

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH  
VETERANS SUPPORT CENTER



*ANNUAL REPORT*  
*2019-2020*

## 1.0. **Overview**

This annual report covers the period of August 1, 2019 to July 31, 2020.

The University of Utah Veterans Support Center (VSC) continues to be utilized as a place for U.S. Armed Forces service members, veterans, and their family members enrolled at the university (military-connected students, MCSs) to find services, support, and camaraderie. The services offered by VSC staff and tenants include university certification of student enrollment for Veterans Affairs (VA) educational benefits, VA Vocational Rehabilitation and educational benefits advising, VA counseling and health services referral, and Utah Tuition Gap processing. The center offers advocacy, computer and printing resources, textbook loans, and peer support, as well as a lounge, study area, refreshments, and veterans' events.

The VSC houses tenants who provide specific services for veterans. Although they are not part of the VSC staff, they are housed in the same suite for the convenience of student veterans. There has been some turnover among the tenants. The Registrar's two School Certifying Officers (SCOs) have not changed. They are normally in the office every work day. The VA Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) Coordinator remained the same and typically works out of an office in the VSC one day each week. The VA VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) Counselor, who worked out of an office in the VSC four days a week, retired and was replaced by an interim counselor until February, when a permanent replacement was hired by the VA. The new VSOC is normally in the office every day, except for every other Friday. A Career Coach from the U's Career and Professional Development Center (CPDC) operates out of the VSC once a week for 2-3 hours. The VSC also received funding to hire a much-needed Veterans Program Coordinator who started in September. The VSC Executive Secretary left the U in late November and initial attempts to hire a replacement failed. However, in July, after the position was reclassified, the VSC hired an Office Manager.

On the first day of class following the add/drop deadline, the military-connected student (MCS) enrollment was 1,063 in fall 2019; of those, 740 were undergraduate students. Spring 2020 enrollment was 1,101; of those, 782 were undergraduate students. These are comparable to fall 2018 and spring 2019 enrollment, which were 1,115 and 1,051, respectively.

### 1.1. Select Accomplishments

The VSC, in collaboration with the Office of Undergraduate Studies and with the approval of the Board of Trustees, established a Veterans Studies certificate program. This undergraduate certificate enables students to develop a better understanding of veterans and their experiences by exploring the political, social, emotional, and historical aspects of military service and their implications for veterans and society. The intent is to provide students with a foundational knowledge that will enable them to better serve or relate to veterans in our communities, workplaces, and care facilities.

Partnering with the Alumni Association and the Union, the VSC awarded \$38,500 in scholarships for fall 2020. This amount of the scholarships exceeds the combined total of scholarships awarded since the VSC was established in 2011.

The VSC hosted the fifth conference of the Veterans Higher Education Collaborative working group. During the conference, the group ratified its charter to become a formal organization known as the Council on Military Transition to Education (CMTE). The CMTE comprises representatives from select postsecondary institutions which are working with the Department of Defense to improve service members' and veterans' transition to and through higher education.

After a five year effort, the VSC was able to obtain university funding to hire a third staff member. In September 2019, the VSC hired a Veterans Program Coordinator.

### 1.2. One U

Although a small department serving a student population that is historically underserved, misunderstood, and underrepresented on college campuses, the VSC staff have participated in multiple opportunities to collaborate in support of veterans and non-veterans on campus, to generate awareness and understanding of military-connected students, faculty, and staff, and to demonstrate that we are One U. In addition to collaboration with other Student Affairs entities in support of individual students, examples of these efforts include volunteering at the Employee Appreciation Day, serving as U Crew staff on student move-in day, supporting the School of Business/Warrior Rising entrepreneurship program, attending job candidate presentations, participating in the Basic Needs Collaborative effort, volunteering at the Student Leadership Summit, collaborating with the Alumni Association and Union for scholarship programs, participating in meetings held by the Vice President for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), serving on the Education Futures Taskforce, providing military cultural competency training to other departments, recruiting students for Student Wellness peer programs or Office of Undergraduate Research Program enrollment, volunteering in the U's Prison Education Program, and participating in or attending other programs offered by other departments.

### 1.3. Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion

Our staff and our MCSs comprise individuals from all over the country and world who have diverse identities, backgrounds, and experiences. Most have received more antiracism, sexual harassment, and cultural competency training than the average individual, and they have life experience that includes working closely with diverse individuals from across our nation and the world. We do not condone harassment, discrimination, or violence towards anyone based on race or any other identity. We will call out racist behavior when we encounter. We will set the example of good citizenship, acceptance of those who differ from ourselves, and respect for others regardless of race, and we will expect the same of our students, colleagues, and partners.

#### 1.4. COVID-19 Impacts

Normally, the VSC has about 7,500 total visits from approximately 1,600 MCSs each year. As the National Survey of Student Engagement (2014) indicated, student veterans are less engaged on campuses than non-veterans. We also know that the military culture which encourages self-reliance, stoicism, and selflessness results in student veterans who are reluctant to seek assistance. By far, VSC staff have found that face-to-face interaction with student veterans has been the most effective means of prompting their engagement in support services. The VSC lost the full capability to do that when the campus closed for COVID-19 in March. This is a chief concern. In the transition to virtual operations, the VSC changed its voicemail to state that staff are operating remotely, and it included phone numbers and email addresses for assistance. The VSC sent out multiple emails to all enrolled student with contact information for the VSC staff, SCOs, VA VITAL counselor, VSCO counselor, Vet career coach, and VA crisis line. The same information was posted on the door of the VSC, its website, the Student Affairs website, and the VSC Facebook page. Additionally, staff have been able to answer the main phone line remotely.

After transitioning to remote operations, the VSC conducted outreach primarily with social media and email. The VSC hosted “U Vet Happy Hours” on Zoom each week. During the events, the staff shared information and updates regarding the campus and VSC. The SCOs provided updates and answered questions, the career coach shared information, and when available, the VITAL and VSOC counselors shared information. After that, the VSC and the students did some distant socializing with such activities as show and tell, a scavenger hunt, or online Pictionary. Attendance was inconsistent, ranging from a dozen vets to just a few.

The VSC had been planning to offer in-person MCS orientation sessions that were supplemental to the main orientation sessions scheduled for the summer. In person events were canceled, so the VSC held sessions online in July and into August. In the fall semester, the VSC will encourage email/phone interactions, will operate with a reduced on-site staff, will be open for limited face-to-face operations for conducting business but won’t be the usual gathering place for U Vets to socialize. Using donated funds, the VSC ordered a large number of VSC-branded face coverings to distribute to MCSs free of charge.

The VSC has an emergency grant fund for MCSs who have an unexpected and unavoidable financial crisis (i.e. not for money mismanagement or parking tickets). In response to COVID-19, the scholarship office developed a common emergency fund application for students. A number of offices, including the VSC, participated in the centralized process. The VSC received one application this way. The VSC also awarded a scholarship in the summer that was originally intended as a fall scholarship.

As noted, the greatest concern is that there are student vets who could benefit from resources or services but are not seeking them because the VSC cannot engage them at the level it would prefer.

## 2.0. **Core Objectives**

### 2.1. Core Objective 1: Outreach & Engagement

The VSC mission is to improve and enhance the individual and academic success of MCSs who attend the university; to help them receive the benefits they earned; and to serve as a liaison between the student veteran community and the university. In support of this, the VSC has a core outreach and engagement objective. The objective includes reaching all MCSs to encourage them to engage the VSC and engaging the campus community in support of MCSs.

#### 2.1.1. *Alignment with Student Affairs Strategic Objectives*

With the intent to inform MCSs of services and resources available to them, encouraging them to utilize resources, and improving support from the campus community, this objective aligns with the Student Affairs objective of student engagement and support, particularly in the areas of building community and meeting the needs of the full student through education, support, and referral services.

#### 2.1.2. *Programs and Services*

The VSC performed a number of activities in an effort to conduct outreach and increase engagement with MCSs and the campus and local community. The outcomes of specific activities cannot be accurately measured, given that long-term retention and graduation data for MCSs has not been adequately collected and that one cannot know exactly what prompted each student to engage the VSC. Therefore, measurement of outcomes is made in terms of overall visits to the VSC. (The VSC has engaged Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER) to identify other potential methods.) Because the campus closed for COVID-19, the VSC cannot reasonably compare student utilization for this academic year (AY) to previous ones. However, a comparison of fall 2018 to fall 2019 is provided. Activities in support of this objective included:

- **Advertisement:** The VSC distributed information via email using a listserv, and posts information on its Facebook page and bulletin boards in the VSC..
- **Applications and admissions:** The VSC director sent out emails to every student veteran who applied to the university and to every student who was accepted. The emails provided basic information about the center's services and encouraged their engagement with the VSC.
- **Veterans Day commemoration:** In November 2019, the university hosted its Veterans Day commemoration event that honors eleven Utah veterans for their service. This was the 22nd commemoration by the U, and the third year of *Vet Week*. The week included a panel discussion about military working dogs, a student veteran-led dodgeball tournament, *Meet a Vet BBQ*, performances of *Vietnam Through My Lens* at Kingsbury Hall, and the annual commemoration ceremony featuring a military formation by the three Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) units, music by the Wasatch and District Pipe Band, music and a cannon salute by the Utah National Guard, recognition of the Student Veteran of the Year, and a luncheon. Senator Mitt Romney and Brigadier General Doug Cherry, USA were the keynote speakers. On the Saturday following the commemoration, the U had a home football game during which some commemorative events took

place. The Auxiliary Business Development Office hosted a tailgate for the student veterans before the game.

- Career development: The VSC continued its partnership with the Career & Professional Development Center (CPDC) to host luncheons for veterans and employers during the career fairs and “brown bag” lunches in the VSC with employers.
- Commencement: In collaboration with the university president’s office, a graduating veteran was highlighted during the virtual commencement ceremony.
- Orientation: The VSC piloted a supplemental orientation program for MCSs. The orientations were held once a month in June and July on the same day as a transfer orientation session for all students. Attendance was modest, with nine veterans attending one and six attending another.
- Peer mentors: In spring 2020, the VSC’s peer mentoring program was expanded, and every new MCS was contacted by a VA VITAL peer mentor via email, phone call, and/or text message. The mentors welcomed each new MCS to the U and provided information about the VSC. About six MCSs responded with more than a “thank you” and requested information or assistance.
- Education: In its role as an advocate for veterans and other MCSs, the VSC provided presentations to a number of campus entities including Admissions, Orientation, Student Affairs, College of Nursing, College of Education, Behavioral Intervention Team, Associated Students of the University of Utah, Senator Romney’s office, Congressman Stewart’s office, and individual staff members from multiple campus and community entities.

**Goals:**

- Make student veterans on campus aware of the services available.
- Demonstrate and elevate the university’s commitment to and support of MCSs.

**Outcomes expected:**

- Increased utilization of the VSC.

**Outcomes Achieved:**

Overall, utilization of the VSC increased. Because the university began virtual operations mid-semester in spring 2020, visit data from August 1 to December 31 for 2018 and 2019 are only being compared. From Aug-Dec 2019, the VSC had 3,578 visits for an average of 715 visits per month. For the same period in 2018, the VSC had 3,397 visits for an average of 679 per month. In the period compared, the VSC had 181 more visits in 2019, which comprises an overall 5.3% increase in visits. The VSC served more than 640 different students in the fall 2019 semester compared to 525 in fall 2018. The table at right provides an overview of the purpose of the 2019 visits.

<b>Purpose of Visit</b>	<b>Number of Visits</b>
Computers/Printing	1,016
Socialize	870
Study Hall	867
GI Bill/VA Ed	346
Assistance/Support	257
Information	111
VA counselor	63
Job Assistance	29
VSC Event	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,578</b>

## 2.2. Core Objective 2: Student Support

The intent of the VSC is to provide a dedicated place for MCSs to obtain services or assistance, to get up-to-date information about benefits they earned, and to receive advice and support regarding challenges they may be facing. It also provides a place for our nation's veterans and service members to share their experiences and common bond as they reenter civilian life. In the case of family members, the VSC provides support in a place that understands military families unlike other places on campus. The VSC continued its support to students; however, virtual operations made engagement and support more challenging.

### 2.2.1. *Alignment with Student Affairs Strategic Objectives*

This objective, focusing on services and resources offered in support of MCSs, directly aligns with the Student Affairs objective of student engagement and support, particularly by building community in an identity-based space and meeting the needs of the full student through support and referral services. Additionally, it aligns with objective of student health and wellness by facilitating referral services for VA, campus, and off-campus health care resources. It also aligns with the objective of strategic enrollment management by supporting academic success and retention through utilization of resources.

### 2.2.2. *Programs, Services, & Resources*

The VSC provides a wide range of programs, services, and resources in support of MCSs. Their specific outcomes cannot be accurately measured, given that one cannot attribute one specific action to an MCS's ability to succeed academically, feel connected to campus, and/or stay healthy. Each case, like each MCS, is different and complex, and support often involves multiple entities and actions. Again, because the campus closed for COVID-19, the VSC cannot adequately compare student utilization for this AY to previous ones. Additionally, retention and graduation data for student veterans are incomplete. Activities and resources in support of this objective include:

- The VSC facility: Prior to virtual operations that started in March, the VSC was open for students from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday – Thursday and 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday. The center offered free coffee, tea, and hot chocolate daily. It contains a computer lab with Common Access Card readers for those still serving to check their military email and free printing. The center includes a lounge and a conference room that has been used primarily as a study hall and tutoring room. The center is a free speech space, permitting students to speak about whatever they want in whatever way they want, with few exceptions (e.g. hate speech, which has never occurred in the VSC, would not be tolerated). This open and unfiltered communication allows student veterans to share a part of their identities without censorship or fear of misunderstanding from those who have not experienced military life. In lieu of face-to-face engagement, the VSC held online meetings to provide information for MCSs and to facilitate distance socializing. Attendance was limited.
- Registrar: Normally, two SCOs are located in the VSC to certify enrollment to the VA for educational benefits and provide related information regarding such things as changes in credits and

classes and the impact on the students' benefits. The SCOs are Registrar's staff who occupy space in the VSC for the convenience of student veterans. They are not VSC staff and even use a separate phone system.

- **VSOC:** Typically, a VA VSOC Counselor is located in the VSC four days a week, providing services to those veterans with service-connected disabilities. The VSOC program provides specialized services in support of education and employment, such as vocational counseling and vocational rehabilitation services. The VSOC Counselor also provides general benefits information to any student veterans. The VSOC Counselor is a VA employee and not VSC staff. Following a VSOC counselor's retirement in July, the VA provided a part-time counselor until February when a full-time counselor was hired.
- **VITAL:** Normally, a VA VITAL Coordinator was located in the VSC one day a week, but can be reached via phone or email daily. The VITAL program provides collaboration between the VA medical services and the university, including counseling and disability support for student veterans. The VSC has partnered with the VITAL program to provide a part-time counselor/coordinator who typically visits the VSC once a week. The VITAL coordinator is a VA employee and not VSC staff. Collaborating with VITAL, the center launched a new peer mentoring program under which every new student veteran will be contacted by a peer as a means to welcome them and offer assistance. The VSC had some difficulty reaching each new student via phone, due to a glitch in the report sent from the Registrar's office. However, the VSC anticipates the problem will be fixed by fall 2020.
- **Orientation:** The VSC piloted a veterans' orientation as part of transfer student orientations in the summer of 2019. The June and July pilots were attended by six and nine veterans, respectively. Although the number of students was not large, a qualitative analysis of the benefit and value to the students was overall positive. The VSC is examining how to increase participation and offer the program throughout the academic year.
- **Scholarships and financial aid:** The VSC currently administers one \$2,000 undergraduate veteran-only endowed scholarship provided by the Stoker family. During this past year, the VSC partnered with the Union to provide \$14,000 in fall scholarships to eight student veterans. Partnering with the Alumni Association, the VSC was able to award another \$24,500 in scholarships.
- **Donation:** The Wagner Foundation donated \$25,000 to the VSC for student support. The funding provides supplies such as paper for free printing, SWAG, and coffee.
- **Library:** The center continues to offer books through a small textbook loan library
- **Assessment:** At the end of the fall 2019 semester, the VSC, in conjunction with CPDC and AER, conducted a survey of student veterans to assess their needs and experiences on campus. Results of the survey are discussed under the "outcomes achieved" section on the following page.

### **Goals:**

- Provide a central place for students to request and obtain academic and individual support.
- Provide a place to receive accurate and up-to-date information about VA benefits.



- Provide a safe place for student veterans to be themselves and engage others who are experiencing the difficult transition from military service to a campus where they feel misunderstood and marginalized.

### **Outcomes Expected:**

- Increased utilization of the center's services.

### **Outcomes Achieved:**

Overall utilization of the center is addressed in paragraph 2.1.2. Although visit data provides a measure of engagement, the purpose of the visits can indicate the level of support provided and needed by the students. In addition to increased visitation and an increased number of students who visited, the visits for the purpose of seeking services (i.e. excluding the computer lab, study hall, and socializing) increased by 156 in fall 2019 compared to fall 2018, indicating an increased level of support provided and increased demand from MCSs.

The results of the survey of student veterans indicated that the top campus services they utilize are the VSC (31%), Registrar's SCOs (24%), and the Academic Advising Center (12%). The top services that they would like to see established or increased are scholarships for veterans (26%), reduced admissions application and deposit fees (17%), and advisors/staff in each department designated for veterans (12%).

On campus, a third of veterans in the survey felt very open about their veteran status, but 48% felt "somewhat" of a sense of belonging on campus, 48% felt a little sense of belonging, and 5% felt no sense of belong. The survey reveals that 6% of them experienced a significant bias or harassment incident on campus. The sources of the incidents were staff members (12%), faculty members (38%), and students (50%). One veteran noted that a teaching assistant "had mentioned on more than one occasion that people who join the military do it as their last resort and don't have any other options. She felt that we were ignorant and misguided." Multiple students who are service members noted that they had professors who refused to make accommodations for military service obligations despite university policy.

The survey revealed that at some time while attending the university 19% of student veterans have not always had safe and suitable housing, 18% have worked two or more jobs at the same time, and 25% had missed meals because they could not afford to buy food, had been unable to pay for medical treatment, or had been unable to pay for vehicle repairs.

## **3.0. Plans for the Future**

### **3.1. Anticipated Challenges**

#### **3.1.1. *Student Engagement***

Engaging student veterans is a nationwide challenge that continues, and the ability to identify and engage every student veteran on the U's campus remains a challenge. However, the VSC will continue its outreach efforts in order to encourage student veterans to visit the VSC, utilize support resources, and participate in veteran-related events. The VSC must conduct outreach to the entire student veteran population and, additionally, to individual veterans in order to engage them.

The VSC will continue to work with the VITAL counselor and will enhance the peer mentoring program by recruiting more MCS peers. This will be especially important during virtual operations. The goal will be to contact every new student veteran to offer a friendly and helpful peer to help them transition successful to the university or to help them with challenges while they are attending the university. The Veterans Program Coordinator will also maintain a focus on outreach and engagement of student veterans.

For the summer semester, the VSC began weekly virtual "happy hour" meetings online to share information with MCSs, answer questions, and then socialize with online activities such as trivia challenges, scavenger hunts, or lighthearted debate. The VSC will evaluate the participation in the events and either continue them in the fall or schedule "drop-in" sessions online for students to engage VSC staff and peers as needed.

### 3.1.2. *Inclusivity & Equity*

The vast majority of student veterans qualify as federally protected veterans. In Utah, they are the only class of citizens with cabinet-level representation at the state and federal levels. However, veterans, service members, and their families have become an afterthought on most campuses. Whether it be due to possessing disabilities, being older nontraditional students, being erroneously stigmatized as "broken" or violent, or simply having served their country, they represent an underserved and marginalized student population in postsecondary education.

Additionally, over the past 19 years, the wave of post-9/11 support for service members and veterans has been receding nationwide. In response to the waning support, awareness, and appreciation for those who serve or served and their families, the VSC must continuously increase the time and effort required to educate partners on and off campus, to ensure that MCSs are considered in equity, inclusion, and diversity initiatives, and to garner resources and general support for MCSs.

### 3.1.3. *Student Support*

Selfless, stoic, and self-reliant to a fault, many veterans are reluctant to seek help. The need to operate in a virtual manner adds an additional challenge to engaging student veterans and providing them with support. A growth in enrollment of student veterans, engagement of student veterans, and utilization of VSC resources, particularly personnel, will challenge the VSC, which is already operating at capacity.

The loss of the National Center for Veterans Studies (NCVS) was one of the most disheartening veteran-related events on campus. The NCVS was a national asset with international recognition for its research

and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide prevention. Garnering millions in grants for suicide research and prevention and PTSD research and treatment, the NCVS provided free treatment to first responders and veterans, including free mental health treatment for veterans on campus who did not qualify for VA health care. The movement of the NCVS to another institution reduced the availability and accessibility of care for student veterans and reduced the university's ability to demonstrate support for them.

### 3.2. New Initiatives Underway or Planned

#### 3.2.1. *Student Engagement & Support: National Veterans Service Academy*

The VSC intends to establish the National Veterans Service Academy (NVSA), if adequate support for the initiative can be garnered. The NVSA will prepare student veterans, who have already demonstrated a propensity for public service as evidenced by their military service, for continued service and leadership as civilians in nonprofit or public agencies. The NVSA will provide advising, internships, education, and job placement for student veterans who are committed to serving in public or nonprofit organizations following graduation. Within the academy, student veterans will study their chosen major and take supplemental classes on topics such as public administration, nonprofit management, fundraising, and financial management. The program would be beneficial to the nation, state, university, and veterans. The university will be establishing a first of its kind program that will leverage the traits, experience, and skills of veterans to produce graduates that are sought-after nationally. In addition to needing the full backing of the university's senior leadership, funding will be required to cover the cost of courses outside of a student veteran's major that are not covered by the GI Bill but support their success in nonprofit or government service.

#### 3.2.2. *Student Engagement & Support: Student Veteran Orientation*

As non-traditional students who are older and have more life experience than traditional students who come to the U directly from high school, student veterans should attend an orientation that is tailored to their needs as veterans and non-traditional students. Furthermore, student veterans are often unaware of the benefits, programs, and services that they have earned and for which they qualify. One option that was piloted was a supplemental orientation for veterans during Transfer Student orientation in summer 2019. The supplemental program included presentations on VA educational benefits processing at the U, adjusting to life as a civilian college student, and resources available to veterans on and off campus. Student participation was voluntary and, unfortunately, minimal. Beginning in summer 2020, the VSC offered online versions of the orientation pilot. Again, participation was voluntary and minimal. The VSC will leverage the peer mentoring program to attempt to engage more new veterans, but engaging a peer will also be voluntary. Without an incentive, such as a registration hold, to attend a veterans' orientation or engage a peer, it is unlikely that student veteran participation will improve given their aversion to seeking help.

A related effort that would not have the breadth of an orientation program is the establishment of a program similar to the Honors program that includes a nature-based orientation/transition program the week prior to the start of the regular fall semester, followed by weekly nature-based activities and related writing projects. This would support the development of a cohort of close-knit student veterans who could serve as advocates to bolster student veteran engagement with the VSC and other veterans. The VSC is collaborating with the Parks, Recreation, & Tourism faculty to develop the program.

### *3.2.3. Student Engagement & Support: Military & Veterans Advisory Council*

Nearly 1 in 20 students at the U are veterans, service members, or their family members. The U must collaborate more deliberately to best meet the needs of our MCSs. To that end, the VSC will establish the Military & Veterans Affairs Committee (MVAC). The MVAC will comprise a diverse group of students, faculty, and staff and will work to address issues related to the recruitment, admission, retention, progression, graduation, employment, and campus experience of students who are active duty members of the military, military veterans, and their spouses and dependents. The committee will be chaired by the VSC director and will report to the Vice President for Student Affairs.

### *3.2.4. Student Engagement & Support: VSC Reconfiguration*

The VSC requested funding from the state Department of Veterans & Military Affairs (DVMA) to cover two-thirds of the cost to reconfigure the VSC in order to make better use of the VSC space and better meet the needs of the student veterans. In addition to the visit data indicating the high number of visits for use of the computer lab and student veteran lounge, the Student Veterans at the U association has requested more computer stations in the lab. There are currently three workstations available to all students and one reserved for a VA work study student. An architectural firm developed a plan to reconfigure the office in such a way that three additional cubicles could be added to expand the computer lab and additional space could be made available in the student lounge. If approved, the VSC will reconfigure the space during the winter break in December 2019.

## 3.3. Anticipated Opportunity - Enrollment

The university should systematically recruiting veterans to its campus. Advertising in military-oriented publications, making presentations at education centers and transition assistance programs at major bases and stations, and sustained communications with those entities will result in increased enrollment of students most of whom possess federal funding for tuition and have honorably served our nation. Additionally, approximately 40% of the DoD are service member of color. Recruiting from the pool of approximately 200,000 new veterans that leave the military each year could increase the diversity of the student population. Such an effort would require additional personnel.

Ideally, the university would establish a veteran recruiting position shared by the VSC and Admissions and located in the VSC. In coordination with Admissions, the recruiter would be responsible for

admissions counseling and support of student veteran admissions and would facilitate veterans’ transition into higher education at the U.

#### 4.0. **Staff Excellence**

##### 4.1. Awards and Recognitions

STAFF	AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS
None	

##### 4.2. Committee Memberships

The following staff were members of listed committees for all or part of the reporting period.

STAFF	COMMITTEE
Brink, Angela	Veterans Day Committee, U of U (Secretary)
Morgan, Paul	National Council on Military Transition to Education (Strategy working group lead, Research working group member)
	Veterans Day Committee, U of U (Chair)
	National Center for Veterans Studies, Ohio State University (board member)
	Utah Department of Veterans & Military Affairs (Campus Support Coordinator)
	Utah Chapter, Association of the US Army (advisory board member)
	NASPA (member)
	Giving Day Committee (member)
	Salt Lake Chamber Military Affairs Committee (member)
	Utah Veteran Education and Training Partnership (member)
	Utah OEF/OIF Community Partnership (member)
	CPDC Career Coach Search Committee (member)
Root, Matthew	Veterans Day Committee, U of U (member)
	NASPA
	Utah OEF/OIF Community Partnership (member)
	Salt Lake Chamber Military Affairs Committee (member)

##### 4.3. Presentations & Publications

The VSC staff provided the following presentations to organizations outside of Student Affairs.

Morgan, P. (2019, July). “Help-seeking Behavior and Engaging Veterans.” Lecture presented to seniors in the College of Nursing at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT.

Morgan, P. (2019, November). “Social Change Model of Leadership.” Workshop facilitated as part of the University of Utah Student Leadership Summit, Alta, UT.

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Root, M. & Cory, C. (2020, February). "Improving Career Preparedness and Success of Military Connected Students." Presented at NASPA Symposium on Military-Connected Students, Seattle, WA.

Morgan, P. (2020, February). "Veterans in Higher Education." Lecture presented as part of the Utah Prison Education Program at Draper State Prison, Draper, UT.

## 5.0. **Anti-racism Plan**

Appendix A is the VSC anti-racism plan.

## 6.0. **Financials**

Reported separately.

## Appendix A

### Anti-Racism Action Plan

#### *Position Statement*

The Veterans Support Center (VSC) has identified integrity, commitment, and respect as its values. In terms of integrity, we act as honest brokers of the public trust, we speak truthfully, and we act in good faith in the execution of our duties. At the end of the day when we each look in a mirror, we see someone trustworthy and honest. Our center's primary commitment is to the students who have served in our nation's military and their family members (military-connected students – MCSs). We will go to the ends of the Earth to support our brothers and sisters in arms and their families, and we are committed to providing a welcoming and supportive environment that serves as their safe haven at the university and that recognizes, supports, and honors the unique culture, experiences, and needs of U.S. Armed Forces service members, veterans, and family members. Like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream, we respect individuals based on the content of their character. We recognize, accept, and welcome the intersectionality and multiplicity of each MCS, but it is the content of one's character and the quality of one's work that earns our genuine respect and trust. The VSC is a small office dedicated to the 5% of the university's student population that comprises MCSs, a group that experiences bias, misunderstanding, and disregard on campus. However, to the degree feasible, the VSC supports the success and safety of the entire university, its students, and our colleagues. We are One U.

Most student veterans and all the veterans on the VSC staff qualify as federally protected citizens. In Utah, veterans are the only class of citizens with cabinet-level representation at both the state and federal levels. However, veterans and service members have become an afterthought on most campuses. Whether it be due to having disabilities, being older nontraditional students, being stigmatized, or simply having served their nation, veterans represent an underserved and marginalized student population in postsecondary education. Many student veterans and some staff members have been victims of bias or harassment, but they are thick-skinned and notoriously self-reliant, so they often do not formally report it. In a discussion regarding the treatment of veterans on campus, one student veteran said, "For me, microaggression means anything under .50 caliber." Research indicates that veterans of color experience more racism outside of the military than they did while serving in the military. This comes as no surprise, given that every member of the U.S. Armed Forces attends equal opportunity training annually, belongs to a workforce that comprises 40% people of color, takes the same oath of office, and knows that everyone in a unit, despite race or other identities, relies on each other in carrying out the mission and helping everyone return home safely. Although no organization is free of racism or inequities, titles such as "Soldier," "Sailor," and eventually "veteran," along with the content of one's character and the quality of one's work, largely transcends race and produces individuals who can set an example of acceptance and respect for others, regardless of identities.

Our staff and our MCSs comprise individuals from all over the country and world who have diverse identities, backgrounds, and experiences. Most have received more

antiracism, sexual harassment, and cultural competency training than the average individual, and they have life experience that includes working closely with diverse individuals from across our nation and the world. We do not condone harassment, discrimination, or violence towards anyone based on race or any other identity. We will call out racist behavior when we encounter it anywhere on campus. We will set the example of good citizenship, acceptance of those who differ from ourselves, and respect for others regardless of race, and we will expect the same of our students, colleagues, and partners.

### ***Current Anti-Racism Initiatives***

Racism has never been an issue in the VSC, and the character, qualities, and experiences of our MCSs have indicated no need to establish anti-racism student programming to augment the myriad other programs in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, as part of our veterans' orientation, we charge new students with setting the example of citizenship, including standing up against racism, sexism, harassment, violence, and dishonesty. To the extent possible, the VSC staff has been engaged in readings, discussions, and events focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, including those focused on racism. When hiring, we will continue to encourage diverse candidates to apply.

### ***Anti-Racism Plan***

We will continue our current efforts. We will encourage our staff to continue to learn about equity, diversity, inclusion, and racism. We will encourage MCSs, including the Student Veterans at Utah organization, to do the same, and we will maintain a list of resources related to equity, diversity, and inclusion to which we can refer MCSs who desire to learn more about racism or other bias and discrimination. Additionally, as we work with student veterans, we will continue to be mindful of the needs of our veterans of color.

Research on the efficacy of diversity and racism training is mixed, with some research finding that it is effective, some indicating it is not helpful, and some even indicating that it has a negative effect, particularly when made mandatory. Telling an individual something can be much less effective than enabling them to experience and observe it. For example, telling Americans, who live in a first-world country, that combatants in a least-developed country could engage in a prolonged war with the U.S. might not convince them to the degree that observing or participating in the war in Afghanistan has. Our attitudes and beliefs are a product of our experiences, and our experiences can be far more transformational than the things we are told. This is why toddlers who have been told not to touch a hot stove will still touch a hot stove until they experience how painful the stove can be. Therefore, the VSC's anti-racism plan is centered on providing more opportunities for students to experience diversity firsthand.

As previously discussed, 40% of the U.S. Armed Forces are people of color. Every year, 200,000 service members leave the military. The VSC has advocated for the deliberate recruitment of veterans and will continue to do so. Veterans are much more racially diverse



than the university's student population, so increasing the enrollment of student veterans can increase the diversity of the entire student population. In so doing, we provide all students the opportunity to experience more racial diversity and observe more examples of acceptance and respect for others. These experiences can shape attitudes and beliefs.

Deliberate recruiting would entail establishing a Veterans Admissions Coordinator (VAC). Collaborating with Admissions, the VAC would serve as the sponsor for any military-connected individual interested in attending the university and would work with the individual from their initial contact with the university through their enrollment. The VAC would travel one week a month to major bases to meet with education officers, Transition Assistance Program managers, Wounded Warrior Program directors, veterans, and their families at each location in order to educate them on the benefits of attending the university.

### ***Community Partners Integral to Success***

Establishing a recruiting program requires resources that the VSC lacks, the support of university leadership, and Admissions' participation. The VSC has advocated for the recruitment of veterans and expressed the value of doing so not only in terms of diversity but also for the financial benefit of attracting more funded students. Attempts to establish such a program have been unsuccessful, with some responding with "We have to think about the return on investment." Until such time that the university can provide substantial resources and Admissions can support the initiative, the VSC cannot implement or measure the success of a recruiting program.

### ***Balancing Commitments***

As previously noted, the VSC is a small office dedicated to supporting the university's 1,600 MCSs, a group that experiences bias, misunderstanding, and disregard on campus. In carrying out our primary mission, the VSC operates at capacity. However, when possible, the VSC will continue to support efforts and initiatives that affect the entire campus, including anti-racism work.

### ***Recommended Divisional Priorities***

We recommend that supporting the personal and academic success of every student, regardless of identity, remains the divisional priority. An essential part of that is continuing our efforts to create a campus free of injustice, bias, harassment, and racism, where every student feels welcomed, supported, valued, and safe, and where everyone is judged only by the content of their character and the quality of their work.