



Veterans Resource Center

Organizational Values & the Veterans Resource Center Assessment Report

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Choose One: Operational Assessment

Date of Assessment Implementation: October 2017

- The assessment period was from October 2017 to December of 2017

Date of Report: May 2018

Purpose of Assessment

The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) was established in 2012 to support the personal and academic success of student veterans and military dependents. The Center serves as a central resource for information, support, guidance, and community. The key to the VRC's success in serving Cal Poly Pomona's military affiliated students is its peer to peer approach. In an effort promote this concept, the Center established various student positions: Lead Veteran Resource Advisors, Veteran Resource Advisors, and Veteran Ambassadors.

Throughout the academic year, there has been a significant increase in the number of complaints that staff have expressed during department meetings. The goal of this assessment was to identify the challenges that VRC staff are experiencing and to create a department strategy that will foster better understanding and communication among team members. Staff engagement throughout this process should help to foster a supportive and transparent work environment.

Division Learning Outcome Professionalism & Ethics

Targeted Learning Outcome

Three learning objectives were established for the Veterans Resource Center's Organizational Values Workshops. Department staff who participated in these sessions would be able to 1) identify and discuss the challenges that the Veterans Resource Center staff (student and professional) experienced as a department during the past academic year, 2) identify and discuss strategies that can help develop guiding principles that are conducive to creating a supportive and transparent work environment, and 3) identify and discuss any strategies that can be used to engage department staff in the implementation of the department's guiding principles.

Assessment Methodology

The VRC hosted two workshops with department staff (N=14 participants). Both workshops were implemented as focus group sessions. Staff were divided into four working groups where they collaborated to address the learning outcomes identified above. Both workshops had two facilitators, Dr. Michael Cholbi and Elke Azpeitia.

Workshop 1: The first half of workshop 1 was to identify the challenges that the Veterans Resource Center experienced as a department and how values played a role. The second half of this workshop had participants explore and discuss the development of the Veterans Resource Center's values (e.g. establishing a value vocabulary).

Guiding Questions for CPP VRC's Values Process:

- I. Who we are as a team?
- II. What we believe as a team?
- III. Are these values reflective of the Division of Student Affairs' mission and that of the overall campus?

Workshop 2: The first half of the second workshop focused on putting the department's values into practice by creating scenarios in which staff were asked to identify the values involved in the challenge and to provide recommended solutions. The second half of this workshop was dedicated to developing strategies that would encourage department staff engagement with the department's values.

Results

Operational Outcomes:

Challenges: VRC staff identified the following workplace challenges: 1) there was a significant increase in staff employment by the Center in the past academic year, and 2) an increase in the number of dependents and non-military affiliated staff working for the department. Both of these issues were identified and discussed as instrumental factors that fostered conflicts among staff members due to each individuals' interpretation of how the department defined work ethic and work quality. More importantly, discussing these challenges helped the department staff to recognize that the Veterans Resource Center had an emerging work culture that needed to be explored and further developed.

Aligning & Defining VRC Values: After much discussion, the VRC staff came to a consensus and selected 5 values to represent the Center's professional ideals: 1) Respect: Equal concern and professionalism to all, 2) Excellence: Embracing high standards, 3) Commitment: Dedication to the mission even in the face of adversity, 4) Integrity: Being principled and conscientious, and 5) Teamwork: Communicate, collaborate, and appreciate.

Action Plan: VRC department staff also created an action plan that would encourage the implementation of these ideals in their work environment. 1) Staff Evaluations would be improved by providing staff members the opportunity to participate in a self-evaluation and to receive a team evaluation from their fellow peers. 2) A values grading rubric was established to help staff understand the definition of a successful staff member. All staff participated in providing feedback for the values grading rubric. 3) The values are listed in the job descriptions for all VRC staff positions and will be an instrumental tool in the hiring process for new staff. 4) Department staff will participate in a values professional development workshop on a quarterly/semester basis. 5) Branding / marketing of the VRC values must consistently be developed to represent the professional ideals of the department to campus and external partners. Department staff will continuously provide input for the branding process. This is to encourage their commitment and support for these ideals. 6) Each year the Veterans Resource Center will conduct an annual values review with department staff to determine whether these values are still reflective of their professional ideals.

Conclusion

Staff engagement is fundamental towards the improvement of workplace challenges. A consensus of staff members expressed work difficulties in the office and were open to having a conversation on how the department as a team can move forward toward establishing guiding principles that would unify the team and enhance their work environment. More importantly, the creation of a value vocabulary enables staff members to have a foundation on which to make critical work decisions and to consistently strive to achieve their professional work ideals.

Implications for Practice

There is a need to re-evaluate the Veterans Resource Center's values in December of 2018 to determine whether these are still reflective of our department's staff professional ideals. We also need to assess the impact that these values have had on the staff and their work environment to determine whether this strategy is influencing our department to have a strong team and healthier work environment.

Closing the Loop

1. During the fall semester of 2018 the Center will conduct a survey to assess the department staff's experience with the VRC values and to determine whether these values have made an impact on the overall team and work environment.
2. A meeting will be scheduled in December of 2018 with the VRC staff to address the following items: A) Review the values survey results with the team. Discuss and reflect on their experiences with the VRC's values and B) Identify and discuss whether the Center's values are still reflective of the department's professional work ideals?