students.

In rating COM’s meeting expectations, 81% rated COM’s counseling and support as very good or good; 71% felt similarly about their welcome on campus. Conversely, 54% rated support to meet other veterans on campus as poor or very poor. 32% said the likelihood they would continue at COM and complete a degree or certificate as poor or very poor.

With regard to awareness of services, the largest number of respondents for every question either identified themselves as somewhat or not aware- indicating greater promotion is needed. The best awareness was that of the Veteran Association. Half of students were not aware of the Veterans website at COM. 37% of respondents note COM is poor or very poor at providing web based info to veterans, and including family of students in campus activities.

42% of respondents were interested or very interested in military related curriculum.

College support for veterans or active duty personnel (57%) was rated much higher than perceived support for women veterans (39%).

“College of Marin’s treatment of disabled veterans, especially female veterans, is extremely poor. COM makes me feel unwelcome and useless. Most of the staff and faculty do not respect special seating through the DSPPS office. I as a disabled veteran, feel like the school would prefer me to just go away and never return.”

Nearly one in five disagree or strongly disagree that they have felt included in class discussions about diversity. 25% report often or sometimes feeling persecuted or hostility by faculty or classmates for opinions voiced. Nearly 30% report this feeling outside of class from other students.

Finally, **89%** reported their overall campus experience to be good or very good. **64%** would recommend COM to other veterans, active duty or family members; **28%** would do so with reservations.

COM's *Veteran, Military and Family Member Student Survey, 2014*, and the other literature referenced inform the recommendations to follow.

Recommendations

To establish and maintain COM as a destination for veterans and create a sense of place for our students, a list of areas and recommendations are offered. Some of these are established and need to be sustained; many others are yet to be developed. A key factor in the pace of progress and COM's commitment will be the resources made available to keep the current momentum. This is especially true when trying to provide adequate support, outreach and coordination services for two campuses.

The VAC identified seven themes within which to group its recommendations. The themes are:

1. Access and Success
2. Climate
3. Curriculum
4. Organization, Staffing and Stewardship
5. Policies and Procedures
6. Space and Visibility
7. Student Services

Under each theme, recommendations identified and endorsed by the VAC follow. It is noteworthy that recommendations under each theme may already be in progress. For instance, those students that participated in COM's *Veteran, Military and Family Member Student Survey, 2014*, de facto received information about current services, as well as advertising of the district's interest in their experience. Other active examples include veteran student employees in the Veterans Center who provide peer assistance, as do officers in the veteran student club, tutors who are veterans, etc.

Access and Success

1. *Create a veteran-specific orientation/breakout sessions*
2. *Include family members; incorporate into campus/veteran activities*
3. *Maintain a student veterans group*
4. *Remember the female veteran*
5. *Recruit and perform outreach to veterans, disabled veterans in particular*
6. *Provide a way where veterans can help veterans (e.g., peer mentor program)*
7. *Host a welcoming reception*
8. *Publish procedures to assist a service member who is deployed in the midst of a term*
9. *Implement specific military exit process to assess drop out reason(s) and enhance retention*
10. *Track veterans for retention*
11. *Change Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) office name to reduce stigma concerns*

1. Whether offered online or in person, developing versions of the current orientations or follow up sessions geared specifically to the needs and interests of veterans should be provided. Topics should include information on benefits, resources on campus like the Veterans Center (and website), related student organizations and events.
2. Develop family friendly events, such as welcoming social for new veteran students, and encourage families to attend other established traditions or activities.

3. Promote COMVA (Veterans Association), the current student veterans group, and its activities. Encourage new membership. Explore linkages to the national organization.
4. Promote opportunities in event planning, organization and vet center recruitments, other outreach and training to female veterans. An excellent example from this past year was the inclusion of a COM female veteran in the Veteran Association's spring panel presentation. This year's *Veteran, Military and Family Member Student Survey* also included a question about the climate for female veterans.
5. Partner with Outreach and Student Accessibility Services, formerly DSPS, to promote COM to prospective veterans.
6. Expand recruitment and other opportunities for veterans to become tutors, ambassadors and other peer roles. When staffing can support it, establish a veteran peer mentoring program.
7. Establish for fall and spring semesters, include Veterans Association in planning and invite relevant student services offices, veteran/veteran friendly faculty and staff, and families of new and continuing veterans.
8. Clarify and publish on Enrollment Services website with link on Veterans website. Familiarize ES staff and Counseling faculty, as well as Veterans Center student employees, with content.
9. Develop process for weekly and semester tracking of drops by students identified as veterans. Conduct timely follow up/intervention to retain and/or understand reason(s) for separation.
10. Expand current data and develop new data gathering to include students who identify as veterans. Ensure admission application and other college procedures map status to Banner database.
11. This step is in the process of completion. Beginning fall 2014, DSPS will be renamed *Student Accessibility Services, formerly Disabled Students Program and Services*. The reference to former name will be dropped for spring semester.

Climate

1. *Educate staff, faculty and students regarding military student needs; provide resources to support professional development opportunities*
2. *Make sure district disability and health service providers are familiar with military needs*
3. *Include veteran within diversity discussions*
4. *Regularly assess and address climate for veterans on campus*
5. *Create a military Handbook for faculty/staff*

COM Survey quote: "Thank you for conducting this survey. It shows a lot of concern."

1. Develop flex and other annual and online training and in-services to educated staff and faculty at both campuses about current best practices in teaching and serving veterans. Provide regular opportunities for those in key offices and programs that support veterans to participate in professional development related to working with veterans.
 - a. Develop a "veteran friendly" program and invite staff and faculty who wish to participate in training to be "certified" so as to visibly promote this support throughout the college.
 - b. Invite faculty and staff who are veterans, active duty, reservists or family members to be part of a resource list for veteran students.
2. Ensure participation for targeted topics in point one above is mandated or strongly encouraged of staff and faculty in Student Accessibility Services, Student Health Services, and those providing personal and/or mental health counseling to veterans.
3. Promote inclusion of veteran identity/experience in equity planning, district diversity trainings and faculty consideration within classroom discussions of diversity.

4. Develop a process for regularly and ad hoc assessing climate and measuring progress towards greater achievement as a “veteran and military friendly district.” Assess this of faculty and staff as well as students, and assess perceptions of veteran organizations and serving offices in the community. Utilize recommendations from those assessed to inform future initiatives and practices.
5. Develop or modify other schools’ handbook to publish as a resource. Update annually or as needed.

Curriculum

1. *Enable military students to earn credits while deployed*
 2. *Consider offering an academic course or program for vets, e.g. meaning of military experience*
 3. *Provide vets only intro or transitional courses*
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1. Explore options for online or asynchronous learning to occur when students are deployed. Explore options to enhance existing enrollment policy to support course completion.
 2. Assess interest among students and potential faculty. Promote opportunities at other community colleges, either in person or online.
 3. Assess interest among students and potential faculty.

Organization, Staffing and Stewardship

1. *Maintain a standing committee to evaluate institutional practices; provide top-down support*
 2. *Create a single point of contact on campus for vets*
 3. *Develop appropriate staffing and resources to provide for effective delivery of service and support, campus coordination and outreach*
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1. It is critical to enhancing the environment for and experience of this community that there is stewardship, dedicated time, resources and engagement in serving the particular and collective needs of our veterans. It is recommended to maintain the Veteran Advisory Committee [updating name to include recognition of active/reserve military students] and continue the current program representation. Evaluate need for adjustment as warranted. The VAC should provide an annual report to Student Access and Success Committee. Both should continue to engage district leadership in support of veteran related needs and services.
 2. A single point of contact is a recommended practice for serving veterans on campus. In the short term, this is a challenge without dedicated staffing. Efforts should be made to develop a strong web resource and coordinate services through the Veterans center- to cross-promote other offices/services and the Veterans center.
 3. Based on COM’s veteran community size, it is recommended that a single position be developed in the near term to provide coordination of services, activities and outreach. This could initially be a half-time role or split role combined with a key function that serves veterans, such as academic counseling or benefits certification, to facilitate connection with new and continuing veterans. Part of this position’s role would be to expand outreach at IVC, liaison with other programs and offices, participate in the VAC, perform outreach and coordinate services with the greater community, to support veteran transitions to, through and after their enrollment at COM.
 - a. The VAC reviewed the Educational Advisory Board (EAB) report on *Establishing an Infrastructure to Support Veterans* and agreed Model #2, the One-Person Office and Campus Working Group, fit best for the current and near-term needs of COM. It was noted that the working group for this model closely parallels the composition of the current Veterans Advisory Committee and that the scale of the model is a reasonable fit to support the current and near term anticipated veteran population at COM.

Policies and Procedures

1. *Extend payment deadlines for veterans when benefits are in process*
2. *Review amount/type of credit awarded for military training/occupations and College Level Examination Program (CLEP)*
3. *Hire vets- work study and full and part-time positions. Is this encouraged? Is a statement against discrimination established? [only in employment for Vietnam era veterans for COM]*
4. *Provide customized advising/registration for vets*
5. *Facilitate transfer of credit to/from college/university*
6. *Participate in concurrent admissions program (CONAP), the Department of Defense's Memorandum of Understanding, the Principles of Excellence, or other initiatives or consortiums that provide access, mobility and transparency to support veterans.*

1. Ensure veterans awaiting benefit awards are held harmless for financial or enrollment penalties associated with delays in benefit receipt. Make short term loans available for veterans and other students awaiting or between aid cycles.
2. Ensure current CLEP credit policy is consistent with other community colleges that students may choose or transfer from.
3. Encourage hiring practices that promote equality and opportunity for veterans. Establish/amend college policy to reflect that value, as well as prohibition of discrimination against veterans. Currently this is only mentioned in employment policy, as related to Vietnam era veterans [as opposed to more blanket statements about military or veteran status] Increase work-study opportunities.
4. Develop specific program to welcome and assist veterans with orientation, advising and registration. Use CCC Apply submissions- where veterans may identify themselves, to initiate veteran specific communications, including links to available resources and services, as well as promote veteran friendly policies such as priority registration.
5. Evaluate academic and military transcripts to ensure veterans are provided efficient and timely transfer and accumulation of credits, prerequisites and requisite courses.
6. Sign the Principles of Excellence and DOD's Memorandum of Understanding, establishing COM's commitment to fair enrollment practices and appropriate services to support veteran enrollment. The MOU is time sensitive (September 2014) if COM wants to remain eligible for tuition assistance programs for active duty personnel who may wish to enroll/continue being funded. Pursue endorsement as a military friendly institution by G.I. Jobs and participate in other activities to raise COM's "profile."

Space and Visibility

1. *Provide a resource center for vets*
2. *Build a web-based presence*
3. *Provide space for veteran student organization(s)/activities*
4. *Create traditions to convey respect to all vets; "thank you;" Memorial/Veterans Day events*
5. *Develop and update veteran targeted publications and outreach*
6. *Create a targeted welcome to be sent after admission*
7. *Create Listserv for information/programs and targeted communications*

COM Survey quote: "Everything could be improved."

1. Utilize adjacent office space to expand services provided through Veterans Center, including drop-in counseling, benefits certification, and other district, VA or community services. Develop a longer term plan for space that addresses the needs associated with being a fuller-service center and providing a sense of place within the college. Develop a satellite space for scheduled hours at IVC.
2. As noted earlier, enhance web based information, resources and activities promotion, including links to both district and state, federal and community agencies and resources. Develop FAQs and other information to ease transitions and provide timely updates for enrollment related and other major college activities. The current site is static, nor is it as thorough or useful as it could be, including a clearinghouse for veteran related policies and resources at COM.
3. Address issues associated with current location and aesthetics of Veterans center space to create more welcoming, visible, comfortable and active space. Expand use of space for veteran activities, including club meetings, unstructured usage and structured activities like peer tutoring. Coordinate use of IVC space or other spaces for events as needed.
4. Continue Veterans Day event(s) and other events/traditions that facilitate connection within the veteran community, with the college and larger community, and enhance awareness and education about the contributions and experiences of veterans and their families.
5. Update current publications and establish regular cycle for revisions. Provide online and paper formats and provide to relevant COM offices, area agencies and Outreach staff.
6. Now that CCC Apply has been implemented, use submissions- where veterans may identify themselves, to initiate veteran specific communications, including welcome veteran letter with links to available resources and services, as well as promotion of veteran friendly policies such as priority registration.
7. Do more to promote services to veterans. Establish a veteran listserv to promote timely distribution of information.

Student Services

1. *Expand customized financial resources for vets*
 2. *Have financial aid help on campus*
 3. *Increase level of short-term loans when vet's benefits are in process*
 4. *Provide housing options for vets*
 5. *Ensure timely and effective veteran certification services*
 6. *Provide tutoring services sensitive to the needs of veterans*
1. With progress on cross-training of enrollment services staff in financial aid and admissions and records policies and procedures, there is opportunity to leverage this greater knowledge in providing more comprehensive and integrated advising and referral for veterans. This will be complemented by anticipated development of more sophisticated systems for applying and awarding scholarships.
 2. This is currently being provided at both the KTD and IVC campuses; however, there is potential to explore drop-in hours on some cycle or basis, such as annually when the new FAFSA opens in January.
 3. Funding was established in fall 2013 to support this initiative; however, staff turnover delayed process and procedures development. This should be completed in fall 2014.
 4. On campus housing is years away from idea to reality if determined to be a priority. However, the opportunity exists to expand the current services offered between the Job Placement and Single Stop functions. Co-location of these services and increase of the job placement technician from part-time to full-time this summer should provide additional support to enhance referral services.

5. Evaluate current services and use of technology and training to enhance delivery. Survey veterans regularly to provide feedback.
6. Assess tutoring needs of veterans as well as talent to provide peer tutoring; follow through on spring 2014 discussion of embedding tutoring services in the Veterans Center, as well as hiring veterans as tutors and promoting their availability in the TLC.