

2012 Veterans Focus Group – Evaluation of Findings Focus Group Findings

The participants that were involved in this study for Cal Poly Pomona were:

- Student veterans

These participants' responses were collected and summed up into three categories: pre-enrollment, student, and campus life services.

Pre-Enrollment Services

Points of Contact

Many student veterans described their experience with the admissions process as difficult and hard to understand. For instance, when seeking information regarding Cal Poly Pomona's veterans admission policies many vets could not find someone on campus that was knowledgeable enough to answer their questions.

According to student veterans, the best way for the university to address this problem is to provide a point of contact list of staff that are knowledgeable about the university's veterans services. They also indicated that this information should be included on the veteran web page, within admission and orientation packets, and as handouts in the Veteran Resource Center.

For those few that were able to find help, they mentioned that Matilda Obaseki, the veterans admission counselor, was extremely helpful.

Military v. University Environment

A second theme that student veterans discussed was their transition from a military to a university environment. While in service, many veterans live by a structure and chain of command. This type of structured setting does not exist within Cal Poly Pomona's academic environment making the admissions process difficult for them. An example of this was when several veterans mentioned that they considered the admissions process as confusing because the university did not structure the admissions process for them.

As for a solution, student veterans suggested that the university develop a "to do" or checklist that would dictate the exact steps that they should follow during their pre-enrollment process. This checklist should be made available via the veteran web page, within admission and orientation packets, and as handouts in the Veteran Resource Center.

Military Credits

The topic of academic credit for military service was a common challenge that several veterans expressed during the focus group sessions. They described their experience as difficult since the university's veteran web page and staff provided them with ambiguous responses to the following questions:

1. Who to contact about this articulation process?
2. What are the steps they need to follow in order to obtain academic credit for their military service?

Student veterans recommended that the university designate a point of contact that is familiar with military transcripts and the articulation process. A second suggestion would be the need for a clear delineation of the university's process of attaining academic credit for military service. This would entail the development of a "to do" or checklist that veterans would use as a guide throughout this process. All this information should be made available to them via the veteran web page, within admission and orientation packets, and as handouts in the Veteran Resource Center.

Admission Applications Delay

An experience that a few student veterans voiced was the delay of their admission application. This problem occurred because the online application system (CSU Mentor) did not request them to submit their DD214 when they had identified themselves as veterans on their admission application. The DD214 is a military document that veterans are required to turn in order to be considered for priority admission.

A solution that student veterans proposed was for the university to indicate on the online application system that veterans must turn in their DD214 in order to be considered for priority admission.

Orientation Services

During the focus group sessions, veterans discussed their experiences about the following orientation services:

1. On campus orientation
2. E-Orientation

On Campus Orientation

Some student veterans considered their experience with on campus orientation as unhelpful since it did not provide them with the guidance and support that they needed as they transitioned into Cal Poly Pomona. A good example of this is the issue of registration. Many veterans stated that on campus orientation did not provide them with the one on one interaction they needed to understand the registration process. They

identified the College of Engineering's Maximizing Engineering Potential (MEP) program as a best practices approach that the university can learn from. More importantly, veterans felt that this program helped teach them the basics of the registration process, provided them with clear and concise information, and gave them the guidance and support of peer mentors.

Other student veterans expressed frustration with the university's former requirement to attend an on campus orientation. They considered this policy as inflexible and are glad that the university now provides an online orientation option.

E-Orientation

The university's E-orientation was considered by many vets as an informative university services tool that can be supplemented with vet to vet mentoring. Some vets believe that vet to vet mentoring is important because it would add the guidance, knowledge and support that most student veterans need in order to learn how to navigate through the world of academia.

Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC)

The Reserve Officers Training Corps was another significant issue that several student veterans identified during the focus group sessions. They indicated that the ROTC program on campus was helpful since it provided them with the support, guidance, and community they needed in order to adapt to their new academic environment. This becomes an issue of concern since as many veterans noted, such support was not available for them on campus. Furthermore, numerous veterans mentioned that they enrolled in the ROTC program in order to gain access to this peer supported community. With this issue in mind, veterans encourage the university to develop a veteran to veteran mentoring session within orientation services.

Academic Advising

A challenge that most student veterans recognized was the need for more academic advising. They identified this need as important since many experienced a sense of uncertainty when it came to understanding their majors' academic curriculum. Some of the difficulties student veterans expressed was:

1. A lack of knowledge regarding what pre-requisite and requisite courses they should be taking according to their academic curriculum.
2. A lack of knowledge regarding what classes they should be enrolled in for their first quarter at Cal Poly Pomona.
3. A lack of knowledge and direction as to what to do when their first class schedule option is not available.
4. A lack of knowledge on how to figure out and plan their class schedule for the academic year.

5. A need for guidance and support with navigating the general education curriculum.

Some programs on campus that student veterans considered as helpful to them and can be used as a guide are the College of Engineering's Maximizing Engineering Potential (MEP) program and the College of Science's Science Educational Enhancement Services (SEES).

Student Services

Priority Registration

Student veteran participants indicated that priority registration has been an advantage that has helped them to enroll in the courses they needed, but some challenges do exist. The following are some difficulties that student veterans have experienced with priority registration:

1. Forgetting their registration appointment.
2. Late notifications of priority registration appointments from Bronco Direct.
3. Scheduled time period for priority registration is too short.

In addressing the issue of forgetting registration appointments, student veterans considered email or text messaging as tools that the university can implement as helpful reminders. In addition, student veterans recommended the university to verify that priority registration appointments are being sent to them on time since Bronco Direct has been an unreliable source. As for priority registration's short time frame, some veterans referred Cal State University of Los Angeles and Mt. Sac as examples of best practices that the university can use as a guide with its own priority registration policy.

Housing Services

During the focus group sessions, veterans discussed their experiences about the following housing concerns:

1. Housing Policies
2. Age Differences

Housing Policies

The university's housing policies were considered by veterans as not military friendly. This was particularly voiced by veterans who received ROTC housing scholarships. Many of the veterans are experiencing difficulties with housing because of the conflicting deadlines for when housing fees are due and when their ROTC scholarships are disbursed. Sentiments such as distress and frustration were expressed by a couple of student veterans because finding a solution to this problem continues to elude them. For instance, ROTC leadership has contacted financial aid and the cashier's office

regarding this problem, but was only able to settle the situation for a short period of time. Many of these veterans recommend that the university coordinate with ROTC leadership regarding housing payments.

Another student veteran had a difficult situation with Cal Poly Pomona Foundation's University Village. The veteran stated that a letter was sent to inform all dorm students about a routine housing check, but that Foundation had failed to indicate the time that this inspection would take place. This ability to just walk in without warning was considered by this veteran as an intrusion to his privacy.

The issue of increased housing costs was also raised. These participants made a clear point of indicating that other universities provided housing discounts for veterans, but Cal Poly Pomona does not.

Age Differences

Participants that lived on campus related some difficulties they had experienced with the younger students that dorm. Many of them described their younger cohorts as immature and inconsiderate.

A solution that most participants encourage the university to consider is to place all student veterans that dorm within the same housing unit. This they believe would help foster vet to vet mentoring which would thereby provide them with the sense of community and support they need to adjust to their new academic environment.

Counseling and Psychological Services

The university's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) was recognized as a good service among those veterans that have used this program. These vets recommended that more information regarding this center should be promoted to the student veteran community (e.g. veteran web site, within admission and orientation packets, and as handouts in the Veteran Resource Center). In addition, they noted that CAPS' location should be more visible on campus.

Career Center

Many student veterans indicated their need for job, work study, and internship opportunities. They also demonstrated an interest in professional workshops, such as resume development that is specific to veterans. More access to such opportunities can help veterans attain the experience they need to gain stable employment. A suggestion that various veterans made was to have a job/internship section on the veteran web page.

Academic Assistance

The need for awareness among the student veteran community regarding the availability of academic tutoring services on campus was also touch upon. Some student veterans suggested that the following academic assistance programs should be

promoted on the veteran web page, within orientation packets, and in the Veteran Resource Center:

- Learning Resource Center
- ASI Tutoring
- University Writing Center

University Email

Several veterans recognized that they did not read the emails that they received from the university. This they noted left many of them unaware of the veteran events on campus. They stated that the best method to communicate information to them is via text messages and/or a Google calendar on the university's veteran web site (e.g. ASI's web site).

Children's Center

The Children's Center on campus was identified as a beneficial resource for those participants that had children. As for using this service, the only setback that some vets expressed was the unawareness that such service existed when they first attended this institution. In order for more student veterans to have access to this service, some participants recommended that Cal Poly Pomona promote this service directly to the student veteran community by including this information on the veteran web page, within admission and orientation packets, and as handouts in the Veteran Resource Center.

Faculty

Cal Poly Pomona's faculty was an additional theme that was discussed during these sessions. Some participants felt that faculty on campus needed to become more aware of the transitional issues that student veterans experience. While other veteran participants considered faculty as not being veteran friendly. With these concerns in mind, student veterans advise the university to educate faculty about the transitional needs, concerns, and experiences of student veterans within the higher education environment.

Campus Life Services

Veterans Club

The veterans club was a common topic among the focus group sessions. Many student veterans expressed a sense of uncertainty over whether the club did or did not exist on campus. Some of the vets considered this sense of unawareness as a communication problem. However, for other student veterans the issue of unawareness and the reason that a veteran club did not exist on campus was due to the fact that many veterans are too busy (e.g. working full time, family responsibilities, etc.). Most veteran participants recognized that a veteran club is important despite the fact that it would require a commitment and consistency from both the university and student veterans. Their recommendation to the university is to establish a veterans club on campus and sustain it by attracting veterans' attention with networking events, speakers, workshops, sports, etc. The club and its activities should be promoted on the veteran web page, facebook page, and on campus club fairs.

Campus Events

Many of the veteran participants were impressed with the university's events. Bronco Fusion, Veterans' Day, and Midnight Madness are just some examples of the events that they really enjoyed on campus. Student veterans recommended the university to encourage the veterans' club to be involved with planning military/veteran events on campus. An additional recommendation would be to promote these events on the veteran web page (e.g. a Google calendar), facebook page, and by text messaging.

Intramurals

ASI's Intramurals is a topic that veterans considered as an attractive incentive to integrate veterans within the university environment. Several veterans proposed for the veterans club to organize veteran teams to compete with each other within this tournament. Others believed that ASI should consider providing veterans with an enrollment discount.

Office of Student Life

The Office of Student Life was recognized throughout the focus group sessions. Veterans considered this office as a great resource toward finding an activity or club of their interest.

Summary of Focus Group Findings

Topic	Issue	Potential Options
Points of Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No central source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop veterans services points of contact.
Military Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No structure to follow No central source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a "To do" list/checklist regarding this articulation process. If possible list what is articulated by the university. Designate a point of contact
Military v. University Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No structure to follow No central source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a "To do" list/checklist regarding the pre-enrollment process. Designate a veterans services point of contact.
Admission Application Delay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online application system did not request DD214 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online box that indicates to veterans that they need to submit their DD214 in order to receive priority admission.
Orientation Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E-Orientation On campus orientation: no guidance and support to transition into academic environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More veteran friendly and can be supplemented with peer mentoring. Use MEP of the College of Engineering as a best practices example toward developing peer mentoring.
ROTC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided support that was unavailable to veterans on campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a peer support network on campus.
Academic Advising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncertainty concerning their major's academic curriculum. A need for guidance and support in order to understand and transition into their new academic environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental advisors would need to address the student veteran's academic concerns. Develop peer mentoring.
Priority Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forgetting appointment time Late priority appointment notifications Registration period is too short. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Text message or email reminders Check Bronco Direct Best practices (Mt. Sac and Cal State LA) as guides to improve the priority registration period.
Housing Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deadlines for housing fees and ROTC scholarships conflict. Age difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate fee payments with ROTC scholarship disbursement dates. Consider veterans to dorm in same rooms or house veterans in the same housing unit.
Career Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List job, internship, and work study opportunities on the veteran web page. Promote these opportunities via email and post them in the Veteran Resource Center.
CAPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post information on veteran web page, as handouts in Veteran Resource Center, and within orientation packets.
University Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a good source of information for veterans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post information on veteran web page and within the Veteran Resource Center. Text messaging reminders is also a possibility.

Topic	Issue	Potential Options
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to understand vet issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate faculty on student veteran concerns
Academic Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post information on veteran web page, as handouts in Veteran Resource Center, and within orientation packets.
Children's Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post information on veteran web page, as handouts in Veteran Resource Center, and within orientation packets.
Veterans Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsure of whether the veterans club exists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Veterans Club on campus. • Post information on veteran web page and facebook. • Promote club both on campus.
Campus Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post event information on online services (e.g. veteran web page). • Develop an online calendar on veteran web page (e.g. events, deadlines, etc.) • The veteran club needs to be involved with planning veteran events on campus.
Intramurals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veterans' participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discount ASI's intramurals fee for veterans.
Office of Student Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extracurricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize as a resource for veterans interested in finding an activity or club on campus.

Focus Group Recommendations

Pre-Enrollment Services

The following are the three highest priorities for pre-enrollment services that student veterans ranked during their focus groups sessions:

1. Admissions Process
2. Advising: Academic and Mentoring
3. Points of Contacts

Admissions Process

A majority of student veterans indicated an interest in understanding the admissions process. Some of the themes student veterans categorized under the admissions process includes:

- Financial aid
- GI Bill benefits certification
- Applying to Cal Poly Pomona
- Information regarding priority registration
- Academic credit for military service

Many of these veterans described their pre-enrollment experience as difficult. Among the factors that influenced the difficulties these veterans experienced as incoming students were:

1. A lack of knowledge on the part of university staff regarding veteran pre-enrollment policies and services.
2. A lack of understanding of what process to follow in order to apply to Cal Poly Pomona, apply for financial aid, request academic credit for military service, and getting GI Bill benefit certification.

In order to address these concerns, veterans suggested that the university develop a “to do” or checklist. This would provide the incoming veteran with a step by step process of what to do in order to successfully navigate the pre-enrollment process.

Advising: Academic and Mentoring

The need for one to one interaction during the pre-enrollment process was an issue that many veterans identified throughout the focus group sessions. Among the concerns veterans expressed regarding advising was:

- A feeling of uncertainty regarding their majors’ academic curriculum.

- A need for guidance and support in order to understand and integrate into their new academic environment.

Potential options that veterans suggested were to use best practices approaches like the College of Engineering's Maximizing Engineering Potential (MEP) as a guide toward developing peer mentoring. Departmental advisors would address student veterans' academic concerns.

Points of Contact

This recommendation ties in and reinforces student veterans' first pre-enrollment choice which was a checklist/to do list. By designating a point of contact the university will be providing staff that can assist student veterans with their unique questions and concerns.

Student Services

The following are the three highest priorities for student services that student veterans ranked during the focus groups sessions:

1. Career Center
2. Housing Services
3. Veterans Club/Lounge

Career Center

Financial stability and career experiences are some of the many influential factors that have driven student veterans to increase their interest in finding job, internship, and work study opportunities while attending this academic institution. The following are some of the suggestions veterans made:

- Professional workshops such as resume development.
- Career Advising
- Jobs section on the veteran web site.

Housing Services

The concern that student veterans have regarding the conflict between University Housing's fees deadlines and ROTC's scholarship disbursements is significant. As a next step, the university should coordinate fee payments with ROTC's scholarship awards calendar.

As for the age difference, the university should be considering this as an integration issue. Many of the veterans felt that the best method to address this problem was by establishing a veteran dorm on campus.

Veterans Club/Lounge

The need for a veterans club and lounge area was suggested by student veterans as a priority. By establishing and sustaining a veterans club on campus, many student

veterans believe it would promote a safe zone environment in which veterans can come together and mingle. Other participants felt that by providing an opportunity to come together as a group, more student veterans will be motivated to be more active on campus.

Campus Life Services

The following are the three highest priorities for campus life services that student veterans ranked during the focus groups sessions:

1. Campus Events
2. Veterans Club
3. Online Calendar

Campus Events

Many of the participants that had attended an on campus event expressed that they were impressed and that the university should keep up the good work. The only recommendation they made was for the university to bring more awareness by posting event information on the veteran web page and by text messaging event reminders to veterans.

Veterans Club

Once more focus group participants identified the veterans club as a priority that the university should address. A key recommendation that vets made was that once the club was established, the university will need to make the student veteran community become aware of the veterans' club on campus. Examples of how to achieve this would be to post club information on the veteran web page and by participating in university events.

Online Calendar

Many of the student veterans indicated that an online calendar on the veteran web page would help them keep current of the events on campus. In addition to this, veterans will also be able to keep track of when their priority registrations appointments will be available on Bronco Direct, university deadlines, and club meetings.

Summary of Focus Group Recommendations

University Service	Issue	Top 3 Recommended Priorities
Pre-Enrollment Services	Admissions Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No central source No structure to follow 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a checklist / "To do" list / Information of services
	Advising: Academic and Mentoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncertainty concerning their major's academic curriculum. A need for guidance and support in order to understand and integrate into their new academic environment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Use College of Engineering's Maximizing Engineering Potential (MEP) as guide toward developing peer mentoring. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental advisors would address the student veteran's academic concerns.
	Points of Contact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No central source 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Veterans Services Points of Contact
Student Services	Career Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More information 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> List job, internship, and work study opportunities on the veteran web page. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote these opportunities via email and post them in the Veteran Resource Center.
	Housing Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deadlines for housing fees and ROTC scholarships conflict. Age difference 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate fee payments with ROTC scholarship disbursement dates. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider veterans to dorm in same rooms or house veterans in same housing unit.
	Veterans Club/Lounge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsure of whether the veterans club exists. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Veterans Club on campus. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post club and Veteran Resource Center information on online services (e.g. veteran web page). Promote both the club and Veteran Resource Center on campus.
Campus Life Services	Campus Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More information 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Post event information on online services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Veterans club should be involved with planning veteran events on campus. Send reminder emails and text messages to veterans regarding campus event.
	Veterans Club <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsure of whether the veterans club exists. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a veterans club on campus. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post club information on online services (e.g. veteran web page). Promote both the club on campus.
	Online Calendar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep track and coordinate important events, dates, etc. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an online calendar on the veteran web page (e.g. events, deadlines, etc.)