

**Veterans Advisory Council**  
**Annual Report**  
Texas State University  
FY 2016 - 2017

**Major Accomplishments/Retention Initiatives**

1. SDI co-coordinated and sponsored two (2) *Veterans Welcome Receptions* were held during the start of fall 2016 and spring 2017, and served 174 participants including student veterans (80), dependents (6), non-veterans/faculty-staff (88).
2. SDI co-coordinated and co-sponsored four (4) *Veterans Monthly Lunches* were held during fall and spring semester to connect student veterans to on- and off-campus support services and resources; programs served 106 participants including student veterans (67), dependents (2) and non-veterans/faculty-staff (37); lunches were sponsored by various Student Affairs Departments (Center for Student Retention, Counseling Center, and LBJ Student Center).
3. SDI coordinated two (2) *Veterans Graduation Receptions* held during fall 2016 and spring 2017 honoring graduating veterans; both receptions served at least 89 participants including 7 graduating veterans during fall and 35 graduates spring (including family/guests the program served just over 90 participants).
4. VATS Executive Board held an *Officer Retreat* during summer 2016 to introduce new executive board to prepare programs and meetings, learn University policy and procedures, and discuss strategies for increasing membership, and included the newly established Round Rock Veterans Alliance.
5. VATS successfully held the annual *Peace Paper Project*, a week-long community-arts initiative and veteran paper workshop that utilizes uses hand papermaking and pulp printing as a form of trauma therapy, social engagement, and community activism; donated military uniforms were used in this process and held in the Texas State Quad; 78 participants including veterans (21), dependents (1) and non-veterans (55) attended.
6. Veterans Alliance of Texas State (VATS) awarded 3 persons with *Up & Beyond Award* (Burel Ford, Dr. Katherine Selber, and Dr. Carl Van Aacken) for outstanding contribution to student veterans at Texas State.
7. Veterans Alliance of Texas State and Veterans Initiative held *Quad Outreach Days* to spread awareness of veteran services and to build rapport with vets.
8. Veterans Alliance of Texas State with support of SDI and Veterans Initiative held the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Golf Tournament which benefited Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, a local non-profit organization that supports veterans. TC and VI coordinated the training and duties of 16 ROTC cadets supported the tournament and resulted in the addition of the posting/retiring of the National Colors.
9. SDI "*Serving Student Veterans*" brochures that provides overview and contact information for various veteran-specific programs or key departments at Texas State and that benefit student veterans; 750 brochures were re-printed.
10. Two (2) *Transition from Service to School: Helping Student Veterans Succeed at Texas State* were facilitated through the Office of Professional Development to 43 faculty/staff during fall 2016 and 21 faculty/staff during spring 2017; 64 new veteran friendly staff spaces were created.
11. Veterans Initiatives updated *Veterans Resources List* that consists of contact information for on- and off-campus support services for student veterans.
12. Tutor Corps (TC) hired 10 student veterans to provide tutoring (STEM, writing, business, and Spanish) and mentorship to 210 student veterans over 715 occasions.
13. TC teamed with SHARE Veterans Guiding Veterans (VGV) to provide a student veteran peer-to-peer health risk prevention program seeking to reduce negative health outcomes associated with alcohol and substance abuse.
14. TC teamed with VGV and Veterans Alliance at Texas State (VATS) to coordinate fall and spring Veteran BBQ to welcome & provide information for student veterans; 33 participants in fall and 115 in spring.
15. Project Healing Waters (HW), a community non-profit, teamed with TC in an initiative called Positive After Combat Transition-Outdoors (PACT) to provide outdoor opportunities to student veterans and their family members.
16. TC also coordinated with HW to provide a weekly Student Veteran Friday Fly-fishing opportunity for student veterans. Five TC team members and 20 community members completed numerous volunteer hours

supporting this initiative that allowed more than 100 student veterans to experience fly fishing (supported by VATS, VGV, SDI).

17. TC assisted Project COHORT, a community-based non-profit organization that sponsored student Veteran Backpacking. 16 student veterans attended (supported by Rec Center, VGV, VATS).
18. Under the PACT initiative, TC and HW coordinated a Veterans Appreciation Day to bring in combat veterans to talk about their experiences and the transition to civilian life while participating in various fly fishing activities (fly tying and fishing). The event consisted of four community- and university-sponsored activities (Veteran Fly Fishing, Veteran BBQ Lunch, Veteran Outdoor Programs Panel, and the Veteran Bonfire & Cookout on the San Marcos River) that were designed to connect student veterans with other university veterans and community members. Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Noe Salinas, former National Training Center CSM who served for more than 30 years in the U.S. Army, 6 tours of combat duty, and received 4 Bronze Star and 2 Purple Heart medals was special guest at the event. 43 student veterans participated and 10 volunteers received VATS Coins of Excellence (supported by VATS, SDI, VGV, COHORT, VI, VA, Tip's Turf, Hays County BBQ, & Restoration Ranch).
19. TC teamed with the department of Information Technology (IT) to identify and provide 2 computer work stations for student veteran interns housed in SLAC.
20. University Seminar faculty, Dana Holmes, teamed with TC to construct a military exhibit titled Memories from My Duffel Bag as a part of the common experience. The exhibit included several hundred military items loaned from more than 50 university students, staff, and faculty members. The exhibit was on display during the spring 2017 semester and was viewed by hundreds of students, staff, and faculty. Visitors to the exhibit left more than 100 laudable comments of appreciation for the display (supported by VATS, IT, VGV, VI, JCK Library staff, & University College).
21. University College teamed with TC to sponsor the Military Exhibit's Opening Reception that was attended by 150 people.
22. TC coordinated participation of veterans in BEATS4VETS, a veteran-based research study on music and lyrics and how they help veterans cope with military experiences (supported by VATS & VI).
23. VA teamed with TC on 3 occasions to hold Veteran VA Jumpstart Spring and Fall Benefits Certification to help student veterans with completing class registration and VA financial assistance paperwork, (supported by VGV).
24. SLAC personnel planned, coordinated, and completed a construction re-design initiative to more than double the Tutor Corps space. This space is now capable of supporting TC staff and up to 10 student veterans seeking drop-in tutoring.
25. TC teamed with VI to pilot a university-based veteran sponsorship program called Bobcat Cadence to assist veterans transitioning from military service to college. 35 students participated (supported by VA, Career Services, SDI, VGV, Counseling, ODS, WC).
26. TC teamed with VI to assist HW with the annual San Marcos Kids Fish event at the San Marcos fish hatchery, providing the opportunity for special needs children to catch a fish.
27. TC teamed with VI to provide a tour of the exhibit, Memories from My Duffel Bag, for eight high school students, a teacher, and the principal of Hill Country Christian School.
28. University College teamed with TC to sponsor the Military Exhibit's Closing Reception. Commemorative plaque presentations were made to the 50 individuals loaning items to the exhibit. 150 attended the event.
29. SDI teamed with TC in organizing student and staff veterans to represent the university at the San Marcos Community Kickoff Event to build a home for a wounded warrior, Spc. Scott Balestra (supported by VATS, IT, VGV).
30. The Leadership Institute teamed with TC to provide PowerPoint, photos, and selected items from the military exhibit to display during the 2017 institute. The express goal of the event was to inspire participants to write notes and postcards to be mailed to military service members who are currently deployed.
31. Under the PACT initiative, TC and HW coordinated Veterans Family Day for student veterans and their family members to discover outdoor activities available both at the university and in the local community. Outdoor activities included fly fishing and tying by Healing Waters; a horse body work demo and clinic demo by Restoration Ranch; information tables staffed by Operation Scuba, Operation Cohort, Tutor Corps, VGV, VATS, VI, Grace After Fire, Cabela's; dinner was provided by Fuschak's BBQ. 116 participated in the event and 25 volunteers received VATS Coins of Excellence (supported by Tip's Turf,

Fushak's BBQ, Texas Vet Outdoors, Restoration Ranch, Cabela's, Ronin Veterans Network, Hill Country Christian School, Martindale Fire Department/EMS, Grace After Fire, OP SCUBA, VATS, SDI, VA, VI, VGV, Career Services). The event highlighted on the front page of the San Marcos Daily Record.

32. TC teamed with Hill Country Christian High School students to volunteer at Restoration Ranch in the building of a new, covered horse arena to be used to support future student veteran outreach activities.

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### **Assessments**

**Assessment:** Transition from Service to School - Evaluation

**Administered:** fall 2016/spring 2017

**Findings:** Data was collected from 61 of 67 faculty and staff across all University divisions and who completed evaluations as part of the training during fall and spring semesters. 83.6% of participants rated the training as excellent for meeting its objectives (who are our student veterans, their experiences and services at Texas State). 78.7 % of participants indicated excellent as their overall impression of the workshop. 94.9% of participants rated the presenters as excellent. Findings indicated that the training met its objectives by successfully improving faculty/staff participants' awareness and knowledge of student veterans at Texas State, student veterans' needs and the various veteran-specific and support services available at Texas State.

**Improvements:** Based on data collected from the Office of Professional Development's post-training evaluation, training facilitators will: 1) assist Professional Development in the promotion of training to increase number of participants; 2) train VAC Committee Members to offer training at Round Rock Campus and substitute existing presenters in event of scheduling conflicts; 3) review content, language and information during summer of 2017 to ensure it is up to date; and 4) increase number of completed evaluations and contracts upon completion of training. Co-facilitators will meet and review training during summer of 2017 and changes to be implemented in fall 2017.

**Assessment:** Veteran Monthly Lunch Evaluation

**Administered:** Fall 2016

**Findings:** Data was collected using post-event evaluations from two (2) *Veterans Monthly Lunches* held during fall 2016 and that served at least 106 participants who were tracked in the Events Management Tracking System. Of the 106 TXST participants, 67 were student veterans, 2 were dependents, and 37 were non-veteran students or faculty-staff. 144 evaluations were completed and collected. Participants reported being "satisfied" with overall experience (74%), food (84%), location (78%), and marketing (68%). Participants also indicated they benefited from meeting with VATS student organization (67%), faculty/staff (81%), TXST departments/offices (94%), and off-campus organizations (94%). The findings indicate that participants are highly satisfied with the information and connection gained from attending an informal lunch setting. Data was not collected for Spring 2017 due to loss of staff member who coordinated programs.

**Improvements:** Based on results obtain through the post-event evaluation, SDI will: 1) continue to co-coordinate and co-sponsor program with support of various offices, departments and services that support veterans; 2) increase marketing promotion to increase number of student veteran participants; 3) provide a variety of meals as recommended in qualitative data; 4) maintain the number of monthly lunches offered and on alternating days; 5) seek and provide opportunity for Veterans Friendly Offices to sponsor lunch; 6) increase number of evaluations by encouraging participants to complete before departing; 7) continue to seek more off-campus organizations to attend; 8) ensure that proper implementation of collecting and reporting evaluations is in place. SDI will review all changes with coordinating partners during summer 2017 and implement in fall 2017.

**Assessment:** Veteran Welcome Reception Evaluation

**Administered:** Fall 2016

**Finding:** Data was collected using post-event evaluations from the fall 2016 and spring 2017 during Veterans Welcome Reception and that served 174 participants including student veterans (80), dependents (6), non-veterans/faculty-staff (88). 72 participants completed evaluations as part of the program per semester. Participants reported being "very satisfied and satisfied" with overall experience (88.8%-fall; 71% - spring), food (88.8%-fall; 71% - spring); location (91%-fall; 74.3% - spring), and marketing (74%-fall; 52.6% - spring). Participants also indicated they benefited from meeting with VATS student organization (93%-fall; 86% - spring), faculty/staff (85%-fall; 100% - spring), TXST departments/offices (96%-fall; 100% - spring), and off-campus organizations (100%-fall; 100% - spring). The findings strongly demonstrate that student veterans have high satisfaction with accessibility of information, resources, representatives that serve their needs.

**Improvement:** Based on the finds gained via the post-event evaluation, SDI will: 1) continue to co-ordinate and sponsor the program with support of various offices, departments and services that support veterans at the start of each semester; 2) host the program in a smaller room fit for size of audience; 3) increase marketing and promotions; 4) collect completed evaluations to ensure a more thorough assessment, and 4) seek additional off-campus organizations to share information and resources. SDI will review program changes during summer of 2017 and implement in fall 2017.

**Assessment:** Tutor Corps

**Administered:** fall 2016/Spring 2017

**Findings:** Data was collected from 49 student veterans who completed the online end-of-semester survey. The following is a summary of the completed survey results. 69% of participants were within their first 3 semesters at the university while 31% were 4 semesters or longer; 96% of participants were completing 15 credits or less while 4% reported taking more than 15 credits; 69% had served in the military 6 years or less, 20% were between 7-15 years military service, and 10% were more than 15 years; 59% of the student veterans received tutoring in math, 14% in science, 4% in writing, and 18% in other topics (psychology, circuits, differential equations, accounting, brain and memory); 51% of participants reported visiting the tutoring center more than 7 times, 14% 5-7 times, 20% 2-4 times, and 14% only completed 1 visit. 81% of participants rated their overall experience "excellent," 19% rated their experience "good," with no students rating the experience "fair or poor." Qualitative comments included: "I was skeptical at first if I even belonged in college but through this group I met a lot of other veterans who have helped me every step so far; Tutor Corps helped me significantly with easing into my studies and made me feel like I was at home; through comradery and subject guidance, I was able to complete my second semester at Texas State successfully; Being with likeminded people that have experienced the transition from military to college worked wonders for my spirit and peace of mind; Overall, I love this program. It helped me tremendously and it made my time this semester much easier. I would have felt alone without it. I strongly recommend keeping it around. I believe it is very beneficial to transitioning vets, which there are many of us every single semester."

**Improvements:** Based on data collected from the survey instrument, Tutor Corps staff will implement the following changes in Fall 2017: 1) continue to train new and returning tutors on current policies and procedures; 2) continue to train tutors to be aware of demographic trends indicated in the survey and be equipped to support a high percentage of new university students; 3) add a training module to new and returning tutor training that includes a review of the past year survey-collected qualitative comments and a corresponding discussion.

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### **Presentation presented by Department Staff**

1. Transitioning from Service to School: Supporting Student Veterans at Texas State (fall 2017 and spring 2017) – Blanca Sanchez-Navarro (Supervising Counselor, Counseling Center), Dr. Katherine Selber (Professor, School of Social Work), Jesse Silva (Assistant Director, Student Diversity & Inclusion), Dr. Carl Van Aacken (Lab Coordinator, Student Learning Assistance Center; Co-Director, Tutor Corps), and Ross Wood (Career Advisor, Career Services)
2. VATS, SDI and TC - 28 student veteran panels for class sections of US 1100 in support of the common experience theme
3. 11th annual Student Academic Success Program - Working with Veterans: Transitioning from Service to College. - Burel Ford & Dr. Carl Van Aacken.
4. Theater Department – Panel: Insight on the Soldier Experience-Iraq & Afghanistan - Glen Stevenson, James Lambert, Blake Holbrook, Brittany Updegrave, Nick Sterling, Mel Harris, Maria Bernal Mora, & Dr. Carl Van Aacken.
5. TC & SDI - Finding Balance After Combat Duty Through Participating in Outdoor Programs Presenters: CSM Noe Salinas (Iraq 4x, Afghanistan 2x), Derek Knapp (Iraq 1x, Afghanistan 1x), Naiha Campos (Father deployed Afghanistan 2x, Iraq 1x), James Graham (Iraq 2x, Afghanistan 2x), & Nick Sterling (Iraq 1x).
6. 8<sup>th</sup> Annual International Research Conference for Graduate Students - Veterans Transitioning to Graduate School: What It Is Like and What You Can Do to Support Them - Dr. Carl Van Aacken.
7. Leadership Film Series screening Hurt Locker - Burel Ford, Nick Sterling, & Dr. Carl Van Aacken.
8. College of Fine Arts and Communication - Documentary film, Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1. - Nick Sterling, Blake Holbrook, & Dr. Carl Van Aacken

9. ODS History Department - Combat & Dis/Ability for the university common experience. - Dr. Sanders Marble (US Army Medical Department Center, San Antonio), Dr. Audra Jennings (Western Kentucky University), & Dr. Carl Van Aacken (Texas State University).
10. School of Social Work - Student veteran panel for Masters in Social Work program - James Lambert & Glen Stevenson.

#### **Special Recognition for Departments and/or Staff**

1. Burel Ford – Veterans Alliance of Texas State Above & Beyond Award
2. Dr. Katherine Selber - Veterans Alliance of Texas State Above & Beyond Award
3. Dr. Carl Van Aacken – Veterans Alliance of Texas State Above & Beyond Award
4. Lisa Whittaker – Tutor Corps Outstanding Service to Veterans Award
5. Blake Holbrook – Tutor Corps Outstanding Achievement Award
6. SDI/TC Veteran Volunteer Appreciation Party - 34 veterans for 340 volunteer hours to the university common experience theme

#### **Major Objectives for 2017-2018**

1. Funding for regular and recurring retention based student veteran programs.
2. Complete and submit TRiO Upward Bound grant that serves student veterans.
3. Request and implement student veteran work-study placement and expansion.
4. Create and implement program that covers first-six weeks of events at Texas State.
5. Support the diversity and intersecting identities of student veterans including race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender expression and ability.

#### **Major Trends/Obstacles for 2017-2018**

1. Addressing issues related to intersections of identity (race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender expression and ability), benefits, employment, and educational opportunities
2. Increase representation, visibility and experiences of female/women student veterans and veterans of color
3. Student veterans are experiencing issues related to housing lease contracts
4. Student veterans have an opportunity to participate in San Marcos Veterans Court to adjudicate legal cases; San Marcos Veterans Court has experienced a substantial increase in number of cases they are assisting with
5. Texas State faculty are increasing solicitation of grant funding that specifically serves student veterans have increased; work with Provost to inform faculty of VAC in order to promote collaborative efforts to request and implement grant.