

A. DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

Student Services

1. Describe the program's purpose and mission. Limit 250 words.

The Veterans Success Center (VSC) is dedicated to supporting Veterans, active military members, and their families as they transition into college life and pursue academic and career goals. Acting as both a direct service provider and a bridge to external resources, the VSC focuses on creating a welcoming, inclusive environment that promotes persistence, engagement, and success. From the first day on campus through graduation and beyond, the VSC provides comprehensive support aimed at fostering personal, academic, and professional development.

Central to the VSC's mission is building community and camaraderie among military-connected students, helping them feel connected and supported. The center emphasizes peer-to-peer support, faculty and staff engagement, and the promotion of an inclusive campus culture that values diversity, service, and excellence. By collaborating with student groups, faculty, staff, and community partners, the VSC enhances the overall student experience and works to empower the next generation of leaders and innovators.

To ensure success, the VSC regularly hosts representatives from veteran-serving organizations, provides a safe and comfortable space for veterans to connect, and educates the broader campus community about the unique needs of military-affiliated students. Veterans are encouraged to participate in student life, join clubs, and fully engage in the college experience. Through these efforts, the VSC supports a learning environment that encourages exploration, growth, and achievement, while strengthening the lives of Veterans and their families.

2. Which of the following Institutional Learning Outcomes does the program support? Select at least one.

ILOs

- ☒ #1 - Acquire the self-confidence and self-discipline to pursue their intellectual curiosities with integrity in both their personal and professional lives
- ☐ #2 - Obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to access, evaluate, and interpret ideas, images, and information critically in order to communicate effectively, reach conclusions, and solve problems
- ☒ #3 - Respect the inter-relatedness of the global human environment, engage with diverse peoples, acknowledge the significance of their daily actions relative to broader issues and events
- ☒ #4 - Assume responsibility for their own impact on the earth by living a sustainable and ethical life style
- ☐ #5 - Demonstrate a level of engagement in the subject matter that enables and motivates the integration of acquired knowledge and skills beyond the classroom

B. STUDENTS SERVED

3. Describe 1-3 salient demographic composition of students served by the program and include an analysis of how it aligns with the students your program is intended to serve. (500 words)

The Veterans Success Center (VSC) at Santa Monica College serves a diverse population of student veterans and military-affiliated students. The demographic composition of this population reflects both the diversity of the U.S. military and the mission of the VSC to support individuals transitioning from military service to higher education.

1. Age and Nontraditional Student Status

One notable demographic characteristic of students served by the VSC is that many are nontraditional students, often older than the typical college student. Many veterans begin their higher education after completing several years of military service, which means they may be in their mid-20s to late-30s or older. This aligns with the VSC's mission because these students often balance multiple responsibilities such as employment, family obligations, and adjusting to civilian life. The center's services—such as flexible counseling modalities (i.e. Drop in, appointments, phone, zoom and in person), benefits assistance, and transition guidance—are designed specifically to address the needs of this nontraditional student population.

Measures: Headcount

Age	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
19 or less	16	18	15	20	29	32
20 to 24	70	66	66	75	80	67
25 to 40	171	150	132	148	189	170
40+	15	16	23	29	24	26
Total	272	250	236	272	322	295

2. Gender Composition

While male students continue to represent the majority of the veteran population, enrollment among women veterans has steadily increased. The VSC serves both male and female veterans by providing inclusive access to academic counseling, benefits assistance, and supportive community spaces. This supports the program's goal of fostering an inclusive environment that reflects the evolving demographics of the military and the growing presence of women in higher education.

In addition to veterans, the VSC has seen growth in military-affiliated students, particularly dependents such as spouses and children of veterans. Data indicates an increase in female participation; however, further analysis shows that much of this growth is attributed to dependent students rather than women veterans. Many of these students are spouses and daughters utilizing Chapter 35 dependent education benefits, which helps distinguish dependents from veterans in program data.

Limits: Veteran Success Center VSC From Fall 2020 to Fall 2025

Measures: Headcount

Gender	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
Female	62	71	60	77	101	99
Male	205	174	171	190	210	186
Unreported	5	5	5	5	11	10
Total	272	250	236	272	322	295

3. Racial and Ethnic Diversity

The VSC also serves a racially and ethnically diverse population, including students who identify as Latino, Black, Asian, and other backgrounds. This diversity reflects both the demographics of Santa Monica College and the broader U.S. military. Many veterans may also be first-generation college students, which can create additional barriers related to navigating higher education systems. The VSC's targeted support services—such as educational planning, resource referrals, and financial benefits guidance—help address these barriers and promote equitable access to educational opportunities.

Limits: Veteran Success Center VSC From Fall 2020 to Fall 2025

Measures: Headcount

Race/Ethnicity	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
Asian	30	25	18	24	27	18
Black	50	47	43	68	75	60
Latine/x	88	81	97	102	118	118
Native American	0	1	0	0	1	1
Pacific Is.	2	2	2	0	0	1
Two or More	19	25	24	28	36	41
Unreported	17	11	6	9	8	7
White	66	58	46	41	57	49
Total	272	250	236	272	322	295

Overall, the demographic composition of students served by the VSC aligns closely with the program's intended population which is student veterans and military-affiliated individuals transitioning into higher education. By recognizing the nontraditional status, gender diversity, and racial and ethnic backgrounds of its students, the VSC is able to tailor its services to support their academic success, sense of belonging, and long-term educational goals.

4. Describe how the program does outreach to, and provides access for, the intended student population. (250 words)

The VSC engages in outreach through several channels, including participation in education fairs held at military installations across Southern California. These events allow us to connect directly with active-duty service members who are typically within 90–180 days of separating from the military. Reaching service members during this transition period gives us the opportunity to not only introduce them to Santa Monica College but also, help them begin planning for their move into higher education if they were to choose another institution.

By tabling at education fairs, we speak with prospective students one-on-one and provide information about the range of services available through the VSC as well as resources offered across the college. These conversations also allow us to learn more about their educational interests and career goals, and to discuss how Santa Monica College's degree and certificate programs may align with their plans.

In addition to external outreach, the VSC regularly invites community organizations that work with veterans to visit campus and speak with our students. These partnerships help connect student veterans with additional resources that can support them both academically and personally, including services related to career development, wellness, community support and housing. Together, these efforts help ensure that veterans are aware of the opportunities and support available to them as they pursue their educational goals.

5. When considering student outcomes, SMC produces the largest equity gaps for Black and Latinx students. How does the program address equity gaps within the scope of work that it performs? (500 words)

The Veterans Success Center at Santa Monica College addresses equity gaps by providing targeted academic, financial, and personal support services that reduce barriers faced by student veterans and military-affiliated students. These efforts focus on improving access, persistence, and completion outcomes for a population that often experiences unique challenges when transitioning from military service to higher education. In comparison to SMC, the VSC's majority of students are comprised of Black and LatinX students. In Fall of 2025, 40% of student's served by the VSC were LatinX followed by 20% Black.

1. Supporting the Transition from Military to College

Many veterans encounter difficulties adjusting to academic environments after military service. The Veterans Success Center (VSC) addresses this equity gap by offering onboarding assistance, educational planning, and counseling tailored specifically to veterans. These services help students understand admissions procedures, degree requirements, and course selection, which supports successful enrollment and early academic momentum.

2. Facilitating Access to Financial and Educational Benefits

Financial complexity can be a barrier for veterans pursuing higher education. The VSC acts as a liaison with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to verify enrollment and assist students in accessing benefits such as the GI Bill and other VA education programs. By helping students navigate these processes and ensuring timely certification of benefits, the center reduces financial obstacles that might otherwise prevent enrollment or continuation in college.

3. Providing Academic

The center addresses achievement gaps by offering veteran specific academic counseling, tutoring referrals, workshops, and transfer. These services are designed to improve academic success indicators such as persistence between terms, completion of transfer-level English and math, and transfer to four-year institutions.

4. Addressing Mental Health and Wellness Needs

Veterans may face service-related conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), or other mental health challenges that can affect academic success. The VSC collaborates with organizations such as U.S. Vets and provides access to wellness counselors and specialized support services. These resources help ensure that veterans receive appropriate mental health care and accommodations that support their academic persistence.

5. Building Community and Sense of Belonging

Student veterans can experience social isolation on traditional college campuses. The VSC addresses this by providing a dedicated veterans' lounge, study spaces, peer mentoring, and workshops that foster connection and community among veteran students. These programs promote a sense of belonging and engagement, which research shows is important for student retention and success.

6. Connecting Veterans to Campus and Community Resources

Finally, the center coordinates referrals to campus departments and community-based veteran organizations, ensuring that students can access services such as disability accommodations, employment assistance, and community support networks. This coordinated approach reduces systemic barriers and helps veterans fully utilize available resources.

Conclusion

Within its scope of work, the Veterans Success Center at Santa Monica College advances equity by addressing the specific academic, financial, social, and health-related barriers that student veterans face. Through specialized counseling, benefits assistance, wellness support, and community-building initiatives, the center works to close equity gaps and improve outcomes for veterans pursuing higher education.

6. If applicable, describe any instructional partnerships or collaborations that impact the students served by the program. (500 words)

The Veterans Success Center (VSC) at Santa Monica College maintains several key partnerships that provide valuable academic support to student veterans and their dependents.

One important collaboration is with the Writing and Humanities Tutoring Center (WHTC). Through this partnership, WHTC tutors provide services directly within the VSC, allowing students to receive academic support in a familiar and supportive environment. This approach helps “meet students where they are” and encourages greater engagement with tutoring services. Students can receive assistance with a wide range of writing-related needs, including transfer essays, personal insight questions, research papers, grammar, MLA and APA formatting, and literary analysis.

The VSC also partners with the SMC Math Lab to provide on-site math tutoring for student veterans and their dependents. Math tutors from the Math Lab hold tutoring sessions within the VSC in a designated private office equipped with a whiteboard, desk, and seating to facilitate focused learning. These tutors provide academic support for several math courses, including Math 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 28, and 54.

Providing tutoring services within the VSC has proven to be highly beneficial. By offering academic support in a comfortable and familiar space, students often feel more at ease seeking help, which can lead to increased engagement and more effective learning outcomes. These partnerships strengthen the VSC’s ability to support the academic success of student veterans and their families.

C. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

7. Describe any changes that have been implemented as a result of the recommendations of the last program review. (500 words)

Based on the last program review, there were no recommendations that needed to be addressed. We look forward to getting feedback from this program review and begin implementing any changes if necessary.

8a. Identify and describe one or two outcomes students are expected to experience after receiving services from, or participating in, the program. (200 words)

Students who receive services from the Veterans Success Center (VSC) at Santa Monica College are expected to experience improved academic progress and a stronger sense of connection to the campus community.

1. Improved Academic Persistence and Completion

One key outcome is increased academic success, including persistence from term to term and progress toward degree or transfer goals. Through specialized counseling, educational planning, and assistance with veterans’ education benefits such as the GI Bill, the VSC helps students navigate institutional processes and reduce financial or administrative barriers. By ensuring that student veterans understand program requirements and have consistent access to academic support and referrals, the center supports their ability to stay enrolled, complete courses, and work toward graduation or transfer to a four-year institution.

2. Increased Sense of Belonging and Support

Another expected outcome is that student veterans develop a stronger sense of belonging and connection to the college community. The VSC provides a dedicated space for veterans, peer engagement opportunities, and access to campus and community resources. These services help reduce isolation that veterans sometimes experience in traditional college environments, while also promoting well-being, confidence, and engagement in campus life.

8b. Describe how the identified student outcomes are assessed. (e.g., a survey of program participants is administered at week 12 of each semester) (200 words)

For the Veterans Success Center (VSC), outcomes are assessed using a mixed-methods approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand student experiences and program effectiveness. Workshops and informal feedback sessions provide opportunities for veterans to share verbal input about their experiences with the center, the challenges they face, and the types of services that are most helpful. These conversations allow staff to gather detailed insights and identify areas where additional support or improvements may be needed.

In addition to these qualitative methods, surveys are distributed to student veterans to evaluate the performance and impact of the VSC. The surveys include questions that assess the team's customer service, professionalism, and responsiveness when assisting students. They also measure the effectiveness and timeliness of GI Bill benefits processing, which is a critical factor in reducing financial barriers for veterans pursuing their education.

The surveys further evaluate the quality of counseling services, including educational planning and referrals to campus or community resources. Another key component of the assessment focuses on students' sense of belonging and comfort within the Veterans Success Center. Together, these assessment methods help the VSC identify strengths, address gaps in services, and continuously improve support for veteran and military-affiliated students.

8c. What is the "effectiveness" target goal for each of the expected student outcomes identified? (e.g., 90% or more of students attending the FAFSA workshops successfully complete the financial aid application within four weeks) (200 words)

The effectiveness target goals for each expected student outcome serve as measurable benchmarks used to evaluate whether services provided by the Veterans Success Center (VSC) are successfully supporting student veterans and meeting program objectives.

1. Academic Persistence and Progress

For the outcome related to academic success, the effectiveness target is improved persistence and continued enrollment among student veterans who utilize VSC services. Indicators may include veterans returning from one term to the next, successfully completing their courses, and making progress toward degree or transfer requirements. The goal is for at least 60% of student veterans who receive VSC counseling and support to remain enrolled, graduate and/or transfer.

2. Sense of Belonging and Student Satisfaction

For the outcome related to belonging and engagement, the effectiveness target is over 70% of students who use the center report satisfaction in the services the VSC offers. This will be measured through surveys and feedback tools that assess students' experiences with VSC staff, services, and the center environment. The goal is for at least 70% of respondents to report positive experiences and a strong sense of support and connection to the campus community.

8d. Analyze the program's performance on the data collected to assess the program's student outcomes. Is the program meeting the target goals? What context is needed to understand the results? (500 words)

Analysis of the data indicates that the VSC is generally effective in meeting its core student support objectives, particularly in the areas of student satisfaction, access to benefits, and academic support. Unfortunately, the data presented below is old. Nevertheless, we see that students are generally satisfied with the services the VSC provides. We intend to ramp up the sending out of surveys although we wish there was a way for surveys to be automatically produced at the conclusion of the services received so that we can collect more data. We notice that if the survey is sent via email, students tend to not be as

responsive. Data collected through surveys, informal feedback, and program participation suggest that most students who engage with the VSC report positive experiences with staff support, counseling services, and assistance navigating VA educational benefits. These indicators suggest that the program is largely meeting its target goals related to student satisfaction and sense of belonging.

One of the most consistent indicators of success is the level of satisfaction students report regarding the timeliness and accuracy of VA benefits processing. For many student veterans, the proper certification of benefits is critical to maintaining financial stability while enrolled in school. Feedback from students indicates that the VSC staff are knowledgeable and responsive in helping them understand and access their benefits, which supports continued enrollment and academic progress.

Another positive outcome is the utilization of academic support services, such as counseling and tutoring partnerships within the VSC. Students often report that receiving support in a familiar and veteran-friendly environment increases their likelihood of seeking help and staying engaged in their academic work.

However, several contextual factors are important when interpreting these results. The program has experienced staffing limitations and increased workloads due to recent budget cuts, which have led to longer wait times for services. In addition, workplace challenges within the team have affected morale, which can indirectly influence service delivery.

2. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following services you received at the VSC this academic year:

	Satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Does not apply/not use service	Responses
Academic course/educational planning	13 96.3%	5 22.7%	1 4.3%	2 8.7%	2 8.7%	23
Certification/assistance with benefits	14 60.9%	6 26.1%	0 0.0%	1 4.3%	2 8.7%	23
Veterans related services	11 90.0%	4 18.2%	0 0.0%	1 4.3%	5 27.2%	23
Tutoring	1 8.4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 13.0%	13 58.0%	23
Mental health counseling	4 17.4%	1 4.3%	0 0.0%	2 8.7%	16 69.6%	23
Vocational rehab counseling	5 21.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 8.7%	16 69.6%	23
Referrals to other agencies	6 26.1%	1 4.3%	1 4.3%	2 8.7%	13 56.6%	23
Out meetings and activities	1 4.3%	0 0.0%	1 4.3%	1 4.3%	10 43.5%	23
Totals						23

6. How much do you agree with the following statements about services in the VSC?

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Does not apply	Responses
The VSC staff are friendly and courteous.	15 68.2%	5 22.7%	0 0.0%	2 9.1%	0 0.0%	22
The VSC staff answer all of my questions thoroughly.	15 65.2%	4 17.4%	2 8.7%	2 8.7%	0 0.0%	23
The VSC provides all of the services that I need.	14 60.9%	6 26.1%	0 0.0%	3 13.0%	0 0.0%	23
Overall, I am satisfied with my experiences visiting the VSC.	14 60.9%	6 27.3%	0 0.0%	2 9.1%	0 0.0%	22
Totals						23

5. How true are the following statements your counseling session experience in the VSC?

	Very true	Mostly true	Somewhat true	Not true at all	Responses
The counselor understood my specific needs and goals.	12 85.7%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%	1 7.1%	14
Every concern or need I brought to the counselor was addressed during the session.	12 85.7%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%	1 7.1%	14
The counselor created a safe and welcoming environment.	12 85.7%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%	1 7.1%	14
The pace of the session was satisfactory (not too rushed, not too slow).	12 85.7%	1 7.1%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%	14
Overall, I am satisfied with my experience in the counseling session.	12 85.7%	1 7.1%	0 0.0%	1 7.1%	14
Totals					14

9. Based upon the outcomes assessment, satisfaction evaluation and/or other data, provide two notable examples of how the program serves students effectively and briefly explain why they are successful. (500 words)

Based on data collected via surveys and focus groups, the two examples that we can currently provide are On-Site Academic Tutoring Partnerships and dedicated support for VA benefits and educational planning. .

One effective practice is the VSC's partnerships with the Writing and Humanities Tutoring Center and the Math Lab to provide tutoring directly within the VSC space. Instead of requiring student veterans to travel across campus, tutors come to the center to work with students in a familiar and supportive environment. Assessment feedback and informal student input indicate that veterans are more likely to utilize tutoring services when they are offered in the VSC, where they already feel comfortable and connected. This approach helps increase engagement with academic support services and contributes to improved academic confidence and performance.

The second is dedicated support for VA Benefits and educational planning. We are fortunate enough to have stellar counselors who combined, have over 50 years of experience working with veterans and their families. This experience and knowledge is a key strength of the program as we assist students with navigating VA education benefits and academic planning to maximize their GI Bill education benefits. Student satisfaction surveys frequently highlight the importance of timely benefits processing and knowledgeable staff support. Because many student veterans rely on these benefits to cover tuition and living expenses, efficient certification and clear guidance help reduce financial stress and allow students to focus more fully on their academic progress.

10. Based upon the overall assessment and evaluation of the program, describe 2-5 areas that require attention or improvement. (500 words)

While the Veterans Success Center (VSC) strives to provide high-quality services to student veterans and their dependents, we recognize that there are areas where the program can improve. Feedback from students and staff has highlighted several opportunities for growth.

One recurring concern involves communication and transparency, particularly regarding how VA education benefits operate and how institutional policies intersect with federal VA requirements. Some students have expressed confusion about these processes and have indicated that clearer communication and guidance would be beneficial. Additionally, students have occasionally reported challenges when working with the Admissions and Records office, especially regarding residency determinations, which can directly affect tuition and benefits eligibility.

Student workers in the VA Work Study program have also shared concerns about the tension within the VSC work environment, noting that it can sometimes be noticeable to those working in the space. Addressing workplace dynamics would likely improve both staff morale and the overall atmosphere for students.

Operational efficiency is another area for improvement. The VSC currently relies on a document management system called FileCenter, which is not cloud-based and can only be accessed from campus computers. This limitation restricts staff's ability to work remotely and slows document retrieval and processing.

Another avenue to increase enrollment for our program and SMC as a whole, is establishing an MOU with the Department of defense for a program called Tuition Assistance (TA) to allow active duty service members to benefit from going to college while still being on active duty. TA are guaranteed funds from the Department of Defense directly to SMC. The VSC loses roughly about 200-300 students a year to other colleges that do offer TA. Given that we are near Los Angeles Air Force base, we would benefit greatly from students coming to SMC. SMC currently is not a TA approved school and seeking approval has been an uphill battle since the Faculty Lead Started at SMC 8 years ago.

Finally, students have expressed interest in establishing a Veterans Club and increasing the number of student-focused activities and community-building events to strengthen engagement and peer connection within the veteran student community.

D. THE FUTURE OF THE PROGRAM

11. Based on the findings from your assessment/evaluation, describe the goals/priorities and accompanying action plan(s) you will pursue to improve your program. (500 words)

Moving forward, the Veterans Success Center (VSC) hopes to maintain stability despite recent budget reductions. The center has already experienced increased workloads with fewer resources, and continued cuts would make it more challenging to provide the level of service that student veterans and their families rely on. Our goal is to sustain high-quality customer service, thoughtful educational planning, and the efficient and timely processing of VA education benefits. To support these objectives, the VSC has identified several priorities for the coming years.

Modernizing Records Management

One priority is identifying a new filing system that is both FERPA-compliant and cloud-based. The current system limits access to on-campus computers, which can slow workflow and collaboration. A modern system would allow secure access from multiple locations while remaining robust enough to manage the large volume of student records the VSC must maintain for at least three years after a student's last enrolled semester.

Improving File Retention Practices

Another operational goal is to review and properly destroy files that exceed the required three-year retention period. This process will improve organization, ensure compliance with record retention guidelines, and reduce the amount of physical storage currently occupied by archived documents.

Expanding Outreach Efforts

The VSC also hopes to increase outreach efforts by attending more education fairs and conducting additional visits to military installations. These engagements help connect with service members who are preparing to transition to higher education and introduce them to the opportunities available at Santa Monica College.

Enhancing Student Engagement and Community

Strengthening community among student veterans remains a priority. The VSC hopes to expand opportunities for students to participate in field trips to four-year universities, recreational outings, and other activities that promote connection, well-being, and a stronger sense of belonging on campus.

Establishing a VSC Director Position

The creation of a VSC Director position would greatly benefit the program. A director could oversee administrative and operational responsibilities, allowing the Faculty Lead to devote more time to counseling, outreach, and mentoring students, including serving as an advisor to a potential Veterans Club.

Strengthening Internal Communication and Workplace Culture

Improving communication and collaboration among staff and faculty is another important goal. Developing more consistent communication practices and fostering a more supportive team environment would help reduce workplace tension and create a healthier atmosphere for both staff and students.

Expanding Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

The VSC would also like to expand Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) opportunities for veterans. Currently, only six courses—primarily in Computer Science—are approved for CPL through evaluation of military training on a student's Joint Services Transcript (JST). Encouraging more academic departments to review military coursework and training could allow veterans to receive credit for relevant experience and accelerate their academic progress.

Increasing Professional Development Opportunities

Providing additional professional development opportunities for staff and faculty is another priority. Internal trainings, cross-training with other departments, and participation in external conferences would strengthen staff knowledge and improve collaboration across the college.

Pursuing Department of Defense Tuition Assistance Approval

Finally, the VSC hopes that by the end of 2026 Santa Monica College can become a Department of Defense–approved Tuition Assistance (TA) institution. Currently, SMC is not an approved institution due to internal barriers at the college. We currently, have about 350-400 students that contact the VSC or inquire about TA and we have to turn them away to other local community colleges that are TA approved. This designation would allow active-duty service members to enroll in courses at SMC while still serving. Achieving this status would not only expand access for military-connected students but also help

create a pipeline for service members to transition smoothly into full-time enrollment at Santa Monica College after separating from the military.

E. EMPLOYEES/PROGRAM STAFF AND DEPARTMENTAL CULTURE

12. List and describe program staffing, including FTE, faculty, classified professionals, managers, and student/intern support. (250 words)

The Veterans Success Center has a total of 6 Employees.

1 x Full time Academic Counselor/ Faculty Lead

2 x Full time Administrative Support Staff

3 x Part Time Academic Counselors

Our program currently is under the supervision of the Interim Associate Dean for Student Life.

13. Analyze staffing levels in the context of the program's mission and purpose. Are there any gaps or needs to be addressed? (250 words)

Our program has been directly impacted by recent budget reductions and staffing layoffs, which in turn is affecting the level of service we are able to provide to student veterans and their families. With fewer hours available for our counseling faculty, wait times during drop-in counseling hours have increased, and the workload for remaining staff has grown significantly—often doubling or even tripling in certain areas. Despite these challenges, the team continues to work diligently to maintain the quality of support our students rely on.

Looking ahead, we hope that as the college's financial situation stabilizes, additional staffing can be restored to strengthen the center's capacity. One priority would be hiring an adjunct counselor who could focus on Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) and serve as a liaison for Stellic, helping veterans translate their military training and experience into academic credit and more efficiently track their educational progress.

Another important goal would be the creation of a dedicated VSC Director position to manage administrative and operational responsibilities. Establishing this role would allow the Faculty Lead to devote more time to student counseling and outreach efforts, which are critical for connecting with prospective and current student veterans and supporting their academic success.

14. Describe how the program provides ongoing professional development opportunities for staff. (500 words)

In addition to the professional development opportunities offered by Santa Monica College, the Veterans Success Center (VSC) staff regularly participates in several national and regional conferences focused on supporting military-connected students in higher education. These conferences provide valuable opportunities for staff to stay informed about best practices, policy updates, and emerging strategies for improving services for student veterans.

Each year, VSC staff attend a minimum of four key conferences. The Western Association of Veteran Education Specialists (WAVES) Conference, the CalVet Leadership Summit, the National Association of Veteran Program Administrators (NAVPA) Conference, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Symposium on Military-Connected Students. Participation in these conferences allows staff to engage with colleagues across the state and nation, share resources, and learn about innovative programs that enhance support for veterans and their families in higher education.

Additionally, the three adjunct counselors within the VSC bring specialized expertise that further strengthens the center's services. Each counselor focuses on a distinct area of student support and attends professional development events aligned with their specialization. These areas include career development, transfer pathways to four-year universities, and support for marginalized student populations, including LGBTQIA+, Black, and Latinx students. By pursuing targeted professional development, the counseling team is able to provide more informed and inclusive guidance that reflects the diverse identities and goals of the veteran student population.

Collectively, these ongoing professional development efforts ensure that VSC staff are staying up to date with changing policies for the Dept. Veterans Affairs and with the chancellors office. Providing the VSC staff with tools and training allows them to remain knowledgeable, responsive, and equipped to meet the evolving needs of student veterans and their dependents.

15. What equity-centered practices and training have been implemented in the program? If applicable, provide examples and discuss strengths and areas for growth. How can the institution better support the program and staff in developing an equity minded work culture? (500 words)

The Veterans Success Center (VSC) has implemented several equity-centered practices and training efforts designed to better support student veterans and military-affiliated students. These practices recognize that veterans often face unique barriers related to the transition from military to academic life, financial challenges, and service-related health concerns.

One key equity-centered practice is specialized staff training on working with veteran populations. VSC staff regularly participate in professional development related to trauma-informed support, understanding military culture, and supporting students who may experience conditions such as PTSD or other service-related challenges. This training helps staff approach student interactions with cultural competency and sensitivity, ensuring that veterans feel respected and understood within the campus environment.

Another important practice is the creation of a dedicated support space and tailored services for veterans. The VSC provides individualized counseling, assistance with GI Bill benefits, academic planning, and referrals to campus and community resources. These services are designed to reduce barriers that may disproportionately affect student veterans, while also fostering a welcoming environment where they can connect with peers who share similar experiences.

A key strength of the program is its focus on building community and offering personalized support. By providing targeted services and maintaining strong connections with local veteran-serving organizations, the VSC helps students navigate both academic and personal challenges.

However, there are areas for growth. Expanding equity-focused training opportunities for both VSC staff and the broader campus community could further improve understanding of the veteran student population. Additionally, increasing outreach and collaboration with other campus departments may help ensure that equity-minded practices supporting veterans are integrated across the institution.

To better support the program and staff in developing an equity-minded work culture, the institution can provide continued professional development, adequate staffing, and dedicated funding for veteran-focused programming. Strengthening cross-department partnerships and incorporating veteran perspectives into institutional equity initiatives would also help ensure that the needs of student veterans remain visible and prioritized across campus.

16. If applicable, describe if the program has a succession plan to ensure that it is minimally impacted by staffing transfers, departures, and/or retirements? (250 words)

The Veterans Success Center (VSC) currently operates with a team of six staff members who work collaboratively to provide comprehensive support services to student veterans and their dependents.

At this time, there is no formal succession plan in place for the Faculty Lead position. Developing a structured plan for this role could help ensure leadership continuity and support a smooth transition should staffing changes occur in the future.

However, a succession plan has been partially implemented for the Senior Veterans Resource Specialist and Certifying Official position, which plays a critical role in the certification of classes and processing of veterans' education benefits. The Student Services Assistant for Veterans' Programs has been cross-trained in approximately 90 percent of the responsibilities performed by the Senior Veterans Resource Specialist. This includes many of the day-to-day operational tasks related to supporting student veterans and assisting with benefits processing. This cross-training effort strengthens the operational stability of the center by ensuring that essential functions can continue in the event of staff absences or transitions.

17. Describe the program's workplace culture, climate, and morale, and discuss how it impacts the program's ability and capacity to effectively serve students. Describe how the college can support and improve the environment and/or morale in your department. (500 words)

Currently, staff morale within the Veterans Success Center (VSC) is extremely low due to ongoing workplace challenges that have persisted for several years. Members of the team have expressed concerns that the program is operating within what many perceive to be a dysfunctional and unhealthy work environment. Staff have described patterns of communication and conflict within the team that have contributed to tension, division among colleagues, and repeated escalation of concerns to senior leadership rather than resolution through collaborative internal dialogue.

Over time, these dynamics have contributed to a culture of fear and mistrust, where team members feel hesitant to openly communicate or collaborate due to concerns about conflict escalation. This environment has negatively affected staff morale, productivity, and overall well-being, making it increasingly difficult for the team to function cohesively and effectively.

For the past eight years, multiple staff members—including myself—have raised concerns with various institutional representatives, including the Faculty Association President, the Director of Human Resources, Classified Union representatives and our direct supervisor. Despite numerous discussions and documented reports outlining the impact of the situation, many staff feel that meaningful intervention or sustained resolution has not occurred.

This ongoing situation has had a significant impact on the program. At times, tension within the team has become visible to students and has even resulted in verbal conflicts among staff members within the VSC space. Given that the VSC serves student veterans, including many with PTSD and disabilities, exposure to workplace conflict can be especially harmful and potentially triggering for the students we support. These workplace dynamics directly undermine the VSC's primary mission of providing a stable, supportive, and welcoming environment for student veterans and their families.

F. BUDGET PLANNING

18. Describe how the current program budget aligns with the program's goals and outcomes over the next three years. If it doesn't align, what would be needed to supplement the current budget allocation? (250 words)

The Veterans Success Center (VSC) at Santa Monica College receives funding from four primary sources that support staffing, programming, and student services.

First, district funding provides support for the center's core personnel, including staff and faculty positions that are essential to the daily operation of the VSC. Second, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office provides annual funding to support program operations and ensure compliance with the Veterans Resource Center Minimum Standards established by the Chancellor's Office. The amount of this funding may vary each year and is largely determined by the number of students at Santa Monica College utilizing VA education benefits. This data is tracked through the Department of Veterans Affairs system used to process student benefits, known as Enrollment Manager.

A third and critical funding source comes directly from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which provides support specifically for the professional development and training of School Certifying Officials. These funds allow staff responsible for processing VA education benefits to remain current on policies and regulatory requirements.

Finally, the Santa Monica College Foundation provides funding that supports student scholarships and enrichment activities. These funds help sponsor events such as mental health retreats, recreational outings, and community-building activities designed to enhance student well-being and engagement. This funding is provided by donations from private party individuals in the community.

19. Are there any special projects or initiatives that will require additional budgeting or a reallocation of existing resources for the program? Consider the following: human resources, reducing racial equity gaps, student success and completion, community relations, professional development opportunities, and federal, state or district initiatives. (500 words)

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) and the California Military Articulation Platform (MAP) initiative are important efforts that can significantly benefit student veterans by recognizing military training and experience as college credit. Successfully

implementing these initiatives, however, requires dedicated staffing and consistent coordination across academic departments. Ideally, this work should be supported by one or two counselors who specialize in CPL processes, as well as a designated institutional lead who can represent the college and guide the initiative forward.

While Santa Monica College does have a designated lead for the MAP initiative, progress has been slower than anticipated. One of the primary challenges has been gaining consistent departmental buy-in, as each academic department must review and determine how military training documented on a student's Joint Services Transcript (JST) aligns with course learning outcomes. With the current budget constraints and increased workloads across the college, it has become more difficult for departments to prioritize this work.

As Faculty Lead for the Veterans Success Center, I believe the program would benefit greatly from the ability to hire a dedicated adjunct counselor who could focus specifically on CPL implementation and serve as a liaison for Stellic. This role could help coordinate evaluations with department chairs, support students navigating the CPL process, and ensure that veterans are able to receive appropriate academic credit for their military experience in a timely and consistent manner.

This form is completed and ready for acceptance.

Completed Date: 6/3/2026

Completed By: BENITEZ_KEVIN-BENITEZ_KEVIN