Veterans Resource Center Review
Project — 2014
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Introduction

Excerpted from Veterans and the Community College: A Training Guide created by the Galvin Group on behalf of the California Community Colleges, Student Services and Special Programs, DSPS Program.

Unlike the traditional verse of the old folk song asking "where have all the soldiers gone" with the reply "gone to flowers every one," today’s soldiers have the highest rate of survival of any war in history. Battlefield skill and heroics of our medics and corpsman, combined with excellent medical care close to the area of conflict, incredible technology that follows injuries, and the best GI Bill benefits since WWII, lend words to a new verse "gone to college everyone."

If you are reading this, you have probably already experienced the influx of returning veterans. Be they recently discharged service personnel or National Guardsmen or Reserves who are between call ups, they are all coming to our campuses attempting to gain skills and move forward with their lives.

Because of the aforementioned medical care and because of the type of war that is being fought, we are seeing men and women in great numbers who have been traumatically wounded, have recovered and are left to deal with the residuals of those injuries, both seen and unseen.

In 2010 the California Community Colleges High Tech Center Training Unit (HTCTU) created a project that has received the support of the Chancellor's Office and the 15 colleges that were selected to pilot the project in 2010-11. Combining a veteran’s lounge for camaraderie with assistive technology to facilitate academic success and a wellness program to assist in psychosocial reintegration, the project is as innovative as it is comprehensive. As the first systemwide effort to create "veteran-friendly" campuses throughout the California Community College System, this project demonstrates an unprecedented commitment to assist service personnel in re-entering the educational system.

In 2010-11, the Chancellor’s Office’s Student Services and Special Programs Division, Disabled Student Programs and Services, contracted for a chronicling of the project’s first year of activity.
The result of that effort was twofold, the development of an online training guide to assist in the implementation of Veterans Resource Centers (VRC) on community college campuses and the profiling of six of the original 15 pilot VRC sites.

During the 2013-14 academic year, the Chancellor’s Office sought to revisit the VRCs started or enhanced through the HTCTU efforts. Nine VRCs were visited and informally reviewed through the use of a standard question protocol and onsite interviews. Of the nine sites visited, five were in the group that was originally profiled in 2010-11.

This is not a scientific study, there are no control groups or attempts to meet rigid research standards. Rather, this is a more intimate and largely anecdotal account of the where these centers stand three years after their inception. The conclusions and opinions contained in this document are solely those of the reviewer and may or may not reflect the positon of the Chancellor’s Office administration and staff.

This document does, however, demonstrate the universal appreciation of the Veterans Resource Center concept. The reader is encouraged to visit the video links contained in this document in order to fully understand the depth of commitment, sense of responsibility and pride of ownership exhibited by those who served and now are served by the campus Veterans Resource Centers.
Veterans Resource Center Reviews
The following Veterans Resource Center reviews are presented in the order in which they were conducted in the 2013-14 academic year.

Long Beach City College

Introduction
This review will differ slightly from subsequent reviews as it was determined after the review had been scheduled that this college had not been a part of the original VRC Pilot Project. While Long Beach City College (LBCC) had applied and was accepted for the project, circumstances were such that they were not able to proceed as anticipated. Though they did receive some of the initial project training, LBCC was not considered one of the initial sites.

As a result, the established protocol for the VRC review was not used and a substitute format was developed. This format describes four areas of the VRC and, even though LBCC is not considered a pilot VRC, these areas are related to the core training areas that were established for the pilot project. These areas are Organization/Logistics, Academics, Wellness, and Camaraderie.

The review of VRC at Long Beach City College was conducted on December 3, 2013.

Organization/Logistics
The VRC at LBCC is located in the basement of the Admissions and Records building which is centrally located on campus. It is estimated that the VRC has approximately 800 sq. ft. of space that houses all services (this is approximately four times the space that was allocated in 2010-11). However, the need for additional space was expressed and was observed. The hours of operation are 8 am to 6 pm, Monday thru Thursday and closed Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Campus rules require the presence of college staff during the hours of operation. Evening hours are not available due to campus restrictions related to safety concerns.

Organizationally, the VRC is located within the Department of Admissions and Records and is headed by Juan Franc Menjivar, Deputy Director of Enrollment Services. Two other full-time staff include Erica Gutierrez, Financial Aid Advisor/Veterans Advisor and James Martinez, Financial Aid Specialist/Veterans Certifying Official. Up to nine VA work study students are employed at any one time and handle front desk operations. Also located part-time in the VRC are a VA Veteran’s Services Counselor and a Clinical Psychology Doctoral Intern.

The VRC offers both an individual and a group orientation program. The group meeting is a comprehensive presentation taking place once a week, lasting somewhat over 90 minutes and
covering all aspects of veteran’s services at LBCC. The individual sessions last about an hour and are tailored to the needs of the applying veteran.

The VRC is the campus hub for services and for organizational meetings of various veteran’s groups serving the 800 plus veterans on campus.

Academics
The academic needs of the users of the VRC seemed to be of primary importance to the staff. This was both observed and in evidence from the emphasis placed on this area during the VRC tour. Filming the tour was delayed, appropriately so, in order for staff to answer academic counseling questions of several walk-in students. The VRC also employs two student workers as tutors. These students are advanced math and science students and can tutor a wide range of subjects. According to the staff, they are heavily publicized and heavily used. The VRC has six computer work stations dedicated to student use, however, none contain adaptive devices or software beyond the standard windows accessibility features. The development of educational plans are required and a discussion of how the VRC attempts to incorporate the Student Success Initiative was captured on film. The staff are keenly aware of transfer requirements and make a strong effort, through onsite presentations and field trips, to make information about transfer opportunities available.

Wellness
It would appear that equal to academics is the attempt to provide services that are best classified under this heading. The tie to Financial Aid is obvious from the VRC’s organizational placement and from the fact that Financial Aid donated the furniture and computers to the VRC. Beyond that, however, was an expressed desire on the part of the staff that the students be as up-to-date as possible on the financial benefits (both campus and VA) that are available to them. Financial aid paperwork for veterans receives a short cut from the general population and is processed in almost half the time. The fact that the VA Veteran’s Services Counselor is onsite three days per week speaks to the close connection that the students are afforded for both financial and medical services. As well, the access to psychological counseling services onsite is a major advantage for the students. A close watch, by the staff, is kept on the students’ needed accommodations and referrals to the DSPS office (located in the same building) are routine.
Camaraderie
Of the three areas, this one probably suffers most from the restrictions of space and equipment. Unlike some other VRCs visited, the space devoted to what is best described as R & R, is limited. While the campus veterans’ organizations use the VRC extensively for meeting and staging areas, the space for veterans to relax is minimal. While the coffee machine, small refrigerator and snack box are existent, missing are the ubiquitous large screen TV, video games or DVDs seen in many other centers. A couch and coffee table make up the lounge area which is all the space allows. There is no room for additional equipment and the noise level of such devices would be unmanageable. However, the friendship and warmth displayed by the participants, student workers and staff have created a very welcoming environment and very busy and well-populated VRC.

Conclusion
Clearly, some of the issues (primarily space) that prevented LBCC from joining the original pilot group remain. LBCC VRC appears to lean toward professional staff for decisions and control of the services and environment and the campus rules regarding staffing and safety limit the operational hours of the center. The lack of adaptive computer technology and training may be limiting the success of some students (this is difficult to determine as there are other student success centers and the DSPS office is involved). However, this is an energetic and thriving VRC staffed by interested and dedicated workers with a strong emphasis on the success and well-being of LBCC veterans. Observations indicated a welcoming environment and a concern for all who come through the door.
Santa Monica College

Introduction
The VRC at Santa Monica College was one of the original HTCTU pilot sites and was the first VRC reviewed using the established protocol, though second VRC visited. In an attempt to organize the collected information, a format similar to the Long Beach City College review was attempted. This format describes eight areas: Webpage review, Organization/Logistics/Services, Academics, Wellness, Camaraderie and DSPS connection. When this format proved suitable, it was then used on all subsequent VRC reviews.

The review of VRC at Santa Monica was conducted on January 22, 2014.

Website Review
The Santa Monica (SM) VRC webpage is easily discoverable under the “Student Services” tab of the SM home page. It is an informative and extensive site containing logistical information such as hours of operation, location and contact information, a mission statement and over 40 links to other sites and information pages relevant to veterans on campus. The page indicates that the current winter hours of operation are 8 am to 3 pm Monday - Thursday and closed Friday, Saturday and Sunday. There is an easily seen invitation for contact if the veteran is unable to come at the posted hours. VRC services are listed under a “Services and Technology” tab on this main page and as follows:

VRC Activities and Services
- Academic Counseling Monday-Thursday 9:00AM to 3:00PM
- Free counseling for individuals and couples on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 10:00AM to 3:00PM, please contact Dr. Todd Adamson at (323) 246-0413 for an appointment
- Information about Veteran entitlements, such as pensions and service connected disabilities contact John Scott at (310) 434-8219 Mon, Tues, and Thurs
- Housing services for homeless veterans contact John Scott at (310) 434-8219
- Certification of units for GI Bill payments for tuition, books, and monthly housing allowance, contact Martha Romano (310) 434-8205
- Veterans Lounge (Come get a cup of coffee, have a snack, or just hang out with veteran peers, the lounge also has a refrigerator and microwave)
- Tutoring on a limited basis, please contact the VRC for any assistance you may need with a tutor
• Emergency Relief fund for veterans enduring financial hardship, please fill out the Emergency Fund application located in the Helpful Documents section of the website

Technology
• Computer Lab consisting of 6 desktop computers with full internet access, browse for classes, complete homework or just surf the web
• 3 laptop computers available for check out at any time for a 4 day period. Please ask the receptionist in the VRC for more details (310) 434-8205
• 10 Livescribe Smartpens with notebooks to assist veterans with taking notes
• 2 assistive technology computers with scanners. Software currently installed on these computers is:
  o Kurzweil
  o IVEO Viewer
  o Dragon Naturally Speaking Software (please bring a memory stick to save your profile)
  o Zoom Text 9.1
  o Inspiration 9
  o Read Out Loud University
  o Natural Reader

Register with DSPS for assistance in learning how to use the technology and creating a plan that will best assist you in your academic endeavors.

Organization/Logistics/Services
The Santa Monica VRC is housed in room 135 on the first floor of the Liberal Arts building which is located on the far east side of campus and is home to over 700 veteran students. Hours have traditionally been from 9:00am – 3:00pm, Monday – Thursday. This winter session opening began at 8:00am with the busiest hours between 10:00am and 2:00pm. On some occasions students are met outside the regular hours. Friday hours have been tried but it was found that students do not show up and while there might be some student traffic at night, past trials have proven futile and funding has been so poor hours could not have been reliably expanded.

The VRC has approximately 900 sq. ft. of space that houses all services. While this space is greater than when the VRC was created, the VRC size has not increased since the Chancellor's Office grant was received. It is clear that additional space is needed and there is the hope for an additional 200 sq. ft. later in 2014. Available space is divided into work areas for 5 staff (four offices and 1 workstation), two computer rooms, a waiting room, lounge and a utility room. Only the small staff offices could be considered barely adequate for their purpose of private counseling sessions and administrative activity. The computer areas are cramped and seasonally warm/hot, the waiting area is small and the lounge is able to accommodate possibly 6 people at once. However, the feeling of warmth and hospitality is pervasive and attitude of...
those using the VRC is very positive and the mood upbeat and cheerful. It is clear that logistical limitations have not been allowed to disrupt the mission of the VRC.

Through the receipt of a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant, SMVRC has been able to increase staff. Staffing includes one full-time Certifying Official (classified staff); 1 half-time Receptionist (classified); 2 adjunct (18 hours per week) Counselors; 1 full-time (32 hours/week) Counselor who is the “back up” Certifying Official and Program Leader. Federal work study students and VA work study students are also employed.

By far, the most popular service is the certification of enrollment for Veterans benefits. The Certifying Official is located in the VRC and students have to pass through here if they want their benefits. Additionally, the only Counselors who can approve a veterans’ educational program are located here, however, “…it doesn’t hurt that we have coffee, and often snacks, students can avail themselves of, if they desire.”

Outreach is accomplished in several ways. The VRC educates the campus about their program by holding trainings at least twice a year. They also do outreach to the local VA and other veteran serving agencies.

**Academics/Wellness/Camaraderie**
The SMVRC also employs student workers as tutors and they are working to increase the pool of tutors in Math and English. The VRC has eight computer work stations dedicated to student use (six of these were the result of the FIPSE grant), two contain adaptive devices and/or software provided through the CO grant and six contain no adaptations or assistive devices beyond the standard windows accessibility programs. The adapted computers are housed in a separate office and the technology is still in use daily. The DSPS office works closely with the VRC and High Tech Center faculty have upgraded the technology as needed and have been involved with training students on its use.

The staff are keenly aware of transfer requirements and make a strong effort, through onsite presentations, to make information about transfer opportunities available. Santa Monica veterans have transferred to schools such as UCLA, Irvine, Cal, and Loyola Marymount. The SMVRC
Veterans Resource Center Reviews

Veterans Resource Center Reviews considers itself a forerunner of the Student Success Initiative. They have been doing education plans for students for quite a while (required by the VA) and have worked with students who are finding college challenging. They indicate they are doing their best to make sure every student has access and outreach to the community is conducted to make sure veterans know what their educational options are.

Classroom accommodations are effective for student veterans with faculty and staff in the VRC referring students to the DSPS program. Additionally, the local VA Vocational Rehabilitation staff refers students to the SM ABI Specialist and to the VRC. SM also participates in the Vet Net Ally program where faculty will have stickers on their doors indicating that they have participated in training and are sensitive to veteran’s issues.

The SMVRC addresses wellness issues by referrals to the PTSD Outpatient Services Team (POST Program) at the local VA, the Culver City Vet Center and other veteran serving programs. They consider themselves very fortunate to have US Vets Outside the Wire Program on campus. As well, the DSPS ABI Specialist is in the office every week and attends the Veterans’ Club meetings. While they feel that they lose too many students who are either not prepared for college or perhaps need to address service-connected injuries or adjust to civilian life before tackling the rigors of education, they attempt to serve all who come to the VRC.

Like some other institutions, camaraderie probably suffers most from the restrictions of space and equipment. The Veterans’ Club (a chapter of the national Student Veterans’ Association) helps to build camaraderie as does the (small) lunch room. Despite the lack of a true lounge and area for R & R, interviews with staff and student veterans indicated a close knit family who enjoy using the VRC and find the center comfortable and inviting. The VRC was busy and well-staffed.

DSPS Coordinator Interview

1. Please describe your working relationship with the VRC. What strategies do you employ to increase the use of DSPS services by veterans with disabilities?

   Over the past several years, DSPS has been working closely with the Veterans Resource Center to provide additional support to the veteran students with disabilities. Linda Sinclair and her staff are in close communication with the DSPS faculty to encourage students to utilize our services. Once we explain the benefits of the various accommodations they are eligible for, such as testing accommodations, small computer classes of 4-5 students in the HTTC, study skills strategies classes in the learning disability program, E-text and other assistive technologies such as the Smart Pen, students will usually continue to request services each semester.

   In addition, the presence of our faculty leader for the ABI program in the VRC every other week has helped students continue their involvement with DSPS.
2. In your opinion what is the largest obstacle in veterans with disabilities receiving the necessary accommodations?

Veterans with disabilities are overwhelmed with the educational system, including making decisions of what is best for them. They have difficulties accepting their disabilities and asking for help. We also found that several of them are not ready to handle a full load but must do so to receive their full benefits.

3. What are your outreach efforts to the VRC?

Sandi Burnett, the DSPS faculty leader for the ABI program, was the first member of the VRC’s Advisory Board. She has also been attending the Student Veteran Association Club meeting every other week and, on the same day, spending time seeing the students in the VRC and strengthening their connections with DSPS services. We also have a DSPS adjunct faculty member who assists students at the High Tech Training Center with assistive technology. The vocational rehabilitation unit at the VA often consults with Sandi regarding ABI patients. We had a couple of in-service trainings with Linda Sinclair, the VRC’s faculty leader, and the DSPS counseling staff to review the needs of the veterans with disabilities.

Nathalie Laille is a new DSPS Coordinator with no historical perspective on the VRC project, as a result, questions 4 and 5 were not used. Both the VRC and the DSPS office complemented each other extensively and it appears that the connection, communication and cooperation expressed translates to effective service for the veteran students at SMC.

Conclusion

Funding has been expressed as the major road block to the continued viability of this and all other VRCs. The message that Santa Monica wishes the CO to hear is...

“All California Community College campuses should have a VRC. I hear too many stories from veterans about lack of services on other college campuses. I don’t think we can do much to affect the CSUs (although they are getting some nice centers) or the UC campuses but the CCCs are the ideal places to help our veterans transition to civilian life and higher education.”

The SMVRC is a small center with a large heart. While the space is limited and cramped, the staff are dedicated, the students inspiring, and the atmosphere friendly and inviting. The services are all there and range from certification for VA benefits to coordinated wellness programs and Veterans’ Club activities. Recreational space is limited, but staff are hopeful about a future expanded location. The website is easy to access and understand and the staff are helpful and while by necessity somewhat directing they are looking to the veterans themselves to chart the future course of the SMVRC.
Fullerton College

Introduction
The VRC at Fullerton College was one of the original HTCTU pilot sites and was the third VRC reviewed, second using the established protocol. In an attempt to organize the collected information, a format similar to the Long Beach City College review was used. This format described eight areas, Webpage review, Organization/Logistics/Services, Academics/Wellness/Camaraderie and DSPS connection.

The review of VRC at Fullerton College was conducted on January 23, 2014.

Website Review
The Fullerton VRC webpage is an attractive and well laid-out page. However, it was not as easy to find as some and required a click on “Student Services,” followed by a click on “Complete List of Services,” followed by a click on “Veterans’ Services,” followed by a click on the site’s URL. It is an informative and extensive site containing logistical information such as hours of operation, location and contact information, a mission statement and dozens of links to other sites and information pages relevant to veterans on campus. The page indicates the current hours of operation:

M, W, Th: 8:00 - 5:00
 Tues: 8:00 - 7:00
 Fri: 8:00 - Noon

The VRC is closed Saturday and Sunday.

While VRC services are not listed, the home page is easy to navigate and the services offered are easily found under the various tabs.

Organization/Logistics/Services
The Fullerton VRC is centrally located on campus in room 518 on the first floor of the APPLIED ARTS/HUMANITIES building and is home to over 600 veteran students. Additionally, the VRC is located approximately 200 yards away from the DSPS office. The interviews confirmed the hours of operation are 8 am to 5 pm, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, extended hours until 7 pm on Tuesday and 8 am until noon on Friday. Closed Saturday and Sunday. Mornings are the busiest times at the VRC and the desire is to have more hours of operation. However, funding for staff is limited and prevents this expansion.
The VRC has approximately 1100 sq. ft. of space that houses all services. This space is significantly greater than when the VRC was created and has expanded to about 6 times its original size. VRC staff are very pleased regarding the space provided for the VRC as Fullerton College is a campus that is VERY short on space. Available space is divided into work areas for 3 staff (3 offices), a camaraderie room nicknamed the “Hive,” main study area and the lobby. There are two computer areas which are divided into the study area housing 4 computers, 2 printers, and an alt media station used by staff, and a large study table. Two more computers are located in the camaraderie room and these machines are available to students for personal, non-academic use. The lounge area also contains a comfortable looking couch, large screen TV, refrigerator and microwave. This area also houses the center’s lending library and additional tables for activities.

Staffing for the Fullerton VRC includes the DSPS Director, as the VRC lead, as part of his “duties as assigned,” one part-time Certifying Official (who is also the DSPS Alt Media Specialist); 1 part-time academic Counselor and up to 6 work study students per semester. It would appear that the veterans themselves are responsible for much of the day-to-day operational activity with paid staff working mainly in counseling and certification roles. All concerned indicate a desire for more counseling time, however, it seems that a maximum efficiency is employed to complete the needed requirements of the VRC.

The most popular service is the certification of enrollment for VA benefits. The Certifying Official is located in the VRC; however, she supports students far beyond the mechanics of certification. Additionally, the Counselor who can approve a veteran’s educational program is located here. A major draw to the VRC is the camaraderie room and the opportunity for students to “hang out” with their peers in a comfortable and relaxing environment.

Outreach is accomplished in several ways. Faculty and staff constantly refer vets to VRC as they are all familiar with the services for vets and that it is a positive place. Many of the current vets stay in contact with their units and an annual care package drive is held, both of which attract newly discharged vets to the campus. Popularity of the program brings vets to the VRC through word-of-mouth. The VRC offers Veteran Awareness Training using the Kognito Program to supplement this training. It hosts an annual Veteran’s Day celebration which was a week-long celebration this past year. As well as, hosting the Vision2Victory GWOT memorial wall during the same week. The VRC held two drop-zone events where it aired “High Ground” and “Restrepo” followed by discussion on the documentaries led by vets. Student Veteran Campus Forum was held where the audience had the opportunity to hear student veterans speak about their student experience – the highs and lows.
**Academics/Wellness/Camaraderie**

The Fullerton VRC also employs a Vets2Vets tutoring program that is well-publicized and well used. The VRC has 6 computer work stations dedicated to student use, four of which are study only computers. The adaptive devices and/or software provided through the CO grant are still in use daily and have been upgraded over time through a mix of donations and college general funds. Veteran work study students are trained on assistive technology and are the primary instructors for other students. Additional technology is a real need for the Fullerton VRC. Academics are a priority of the VRC and besides the tutoring program the VRC offers various workshops throughout the semester on subjects requested by vets. Topics can include Transfer, Jobs, Study Skills, Stress Management, etc. Despite the limited staff, all education plans and schedules are reviewed each semester and additional help is offered as available.

The VRC provides a great deal of training on Universal Design for Learning (UDL). As a result, instructors initiate accommodations just by adopting UDL principles. The student veteran must justify any request for accommodation that is not already provided; however, the close working relationship with the DSPS office makes this an easy occurrence once the veteran has been convinced to avail themselves of these services.

Of the few things lacking at the Fullerton VRC are on-campus wellness services. Veterans are eligible for 6 mental health sessions from campus services but this is often not enough. While the VRC is well-connected to off-campus organizations that address wellness issues, they have a great desire to increase what is available in the VRC.

Camaraderie is one of the leading draws of the VRC. The Veterans’ Club is active, the recreational space is comfortable and quite adequate and the environment inviting. The club has many activities and the companionship among the students is evident.

**DSPS Coordinator Interview**

1. Please describe your working relationship with the VRC. What strategies do you employ to increase the use of DSPS services by veterans with disabilities?

   Since I am the Director over both I guess we get along quite well. Having the same Director makes the initial step into the DSPS office an easier one. I talk to our Vets all the time about our DSPS services and accommodations. We also have AMVETS and Vietnam Veterans of America in once per month to assist our Vets with their VA
Disability Rating. We have the mobile Veterans unit on campus once per month as well.

2. In your opinion what is the largest obstacle in veterans with disabilities receiving the necessary accommodations?

The fact that they don’t feel they are disabled. They see themselves as wounded warriors and don’t want to be treated differently than their comrades.

3. What are your outreach efforts to the VRC?

See above.

4. Since 2010 have you observed any change in the perception of DSPS by the veterans/VRC?

Absolutely, because that coordinates with the time when I took over as Director of the VRC. At that time, the college had about 240 veteran students and now it has over 640. I do not have exact count of student vets who are part of DSPS as our college does not currently track data on vets. Hopefully this will change soon.

5. What message regarding veterans would you like the Chancellor’s Office to hear?

See below.

Conclusion

Once again, funding has been expressed as the major road block to the continued viability of this and all other VRCs. The message that Fullerton wishes the CO to hear is...

“Let’s start funding Vets categorically like DSPS, EOPS, etc.”

The Fullerton VRC is a well-appointed center with a close knit feeling of a family. The space, though not abundant, is more than adequate, pleasing to the eye and with a comfortable feeling. The limited staff are dedicated and very hard working to accomplish the results they have achieved. The student workers seem to have above average training and fill many needs of the VRC. The students that were interviewed were a mix of old and young, male and female and of service branches. They all appeared content with what they consider to be their VRC. A full range of services are offered and the recreational space is comfortable and inviting. The website is easy to use and understand once it is located. There seems to be solid campus-wide interest in the VRC and it is well-supported by administration, faculty and other students.
Foothill College

Introduction
The VRC at Foothill College was one of the original HTCTU pilot sites and was the fourth VRC reviewed. The review was conducted with the assistance of Teresa Ong and Carmela Xuereb. Administratively, the VRC is located under the DSPS umbrella.

The review of VRC at Foothill College was conducted on March 28, 2014.

Website Review
The Foothill College VRC webpage is discoverable under the “Student Services” tab of the Foothill College home page. The page contains limited information and links to other resources. While the site provides links to the various service branches homepages and to a handbook with application information, it does not provide local resource links, online applications or hours of operation. There is a contact phone number, email and campus address.

The following is copied from the page and indicates an available list of services:

*The center will provide veterans the essential components in assessment and screening, general academic support services, peer counseling, culturally relevant support programs, outreach, student clubs, wellness or access to training in assistive computer technology. Training will include learning styles for non-traditional learners, sensitivity training regarding veterans' issues, or civil rights training for vets.*

*Veterans can take advantage of other services, which include:*

- **Library**
- **Student Center**
- **Computer Centers**
- **Counseling Services**
- **Disability Services and Accommodations**
- **Student Activities and Organizations**
- **Financial Aid**
- **EOPS**
Organization/Logistics/Services
The Foothill College VRC is housed at the Campus Center room 2014. While hours of operation are not listed on the website, they are posted on the door and indicate that the VRC is open Monday through Friday from 7 am until 3:30 pm. On occasion the center will be open until 5 or 6 pm but this is random and not part of the regular hours. The VRC is usually at its busiest at 7 am as vets stop by for morning coffee and then again from 11 until 3. While there are no security issues preventing longer hours, a substantial lack of resources does not allow for extended hours now or in the foreseeable future.

The VRC has not expanded the space since the receipt of the original grant in 2010-11 and it is truly a stretch to say that it meets the 400 square foot minimum. This minimum is most likely reached by counting space available in the DSPS High Tech Center where some of the services are provided. The primary VRC space is divided between two small offices located about 30 feet apart. The first has outside access such that when entering into the office from the sidewalk, one enters a 12’ by 14’ room which is the office of the Certifying Official and also contains a small couch, a couple of chairs, small refrigerator, coffee pot, microwave, bookshelves and snack boxes. Every inch of wall space is used for some purpose. Also, in this room is a door to the interior where the student government and other organizations have a number of cubicles. Thirty feet down the hall is another small room (approximately 10’ by 10’) that houses two computers, a printer, a table, chairs and a bookshelf. This is the study area of the VRC. It should be noted that plans and an identified physical construction site of the new DSPS offices, which will house an expanded VRC, were shared. However, this space increase has been promised for several years and the additional space is clearly needed.

The equipment associated with the grant has not aged well. The operating systems are still XP and will not run some of the upgraded programs. The peripherals have worn out and new keyboards and mice are needed. There are no available funds for maintenance of these machines. Most of the assistive technology support for the veteran population at Foothill takes place in the DSPS High Tech Center (this is the same arrangement as the visit in 2011). The benefit of this arrangement is that these students get a high quality assistive technology experience and accommodations can be maximized. One area of technology, the Smart Pens, seems to have remained in the VRC. Thanks to the local Rotary Club (whose president is a veteran and whose role with be detailed later in this report), 40 additional Smart Pens have
been purchased and are available for check out in the VRC. This accompanies an additional 40 pens available in the DSPS High Tech Center.

Foothill College funds the position of Certifying Official (a universally loved individual) who is the only professional staff located in the VRC. Four dedicated and vocal VA work study student workers comprise the balance of the VRC workforce. Since the fall of 2013, the veteran population has increased from 450 to over 700 and the numbers continue to rise. There is no evidence of detailed service recordkeeping beyond the certification documentation and a sign-in sheet for the VRC itself.

By far, the most popular service is the certification of enrollment for Veterans benefits. Despite the small space, the privacy of the computer room is appreciated as are the seemingly always available coffee and snacks.

As the webpage indicates, the VRC is the hub of veteran’s activities on campus. Though there is not a formally organized veterans club there appears to be a loose association of students led by the VA work study students who arrange activities and projects. This group is supported very strongly by the Certifying Official and the local Rotary Club.

Academics
A primary goal, if not the primary goal, of the Foothill College VRC, is to create the ability for veteran students to attend the college. Considering that many veterans wish to save their benefits for the more expensive four year institutions, an initial hardship of navigating the first two years is created. Many find the VA stipend insufficient for living and school and those saving benefits find financial hardship even with employment. The Certifying Official has negotiated, with great difficulty, a book voucher program sponsored by the student government. $6000 in $150 vouchers are available to Foothill College veterans. As well, as a result of a yearly spaghetti dinner sponsored by the Rotary Club, $20,000 is available for tuition scholarships. The current Rotary Club president usually visits the campus twice a week to check on needs, arrange for mentoring of students, and meet with campus administration to push for, increased at best, or at least no decrease, in available resources.

All counseling services for Student Educational Plans, assessment and orientation are the purview of the general counseling services on campus. There are no specific set asides for veterans. The VRC has been able to make arrangements for informal volunteer math tutors, again with Rotary Club help.

The connection to the DSPS office and needed assistive technology, classroom accommodations and disability information is quite strong. The High Tech Center, a very nice, well-appointed and highly competent operation consistently reaches out to and serves the student veteran.
Much like Fullerton College, the DSPS/VRC connection appears to be a model of cooperation and effectiveness. The new space and location should only enhance the service capabilities.

Faculty are reported to be very supportive and open to needed accommodations and will communicate with either DSPS or the VRC if veteran-related issues arise.

**Wellness**

During the 2011 visit, Foothill College seemed a shining example of the connection between campus counseling services and the VRC. The presence of a reserve Marine officer as a post doc clinical psychologist in the campus counseling center was an ideal fit. Visiting the VRC several days a week made the connection easy for vets to be aware of needed psychological services. All things change and while the connection is still strong with the counseling center, the psychologist mentioned has moved on and the special qualities of the relationship lost. Currently local community VA clinic services are the primary source of wellness activities. The connections are there but the services (benefits, medical, psychological) are not on campus.

**Camaraderie**

The lack of sufficient dedicated space as well as (possibly) an organized veteran’s organization hinder the camaraderie on campus. This is not to say that it does not exist but it does have severe limitations. With essentially no space to meet, groups of larger than 6 or 7 would be completely uncomfortable in the VRC. As a result, rather than spontaneous informal gatherings, more planned activities constitute the major aspects of Foothill College camaraderie. The events, dinners and celebrations will be combined with more day-to-day interaction once the additional space is available. Foothill College VRC struggles and yet seems appreciative of the limited resources they have.

**DSPS Coordinator Interview**

1. Please describe your working relationship with the VRC. What strategies do you employ to increase the use of DSPS services by veterans with disabilities?

Currently we have a DRC Counselor who has open hours at the VRC approximately 4 hours a week. These are "drop in" appointments. Vets who need more time can also schedule a time to see her for an hour during the week. The DRC High Tech Center Lab Coordinator also provides training and workshops for veterans who want to learn to use assistive technology. We have a separate set of Smart Pens for vets to borrow and they do not have to have documentation to attend workshops or use the Smart Pens. There is also a scholarship, book vouchers and emergency fund for students with physical disabilities and this has been popular with our veterans who fall into that category. Mostly we have been able to get our vets to see DRC in a positive light- a place to get extra help and even perks.
2. In your opinion what is the largest obstacle in veterans with disabilities receiving the necessary accommodations?

   Perception that DRC will talk to the VA and mess with their benefits or status/ Stigma of disability

3. What are your outreach efforts to the VRC?

   We don't have any specific outreach activities. Most of the time though DRC and VRC combine their efforts to inform the campus community about issues of disability and disability etiquette or veteran- friendly etiquette (although we know they're not necessarily the same thing). Our VRC Coordinator frequently gets vets to come over here. We also "cross hire" them to help us with shuttling people with disabilities around campus. As supervisor of both DRC and VRC, I make an effort to hang out in the VRC as much as possible and attend all their events. I would not call it outreach- more like cross pollination.

4. Since 2010 have you observed any change in the perception of DSPS by the veterans/VRC?

   Yes, especially with the use of Smart Pens, assistive technology and scholarships. Again, I think vets see DRC as a place where they can get assistance and "cool gadgets.”

5. What message regarding veterans would you like the Chancellor’s Office to hear?

   a. Funding a position is wayyy better than just providing the technology. Our VRC Specialist is great, but her responsibilities go beyond just certification. Running a program and ensuring VA certification are 2 separate jobs. To have a functioning VRC you need both.
   b. I hope the Chancellor’s Office can find some way to connect academia to the workplace. Our vets want to work in Apple, Google, Facebook- all of which are connections that are hard to get. If there is some way that they can help us with that, it would be great.
   c. I know the focus is on post 9/11 veterans. Often non-combat, pre 9/11 vets are also in need of some help. We work with a population at the Menlo Park VA. Their age range is between 45 and 60. These are folks who have lost their jobs in the recession and are struggling to find jobs AND keep a family AND learn a new trade. Different generation, different problems- somehow they feel like they’re left out.
Conclusion

Foothill College seems a model program from the DSPS/VRC perspective. This is probably only natural considering the DSPS umbrella under which the VRC is located. However, little in this regard has changed since the 2011 visit. The ties remain strong and the DSPS support remains constant. Clearly space is insufficient for many services beyond certification and some computer usage to be given from the VRC itself. More staff, as well as space, is needed to expand the scope of services beyond those described. As with all other programs visited, categorical funding is a primary request from VRC staff.

As is generally seen in life, happiness is not always proportional to the things one possesses. To say the Foothill College VRC is happy with their circumstances, their resources or their ability to provide services is a stretch, but to say they are happy with themselves, are dedicated to each other and greatly appreciate their Certifying Official is not. They continue to do the best they can and do provide real and tangible service to over 700 veterans on campus. They have wonderful support from the local Rotary Club which makes a tremendous difference in the life of the students, a strong connection to the DSPS office and a hardworking and dedicated staff that makes the best of their many limitations.

Veterans Resource Center Update, August 2014

- The remodeling of Building 5400 is near conclusion. This Fall 2014, we will see the opening of the Student Resource Center which will house the following Resource Centers:
  - Disability Resource Center
  - Veterans Resource Center
  - Workforce Center
  - Family Engagement Institute.
- The VRC space will house 2 private offices, cubicle space for 2 student workers, sink and refrigerator space and lounge area for veteran students. The square footage is approximately 800 square feet.
- The VRC will also share a multi media lab and study space with DRC where student veterans may check out laptops daily for use. This was made possible by donations from the Los Altos Town Crier and the Rotary Club of Los Altos.
- Beginning this Fall, we will have a part-time volunteer and events coordinator. This position is funded entirely by the Rotary Club of Los Altos.
- The official opening celebration of the VRC, which will also serve as a fund raiser, is on October 30th 2014. Journalist, Aaron Glantz from the Center for Investigative Reporting is our guest of honor. President Judy Miner will preside over the celebrations.
City College of San Francisco

Introduction
The VRC at City College of San Francisco (CCSF) was one of the original HTCTU pilot sites and was the fifth VRC reviewed. The review was conducted with the assistance of Matais Pouncil, Interim Associate Dean, Financial Aid Services and Student Success Programs and Jose Goussen, Certifying Official. Administratively the VRC is located under the Financial Aid umbrella.

The review of VRC at CCSF was conducted on March 28, 2014.

Website Review
The City College of San Francisco VRC webpage is easily discoverable under the student services tab of the CCSF home page. It is an informative and extensive site containing logistical information such as hours of operation, location and contact information, frequently asked questions, descriptions of application and assessment processes, descriptions of various VA programs, and numerous contact links to other sites and information pages relevant to veterans on campus. The page indicates that the current hours of operation are 8 am to 5 pm Monday - Thursday and 8 am to 2:30 Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. There is a note that these hours are subject to change. There are no specific services listed on the web page. There is a separate link on the home page to the Veterans Club which has its own site.

Organization/Logistics/Services
The City College of San Francisco VRC is centrally located on campus in room 333 Cloud Hall. Hours listed on the website appear to differ from the hours stated in the interview. While the VRC opens each day at 8 am it is not uncommon for it to remain open until 9 pm and most often at least until 7 pm. The closing hours appear to be flexible in relation to the needs of the student veterans. This appears possible mainly due to location, as classes are held in the same building until 10 pm, the campus police are also located in the building and the VA student workers are willing to staff these extended hours. (VRC is closed on weekends.) The traffic in the VRC is reported as fairly constant throughout the open hours. It would appear to be unrealistic to anticipate longer hours in the future and it seems that the VRC staff are satisfied with the availability of their service hours.

The VRC has approximately 1700 sq. ft. of space that houses all services. The space is divided into two separate areas with separate entrances, yet located next to each other. The smallest space is approximately 800 sq. ft. and contains the veterans lounge, study areas and student technology. The second area is administrative (900 sq. ft.) which houses the Certifying Official,
Jose Goussen, the Associate Dean, Matais Pouncil, onsite Veterans Administration Counselors, full-time faculty Counselors and support staff. CCSF is quite happy with the space available ad does not see an immediate need for additional space.

CCSF funds the Certifying Official, two full-time counseling staff, three part-time Counselors and two classified staff. In addition, the 17 VA student workers are employed with 9 workers on the administrative side and 8 dedicated to the VRC itself. There is no evidence of detailed service recordkeeping beyond the certification documentation and a sign-in sheet for the VRC itself.

By far, the most popular service is the certification of enrollment for Veterans benefits. The Certifying Official is located next door to the VRC and students have to pass through here if they want their benefits. If additional resources were to become available, CCSF desires to add an additional Certifying Official to assist in serving the over 600 student veterans that are currently receiving benefits and additional technology (computers, printers, scanners). While readily available, staff indicate that counseling may be the least used of the VRC services.

Leadership at the VRC seems divided between the Veterans Club (Veterans Alliance) and the VA work study staff who operate the VRC student area. While there is considerable crossover among these two groups, there is independent activity. For example, the VA student workers have taken responsibility to organize a lecture series at the VRC while the Vets Club organizes recreational and community activities.

Academics
Academic success appears to be a primary goal of the CCSF VRC. The two dedicated academic Counselors along with the 3 part-time Counselors are responsible for student orientations, development and implementation of the educational plans and ensuring that the academic goals of the student veterans are achieved.

The computers received from the CO grant have long since outlived their viability and are no longer usable. The software associated with these machines has either been discarded with the old hardware or, if it was transferred to the newer machines, its existence and use is unknown to the present administration of the VRC. Similarly, the Smart Pens are no longer in use and the initial training that was given to use the assistive technology has not been renewed, passed on or has been forgotten. This is not unanticipated as the current staff is new to the VRC since the original grant was received. While the current staff is open to a visit from HTCTU to locate or re-install the assistive technology and are open to additional training in its use, they do see disability and the assistive technology as the purview of DSPS, somewhat separate and apart from their daily experience.

Despite the lack of the assistive technology there are numerous computer workstations, a large study area, printers and peer-to-peer informal tutoring available in the VRC.
Faculty are reported as being very supportive and open to needed accommodations and will communicate with either DSPS or the VRC, if veteran-related issues arise, prior to taking any adverse actions.

The VRC webpage, common area tables, positive press, and word-of-mouth are the primary means of outreach and veterans’ information on campus.

**Wellness**

CCSF relies primarily on their very close connection to the Veterans Administration Outreach Program. The following is a description of that program that comes from the CCSF Veterans Webpage.

*The SFVA Medical Center Veterans Outreach Program (VOP)*

Initiated in August 2010 with the support of leadership at the San Francisco VA Medical Center, the Veterans Outreach Program (VOP), part of the VA’s national Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership or VITAL program, has been recognized for providing comprehensive services to student Veterans at City College of San Francisco. These services include enrollment in SFVA health care, evidence-based psychotherapy, social work services, medication management, smoking cessation, and referrals for additional services not available on campus. The VOP has coordinated and provided a series of lectures on relevant topics for student Veterans, and has conducted outreach to students from other colleges and universities in the San Francisco Bay Area. The program aims to ease the experience of asking for and receiving help from the VA, and to support Veterans’ well-being in an academic environment.

The VOP has space in the VRC and regular visits are received from a licensed Psychologist, 2 full-time and 3 part-time Counselors. This connection takes care of most of the mental health needs of the CCSF student veterans.

The DSPS connection seems less formal (than other college programs) especially since the DSPS staff stationed at the VRC has been discontinued. Both DSPS and the VRC speak well of each other, however, the typical struggle for the student veteran to associate with disability seems common at CCSF. While the classroom accommodation needs of these students are being met, the initial connection might benefit from a more formalized relationship, assistive technology being useful in the VRC and a more apparent connection of DSPS and the VOP.
Camaraderie
The VRC lounge area, a highlight and major attraction to the VRC is well-equipped with a large screen TV, game systems, DVD, kitchen, coffee and snacks. The VRC’s appealing features are due to a large list of community partners and the bequest of a WWII veteran.

An active veterans club and interested and motivated VA student workers have created an atmosphere of comfort, trust and acceptance in the CCSF VRC. Community and recreational activities and informational lectures, combined with a comfortable and well-equipped lounge, have made the VRC the place to be on campus for student veterans. Observation of the users of the VRC confirmed that ease of use and acceptance of both male and female student veterans.

DSPS Coordinator Interview
1. Please describe your working relationship with the VRC. What strategies do you employ to increase the use of DSPS services by veterans with disabilities?

DSPS has stationed Counselors at the VRC when we have had sufficient counseling coverage in the DSPS office. Due to cuts we have not been able to continue this important outreach. Although use of services at the VRC was limited, when they were used, it proved to be an important way to link students to services available through DSPS.

2. In your opinion what is the largest obstacle in veterans with disabilities receiving the necessary accommodations?

The largest obstacle in veterans with disabilities receiving necessary accommodations is the reluctance of veterans to admit to a) having a disability and/or b) admitting to needing accommodations/assistance. Societal stigma and prejudice related to disability, real and perceived, often internalized, prevent veterans from identifying as a person with disability.

It is often extremely difficult to provide appropriate accommodations without appropriate documentation. DSPS has seen veterans who are eligible for services based on psychological disability, mild traumatic brain injury, and physical disabilities who also have had pre-existing disabilities, such as significant learning disabilities or other mental health issues. Some veterans have learning disabilities that are severe. Veterans who have not done well in school prior to college are arriving at the college ill-prepared. These veteran-students are required to enroll full-time in order to receive veteran educational benefits. Some students might be eligible for additional accommodations, such as alternate format (audio books, Kurzweil) if comprehensive psychological/educational evaluations were readily available to these veterans. The community colleges cannot assess for learning disability eligibility.
when other disabilities can co-exist. Evaluation by a licensed psychologist or neuropsychologist could best determine eligibility for these accommodations. Referrals and requests for these evaluations through the VA have not been fruitful. A full-time course load is also ill-advised for many students who are struggling with symptomatic PTSD. A reduced course load is one of the strategies often recommended for students with psychological disabilities during periods of instability.

Veteran-students sometimes request “accommodations” that substantially change the course requirements. Open-book tests are not an accommodation for a disability in a college course. Veteran-students with short term memory loss (particularly students with ABI, TBI, mild TBI) sometimes request open-book tests or use of notes for exams.

3. What are your outreach efforts to the VRC?

DSPS has had a presence at many outreach events offered by the VRC and DSPS has participated in forums for veterans that address returning to college.

4. Since 2010 have you observed any change in the perception of DSPS by the veterans/VRC?

Since 2010 the changes in perception of DSPS by the veterans and VRC has largely come through experience and “word-of-mouth” positive experience by other veterans who have utilized DSPS services.

5. What message regarding veterans would you like the Chancellor’s Office to hear?

DSPS would like the Chancellor’s Office to hear that despite on-campus VRCs the psycho-social needs of veterans returning from active duty, suffering from physical and/or psychological trauma, those with substance abuse issues, and co-occurring mental health issues are often not being met…. making success in educational environments challenging and difficult at best. Sometimes college provides a structure that is beneficial to veterans who are homeless, struggling financially. Sometimes the stress of academic class work and maintaining the requirements of VA educational benefit eligibility is a “straw that breaks the camel’s back.” For veteran-students who may have had a history of special education services prior to service in the military, or who had undiagnosed learning disabilities, who have hidden their academic challenges from the military, and now are returning to school with additional disabilities have a long and difficult road to achieving educational goals.

Conclusion

Unlike some other VRCs, the CCSF staff feel confident in an ongoing and continual high level of support from the college administration. They see no circumstance that endangers the viability and sustainability of their VRC. However, staff expressed the need for categorical funding to ensure that VRCs are consistent and available throughout the California Community College system and to continue to keep up-to-date with the latest in technology and information.
CCSF seems a model program from the student veterans/VA viewpoint. Strong connections with the VOP and with the community show a successful and useful experience for student veterans. It would appear that both the staff and the students are dedicated and motivated to maintain this high level of service and camaraderie. It also appears that much of the original grant model had been lost especially in the area of assistive technology. The DSPS connection, while viable, could be stronger, but was similar to other colleges where the DSPS program was not the grant recipient.

The VRC is open to follow-up and a revisiting from HTCTU, however, closer philosophical ties would be helpful between the VRC and DSPS prior to any re-training.
**Merced College**

**Introduction**

The VRC at Merced College was one of the original HTCTU pilot sites and was the sixth VRC reviewed. The review was conducted with the assistance of Terina Davis, Certifying Official; Sherry Elms, Associate Registrar; and Shannon Gragg, DSPS Program Assistant. Administratively the VRC is located under the Admissions and Records umbrella.

The review of VRC at Merced College was conducted on March 28, 2014.

**Website Review**

The Merced VRC webpage is easily discoverable under the “Services for Students” tab of the Merced College home page. The page is simply constructed but contains considerable information and links to local veteran resources. The site provides information such as VRC hours, Veterans Counselor hours, a list of available services, links to DSPS and other local resources. There is a contact phone number, email and campus address with a map and locator.

The following is copied from the page and indicates an available list of services:

Merced College Veterans Resource Center
located in the Merced College Student Union Building

**OFFICE: HOURS:**

**Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday** 8:00am-5:00pm

**Wednesday** 8:00am-7:00pm

**VETERANS COUNSELOR AVAILABLE:**

**Tuesday**

**Wednesday** 9:00am-2:30pm

**Thursday** 11:00pm-1:30pm & 5:00pm-7:00pm

8:30am-3:00pm

**Multiple Services will be offered in ONE location:**

Veterans Certifying Official

Veterans Counselors
Welcome Veteran Students:

Merced College welcomes veterans wishing to further their education and encourages them to seek assistance through the Merced College Veterans Resource Center located in the Student Union Building. Staff are available to provide the paperwork and information necessary to establish eligibility. Veterans are also supplied with information about other campus resources and local agencies’ services. Department of Veterans Affairs encourages all new and returning veterans to contact them directly at [https://gibill.va.gov/](https://gibill.va.gov/) or (888) 442-4551 for questions about veteran’s benefits and payments.

Academic counselors specializing in Veterans services are available to provide educational and career planning. Veterans Counseling is provided in the Veterans Resource Center located in the Student Union Building, Tuesday thru Thursday. General counseling services are provided on the second floor of the Lesher Student Services Center, next to Admissions. Class registration information can be found in the “Schedule of Classes” booklet printed each semester or on the Merced College website [http://www.mccd.edu/academics/resources/schedule.html](http://www.mccd.edu/academics/resources/schedule.html).

Veterans with disabilities can receive assistance from the College’s Disabled Student Services program. Call 209-384-6155 or visit the Disabled Student Services website at [http://www.mccd.edu/dss/](http://www.mccd.edu/dss/) for information about available services.

Personal Counseling is available through the Merced College Student Health Services Office. Call 209-384-6045 or visit our Student Health website at [http://www.mccd.edu/studenthealth](http://www.mccd.edu/studenthealth) for information about personal counseling services.

Additional information may be obtained by calling the Veterans Certifying Official at 209-384-6113.

Organization/Logistics/Services
The Merced VRC is conveniently located in the Student Union Building and is easily accessible (the VRC is actually listed on the maps posted around campus). The posted hours of operation are the same as listed on the website, the VRC is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 am until 5:00 pm and on Wednesday from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm. The VRC is usually at its busiest from opening to about 1:00 pm. While there are no security issues preventing longer hours, a
substantial lack of resources does not allow for extended hours now or in the foreseeable future.

The VRC has not expanded the space since the receipt of the original grant in 2010-11 and it currently contains approximately 500 sq. ft. that is divided into a main area and two Counselor offices. The main area (approximately 320 sq. ft.) has a reception desk, Certifying Official work space, student veteran computer area, waiting area, supply closet, snack area and veterans information. Every inch of wall space is used for some purpose. There is a plan to move to larger and better space in the Student Services building. The new area would almost double the available space and include a larger lounge and study area. While the staff feel the work gets done, the additional space would greatly enhance the camaraderie experience.

As with other VRCs, the equipment associated with the grant has not aged well. The operating systems are still XP and will not run some of the upgraded programs. One of the computers has stopped functioning altogether and has been replaced by a surplus computer from Admissions and Records. The assistive technology software has not been updated for several years. Information regarding the Smart Pens was sketchy and neither the VRC nor DSPS knows where they are. There has been minimal use of the other assistive technology in the VRC and most technology assistance is handled by DSPS in their High Tech Center.

The Certifying Official, a ½ FTE Academic Counselor (these duties are divided between 3 different Counselors), a transcript evaluator and four dedicated VA work study student workers comprise the balance of the VRC workforce. There are approximately 300 student veterans who are currently certified and using benefits. It is estimated that there are many others who use the VRC but are currently not using the educational assistance. Data collection appears to be possible but is not being done at present. The student veterans are coded and some service data could be compiled if the VRC chose to do so. Currently, only certification data and a sign-in sheet are in regular use.

By far, the most popular service is the certification of enrollment for Veterans benefits.

Academics
Orientation and assessment services are handled as with all incoming students, however, all counseling services for Student Educational Plans are performed in the VRC. Academic counseling seems readily available in the VRC and hours are posted both on the web page and in the VRC itself.

Computer space is limited to two small computer stations (one of which is still functioning grant equipment). There is no additional space available for study for either individuals or groups.
The VRC has been able to make arrangements for informal volunteer tutors in many different subject areas.

Faculty, especially those with military experience, are reported as being very supportive and open to needed accommodations. It is noted that additional training or in-service for faculty would be very welcome by the college.

Wellness
Wellness services are very limited on campus. A VA Counselor comes to campus once a week and is available to students as is an on-campus Counselor. However, there is no crossover allowed and if the veteran is seeing the VA Counselor then they cannot use the on-campus services. The local VA clinic runs a weekly support group and information about this service is available in the VRC, however, there is no record of actual usage.

The most promising on-campus wellness service is a yoga class that is delivered by a student veteran. This video clip explains this opportunity in more detail (click here).

Merced is currently on the wait list for a “Welcome Home” presentation.

Camaraderie
The lack of sufficient dedicated space makes camaraderie within the VRC more than difficult. However, an active veterans club (information shown below) demonstrates that the veterans of Merced College do not need a specific location to create a high level of interaction and support.

About The Military Veterans of Merced College
The Military Veterans of Merced College Club is an ASMC organization comprised primarily of military veterans who are currently using their GI Bill benefits to pursue their education. In addition, we also have members who are no longer eligible to use their educational benefits and we welcome non-veteran students that support veteran causes. The club was formed in 2010 to provide a social forum where our student vets share information and resources regarding a variety of issues they face as they transition from military life to academia.

Website: [https://mc.ams.mccd.edu/clubs/veterans_club/default.aspx](https://mc.ams.mccd.edu/clubs/veterans_club/default.aspx)
DSPS Coordinator Interview
A representative of DSPS was present in the interview and indicated a strong level of cooperation between the VRC and DSPS. Veterans are encouraged to make use of DSPS services and referrals work in both directions. There does not appear to be any co-location of staff at this time (no space available), however it appears that DSPS services are used, especially the assistive technology services that seem to have been lost from the VRC.

The difficulty of veterans accepting the disability classification still exists and the potential of a label must always be approached with discretion. The Certifying Official (a veteran herself) has personal experience in the use of DSPS services and is a strong advocate for the DSPS connection. She has been quite successful in making this connection.

Conclusion
The Merced VRC feels welcomed and supported by campus administration and faculty. They are visited on a regular basis by top administration officials and feel that the anticipated space will happen in the near future. Despite the small facility and lack of space for both study and lounge areas, the energy and attitude of staff and participants is strong and encouraging. The VRC is well-publicized on campus and in the community and is widely known and used despite a lack of resources. There have been a number of opportunities to make the VRC known to the community, such as fairs and other events. The Veterans Club is active and in cooperation with community organizations has raised funds for activities and scholarships.

A strong message, once again, is categorical funding for VRCs. More specifically, Merced will soon have a technology crisis. The equipment is outdated, and rapidly declining in usefulness. Just getting the computers to turn on is an accomplishment.

Once again, a small, underfunded VRC with limited space and resources is doing the best it can to serve a substantial population. Mostly succeeding but in need of help.
Cuesta College

Introduction
The VRC at Cuesta was one of the original HTCTU pilot sites and was the seventh VRC reviewed. The review was conducted with the assistance of Karen Andrews, Certifying Official. The VRC is located under the Admissions and Records umbrella.

The review of VRC at Cuesta was conducted on April 15th, 2014.

Website Review
The Cuesta VRC webpage is discoverable under the “Current and Future” student tab of the Cuesta College home page. Once there, a click on Veterans Services in the “Academics” column and a specific veteran’s services page will open. The page is well-organized and contains considerable information and links to local and national veteran resources. The site provides information such as VRC hours, a list of available services, contact name and phone number, email and campus address.

The following is copied from the page and indicates a list of available services:

Veterans Resource Center (VRC)

The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) is the heart of the college's veteran community and serves as a gathering place for student veterans to connect and socialize. Veterans from all branches of service are welcome and can expect to receive professional, courteous, and compassionate support as they pursue their educational and vocational goals at Cuesta College.

The VRC provides the following services in a one-stop location on the San Luis Obispo Campus, Room 3174.

Certifying Officials (VA and Educational)

Veterans Orientation

Priority Registration

Veterans Club and Support

Computer lab and printers

Free Semester Parking Permits
Organization/Logistics/Services
The Cuesta VRC is conveniently located in the Student Services Building, room 3174. This is the center of campus and is easily found and accessible. This new location is more central than the previous facility. The posted hours of operation are the same as listed on the website, the VRC is open Monday through Thursday from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm. While officially closed on Friday, the VRC is often open and useable for study and the computer lab whenever the Certifying Official is present (usually all day Friday). The VRC is at its busiest from 10:00 am until 1:00 pm. While there are no security issues preventing longer hours, a lack of staffing resources does not allow for additional hours.

The Cuesta VRC is the one center visited that has had a considerable reduction in space since the receipt of the 2010-11 grant. Due to the discovery of black mold, the building housing the VRC was razed in 2013 and the operation was moved to the new space in the Student Services building. The new space, approximately 540 sq. ft. is about half the size of the original VRC. To complicate matters, the space was previously divided into two rooms of almost equal size. Upon entry from the hall is a room of 280 sq. ft. that houses the computer area, lounge, refrigerator and microwave, and the work/study reception area. Off this main room is another room of 260 sq. ft. that is the Certifying Official’s office. No one thinks this is ideal and requests to reconfigure the space have been denied. In order to make the VRC more student friendly, Karen Andrews (Certifying Official) allows students to use the conference table in her office as a study area whenever there is no need for a private interview. While this is unwieldy at times it is making the best of a bad situation. The rooms themselves are nicely appointed and are newly painted and decorated, however, the space is not particularly functional as configured.

As with other VRCs, the equipment associated with the grant has not aged well. The operating systems are still XP and will not run some of the upgraded programs. Again, as at other VRCs, one of the computers has stopped functioning altogether. However, there are five working computers, two scanners, a printer and fax machine. The college has provided the additional equipment and application to the Cuesta Foundation has been made for new equipment. The assistive technology (AT) software has been updated and is being used by the students. The DSPS office maintains the AT, while the college maintains and repairs the computer hardware. While the AT is used in the VRC, any assessment and instruction takes place in the DSPS High Tech Center. The Smart Pens also are located in the DSPS High Tech Center and instruction and checkout are handled there.
Therefore, only veterans associated with DSPS would have the skills to use the AT in the VRC itself. Veterans with disabilities are highly encouraged to use DSPS services. The Certifying Official is especially encouraging, having used DSPS services herself. It would appear that the relationship between DSPS and the VRC is a successful one and many veterans with disabilities take advantage of the various services. As with all reviewed VRCs that are not under a DSPS umbrella, there is little specific knowledge of the types of disabilities that students have who are using AT services.

The Certifying Official, and one VA work study student worker comprise the VRC workforce. There are approximately 300 student veterans at Cuesta, with approximately 250 currently certified and using benefits. Data collection appears to be possible but is not being done at the present. The student veterans are coded and some service data could be compiled if they choose to do so. Currently only certification data and a sign-in sheet are in regular use.

The most popular service is the certification of enrollment for Veterans benefits.

**Academics**

Academic counseling services occur in the general counseling center, however, there are two dedicated Veterans Counselors who create the Student Educational Plans. Orientation and assessments also take place in the counseling center, however, there is an additional orientation that happens in the VRC. At this session the veteran is given additional educational plan information. While not an official counseling activity, this additional orientation allows the Certifying Official to keep track of the student veteran and to assist with information to keep them on an appropriate educational track.

Despite a lack of space the computer area is well used and the Karen’s office becomes the quiet study area of choice. Study groups often convene on Fridays (when VRC is closed) and take advantage of the unofficial hours of operation.

Formal tutoring is available as a general college service but it is not located in the VRC. Informal peer-to-peer tutoring is encouraged but is not coordinated and does take place in the VRC on occasion.

For the most part, academic accommodations for veterans proceed without problems. Cuesta has a rather unique faculty support for the VRC. Several years ago, as the result of a student veteran calling a faculty member from Iraq to inform them that they would be late to enroll in the coming semester and then subsequently dying days before returning from the battlefield,
the instructor personally pledged a sizable yearly contribution (which has increased by participation of other faculty, staff and students) to create free parking passes for veterans. This program is administered from the VRC and is a very popular and shows a broad base of support from the Cuesta campus community.

Wellness
There are no on-site (in VRC) counseling or psychological services as there is no private space to house such services. However, there are viable counseling services available through the college and these are well-advertised to the VRC. As well, there is a strong relationship between the local Veterans Service Office and VA Clinic and the VRC. Presentations are often made in the VRC regarding these VA services though, due to space considerations, no VA services actually take place on campus.

Some veterans with disabilities appear to have no issues in using the DSPS services and are highly encouraged and outwardly welcomed to do so. As always, there remains a percentage of veterans for whom asking for help or acknowledging a disability is extremely difficult. Space, again, precludes DSPS services in the VRC.

Camaraderie
Space is an issue at the Cuesta VRC. A comfortable couch, refrigerator, microwave, affordable drinks and snacks and a welcoming staff certainly encourage and build the camaraderie of the VRC, however, the available space just does not permit even moderate numbers to meet and talk in much comfort. An active veterans club (no web page available) is the outlet for most substantial gatherings of student veterans. The veterans club is the most affluent club on campus because of the various fundraisers, is quite active in the community and participates in and contributes to many service projects. The veterans club also coordinates many social activities, mostly off-campus.

DSPS Coordinator Interview
Several attempts to have the DSPS office respond to the interview questions were unsuccessful.

However, past and present connections between the VRC and DSPS seem to be strong. DSPS staff participate in monthly meetings with the VRC to identify issues and develop better service strategies.

Conclusion
Among those who miss Patrick Schwab, former DSPS Dean, the Veterans Resource Center may unknowingly miss him the most. With the 2013 black mold incident, the VRC space was reduced by half upon relocation to the student services building. There are those who think that that move would have resulted in more usable space had Patrick been around to weigh in on the situation. Though having no administrative authority over the VRC, his support and interest in services to veterans may have resulted in a more favorable outcome.
Generally supported by administration there appears to be no long term viability issues and recent Cuesta Foundation grant applications are encouraging for additional computer equipment. Lack of staffing reduces the hours that the VRC is formally open yet simple concern on the part of the Certifying Official increase the usable hours by almost 20% with the unofficial Friday availability. While small to begin with, the configuration of the 540 sq. ft. is less than optimal and reduces the VRC’s ability to meet some of the academic, wellness and camaraderie needs.

A strong message, just by observation, is the need for categorical funding for VRCs. It was difficult to gauge the energy of the VRC. While both Karen and Randy (VA student worker) were clearly excited about the VRC, the absence of many other students made it difficult to get a “vibe” from the room. However, the tour given by Randy and Karen’s clear dedication lead one to believe, that despite a lack of space and in-house services, the VRC is welcoming to veterans, much used and a catalyst for veteran’s interaction at Cuesta College.
**Pasadena City College**

**Introduction**
The VRC at Pasadena City College (PCC) was one of the original HTCTU pilot sites and was the eighth VRC reviewed. The review was conducted with the assistance of Patricia D’Orange-Martin.

Administratively, the VRC is located under the Admissions and Records umbrella.

The review of VRC at Pasadena was conducted on May 16, 2014.

**Website Review**
The only negative thing to say regarding Veterans Services at Pasadena City College is that their webpage is hard to find. Going the usual student services route produced no reference to the VRC or veterans services in general. After trying several tabs to no avail, a search of the site finally directed to the appropriate page:

*http://www.pasadena.edu/veterans/*

The page contains a great deal of information including contacts and location, lists of services for both the VRC and the Veterans Services Office (VSO), many links to specific and related activities and a warm welcoming message. The only thing the site does not display are the hours of operation.

The following is copied from the page and indicates a list of available services:

*Veterans Resource Center*

**Welcome to PCC Veterans Services**

*Patricia D’Orange-Martin, Coordinator, Veterans Resource Center*

Room: L113  
Telephone: 626-585-7226  
Email: pddorange-martin@pasadena.edu

*Terry Powell*  
Admissions, Veteran Certifying Officer  
Telephone: 626-585-7294  
Email: tdpowell@pasadena.edu

*Welcome to the PCC Veterans Website*
Pasadena City College strives to help all student Veterans and Military attend college and succeed, whether or not you are using your GI Bill benefits. Veteran’s services are provided in the following PCC areas:

**Admissions and Records - GI Bill Certifying Official**
Benefit certification for veteran’s educational benefits

**Counseling - Educational Plan, Academic Counseling and Career Counseling**
Assistance in choosing a qualifying program and selecting courses
Career and employment services
Support and oversight for the Veteran's Resource Center and the PCC Veterans’ Club

**Special Services**
Health Services
Disabled Students Programs and Services
Psychological Services
Referral assistance for off-campus support concerning health care and transition

Welcome from the PCC Veterans' Club and Resource Center

We strongly encourage all veterans to join PCC Veterans' Club, our student organization. Statistics show that students who assimilate to campus life by developing associations with like-minded students or faculty members have a higher degree of success. The PCC Veterans’ Resource Center offers:

Help navigating the college
Benefits information workshops and appointments
Referrals
Ten computer study stations, some with assistive technologies software
Women veterans activities and programs
Free tutoring
An R & R station
Free legal services by Intercity Law Offices
Mentoring program
Study groups
Advocacy

Veterans Job announcements

Join us anytime in the Veterans' Resource Center in Building W. Room 108. It is also a great place to do homework!

Veterans Services Office Links

Veterans Services Office Home

New Students

Continuing Students

Veterans' Learning Collaborative

Education Benefits

Benefits Videos

Priority Registration

Payment Info

Health Services

Financial Aid for Veterans

CAL VET Fee Waiver

Resources and Tools

News & Events

Related Links

Steps to Register

Important Dates

Student Services

Learning Assistance Center

Scholarships

Of note is the specific mention of DSPS services.

Organization/Logistics/Services

The Pasadena VRC is housed under the Office of Admissions and Records and while the website might give the impression that the VRC and the VSO are collocated, they are, in fact, not. This,
however, is soon to change. The opportunity to receive expanded space this year was optioned for inclusion in what will be called a “Veterans Village,” that is currently under construction. The new facility will house all veterans’ services and double the current VRC space to 1700 sq. ft.

Currently, one Certifying Official serves approximately 385 students receiving benefits and over 700 total veterans are using the wide variety of available services. At the time of the visit, but soon to change, the Certifying Official worked out of the VSO and not the VRC. This creates somewhat of an advertising problem for the VRC, but signage in the VSO and the Counseling Center, as well as activities around campus, combine to make the veteran aware of the VRC and its opportunities. PCC has provided a budget for staffing at the VRC which includes one full-time Coordinator/Counselor, one Veterans Specialist functioning as community benefits case manager, one adjunct academic Counselor and three VA work study students. What is currently needed is a classified clerical support staff. There are many additional service staff who are not college employees but are coordinated by the VRC who spend considerable time in the VRC. These will be discussed under the academic and wellness heading below.

The Pasadena VRC is centrally located on campus and is easily accessible. The hours of operation are Monday to Thursday 9 am to 6 pm and Friday 9 am to 4 pm. Noon is the busiest time at the VRC. It is VRC policy that college staff should be present at all times. While this is not a hard and fast rule, it is the exception for VA work study students to be the solely in charge of the VRC. It is the desire of the VRC to have extended evening hours and while there are no security issues preventing longer hours, a lack of staffing resources does not allow for extended hours at present.

Community support for the PCC VRC has been outstanding. Supplies for the VRC, supplies for students, bus passes, food and gas cards all have been donated by a variety of benefactors. As well, the Veterans Specialist has secured everything from car repair to rent assistance from various community and government sources.

Since the grant was initiated, the Pasadena VRC has remained the same size. Currently the lounge, study area, 10 computer stations, and printer and other peripheral equipment are in one room of approximately 850 sq. ft. As well, there are two 100 sq. ft. offices for the Coordinator/Counselor and Veterans Specialist. The lounge area has the usual refrigerator and microwave but the large screen TV is missing. There was originally a large screen TV but this was removed as a space issue and noise distraction. It is being considered that it will not be replaced when the larger space is available as it tends to distract from a more social camaraderie. This feeling was also held by other VRCs that have been reviewed.
Regarding the grant equipment: The Smart Pens are functioning and still in use though additional training would be helpful. The training is student-driven and instructions and best practice may or may not always be the best. While the two computers are still operational, the software was essentially abandoned after the first year. This was primarily the result of poor integration with the college computer system and an inability to keep trained and knowledgeable staff up-to-date on the use of the various programs. Once the individuals originally trained to use the AT in the VRC left the program, the skills were lost. Those for whom the AT would be of benefit are now directed to the DSPS High Tech Center and receive assistance and instruction there. With the advent of the new space will come new computers and the DSPS staff have indicated that they will equip and train the VRC at that time. It appears that those who need AT have access to it, but not in the VRC. During the interview many kind words were expressed regarding the seeding of the VRC concept through the HTCTU grants. Even though the AT use has not gone as anticipated, the concept of a VRC has grown and spread in large part because of those initial grants.

While the connection to DSPS is viable, it is desired that the presence of DSPS staff be increased. DSPS staff shortages limit the amount of time that is now available. Discussions are happening around the creation of TBI workshops. DSPS/VRC interaction seems to be working fine in providing the needed classroom accommodations and the majority of faculty are cooperative.

Academics
Orientation and educational plans are handled by the VSO and assessments are done in the same manner as all students. Academic counseling is happening in the VRC and it seems that these needs are being met without the need for general Counselor use, although vets can use a general Counselor if desired. The wait time for educational plans is considerably shorter in the VRC than in the general counseling office.

The VRC does house a rather large computer lab (ten computers) and a good-sized study area. With no distractions, other than conversation, the tables and comfortable chairs and couches of the VRC provide a pleasant place for academic activities.

The VRC has a cadre of 20 volunteer tutors which are coordinated by an outstanding student coordinator who recruits from places such as Cal Tech and community professionals.

Academics is a focus of the PCC VRC, and one of the most expressed desires is to teach the student veteran how to be a good student in the process.

Wellness
Wellness at the PCC VRC seems to begin with the Veterans Specialist who is always looking for ways to increase the life experience of PCC veterans. Rather than just giving out information, actual contact and a “warm handoff” is provided for needed community and campus services. Follow-up is included and barriers to using the offered services are addressed. Specific
opportunities for services in the VRC include meditation, yoga, weekly visits from a health center nurse, weekly visits from US Vets MCSW Counselor, alcohol assessments, on-campus psychological services (which have had the benefit of in-services on veterans issues from the VRC), VA Benefits Specialist 3-4 times per month, VA Voc Rehab Counselor 2 days per week and on-call crisis management for acute veterans issues in the classroom. Rounding out this impressive list of onsite services is the weekly visit by a masseuse for chair massages.

Camaraderie
Camaraderie in the Pasadena VRC is multi-faceted. The Veterans Club is very active and meets weekly (though they don’t actually meet in the VRC, the availability of meeting and activity space is coordinated out of the VRC), an every Thursday “Lunch and Learn” where relevant veteran topical discussions are held, baseball games, barbecues, specific female veteran monthly luncheons, Faculty/Student breakfasts, service projects, camping trips and a 12 unit class, the “Veterans Cohort.” There appeared to be no shortage of activities and opportunities for PCC veterans to participate in a variety ways.

DSPS Coordinator Interview
1. Please describe your working relationship with the VRC.

VRC staff refer students to DSPS for services; DSPS recommends and sets up accommodations; we consult with one another and discuss certain issues and situations when necessary; students are referred for training with assistive technology; DSPS participates in new veterans orientations.

2. What strategies do you employ to increase the use of DSPS services by veterans with disabilities?

We have no extra-ordinary strategy.

3. In your opinion what is the largest obstacle in veterans with disabilities receiving the necessary accommodations?

The lack of awareness and experience requesting accommodations; acknowledging a disability in the first place; having to come to DSPS to initiate services and receive the services through the DSPS office.

4. What are your outreach efforts to the VRC?

None now, but one idea that we are thinking of is a name change from DSPS to DRC (Disability Resource Center).

5. Since 2010 have you observed any change in the perception of DSPS by the veterans/VRC?
Yes, especially from the veterans with a disability who have positive experience and will refer other veterans to us.

6. What message regarding veterans would you like the Chancellor’s Office to hear?

Establish more focused support to incoming veterans with disabilities to access services with DSPS; explain more to veterans their rights under ADA; explain what are reasonable educational accommodations and why one should request then how to request; students with a disability must connect and identify themselves to DSPS and DSPS should be the office that does the accommodations.

Conclusion
The Pasadena VRC is possibly the most impressive, if not in terms of space, in terms of opportunities and services, of all the visited VRCs. The variety and availability of the services combined with awards and accolades that are routinely given to veterans create one of the most welcoming campuses that has been observed.

As impressive as the VRC is now, the coming “Veterans Village” sounds even more so. A complete one-stop campus shop with Certifying Officials, academic counseling, wellness services and recreational opportunities, co-located with a VA Clinic and VA Benefits Office would truly be a model plan.

Of course additional funds could be used to increase operational hours and services and to this end, PCC joins the growing list of colleges that support categorical funding for veterans services. However, here is a campus that has embraced the returning veteran, substantially invested in the opportunity for them to succeed in higher education and in the process has created a welcoming and highly effective environment to ensure that success.
**Grossmont College**

**Introduction**
The VRC at Grossmont was one of the original HTCTU pilot sites and was the ninth VRC reviewed. The review was conducted with the assistance of Carl Fielden, VRC Project Coordinator and DSPS LD Specialist. Administratively, the VRC is located under the Admissions and Records umbrella.

The review of VRC at Grossmont was conducted on May 22, 2014.

**Website Review**
The Grossmont VRC webpage is first discoverable under the “Help for Students” tab of the Grossmont College home page. After reaching a comprehensive veteran’s resource page one then clicks on a “Veterans Resource Center” tab. This is to say that the VRC is a part of a more comprehensive campus Veterans Affairs Office (VAO). Once at the VRC page, considerable information is available. Location, service, resource links and contact information is included but hours of operation are not.

The following is copied from the page and indicates a list of available services:

**Veterans Resource Center**

*The Veterans Resource Center (VRC), located in building 21, Rm 253 provides a central entry point for veterans and their families as they transition from the military into the Grossmont College community. Staffed by veterans, the overall goal is to deliver tangible tools and services to optimize students' academic success. Separate from the campus Veteran Services Office, the VRC fosters a collaborative delivery of student services between such offices as Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS), Counseling, the Assistive Technology Center, as well as other on/off campus agencies who provide services to veterans and their families. The VRC provides services in three primary areas: academics, camaraderie, and wellness. Specific services include the following:*

- Access to computers and assistance in the use of assistive technologies, including specialized software for nontraditional learners
- Academic counseling
- Peer support, mentoring
- Financial aid information and application assistance
- Referral to on/off campus resources (e.g., DSPS, campus Veteran Services Office and community veterans agencies)

*For more information, contact Carl Fielden, the Project Coordinator for the VRC. He can be reached at (619) 644-7111 or carl.fielden@gcccd.edu*
From this webpage, one can move to the “Student Veteran’s Organization” webpage or to several other links regarding benefits or the ability to apply online for educational services.

**Organization/Logistics/Services**

The Grossmont VRC is housed under the Office of Admissions and Records and functions quasi-independently from the Veterans Affairs Office (VAO). Eligibility, certification, veteran’s counseling and the Student Educational Plans (SEP) are handled from the VAO office in the Administration building or the campus counseling center. There are currently two Certifying Officials serving over 900 veterans currently using benefits. There are many more veterans who are not using benefits, however, there is no data collection beyond the certification information (the college systems are capable of collecting such data, if it is so desired).

The Grossmont VRC is centrally located on campus and is easily accessible. The hours of operation are Monday and Tuesday from 8:00 am until 7:00 pm, 8:00 am until 5:00 pm on Wednesday and Thursday, and Friday from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm. The VRC is usually at its busiest from opening to about 1:00 pm. While there are no security issues preventing longer hours, a substantial lack of resources does not allow for extended hours now or in the foreseeable future.

The organization of the VRC is unlike any other that was visited on this review. Previous iterations of VRCs have a Certifying Official (usually female) acting as a coalescing force and creating order out of chaos. There may or may not be more extensive counseling or wellness services present but the Certifying Official is clearly a focal point. Here the vibe was strikingly different. Upon entering campus, the VRC was located (quite easily) after a stop, unknowingly, at the VAO in the Administration building. Given directions, a minute later the doorway of the VRC was evident (different building 50 yards away). Once there, a request for Carl Fielden was greeted with shaking heads and unknowing looks. Retreating to the hall and contacting Carl by phone, we met at the DSPS office. During our conversation an inquiry was made about the lack of name recognition among the troops (pun intended) and he smiled and indicated that he was quite pleased that this was the case. Upon further explanation, Carl indicated that he tries to maintain a very low profile at the VRC and in fact the center is really run by the vets themselves with VA student workers being in nominal charge. Staffing at the VRC is minimal. There are no paid classified or professional staff housed at that location. The VA work study students are the only paid staff in residence, however, these are the same work study students employed in the VAO. They are rotated to the VRC and thus have a strong knowledge of benefits and can answer a wide range of questions. These staff are supervised by the Certifying Official located in the VAO, but no onsite supervision is maintained. Sometimes hours of operation are disputed by lack of available work study students to open the doors, but this is rare. As stated earlier,
this is not the usual arrangement. Having no “official” college services happening at the VRC enables the center to truly be a “vets owned” area.

Since the grant was initiated, the Grossmont VRC has doubled in size. During the first visit in 2011, a single room housed a lounge, computers and a study area. Currently, the lounge and study area are in one room of approximately 400 sq. ft. and the newly added space of the same size holds the computer area with eight computers, printer and other peripheral equipment. The lounge area has the usual refrigerator and microwave but the large screen TV is missing. As the VRC visits progressed throughout the year, it appeared that those VRCs that have space for a recreational lounge seem to be split as to whether or not to have the TV. Some say it is distracting to a combined study area, others that is distracting to a more social type of camaraderie and others find the TV a center focal point.

Regarding the grant equipment: no computer equipment or software other than the Smart Pens was accepted. All computers at the VRC were provided by the college and the software by DSPS. Maintenance of the equipment and the technology is a DSPS responsibility.

**Academics**
Orientation and assessment services are handled as with all incoming students and all counseling services for SEPs are performed in the counseling center. While there are no dedicated Veterans Counselors there are four (4) Counselors that work with veterans on necessary academic counseling. Tutoring other than informal peer-to-peer tutoring is handled as with all students.

The VRC does house a rather large computer lab (eight to ten computers), all of which have assistive technology (AT) installed. While the use of the AT varies from semester to semester the lab itself is very well used. The supplies and support for the lab are provided for by the DSPS office.

The study area of the VRC is also significant. With no distractions other than conversation, the tables and comfortable chairs and couches of the VRC provide a pleasant place for academic activities.

Faculty, especially those with military experience, are reported to be very supportive and open to needed accommodations.

**Wellness**
There are no counseling services that occur in the VRC. College Counselors for personal counseling services (limited), as well as VA Counselors who come to campus occasionally, do
not see students in the VRC. Traditional VA services primarily occur off-campus at local VA clinics.

**Camaraderie**
Camaraderie in the Grossmont VRC is almost entirely the purview of the Student Veterans Organization (SVO). The VRC itself was not designed with a great deal of recreational activity in mind. One of the conditions upon which it was originally approved is that the center primarily be a learning center. This has become and remains the case. While the student organization regularly meets at the VRC, most activities are held elsewhere. The SVO is involved in community activities and in the support of students and their families, but the VRC itself does not take a lead in this area. Click the link to the [Grossmont SVO](#).

**DSPS Coordinator Interview**
Carl Fielden, the VRC Project Director, is also the DSPS LD Specialist, so the DSPS interview occurred simultaneously with the VRC questions. Specifically, the issues remain much the same across campuses. Vets are reluctant to identify themselves as having a disability and hesitant to avail themselves of DSPS services including the High Tech Center. It would appear that vets with learning disabilities are most likely to use the DSPS services for these non-service connected reasons. It appears that there are few vets with physical disabilities on campus and many more with psychological or learning issues.

The close connection between the VRC and DSPS is primarily due to Carl’s direction and support. His attention and dedication (see VRC proposal in the conclusion) will be paramount to increased services.

For those veterans seeking DSPS services there are no outstanding issues regarding classroom accommodations.

**Conclusion**
More than anything, the Grossmont VRC is a learning resource center where academic activities take precedence and are the most valued. This is a direction that veterans themselves have created and continue to follow. This direction has been strongly endorsed by the college administration. It was concern over the potential disruption that might be possible with a “club house” atmosphere that led to close scrutiny during the formative phases of the VRC. However, despite early discord between campus administration and veterans, the VRC has been an exemplary organization and is now highly respected on campus.
Recently, Carl submitted an activities proposal (which has received widespread support) which, combined with a long-term college plan, would change the face of Veterans Services at Grossmont. The long-term construction plan calls for a facility that would house the VAO and the VRC together, creating a one-stop shop for services. The activity proposal would include funding for paid college staff to be located at the VRC. These classified staff would be veterans themselves, but not those currently eligible for VA work study. As well, the proposal includes funds to create internships for doctoral level psychological staff to be housed in the VRC. The additional staff would allow the VRC space to be used more productively by bringing in speakers and other services that have been offered but lack coordination and an implementation plan. Long-term, the outlook for veteran’s services at Grossmont is bright, for now the VAO and the VRC must work closely in spirit if not in location. Again, for the short-term, academics will remain the focus of the VRC, but wellness services and opportunities for greater camaraderie are on the horizon.

A strong message, once again, is the need for categorical funding for VRCs. Beyond the initial concept of the VRC and the initial training, Grossmont has created and increased the size and scope of the VRC. If the current proposal comes to fruition, they will have a preeminent veteran’s services operation. Categorical funding would move these concepts along much faster at Grossmont and at other community college campuses.
Conclusions and Opinions

The following is a summary of the “takeaways” that were gleaned from these visits (no particular order of importance):

1. **Regardless of the size or support received from the hosting institution, the unanimous opinion of the VRCs is the need for categorical funding at the state level for Veterans Resource Centers.** The prevailing thought is that, despite the available college resources, college VRCs should have a minimal level of funding to support critical baseline services.

2. **In terms of space utilization, academics will win out over wellness or camaraderie if space is limited.** Even where sufficient space is available, there is a philosophical split as to how to present VRC recreational activities. Some colleges seem content to forgo the large screen TV and video games that are so ubiquitous in other VRCs, claiming that a more useful and engaging camaraderie is developed without the distractions that the TV presents. In many VRCs there is simply not enough space to facilitate this type of recreational opportunity.

3. **Size truly does not matter.** The dedication of staff, the warmth of acceptance, feeling of welcome, the usefulness of service and the appreciation of camaraderie cannot be measured in square feet. From four hundred square feet to two thousand, the “band of brothers/sisters” feeling was prevalent regardless of the space available.

4. **Staffing does matter.** The creativity of the staff, the level of authority, the umbrella department, staff education and training are all determinates of the resources and amenities available in individual VRCs. Creative staff develop strong community and campus partnerships. VRCs where a Dean is a primary player in the VRC seems to have better access to college funding and space. VRCs under the DSPS umbrella show a more useful technology presence and those under Financial Aid quick time frames for paperwork. Staff that combine these traits have put together model VRCs. For example (and without disparagement to other VRCs) Patty de’Orange Martin at Pasadena, Paul McKinney at Fullerton and Linda Sinclair at Santa Monica come from diverse organizational placements, resources and size, but the intangibles of drive, creativity, dedication and personal power have created programs that seem to stand out.

5. **From this point on, the HTCTU grant should be considered a successful kick start and left to stand on that note.** The philosophy of academics, wellness and camaraderie have aged well and have formed a strong foundation, however, the technology training has not continued as seamlessly. VRCs that have had staff turnover have, for the most part, lost the ability to instruct on the technology onsite (this is less true where the VRC is under a DSPS umbrella). As well, the equipment is obsolete and not functional in a number of sites, the software ranges from “didn’t know it was there” to “right up-to-
date” and the concept of wellness is understood at some VRCs better than others. Further follow-up as a grant might be pointless without a new round of training (most visited VRCs are open to that), financial or in-kind assistance.

6. **Leaders of the future are living in VRCs.** At other campus locations as well, obviously, but the VRCs are a goldmine of bright, energetic future leaders. From Butte to Grossmont over the course of visits conducted this year and 2010-11, I met at least one (often more) student veteran in each VRC who will make a difference somewhere, someday. It is also interesting to note how so many of these young men and women were enlisted personnel and staff sergeants (and the Navy equivalent) or above. They had risen to leadership positions in the military and are now available in the VRCs.

7. **The DSPS/Veterans connection is a lot of work.** For almost two generations (GenX and the Millennials), children with disabilities and special services are words often used in the same sentence. For military personnel who have been trained to show no fear, no pain and to survive, the idea of disability and special services can be a difficult concept to internalize. This is especially true for those with PTSD, TBI or other wounds that leave little or no visible indication of an injury. I suspect that our lack of understanding of disability, our lack of technology, our perception of perfection which has led to poor or misguided treatment of Veterans of Korea and Vietnam have resulted in the returning wounded warrior not wishing to align themselves with two generations of seemingly entitled peers but rather seeking anonymity unwilling to accept help that comes with a label and a public persona much different than that of soldier, warrior, or hero. As a result, the DSPS office and the VRC will most likely never be co-located and in many cases, convincing returning veterans with disabilities to use DSPS service will remain a challenge. (A personal opinion: Veterans with disabilities have much more in common with the Baby Boomer generation. This generation of persons with disabilities battled and fought for their civil rights and their courage and sacrifice, not unlike our returning veterans, resulted in IDEA, Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the ADA. In my mind, the disability movement has stalled, immobilized by entitlements with the anger replaced by complacency. The infusion of a generation of warriors with disabilities who will take up the banner and continue the fight for equality is exactly what is needed.)
Veterans Resource Center Video Library

* Visited in 2011

Butte College *
  - Butte VRC Tour -- 2011
  - Butte Certifying Official -- 2011
  - Butte Students -- 2011
  - Butte Faculty -- 2011

City College of San Francisco * **
  - CCSF Welcome 2014
  - CCSF VRC Tour 2011

Cuesta College * **
  - Cuesta Tour -- 2014
  - Cuesta Wellness -- 2014
  - Cuesta Student -- 2011

Foothill College * **
  - Foothill Certifying Official -- 2014
  - Foothill Students -- 2014
  - Foothill Psychologist -- 2011

** Visited in 2014
Fullerton College **
- Fullerton VRC Tour -- 2014
- Fullerton Students -- 2014
- Fullerton VRC Staff -- 2014
- Fullerton Danielle -- 2014
- Fullerton Joseph -- 2014

Grossmont College * **
- Grossmont VRC Tour -- 2011

Long Beach City College **
- Long Beach City College VRC Tour -- 2014

Merced College **
- Merced VRC Tour -- 2014
- Merced Veterans Club -- 2014
- Merced Wellness -- 2014

Pasadena City College * **
- Pasadena Patty D’Orange-Martin -- 2011
- Pasadena Harold Martin -- 2011

Riverside City College *
- Riverside Veterans Club Meeting -- 2011

Santa Monica College **
- Santa Monica Faculty Lead -- 2014