Advancing Veteran Success
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Case Studies of Student Veteran Support Programs at San Diego State University, the University of Texas-Arlington, the University of South Florida, and Florida State College Jacksonville

Capt. Josh Keefe, USMC │ Zach Huitink │ Paige Donegan

JPMorgan Chase & Co.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This project assessed the preliminary performance of programs supporting student veterans at four U.S. colleges and universities. Informed by prior research on the drivers of veteran success in higher education, the programs provided a mix of veteran-specific orientation and bridging activities, academic and employment-related services, and changes in university administration and the classroom experience to further support student veterans. The project found that the programs made a number of positive impacts on veteran academic performance, access to campus and community resources, and skills training and employment opportunities, but also experienced challenges with personnel turnover, sustainability, and integration with existing on-campus services and supports. Based on the programs' achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, the report provides a set of recommendations to guide future design, funding, and implementation of initiatives to promote veteran success in the college and university environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CAPT. JOSH KEEFE

Capt. Josh Keefe of the U.S. Marine Corps holds an M.P.A. from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and a J.D. from Syracuse University School of Law. While at Syracuse, he did a fellowship which concentrated his studies on national security law and policy and public administration in the federal sector. Actively involved in veterans advocacy, he co-founded the Syracuse Veterans Legal Clinic, which provides free civil legal assistance to veterans and service members. After graduating from Syracuse, Josh returned to active duty with the Marine Corps, where he currently serves as a judge advocate and remains active in veterans affairs.

ZACH HUITINK

Zach Huitink is a research associate at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University, and a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Public Administration and International Affairs at Syracuse University's Maxwell School. He holds an M.P.P. from the James W. Martin School of Public Administration and Policy at the University of Kentucky, and a B.A. with a dual major in business administration and economics from Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he graduated magna cum laude with departmental honors. Prior to graduate school, Huitink worked as an analyst in the financial services industry, and previously served as an intern in the policy research group at the Council of State Governments and a volunteer with AmeriCorps VISTA. He maintains an active research agenda concerned with U.S. national security, defense policy, and veterans issues.

PAIGE DONEGAN

Paige Donegan is a former research associate at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University. She holds an M.P.A. from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University and a B.A. in political science from the University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY), where she graduated summa cum laude with departmental honors. During her studies, she was heavily involved in the research for The Project on Violent Conflict, an academic research center based at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy located at the SUNY Albany. Following graduate school, Paige has been working as an analyst for Wittenberg Weiner Consulting, LLC., on various Department of Defense contracts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SUGGESTED CITATION

Advancing Veteran Success
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Case Studies of Student Veteran Support Programs at San Diego State University, the University of Texas-Arlington, the University of South Florida, and Florida State College Jacksonville

Capt. Josh Keefe, USMC | Zach Huitink | Paige Donegan

JPMorgan Chase & Co.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I n recognition of the sacrifices America's veterans, military members, and their families make in service to our nation, JPMorgan Chase (JPMC) is committed to supporting veterans and military families in the areas of employment, financial capability, and small business, and has also supported veterans higher education programs. Education is a critical path to achieving gainful employment and financial stability— factors that can have a significant impact on veteran and military family member reintegration to civilian life. To these ends, JPMC has dedicated resources to support higher education institutions and programs that improve educational outcomes for student veterans.

Using primary and secondary research conducted by Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), JPMC identified three focus areas that represent the greatest opportunities for higher education institutions to support success of student veterans: orientation and bridge programs, student services, and programs affecting university administration and the student veteran classroom experience. To promote and improve veteran educational outcomes, JPMC provided seed money to four schools to develop new programs or expand existing programs that increased their programmatic capacity in accordance with its three primary focus areas.

This report provides an overview and assessment of initial performance of the student veteran programs at the four pilot schools—San Diego State University, the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of South Florida, and Florida State College at Jacksonville. The purpose of the evaluation is to gauge the initial impact of each school's program on veteran academic success on campus. Through an assessment of programmatic achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, the evaluation isolates best practices that can inform future veterans' services programming on college and university campuses.

Analysis of the four programs reveals a number of common best practices that can help to inform stakeholders interested in growing and improving student veteran programs nationwide. **Five broad recommendations drawn from the successes and lessons learned from the four pilot programs are as follows:**

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 ▶ Funders should focus support on programs that involve successful collaboration between higher education institutions and community partners, including partnerships with employers seeking to hire veterans.

#2 ▶ Veterans program administrators seeking to add veteran-specific programming and services should also consider means to adapt or integrate existing campus programs or services in support of student veterans' initiatives.

#3 ▶ Staffing choices are critical to the success of veterans programs. Program administrators should ensure they budget adequate time to find, hire, and train the right candidates to ensure program success.

#4 ▶ Student veteran programs should develop and maintain sustainability plans to ensure successful programs can continue after grant funding is exhausted.

#5 ▶ In funding new higher education student veteran programs, funders should consider establishing a two-year minimum funding cycle to allow programs adequate time to build and develop self-sustaining programs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose and Approach

This is a preliminary assessment of student veteran programs at four pilot colleges—San Diego State University, the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of South Florida, and Florida State College at Jacksonville. The purpose of the evaluation is to gauge the initial impact of each school's program on veteran academic success on campus. Success in higher education is a critical component of veterans' and transitioning service members' reintegration into civilian life, and a key prerequisite for economic success, family stability, and civic engagement. Through an assessment of programmatic achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, the evaluation aims to isolate best practices that may inform future veterans' services programming on college and university campuses. Accordingly, the findings of the evaluation are relevant for a range of stakeholders, including JPMC and the participating grantees, as well as veterans' program administrators and senior leadership at other higher education institutions; donors interested in supporting veterans' higher educational attainment; veterans-focused research and service organizations; and current and prospective student veterans.

To establish a sense of each program's impact, this report relies on documents describing each program's goals, objectives, and service delivery model, and compares these with initial program performance data from three sources:

1. Administrative data on program inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, provided in periodic performance reports and community-of-practice calls;

2. A survey intended to gauge program administrators' perceptions of impact one year after the start of the programs;

3. A follow-up interview to garner additional thoughts and insights from program administrators.

The assessment is limited in that it focuses on the programs' first year of operation, meaning the findings should be treated as preliminary and could change over time. In addition, the available data are based in part on administrators' self-reported perceptions of impact, which may diverge from actual program performance and may not reflect the experiences of program participants. Finally, to the extent program service delivery relied on voluntary participation, subsequent outcomes (e.g., improved academic performance, internship and job placement, etc.) could to an extent reflect the stronger motivation of participating vs. non-participating student veterans in addition to the value-added contribution of the services the programs provided.

UNIVERSITY

JOBS

THE JOAN AND ART BARRON VETERANS CENTER
San Diego State University

Program Background

The Joan and Art Barron Veterans Center (JABVC) at San Diego State University (SDSU) is the first center established to support student veterans in the California State University system. The center serves more than 3,700 veterans, active duty military, reservists, and dependents on campus and at military bases throughout the San Diego area, which is home to the nation's largest concentration of U.S. military personnel. Under the direction of Joan Putnam, JABVC works to maximize every educational opportunity available to its veteran and military students. Putnam also oversees SDSU's Veterans House and is a Secretarial appointee to the Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education. JABVC maintains a 14-member professional staff to include a full time VA VetSuccess on Campus counselor to advise all student veterans on their educational benefits, and a Wounded Warrior academic

UNIVERSITY

advisor to assist wounded, ill, or injured servicemembers and caregivers with customized educational plans. The center also provides assistance to ease the transition from military life by helping with psychological and physical challenges and helping student veterans connect with their classmates.

JABVC embraces the broad vision of expanding educational opportunities to veterans and military personnel who wish to attend a university. With the support of JPMC, the center developed three programs to enhance its support services for veterans and servicemembers on the San Diego State campus, and increase the center's reach to pre-admission students.

JABVC leaders first proposed an expansion of their staff to reach out to more pre-admission students through an orientation program. The program, Basic Training for Higher Education, offers half-day orientations for veterans, active duty military, and their dependents to assist them in the often-difficult process of finding and applying to the right university to match a student's needs. The orientations, hosted on bases and at schools throughout San Diego County, cover information on admissions, VA and GI Bill information, and scholarships for partnering community colleges and public universities in San Diego County.

JABVC also proposed expanding support services and developing a peer mentoring network program through hiring an assistant veterans' coordinator (AVC). The AVC's role is twofold: first, to assist in processing education benefit claims, and second, to pair upper-level student veteran advisors with new student veterans with similar military experiences. This expansion aims to accelerate veteran benefits claims and reduce undue stress by dividing the workload of paperwork for up to 2,600 students between three people. Additionally, the peer-mentoring network seeks to assist the large number of transfer student veterans--up to 95% of SDSU's student veteran population—adjust to a four-year university.

Finally, as an extension of SDSU's broader efforts to support student veteran assimilation into campus life, JABVC established a Veteran Ally Program to educate faculty, staff, and administrators on how to create a welcoming environment for student veterans. Educators for the pilot program – from Cal State University Long Beach – hold the training once a semester, and it is open to all SDSU faculty and staff. The formal training is designed to increase recipients' understanding of military lifestyle and culture. Once the program is well established, the SDSU Office of Diversity and Equity will lead its own regular training sessions. Since student veterans comprise over 10 percent of the student body, this is a critical imitative as all university employees will eventually encounter a student veteran.

Preliminary Outcomes

Data and feedback collected throughout the initial implementation and operation of JABVC's initiatives suggests they have made a number of positive impacts on the lives of SDSU's current and prospective student veterans. However, sustainability (including the sustainability of cross-organizational relationships that have at times been disrupted by leadership turnover) remains a key concern.

JABVC has seen success with the Basic Training for Higher Education program, as evident by the doubling in program participants from 744 to 1,497 over the program's initial run. This was described as one of the highlights of the program, as the grant allowed JABVC to triple the number of events, from 16 prior to receipt of grant funds, to 49 orientations after receiving grant funding. The center has a strong relationship with area bases and is trusted by the community as it works to direct veterans and military personnel to the right college for them—even if it is not San Diego State University. That said, base commander turnover tends to be a recurring problem that requires JABVC to rebuild new relationships every few years. During the term of the grant, JABVC was temporarily restricted from accessing some local bases due to changes to the existing applicable Department of Defense Memorandum of Understanding and, consequently, the university's required processing and approval time. As a contingency, should a future commander not see the importance of the program and deny base access, JABVC will turn to newly established partnerships with the USO and American Legion nearby as alternative orientation hosts.

The peer network program and services expansion experienced mixed success. On the one hand, with the help of the additional veterans' coordinator, JABVC reduced its claims turnaround time from an average of two weeks to less than two days. However, the peer network will discontinue. Participation in this program is voluntary and the intention was to assign each mentor to fellow students should there be enough interest. The funds for the grant were released mid-semester, which made it difficult to attract many students despite the overall passion to help each other. During its initial run, the program grew only slightly, from 12 mentors to 14 and 12 mentees to 20. Given the meager uptake, JABVC leaders determined it was not sustainable.

As a lesson learned from its initial experience with the mentoring/services expansion and other programs, the SDSU administration has implemented a new JABVC policy that all new initiatives must be planned with a minimum of two years of seed funding. In addition, JABVC will only start projects with a demonstrated level of community interest, with the idea being that this will lead to more sustainable programming. The center will be able to sustain the ongoing success with its expanded outreach programs thanks to additional funding support provided by the university, but the peer mentoring/support services expansions initiated by the JPMC grant will be discontinued due to lack of funders in the surrounding community. The Veteran Ally program will continue past its initial seed-funding period as faculty and staff have shown a consistent interest in participating. In the two trainings held during initial implementation and operation, 66 university
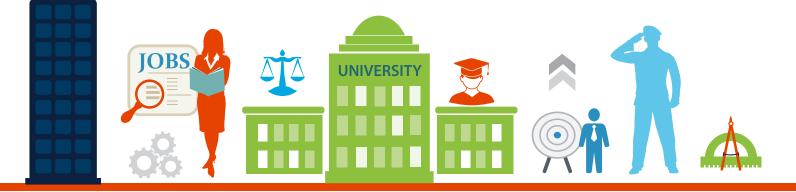
employees attended to increase their understanding of military culture (30 at the first training and 36 at the second). Through the university's Office of Diversity and Equality, the Veterans Coordinator will take over the training from California State Long-Beach (as the Coordinators tasked with other training responsibilities on military culture and family life).

Discussion and Recommendations

Despite being among the oldest and most established veterans programs in California, the JABVC case study shows that there is potential for continued improvement in enhancing the student veteran experience. As discussed above, SDSU has expanded its outreach, more than doubled participation in its orientation events, and tripled its veteran and servicemember related events across the greater San Diego community. Due to the size of SDSU and the number of applicants to the university, JABVC's goal was not specifically to attract more student veterans to campus. Instead, the center worked to inform the area's broader military community of their options in attending any of the California four-year schools and community colleges. The mentorship program saw initial positive returns with its first 20 mentees enrolled in the program. However, the program will be discontinued due to funding constraints. Even so, student veterans are experiencing an improved educational experience as their questions are being answered in a more timely manner, the staff is trained to understand their culture (through the Ally program), and they have a network constantly available to them should they choose to participate.

In summary, while the Joan and Art Barron Veterans Center experienced a number of overall successes with the new programs it started using its JPMC funding, there is always room for improvement, both within the university and more generally for funders and others schools interested in implementing similar programs. As drawn from the JABVC case study, the following recommendations will provide universities and funders with better opportunities to create sustainable and effective veterans programs.

Recommendation: University veterans programs should create a strong network with surrounding area veterans programs and military installations. This will attract potential students to the university's programs and create a reputation that the university is a welcoming and supportive campus for veterans and military personnel/dependents. This will also expose military personnel to educational opportunities at earlier points in their military service and will allow them more time to meet deadlines prior to their separation—and start school immediately as opposed to waiting an extra year to begin work toward their degree.

Recommendation: Funders of future initiatives like these should consider a funding cycle of at least two years. Based on the experience of JABVC, at least two years is the time frame necessary to establish a well-respected program in a university and make any necessary changes to ensure success before funding is exhausted. Additionally, funds should be released in accordance with university calendars so that the full benefit can be realized. It takes several cycles for programs to become well established, which was not fully possible under the JPMC grant.

Recommendation: As a matter of best practice in higher education, colleges and universities should assist veterans in finding the best fit for their education and lifestyle needs—even if it means another institution. Some universities may be perceived as taking advantage of students through high tuition rates and limited services, or in the case of veterans, through quickly exhausting their hard-earned educational benefits like the GI Bill. Universities should work to eliminate this view of higher education generally, but should work especially hard to uphold the trust of, and work in the best interests of, current and prospective student veterans. Higher education institutions should also maintain full-time staff to assist student veterans with their educational benefits, such as the GI Bill, and other available school and community-based resources that will support their long-term success.

The Student Veteran Project
University of Texas-Arlington

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Student Veteran Project (SVP) is an onboarding and bridging program operating out of the Veterans Assistance Center at the University of Texas-Arlington. In its initial period of implementation and operation, SVP served 54 student veterans (42 males, 12 females). The program is directed by Dr. Alexa Smith-Osborne, a licensed clinical social worker and associate professor in the university's Department of Social Work. Dr. Smith-Osborne developed and launched SVP based on prior research indicating the potential for supported education interventions to facilitate veteran reintegration into civilian life. This prior research included (1) fieldwork meant to both actively support veteran reintegration and elicit stakeholder perspectives on how supporting veteran education attainment could support the reintegration process, and based on this fieldwork, (2) a foundation-funded randomized control trial to test the efficacy of a forerunner of the current SVP model.

SVP addresses the challenge student veterans face in harnessing an array of campus and community resources. Such resources, while designed to assist student veterans successfully transition to colleges and universities, often go underutilized because they appear complex, fragmented, and difficult to navigate. SVP's approach to this problem is to use an individualized peer support model that pairs freshman and transfer student veterans with an upper-level undergraduate or graduate student veteran advocate who can assist in navigating campus and community services. All participating Veteran Advocates are matriculated students in degree programs offered by the Department of Social work. In addition, each receive training specific to their roles and responsibilities under SVP in the summer—immediately before SVP's new enrollees arrive on campus for orientation. During the program's initial run, Veteran Advocates provided individualized peer mentoring and support to "teams" of approximately 6-7 student veterans each. Participating student veterans enrolled voluntarily in the program through their attendance at a veteran-specific academic orientation. They received a small incentive for their participation in the program, which included a baseline assessment scheduled shortly after the initial orientation and follow-up assessments throughout the ensuing academic year and beyond.

The stated goals of SVP are to increase student veterans' academic persistence (i.e., enrollment and degree progress), academic performance (i.e., GPA and graduation rates), and transition to civilian life through obtaining employment after graduation. The program seeks to realize these goals through an individualized peer support system in which each participating student veteran is paired with a Veteran Advocate who, according to the program proposal, serves in a role akin to a "personal trainer." Veteran Advocates assist their students in formulating an individualized achievement plan with education and career goals, and aids the student in realizing these goals through intensive one-on-one interaction. These interactions occur both in-person and through a university-developed "enhanced email" platform where Advocates can distribute messages (e.g., deadline reminders, encouraging notes, etc.) that are transmitted to their students via text message. Advocates also assist their new student veterans in accessing the full range of available campus and community resources, including education, financial aid, and career counseling-related services offered on campus, as well as community-based services such as those provided through the local offices of the Veterans Health Administration.

In addition to Veteran Advocates, SVP provides ancillary services delivered with the cooperation of other academic

departments and administrative units at the university. For example, faculty reserve blocks of seats in select core courses so that participating student veterans can take their initial classes with each other. Individual faculty also mentor program participants wishing to major in the faculty mentor's area of study and, in addition to these mentors, each major department includes a dedicated military-friendly advisor who can assistant students in planning for and completing their major.

PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

Evidence from its initial period of performance suggests SVP is a promising approach to supporting student veteran higher education attainment and civilian re-integration. Data gleaned from the program's first two performance reports and information its administrators shared in two community-of- practice calls and follow-up interviews indicate participating student veterans are laying a solid foundation for academic achievement, career success, and higher quality of life. Over its initial performance period, SVP attempted to track its progress using both measures of the program's primary outcomes (i.e., academic persistence, academic performance, and employment), and activity-based indicators (i.e., interaction frequency, new referrals for services, and progress on individual achievement plans). SVP also conducted regular self- and peer assessments.

Over the course of its initial period of performance, available data indicated that all 54 participants originally enrolled in the SVP program remained enrolled at UT-Arlington, and all were making use of available campus and community resources. On campus, all participants were using university-provided tutoring, money management, and counseling services. Off campus, all participants were accessing benefits provided through the Veterans Health Administration. In addition, the data indicate that sub-sets of the program participants utilized several community-based benefits, including 25 students using federal- or state-level veterans' benefits counseling, 10 students using mental health services, 5 students using an external tutoring service, 4 students using housing assistance services, 1 student using transportation services, and 1 student using SNAP enrollment services. That these students accessed both on- and off-campus socioeconomic and learning support suggests SVP's peer mentoring model is effective in helping identify and access an array of services required to meet student veterans' needs, including wrap-around services that span across providers and service delivery contexts.

In addition to these data, other information in the program's preliminary performance reports and community-of-practice calls allude to SVP's potential to improve student veterans' employability, workplace skills, and quality of life along several dimensions. Over the course of its initial run, the program reported an increase in the number of participants

deemed generally employable, from 8 participants (7 men, 1 woman) at the beginning of the fall semester to 13 (11 men, 2 women) at the end the fall semester. Moreover, following the fall semester, program participants reported improvement in 6 of 9 quality of life areas, including increased job market competitiveness, improvements in family relations, housing and local environments, and participation in faith, recreation, and community-based activities.

Anecdotally, SVP's ancillary services appear to be effectively complementing the program's peer mentoring approach. For example, during a follow-up interview, a program administrator relayed a story of a student participant who became ill and fell behind in an online course. The student's Veteran Advocate engaged the military-friendly academic adviser in the relevant department, who approached the course instructor and facilitated a process through which the instructor, the Veteran Advocate, and the student developed a plan of action to meet the outstanding course requirements and remain on track to complete the course as originally intended. Absent the Veteran Advocate and the network of institutional support SVP provides, the administrator claimed this student's illness might have put their academic progress in jeopardy. As further articulated below, this anecdote suggests bridging and onboarding approaches to veterans' higher education attainment may work best when peer mentoring is coupled with institutional-level support that includes the cooperation of faculty and staff advisers in academic departments.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the preliminary and anecdotal nature of the evidence provided, the available data suggest SVP is making a meaningful contribution to participating student veterans' academic success, job market prospects, and overall quality of life. In fact, the onboarding process and first semester's experience proved so positive that the UT-Arlington Student Orientation Office agreed to expand the number of no-charge, student-veteran specific orientations it offers, and to formally incorporate the SVP onboarding process into the agenda for these orientations. Thus, while outside the scope of JPMC's funding, SVP's early success afforded its administrators the opportunity to recruit additional student veteran participants. In the follow-up survey conducted for this assessment, SVP administrators cited this improved "buy-in" from the Student Orientation office as one of the program's crucial early wins, and a primary means of expanding the program's size going forward. Accordingly, SVP appears poised to multiply its impact through expanded recruitment and use of its unique peer mentoring approach.

Whether and to what extent SVP can expand, however, depends importantly on overcoming three key challenges identified through the survey and interview with program administrators. First, for SVP to serve a larger number of students, the program will need additional funding—most likely from external sources. To the extent external funding opportunities are not available, the program's sustainability and long-term impact may be threatened.

Second, insofar as human capital is arguably SVP's most important input, the program could also be threatened by high turnover among Veteran Advocates and advisors in the university's academic departments. Indeed, without a cadre of individuals in place long enough to accumulate the institutional knowledge and establish the working relationships necessary for implementing the SVP approach, the program may not realize its full potential even if it can secure funding to continue well into the future.

Third, to the extent SVP is focused on promoting academic success as a gateway to a career, the program must

overcome its current difficulties in developing internship and early career exploration opportunities. Without these, program participants cannot translate their classroom learning into the kind of real world work experience meant to sharpen their career interests, help them refine their plan of study, and, potentially, assist them in securing jobs after graduation.

Based on the available evidence of programmatic achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, SVP's initial experience warrants three recommendations.

✅ **Recommendation: Future funders of similar programs should emphasize their interest in—and target grant funds toward—proposals that mimic the SVP approach.** Available evidence suggests the SVP approach works, and can meaningfully enhance student veterans' academic, employment, and quality of life prospects. SVP appears to be a leading model for others to follow and should be featured accordingly.

✅ **Recommendation: SVP administrators should strive to capture and institutionalize the knowledge and expertise of current Veteran Advocates and departmental academic advisers.** People are the most important input into the SVP model. Given the likelihood of eventual turnover of key personnel, however, it is imperative that SVP administrators do not allow the knowledge, expertise, and relationships these individuals built through their work with the program to dissipate. SVP administrators can ensure departing personnel transfer their knowledge to current and incoming program staff by holding exit interviews with individuals who are leaving, as well as asking both those who are departing and those experienced individuals who remain on staff to update training materials and contribute to onboarding sessions for newcomers.

✅ **Recommendation: Veterans program administrators at other colleges and universities seeking to add individualized peer mentoring to their menu of student veteran services should ensure mentoring is coupled with a broader network of institutional support.** The SVP experience suggests peer mentoring can have a meaningful impact on student veterans' academic success, but that it is most effective when implemented with cooperation from other academic and administrative units on campus. Supporting veteran success in higher education is ultimately a team effort—peer mentors are poised to have the most impact when faculty, staff, and the broader campus community are apprised of the mentor's role, and are actively committed to working with the mentor to support student veteran achievement.
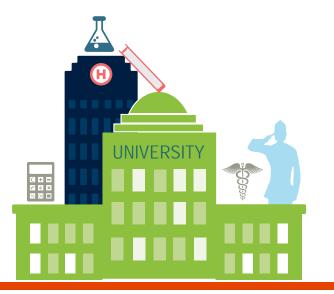
USF UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

Success Beyond Service
University of South Florida

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Success Beyond Service is a system-wide program of the University of South Florida's (USF) Office of Veteran Success (OVS). The program aims to provide services that support veterans' successful transition from the military to the classroom and the workforce. Dr. Larry Braue, a retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel, directs the OVS and oversees the Success Beyond Service program. Support from JPMC allowed the OVS to launch or expand three key initiatives within Success Beyond Service: (1) The Veteran Career Mentoring Program; (2) The Academic Enhancement Program; and (3) The Veteran Employment Project. Together, these initiatives attempt to address the major issues facing student veterans at USF, and aim to improve student veteran retention, increase degree completion, and improve student veteran employability and suitable employment outcomes.

The USF Veteran Career Mentoring Program provides opportunities for USF student veterans to learn from local business and community leaders how to best prepare for employment within the civilian community. The underlying logic of the program is that having a mentor creates

networking opportunities in veterans' desired career fields that may ultimately lead to internships or employment. The program is flexible, allowing mentors and student veterans the space to create their own timelines and levels of commitment, while providing the Tampa Community more broadly a unique opportunity to bridge the gap for the men and women who have served the nation. Overall, the program has three goals: first, provide USF student veterans with opportunities to develop relationships with successful local business and community leaders that will enhance their ability to transition from USF into the local workforce; second, enable USF student veterans to increase their knowledge of the local job market, employer expectations, and skills necessary to be successful; and third, increase the veteran's confidence in their knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as their ability to succeed in the local civilian workforce. Both mentors and mentees benefit from investing time in a mentoring partnership. Mentors develop leadership skills, make connections as volunteers, and experience the rewards that come with helping others develop and succeed. Mentees gain confidence, make connections, and gain the inside industry knowledge needed to make informed career decisions. Further, mentees learn how to be a mentor, which will allow them to return the favor to other veterans.

The Academic Enhancement Program seeks to identify and assist student veterans who are at risk of not completing degrees on time, or whose scholastic performance puts them at risk for academic probation or dismissal. Many student veterans face unique barriers to academic success, including undiagnosed or untreated injuries related to their service (including post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, depression, and reintegration issues). Additionally, many student veterans have been away from a classroom setting for several years and find the transition back to school difficult. Finally, because of their military background, veterans frequently have a "grin-and-bear-it" mentality that makes them reluctant to ask others for help.

The Veteran Employment Project (VEP) seeks to provide student veterans with the tools and skills necessary to allow them to successfully compete in the 21st century workforce and secure meaningful employment in a desired career field. Although veterans bring invaluable skills learned in the military to civilian careers, they frequently lack basic professional skills in key areas like resume writing, interviewing skills, and networking, and consequently can struggle to find jobs that are commensurate with their skills and abilities.

PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

Although complete program data was not yet available as of the time of this writing, a review of the available evidence suggests that the Success Beyond Service programs have succeeded in creating stronger veteran networks on campus, improved student veteran academic success and retention, and provided meaningful professional skills training and employment opportunities.

Veteran Career Mentoring Program

To date, the veteran mentorship program has tracked success through both qualitative and quantitative measures. At the completion of each mentoring period, the OVS conducted a survey with each student participant that measured the veteran's overall satisfaction with the program, satisfaction with the mentor, and assessed the extent to which the mentoring relationship was perceived to help prepare the protégé for their desired career (including whether the mentorship led to a job or internship offer). At the program's outset, program administrators defined the following success metrics for the first year: (1) 15 percent of 1300 student veterans on campus enrolled in the mentoring program; (2) 100 percent of mentoring program participants matched with a mentor in a desired career field; (3) 90 percent of participants satisfied with their mentoring relationship; and (4) 5 percent of participants receiving employment or internship offers from mentoring relationships.

Notably, while the mentorship program demonstrated a slower intake in participants than it hoped for in the first year, it is encouraging as it appears to be an effective initiative for its participants. In less than two full semesters, 40 student veterans received formal mentorship. By the first grant reporting period, the program had 19 veteran students enrolled in a mentoring relationship, of which 9 were matched to mentors within a desired career field. Of this group, one veteran reported receiving an employment offer because of the mentorship. By the second reporting period, student enrollment in the mentorship had more than doubled, with 40 students enrolled, and more than half of these students (22) being assigned to mentors in a desired career field. Of the 40 student-mentees, six received internship or employment offers as a direct result of the mentorship (five internship offers, one job offer). Additionally, all of the students surveyed after their mentorship indicated "high satisfaction" with the mentoring they received— the highest feedback score available in the survey.

Academic Enhancement Program

The Academic Enhancement Program (AEP) uses USF's existing reporting tools to identify students who are struggling. This system classifies all struggling students into one of three risk categories: tier 1 for those on academic probation with a GPA below 2.0; tier 2 for those on academic probation with a GPA

between 2.0 and 2.4; and tier 3 for students in good academic standing but who are failing or struggling with a course required for graduation. Once identified, the program provides resources to struggling students based on individual needs. Resources include free, individualized tutoring from a Veteran Tutoring Network that includes current USF student veterans hired as tutors and tasked to work one-on-one with assigned veterans through the course of the program. Additionally, veterans are provided learning style assessments and are given tailored study and learning strategies to help them with basic academic preparedness. The program also offers mental health related support services, and OVS personnel will screen and refer veterans to mental health partners, including a certified readjustment counselor, a dedicated mental health counselor, and a licensed psychologist (and veteran), all of whom work on campus and are available to serve the student veteran population.

To date, success for the Academic Enhancement Program has been measured quantitatively by looking at whether, and to what degree, students who were classified as "struggling" have improved academic outcomes. At the program's outset, program administrators defined success as meeting the following conditions: (1) 30 percent of all tier-1 veterans enrolled in the AEP being removed from academic probation at the end of the semester; (2) the number of student veterans placed on academic probation each semester being reduced by 20 percent; and (3) 50 percent of all student veterans enrolled in the AEP ultimately graduating.

Within the first year of its grant-funded implementation and operation, the Academic Enhancement Program (AEP) demonstrated significant improvements in student veteran academic outcomes by drastically reducing the number of student veterans who were dismissed for academic reasons. The program began in spring 2014 with a test cohort of 15 students who were all on academic probation and facing academic dismissal because of low GPAs. The semester before the AEP began, 37 veteran students faced academic probation, of which 27 percent (10 students) were ultimately dismissed. Fifty-four percent (20 students) continued on academic probation, and 19

percent (7 students) returned to good academic standing. In just one semester, these figures changed drastically for the better. Of the 15 students enrolled in the AEP during its first semester, at the completion of the semester 53 percent of those students in the program returned to good academic standing, 40 percent remained on probation, and only 7 percent were ultimately dismissed. The data for the program's second semester (fall 2014 semester) was not available at the time of this report.

Veteran Employment Project

The Veteran Employment Project involves two components. Phase I provides a comprehensive series of workshops on critical professional skills such as resume writing, interviewing techniques, translating military experience into civilian language, networking, and crafting an "elevator speech." Phase II, an expansion of an existing program, connects veteran students with job or internship opportunities by pairing them with dedicated local, regional, and national companies who have expressed a commitment to hiring veteran USF students. These connections will occur through on-campus employer visits where veterans will have the chance to meet with company representatives and learn about careers, have their resume reviewed, and potentially be interviewed. Success for the VEP is assessed by reviewing both measures of the program's primary outcome—increasing veteran employment—and by tracking activity-based indicators that capture how many veterans utilized the program's career resources by attending professional skills training or receiving resume review services.

Preliminary findings from VEP suggest a promising approach for helping veteran students better prepare themselves to be competitive in the modern workforce. In its first semester, 36 veteran students (14 of whom were enrolled in the program) attended at least one professional skills training session hosted by the VEP, and seven of those students received an employment offer as a result. In the same period, all 14 students enrolled in the program had their resume reviewed and updated by a qualified hiring manager through the program. During the program's second semester, the student enrollment more than doubled to 30 students, three students received employment offers as a result of the program, and 100 percent of student participants had their resume reviewed by a qualified hiring manager.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the three Success Beyond Service programs funded by JPMC were less than a year old as of the time of this writing, the initial evidence suggests each represents a promising approach to assisting veterans in achieving success both in college and in their civilian lives and careers thereafter. Of the three programs under review, the Academic Enhancement Program achieved the most notable results during the relevant grant period.

Although the Veteran Career Mentoring Program did not achieve the goal it originally set forth at the time of this report—i.e., signing up 15% of the 1300 veteran students enrolled at the school in the first year—its results were nevertheless impressive and indicate a promising opportunity. Every participating student surveyed indicated a high level of satisfaction with the mentoring that they received—strong evidence that the program is achieving its desired outcome of connecting with students to create stronger veteran communities. Moving forward, program administrators should focus on how more student veterans can be recruited to participate in the program so that the benefits can be realized by more of the veteran student body.

Although only one semester's worth of data on a sample of 15 was available at the time of this writing, the figures for the Academic Enhancement Program present an encouraging first look at a program with potential to meaningfully improve student veteran academic performance. Indeed, that more than half of the students on academic probation who enrolled in the program returned to good academic standing is strongly suggestive of the program's promise.

To varying degrees, the Veteran Employment Project achieved success in both of its desired outcomes: it provided professional skills training to veteran students, and was able to offer an institutional program that helped veterans find jobs through on campus hiring programs. Although the 36 students who attended the professional skills training and the 10 students who found jobs through the VEP constitute a small percentage of the veteran student population at USF, it represents a starting point. Moving forward, program administrators should attempt to better integrate the student veteran population into the employment readiness program. Program administrators could increase veteran participation by making some or all of the skills training component of the program mandatory (via a capstone course or required lecture series, for example). Alternatively, participation could be increased by better incentivizing veterans to attend and participate. Providing incentives like early course enrollment for the next semester or providing a certificate of completion that could be put on one's resume might prove a low cost but adequate incentive to get more veterans to participate.

Ultimately, the program's success will be measured by employment outcomes, and so USF should focus on the end state—assisting veterans in building skills that result in them finding actual jobs. If future do not show an increase in both the number of students participating and, more importantly, the number of students who find jobs as a result of the program, then administrators should look carefully at alternative means of achieving these same desired results.

Based on the available evidence of programmatic achievements and the lessons learned from the first year, USF's veteran programs initial experiences warrant three recommendations:

✓ **Recommendation:** Since gaining meaningful employment is the single largest priority for student veterans returning to college, future funders of similar programs should prioritize funding program that have demonstrated success in helping veterans find jobs in a desired career field. Ultimately, most veterans return to college to re-train so that they can successfully transition to a civilian career after the military. The ability to find meaningful work using the skills, training, and degree gained from school stands as the primary goal of most veterans, and accordingly funders should focus attention on supporting programs that have proven successful in actually placing veterans in jobs.

✓ **Recommendation:** To ensure program sustainability and long term funding, student veteran program administrators should create and capture meaningful quantitative data that demonstrate well-defined success in achieving desired program outcomes. Student veteran programs, especially new ones, must demonstrate evidence of their success to maintain the funding required for sustainability. Given smaller operating budgets across higher education institutions, having empirical data to prove a program's value and viability to the school, the students, and the associated community is necessary. Program administrators should strive to capture quantitative data that can be used to conclusively show the positive impact that their programs are having.

✓ **Recommendation:** Veterans program administrators at other colleges and universities seeking to utilize grants to establish or enhance student veteran programs should consider developing a sustainability plan for maintaining the programs after the grant period ends. Program administrators at USF cited uncertainty as to whether and how the programs created were sustainable as the single biggest challenge they faced moving forward. Having a succession plan already in place that included other funding sources, both institutional and external, would help ensure programs that were newly established and successful had the funding required to ensure that they are able to continue in the future.

Military and Veteran Service Center
Florida State College at Jacksonville

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) has seen the highest recent veteran enrollment among colleges in the state of Florida. At the writing of this report, it boasted 7,410 enrolled military and veteran students—13.4 percent of its entire student population. In response to a rapid increase in student veterans, and to better address their unique challenges, FSCJ created the Military and Veteran Service Center (MVSC). The MVSC's mission is to provide veteran and military students resources that further academic success, promote degree completion, and ultimately lead to employment in high-demand, high-wage career fields. Herbert Babin, Dean of Military and Government Operations at FSCJ, directs the Military and Veteran Student Center.

The MVSC was created to provide the resources necessary to ensure student veterans succeed academically while at FSCJ, and then secure employment in a desired career field. Although the Jacksonville area has numerous services for veterans, many are hard to locate or narrow in their scope. Additionally, although FSCJ has some student success infrastructure in place, it has not historically dedicated any resources to the unique veteran population—a group characterized by generally older

students with unique needs, many of whom are transitioning to college directly from the military environment. The MVSC offers a one-stop center that provides student veterans trouble-free access to all the resources necessary to be successful in their studies and careers. Through the generosity of JPMC, the MVSC created two new programs aimed at meeting the unmet needs of its student veterans: a student-success advising program and a career development program.

Veteran Student Success Advising Program

The Veteran Student Success Advising Program was created to ensure that student veterans, many with unique needs, have access the tools they need to be successful in college. The student veteran population is often older than, and frequently brings life and career experiences that are different from, traditional college students. Relatedly, many student veterans report feeling disconnected from traditional students and student programs, and some veterans come back to school with service-related injuries, including physical injuries, Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI), and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Traditional student support programs often fail to account for the specific needs of student veterans (despite wide recognition that students who utilize campus-based support resources are more likely to be successful students).

The Advising Program assists student veterans by (1) providing veteran-specific orientations, (2) offering trained personnel dedicated to veterans, and (3) providing veterans on-site tutoring at the MVSC. FSCJ research indicates that student veterans who utilize campus resources cite stronger ties to the institution and generally realize higher success rates as students with respect to graduation and employment figures.

Although FSCJ had existing orientation programs for new students, it did not have any programs specific to veterans. The veteran orientation sessions provide in-depth coverage of popular issues among student veterans, such as veteran-specific financial aid and programs of study. The sessions also highlight key resources including career development and campus facilities. In addition to providing veterans with a topical orientation to resources and services that matter most to them, the orientation sessions have also served as a way for new student veterans to meet one another and create stronger communities.

After matriculating at FSCJ, student veterans often face a host of complex choices regarding what classes to take in order to graduate, how to access the benefits they are entitled to, and how to apply for and access other sources of financial aid. Traditional college advisors are not always familiar with the GI

Bill, the VA, or other veteran benefits programs. To address this challenge, the MVSC hired a Veteran Student Success Advisor to provide advising services tailored for veterans directly out of the MVSC. In this role, the Student Success Advisor assists student veterans on matters including choosing classes that fulfill GI Bill and degree requirements, assisting students in filling out and submitting paperwork for VA benefits, and helping veterans access other aid resources that would assist them in financing their educations.

Some student veterans also struggle with the foundational skills necessary to succeed in required general education courses, including math and language arts. Research indicates that historically, the student veteran population at FSCJ has   not utilized on-campus tutoring resources. To ensure that student veterans have access to and can utilize tutoring resources, the MVSC established a veteran-specific tutoring program out of the MVSC facility. Student veterans who want assistance are able to contact MVSC staff members to schedule individual tutoring sessions, or participate in group tutoring sessions. In addition to live tutoring, the MVSC also offers self-paced, computer-based instructional software that reinforces key foundation skills in reading, writing, and mathematics for student veterans.

Veteran Career Development Program

The Veteran Career Development Program focuses on student veteran success upon graduation and entry into the civilian workforce. The Career Development Program's mission is twofold: (1) to provide student veterans with the professional and career skills necessary to secure meaningful employment, and (2) to assist student veterans in securing internships and full-time positions in desired career fields. The Career Development Program is run by the Career Development Coordinator, a new full-time hire made possible through JPMC funding.

To develop professional and career skills, the Career Development Coordinator a series of career development workshops tailored to provide student veterans with the skills necessary for finding competitive jobs in the modern workforce. Workshop topics include resume writing, professional dress, networking, behavioral interviewing, and how to approach potential employers. These workshops are offered every three weeks at different locations across campus and in the community to ensure student veterans can attend.

To provide meaningful internship and job opportunities, the Career Development Coordinator engages in a robust campaign to partner with area businesses willing to hire veterans. The Coordinator meets with the businesses to assess the skills they are looking for in employees, while also ensuring they were aware of many of the key skills that veterans offer—attributes that include proven leadership ability, strong work ethic, focus on mission accomplishment, and loyalty. After meeting and partnering with local businesses, the Coordinator receives job

and internship postings from interested companies and passes them along to student veterans within the program via phone and email distribution. Additionally, the Coordinator facilitates and attends career and employment fairs to represent the MVSC in the community and to source new employment referrals. The overall goal of these efforts is to create a large network of local, regional, and national employers who are interested in hiring veterans, and then putting related job opportunities into the hands of FSCJ veteran students.

PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

Over its initial period of performance, the MVSC monitored its progress by tracking activity-based outcomes that measure the amount and frequency of services offered and the number of veterans who access these services. The Advising Program's success was measured by tracking the number of student orientations offered, the amount of advising requests received, and the number of tutoring requests directed to the Center. The Career Development Program's success was measured by quantifying the number of internship and employment opportunities that were generated and, to the extent possible, the number of student veterans who secured positions from these opportunities. Although the MVSC's project proposal suggested plans to track primary program outcomes, including measuring academic retention and student success as measured by graduation rates and job and internship placement rates, these figures were not available at the time of this report.

Although at the time of this writing the MVSC was just beginning its second semester of operation, available data suggest that both of the Center's JPMC-funded programs—the Veteran Student Success Advising Program and the Veteran Career Development Program—demonstrated strong early markers of success, and each represents a promising approach to promoting veterans' success in higher education and the transition to the civilian labor force.
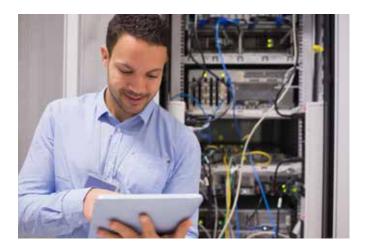
Veteran Student Success Advising Program

Though the information collected represents an early sample—taken prior to the completion of the academic year included in the program's grant-funded period of performance, the available data suggests that the Advising Program has achieved some notable success, and exhibits potential for additional growth in the future. Within the Veteran Student Success Advising Program, the orientation and advising offerings realized the greatest success, while the tutoring element saw a more modest impact.

In the first year of operation, the MVSC offered veteran-student orientations that touched 2,983 unique students. The orientations, offered on a quarterly basis, were tailored to provide information most relevant to the student veteran population. The grant's first reporting period saw nine orientations offered, with 850 student veterans participating. During the second half of the review period, the MVSC more than doubled these efforts, offering 18 orientations (27 total) that included 2,133 participants across them.

The veteran advising services offered by the MVSC were built modeling the success of traditional advising programs that already existed on campus, and they quickly found success with the veteran population. By the program's first performance report, the MVSC's veteran advisors, called Military Education Institute Program Specialists, had already received 1,621 unique advising requests from student veterans. During the period covered in the second performance report, the MVSC received and processed an additional 1,580 advising requests (3,201 total). Advising services were provided across a range of mediums, including face-to-face advising on campus, phone advising, and advising students electronically via email. Evidence collected indicates that a majority of advising requests involved questions related to the following topics: (1) VA benefits and financial aid questions, or (2) questions about course selection and degree requirements. Additionally, interviews with MVSC program leadership provided anecdotal evidence that the veteran advising services were the most popular of the three Advising Program services offered.

The tutoring services offered, compared to the orientation and advising programs, realized modest success. Initially, the MVSC received 75 tutoring requests from student veterans, with that figure declining by 52% to 39 tutoring requests over time.

Although the program had anticipated administering significant on-site tutoring, few students ultimately opted to seek tutoring at the MVSC, with most instead utilizing the tutoring services already established elsewhere on campus.

Veteran Career Development Program

Initially, the Career Development Program was slow to launch, largely because MVSC was unable to hire the program coordinator until late into its grant. However, once a coordinator was in place, the program quickly gained momentum and was able to achieve notable results during the latter portion of the grant period.

Between September 2014 and February 2015, 154 unique job and internship opportunities have been made available to student veterans through the MVSC Career Development Program. These opportunities were made possible through the Career Development Coordinator's dedicated effort to seek out and connect with employers to promote the value of hiring veterans and create dedicated referral networks for employers. From December 2014 and February 2015, 25 student veterans had accepted jobs found through the Career Development Program.

In addition to promoting job placement, the Career Development Program has succeeded in its efforts to teach veterans key professional skills necessary to be employable. During the fall 2014 academic semester, the MVSC conducted a five-week training course focused on teaching student veterans professional skills such as resume writing, how to research potential employers, how to dress for success, professional social media techniques, and how to craft an effective "elevator pitch." This training course was offered at three different FSCJ campuses, and included 443 veterans, active duty servicemembers, and veteran and military spouses in attendance. The success of these trainings has lead the MVSC's Career Development Coordinator to create a second series that ran for four months in the spring and summer of 2015, and will include 17 topics.

DISCUSSION

Although complete program data was not yet available as of the time of this writing, the above review of the available evidence suggests that the MVSC and its programs represent promising approaches towards facilitating both veteran success on campus and in the workforce.

The clear observation that a large number of student veterans have accessed orientation, advising, and to a lesser extent tutoring services supports a conclusion that this population is likely better prepared to be successful moving forward. Note, however, that any conclusions about the Advising Program's overall success should be drawn cautiously. Some key evaluative metrics, including academic persistence as measured by degree completion and academic performance, were not yet available at the time of this writing. Accordingly, although data from the initial performance period appear promising, they provide a somewhat limited view of the program's long-term outcomes to date.

The Veteran Career Development Program posted encouraging results initial results, achieving noteworthy outcomes in both of the initiatives it undertook. It succeeded in providing meaningful career skills training to a large number of veterans, as well as in finding and providing job and internship opportunities for student veterans. Although these positions in many cases were not exclusively for veterans, the employers in each instance had met with the Career Development Coordinator and were interested in interviewing and hiring a strong veteran candidate if possible. The fact that 25 student veterans secured jobs through the MVSC's Career Development Program—within three months of program operation—strongly suggests that the program is successful in facilitating student veteran employment. The largest challenge that the Career Development Program faces, as described by MVSC's director Herbert Babin, is that the Career Development Coordinator is a very dynamic individual, and the program might be in flux if the position is eliminated and this Coordinator does not continue in this role in future years.

Based on the available evidence of programmatic achievements and the lessons learned from its preliminary period of performance, the MVSC's initial experience warrants three recommendations.

✓ **Recommendation** Future funders of similar programs should prioritize funding those with meaningful partnerships between higher education institutes and employers. One of the highlights of the MVSC program was the success of the Career Development program, including the high number of jobs that became available and the corresponding number of veterans who found suitable positions accordingly. This success was due in large part to the fact that the MVSC was diligent in seeking out and creating meaningful partnerships with local employers.

✓ **Recommendation:** Staffing choices are critical to the success of veteran programs, and program administrators should ensure they budget adequate time to find, hire, and train the right candidates. Although the MVSC's Career Development Program ultimately achieved strong results, the program did very little during the first half of the grant period because FSCJ did not immediately have a career coordinator in place. Program administrators should recognize that finding talent is time intensive, and should plan enough time for these tasks, ensuring that adequate resources are devoted to promoting the position, attracting and screening potential candidates, and then training new hires.

✓ **Recommendation:** Veterans program administrators seeking to add veteran-specific programming and services should consider whether existing campus programs or services could be better utilized to achieve the same ends. Although the program administrators at FSCJ anticipated a high demand for tutoring services from student veterans, the tutoring program they created received much less attention than expected. In hindsight, program administrators cited the fact that there were already strong existing tutoring resources on campus that were convenient for students as one factor that likely contributed to the lower-than-expected usage of the veteran-specific tutoring resources. In some cases, strategic partnerships on-campus might be better and more cost-effective ways to deliver the same desired services to veterans, and veteran program administrators would do well to consider how to leverage existing resources accordingly.

BEST PRACTICES

A review of these four programs provides a number of common best practices that may inform stakeholders interested in creating new and improving existing student veteran focused programs nationwide. What follows are five recommendations based on the successes and lessons learned from these four pilot programs.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Funders should focus support on programs that involve successful collaborations between higher education institutions and community partners, including partnerships with employers seeking to hire veterans.

The most successful programs surveyed were those that found ways to meaningfully collaborate with community partners—especially with local employers. At FSCJ, their Career Development program achieved success very quickly by finding and partnering with local, regional, and national employers seeking to hire veterans. In less than one semester, the program has made over 150 unique job opportunities available to student veterans, and in just three months, 25 students found employment or internships from these opportunities. Similarly, USF's Employment Readiness Program was able to help 100 percent of its students enrolled with resume reviews by local hiring managers. One-third of its enrolled students received employment offers as a result of their meeting with an employer.

Successful partnerships can also be developed with area service providers, veteran organizations, and even military instillations. At SDSU, the Joan and Art Barron Veterans Center attributed much of the success of its program's growth to the strong relationships built with the area's military installations.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Veterans program administrators seeking to add veteran-specific programming and services should consider means to adapt or integrate existing campus programs or services in support of student veterans initiatives.

In many cases, existing campus personnel and services might be able to fill student veteran program needs and requirements, allowing program administrators to better utilize existing resources and avoiding duplication of effort and resources. At FSCJ, program administrators developed veteran-specific tutoring assets and personnel only to find that student veterans preferred using existing campus tutoring resources. To avoid duplicating resources unnecessarily, program administrators should evaluate the full spectrum of existing campus resources to assess whether existing programs and services can be utilized or adapted in support of veteran programming objectives.

Beyond resource conservation, in some cases existing campus programs and services may be better suited to maximize positive outcomes for student veterans. At UT Arlington, the veteran mentoring program attributed its success in part to the robust institutional support network that was already in place. Student veterans at UT Arlington had access to a wide range of campus resources and services, including mental health services, tutoring services, and housing- and transportation-assistance services.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Staffing choices are critical to the success of veteran programs. Program administrators should ensure they budget adequate time to find, hire, and train the right candidates to ensure program success.

Across all four schools surveyed, one of the single biggest challenges facing new student veteran programs was finding, hiring, training, and retaining talented personnel. Hiring is a time-intensive and important task, and in the short timeframe of the grant period, three of four schools—UT Arlington, FSCJ, and SDSU—identified hiring and keeping new staff as a major challenge to program success and sustainment. At SDSU, because grant money was not received until midway through academic year aligning with the program's initial performance period, the staff position was not filled until the semester was almost over. Likewise, at FSCJ, a key position took nine months to fill, and so critical element of their program was dormant for almost half of the grant period. UT Arlington faced similar issues with personnel leaving at the end of the grant period, and the threat of a loss of institutional knowledge from these departures.

Since finding, hiring, and keeping good staff can be time-consuming, program administrators should build in adequate time for this task at the outset, especially in instances where new programs need to demonstrate results to funding sources.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Student veteran programs should develop and maintain sustainability plans to ensure successful programs can continue after grant funding is exhausted.

All four of the programs evaluated cited concerns about program sustainability as a major challenge they faced after the grant period ended. Although each program realized success to varying degrees, at the time of this report, none had secured dedicated institutional funding to continue the new programs moving forward. From the schools surveyed, two best practices concerning how to deal with succession emerged. First, program administrators should seek to capture and institutionalize the knowledge of existing program personnel so that the lessons learned are not lost if there is a reduction or changeover in staff. UT Arlington's proactive efforts to capture this knowledge may serve as a template for other schools to follow moving forward. Capturing and institutionalizing important program knowledge provides administrators the flexibility required to reconfigure programs later to adapt to changes in available staffing and resources. Second, program administrators who are building programs from grant funding should early on develop a sustainability plan that includes other funding sources, both institutional and external, that can ensure a program's continuation after seed money is utilized.

RECOMMENDATION #5

In funding new higher education student veteran programs, funders should consider establishing a two-year minimum funding cycle to allow programs adequate time to build and develop self-sustaining programs.

All of the participating schools found it challenging to build successful programs in just 12 to 18 months. Staffing, program development, and student recruitment all take time, and most schools' programs were just coming into their own when the grant period was ending. Because it takes time to build a successful program that is producing demonstrated positive outcomes, and since continued funding (institutional or otherwise) requires that program success be demonstrated, future funders should consider extending the funding cycle to a period of no less than two years.

UNIVERSITY

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES
JPMorgan Chase & Co., Founding Partner

About The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)

The IVMF is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education, and policy issues impacting veterans and their families post-service. Through the focus on veterans programming, research and policy, employment and employer support, and community engagement, the Institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community, captures best practices, and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between the individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families.

About JPMorgan Chase & Co.

JPMorgan Chase & Co. (NYSE: JPM) is a leading global financial services firm with assets of $2.5 trillion and operations worldwide. The firm is a leader in investment banking, financial services for consumers and small businesses, commercial banking, financial transaction processing and asset management. Through its programs in employment, financial capability and small business, JPMC aims to position military members, veterans and their families for success in their post-service lives. The company is investing $45 million toward programs and initiatives to help military families. To learn more about the company's programs for military, Veterans and their families, visit www.jpmorganchase.com/veterans.

STAY IN TOUCH

→ p 315.443.0141
f 315.443.0312
e vets@syr.edu
w vets.syr.edu

→ f ✦ in +
IVMFSyracuseU

→