

Collaborating for Change: Assessing the Needs of Student Veterans at Penn State



A PRESENTATION ON BEHALF OF THE
MILITARY SUPPORT SERVICES TASK FORCE

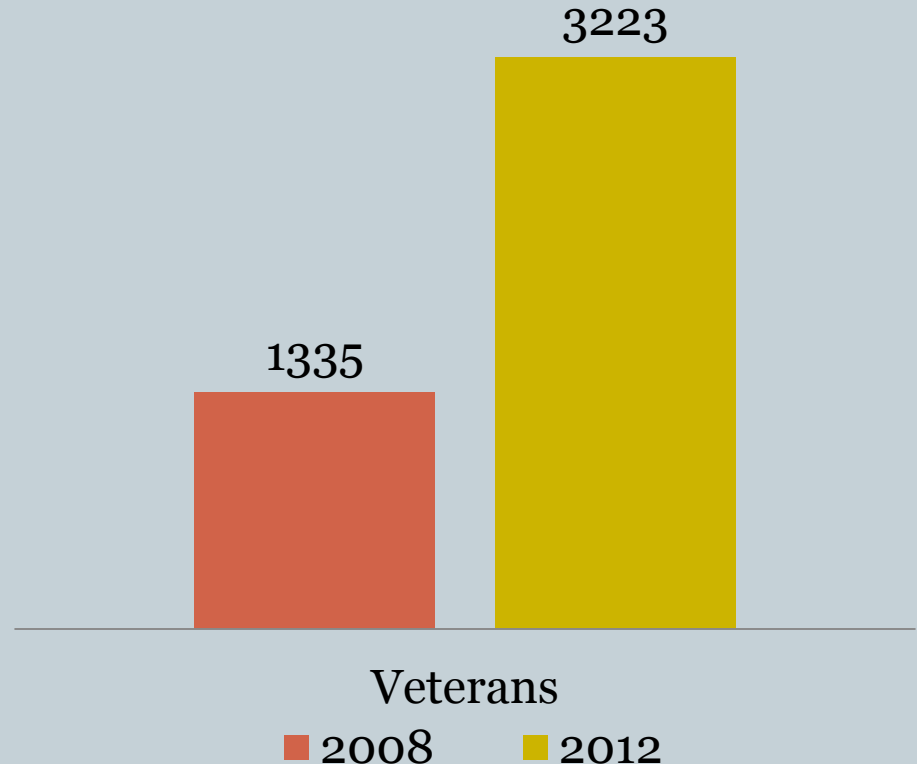
SUEANN DORAN, PENN STATE DUBOIS ADULT
STUDENT AND VETERANS SERVICES
COORDINATOR

RENEE THORNTON-ROOP, VETERANS
COUNSELOR/CERTIFYING OFFICIAL, PENN
STATE OFFICE OF VETERANS PROGRAMS

Why are we here?



- Nationally, more veterans going to college
- Veteran student enrollment at Penn State has more than doubled since 2008, making up 3.5 % of our undergraduate population and 6.1% of the graduate population



Why the influx?



- Implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) in 2009
- Over one million veterans have used Post 9/11 benefits, with over 30 billion dollars spent.
- Vocational Rehabilitation (Chapter 31) benefits

Who are we serving?



- Most have served during the United States Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) 2001-2009, and ongoing contingency operations, with nearly one third having been deployed two or more times
- Veterans who served prior to 9/11/01



What we think we know about veterans



- Older than the average traditional student –median age of 29
- Many are part-time students
- Often have families to support
- Combat veterans with injuries
- Those with physical and psychological injuries benefit from being close to their support network, requiring distance education services.

Commission for Adult Learner Charge



- Veterans recognized as a special population within adult students
- Subcommittee developed within Commission, a Military Support Services Task Force, consisting of veterans, certifying officials, advocates from UP and WD, satellite campuses and the military team.

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY



Commission for Adult Learners

Task Force Action



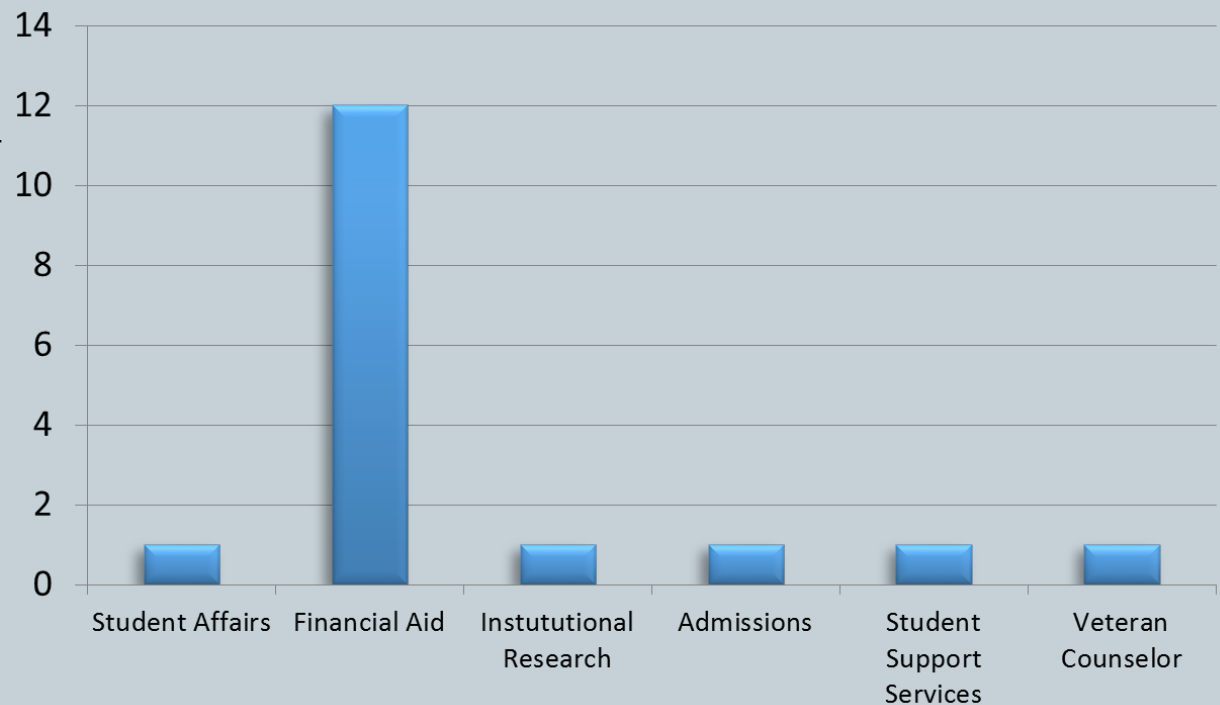
Preliminary survey to Certifying Officials:

- 37 certifying officials at 21 campuses
- 17 campus certifying officials of the 21 responded
- Questions asked:
 - Other roles of certifying officials
 - Campus veteran services
 - Number of veterans
 - Veterans organizations
 - Veterans advisory council
 - Partnering with other offices on campus for veteran services
 - Challenges/barriers for veterans

Certifying Official Survey Results



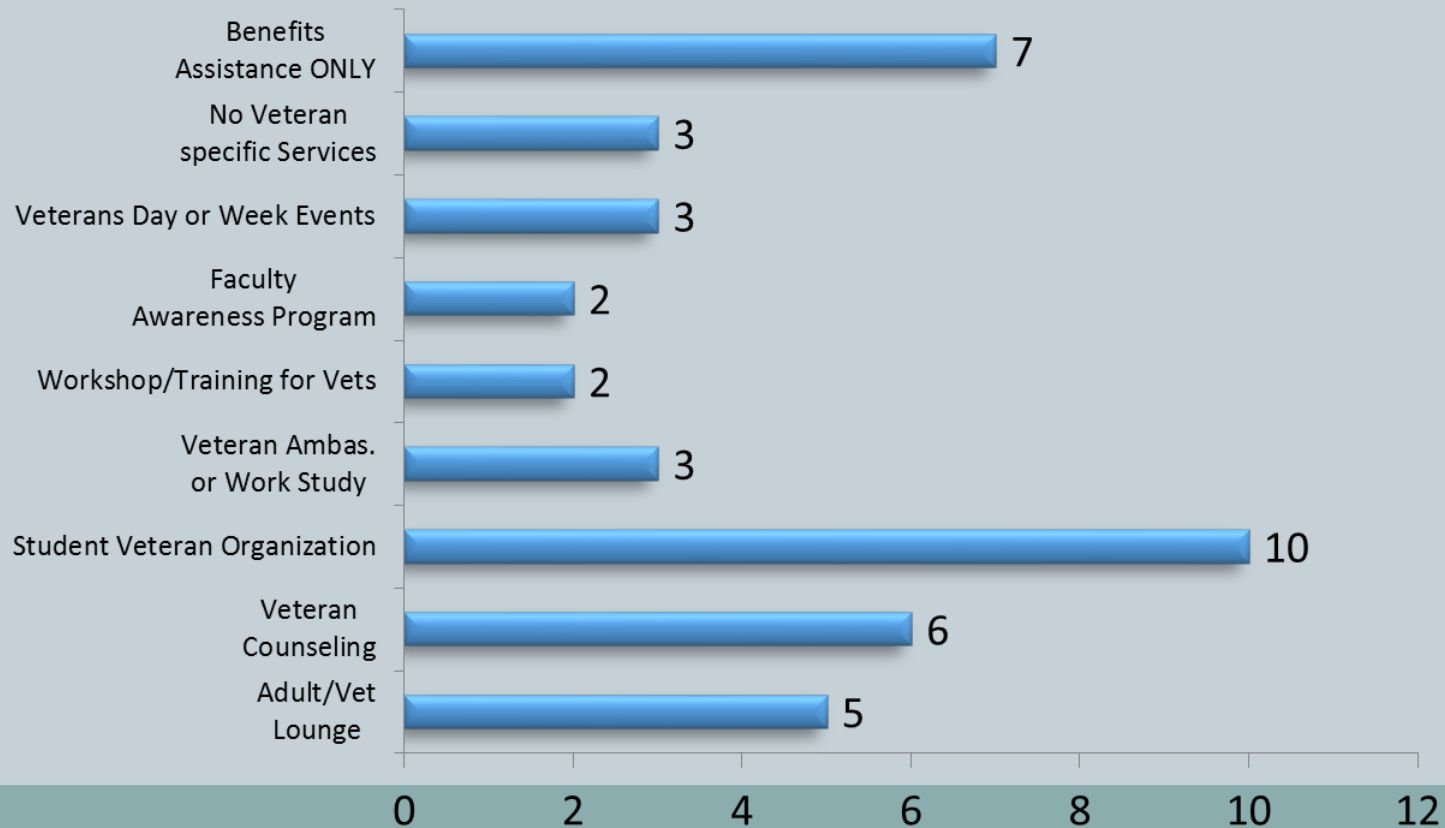
- Who are the certifying officials? –
 - only staff at Vets Affairs at UP are veterans
- Where are they at the campuses? – mostly Financial Aid office
- UP has its own office dedicated to veterans' services.



Certifying Official Survey Results



- Number of veterans from all campuses– 20 to 1574
- Services vary - not consistent across all campuses



Certifying Official Survey Results



Challenges/barriers identified by the Certifying Officials:

- Mental Health Concerns
- Instructor sensitivity
- Juggling school, work, family
- Time Management
- Education Benefits
- Adapting to civilian life

Certifying Official Survey Results



Certifying Official Recommendations:

- Veteran Room/Lounge
- Instructor/Adviser Awareness Training
- Veterans Organization
- Veterans Awareness Activities
- Counseling
- Veteran Representative
- Veteran Lion Ambassadors

Committee response to survey challenges/barriers



- **Mental Health Concerns**
 - Veterans counseling – on and off campus
 - Disability Services can assist

- **Adapting to life outside of the military**
 - Case management
 - Mentor program
 - Networking
 - Develop programming

- **Campus climate**
 - Provide training to staff/faculty
 - Incorporate into existing trainings

- **Benefits concerns**
 - Communicate with students

Committee Recommendations



- Form “Veterans Advocacy Group”
- Hire veterans as Certifying Officials
- Educate faculty and staff (including advisers)
 - Webinars (<http://equity.psu.edu/veterans/resources>)
- Veterans Forums
- Certifying Officials and vet advocates meeting
- Recognition of graduating veterans
- Explore best practices, “Military Friendly,” Principles of Excellence (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/27/executive-order-establishing-principles-excellence-educational-instituti>)

Penn State's Charge



- March 20, 2014 memo from Rodney Erickson
 - To honor military service members and veterans, their families and loved ones
 - To honor and empower Wounded Warriors and their loved ones
 - To support injured service members and the families of deceased service members
 - To sustain such efforts as an expression of Penn State's ongoing commitment and contribution to our national security
 - To increase financial scholarships, academic opportunities, and career services to Penn State veterans and their families.

PENNSTATE



Reputation as Veteran/Military Friendly



- Penn State's University Park campus No. 1 Military Friendly School among National Universities, Fall 2013 (<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2013/11/11/us-news-releases-best-colleges-for-veterans-rankings>)
- Individual campuses “Military Friendly”
 - Includes: priority registration, yellow ribbon participation, veteran specific services, etc.



Committee Future Exploration Based on Results and Penn State's Charge:



- Want a more complete picture of veterans and their needs at Penn State
- Evaluate Student Satisfaction Survey
- Pilot survey at University Park



Quick Action Steps



- Get to know your veterans
 - Host a lunch
 - Start a Veterans list serve
- Determine services that already exist
 - Communicate to students
- Create other opportunities for Veterans to connect
 - Fair to connect with community
 - Veterans Day
- Create Veterans Advocacy Group
- Create Veterans organization
- Explore Best Practices



Questions?



Thank you!