

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
VETERANS SUPPORT CENTER



ANNUAL REPORT
2020-2021

1.0. Overview

This annual report covers the period of August 1, 2020 to July 31, 2021. During this period, the Veterans Support Center (VSC) conducted the majority of its operations virtually in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The University of Utah Veterans Support Center (VSC) is a place for U.S. Armed Forces service members and 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 advocacy, mentoring, career support, 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 computer and printing resources, textbook loans, scholarships, and peer support, as well as a lounge, study area, refreshments, and veterans' events. To the maximum extent possible, the VSC provided these services through alternative means in response to the pandemic and public health risks. Section 1.4 discusses the impacts of the pandemic and adjustments made for it.

The VSC houses tenants who provide specific services for MCSs. Although they are not part of the VSC staff, they are housed in the center for the convenience of the students. There has been no turnover among the tenants. The Registrar's two School Certifying Officers (SCOs) are normally in the office every workday. The VA Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) Coordinator typically works out of an office in the VSC one day each week, and the VA VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) Counselor is normally in the office daily, except for every other Friday. A Career Coach from the U's Career and Professional Development Center (CPDC) typically operates out of the VSC once a week for 2-3 hours. The VSC Executive Secretary left the U in late November 2019 and initial attempts to hire a replacement failed. However, in July 2020, after the position was reclassified, the VSC hired an Office Manager.

On the first day of class following the add/drop deadline, the overall MCS enrollment was 1,152 in fall 2020; of those, 794 were degree-seeking undergraduate students. Spring 2021 enrollment was 1,082; of those, 738 were undergraduate students. Although comparable to MCS fall 2019 and spring 2020 enrollments, which were 1,063 and 1,101 respectively, the combined enrollment for the spring and fall semester was 3% greater during a pandemic. In spring 2020, about 25% of the university's MCSs were students of color and 30% identified as female. The university's overall percentage of students who identify as female is greater than that of MCSs. This is because the percentage of female student veterans and service members is only 18%, which is comparable to the percentage of women in the military.

1.1. Select Accomplishments

Partnering again with the Alumni Association and the Union, the VSC awarded \$57,000 in scholarships for fall 2021. This amount is more than ten times that which the VSC awarded in any year prior to 2016.

The VSC received a grant from the Utah Department of Veterans & Military Affairs (DVMA) for two-thirds of the cost to remodel the student lounge, computer lab, and staff cubicle areas. The remodeling resulted in a larger student lounge with upgraded furniture, three additional workstations for the computer lab, and increased storage space in the VSC.

Following the Magna, Utah earthquake on March 18, 2020, the VSC moved to virtual operations. To serve MCSs better, the VSC reopened its doors on July 1, 2020, providing select in-person services daily, some in-person services by appointment, and the majority of other services virtually. On May 1, 2021, the VSC staff returned to offer in-person services only.

In May 2021, the Senior Advancement Director for Student Support Initiatives secured the VSC's second endowed scholarship, made possible through the generosity of two university employees who are veterans.

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 in support of the LGBT Resource Center during Pride Week, supporting multiple search committee or candidate public forums, supporting the Basic Needs Collaborative, collaborating with the Alumni Association and Union for scholarship programs, providing military cultural competency training to other departments, and participating in or attending 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 U Vets 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 globe. We do not condone harassment, discrimination, or violence towards anyone based on race

or any other identity. We will call out racist behavior if we encounter it. We set the example of good citizenship, acceptance of those who differ from ourselves, and respect for others regardless of identities, and we expect the same of our students, colleagues, and partners.

As noted in last year's annual report, the VSC's December 2019 survey of our service members and veterans ("U Vets" or "student veterans") revealed that 6% of them experienced a significant bias or harassment incident on campus. Non-veterans often misunderstand veterans. For example, the military fosters stoicism, honor, and sacrifice. Service members are expected to uphold the honor of the unit (unity and trust), to maintain the appearance of stability and strength (confident and professional bearing under pressure and during hardship), and to overcome hardship on their own (resilience), while putting the mission and unit above oneself (selflessness and serving the greater good). The military teaches service members to be self-reliant, to let others utilize resources first, and to be a strong link in an interdependent chain. However, a consultancy's April 2021 report to Student Affairs on mental health services at the U stated that "toxic masculinity in the military" is a reason that veterans are reluctant to seek help. Given this kind of bias, one can understand why veterans and service members can be slow to trust civilians, even on campuses. This remains a concern for the VSC.

1.4. COVID-19 Impacts

Normally, the VSC has about 7,500 total visits from approximately 1,600 MCSs each year. Face-to-face interaction with student veterans has been the most effective means of prompting their engagement in support services, but the VSC lost the full capability to do that when the campus closed for COVID-19 in March 2020. However, as previously noted, the VSC reopened its doors in July 2020, providing hybrid in-person/virtual services, and in May 2021, the entire VSC staff returned to the office. Tenants in the center worked hybrid schedules beginning in May 2021.

The VSC continued outreach primarily with social media and email and periodically hosted "U Vet Happy Hours" on Zoom to share information and updates regarding the campus and VSC. Attendance waned as the pandemic continued, so the events were discontinued when the staff returned to the office. The VSC continued its participation in the university centralized emergency fund program. To assist some veterans who were facing financial hardships and were attending summer 2021 classes, the VSC awarded scholarships to them that were originally intended for fall.

Two student veterans passed away during the academic year (AY). One is believed to have passed as a result of COVID-19 and another from suicide.

2.0. **Core Objectives**

2.1. Core Objective 1: Outreach & Engagement

The VSC mission is to support the individual and academic success of veterans, service members, and their family members who attend the university; to help them receive the benefits they earned; to support their goals for a successful future; and to serve as a liaison between the student veteran community and the university. Outreach and engagement are critical to the VSC in carrying out its mission.

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 have been difficult to measure, given that long-term retention and graduation data for MCSs have not been adequately collected and that one cannot always know exactly what prompted each student to engage the VSC or what other services the student has utilized. However, the VSC engaged Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (now called Assessment & Analytics) to develop an assessment plan that will enable the VSC to identify high impact practices better. Activities in support of Objective 1 included:

- **Advertisement:** The VSC distributed information via email using a listserv and posted information on its Facebook page and bulletin boards in the VSC. The center also started using AdmitHub, a texting program, which supported the VSC's ability to engage veterans.
- **Applications and admissions:** The VSC director sent out emails to student veterans who applied to the university and who were accepted. The emails provided basic information about the center's services and encouraged their engagement with the VSC. Attached to the emails for those who were accepted was an FAQ sheet with guidance on such things as applying for the GI Bill, qualifying for resident tuition, filing a FAFSA, and other useful information.
- **Veterans Day commemoration:** In November 2020, the university commemorated Veterans Day and honored eleven Utah veterans and service members for their service. This was the 23rd commemoration by the U. The pandemic prohibited the university from hosting an in-person event, so the VSC worked with University Marketing & Communication (UMC) to develop a commemorative video that was released on Veterans Day. The 2020 honorees will be invited to the 2021 commemoration. Prior to the large 2021 event, they will be honored at a breakfast during which they will receive their medallions.

- Career development: The VSC continued its partnership with CPDC and hosted events for student veterans such as employer resume reviews and employer networking events virtually.
- Commencement: In collaboration with the university president's office, a graduating veteran was highlighted on the *Humans at the U* website.
- 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. For students who engaged the program, the mentors welcomed them to the U and provided information about the VSC. The VSC continued to expand the mentoring program, working closely with the VA, and recruiting more students to serve as mentors.
- Education: In its role as an advocate for veterans and other MCSs, the VSC provided presentations to a number of campus entities including Admissions and Orientation.

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:

As one might expect, the pandemic significantly reduced utilization of the VSC.

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 U Vets 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 the objective of student health and wellness by

facilitating referral services for VA, campus, and off-campus healthcare 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 are difficult to measure, given that one cannot attribute a single action or event 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 in response to the pandemic, 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 free printing and Common Access Card readers for those still serving to check their military email. 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. On July 1, 2020, the VSC re-opened with limited services and with staff working on hybrid schedules. Students were encouraged to continue to engage the center virtually, but they were able visit the center for information, use the computer lab for brief tasks, and if needed, meet with staff by appointment. On May 3, 2021, the VSC staff returned to the center.
- Registrar: Normally, two SCOs are located in the VSC to certify enrollment to the VA for educational benefits and provide 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. They worked remotely until June 1, 2021, after which they began working hybrid schedules.
- VSOC: Typically, a VA VSOC Counselor is located in the VSC at least four days a week. The VSOC program provides specialized services in support of education and employment, such as vocational counseling and vocational rehabilitation services for service-disabled veterans. The VSOC Counselor also provides general benefits information to any student

veteran. The VSOC Counselor is a VA employee and not VSC staff. The VSOC counselor worked remotely during this period.

- VITAL: Normally, a VA VITAL Coordinator is 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. The services include counseling, disability support, and assistance with VA healthcare access for student veterans. The VSC has partnered with the VITAL program to provide a part-time counselor/coordinator who has worked remotely since the beginning of the pandemic. The VITAL coordinator is a VA employee and not VSC staff. Collaborating with VITAL, the center expanded its peer mentoring program with the intent of every new student veteran meeting with a peer. Although the VSC and peer mentors reached out to every new student, engagement with the peers was optional and therefore limited. From January 1 – July 31, 2021, the U’s VITAL peers and VITAL program coordinator addressed the following issues with undergraduate student veterans and service members. Although less critical issues are not included, the data only include U Vets who engaged the VITAL program. Even though engagement with the VSC was significantly less during the pandemic, these cases comprise 15% of the undergraduate U Vet population. This is cause for concern.

Issue	Number
Disabilities	27
Financial concerns	16
Suicidal ideations/actions	8
Basic needs concerns	7
Homelessness risk/reality	6
Unsafe living conditions	3

- VSC remodeling: The Utah DVMA provided a grant of nearly \$27,000 towards the cost to remodel the center. The remodel enabled three computers to be added to the lab, enlarged the student lounge, and updated furniture in the lounge.
- Orientation: The VSC held orientation sessions virtually each month of the summer, but participation was limited, with most sessions only hosting only a few veterans. Subsequent to summer, the staff held “happy hours” on Zoom and invited students, new and old, to join the events. Participation was minimal.
- Scholarships and financial aid: The VSC currently administers one undergraduate veteran/service member-only endowed scholarship provided by the Stoker family. A member of the family who is a veteran and alumnus established the scholarship. This year, two veterans who are university employees established the Tsuya-Stephens endowed scholarship with a donation of \$25,000. The Union matched funds with the VSC to provide \$7,000 in fall scholarships for MCSs. Thanks to the generosity of the Alumni Association and the strength of its partnership with the VSC, the center was able to award \$50,000 in

scholarships for fall 2021, an increase of \$25,500 from the funds received from the Association the previous year.

- Donations: The Wagner Foundation donated \$25,000 to the VSC for student support. The funding provides supplies such as paper for free printing, textbooks for the library, SWAG, computers for the lab, and coffee. The VSC's "Donations for Duty" Giving Day effort raised \$5,420, setting a Giving Day record for the center.
- Library: The center continues to offer books and supplies through a small textbook loan library.

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 might feel misunderstood and marginalized.

Outcomes Expected:

- Increased utilization of the center's services.

Outcomes Achieved:

The pandemic resulted in a significant decrease in engagement.

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. Moreover, as students return to campus following quarantines and online classes, many may feel disconnected from the campus or MCS community. However, the VSC will continue its outreach efforts in order to encourage U Vets to visit the VSC, utilize support resources, and participate in veteran-related events. The VSC must conduct outreach to the entire MCS population and, additionally, to individual student 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. As part of this effort, the VSC is working with the

Registrar's office to require new student veterans to meet with a peer mentor as a prerequisite for obtaining veterans' priority registration. This will serve as a mechanism for the VSC to reach more new veterans to help them transition successfully to the university and/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.

3.1.2. *Inclusivity & Equity*

The majority of student veterans qualify as federally protected class of citizens. However, veterans, service members, and their families remain an afterthought on most campuses. Student veterans and service members are significantly more likely than other students to face key risk factors associated with stopping out such as delayed entry into postsecondary education, having dependents, working while attending school, and being first-generation. Not only do most student veterans face these challenges but most of them also face many at once. Whether it be due to their possessing disabilities, being older nontraditional students, being erroneously stigmatized as "broken" or violent, or simply having patriotically served their country, they represent an underserved and marginalized student population in postsecondary education. Despite these challenges, MCSs enrolled at the U for fall 2021 carry a mean cumulative GPA of 3.38, and for U Vets, the mean cumulative GPA was 3.41. This is even more remarkable given that nearly 44% of them were STEM majors.

As noted in last year's report, the university's loss of the National Center for Veterans Studies (NCVS) was one of the most disheartening veteran-related events on campus. The NCVS provided very effective treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide prevention at no cost to veterans, including those who did not qualify for VA health care. The departure of the NCVS significantly reduced the availability and accessibility of care for student veterans and represented a symbolic loss of university support for veterans and service members. Similarly, the university inadequately planned for the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) relocation from the Annex building, which had been designated for demolition for several years, to a suitable new location. This, too, did not demonstrate strong support for MCSs.

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. *Resources*

Historically, veterans have not been important on campus, and VSC budget initiatives, particularly staffing requests, have not prioritized well. For instance, after requesting funding for a new position for five years, the VSC received approval and state-appropriated funding to hire a Veterans Program Coordinator in July 2019. The VSC continued operating at capacity with the

position filled, and as engagement continues to increase and new initiatives develop, additional personnel will be required. A growth in enrollment of student veterans, engagement of student veterans, and utilization of VSC resources, particularly personnel, will further challenge the center.

The VSC is staffed by only three full-time equivalent (FTE) employees and one quarter-time career coach in support of nearly 1,600 students (nearly 5% of all students). Other personnel in the center are VA employees or Registrar's personnel who are not part of the VSC staff, do not perform VSC tasks, and do not use the same phone system. A February 2021 survey of Chief Student Affairs Officers in Utah revealed the following student veteran-to-staff ratios for veterans centers. The ratio does not include student family members supported (approximately 300 each semester at the U). For centers in which SCOs are part of the veterans center rather than Registrar's office, the SCOs were considered as 0.5 FTEs for comparison purposes because they share SCO and veterans center responsibilities.

- University of Utah: 398:1
- Utah State University: 333:1
- Salt Lake Community College: 306:1
- Utah Valley University: 300:1
- Southern Utah University: 286:1
- Weber State University: 172:1

Considering the staffing at other institutions and the extended operating hours of the U's center, the VSC remains understaffed.

3.2. New Initiatives Underway or Planned

3.2.1. *Student Engagement & Support: Increased Peer Mentoring*

Student veterans, service members, and family members are often unaware of how to best use their educational benefits. Many, particularly veterans, are unaware of many other important benefits available to them or do not know how to access them. Most need encouragement to engage services and access resources. In an attempt to mitigate this problem, the VSC offered an optional orientation program for veterans, but attendance was poor. However, many who have attended the events learned things they did not know, and some became immediately engaged with the VSC. The VSC needs to reach every MCS, but without a mandatory process or incentive for them to engage the VSC staff or peer mentors, it cannot do so. There are a number of reasons that we need a mandatory process. From an enrollment perspective, the students may not know the application process for VA educational benefits, the programs for which they qualify, or the other financial aid for which they might be eligible. Student veterans might not be aware of state and federal veterans' benefits for which they qualify, might not recognize health care issues such as traumatic brain injuries, and might be struggling to find a sense of connection with the campus. Additionally,

veterans and service members are nearly twice as likely as non-veterans to kill themselves, so screening for suicidal ideations or intent is critical.

The VSC is working with the Registrar's office to develop a process to encourage MCSs to meet with a peer mentor or staff member at the VSC. Although a registration hold is unlikely, the solution in development might involve requiring student veterans to meet with a staff member or peer mentor in order to qualify for priority registration.

3.2.2. 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 pay the cost of courses outside of a student veteran's major that would not be covered by the GI Bill but support their success in nonprofit or government service. Unfortunately, the VSC has been unable to generate sufficient campus support for the concept.

3.2.3. Student Engagement & Support and Strategic Enrollment Management: Veterans Admission Coordinator

Transitioning from the military to higher education can present logistical challenges such as moving household goods cross-country, registering for and accessing VA programs, or finding daycare for a child. Emotionally, the transition comes with the loss of a sense of belonging, loss of one's military identity, uncertainty about the process of applying, enrolling, and succeeding in college, and frustration with those who misunderstand veterans and their experiences. These kinds of challenges, combined with the fact that most veterans are first generation students who are entering higher education well after high school, can make the transition complex. However, with the right support, the academic achievement of student veterans is greater than that of other nontraditional students and comparable to that of traditional students.

In the military, a service member transferring to a new duty station is assigned a sponsor who helps facilitate the service member's transition to the new duty station and assignment. In a similar

approach, the VSC intends to establish a Veterans Admissions Coordinator (VAC). Collaborating with Admissions, the VAC would serve as the sponsor for any military-connected individuals interested in attending the U and would work with them from their initial contact with the U through their enrollment. Similar programs have resulted in increased enrollment yield and greater student veteran academic achievement and retention. Additionally, the VAC could be trained as a general academic advisor in order to assist new MCSs as they navigate degree requirements, course registration, Joint Service Transcript credit evaluation, and related VA educational guidelines.

3.3. Anticipated Opportunity - Enrollment

The university could benefit from deliberate recruitment of service members and veterans. Recruiting could involve advertising in military-oriented publications, making presentations at education centers and transition assistance programs at major bases and stations, and sustaining communications with those entities will result in increased enrollment of MCSs. About 60% of these students would be eligible for federal funding for tuition, adding to the millions of VA funds the university already receives from its enrolled MCSs. Additionally, approximately 40% of the military comprises service members of color, so recruiting from the pool of approximately 200,000 new veterans that leave the military each year could increase the diversity of the student population. Although the idea has been proposed by the VSC, Enrollment Management has been unable to support the intentional recruitment of undergraduate student veterans and service members.

4.0. **Staff Excellence**

4.1. Awards and Recognitions

STAFF	AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS
None	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	University of Utah Veterans Day Committee (Secretary) LGBT Resource Center Scholarship Committee (member)
Morgan, Paul	National Council on Military Transition to Education (Chair-elect, Strategy subcommittee member, and Research subcommittee lead)
	University of Utah Veterans Day Committee (Chair)
	Utah Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families task force (lead for Priority 1 subcommittee)

	Utah Department of Veterans & Military Affairs (Campus Support Coordinator)
	Center for Student Wellness Engagement Coordinator Search Committee (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	University of Utah Veterans Day Committee (member)
	NASPA (member)
	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 the university.

Root, M. & Cory, C. (2020, December). “Supporting Career Development for Veterans.”
 Presented virtually at MPACE Annual Conference.

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 core 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 very 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 develops 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 the 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 manifested as 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 discussions with new students, 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. Additionally, the VSC maintains a bibliography of relevant readings, so that staff can recommend resources to students if needed.

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 diversity and observe more examples of acceptance and respect for others. These experiences can shape attitudes and beliefs.

Community Partners Integral to Success

Establishing a recruiting program requires resources for the VSC and Admissions, the support of university leadership, and Admissions' participation, all of which are lacking. 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 U 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, heard, and safe.