Program History

In response to the growing number of student veterans attending California community colleges and the re-entry challenges many of them face, colleges have recognized the need to expand support services to help veterans successfully integrate into civilian and college life. To provide broader statewide leadership and coordination in order to assist the colleges in this effort, the Chancellor’s Office hired its first full-time Veteran Services Specialist in 2012.

A growing number of community colleges are making noteworthy efforts to address the personal, social and educational needs of returning veterans. However, there is inconsistency in the level of support throughout the system, in part due to the lack of dedicated resources for student veterans services. An infusion of funding would allow more colleges to provide the level of service necessary to meet the specific needs of this emerging student population.

Description

With an estimated 1.8 million veterans residing in California, our state’s veteran population is the largest in the nation. Many of the increasing number of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan will look to one of the 112 community colleges as the most easily accessible and affordable educational option available. In fact, more than 44,000 veterans and active duty service members enrolled at a community college in 2012-13.

Experts on veterans’ education issues note that veterans not only must adjust to civilian life and manage a host of social and health issues, but also adapt to life on a college campus. While community colleges can provide the education and training that veterans need, veterans often find it difficult and confusing to utilize their well-earned GI Bill education benefits, and even more difficult to find and access the special support services they need to be successful. In response, 54 community colleges have established Veterans Resource Centers (VRCs) where student veterans can decompress, access important services and feel a sense of camaraderie with other student veterans. There were only 15 community colleges with VRCs in 2011 when the system’s focus on services for student veterans began.

Statewide Veterans Services Efforts

The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, with the strong support of the Board of Governors, has engaged in several statewide efforts to improve support services for veterans entering a California community college, including:

Veterans Summit

In December 2013, the Chancellor’s Office co-hosted the third annual Veterans Summit. Made possible by generous support each year from JP Morgan Chase and joined for 2013 by Majestic Realty’s Land of the Free Foundation, the Summit is designed to share information and best practices for faculty, administrators and staff who work with student
veterans on our campuses. Topics at the 2013 summit included VA benefits and education plans, creating Veterans Resource Centers, women veterans, academic counseling, best practices in serving student veterans, mental health issues confronting veterans and accessing federal, state and local resources. For the first time in the three-year history of this event, veteran service professionals from the California State University and University of California systems were invited to attend as well. Planning is already underway for a fourth Veterans Summit to be held in San Jose, California on December 4-5, 2014. More information related to the most recent Veterans Summit can be found at these links:

- 2013 Veterans Summit Webpage: https://veteranssummit.org/
- 2013 Veterans Summit Session Videos: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL367nn10rv0sELnMkl6UYzuLpJeMyYGq5

**Welcome Home: Creating a Campus Climate of Wellness for Returning Veterans Training**

In March 2010, the Chancellor’s Office applied for and received a $75,000 grant from the Zellerbach Family Foundation to support the development and implementation of a training program for faculty and staff to increase awareness on military culture, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and depression so that faculty and staff can better understand the challenges faced by many community college student veterans. The training has been provided at thirteen colleges and six statewide conferences since its inception, and is scheduled to be delivered at an additional eight colleges in 2014. More information about the Welcome Home training, including video of a training delivered at the 2011 Veterans Summit, can be found at the link below:

http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/StudentServices/VETS/WelcomeHomeProgram.aspx

**Veterans Resource Center Project**

When asked how colleges can support their success, student veterans consistently identify a Veterans Resource Center as a key resource. There they can interact with one another and obtain information and services. The Chancellor’s Office, through the High Tech Center Training Unit at De Anza College, offered grants that would provide free hardware, software and on-site training in assistive technology to colleges that were able to provide and staff a dedicated space to establish a full-service VRC. As a result of this project, 24 colleges established or enhanced VRCs.

**Student Veterans Statewide Study**

This Chancellor’s Office-funded study investigated essential practices for serving student veterans in the California Community Colleges system. Using data collected from electronic surveys and face-to-face focus groups, the study is intended to benefit college administrators, advisors, counselors, and disability service providers in helping student Veterans as college students. Preliminary results were shared at the 2013 Veterans Summit.