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Testimony in Support of SB 143

Student-veterans are an all-around unique population. Their life experiences have given them a worldview that is drastically different than their peers. These students require supportive services that differ significantly from traditional and nontraditional students. In order to better assist them through their academic career we have taken steps to provide a Veterans Center (VC), and full time Veterans Services Coordinator (VSC) who is responsible for supporting student-veterans. The VSC is not responsible for the certification process in order to enable a full time commitment to the student-veteran needs, and to facilitate an appropriate level of advocacy for the student-veteran.

The VSC also advises and provides information regarding the various G.I. Bill education benefits. The VC has helped with retention and graduation rates as well as greatly increased student-veteran morale on campus. Many student-veterans have found success in navigating the transition process by means of using the VC and VSC.

The VSC is also responsible for managing and maintaining the VC. The VSC's office is located within the VC, which allows him to be fully available to meet the unique needs of the student-veterans. Unfortunately, these needs cannot always be met without seeking financial support elsewhere. The equipment in the VC is outdated, and much of the furnishings in the VC are secondhand. The VSC spends time seeking outside contributions in order to provide adequate programs, which detracts from the time he has to work with student-veterans.

Some of our most successful programs include our "Veterans Orientation" during new student week. This unique orientation introduces student-veterans to the resources available on campus from day one. It also connects the incoming student-veterans to their particular "go to" people. The VC follows the philosophy of "Integration not Isolation". This purposeful statement encourages student-veterans to begin the transition process by being involved with their veteran peers as well as their non-veteran peers.

It could not happen without the financial support of private donors and fundraising. This typically occurs in an all-campus event hosted by the VC. These events are typically of military nature (Memorial Day Banquet, Veterans Day potluck, Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, etc.), but they are not always military affiliated. The VSC has designated general funds for the VC, but the need exceeds the available funds. If more funds were to be made available we could provide more supportive programs and properly show that this diverse and unique population is a valuable asset both on campus and in the classroom.