



Welcome to Program Review

Merritt College - 2019

Veterans Affairs Program - Service Area or Special Program

Annual Program Update

Program Overview

Please verify the mission statement for your program. If your program has not created a mission statement, provide details on how your program supports and contributes to the College mission.

The mission of Merritt Veterans Services is to support the academic success of student veterans, dependents of veterans, and actively-serving military as they transition from military to civilian life.

Program Total Faculty and/or Staff

Full Time

â€¢ Program Manager: None. This position is vacant and must be filled so as to ensure Merritt's compliance with VA regulations, to bring Merritt Veterans Services into parity with our sister Peralta Colleges, and to conform to minimum standards for CCC Veterans Programs statewide.

Part Time

â€¢ Counselor: 50% assignment to Veterans Services (15 hours/week). In the absence of a Coordinator, the Counselor assumes a portion of typical Coordinator responsibilities, though her primary duty is to provide student veterans and dependents with academic advising to VA specifications, as well as transfer, career and personal support counseling.
â€¢ Certifying Official: The state-mandated certification and processing of VA Education Benefits, which is a full-time job in most California Community Colleges, has been appended at Merritt to the already-substantial workload of a Student Services Specialist whose primary duties include staffing and managing the campus Welcome Center and coordinating campus tours for prospective students. None of her hours are specifically earmarked for Veterans Services.
â€¢

The Program Goals below are from your most recent Program Review or APU. If none are listed, please add your most recent program goals. Then, indicate the status of this goal, and which College and District goal your program goal aligns to. If your goal has been completed, please answer the follow up question regarding how you measured the achievement of this goal.

Establish systems to identify student veterans and collect Veterans Services program data in the following areas:

- â€¢ Demographics (age, race, gender)
- â€¢ Status of VA educational benefits
- â€¢ Success (persistence toward goals)
- â€¢ Customer Service (satisfaction)

Status

Completed

If Completed, What evidence supports completion of this goal? How did you measure the achievement of this goal?
Veterans Counselor developed an intake form to track demographic and VA benefits data. Data from the intake form is captured in a continuously-updated Excel spreadsheet.

College Goal

Completion: Increase number of degrees and certificates by 20% over the next 5 years.

The program gathers student success data annually from District or College Data Analyst.

District Goal

Advance Student Access, Equity, and Success

Prior to 2016, student satisfaction with Merritt Veterans Services had not been tracked. Veterans Counselor created an anonymous Customer Service survey which is periodically emailed to all students enrolled in Veterans Services.

From this survey, Merritt Vets consistently identify the program's top two needs:

• Veterans Resource Center

• Program staff assigned to Veterans Services full-time

Develop a comprehensive program that will establish a greater sense of community within the Veterans population, focused on assisting students in achieving academic and personal success.

Ongoing/Unaddressed Needs Pertaining to this Goal:

(1) Despite having secured ample grant funding to develop a Veterans Resource Center “a one-stop shop for VA certification, academic planning, tutoring, peer mentoring, workshops and other support services” a physical space for the Vets Center has yet to be secured. As such, Merritt remains the sole Peralta College without a Vets Center, which is the #1 priority and concern among Merritt veterans. Given the limited time to use these one-time grant funds, continued failure to designate a space for the Vets Center jeopardizes the program’s future.

(2) Likewise, Veterans Services has yet to enjoy the benefit of a full-time Coordinator or Program Manager who can anchor and grow the program. Merritt is the only Peralta College that still lacks a full-time Veterans Coordinator - or, for that matter, any personnel with 100% assignment to Veterans Services. Without a full-time Coordinator to serve and advocate for the needs of Merritt’s military population, the following service gaps and compliance issues will continue to plague the program:

• According to MIS data, Merritt College is home to 533 student veterans, but only 211 of these were known to Veterans Services in 2018-19. This indicates a need for greater in-reach to educate Merritt’s military students about the services, such as Priority Registration and dedicated academic advising, to which they are entitled whether they use VA education benefits or not.

• Each semester, approximately 20% of student vets served by the program report problems enrolling and receiving VA benefits in an accurate and timely manner.

• Systemic errors in bookkeeping and benefits-processing exist. Specifically:

- o VA benefits are not always processed in an accurate and timely manner, resulting in erroneous past-due balances and Bursar’s Holds on student accounts;
- o No system exists to alert the Certifying Official when VA students are awarded California Promise fee waivers, which results in VA overpayments;
- o Some incoming VA students are flagged as nonresidents and charged out-of-state fees in violation of the 2014 Veterans Choice Act. Correcting this issue can take months.

• The program fails to provide the required level of oversight to student vets and dependents who drop or add units, enroll in unauthorized courses, enter Probation status or otherwise demonstrate a need for greater support;

• Merritt has offered no veteran-specific workshops, events or guest speakers because program personnel lack sufficient time to plan and implement such services.

Merritt Administrators have been apprised of these compliance issues repeatedly since 2015, yet despite our procurement of two ongoing grants and one VRC-specific grant, no progress has been made in the areas bulleted above. Since 2016, program personnel (Counselor, Certifying Official and student veterans) have initiated meetings with Merritt leadership - including eight different administrators, the Academic Senate, the Classified Senate, CDPCD, and the Facilities Committee - in repeated attempts to secure a space for the Vets Center and to get a Vets Coordinator in the Classified hiring pipeline. In that time, six possible locations for the Vets Center have been discussed, but no action beyond discussion has taken place. The Classified Senate included a Vets Coordinator in its hiring priorities, yet no such position has been posted. Instead, at least three Program Coordinator or Program Manager positions have been hired to serve other student populations in the last three years.

Status

If Completed, What evidence supports completion of this goal? How did you measure the achievement of this goal?

In-Progress

College Goal

Equity: Reduce the achievement gaps for African-American, multiethnic and male students.

District Goal

Build Programs of Distinction

Provide professional development training, sufficient staff and office equipment necessary to ensure timely and accurate certification of units and VA benefits for the Veterans Services population.

Ongoing/Unaddressed Needs Pertaining to this Goal:

(1) Veterans Services needs a full-time Coordinator for reasons previously stated, as well as the following:

â€¢ The Veterans Services population at Merritt has increased 133% since 2015 and is expected to continue increasing. Per California Senate Bill 694, the number of California veterans will continue to grow by approximately 25,000 veterans annually as post-9/11 service members transition back into the civilian population.

â€¢ Statewide, the MINIMUM standard for CCC Veterans Services is 1 FTE Classified + 0.5 FTE Counselor. At present, Merritt fails this minimum standard.

â€¢ One FTE Coordinator can leverage resources at no cost to Merritt, such as VA Work-Study (free labor) and charitable donations.

(2) Veterans Services needs an Operating Budget

â€¢ Although program personnel have taken the initiative to secure grant funds from outside sources in order to build Veterans Services, grant funds alone cannot permanently sustain a permanent, full-time Coordinator.

â€¢ Merritt vets have noticed the lack of parity in the allocation of college resources for student-serving programs such as Puente, Sankofa, and Veterans. Some have concluded that there is an anti-military bias at work. Others have opined that the institution is deliberately starving this program of funds and adequate staffing in hopes that the Department of Veterans Affairs will decertify Merritt entirely, thus â€œcleansingâ€ it of military students.

â€¢ The Veterans Services Budget should also be comparable to that of the three Veterans Services Programs at our sister Peralta Colleges, which range from \$40,000 annually at Berkeley City College to \$90,000 annually at Laney College. Our sister colleges set aside funds for this purpose from SSSP, Equity and/or PASS.

Status

If Completed, What evidence supports completion of this goal? How did you measure the achievement of this goal?

In-Progress

College Goal

Equity: Reduce the achievement gaps for African-American, multiethnic and male students.

District Goal

Develop and Manage Resources to Advance Our Mission

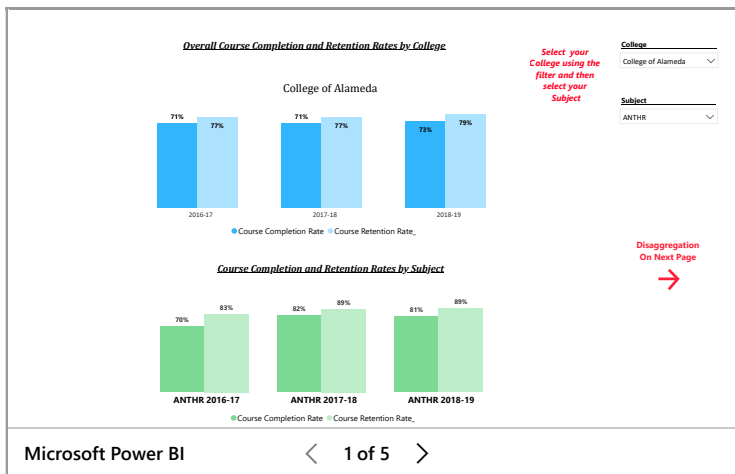
Describe your current utilization of facilities, including labs and other space

At present, the Certifying Official and Veterans Counselor each have an office in R-105, the Welcome Center area of the Student Services building. It should be noted that since neither person has 100% assignment to Veterans Services, these office spaces also serve other programs and populations. There is no room or area on the Merritt campus that is solely devoted to Veterans, despite the presence of funds to develop such an area.

Program Update

Semester End Enrollment/Usage Pattern

Review your Semester End Enrollment by setting the filter to your college and subject



Using the dashboard, review and reflect upon the data for your program. Describe any significant changes and discuss what the changes mean to your program. Consider whether performance gaps exist for disproportionality impacted students. Focus upon the most recent year and/or the years since your last comprehensive program review. Cite data points from the dashboard to support your answer.

Per Peralta's Research Office, the Veterans data on the four data screens breaks down as follows: pages 3 and 4 show data on students who have actively participated in the Veterans Services program at Merritt; page 2 includes the aforementioned group PLUS any Merritt student who self-identified as a Veteran on CCC-Apply, whether they participate in the Veterans Services program or not.

Knowing this, the first item of interest is the difference in population size: in 2018-19, 140 students used Veterans Services, but there were 199 students enrolled at Merritt who identified as Veterans. This suggests that our program reaches 70% of the students who are eligible for our services, which is a slight improvement over 2016-17 (69%) and 2017-18 (68%). From this, we can conclude that in-reach continues to be a challenge. Student vets who use our services typically do so because they need us to process their VA education benefits and to provide education and transfer planning per VA specifications. Since this is virtually the only service we offer, it makes sense that the 30% of vets who are not using VA benefits see little value in this program and are therefore not involved. If Merritt follows the lead of our three sister Peralta Colleges by establishing a Veterans Resource Center and a Program Manager to raise visibility, organize workshops and create a community gathering place for student Vets, we predict that this service gap will narrow considerably.

Per data on page 2, Veteran enrollment at Merritt declined 32% over the last three years, from 291 in 2016-17 to 199 in 2018-19. This is commensurate with our sister colleges, where Veteran enrollment dropped over the same period by 34% at Laney, 25% at BCC and 24% at COA. In these cases, the loss of Veterans accompanied a loss of enrollment overall. However, Merritt's overall enrollment bucked the district and statewide trends by INCREASING 7% over the last three years, making the loss of veteran enrollment all the more poignant by comparison. Merritt's rising enrollment among general population students is likely due to a dramatic increase in dual enrollment and to intensive outreach in our feeder high schools, where programs like First Year Experience recruit hundreds of students to Merritt annually. In contrast, proven Veteran recruitment strategies are website-dependent: vets typically search online for colleges that are VA-approved. Merritt will continue to suffer in this area until our website is upgraded and a full-time person tasked with updating its content on a regular, ongoing basis.

Turning now to measures of success, data from the last three years indicates that Merritt Veterans do slightly worse than the general Merritt population, with rates of completion and retention typically 1-3 percentage points lower than the population at large. This mirrors the Veteran experience at Laney. In contrast, Veterans at BCC and COA typically outperform the general student population, maintaining completion and retention rates up to 7 percentage points higher than their civilian peers. When Merritt commits to a full-time Veterans Program Manager, one of their first tasks should be to study Peralta's more successful Veterans programs and adopt student success strategies that have proven effective in those programs.

Among Merritt's vets, African Americans comprise the largest ethnic group (39% of the total), followed by Whites (18%) and Latinos (15%). Merritt's African American and White students show significantly worse completion and retention rates than their Asian and Latino peers. In 2018-19, we see a course retention gap of 20 percentage points between these groups, suggesting that White and African American students are more likely to withdraw or fail. Given that a sense of community, support and belonging is cited in education research as the #1 determinant of student retention and persistence, establishing Merritt's Veterans Resource Center is key to our student veterans' success. We therefore hope that Merritt's administration follows through and designates a room for the VRC so that our student Veterans can reap the benefits of the \$100,000 in VRC grant funds that this program won in a competitive grant process in the Summer of 2018.

Describe the department's progress on Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and/or Administrative Unit Outcomes (AUOs) since the last Program Review/APU. If your discipline offers a degree or certificate, please describe the department progress on Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs).

The Service Area Outcome for Merritt Veterans Services measures the number of students in our program who have completed both an Abbreviated (ASEP) and a Comprehensive Student Education Plan (CSEP) by their third semester of enrollment. In the last SAO reporting period, 99% of students served by our program had completed ASEPs on file and 74% had completed CSEPs. One reason for the discrepancy between ASEPs and CSEPs: by definition, a CSEP covers at least 3 semesters. Many Vets come to Merritt having already attended several other colleges and therefore don't need three semesters to complete their degree or transfer goals. Instead, the Veterans Counselor researches course articulation to apply those previously-earned units to Merritt degrees and certificates, thereby saving the Veteran time and GI Bill funds. Another reason for the discrepancy: CSEPs map out a student's pathway semester by semester, whereas an ASEP gives the student an overall list of required courses with the flexibility to determine the order in which they will complete those courses and their unit load. Since many Veterans are working and raising families in addition to attending college, they often choose courses solely on the basis of scheduling. Vets therefore wait for each semester's Course Schedule to be published, then construct their schedules based on when, where and in what format their required courses are offered.

Describe the outcomes and accomplishments from previous year's funded resource allocation request.

Brief description of funded request	Source (any additional award outside your base allocation)	Total Award Amount	Outcome/Accomplishment
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No requests were funded last year.

Grants received from State Chancellor's Office

\$119,823

Merritt Veterans Services has 2 grants:

(1) We won a one-time \$100,000 grant in Summer 2018 to establish a Veterans Resource Center. These funds are held at the State Chancellor's Office until Merritt administration completes the required forms. These funds must be expended no later than 12/30/20.

(2) We receive an annual allocation from the State Chancellor's office based on the number of Merritt Veterans using VA benefits. The 2019-20 allocation, after the District took its cut, is \$19,823. We are currently waiting for the Business Office to load this budget.

In the boxes below, please add improvement actions and resource requests that are directly related to the questions answered in this section. If there are no improvement actions or resource requested in this area, leave blank.

Improvement Actions

Improvement Action

Improvement Action

Action Item	Description	To be completed By	Responsible Person
Establish Veterans Connection Center at Merritt College	Convert R-108 from disused Assessment Center to Veterans Connection Center.	2/29/2020	Facilities Manager and President or VPSS

Resource Request

Facilities Other

Description/Justification	Estimated Cost
Remove 2 countertops. Paint walls. Shampoo carpet. Install code keylock door. Install two large cubicles for private meeting/office space.	5000

Resource Request

Technology and Equipment New

Description/Justification	Estimated Cost
One multifunction printer/copier/scanner. Install phone and phone line. Upgrade IT comparable to smart classroom and install six desktop computers with IT access.	15000

Resource Request

Supplies	Noninstructional Supplies and Materials	
Description/Justification		Estimated Cost
2 sofas, 1 coffee table, 4 lamps, 1 conference-style table, 1 computer desk, 15 rolling desk chairs, 1 refrigerator, 1 microwave, 1 coffee maker, 1 water dispenser, 1 locking 4-drawer file cabinet, 1 small pantry cabinet, 2 bookshelves, 2 cork boards, 3 display racks, 1 flat-screen TV with 3 bluetooth headsets, 2 trash cans, 1 wall clock, paper goods (cups/plates, etc.), printer ink, 1 large whiteboard, dry-erase markers and eraser.		20000

Resource Request

Supplies	Software	
Description/Justification		Estimated Cost
Survey Monkey, Kahoot, PDF converter, Photoshop		2000

Resource Request

Supplies	Instructional Supplies and Materials	
Description/Justification		Estimated Cost
Textbooks for Veterans Lending Library and book rental program		10000

Improvement Action

Action Item	Description	To be completed By	Responsible Person
Hire Veterans Program Manager for Merritt College	To ensure compliance with Federal and State regulations, and to promote, manage and assess program activities, Merritt Veterans Services requires a Program Manager commensurate with our three sister colleges and with Merritt's other special populations, such as Sankofa, CalWORKS and EOPS.	7/1/2020	President or VPSS

Resource Request

Personnel	Classified Staff		
% Time	Description/Justification	Estimated Annual Salary Costs	Estimated Annual Benefits Costs
100	Veterans Program Manager: responsibilities include VA certification of students' course schedules, processing of VA benefits, maintaining compliance with state and federal regulations, managing annual VA audits, benefits consultation, coordination of workshops and events, budget management, program outreach and recruitment, PR and publicity, communication through Merritt Vets listserv and social media, annual Service Area Outcomes assessment, Program Review and APUs, training and management of VA student workers.	84000	16000
Total Costs			
100000			

Resource Request

Professional Development	Individual/personal PD needed		
Description/Justification		Estimated Cost	
Required conferences, workshops and training to maintain currency with VA regulations and to implement best practices.		4000	

Resource Request

Technology and Equipment	New		
Description/Justification		Estimated Cost	
New dual-screen computer and multifunction color printer/copier/scanner, ergonomic keyboard and mouse.		2000	

Resource Request Summary

Total Cost: \$158000
 Total Resource Request: 8

Program Update					
Personnel					
Type	% Time	Description/Justification	Estimated Annual Salary Costs	Estimated Annual Benefits Costs	Total Costs
Classified Staff	100	Veterans Program Manager: responsibilities include VA certification of students' course schedules, processing of VA benefits, maintaining compliance with state and federal regulations, managing annual VA audits, benefits consultation, coordination of workshops and events, budget management, program outreach and recruitment, PR and publicity, communication through Merritt Vets listserv and social media, annual Service Area Outcomes assessment, Program Review and APUs, training and management of VA student workers.	84000	16000	100000
Sub-Total: \$100000					
Professional Development					
Type	Description/Justification		Estimated Cost		
Individual/personal PD needed	Required conferences, workshops and training to maintain currency with VA regulations and to implement best practices.		4000		
Sub-Total: \$4000					
Technology and Equipment					
Type	Description/Justification		Estimated Cost		
New	One multifunction printer/copier/scanner. Install phone and phone line.		15000		
	Upgrade IT comparable to smart classroom and install six desktop computers with IT access.				
New	New dual-screen computer and multifunction color printer/copier/scanner, ergonomic keyboard and mouse.		2000		
Sub-Total: \$17000					
Supplies					
Type	Description/Justification		Estimated Cost		
Noninstructional Supplies and Materials	2 sofas, 1 coffee table, 4 lamps, 1 conference-style table, 1 computer desk, 15 rolling desk chairs, 1 refrigerator, 1 microwave, 1 coffee maker, 1 water dispenser, 1 locking 4-drawer file cabinet, 1 small pantry cabinet, 2 bookshelves, 2 cork boards, 3 display racks, 1 flat-screen TV with 3 bluetooth headsets, 2 trash cans, 1 wall clock, paper goods (cups/plates, etc.), printer ink, 1 large whiteboard, dry-erase markers and eraser.		20000		
Software	Survey Monkey, Kahoot, PDF converter, Photoshop		2000		
Instructional Supplies and Materials	Textbooks for Veterans Lending Library and book rental program		10000		

Sub-Total: \$32000

Facilities Type	Description/Justification	Estimated Cost
Other	Remove 2 countertops. Paint walls. Shampoo carpet. Install code keylock door. Install two large cubicles for private meeting/office space.	5000
Sub-Total: \$5000		

Library
No Resources found for this category

Other
No Resources found for this category

Sign and Submit

Please provide the list of members who participated in completing this program review.

Stefani de Vito and Margie Rubio

Please enter the name of the person submitting this program review.

Stefani de Vito