

Support and Services for Military Veterans

Portland Community College

August 15, 2013

INTRODUCTION

Since 2008 Portland Community College has made great efforts to ensure that student veterans, military service members and their family members integrate into classroom and campus life. This has included providing multiple trainings and workshops for faculty and staff, forming campus and district task forces, establishing Veterans Resources Centers and support services, and improving processes for veterans education benefits. We continue to strive to be educated and respond to the experiences of our student veterans who most recently have served and were impacted by the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND). The following highlight a few of our best practices:

Rock Creek Veterans Resource Center www.pcc.edu/resources/veterans

Mission & Purpose: To provide a safe space at Rock Creek for our veteran students to receive peer networking, support services, and resources to improve their successful integration into educational society. To provide a safe environment where veterans can go to de-escalate, decompress, network, and socialize with other veterans.

Staffing: .50 FTE Veterans Resource Coordinator & 5 Veterans Student Advocates

2012-13 Activity Highlights:

- The Center served 450 self-identified veterans – integrated onsite academic advising
- 20 to 30 students accessed resources on a typical day; the Center logged 1,920 total visits
- Continued to offer faculty and staff professional development via Teaching and Learning Centers district wide, including best practices to address the needs of students in the classroom
- Celebrated “PCC Veterans Appreciation Week” in May, culminating in “Veterans Ball” held on the Portland Spirit
- Collaborated heavily with community stakeholders and partners
- Student veterans held a fundraiser for Lacey House in Washington County to benefit homeless veterans
- Partnered with Washington County Aging & Disabilities Services to hold training day for VA benefits applications

District Veterans Task Force

Purpose: The task force will address the growing issues surrounding veterans’ integration into PCC by recommending proactive steps to streamline processes and policies, increase awareness, decentralize services, and assist veterans with the difficult transition from military life to college.

Membership: 4 faculty, 1 administrator, & 10 staff

Goals for 2013-14:

- Increase communication & collaboration between campuses, centers, and the community
- Increase college awareness of veterans’ needs and advise on support services integration
- Make college policy and practice recommendations in support of veterans success related to:
 - ✓ Priority enrollment and credit for military experience/coursework
 - ✓ Financial support & literacy
 - ✓ Orientation and intrusive advising
 - ✓ College climate and recognition of service

FLAIR (Title III) Systems Improvements <http://www.pcc.edu/enroll/paying-for-college/flair/>

Veteran Benefits Title III Grant Objective: By September 30, 2015, reduce the proportion of Veterans benefit applicants who have to be re-certified from 71% (2009 baseline) to 45%. Recertification is defined as making any change to a Veteran’s course schedule once certified.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Online certification and enhanced website for veterans
- Assessment of student veterans population
- Improved business processes
- Engaging and supporting students through intrusive advising system for veterans

Timeline of Programming Efforts to Support Veterans Success

2008-09

- District student & enrollment services retreat with panel of experts focused on veteran readjustment
- Rock Creek established campus Veterans Task Force
- Rock Creek established Veterans Resource Center (VRC) <http://www.pcc.edu/resources/veterans/>
- Rock Creek established college success & stress management courses targeting student veterans

2009-10

- Program Review of Veterans Services with assessment and recommendations from outside consultant AACRO (American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers)
- Rock Creek established Student Veteran Club

2010-11

- *Title III activity:* Completed online access to compete VA education benefits certification
- Sylvania campus established campus Veterans Task Force

2011-12

- Cascade campus established Veterans Resource Center http://www.pcc.edu/resources/aspcc/cascade/VRC_CA.html
- Cascade campus established Student Veteran Club
- Sylvania campus hosted 4 workshops for faculty/staff targeting success for students in and out of class
- *Title III activity:* Military Billing Specialist hired
- *Title III activity:* Student survey administered to assess needs, attitudes, and awareness of veterans

2012-13

- District Veterans Task Force was established
- Sylvania piloted Veterans New Student Orientation
- Sylvania established re-activated Student Veteran Club
- *Title III activity:* Second student veterans survey administered
- *Title III activity:* Veteran Services website and MyPCC Veterans Channel were improved, offering enhanced self-service tools for students to access veterans education benefits status www.pcc.edu/vets

2013-14

- Dept. of Veterans Affairs has selected PCC to participate in their **VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC)** program, **assigning a 1.0 FTE Vet Center Outreach Coordinator to the college**
- Sylvania campus will hire a 1.0 FTE Veterans Resource Specialist and begin identifying space for a VRC
- SE campus will begin identifying staffing & space needs for veterans support for future development
- Veterans Services will expand access to benefits specialists on all four campuses
- *Title III activity:* Intrusive advising and orientation model for veterans will be proposed and piloted

Our PCC Student Veterans

- Number of certified veterans has **increased by 85%** between fall 2008 and fall 2012
- 2012-13 veterans certified for education benefits = **1,898**
- 2012-13 self-identified veterans (from admissions application) = **2,109**

"One area I would focus on is the need to connect veterans (returning from combat or not) to education. I personally suffer from PTSD and frequently visit a counselor at the VA to explore options to maintain a successful position as a citizen. I was successful as a soldier, and now I need to be successful as a citizen. What I am trying to get to is, education engages individuals (soldiers), and if you utilize the resources stated above through peer mentoring (counseling/coaching), class for stress management and other ways to assist veterans with integrating their lives back into society with the help of education, I believe you will have nothing but success"

Student response – PCC Survey of Students who are Veterans of the US Military, 2012