

Veterans Community College Survey:

OVERVIEW:

From September through November 2013, a comprehensive survey was sent to student veterans across the state. In total, the survey received 802 responses during this time, with 50 colleges represented by at least three or more responses. The goal of the survey was to assess the needs for certain kinds of services that might be available to veterans, while exploring the possibility of using social networking and video chat technology as a means for providing those services. In addition, this survey also touched on the difficulties that some veterans face when they begin studying at a community college.

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. **Student Veterans in Need:** The data appeared to confirm much that has been learned elsewhere either anecdotally or in the research literature about the experiences of student veterans. This sample confirmed that a certain subset of student veterans has a very difficult time adjusting to the college setting, feels very unprepared for college and has trouble interacting with non-veteran students, which is another way of saying trouble re-integrating into civilian social engagement.
2. **The Importance of a VRC on Campus:** This data also confirms the importance of having a VRC on campus and of making sure that students know about their VRC and are able to access it. Students who had and accessed their VRC's in this study reported feeling more prepared for college, experiencing a less stressful transition and feeling more comfortable with their non-veteran peers than students without VRC's on their campus.
3. **The Need for More Information:** The data also suggests a serious information gap that exists for entering student veterans. A vast majority of veterans report needing information about both campus specific topics and general topics. Campus specific topics include who their certifying official is, what services are available on campus, and how to connect with an academic advisor. General topics include more information on accommodations, Basic Housing Allowance, Vocational Rehab and The Post 9/11 GI Bill.
4. **Overall Comfort with Social Networking & Video Chat:** The data from this sample show that in general today's student veterans are comfortable using social networking and video chat technology. Older veterans (40yrs +) appear to be somewhat less familiar with these programs, but a majority still report familiarity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The continued proliferation of VRC's seems essential, including finding better ways to let incoming student veterans know about their VRC and how to be in contact with veterans and staff who work there.
- More information about both general and specific topics related to the experience of being a student veteran appears to be highly sought. The data from this survey suggested that student veterans are more interested in accessing information than they are in connecting to others via chat or elsewhere.

- However, due to high levels of comfort and familiarity with these technologies, utilizing social networking and video chat technology could be one way to accomplish the goal of providing more accessible and useful information to this population.

DETAILED REPORT ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS AND DATA FROM THE SURVEY:

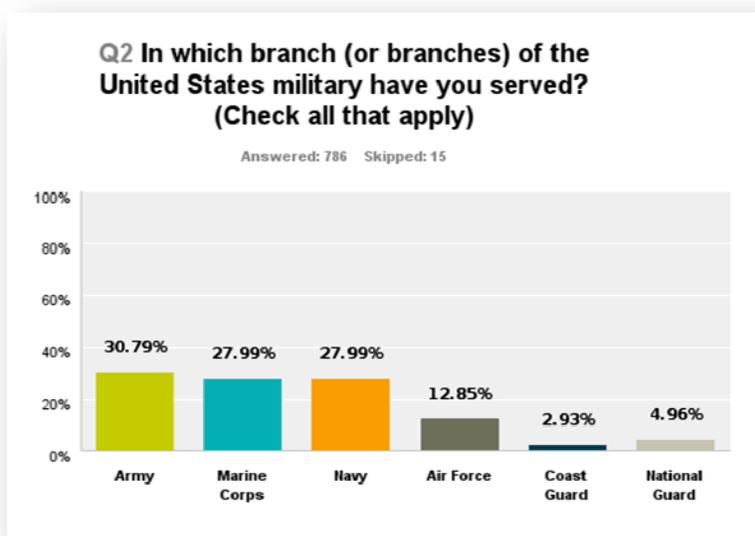
DEMOGRAPHICS: GEOGRAPHY

The ten colleges with the greatest number of respondents represent both geographic and demographic diversity. Both small and large schools were represented. Schools in higher (DeAnza and MiraCosta) and lower income areas (College of the Desert) were both represented in the sample.

The top highest responding schools were:

College Name	No. of Respondents
Oxnard College	26
College Of The Desert	28
San Diego Miramar College	35
Las Positas College	36
Santa Rosa Junior College	39
Moorpark College	44
Miracosta College	51
San Diego City College	55
Sacramento City College	58
San Diego Mesa College	66
De Anza College	71

Branches of service all represented with Army (31%), Marine Corps (28%) and Navy (28%) as the most common. In this sample, the Marine Corps is over-represented (perhaps as a result of certain colleges' proximity to Marine Corps bases) while the Air Force is under-represented.

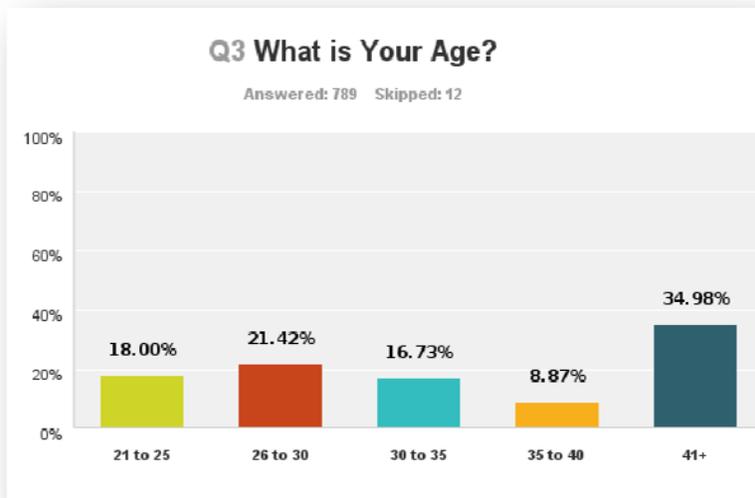


DEMOGRAPHICS: AGE

The veteran population in this sample was diverse, with large portions of the sample under 30 years of age (39%) and above 40 (34.9%). However, compared with all students at California community colleges in 2012-2013, the veteran population is *significantly older*. While students under 30 made up approximately 69% of all students, they constituted only 39% of this sample. In addition, students older than 40 made up approximately 17% of all students, but totaled 35% of this sample of veterans. [Note: veterans under 21 yrs were not specifically counted in this sample, as it was estimated that this would represent a very small group].

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office All Student Enrollment Status Summary Report		
	Annual 2012-2013 Student Count	Annual 2012-2013 Student Count (%)
State of California Total	2,292,268	100.00%
19 or Less	553,077	24.13%
20 to 24	729,236	31.81%
25 to 29	308,486	13.46%
30 to 34	181,599	7.92%
35 to 39	121,216	5.29%
40 to 49	186,518	8.14%
50 +	211,549	9.23%
Unknown	587	0.03%

Data retrieved from <http://datamart.cccco.edu>



NATIONAL GUARD:

In this sample, 98 students (12.5%) reported currently having National Guard of Reserve obligations. With over 44,000 veterans currently expected to be enrolled in California Community Colleges, the number of veterans with National Guard obligations is likely to be well over 5,000 students.

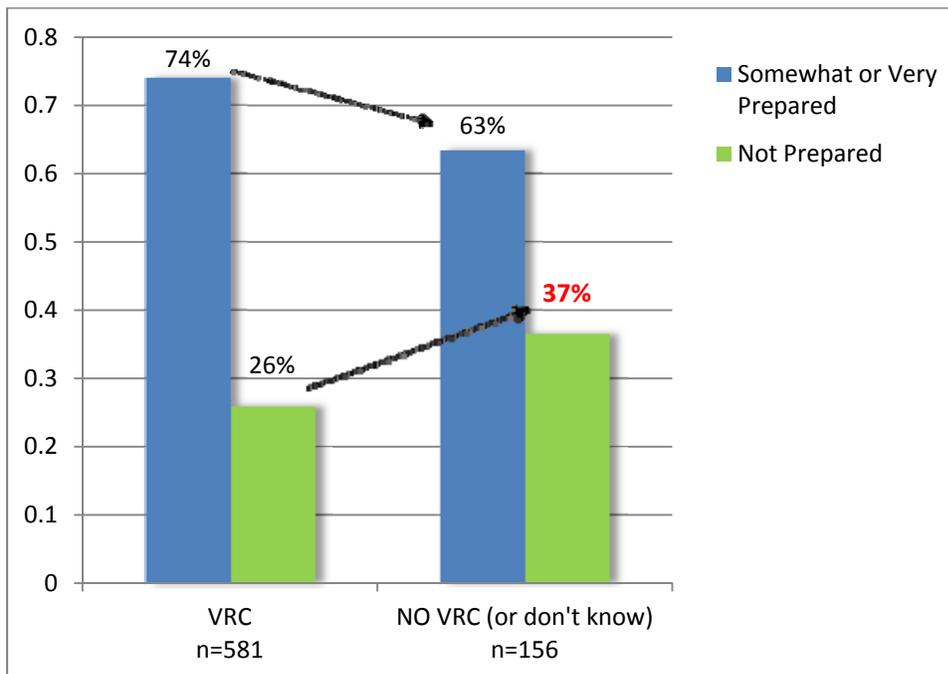
IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN VETERANS

This questions (Q5) was added later in the distribution of the survey and only accrued 15 responses. However, of that small sample, 47% reported serving either in Iraq or Afghanistan or both.

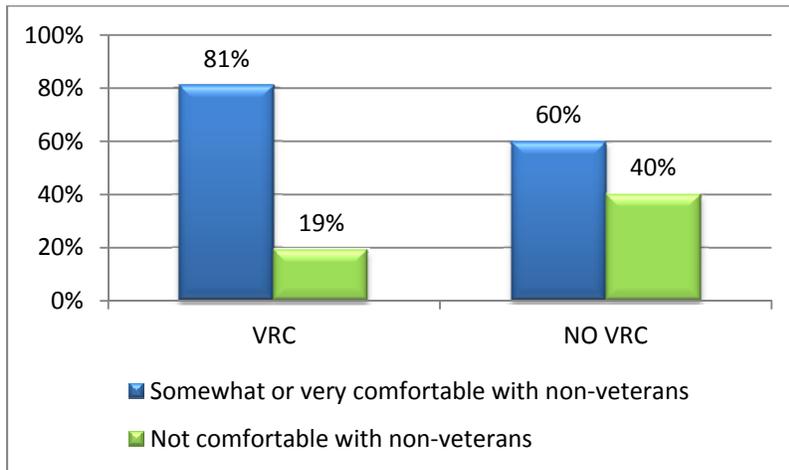
IMPORTANCE OF VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS

Nearly 80% of respondents reported that their campus had a Veterans Resource Center (VRC) and 7% reported that theirs did not. Nearly 15% of respondents did not know whether their campus had one or not. When the two groups were compared, they differed greatly in their comfort level with non-veterans. As the graph below illustrates, **students who reported not having a VRC on campus also reported experiencing significantly less comfortable with non-veterans**. This data lends support to the notion that although VRC's provide veterans with a separate place to be on campus, the VRC's also improve veterans' overall readjustment into college life as well.

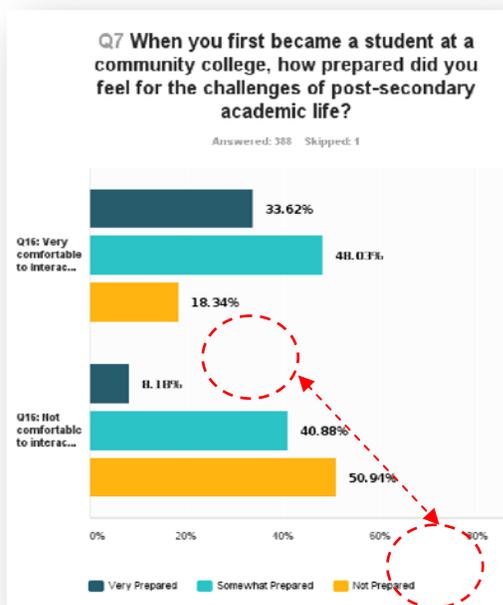
Q7: WHEN YOU FIRST BECAME A STUDENT AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE, HOW PREPARED DID YOU FEEL FOR THE CHALLENGES OF POST-SECONDARY ACADEMIC LIFE?



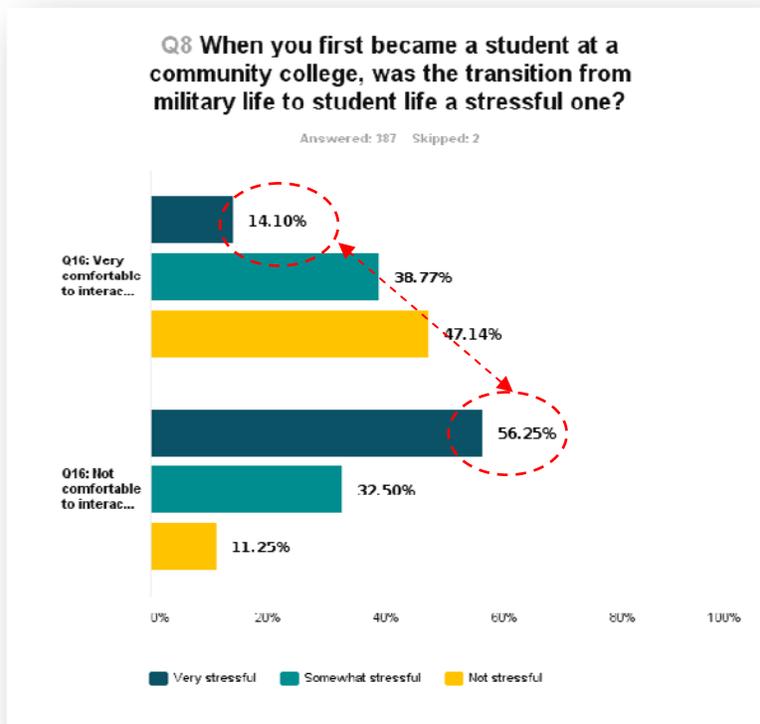
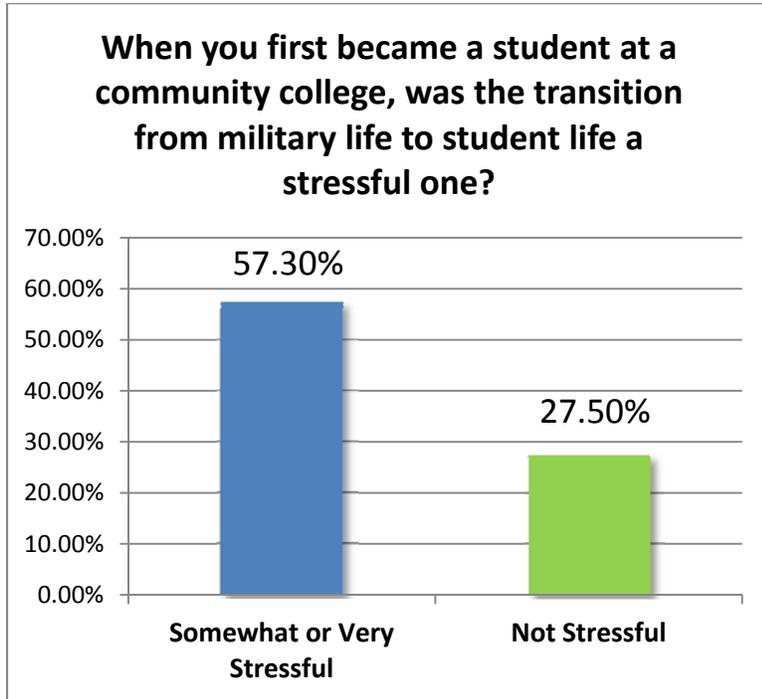
Q16: WHEN YOU FIRST BECAME A STUDENT AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE HOW COMFORTABLE WAS IT FOR YOU TO INTERACT WITH OTHER STUDENTS (NON-VETERANS)?



Q7: NOT PREPARED FOR STUDENT LIFE: **29% of all students said that they felt “Not Prepared” for post-secondary academic life. Of those, 53% reported that their transition from military to civilian life was “Very Stressful,”** and 33% reported that it was “Somewhat Stressful.” There also seems to be an association between perceived preparedness for college and comfort with non-veteran students. Compared to their peers who reported being “Very Comfortable” interacting with non-veteran students, veterans who reported feeling “Not Comfortable” interacting with non-veteran students (Q16) also reported feeling much less prepared for the challenges of post-secondary academic life (Q7). Just over 50% of students who reported not being comfortable with non-veteran students also report feeling “Not Prepared.”



Q8: STRESSFUL TRANSITION: Overall, 30% of respondents reported that their transition from military to student life was “Very Stressful.” Students who experienced a difficult transition also report not being comfortable with non-veteran students (14% vs. 56%).



Q9: CONTACT WITH VETERANS GROUPS: Overall, 50% of students said it would have been “Very Helpful” to have made contact with veterans groups on campus.

Q10: KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BENEFITS: **Overall, nearly 1 in 5 (19%) veterans said they had “No Knowledge about benefits at all”** when they arrived on campus. Another 64% only knew “a little bit.” There is clearly a huge knowledge gap in new student veterans.

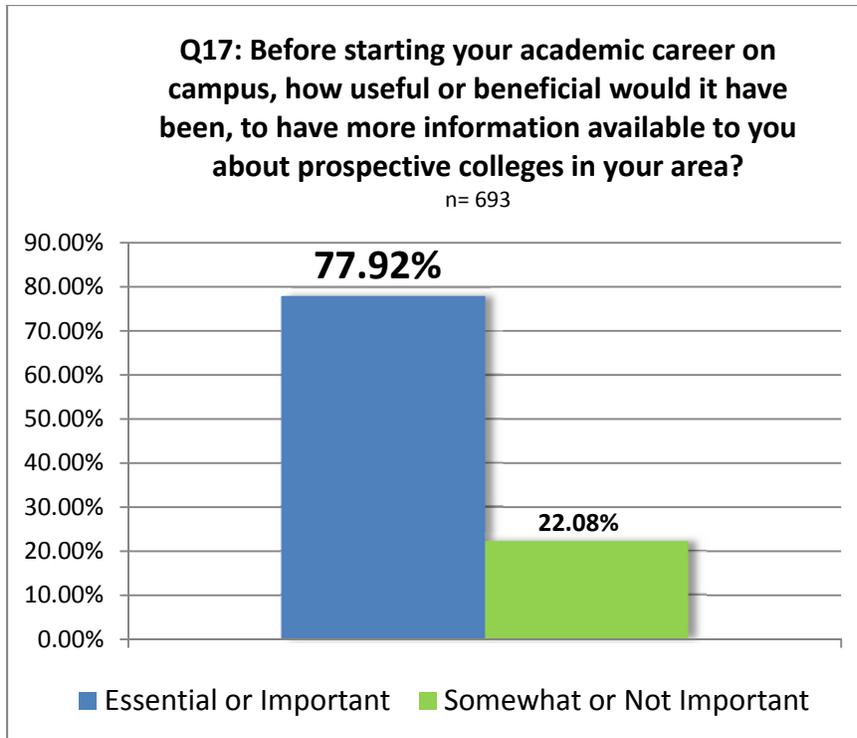
Q11: KNOWLEDGE ABOUT VRC’S ON CAMPUS: Even on campuses with VRC’s, **25% of respondents had “no idea” that they existed. Of those who knew about their campus VRC, 84% report visiting the VRC** and only 16% report never visiting. This speaks to the very high utilization rate of campus VRC’s – if you build it, they will come!

Q12: VETERAN REPRESENTATIVES: Overall, 38% of veterans on campus were “not aware that my college had a veteran representative (certifying official).” Within that group, 37% reported that they “Did Not Feel Prepared” for Post-Secondary Life (Q7). Those veterans who reported knowing about their certifying official (63%) reported feeling more prepared for post-secondary education, with only 24% reporting that they “Did Not Feel Prepared.” ***This data implies that having better knowledge of and ability to contact certifying officials is likely to help veterans feel more prepared for campus life.***

Q13: INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER VETERANS: Overall, nearly 40% of student veterans report not interacting with other veterans when they first become students on campus. This is a relatively high number of students who are not connecting with their veteran peers, considering how helpful we know these interactions to be in many cases. Even when controlling for age of student veterans, the ***data show that a sizable amount of veterans do not utilize their veteran peers when they arrive.***

Q17: INFORMATION ABOUT PROSPECTIVE COLLEGES: A vast majority of students (78%) report that it would have been useful or beneficial to have more information available to them about prospective colleges. It’s not uncommon for veterans to express confusion about knowing where to start when they go back to school, particularly if there are a number of schools in their area. ***The data show that information needs to more easily available to prospective students to help them choose the right college to match their needs.***

*(Note: Answer choices in this graph were collapsed from four categories to two for simpler viewing)



Q18: LEARNING ABOUT VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS: Overall, 83% of students reported that it would have been either *Essential* (43%) or *Important* (40%) to have learned about VRC's in their areas. This data once again highlights the importance veterans place on their VRC's.

Q19: ASKING QUESTIONS OF CERTIFYING OFFICIALS OR VET REPS VIA VIDEO CHAT: Overall, 75% of students report that it would be either *Essential* (35%) or *Important* (40%) to have asked questions via video chat before starting on campus.

Q20: LEARN WHERE SERVICES ARE ON CAMPUS: Overall, 83% of respondents reported that they felt it would be either *Essential* (39%) or *Important* (44%) to learn where various services were on campus and what hours they were available. This question speaks directly to a common complaint that veterans have when they arrive on community college campuses. They don't know which services are available or where they are. Veterans are used to a system that directs them where to go, and are often overwhelmed by instances where they are given little guidance or instruction about how to proceed with acquiring services. As a result, anecdotally, many veterans report not accessing certain services because they either didn't know about them or didn't know where to find them.

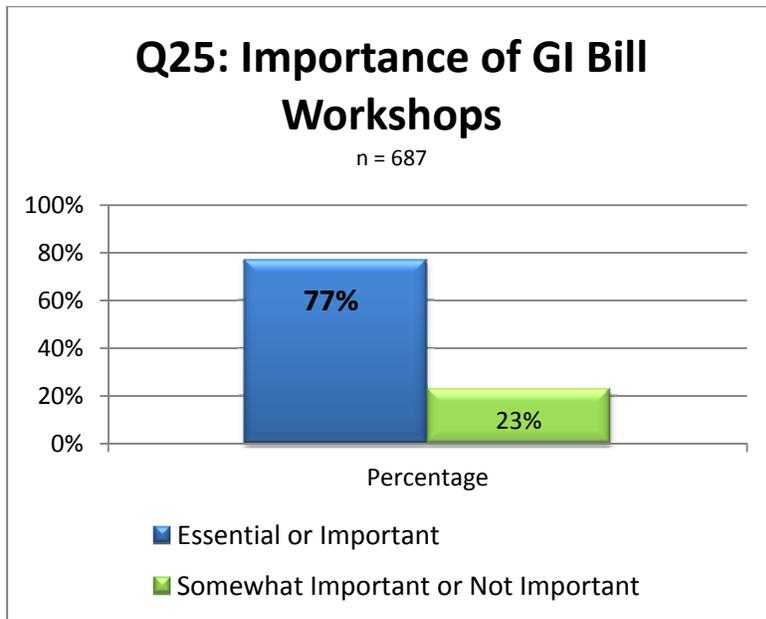
Q21: ASK QUESTIONS VIA VIDEO CHAT OF STUDENT VETERANS ALREADY ON CAMPUS? In contrast with results from the previous question, on this issue, only 46% of students thought it would be either *Essential* (15%) or *Important* (31%) to be able to do this via video chat.

Q22: ASK QUESTIONS OF INSTRUCTORS VIA VIDEO CHAT? Overall, 48% of students thought this would be either *Essential* (19%) or *Important* (29%), while 52% felt it would be only *Somewhat or Not Important*.

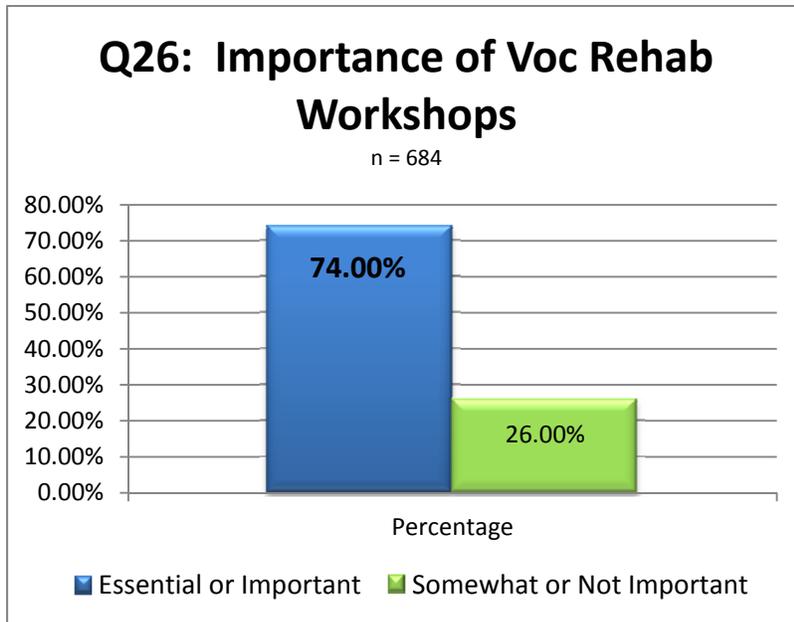
Q23: BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL, MEET WITH AN ACADEMIC COUNSELOR VIA VIDEO CHAT: Overall, 56% of students thought this would be either *Essential* (26%) or *Important* (30%). However, 44% felt it would be only *Somewhat or Not Important*.

Q24: BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL, CONNECT VIA SOCIAL NETWORKING WITH OTHER STUDENT VETERNS: Overall, 47% of students thought this would be either *Essential* (21%) or *Important* (26%) while 53% felt it would be only *Somewhat* or *Not Important*.

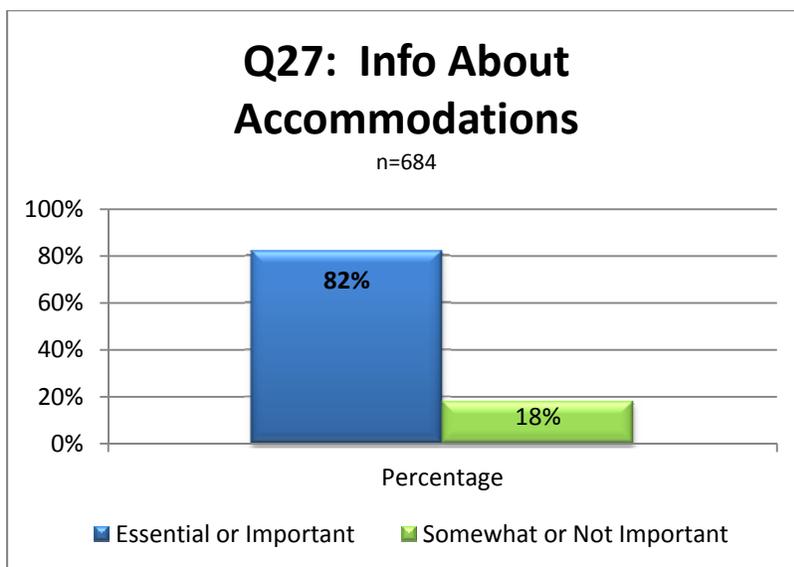
Q25: BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL, PROVIDED WITH EASY-TO-DIGEST INFO ON POST 9/11 GI BILL: Overall 77% of students noted that this would have been either *Essential* (45%) or *Important* (32%). This data speaks to anecdotal evidence that veterans often mention about how frustrating it is for them to understand or make sense of what is required of the Post-9/11 GI Bill.



Q26: BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL, PROVIDED WITH EASY-TO-DIGEST INFO ON VA VOCATIONAL REHAB (VOC REHAB)? Overall, 76% of respondents reported that this would have been either *Essential* (40%) or *Important* (34%). This data speaks to anecdotal evidence that it is often frustrating for veterans to understand how to access Voc Rehab services through the VA to help pay for their educations.



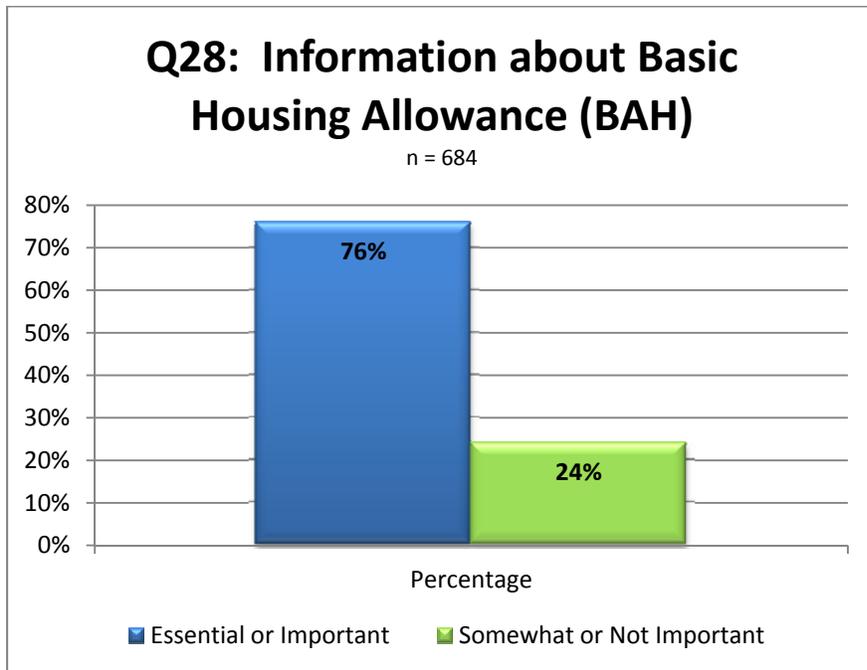
Q27: BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL, PROVIDED WITH EASY-TO-DIGEST INFO OR WORKSHOPS ABOUT ACCOMMODATIONS AVAILABLE ON CAMPUS: **Overall, 82% of respondents reported that this would have been either Essential (45%) or Important (37%).**



Q30: BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL, INFO ABOUT TYPICAL CHALLENGES VETERANS FACE RETURNING TO SCHOOL: **Overall, 73% of student veterans reported that having more information available to them, before starting school, about typical challenges student veterans experience would have been either Essential (37%) or Important (36%).** This data speaks to the often disorienting process of becoming a student after leaving the military.

Q31: BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL, HAVING INFO AVAILABLE ABOUT CONVERTING MILITARY RESUME INTO A CIVILIAN ONE? **Overall, 77% of student veterans reported that having more information available to them, before starting school, about typical challenges student veterans experience would have been either Essential (46%) or Important (30%).** This data speaks to the often disorienting process of finding work, or preparing for a career after serving in the military where skills are accounted for differently than in the civilian world. Having the ability to translate those skills and classes appears to be thought of as extremely helpful by this sample.

Q28: BEFORE STARTING SCHOOL, PROVIDED WITH EASY-TO-DIGEST INFO ON BASIC HOUSING ALLOWANCE (BAH)? Overall, 76% of respondents reported that this would have been either *Essential* (48%) or *Important* (28%). This data speaks to an often heard complaint amongst veterans that they did not really understand how their BAH would work and how to budget correctly for it.



SOCIAL NETWORKING

Overall, student veterans appear to be very comfortable using social networking sites such as Facebook and Google+. This sample also proved to be quite comfortable with video chat technology such as FACETIME and Google Hangout. Not surprisingly, younger veterans report greater familiarity with these technologies, but even the majority of veterans over 35 years old report being familiar with these arenas.

