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WDVA VET CORPS PROGRAMS: IMPACT EVALUATION

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Washington Department of Veterans Affairs
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) was created in 1976 by the State legislature to serve the military veterans of Washington State and their families. In 2009, the WDVA obtained an AmeriCorps grant to fund the Vet Corps Program which is housed within general fund, state-supported Veterans Conservation Corps. The purpose of this report is to provide formative and summative feedback to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA).

Utilizing a mixed-methodology approach, evaluators implemented a quasi-experimental design comprised of two different groups: students served by Vet Corps Members and those not served by Vet Corps Members, as well as institutions served by Vet Corps Members and those not served. The evaluation assessed levels of implementation (process evaluation) and levels of impact (outcomes and impact evaluation).

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The Vet Corps Program has multiple layers of goals. It seeks to provide peer-based assistance for the population it serves: military-connected individuals seeking continued education and training. The program also seeks to create institutional change in colleges, universities, and other post-secondary education programs, and to educate faculty and administration in veteran cultural competencies. In addition, the program provides leadership development and leadership opportunities for Vet Corps Members.

For 2016-2017, the Vet Corps Program placed 50 veterans, dependents, or spouses in colleges, universities, and other post-secondary education sites to support other veterans, active duty service members, and military-connected individuals in those programs. At the sites, Vet Corps Members provided peer mentoring, direct support, resources, and referrals for a range of issues. This included assisting individuals in connecting to federal, state, and local veterans' benefits. They also provided training and support for site-based faculty and staff members to enhance awareness of student veterans' needs. Vet Corps Members established community partnerships to provide additional supports for the students they served and to obtain opportunities for those students to engage in community service.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Student veterans have specific needs and concerns as they pursue education and training. They may have little experience with higher education. On campus, their classmates are younger and have very different life experiences, making it difficult for student veterans to develop a sense of community. Student veterans may also have challenges with class content, in relationships with faculty, and with academic skills. Student veterans may also be supporting families and therefore working in addition to taking classes. Each of these challenges may be exacerbated by traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress.

To address these needs, Program Leaders, Vet Corps Members, and Site Supervisors identified peer-to-peer support, navigation of the college and financial aid system, and

referrals for other concerns as areas that have produced positive outcomes for student veterans. On the survey, 83 percent to 87 percent of Vet Corps members agreed the Vet Corps Program was effective in all these areas. Of the Site Supervisors, 89 percent agreed the Vet Corps Program was effective in making peer-to-peer connections, 77 percent agreed it was effective in helping student veterans navigate the systems, and 65 percent to 77 percent agreed it was effective in making referrals, depending in the type of referral (e.g. academic, financial, medical). In total, 90 percent of Vet Corps Members and 77 percent of Site Supervisors rated their experience with the Vet Corps Program as good or excellent.

While the Program also intended to positively impact the lives of student veterans, it also has a positive impact for the Vet Corps Members, themselves. Vet Corps Members described how participation in the program helped them serve others and develop critical leadership skills. Survey results showed that between 78 percent and 86 percent of Vet Corps Members agreed their service made a difference, was interesting, that they are likely to seek additional volunteer opportunities, and the experience will positively influence their employment plans.

The Vet Corps Program also intended to promote systemic change by encouraging campuses to create institutionalized programs focused on supporting veterans, developing opportunities for volunteerism, and educating faculty and administration in veteran cultural competencies. Overall, Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors agreed they made progress in these areas. This was accomplished by increasing awareness and understanding of veterans' issues, providing resources dedicated to serving veterans, integrating veterans into campus life, and coordinating services for veterans and family members. While there were differences in implementation across campuses, survey results were positive. The one area of discrepancy is that 90% of Vet Corps Members and 66% of Site Supervisors agreed the Vet Corps Program provided opportunities for site-level staff to learn about student veterans and their needs. During interviews, it was apparent these opportunities were available, but they did not necessarily reach all staff, and this may account for the differences in responses.

An analysis of educational outcomes at sites with a Vet Corps Member compared to sites without a Vet Corps showed substantial differences. This analysis was conducted because of the assumption that all Veterans on a campus with a Vet Corps member would benefit even if not directly served by the Program. Across all years, student veterans at Vet Corps Sites had a statistically significant higher number of credits attempted and passed, were more likely to take took 12 or more credits, had higher Fall to Spring retention rates, and higher completion rates. Additionally, veterans at sites with a Vet Corps Member also had higher GPAs than veterans at Non-Vet Corps Member sites, but the difference between the two groups was small. Also, there was a higher percentage of veterans at Vet Corps Sites enrolled in pre-college math courses compared to veterans at Non-Vet Corps Sites. This last finding may be because student veterans are earlier in their education career or that they are simply more likely to enroll in math or English. This is not necessarily a reflection of greater need for remediation.

Other analyses were more limited because of issues with data collection through the America Learns system. Vet Corps Members often did not include information to identify individuals using their services, which made it difficult to match data. Additionally, they did

not always include information about referrals, time spent with veterans, or how they calculated time on service projects. Thus, these analyses should be interpreted cautiously.

Analyses of data comparing veterans served by Vet Corps Members to veterans attending the same colleges but not served by Vet Corps Members also show some significant results. Student veterans served by Vet Corps Members attempted and passed a statistically significant higher number of annual credits, and were more likely to be enrolled in 12 or more credits. In 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years, veterans served by Vet Corps Members had higher Fall to Spring retention rates compared to veterans not served by Vet Corps Members. Generally, a higher percentage of veterans served by Vet Corps Members took pre-college level coursework in math and English (one year), as compared to veterans not served by Vet Corps Members.

Other analyses of the relationships of peer mentoring, referral services, and number of contacts Vet Corps Members had with student veterans showed mixed results. However, the quality of these data were poor. It is important that Vet Corps Members properly document the services provided in America Learns to learn more about these relationships and utilize the student identification number as a means of connecting data. Because of data quality issues, these results should be interpreted cautiously.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Several contextual factors supported and hindered implementation and outcomes of the Vet Corps Program. These factors include characteristics of the Vet Corps Member, expectations for and supervision of the Vet Corps Member, site-level leadership, role of the Site Coordinator within the institution, location on campus and physical space, existing site-based departments and programs that serve student veterans, Vet Corps Member retention, annual Vet Corps implementation calendar, communication within the Vet Corps Program, and data collection.

BEST PRACTICES

The Vet Corps Program is designed around AmeriCorps requirements. Several best practices are emerging, and it is anticipated that, with continued development, these practices will deepen over time and continue to strengthen the program. These practices include using flexible program implementation, cultivating Site Supervisor roles, addressing the breadth and knowledge Vet Corps Members need, developing a Vet Corps Member cohort, using data to monitor program implementation, and using feedback from training participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon these findings, we offer the following recommendations: improve data quality, increase training opportunities, cultivate the role of the Site Supervisor, improve regional coordinator communication, and sustain the efforts of the Vet Corps Members.

WDVA VET CORPS PROGRAMS: IMPACT EVALUATION

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide formative and summative feedback to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) regarding evidence of implementation and impact for the Vet Corps Program. The report, while addressing the impact of the Vet Corps Programs and aligned to meet the regulations of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) grants of $500,000 or more, is also designed to provide formative feedback to assist in ongoing program development. The evaluation assessed levels of implementation (process evaluation) and levels of impact (outcomes and impact evaluation). This report focuses on the 2016-2017 academic year and includes a description of the evaluation design, evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Evaluation Design

To align with the objectives of this study, we implemented a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods research design. This rigorous design provides information on the implementation and impact of the Vet Corps Program. The collection of both quantitative and qualitative data adds scope and breadth to the study in addition to providing the ability to triangulate findings. The use of comparison groups enhances the ability to identify impact. While causality cannot be determined through this design, the evaluators were able to determine differences between groups of students served by Vet Corps Members and those not served by Vet Corps Members, as well as institutions served by Vet Corps Members and those not served. By comparing these outcomes, evaluators can estimate the impact the Vet Corps Programs. A description of the evaluation questions, participants, and data sources is provided below.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following questions, as identified in the proposal and workplan, guided the evaluation:

1. What services do Vet Corps Members provide to veterans and to the organizations in which they serve?
2. To what extent did program implementation occur as planned?
3. What key outcomes were achieved through program implementation?
4. What was the impact of peer mentoring and referral services on veterans' short-term retention and course taking outcomes?

5. Does the number of contacts a veteran receives in a specified time period correlate with short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes?
6. What are longer-term outcomes for veterans served by Vet Corps Members (degree, certification, credits earned, GPA)?
7. What specific system impacts has the program had on participating campus sites?
    a. Awareness/understanding of veterans' issues
    b. Resources dedicated to serving veterans
    c. Integration of veterans into campus life
    d. Coordination of services for veterans/family members
8. Did differences emerge in the outcomes based on type of institution or other factors?
9. What differences are there in the educational outcomes for veterans served by Vet Corps members compared to those not served by Vet Corps members?
    a. What differences are there in the educational outcomes of veterans at sites with a Vet Corps member compared to those without a Vet Corps member?
    b. How do the educational outcomes of veterans served by Vet Corps members compare to national educational outcomes of veterans?
10. What contextual factors impact program implementation and program outcomes?
11. What are the emerging best practices?

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

For 2016-2017, the Vet Corps Programs served installations and nine regions across Washington State:

Central Washington	North King County
North East Washington	South King County
South East Washington	Olympic Peninsula
North West Washington	South Sound
South West Washington	Installations

Vet Corps Programs sites were located in the following Washington counties:

Benton	Grays Harbor	Spokane
Clallam	King	Stevens
Clark	Kittitas	Thurston
Chelan	Lewis	Walla Walla
Cowlitz	Pierce	Whatcom
Franklin	Skagit	Yakima
Grant	Snohomish	

A list of the Vet Corps Program sites during the four academic years from 2013-14 to 2016-17 can be found in Appendix A. Many of the Vet Corps Programs have participated all four years. The sites represent technical, two-, and four-year colleges, including both public and private institutions, as well as community organizations.

The Tables below present descriptive information for the Vet Corps Programs collected from the America Learns database for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years. This information is used in some analyses throughout the report. Information prior to 2015-16 is not included because of poor data quality. All data in the current report should be interpreted cautiously, as there were inconsistencies and inaccuracies in site-level data-entry. Analyses of data quality suggest the results likely under-estimate of actual numbers in some implementation areas.

Table 1 shows the total number of minutes Vet Corps Members met with student veterans by site. Overall, the total number of reported minutes increased from 63,045 minutes (1,050.75 hours) in 2015-16 to 80,940 minutes (1,349 hours) in 2016-17. Empty cells on these tables indicate that either there was no Vet Corps Program at that site during that year or that America Learns data was not available

Table 1.
Total Number of Minutes Spent with Veterans by Site

Site	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Antioch University	2910	
Bates Technical College	420	
Bellevue College	300	
Big Bend College	1320	33345
Cascadia Community College		480
Centralia Community College	180	1530
Chelan County Veterans Office		60
City University of Seattle	2205	
Clark College	2205	
Clover Park Technical College		90
Columbia Basin College	3300	
Columbia Basin Veterans Coalition	6075	1410
Eastern Washington University	1635	
Edmonds Community College		360
Everest College		705
G.A.V.E	1260	
Gonzaga University	780	315
Grays Harbor Community College	270	480
Green River College		75

Kittitas County Veterans Coalition	60	
Lower Columbia College	7095	
Olympic College	1200	
Pacific Lutheran University		4500
Peninsula College	300	
Perry Technical Institute	1320	4260
Seattle Central Community College	360	1605
Shoreline Community College	900	300
Skagit Valley Community College Mount Vernon	6660	
South Seattle Community College		2355
Spokane Community College	1665	2610
Spokane Community College (Colville)	14025	23910
Spokane Falls Community College	420	1560
Tacoma Community College		300
University of Washington Bothell	120	
Veterans Training and Support Center		330
Washington State University Pullman		360
Washington State University Tri-Cities	1200	
Wenatchee Valley College	4125	
Western Washington University	270	
Whatcom College	465	
TOTAL	**63,045**	**80,940**

Note. Data from America Learns site: *How much time did you spend with this Veteran during this reporting period?*

Table 2 details the total number of on-campus referrals reported by site, and Table 3 details the total number of service referrals. In both areas, referrals decreased from 2015-16 to 2016-17. However, these results should be interpreted cautiously due to possible under-reporting and missing data.

Table 2.
Total Number of On-Campus Referrals made by Vet Corps Member by Site

Site	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Antioch University		3
Bates Technical College	11	
Bellevue College	3	
Big Bend Community College	1	2
Centralia Community College	2	1
City University of Seattle	3	
Clark College	6	
Divers Institute of Technology		2

Edmonds Community College		1
Everest College		1
Green River Community College		2
Highline Community College	1	
Lower Columbia College	9	
Pacific Lutheran University		3
Perry Technical Institute	1	
Skagit Valley Community College	2	2
South Seattle College		1
Spokane Community College		3
Spokane Community College Colville	19	4
Spokane Falls Community College	1	1
Washington State University		1
Wenatchee Valley College	2	
Whatcom Community College	1	
TOTAL	**62**	**27**

Note. Data from America Learns site.

Table 3.
Vet Corps Member Number of Service Referrals

Site	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Antioch University		1
Bellevue College	4	
Big Bend Community College	1	
Cascadia College		1
Centralia Community College	1	1
City University of Seattle	4	3
Divers Institute of Technology		2
Eastern Washington University	2	
Edmonds Community College		1
Lower Columbia College	4	
Pacific Lutheran University		3
Perry Technical Institute	2	1
Shoreline Community College		2
South Seattle College		2
Spokane Community College Coleville	55	35
Spokane Falls Community College	1	
TOTAL	**74**	**52**

Note. Data from America Learns site.

Table 4 details the total number of service projects per site. These data show some of the issues with data quality. For example, it appears that some people reported the number of minutes devoted to service projects, while others reported the number of hours. Similarly, at some sites there were volunteers, but no volunteer hours included.

Table 4.
Vet Corps Member Service Projects Data

Site	2016-2017			
	# of Service Projects	Total # of Hours Devoted	Total # of Volunteer Hours Leveraged (unduplicated)	Total # of Volunteers Leveraged
Antioch University	19	8,940	0	9
Bates Technical College	19	2,730	150	2
Big Bend College	17	15,210	1,283	73
Cascadia Community College	17	5,220	253	35
Centralia Community College	19	6,060	120	22
Chelan County Veterans Office	17	150	90	1
City University of Seattle	16	17,430	2,172	96
Clark College	32	5,310	93	7
Clover Park Technical College	14	150	30	2
Columbia Basin Veterans Coalition	20	600	0	0
Divers Institute of Technology	19	2,160	116	31
Eastern Washington University	17	9,630	41	6
Edmonds Community College	20	14,190	92	20
Everest College	17	3,750	355	63
G.A.V.E	17	900	1,040	16
Gonzaga University	19	33,000	266	22
Grays Harbor Community College	20	5,520	184	22
Green River College	20	17,280	107	158
Highline Community College	1	0	0	0
Lake Washington Institute of Technology	19	1,530	330	25
Lower Columbia College	20	3,000	360	33
Northwest Wooden Boat School	3	2,910	1,140	7
Olympic College	26	8,670	374	72
Pacific Lutheran University	20	1,110	1,540	12
Peninsula College	4	1,740	180	17
Perry Technical Institute	20	5,700	230	83
Saint Martins University	19	3,810	0	0
Sarge's Place	19	4,260	0	0
Seattle Central Community College	19	4,770	1,095	31
Seattle Pacific University	19	11,580	208	18
Seattle University	16	6,540	1,800	15
Shoreline Community College	20	6,300	435	13

Skagit Valley Community College Mount Vernon	17	19,200	400	60
South Puget Sound Community College	17	4,500	171	43
South Seattle Community College	15			
Spokane Community College	20	3,180	390	6
Spokane Community College (Colville)	14	6,120	215	18
Spokane Falls Community College	20	9,150	218	52
Tacoma Community College	14	4,260	170	29
The Art Institute of Seattle	1			
The Evergreen State College	16	1,110	4,500	11
University of Washington Bothell	20	9,900	480	52
University of Washington Tacoma	20	5,400	150	10
Veterans Training and Support Center	19	6,510	1,710	13
Walla Walla Community College	18			
Washington State University Pullman	17	1,560	240	17
Washington State University Tri-Cities	17	2,700	263	32
Washington State University Vancouver	20	28,290	291	109
Wenatchee Valley College	3			
Whatcom College	19	12,120	1,121	23
TOTAL	**851**	**324,150**	**24,403**	**1386**

Note. Data from America Learns site.

DATA SOURCES

To answer the evaluation questions, the following data sources and evaluation tools were used.

Interviews and Focus Groups. We conducted interviews and focus groups with WDVA leadership, and we visited 12 Vet Corps Program sites across Washington State, which were selected based on geographical region, high or low performing (based on available data/WDVA leadership recommendations), and other variables. During the site visits, we interviewed the Vet Corps Member, the Site Supervisor, student veterans, and other stakeholders of the program. During the visit or on follow up, we also interviewed Regional Coordinators. In total, 83 participated in interviews and focus groups. Table 5 shows the sites we visited.

Table 5.
Site Visit Locations

LOCATION OF SITE VISITS	
Site	**Region**
Big Bend Community College	Central
Clover Park Technical College	Installation
Columbia Basin Veteran's Coalition	South Eastern
Eastern Washington University	North Eastern
Edmonds Community College	North King County
Northwest Wooden Boat Show	Olympic
Pacific Lutheran University	South Sound
Seattle University	South King County
Shoreline Community College	North King County
Skagit Valley College	Northwest
Veterans Training and Support Center	North King County
Washington State University – Vancouver	Southwest

Surveys: Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors completed online surveys two times during the year. A pre-survey was administered in the fall and a post-survey was administered in the spring. The table below shows the number of participants completing each survey (see Table 6).

Table 6.
Survey Return Rate

Survey Return Rate		
Group	**Pre-Survey**	**Post-Survey**
Site Supervisors	35 (71%)	33 (67%)
Vet Corps Members	43 (88%)	42 (86%)

Results of the Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisor surveys reflect similarities in the composition of these groups. For example, 67% and 64% of Vet Corps Members reported they were in their first year of the program on the pre- and post-survey, respectively. On both the pre- and post- survey, 94% of Site Supervisors represented a technical school, college, or university. The results from the Vet Corps Member and Site Supervisor Surveys can be found in Appendices B and C, respectively.

Data Collection and Analyses. We worked with the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to collect data on college attendance, courses taken, credits earned, and persistence. We merged this data with WDVA data collected through America Learns to analyze impact of the program. We also worked with the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) to obtain data from four-year colleges; however, the ERDC was unable to provide the data at the time of this report. That said, the ERDC will be creating dashboards

for all institutions with disaggregated results for veterans. This data can be used to assess impact of the Vet Corps Program.

Whenever possible we analyze outcomes for both veterans appearing in the America Learns database and for all veterans at campuses served by a Vet Corps Member. This was done because of the assumption that all Veterans on a campus with a Vet Corps member would benefit even if not directly served.

Vet Corps Conferences. To understand the Vet Corps Program, we attended one Regional Coordinator meeting, and the beginning, middle, and end-of-year statewide conferences for the 2016-2017 academic year.

Document Review. We also reviewed documents pertaining to program design, planning, activities, and goals.

Evaluation Findings

EQ #1 – What services do Vet Corps Members provide to veterans and to the organizations in which they serve?

OVERVIEW

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) was created in 1976 by the State legislature to serve the military veterans of Washington State and their families. In 2009, the WDVA obtained an AmeriCorps grant to fund the Vet Corps Program which is housed within general fund, state-supported Veterans Conservation Corps. The WDVA summarizes the purpose of the Vet Corps Program: "The Vet Corps helps veterans and their family members navigate Washington's higher education and training programs as veterans adjust from military to college life."[1]

For 2016-2017, the Vet Corps Program placed 50 veterans, dependents, or spouses in colleges, universities, and other post-secondary education sites to support other veterans, active duty service members, and military-connected individuals in those programs. At the sites, Vet Corps Members provide peer mentoring, direct support, resources, and referrals for a range of issues. This includes assisting individuals in connecting to federal, state, and local veterans' benefits. They also provide training and support for site-based faculty and staff members to enhance awareness of student veterans' needs. Vet Corps Members establish community partnerships to provide additional supports for the students they serve and to obtain opportunities for those students to engage in community service.

[1] From the WDVA website: http://www.dva.wa.gov/program/vet-corps

THE NEED FOR THE PROGRAM

Program leaders spoke of the challenges faced by veterans and their families when an active duty service member returns to civilian life. Veterans receive a service-related education benefit, and many seek education or training as they develop post-service goals and careers. However, the transition is not always easy. One person said, "The biggest needs and goals are transitioning from one culture to another culture. Higher education culture is very different from military culture." Another observed, "In military culture, you are taught there is a mission greater than yourself. When they get out [of the military], they often need a second mission. If veterans are given some support and have an opportunity to give back… research shows their own resiliency kicks in." The Vet Corps Program seeks specifically to aid veterans and their families be successful in these transitions as they obtain education and training for their post-military lives. They also intend to assist colleges, universities, and other training programs become more supportive and welcoming of military-connected individuals.

Colleges have also had to develop programs and become responsive to veterans' needs because of an influx on new student veterans beginning around 2009. Program leaders described the specific needs and concerns experienced by student veterans as they pursue education and training, some of which may be similar to other nontraditional groups. Student veterans may have little experience with higher education and may be first generation college students. One person offered an example: "[They may come from] impoverished communities and don't have family members to reach out and ask what to do…so many didn't even realize they were eligible for financial aid." On campus, their classmates are younger and have very different life experiences, and it can be difficult for student veterans to develop a sense of belonging or community. Program leaders also noted that challenges can arise with class content, in relationships with faculty, and with academic skills. In addition, student veterans may be supporting families and therefore working in addition to taking classes, and each of these challenges may be exacerbated by traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress. Student veterans are at risk of losing their education benefit if they fail classes. Further, program leaders observed that student veterans may not be recruited by support networks and organizations on campus, such as multi-cultural centers or other outreach programs. In many cases, the Vet Corps Member serves as a source of information and support and can connect student veterans to other veterans on campus through a veteran resource center, a club, or service projects.

Program leaders and Vet Corps Members emphasized the need for colleges, universities, and training programs to build awareness of veterans and their experiences. Some sites have very few practical supports, such as services to assist veterans with benefits. Program staff and participants also reported conflicting values and belief systems at some sites, which can alienate veterans. Examples included a writing assignment focused on "why the United States is propagandizing people to join the military" and an anti-military poster on a faculty member's door. Difficulties navigating a new environment, particularly if that

environment is perceived as unwelcoming, can create barriers to completing education or training programs. A program leader said:

> [The question is], how do we create a more welcoming environment and have conversations differently in academia? How do you balance free thoughts and ideas and work with people who have different ideas and thoughts and that are very close to them?...If it's about how do I feel about war, how do I feel about killing people, if I have an outburst with a faculty member or leave a class, where do I go with that?...How do we change the conversations, for these folks to have a sense of belonging on a campus?...If I am looking for belonging, what if a speaker comes in and questions the decisions I made?...When questions come up, where do they [student veterans] go and how do we talk about it?

VET CORPS PROGRAM GOALS

The Vet Corps Program has multiple layers of goals. It seeks to provide peer-based assistance for the population it serves: military-connected individuals seeking continued education and training. The program also seeks to create institutional change in colleges, universities, and other post-secondary education programs, and to educate faculty and administration in veteran cultural competencies. In addition, the program provides leadership development and leadership opportunities for Vet Corps Members.

VET CORPS STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION

The Vet Corps Program is administered by WDVA personnel. In addition, there are three key positions for field implementation of the program: Vet Corps Members, Site Supervisors, and Regional Coordinators.

Central Program Administration and Staffing. At the WDVA, the Vet Corps administration includes a program manager, a program support specialist, and a data compiler. Personnel in each of these roles have responsibilities at the WDVA beyond the Vet Corps Program. Additional program specialists and support personnel include: Traumatic Brain Injury Program Coordinator, Eastern Washington Traumatic Brain Injury Outreach Coordinator, Veterans Conservation Corps Program Coordinator, and Internships Coordinator.

Vet Corps Member. The Vet Corps Program has 50 Vet Corps Members placed in colleges, universities, and other post-secondary training programs across the State of Washington. Vet Corps Members are veterans or family members of veterans, and many are currently enrolled as students. Vet Corps Members have military experience in common with the people they serve. In addition, a program leader observed, "We want to rely on the leadership the veterans can bring to the table. They are resilient people, and have experience with that." Vet Corps Members make a ten-month commitment, which can be repeated four times. They serve 42.5 hours per week during the academic year and receive

a $1,343 per month stipend and education service award of $5,815 for completing a full term of service (1,700 hours). The role of the Vet Corps Member depends, in part, on the needs and existing resources for veterans at their site. For example, they may play a larger role in assisting student veterans in obtaining financial aid on campuses that do not have a veteran's center or staff dedicated to addressing financial need of student veterans. At sites where those services already exist, the Vet Corps Member assumes different roles. Vet Corps Members are supported by and accountable to their Site Supervisor and Regional Coordinator. Some reported having two supervisors can be challenging, particular if they are not consistently in communication with each other. A Site Supervisor commented, "It's awkward having two supervisors. I am on site and work with the Navigator [Vet Corps Member] more frequently."

Site Supervisor. Each Vet Corps site has a Site Supervisor. The Site Supervisor is a representative/ employee of the institution who commits part of their time to the Vet Corps Program. The Site Supervisor has a dual role in the Vet Corps Program: to support and supervise the Vet Corps Member and to serve as a liaison between the program and the institution. One person explained, "They are a contact point for us [Vet Corps Program] to make sure we are meeting the needs of the college. Some colleges take it further [than others], so there is variation in this relationship." Site Supervisors oversee the Vet Corps Member's activities. The frequency and focus of supervisory meetings vary. For example, one Site Supervisor reported monthly meetings with the Vet Corps Member to discuss overall progress and concerns, whereas another meets weekly to review that week's activities, discuss detailed plans for the service project, set priorities, and coordinate the work they both do regarding student veterans. Survey results show that greater than 70% of Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors meet once per week, with the remaining meeting every other week to two to three times per year.

To identify current Site Supervisors, the WDVA contacted Student Services or an equivalent at each site, who helped identify someone in Student Services or elsewhere at the campus or program. Site Supervisors do not receive additional compensation for their roles. Within the Vet Corps Program, there is no formal oversite of Site Supervisors. Across programs, Site Supervisors serve different roles and work in different departments. For example, the position may be filled by a Dean, a Vice President of Student Development, or a staff member who more directly serves students. They may be part of a team, work in isolation, or be central to all activities and services for veterans on campus. The specific role of the Site Supervisor in the institution influences the activities taken on by the Vet Corps Member, as well as the type of mentoring the Site Supervisor provides.

Regional Coordinator. The position of Regional Coordinator was added after the Vet Corps Program began. Prior to the addition of Regional Coordinators, the Program Director fielded all requests for information from the 50 Vet Corps Members. Now, Regional Coordinators serve as liaisons between program leaders at the WDVA and the site-based Vet Corps Members. They are a direct resource for the Vet Corps Member, answering questions, helping find resources for student veterans, and providing guidance. They also

serve an administrative role (e.g., approving time sheets, reviewing reflection logs). Regional Coordinators are independent contractors who are accountable to Vet Corps Program leadership. For 2016-2017, there were initially 10 Regional Coordinators: nine regionally based and one attached to Installations. One Regional Coordinator left during the year, and his duties were assumed by the Vet Corps Program Director.

VET CORPS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The Vet Corps Program is based on a peer-mentor model. WDVA developed a peer-mentor curriculum, based on one used by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. However, they adapted the curriculum to shift from the idea of diagnosis to one of "shared experience." The peer-mentor approach frames the roles and activities of the Vet Corps Members. Within this common framework, Vet Corps Members perform a wide range of roles and activities. The following list presents common examples of the activities of Vet Corps Members. It is neither exhaustive, nor does any Vet Corps Member perform all of them.

- Reaching out to student veterans (i.e. via campus website, social media, events, information tables)
- Participating in student orientations
- Providing peer mentoring and supporting other veteran peer mentors on campus
- Providing homework support
- Connecting student veterans to resources on campus (e.g. financial aid, disability services)
- Connecting student veterans to resources off campus (e.g. Veterans Administration services)
- Assisting student veterans with referrals for supports (e.g. housing, counseling)
- Coordinating annual service project
- Entering Vet Corps Program data
- Promoting awareness of student veteran experiences and needs
- Teaching campus personnel about student veterans' needs and experiences, promoting the need for further training
- Teaching campus staff about student veterans' benefits
- Participating on campus advisory boards and committees (e.g. Teacher of the Year selection committee, Chancellor's Advisory Board)
- Leading/organizing student veteran organizations
- Connecting with student organizations (e.g. student government)
- Developing community partnerships

Site Supervisors set and monitor expectations for Vet Corps Members, and most were aware of the degree to which Vet Corps Members had established relationships with campus departments and personnel and with community partners. For example, one said,

"I have worked with three [Vet Corps Members), seen their work range from above and beyond to barely there. It really depends on the person… I am relying on the person in that role to know the ins and outs of financial aid policy, on campus and off campus support, disability outreach...I need the Vet Corps Member to know all those moving parts and how those parts connect with all of the agency-level supports that are external to campus." Another observed, "We had a Navigator [Vet Corps Member] who established clear working relationships with people in outside agencies, so there were people in those agencies that knew how the university does things."

In interviews with Vet Corps Members, two common implementation issues surfaced: redundancy across sites in efforts to locate resources for student veterans and loss of information between transitions from one Vet Corps Member to the next. They recommended a compilation of resources that includes a flow chart of how to address specific issues, such as a student veteran who needs emergency resources on short notice. This compilation could include ongoing state services that are likely to exist over time and are applicable to all sites, along with a template for documenting local resources and agencies, which may change over shorter periods of time.

Institutional Partnerships with the Vet Corps Program. When the Vet Corps Program started, the partnering institutions were not required to pay a participation fee. However, a $2,000 site fee was added in 2012, and the fee may increase to $3,000 for 2017-2018. Program leaders anticipate that some institutions may baulk at the fee. Interestingly, the initial implementation of a site fee changed the Vet Corps Program's relationships with the sites. According to one person, "It increased dialogue between us and the colleges. Some places didn't even know they had a Vet Corps Program. We wanted more skin in the game: we want you to be a part of the entire process. We want support in managing the Vet Corps." The presence of the Vet Corps Program has led to some campuses to request institutional trainings to increase awareness of student veterans' needs and to develop ways to create a welcoming environment. In addition, the program has enabled the WDVA to become more aware of the different ways different institutions and programs serve, or do not serve, student veterans.

Facility Access and Location at the Site. At their college, university, or training program site, the Vet Corps Members' access to facilities and their location on campus vary considerably. Vet Corps Members may be housed within a larger veteran's program, may have an office, or may have a shared desk in a small office or a common room. Proximity to the campus veterans center, to student services, to financial aid offices, and to their Site Supervisor is helpful in integrating the program and in meeting the needs of student veterans directly and efficiently. For example, several Vet Corps Members spoke of their need to escort student veterans to specific offices, particularly during a student's first semester when they were unfamiliar and hesitant to seek the help they needed. Proximity to offices that are essential to the program or to student veterans helps the Vet Corps Member build relationships with individuals in those offices, enabling them to make direct connections

for student veterans. Providing students with a staff member's name and introduction makes it easier for them to approach that office.

The location and nature of the space for the Vet Corps Program is of concern to many Vet Corps Members. One said, "We share one of the underutilized spaces, and we've been badgering them [the campus] all year to be making something more permanent to make veterans feel more welcome here." Ideal spaces meet multiple needs: confidential conversations, tutoring, quiet work time, and social interaction.

Community Partnerships. Community partnerships are an important part of the Vet Corps Program. One program leader observed, "What is available in the different communities makes a difference. Some have robust programs and [Vet Corps Members] are finding resources, such as the VFWs and other veterans organizations." Some have tapped into new veteran service organizations such as the Mission Continues; Team Rubicon; and Team Red, White and Blue. Several Vet Corps Members noted involvement in Stand Downs, which provide services for homeless veterans, both as a service project and as a resource for student veterans. Some Vet Corps Members have also helped establish programs for veterans, such as the garden in Port Angeles and a farm in Western Washington.

VET CORPS TRAINING AND SUPPORT

State-level Trainings. The Vet Corps Program provides training events for Vet Corps Members and Regional Coordinators annually at the beginning, middle, and end of the academic year. These training meetings provide an opportunity for Vet Corps Members to develop the knowledge and skills needed for their positions, discuss issues they encounter, and receive support from peers and program staff. The two and a half-day training at the beginning of the year focuses on the administrative responsibilities of the Vet Corps position, such as the intake process and data entry. It also addresses information and skills Vet Corps Members need to directly serve veterans in the program. These areas include but are not limited to peer mentoring, AmeriCorps, financial assistance, post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, and suicide awareness and prevention. A mid-year training provides opportunities to trouble-shoot program implementation, to cover additional topics, and for Vet Corps Members to interact with peers. The one-day event the end of the year is primarily a day of service and celebration.

Site Supervisors are invited to the initial training but few attend. For example, six Site Supervisors attended the training at the beginning of the 2016-2017 academic year, and this is an increase from 2015-2016. Reflecting on the WDVA trainings, one Site Supervisor commented, "They do extensive training, and they invite the Site Supervisors to come to as much of the training as possible, but the training is timed to the busy ramp up [of the school year], during that really busy period when the school year starts. Is there is a way to work with the school personnel separately? It could even be an online module about what the Navigator [Vet Corps Member] needs to know." Recommendations for what to address

in such a training included WDVA expectations and resources in the community veterans can access.

Program administrators reported efforts to ensure the state-level trainings address the needs of Vet Corps Members and Regional Coordinators. One said, "[We are working on] what does our training look like, and what are our training objectives?" To that end, they gather feedback on the trainings and use that information to guide subsequent training activities. During interviews, Vet Corps Members said they were interested in using trainings and other methods to build a greater sense of their cohort, and perhaps learn to disseminate information in alternate ways. One Vet Corps Member commented, "In general, it feels like the method of information delivery is out of date with how information is passed on now. We have tons of printed material, guidebooks, and written works. Multimedia presence is absent and the ability to use it all is lacking. We could train vets on how to use media and social media. It's practical and cost saving. We would probably need some formal training for that." Finally, Vet Corps Members on the eastside of the state noted that the timing and location of the winter meeting makes it difficult to attend. Additionally, much of the winter meeting included King County specific information. Vet Corps Members recommended hosting an Eastside and Westside mid-year meeting to avoid winter driving over the passes and to create an agenda relevant to that specific location.

Regional meetings. Vet Corps Members meet regionally during the state-wide trainings and monthly during the rest of the year. Regional Coordinators provide training in peer mentoring, and model this approach by sharing their own experiences. Regional meetings also focus on reviewing progress, trouble-shooting, and addressing concerns. The regional monthly meetings usually occur at one of the program sites. In-person meetings are somewhat easier for geographically smaller regions. In larger regions, meetings have occasionally occurred via phone to minimize the time Vet Corps Members would spend driving to the meeting.

Regional Coordinator meetings. There are four quarterly meetings for the Regional Coordinators. These meetings provide opportunities for the Regional Coordinators to address issues, to learn about and share resources, and to plan for the statewide and regional meetings.

EQ #2: What key outcomes were achieved through program implementation?

According to the logic model, the goals of the Vet Corps Program are to (1) Provide peer-based assistance and referrals to student veterans, helping them overcome hurdles that might be unique to the student veteran population; (2) Promote systems change by encouraging campuses to create institutionalized programs focused on supporting veterans and developing opportunities for volunteerism; and (3) Educate faculty and administration

in veteran cultural competencies. Through the implementation of the strategies and activities listed above, the program is designed to impact short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes. These outcomes pertain to referrals, financial assistance, partnerships, training, and improved academic performance.

According to performance measures, the Vet Corps Program met the target of veterans receiving CNCS supported assistance. Other performance measures were not met, including the number of veterans referred on campus programs, the number of veterans receiving financial assistance to prevent homelessness, and the number of veterans receiving financial assistance for food, utilities, transportation, or other necessities. However, there were issues with Vet Corps Members inputting inaccurate data into America Learns, and the numbers reported are likely underestimated. Program leaders are working with Vet Corps Members to improve data entry into this system.

While program leaders acknowledge the outcomes identified in the logic model are important, they also emphasized that the Vet Corps Program provides student veterans with specific, critical supports that change and even saves lives. A program leader said, "For outcomes, to me, if we can prevent a veteran from being homeless, provide a veteran a resource to ameliorate family problems and provide mental health stability, and save a life. Those are the outcomes." Another program leader said, "I think AmeriCorps looks at this as a typical AmeriCorps program, but this is different. It saves lives, and I know that because I got calls from people who said, 'This saved my life because of this person.'" On the post-survey, 77% of Vet Corps Members agreed the program impacted student veterans' overall sense of wellbeing. This was consistent with stories shared by Vet Corps members.

The next section describes the outcomes for student veterans and for Vet Corps Members pertaining to the first goal. The following sections describe the impact of specific strategies on educational outcomes, as well as systems impact on campus sites.

OUTCOMES FOR STUDENT VETERANS

Student veterans have many unique needs as they transition from serving in the military to pursuing post-secondary education. The needs include peer-to-peer support, support navigating the college system and obtaining financial assistance, and referrals for other concerns.

Peer-to-peer support. Student veterans identified peer-to-peer support as one of the important outcomes from the Vet Corps Program. This was evident on the post-survey where 97% of Vet Corps Members and 96% of Site Supervisors identified peer-to peer connections with student veterans as moderately important or very important. A student veteran shared, "This program provides a sense of connectiveness and camaraderie. You have camaraderie in the military, and [then] you come here [to school] and you feel alone. This Veterans Center allows people to connect." Student veterans make peer-to-peer connections by visiting the veterans center, if available, by participating in a veterans' club,

by participating as a volunteer in the service projects, and through introductions by the Vet Corps Member. Although there are many veterans on campus, student veterans shared that they may not easily identify their peers because many veterans do not talk about their military experience. A Vet Corps Member shared,

> When they leave the military, they leave behind their social network, and they are missing camaraderie. We set this up the way a small military unit is set up. We try to harness the good parts, and we make a place where they can meet friends with a common life experience. People don't self-identify, and it is typically hard to meet veterans.

Student veterans agreed this is critical to their college success. A student veteran reflected, "Without this program, I would be more isolated. It helps to find your peers, especially in a community college setting, where you don't know who is a veteran. Without it, I would be more isolated." On the post-survey, 83% of Vet Corps Members indicated that the Vet Corps Program was moderately or very impactful in helping student veterans in their comfort in interacting with peer veterans, and 89% of Site Supervisors agreed making peer-to-peer connections with student veterans was moderately or very effective.

Navigating the college system and obtaining financial support. Student veterans, Vet Corps Members, and Site Supervisors identified general assistance with navigating the college, making referrals for academic support, and obtaining financial support as critical outcomes. On the post-survey, 87% of Vet Corps Members and 88% of Site Supervisors identified assistance in navigating the system as moderately or very important. A student veteran shared, "I think the most difficult issue starting school is that we are used to having our hand held for every process. It is overwhelming that, when you enroll, you don't know what to do. It is huge to go from everything being structured to no structure here."

Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors shared how enrollment, student services, and financial aid might be located in different areas of the campus, making it difficult for student veterans to know what resource to access and how to access them. Additionally, many student veterans have not taken English or math since high school, and they may need to take a developmental course or obtain additional support in these areas. They may experience confusion as to how the GI Bill, financial aid, and vocational rehabilitation can work together to finance their education. To address these issues, Vet Corps Members work with student veterans through the enrollment and advising process, making the appropriate referrals, and at times, walking them to the correct office. They also refer student veterans to writing or math labs and create study groups. Finally, they help student veterans apply for vocational rehabilitation and learn how to use their benefits. Regarding services, a Vet Corps Member shared, "The most consistent problem is a combination of a lack of awareness of the benefits available to them. The other is a lack of understanding of how those benefit programs work together and what the students' responsibilities are to keep the benefits flowing." A Site Supervisor commented,

> Student veterans' average age is 25 to 28, and they have been out of high school around 8 to 10 years. I believe the first year is critical for retention. They need to take the right classes, and they need to get the right grades. We have to get them to use advising, to seek out tutors, and to take the math placement test. Some older veterans don't ask for help.

The Vet Corps Member plays a crucial role for student veterans in navigating the system, which helps with retention. A student veteran shared, "[The Vet Corps Member] fills all the gaps. There is a lack of communication among the departments. I didn't know where to go. They will tell us who to talk to. Without this program, I would have dropped out." On the post-survey, 87% of Vet Corps Members indicated that the program was moderately or very impactful in increasing student veterans' comfort with the college/university/school setting, and 77% of Site Supervisor indicated the program was moderately or very effective in assisting student veterans in navigating the system.

Referrals for other concerns. Student veterans have many other needs that may need to be addressed while they are in school. Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors highly believe that referrals to services, such as medical, behavioral health, and basic necessities, were very important and contributed to educational success. A Vet Corps Member explained,

> Obviously, funding their education is an issue. We help veterans through the process of accessing their benefits, and we try to make this as painless as possible. There are challenges of addressing the combat-related challenges, PTSD, and physical problems. We have a lot of veterans, and one of the sacrifices of going to school is they don't have a job, they have limited income, and some experience homelessness. That is big. We have had guys living in cars, and we let them park here and we look the other way. The VA is huge for our veterans and being able to get the medical and psychological needs [addressed] is important. They [VA] aren't always flexible, and if you miss an appointment you don't get another for six months. We can help with referrals.

Vet Corps Members are knowledgeable about making referrals, and they have additional contacts to help identify referrals as well as statewide partners with specific expertise. They support student veteran in other ways, such as providing peer mentoring and helping with transportation to referrals. A Vet Corps Member shared, "There are two veins to this program. One is that it is intended to support their [student veterans] education, and the other is to help [student] veterans who are having problems and identifying resources in crisis situations." On the post survey, 83% of Vet Corps Members indicated that the program was moderately or very impactful in in helping student veterans access needed services. Similarly, approximately 70% of Site Supervisors agreed Vet Corps Members were effective in making referrals to a variety of services.

IMPACT ON VET CORPS MEMBERS

The Vet Corps Program is unique. While it is intended to positively impact the lives of student veterans, it also has a positive impact for the Vet Corps Members. Vet Corps Members described how participation in the program helped them serve others and develop critical leadership skills. A Vet Corps Member shared, "I have work that means something again. I left the Air Force in late February, and I took a month off for the quarter. … I didn't have meaning, and I like working with young people and young airmen. Since taking this on, I'm working with veterans and navigating the transition from the military world. It has been great to have this opportunity." Another shared, "It is about helping people, and I have been able to help many. This is a life changer. This is my most rewarding experience." Vet Corps Members also acknowledged that they gain valuable experience that can help with their own future employment goals. Survey results are consistent with interview findings. Vet Corps Members post-survey results show:

- 86% agreed their service made a difference
- 86% agreed their service was interesting
- 82% agreed they are likely to seek volunteer opportunities in the future because of their service
- 78% agreed their service will positively influence their future employment plans

SUMMARY

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, Vet Corps Members described positive outcomes that have occurred for student veterans, for the Vet Corps Members themselves, and in the systems in which they are working. Most Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors who completed the post-survey rated the Vet Corps Program as good or excellent (see Figure 1). In the few cases where the program was not rated good or excellent, they noted issues with communication or being a "good fit" for the site. These will be described in the *Contextual Factors* section.

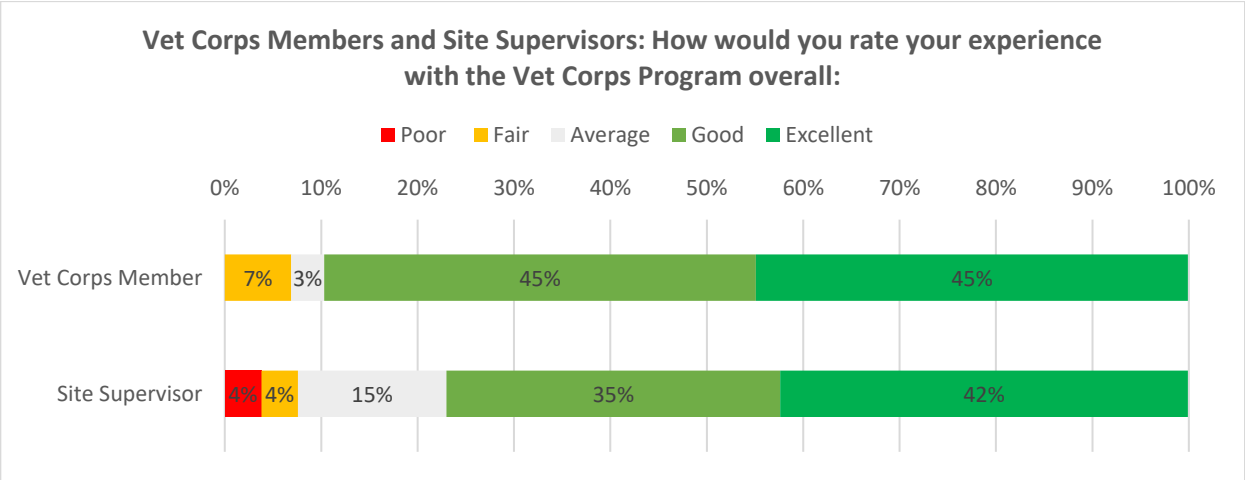


***Figure 1*. Vet Corps Members, Site Supervisors: Overall Experience with Vet Corps Program**

EQ #3: What was the impact of peer mentoring and referral services on veterans' short-term retention and course taking outcomes?

Analyses connecting Vet Corps member mentoring, referral, and contact data with SBCTC data were limited by several factors, including issues with data collection through the America Learns system (i.e. missing or inaccurate data), inaccurate or missing student identification, and small mentee n-sizes for some colleges. These issues limit the ability to find statistically significant results. Given these limitations, these analyses should be interpreted cautiously.

Evaluators investigated the impact of peer mentoring on short-term (Fall to Spring) retention and course taking outcomes. For this analysis, peer mentoring was defined as the number of minutes Vet Corps Members reported spending with student veterans each school year. Evaluators aggregated the number of minutes reported for each Vet Corps site for both 2015-16 and 2016-17 and then correlated it with data elements collected from SBCTC. Table 7 shows the correlations between total number of minutes and SBCTC data elements for all veterans at each Vet Corps sites, including student veterans who were not directly served by a Vet Corps Member. No statistically significant correlations were present between number of minutes and any of the SBCTC data elements in 2015-16. In 2016-17, statistically significant negative correlations were found between the average number of pre-college math credits attempted and passed: as the number of minutes increased, the average number of pre-college math credits attempted and passed decreased. Finally, a statistically significant positive correlation was found between completion and number of minutes: as, the number of minutes increased so did completion. This same analysis was repeated for only those student veterans directly served by a Vet Corps Member and no statistically significant correlations were found for either school year (see Table 8).

Table 7.
Correlations between SBCTC Data and Number of Minutes Served in 2015-16 and 2016-17 – All Student Veterans

Data Element	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Average # of pre-college math credits - Attempted	-.05	-.59*
Average # of pre-college math credits - Passed	-.22	-.57*
Average # of pre-college English credits - Attempted	-.00	-.46
Average # of pre-college English credits - Passed	.05	-.42
Average # of Annual Credits - Attempted	.00	.23
Average # of Annual Credits - Passed	-.19	-.29
Average Annual GPA	-.45	.28
Average Fall to Spring retention	-.22	.14
Average Completion	-.25	.56*

*$p < .05$

Table 8.
Correlations between SBCTC Data and Number of Minutes Served in 2015-16 and 2016-17 – Only Student Veterans Served by Vet Corps Member

Data Element	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Average pre-college math credits - Attempted	-.14	-.08
Average pre-college math credits - Passed	-.13	-.23
Average pre-college English credits - Attempted	.42	-.29
Average pre-college English credits - Passed	.42	-.23
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	.04	.29
Average Annual Credits - Passed	.10	.04
Average Annual GPA	-.16	.14
Average Fall to Spring retention	-.15	.21
Average Completion	.18	.20

Evaluators investigated the impact of referral services on short-term (Fall to Spring) retention and course taking outcomes. For this analysis, referral services included both on-campus referrals and service referrals. Evaluators aggregated the number of referrals for each Vet Corps site for both 2015-16 and 2016-17 and then correlated it with data elements collected from SBCTC. Table 9 shows the correlations between total number of referrals and SBCTC data elements for all veterans at Vet Corps sites regardless of whether they were directly served by a Vet Corps Member. No statistically significant correlations were present between number of referrals and any of the SBCTC data elements in 2015-16. A negative correlation existed in 2016-17 between number of referrals and average annual credits passed: as the number of referrals increased, the average annual credits passed decreased. This same analysis was repeated for only those student veterans directly served by a Vet Corps Member, and no statistically significant correlations were found for either school year (see Table 10).

Table 9.
Correlations between SBCTC Data and Number of Referrals in 2015-16 and 2016-17 – All Veterans

Data Element	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Average pre-college math credits - Attempted	-.21	-.41
Average pre-college math credits - Passed	-.22	-.55
Average pre-college English credits - Attempted	-.19	-.31
Average pre-college English credits - Passed	-.20	-.36
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	.14	.51
Average Annual Credits - Passed	.06	-.62*
Average Annual GPA	-.26	-.06
Average Fall to Spring retention	.06	.36
Average Completion	-.16	.15

*$p < .05$

Table 10.
Correlations between SBCTC Data and Number of Minutes Served in 2015-16 and 2016-17 – Veterans Served by Vet Corps Member

Data Element	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Average # of pre-college math credits - Attempted	-.22	.44
Average # of pre-college math credits - Passed	-.23	-.16
Average # of pre-college English credits - Attempted	.36	-.12
Average # of pre-college English credits - Passed	.36	-.12
Average # of Annual Credits - Attempted	-.17	.21
Average # of Annual Credits - Passed	-.19	-.38
Average Annual GPA	-.32	-.02
Average Fall to Spring retention	-.22	.15
Average Completion	.13	-.02

EQ #4: Does the number of contacts a veteran receives in a specified time period correlate with short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes?

Evaluators investigated the relationship between number of contacts with the Vet Corps Program and student outcomes. Number of contacts was estimated by using the service dates provided in the America Learns database for setting and achieving goals and for referrals. Evaluators aggregated the number of contacts for each Vet Corps site for both 2015-16 and 2016-17 and then correlated it with data elements collected from SBCTC. Table 11 shows the correlations between total number of contacts and SBCTC data elements for all veterans at Vet Corps sites regardless of whether they were directly served by a Vet Corps Member. No statistically significant correlations were present between number of contacts and any of the SBCTC data elements in 2015-16. In 2016-17, a statistically significant negative correlation was found between number of contacts and average number of pre-college math credits passed: as the number of contacts increased, the average number of pre-college math credits passed decreased. Similarly, a statistically significant negative correlation was found between number of contacts and average annual credits passed: as the number of contacts increased, the average number of average annual credits passed decreased. This same analysis was repeated for only those student veterans who were directly served by a Vet Corps Member and no statistically significant correlations were found for either school year (see Table 12).

Table 11.
Correlations between SBCTC Data and Number of Contacts in 2015-16 and 2016-17 – All Veterans

Data Element	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Average # of pre-college math credits - Attempted	-.17	-.42
Average # of pre-college math credits - Passed	-.25	-.54*
Average # of pre-college English credits - Attempted	-.20	-.26
Average # of pre-college English credits - Passed	-.22	-.29
Average # of Annual Credits - Attempted	.04	.45
Average # of Annual Credits - Passed	-.05	-.56*
Average Annual GPA	-.30	.17
Average Fall to Spring retention	-.01	.18
Average Completion	-.24	.17

*$p < .05$

Table 12.
Correlations between SBCTC Data and Number of Contacts in 2015-16 and 2016-17 – Veterans Served by Vet Corps Member

Data Element	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Average pre-college math credits - Attempted	-.17	.09
Average pre-college math credits - Passed	-.20	-.19
Average pre-college English credits - Attempted	.30	-.18
Average pre-college English credits - Passed	.30	-.13
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	-.09	.26
Average Annual Credits - Passed	-.07	-.28
Average Annual GPA	-.22	.04
Average Fall to Spring retention	-.21	.20
Average Completion	-.01	-.04

EQ #5: What are longer-term outcomes for veterans served by Vet Corps Members (degree, certification, credits earned, GPA)?

Evaluators submitted data on individuals served by Vet Corps Members to the SBCTC to match with their system, which includes all public community and technical colleges in Washington State. Researchers at the SBCTC provided de-identified data back to evaluators on credits attempted and passed, annual GPA, and completion. We attempted to gather data for 2013-14 through 2016-17, but the quality of data in the America Learns database prior to the 2015-16 school year was not high enough to allow for accurate matching in 2013-14 and 2014-15. Data for a total of 85 individuals was found for the 2015-16 school

year and data for a total of 109 individuals were found for the 2016-17 school year. A total of 65 individuals were found in both 2015-16 and 2016-17. The percentage of students matched from each college for both years is displayed in Table 13. The average number of credits attempted and passed total and for pre-college level and college level math and English, average annual GPA, and percent completion is displayed in Table 14 for 2015-16 and 2016-17. Table 15 shows the same data but only for the 65 individuals found in both school years. Of the individuals with two years of data, results show that in 2016-17, they attempted a higher number of annual credits, but passed a similar number to 2015-16. A lower percentage were enrolled in pre-college coursework in 2016-17 compared to 2015-16. The majority took 12 or more credits both academic years. The Fall to Spring retention rate was slightly higher in 2016-17 compared to 2015-16 and completion rates were similar between the two years.

Table 13.
Percentage of Students Matched with SBCTC Data by College

College	School Year	
	2015-16	2016-17
Bates	9%	4%
Big Bend	13%	8%
Cascadia	1%	1%
Centralia	8%	9%
Clark	7%	6%
Clover Park	1%	
Edmonds	1%	1%
Everett	1%	1%
Grays Harbor		3%
Green River	4%	4%
Highline		1%
Lower Columbia	11%	5%
Olympic	2%	2%
Seattle - Central	5%	6%
Seattle - North	1%	
Seattle – South	11%	26%
Shoreline	5%	3%
Skagit Valley	1%	3%
Spokane	9%	9%
Spokane Falls	4%	1%
Tacoma	5%	8%
Walla Walla		1%

Table 14.
SBCTC Data for Veterans Served by Vet Corps Members in 2015-16 and 2016-17

Data Element	School Year	
	2015-16 (n=85)	2016-17 (n=109)
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	34.6	38.2
Average Annual Credits - Passed	29.3	26.7
Average Annual GPA	2.82	2.54
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in math	38.8%	38.5%
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in English	14.1%	7.8%
Enrolled in < 12 credits	5.9%	9.2%
Enrolled in 12 or more credits	94.1%	90.8%
Fall to Spring retention	49.4%	53.2%
Completion	22.4%	13.8%

Table 15.
SBCTC Data for Veterans Served by Vet Corps Members in 2015-16 and 2016-17 – Only Veterans Found in Both Years

Data Element	School Year	
	2015-16 (n=65)	2016-17 (n=65)
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	33.9	37.9
Average Annual Credits - Passed	29.0	28.2
Average Annual GPA	2.87	2.50
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in math	40.0%	32.4%
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in English	13.8%	2.9%
Enrolled in < 12 credits	6.2%	11.8%
Enrolled in 12 or more credits	93.8%	88.2%
Fall to Spring retention	47.7%	50.0%
Completion	20.0%	20.6%

EQ #6: What specific system impacts has the program had on participating campus sites?

The Vet Corps Program is intended to promote systemic change by encouraging campuses to create institutionalized programs focused on supporting veterans, developing opportunities for volunteerism, and educating faculty and administration in veteran cultural competencies. Overall, Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors agreed they made progress in these areas. This was accomplished by increasing awareness and understanding of veterans' issues, providing resources dedicated to serving veterans, integrating veterans into campus life, and coordinating services for veterans and family members. These are described in more detail below.

AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF VETERANS' NEEDS

Vet Corps Members and other program personnel described a variety of activities intended to enhance awareness and understanding of student veterans' needs. Efforts to address systems-level issues really being with the relationship between the Vet Corps Member and the Site Supervisor. Where the relationship is strong, it is often bilateral. Vet Corps Members receive mentoring and support from the Site Supervisor in multiple areas, from the structure of the system to campus politics, and the Site Supervisor personally facilitates connections between the Vet Corps Member and stakeholders across the site. Likewise, several Site Supervisors reported learning from the Vet Corps Members, particularly about the life experiences of veterans and how those experiences impact their ability to succeed in post-secondary education. As a result, the Site Supervisors were able to represent the interests of the Vet Corps Program on campus and to suggest appropriate solutions and resources for student veterans. They also personally valued the openness of the Vet Corps Member.

Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors, either collaboratively or independently, have provided information or conducted trainings to help staff and faculty understand military culture and student veterans' needs. The trainings vary greatly across sites, with some incorporated into campus activities that occur at the beginning of the school year, some provided during in-services, and some presented as formal trainings within the campus community. For example, in their collaborations with campus departments, such as counseling services, disability resource centers, and libraries, Vet Corps Members have provided staff training.

The content and depth of information provided by Vet Corps Members has varied depending on need and opportunity. Vet Corps Members have shared information about the experiences and needs of student veterans, as well as the policies, benefits, and resources that impact their academic success. At one site, the Vet Corps Member presented information at the new faculty training and at in-service events. Each time, the Vet Corps Member had approximately 15 minutes to provide information on the Vet Corps Program, on myths about student veterans, and on resources to help student veterans. Another site conducted round robin break-out sessions where the Vet Corps Member shared information about invisible wounds and traumatic brain injury. At another site, the Vet Corps Member and Site Supervisor created a three-hour training called "Got Your Six" where faculty, staff, graduate students, and community members can learn more about military culture. Other trainings that have occurred across campuses touching upon veteran's issues include trainings on PTSD, traumatic brain injury, Title 9, cultural competency, and Military Training 101.

Vet Corps Members supplement trainings by providing resources to faculty and staff members. This includes participating in resource fairs, sending out information in newsletters or emails, and providing consultation if a faculty member has a question. For example, one Vet Corps Member sent out a text blurb that faculty members could put into

their syllabus, acknowledging the unique needs of student veterans and the support the program provides. In addition, Vet Corps Members conduct awareness events during Veteran's Day and Memorial Day. For example, many sites installed the 22 Boot Display to symbolize the 22 suicides that occur daily among the military population.

Site Supervisors and Vet Corps Members believe these programs have contributed to a greater understanding of military culture. On the post-survey, 90% of Vet Corps Members and 66% of Site Supervisors agreed the Vet Corps Program provided opportunities for site-level staff to learn about student veterans and their needs. Site Supervisors acknowledge, however, that the trainings are usually provided as part an event with a menu of options, so many of these trainings only reach those who are interested. In addition, many campuses now have large percentages of adjunct faculty, who typically have fewer requirements to attend such trainings. A Site Supervisor reflected, "The gap is how do you create awareness on campus and [provide] training so that all our staff is aware of veterans' needs. That is a delicate situation."

RESOURCES DEDICATED TO SERVING VETERANS

All sites have demonstrated a commitment to allocate resources to serving veterans by committing to the $2,000 fee for the Vet Corps Program and by allocating staff time for Site Supervisors to carry out duties related to the Vet Corps Program. Some sites have also hired work study students to provide additional support for the veterans.

Many of the sites have also developed a dedicated space for student veterans. This is perceived to be of great value because it allows student veterans to meet each other. In some cases, the Vet Corps Members' office is located within the center, allowing student veterans to engage with the Vet Corps Member and access any services. Others have created a "hub" with all services located in one central location. For example, one site has centralized personnel, including the certifying official, work study students, Vet Corps Member, and Site Supervisor, in one location within the Veteran Resource Center. The center also includes spaces to study with access to computers and printers, as well as television and game areas for veterans to socialize. Other departments that interact with the veterans are located in close proximity. In contrast, some schools do not have a Veteran's Center or it is located in a separate building from the Vet Corps Members office. Several student veterans described the importance of this space. One said, "It is nice, the Veterans Resource Center and knowing the other vets, there is somewhere I can go and feel normal. I feel different interacting with the other students. I'm close in age to the typical college student, but our experiences are different." A Site Supervisor said,

> The Vets can come here and have a common background. No matter what branch they served in, they have a common background, and they share stories and have camaraderie. It is tough to be a transitioning veteran because civilians don't understand there is more to getting out and coming home, and you aren't picking up

> the regular life. This space provides them with opportunities to interact with their peers.

In addition to the centers, some sites have also provided a food pantry and different special events through clubs. These resources serve to address some immediate needs and encourage peer support. On the post-survey, 80% of Vet Corps Members and 88% of Site Supervisors agreed the college/university/school has increased their support for student veterans' needs in some way.

INTEGRATING VETERANS INTO CAMPUS LIFE

The Vet Corps Program also serves to integrate veterans into campus life. As described previously, Vet Corps Members help students navigate the college, university, or program systems, develop peer-to-peer connections, and connect to resources. They also may help organize the Vet Club and other social activities.

In addition to these activities, Vet Corps Members also develop a minimum of three service projects a year that help to bring awareness to veterans and their culture and to provide opportunities for student veterans to volunteer. By engaging student veterans in these activities, they develop a stronger sense of connection to campus life. A student veteran explained,

> It is important to get involved with the campus and to join clubs. It is helpful to get veterans involved in a volunteer program. There are three things people need: a friend, a job and that can be making coffee or organizing something, and they need a purpose and value and belief in what they are doing. That will get people to stay. I think that starts the minute the veteran walks into the Veterans Center. As we build on those, you gain friends and connections.

On the post survey, 84% of Vet Corps Members and 89% of Site Supervisors agreed the Vet Corps Program outreach activities resulted in student veterans engaging with the Vet Corps Program on campus.

COORDINATING SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Finally, the Vet Corps Program is designed to connect student veterans and their family members with necessary resources. Vet Corps Members consult with student veterans to learn more about their issues and needs, and they provide referrals to help student veterans and their family members access basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, money for bills), behavioral health care, or medical care.

To address these needs, Vet Corps Members spend much of their time conducting outreach to other community organizations or existing veteran agencies and accessing referral

information. They do this by hosting events or conducting community service projects that generate awareness of veterans' needs. Events have included a golf tournament and a running event to generate donations to serve homeless veterans or their dependents. Vet Corps Members have also developed partnerships with many different agencies, including the American Legion, Workforce Development, and Growing Vets. While these outreach efforts help to develop Vet Corps Members' knowledge of available resources, several indicated that it would be helpful to have previous Vet Corps Members prepare a list of referral sources, which could be updated and expanded. On the survey, 90% of Vet Corps Members and 74% of Site Supervisors agreed the Vet Corps Program provided opportunities for the community to learn about student veterans and their needs.

EQ #7: Did differences emerge in the outcomes based on type of institution or other factors?

Data were not available for veterans served by Vet Corps Members at 4-year colleges, so outcomes could not be compared by type of institution. Additionally, only a small number of veterans served by Vet Corps Members at each college could be matched with the SBCTC database, which did not allow for analyses to compare outcomes by college. This underscores some of the issues with data input.

Evaluators did investigate whether differences emerged in outcomes based on a veteran's gender and ethnicity. No statistically significant differences emerged based on either of these demographic variables for 2015-16 or for 2016-17.

EQ #8: What differences are there in the educational outcomes for veterans served by Vet Corps Members compared to those not served by Vet Corps Members?

Evaluators compared SBCTC data on veterans served by Vet Corps Members to veterans attending the same colleges but not served by Vet Corps Members (see Table 16). In the 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years, student veterans served by Vet Corps Members attempted and passed a statistically significant higher number of annual credits, and were more likely to be enrolled in 12 or more credits. In both academic years, a higher percentage of veterans served by Vet Corps Members took pre-college level coursework in math, as compared to veterans not served by Vet Corps Members. In 2015-16, a higher percentage of veterans served by Vet Corps Members took pre-college level coursework in English compared to other veterans on campus. Although we were not able to confirm using the data provided, one potential explanation for this is that the veterans served by Vet Corp Members may be earlier in their post-secondary careers and thus more likely to be enrolled in pre-college courses compared to the other veterans in the database. Additionally, it may be that other veterans are just not enrolling in math or English courses as much as those served by Vet Corp members. In both academic years, veterans served by Vet Corps Members had higher Fall to Spring retention rates compared to veterans not served by Vet Corps Members.

Table 16.
SBCTC Data for Veterans Served by Vet Corps Members in 2015-16 and 2016-17 Compared to Veterans Not Served by Vet Corps Members

Data Element	2015-2016		
	Vet Corps (n=85)	Non Vet-Corps Veterans (n=7,412)	Significance Tests
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	34.6	29.3	t = -2.78, p < .01
Average Annual Credits - Passed	29.3	24.7	t = -2.22, p < .05
Average Annual GPA	2.82	2.73	NS
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in math	38.8%	28.6%	*Chi-square* = 6.29, p < .05
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in English	14.1%	5.8%	*Chi-square* = 7.97, p < .01
Enrolled in < 12 credits	5.9%	19.8%	
Enrolled in 12 or more credits	94.1%	80.2%	*Chi-square* = 7.89, p < .01
Fall to Spring retention	49.4%	38.6%	*Chi-square* = 6.10, p < .05
Completion	22.4%	26.7%	NS
Data Element	**2016-2017**		
	Vet Corps (n=109)	Non Vet-Corps Veterans (n=6,917)	Significance Tests
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	38.4	29.6	t = -4.73, p < .001
Average Annual Credits - Passed	26.9	22.7	t = -2.26, p < .05
Average Annual GPA	2.54	2.73	NS
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in math	38.0%	27.4%	*Chi-square* = 5.98, p < .05
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in English	7.4%	5.5%	NS
Enrolled in < 12 credits	9.3%	18.1%	
Enrolled in 12 or more credits	90.7%	81.9%	*Chi-square* = 5.62, p < .05
Fall to Spring retention	53.7%	38.2%	*Chi-square* = 10.85, p < .01
Completion	13.9%	17.6%	NS

WHAT DIFFERENCES ARE THERE IN THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF VETERANS AT SITES WITH A VET CORPS MEMBER COMPARED TO THOSE WITHOUT A VET CORPS MEMBER?

To address this evaluation question, evaluators matched the list of Vet Corps sites to the SBCTC data for each school year and compared outcomes for those student veterans with their counterparts at Non-Vet Corps sites. Since the list of Vet Corps sites is accurate and

complete for the entire duration of the program, we were able to examine data from 2013-14 through 2016-17. Generally, across all years, veterans at Vet Corps Sites, including those served by the Vet Corps Member and those not served, had a statistically significantly higher average number of credits attempted and passed, and a higher percentage were taking 12 or more credits compared to veterans at Non-Vet Corps sites. Overall, there was a higher percentage of veterans at Vet Corps Sites enrolled in pre-college math courses compared to veterans at Non-Vet Corps Sites. Additionally, higher Fall-to-Spring retention rates and completion rates were present for veterans at sites with Vet Corps Members compared to veterans at sites without a Vet Corps Member. Additionally, veterans at sites with a Vet Corps Member also had higher GPAs than veterans at Non-Vet Corps Member sites, but the difference between the two groups was small for this data element. Table 17 presents the results of these analyses.

Table 17.
SBCTC Data for Veterans at Vet Corps Sites in 2013-14 through 2016-17 Compared to Veterans Not Served at Non-Vet Corps Sites

Data Element	2013-2014		
	Vet Corps Sites (n=6,978)	Non-Vet Corps Sites (n=4,434)	Significance Tests
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	29.0	24.0	t = -14.42, p < .001
Average Annual Credits - Passed	24.6	20.1	t = -13.08, p < .001
Average Annual GPA	2.78	2.67	t = -4.62, p < .001
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in math	31.4%	26.9%	*Chi-square* = 26.94, p < .001
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in English	8.3%	7.0%	*Chi-square* = 6.57, p < .05
Enrolled in < 12 credits	20.6%	31.3%	
Enrolled in 12 or more credits	79.4%	68.7%	*Chi-square* = 167.63, p < .001
Fall to Spring retention	39.2%	30.3%	*Chi-square* = 93.54, p < .001
Completion	37.5%	31.7%	*Chi-square* = 41.51, p < .001
Data Element	**2014-2015**		
	Vet Corp (n=7,278)	Non-Vet Corps (n=3,641)	Significance Tests
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	28.8	23.8	t = -13.87, p < .001
Average Annual Credits - Passed	24.5	19.9	t = -12.43, p < .001
Average Annual GPA	2.76	2.70	t = -2.29, p < .05
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in math	30.6%	25.2%	*Chi-square* = 35.20, p < .001
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in English	7.0%	6.9%	NS

Enrolled in < 12 credits	20.9%	31.7%	
Enrolled in 12 or more credits	79.1%	68.3%	*Chi-square* = 150.91, $p < .001$
Fall to Spring retention	38.7%	30.5%	*Chi-square* = 70.46, $p < .001$
Completion	33.0%	29.6%	*Chi-square* = 13.31, $p < .001$
Data Element	**2015-2016**		
	Vet Corp (n=7,468)	Non-Vet Corps (n=2,821)	Significance Tests
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	29.4	24.1	$t = -13.10$, $p < .001$
Average Annual Credits - Passed	24.7	19.8	$t = -12.01$, $p < .001$
Average Annual GPA	2.73	2.66	$t = -2.75$, $p < .01$
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in math	28.7%	23.4%	*Chi-square* = 29.78, $p < .001$
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in English	5.8%	5.4%	NS
Enrolled in < 12 credits	19.7%	29.2%	
Enrolled in 12 or more credits	80.3%	70.8%	*Chi-square* = 106.57, $p < .001$
Fall to Spring retention	38.8%	31.6%	*Chi-square* = 45.40, $p < .001$
Completion	26.7%	19.5%	*Chi-square* = 56.70, $p < .001$
Data Element	**2016-2017**		
	Vet Corp (n=7,005)	Non-Vet Corps (n=3,327)	Significance Tests
Average Annual Credits - Attempted	29.7	23.9	$t = -15.31$, $p < .001$
Average Annual Credits - Passed	22.7	19.6	$t = -7.98$, $p < .001$
Average Annual GPA	2.73	2.63	$t = -3.81$, $p < .001$
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in math	27.5%	25.9%	NS
Enrolled in pre-college coursework in English	5.5%	5.2%	NS
Enrolled in < 12 credits	18.0%	32.2%	
Enrolled in 12 or more credits	82.0%	67.7%	*Chi-square* = 265.17, $p < .001$
Fall to Spring retention	38.4%	32.4%	*Chi-square* = 34.69, $p < .001$
Completion	17.6%	11.7%	*Chi-square* = 59.27, $p < .001$

HOW DO THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF VETERANS SERVED BY VET CORPS MEMBERS COMPARE TO NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF VETERANS?

It is difficult to compare the results for the WDVA Vet Corps Program with national and state data since few studies have investigated these postsecondary outcome variables for student veterans in particular, and often do not disaggregate results by institution type. When comparison data was not available for student veterans exclusively, evaluators examined data for all students. This allows the Vet Corps data to be interpreted in light of general national or state trends.

Regarding enrollment in pre-college coursework, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that about 68% of students who started at public 2-year institutions took at least one remedial course during their postsecondary enrollment between 2003 and 2009. Math remediation was more common than English/reading remediation: 59% of students entering public 2-year institutions took a remedial math course, whereas enrollment rates in remedial English/reading courses was 28%. These percentages are significantly higher than the rates for student veterans served by Vet Corps Members; however, this comparison should be interpreted cautiously since the NCES study was based on student enrollments between 2003 and 2009 and included all students, not just veterans. The 2014 remediation rates for Washington State high school students entering public 2-year and 4-year colleges within the state was 29% in 2014 for math and 14% for English. Compared to this, the math remediation rate for veterans served by Vet Corps Members was higher, while the English remediation rate was similar or lower. These comparisons should be interpreted cautiously as the state numbers include students enrolling in 4-year institutions as well, who are less likely to take a remedial course, and these rates are not specific to veterans.

Few studies have investigated the GPA of student veterans. Lemos and Lumandue (2013) found the average GPA for their sample of veterans was 3.43, while another study at the University of California with a larger student veteran sample size found the average GPA of a sample of student veterans to be lower at 3.03 (Durdella & Kim, 2012). These numbers are higher than the average GPAs found for veterans served by Vet Corps Members.

The Million Records Project (MRP) published in 2014 is one of the most comprehensive research studies on student veterans and examines veteran achievement in higher education. A majority of the student veteran sample investigated in this study earned a postsecondary degree or certificate, for a postsecondary completion rate of 51.7%. This completion rate is much higher than the completion rate for veterans served by a Vet Corps Member; however, the MRP does not disaggregate the completion rate based on institution type and it is possible the completion rate for associate degrees is lower. Additionally, the MRP study found that veterans may require “slightly more time to complete a degree than the traditional time-to-completion expectations established by the U.S. Department of Education” (p. 54). Indeed, the average time-to-completion for the sample used in the study was 5.1 years for an associate-level degree. Since student identification numbers

were not consistently accurate in the America Learns database, we were not able to track students for the longer period of time that it might take to capture more accurate completion rates. With improvements in the completeness and accuracy of Vet Corps data collection, this type of analysis could be completed in the future.

EQ #9: What contextual factors impact program implementation and program outcomes?

Several contextual factors support and hinder implementation and outcomes of the Vet Corps Program. These factors include:

- Characteristics of the Vet Corps Member
- Expectations for and supervision of the Vet Corps Member
- Site-level leadership
- Role of the Site Coordinator within the institution
- Location on campus and physical space
- Existing site-based departments and programs that serve student veterans
- Vet Corps Member retention
- Annual Vet Corps implementation calendar
- Communication within the Vet Corps Program
- Data collection

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Characteristics of the Vet Corps Member. The Vet Corps Member is critical to successful implementation of the Vet Corps Program. The Vet Corps Member acts as a liaison to the institution or training program, to the WDVA, and to student veterans. One person said, "Having a good person in the position is probably the overriding factor. We need someone who will follow the college rules, make connections with everyone, and get the resources that we need." While characteristics of strong Vet Corps Members varied, people noted it is helpful to have individuals who have successfully transitioned from active service, who have navigated the college/university system, who have addressed any behavioral and mental health issues, and who have a strong sense of service. Site Supervisors also commented on the importance of initiative and leadership.

Expectations for and supervision of the Vet Corps Member. Vet Corps Members are hired by and responsible to the WDVA, and report to the Program Director and Regional Coordinators. However, the Vet Corps Member is also accountable to the Site Supervisor. Some Vet Corps Members described different sets of expectations among the people who supervise them and the resulting challenges. There were fewer challenges where the Site Supervisor and Regional Coordinator communicated regularly or where one role took the lead in supervising the Vet Corps Member. Participants believed open communication,

shared expectations of the Vet Corps Member, and regular check-ins among the various roles, including the Program Director and Regional Coordinator, would be helpful.

Site-level leadership. It is also critical to have strong, supportive leadership at the site. One person shared, "Leadership at a college campus, if they don't value or understand the program, you will not have a successful program." College leadership can provide training and support to the Vet Corps Member, which contributes to success, and they can help increase visibility of the Vet Corps Member by creating opportunities for the Vet Corps Member to provide training or share information at campus events. One person reflected,

> "Site Supervisors. It is huge, and I know Vet Corps Members that have Site Supervisors, who don't want them there. It affects how effective they can be. They don't get connected to students, they don't get invited to events to learn about community resources."

Role of the Site Supervisor within the institution. The role of the Site Supervisor within the institution plays a significant role in the development and effectiveness of the Vet Corps Members' position. It influences the amount of time they have to mentor the Vet Corps Member and to facilitate connections on campus. It also influences the impact the program can have with student veterans and institutional systems. Where they exist in the hierarchy of the system, in relation to other departments and programs, and in authority for making decisions will affect the degree of outreach and visibility the Vet Corps Program has as well as access to resources. Some interviewees suggested that when the Site Supervisor is a visible and key point person for veteran affairs on campus, those sites may be better able to maximize the impact of the Vet Corps Program.

Location on campus and physical space. Many people noted the importance of the location and type of space allocated to the Vet Corps Program. While some have access to spaces that effectively serve the needs of the program, others operate in marginal conditions, such as sharing large, open space with unrelated programs. These conditions are not conducive to confidential conversations, to tutoring, or to creating a sense of community. In addition, proximity to other services or personnel needed by veterans, such as the certifying official, enhances collaboration and coordination amongst all persons serving the veterans. To be effective, the Vet Corps Member needs to have access to a centrally-located space and to space for private conversations, as well as a computer, a desk, and telephone. A Site Supervisor said,

> We need a professional space and environment for the [Vet Corps Member]. [Vet Corps Member] has a professional place to talk and work with someone. We have created a professional atmosphere that brings legitimacy to the position. She has a computer, business cards, phone. That is huge, and it makes a good first impression. That builds credibility and trust.

Existing site-based departments and programs that serve student veterans. Campuses with existing Veteran's Resource Centers or other programs that serve student veterans provide an advantage. Vet Corps Members can tap into those populations, develop the critical peer-to-peer relationships, and leverage the resources those programs provide.

Vet Corps Member retention. Retention of Vet Corps Members is critical to program effectiveness and continuity. When there are high turnover rates, the infrastructure of the programs and referral networks at the site level are always being redeveloped. Vet Corps Members hired as replacements will likely have missed the initial training that provides foundational information and prepares them to assume their responsibilities. Positions vacated after a certain date cannot be replaced because the incoming Vet Corps Member will not be able to meet the service hours requirement. According to interviewees, Vet Corps Members leave primarily for two reasons: they have either received an offer of fulltime employment or they have multiple responsibilities they can no longer juggle, such as school, family, and supplemental employment due to the low pay rate. In fact, AmeriCorps requirements were cited as a negative contextual factor because they contribute to high turnover rates of Vet Corps Members. One person shared, "The amount of the stipend is so low. I think if we have more money, our program would succeed in leaps and bounds."

Annual Vet Corps implementation calendar. While colleges, universities, and many training programs have a year-round schedule, Vet Corps Members serve a 10-month term. Site-based personnel noted that, during the summer, they are not able to offer student veterans services they may need.

Communication within the Vet Corps Program. Several people identified communication as a positive and negative contextual factor. The structure of the Vet Corps Program, with multiple levels of personnel and many sites, necessitates strong communication. Most communication from the WDVA occurs by email, and thus is impacted by individuals' use of email. Vet Corps Members are provided Vet Corps email accounts. However, Regional Coordinators are independent contractors and have their own email accounts, and not all use them consistently.

Data collection. Data collection has been a significant challenge. The quality of the data in the America Learns database prior to the 2015-16 school year was not high enough to allow for accurate SBCTC matching in 2013-14 and 2014-15. The 2015-2016 data was better, but likely still not enough for high quality matching. This has substantially limited the analyses that could be conducted. While the Program Director has reinforced to Vet Corps Members and Regional Coordinators the need for consistent data collection, this has continued to be a struggle in 2016-17. One person shared, "A lot of the Navigators [Vet Corps Members] and Coordinators have their mindset on the peer mentorship, and retaining data is tough. They don't understand the importance of getting the data." This is an area that will need continued support.

EQ #10: What are the emerging best practices?

The Vet Corps Program is designed around AmeriCorps requirements. Several best practices are emerging, and it is anticipated that, with continued development, these practices will deepen over time and continue to strengthen the program. These practices include:

- Using flexible program implementation
- Cultivating Site Supervisor roles
- Addressing the breadth and knowledge Vet Corps Members need
- Developing a Vet Corps Member cohort
- Using data to monitor program implementation
- Using feedback from training participants

BEST PRACTICES

Using flexible program implementation. The WDVA seeks to support student veterans across Washington State in a variety of colleges, universities, and training programs. The sites differ in many ways, including size, percentage of veterans enrolled, the type of education or training provided, institutional mission and values, among many other factors. The program is designed to be implemented in a variety of contexts, enabling more institutions, and therefore more student veterans, to benefit.

Cultivating Site Supervisor roles. At sites in which the Site Supervisor plays an active role in working with students and is well-connected with other departments, their role is pivotal. They can facilitate relationships between the Vet Corps Member and other departments, student organizations, faculty members, and administrators. This enhances the outreach efforts of the Vet Corps Member.

Addressing the breadth of skills and knowledge Vet Corps Members need. The breadth of skills and knowledge required for Vet Corps Members to be effective and confident is quite broad. They include but are not limited to: awareness of psychosocial issues and risks; peer mentoring skills; expertise in veterans' benefits and institutional processes; capacity to develop professional relationships with community leaders, campus administrators, faculty, and students; and capacity for technical data entry. Several Site Supervisors commented on the fact that they rely heavily on Vet Corps Members for technical information about veterans' benefits and for resources to serve student veterans. Program leaders are seeking to support this wide range of needs through training and supervision.

Developing a Vet Corps Member cohort. Vet Corps Members do not work in isolation, but most are the only person on their campus in this position. They spoke of the need to

develop their cohort for peer support and to share knowledge and resources. Program leaders are taking steps to cultivate this sense of a cohort.

Using data to monitor program implementation. The WDVA, as part of their AmeriCorps grant, is gathering implementation data in America Learns. These data will help the program monitor progress over time and document implementation. This practice is in the early stages, as there are inconsistencies across sites in data collection. However, as the program continues and data quality improves, this practice of data collection is key for monitoring implementation and impact.

Program leaders are using feedback from training participants. Program leaders collect feedback for the training they provide, share the results of that feedback, and explain how they are responding to that feedback. This helps the trainings to be more responsive to the needs to participants, demonstrates the interest of program leaders in meeting the needs of the participants, and helps build buy-in.

Summary and Recommendations

For 2016-2017, the Vet Corps Program placed 50 veterans, dependents, or spouses in colleges, universities, and other post-secondary education sites to support other veterans, active duty service members, and military-connected individuals in those programs. At the sites, Vet Corps Members provided peer mentoring, direct support, resources, and referrals for a range of issues. This included assisting individuals in connecting to federal, state, and local veterans' benefits. They also provided training and support for site-based faculty and staff members to enhance awareness of student veterans' needs. Vet Corps Members established community partnerships to provide additional supports for the students they served and to obtain opportunities for those students to engage in community service.

Survey results and qualitative data show that Vet Corps Members and Site Supervisors agreed the services provided through the Vet Corps Program, such as focusing on peer-to-peer support, navigating the college and financial aid system, and making referrals for other concerns were important and positively impacted student veterans. They also agreed the Program positively impacted the education and training program systems, particularly when Vet Corps Members had access to staff and faculty and the opportunity to provide them with information. However, some contextual factors impacted the extent to which this could happen.

An analysis of data showed positive outcomes at sites with Vet Corps Members in comparison to sites without a Vet Corps Member. Student veterans at Vet Corps Sites had a statistically significant higher number of credits attempted and passed, were more likely to take 12 or more credits, and had higher fall to spring retention rates and higher completion rates. Additionally, veterans at sites with a Vet Corps Member also had higher GPAs than

veterans at Non-Vet Corps Member sites, but the difference between the two groups was small. In addition, there was a higher percentage of veterans at Vet Corps Sites enrolled in pre-college math courses compared to veterans at Non-Vet Corps Sites. This last finding may be because student veterans are earlier in their education career or that they are simply more likely to enroll in math or English. This is not necessarily a reflection of greater need for remediation.

Similar results were found between veterans served by Vet Corps Members to veterans attending the same colleges but not served by Vet Corps Members. These results should be interpreted more cautiously because only a limited number of student veterans could be identified in the database. Finally, analyses of the relationships of peer mentoring, referral services, and number of contacts to outcomes showed mixed results. These results should be interpreted cautiously, as well, due to poor data quality.

Based upon these findings, we offer the following recommendations:

Improve data quality. Results from the evaluation showed positive outcomes and impact from the Vet Corps Program. However, poor data quality limited the extent to which all evaluation questions could be addressed adequately. The issues included omitting the student identification numbers necessary to match student veterans being served with outcomes data, not including the services provided, and inaccurately inputting the time spent with student veterans and the time spent with service projects. The America Learns system is robust and should be used with fidelity to determine full impact of the Vet Corps Program. While the Program Director has shared expectations to use the system and provided training in the 2016-2017 year, it is imperative that this become even more of a focus in the next year. We recommend the Program Director share results from this report with Regional Coordinators and Vet Corps Members to show the positive outcomes as well as the limitations that occurred because of problems with data collection. We also recommend Vet Corps Members receive hands-on training on how to use the system, and follow-up should occur by the Regional Coordinator to ensure data input is correct. To supplement this work, there should be clear guidelines on what should be included in the system and definitions for each of the variables, such as whether Vet Corps Members should input minutes or hours. With continued expectations for quality data and direct support, data quality should improve.

Increase training opportunities. During interviews and focus groups, Vet Corps Members and Regional Coordinators commented that training has improved each year. On the survey, 84% rated the beginning of year training as moderately or very useful and 77% rated the mid-year training as moderately or very useful. In addition to learning information relative to their positions, participants also had the ability to network with others.

Although these results are positive, Vet Corps Members and Regional Coordinators indicated that the use of technology may enhance training. At the minimum, they suggested that guidebooks and materials should be available and stored electronically. However,

Program Leaders may also consider offering training through webinars on a more frequent basis. The webinar could be an hour or two around a specific focused need, pertinent to the Vet Corps Member or the Regional Coordinator position. This will be less costly than bringing together all members for larger trainings during the school year and would focus on immediate needs.

Furthermore, the mid-year training was somewhat problematic for Vet Corps Members on the eastside of the state because of travel and timing. In addition, part of the focus was information relevant primarily to King County. Because of these issues, Program Leaders might consider hosting two trainings, one for the eastside and one for the westside, specific to the needs for that area. Further, one of the colleges might consider hosting the visit to limit costs to the program, and this will allow Vet Corps Members to see how other sites are set up and to learn from each other.

Finally, Site Supervisors could rarely attend trainings because of timing. However, many shared that they would like to learn more about their role in supporting the Vet Corps Member and to receive more communication from the Program Director and Regional Coordinator. Providing training through webinars may be a way to reach more Site Supervisors, to focus on critical information they need, and to provide a mechanism in which they can share best practices with other sites. This would also help to improve communication and clarify expectations.

Cultivate role of Site Supervisor. The Site Supervisor plays an active role in working with students, is well connected with other departments, and serves a pivotal role within the Vet Corps Program. They can facilitate relationships between the Vet Corps Member and other departments, student organizations, faculty members, and administrators. Where they exist in the hierarchy of the system, in relation to other departments and programs and in authority for making decisions, will affect the degree of outreach and visibility the Vet Corps Program has as well as access to resources. We recommend that great care is taken in selecting the Site Supervisor.

Further, Site Supervisors mentioned they needed support to understand their role in supervision of Vet Corps Members, and they would appreciate more communication from the Program Director and Regional Coordinator. Many wanted information on the successful practices of Vet Corps Programs, as well as strategies on how to strengthen training to faculties and staffs. To improve in this area, we recommend using technology, such as webinars, to provide greater access to information. This may include highlighting a program that is successful in one of these areas. We also recommend creating a document of minimal expectations for each site and what best practices look like. Finally, because the Program Director cannot provide full support to 50 Site Supervisors, we recommend that the Regional Coordinator meet with or check in with the Site Supervisor on a more frequent basis to provide support.

Improve Regional Coordinator communication. Regional Coordinators are pivotal in the communication that occurs among the different entities of the Vet Corps Program: Vet Corps Members, Site Supervisors, and Program Leaders. They provide technical assistance, guidance, and practical resources to Vet Corp Members. They also help to facilitate communication from Program Leaders. Clear definitions of the Regional Coordinator role, including responsibilities for communication, will enhance Program implementation. There are several areas that may warrant attention. For example, it would be helpful to improve communication among the Regional Coordinator, Site Supervisor, and Vet Corps Member in order to clarify supervisory roles, as well as the expectations and responsibilities of the Vet Corps Member. They can also provide support to the Site Supervisor to strategize ways to strengthen implementation of the Vet Corps Program at each site by helping to share practices across sites. Consistent check-in intervals for the Regional Coordinator with Vet Corps Members, Site Supervisors, and Program Leaders may also be helpful, and it may be useful to create a checklist of the key areas of focus for those contacts.

Sustain the efforts of the Vet Corps Members. AmeriCorps rules and regulations make turnover of the Vet Corps position inevitable. Vet Corps Members noted that there is a loss of information between transitions from one Vet Corps Member to the next, and that multiple sites are duplicating efforts to locate resources. Because of this, it would be helpful to centrally develop a compilation of resources that includes a flow chart of how to address specific issues, such as a student veteran needing emergency resources on short notice. This compilation could include ongoing state services that are likely to exist over time and are applicable to all sites, along with a template for documenting local resources and agencies, which may change over shorter periods of time. This template that documents local resources could be frequently updated and passed down to the next Vet Corps Member.

APPENDIX A: VET CORPS PROGRAMS BY YEAR

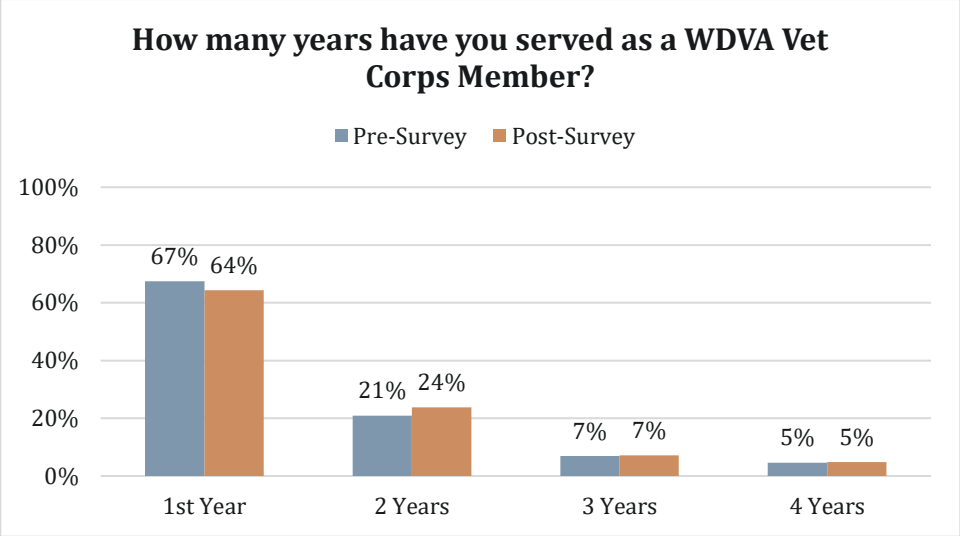
Vet Corps Programs by Year

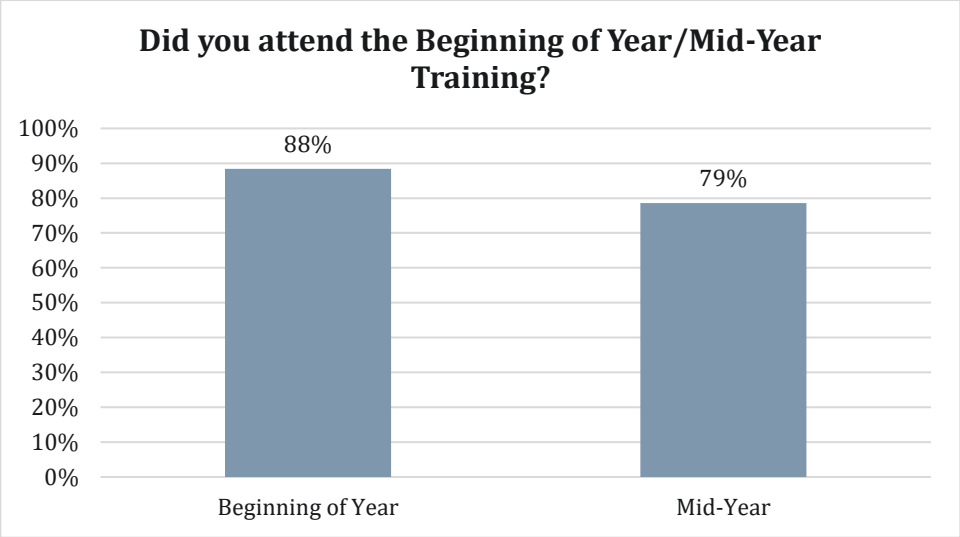
Site	School Year			
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Antioch University	X	X	X	X
Bates Technical College	X	X	X	X
Bellevue College	X	X	X	
Bellingham Technical College	X			
Big Bend College			X	X
Bremerton Work Source	X			
Cascadia Community College	X	X	X	X
Centralia Community College			X	X
Chelan County Veterans Office				X
City University of Seattle (Tacoma)		X	X	X
Clark College	X	X	X	X
Clover Park Technical College	X	X	X	X
Columbia Basin College				
Columbia Basin Veterans Coalition		X	X	X
Divers Institute of Technology				X
Eastern Washington University	X	X	X	X
Edmonds Community College	X	X	X	X
Everest College				X
Green Alliance for Veterans Education (G.A.V.E.)	X	X	X	X
Gonzaga University		X	X	X
Grays Harbor Community College	X	X	X	X
Green River College	X	X	X	X
Growing Veterans	X	X	X	
Highline Community College				X
JBLM-ACAP	X			
JBLM-WWTB	X	X		
Kittitas County Veterans Coalition	X	X	X	
Lake Washington Technical College				X
Lower Columbia College	X	X	X	X
North Seattle Community College	X			
Northwest Wooden Boat School				X
Olympic College	X	X	X	X
Pacific Lutheran University	X	X	X	X
Peninsula College			X	X
Perry Technical Institute	X	X	X	X
Pierce Community College - Puyallup	X	X	X	
Renton Technical College	X	X	X	

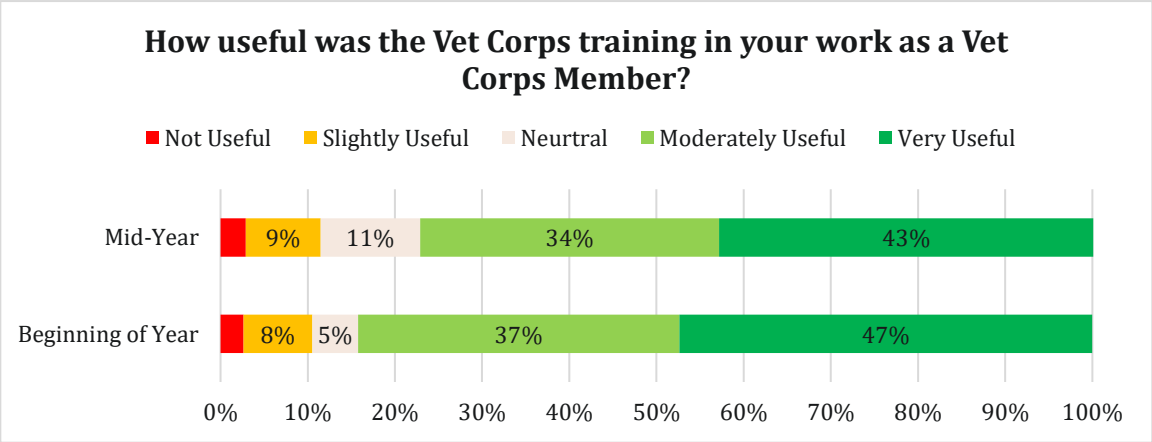
Saint Martins University	X	X	X	X
Sarges Place	X	X	X	X
Seattle Central Community College		X	X	X
Seattle Pacific University		X	X	X
Seattle University	X	X	X	X
Shoreline Community College	X	X	X	X
Skagit Valley Community College	X	X	X	X
South Puget Sound Community College	X	X	X	X
South Seattle Community College				X
Spokane Community College	X	X	X	X
Spokane Community College (Colville)	X	X	X	X
Spokane Falls Community College	X	X	X	X
Tacoma Community College	X	X	X	X
The Art Institute of Seattle	X	X	X	X
The Evergreen State College		X	X	X
University of Washington Bothell		X	X	X
University of Washington Tacoma	X	X	X	X
VARO Office	X			
Veterans Training and Support Center	X	X	X	X
Walla Walla Community College	X	X	X	X
Washington State Military Transition Council		X		
Washington State University Pullman				
Washington State University Tri-Cities	X	X	X	X
Washington State University Vancouver	X	X	X	X
Wenatchee Valley College	X	X	X	
Western Washington University	X	X		
Whatcom College			X	X

APPENDIX B: VET CORPS MEMBER SURVEY

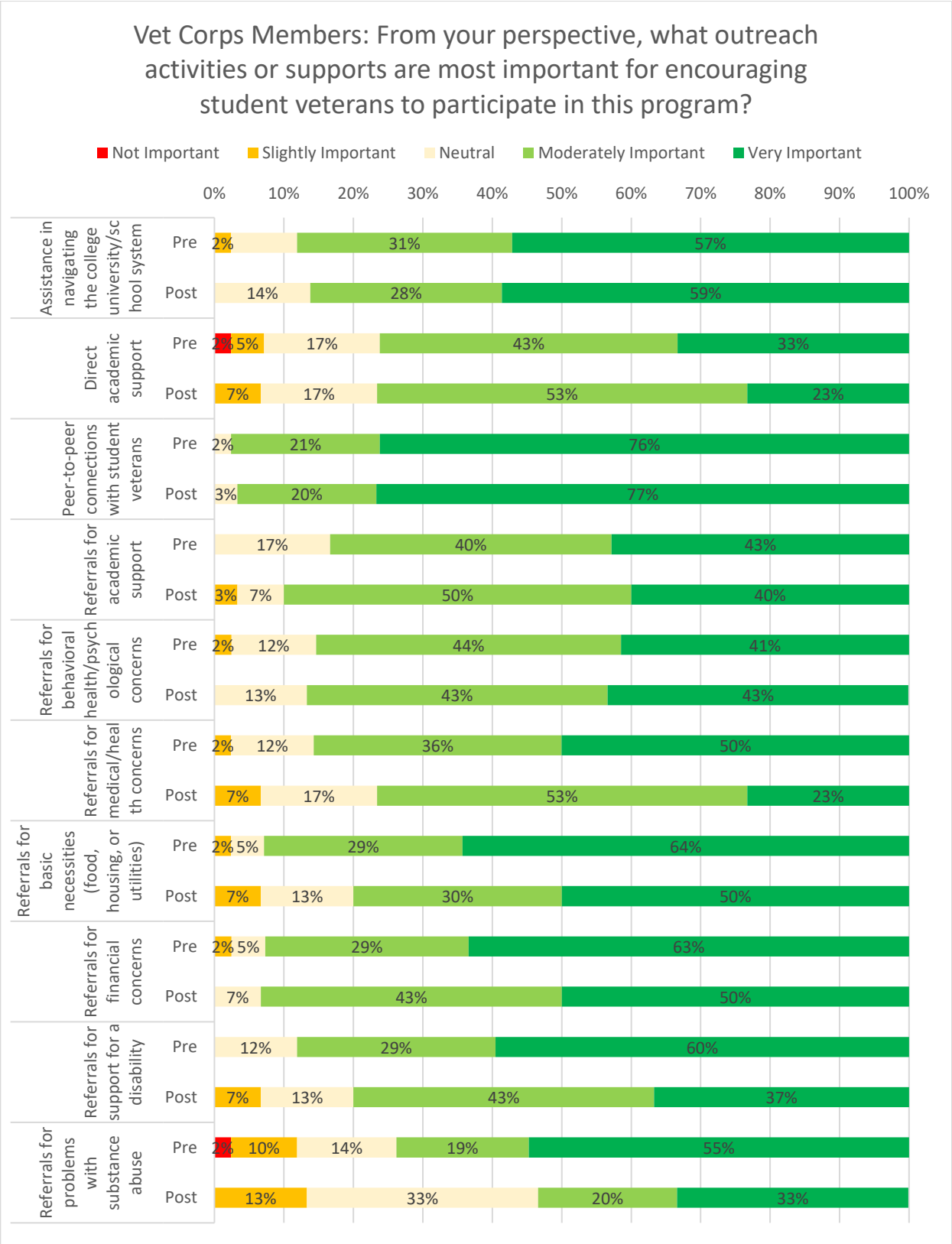
VET CORPS MEMBER INFORMATION AND TRAINING



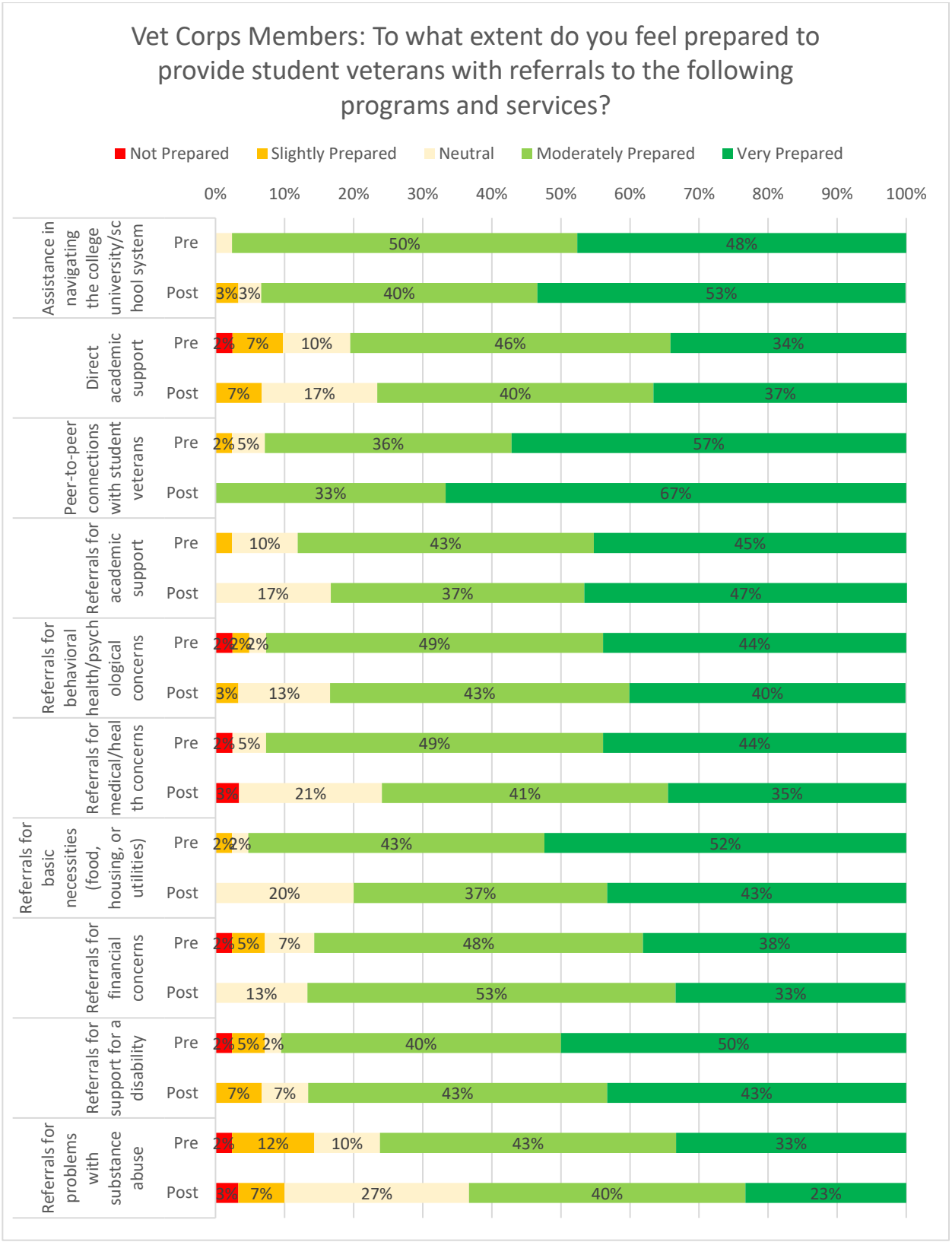




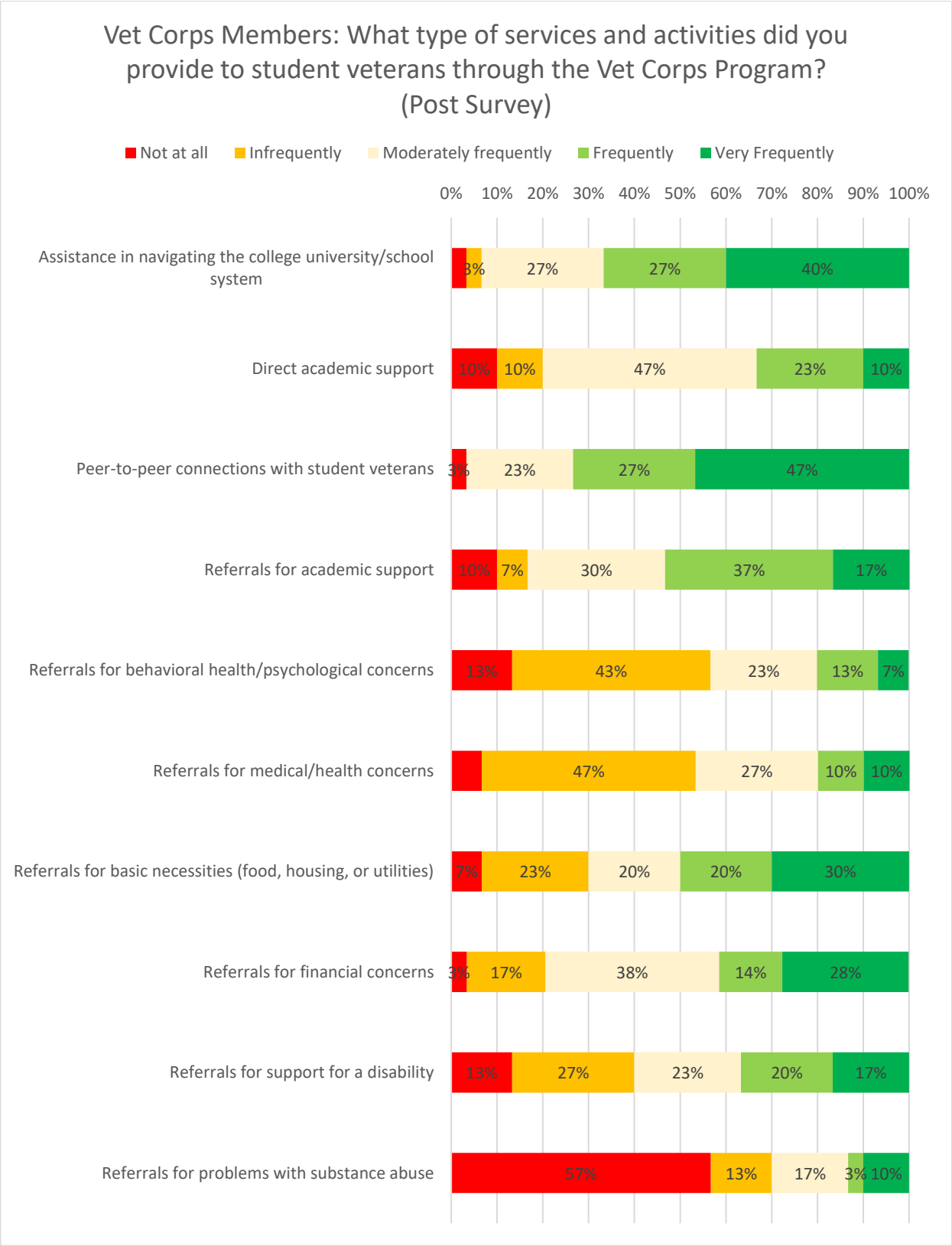
MOST IMPORTANT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORTS



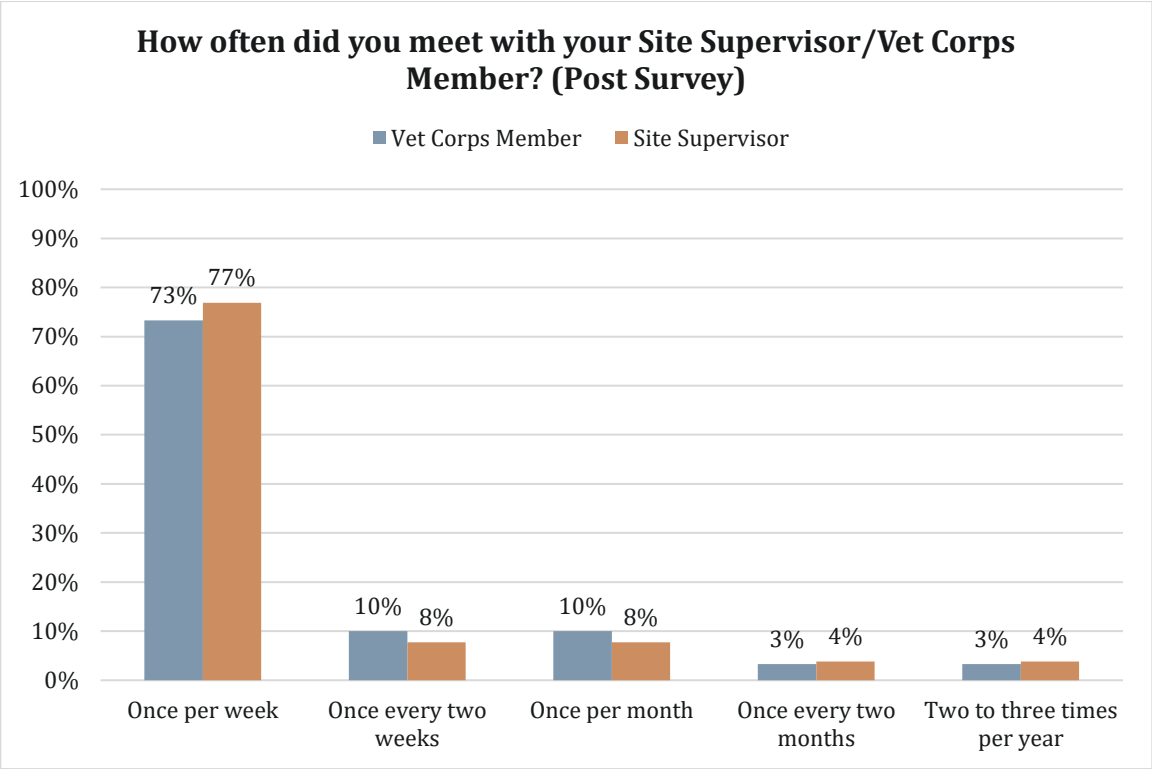
PREPARED TO PROVIDE REFERRALS

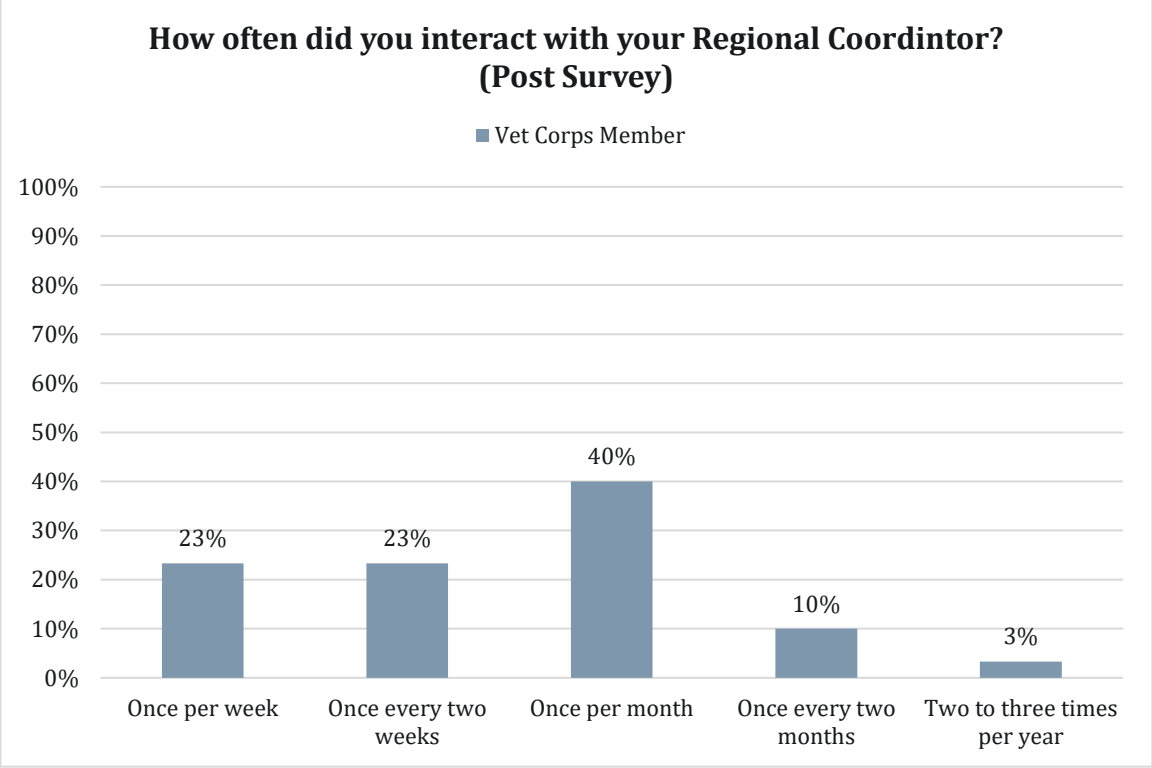


SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES PROVIDED TO STUDENT VETERANS

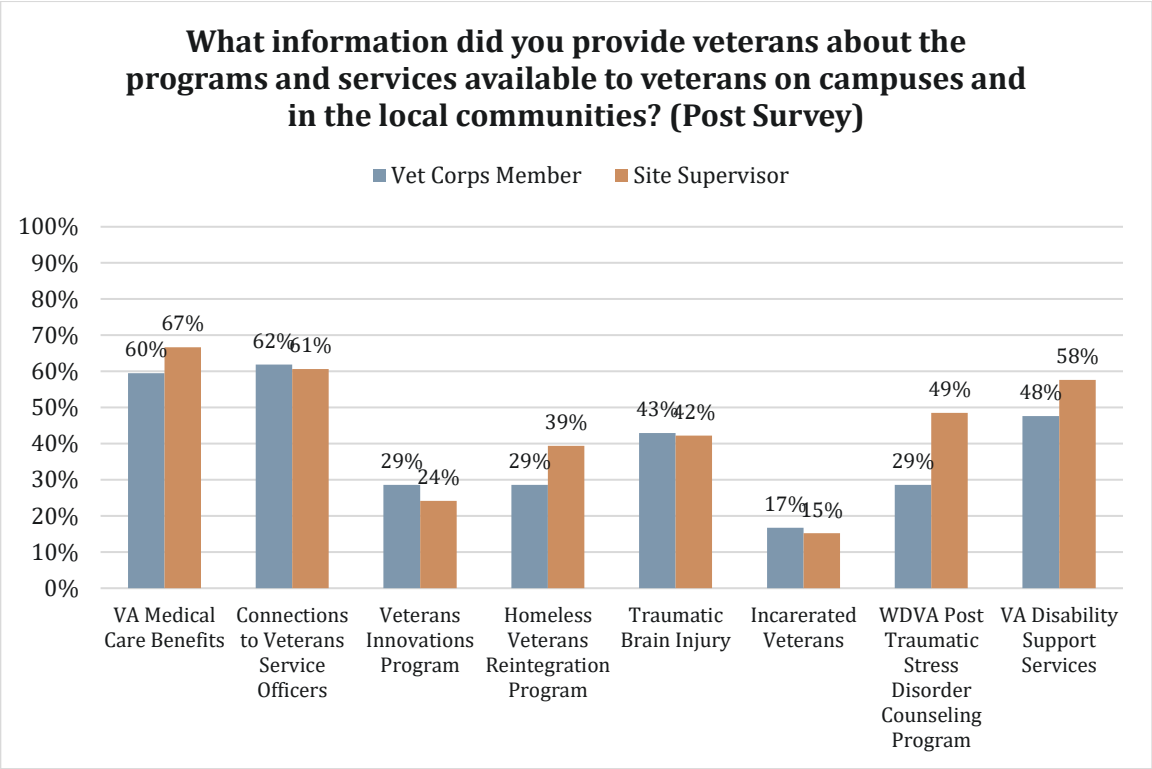


COMMUNICATION

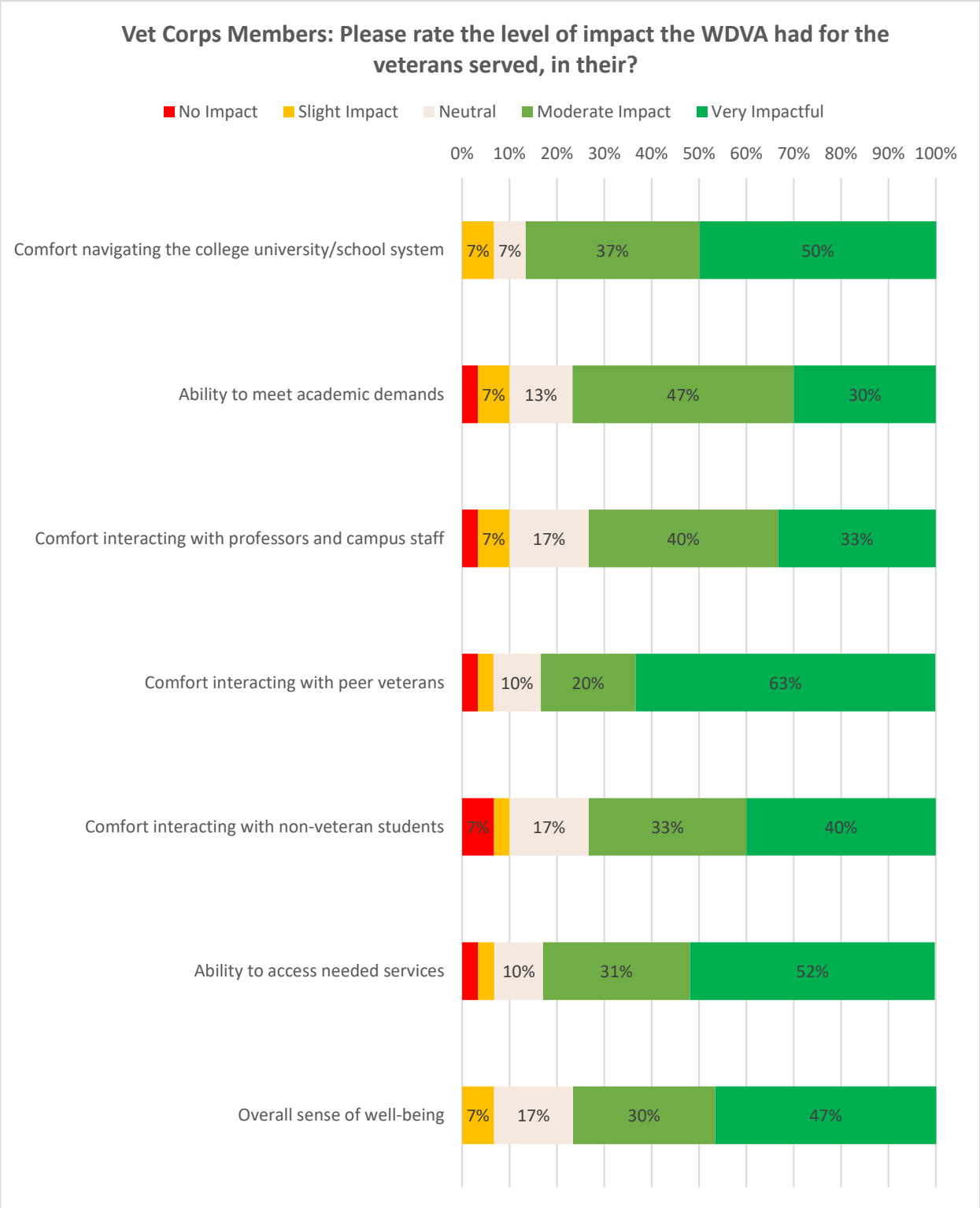




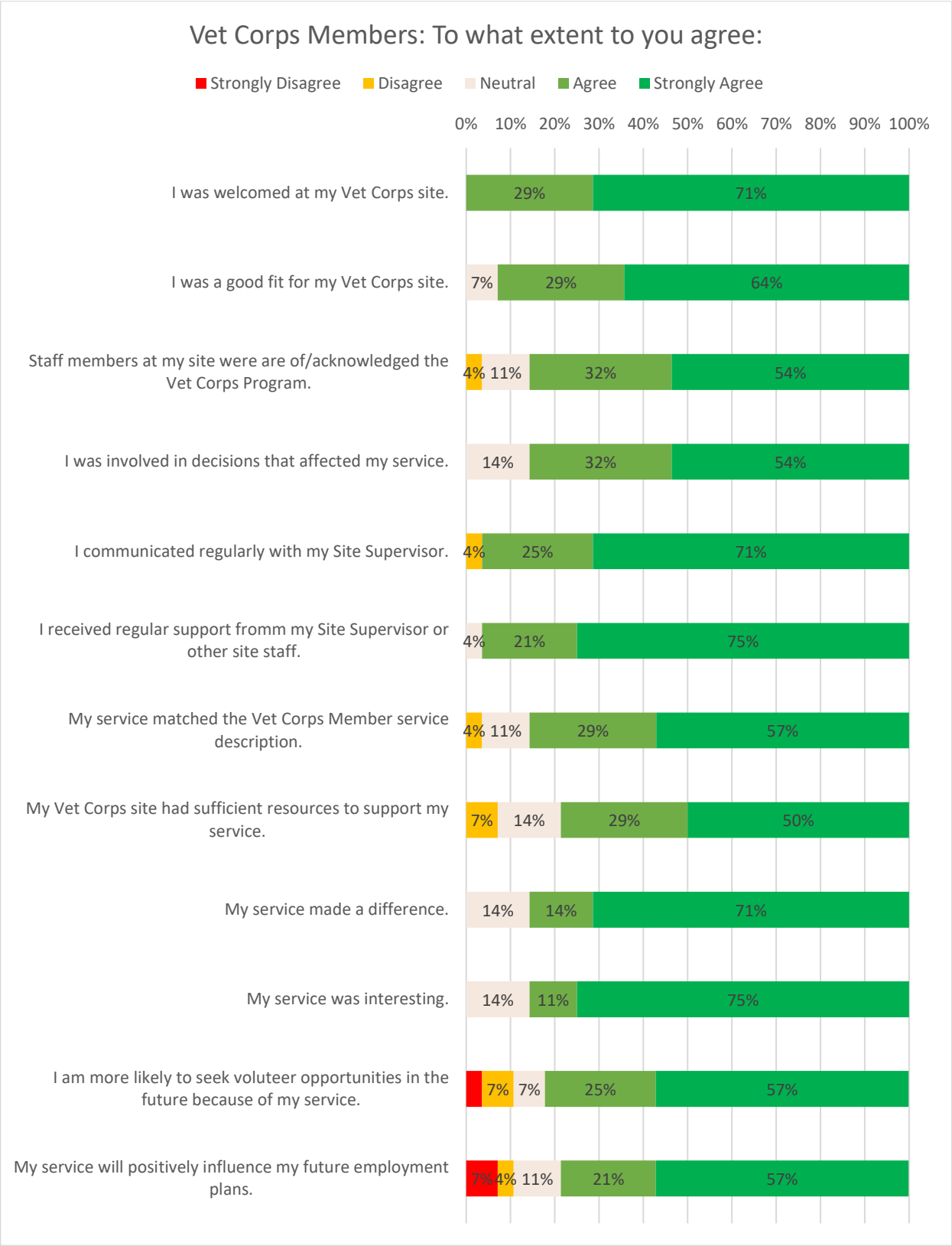
INFORMATION PROVIDED TO VETERANS ON CAMPUS AND IN LOCAL COMMUNITY



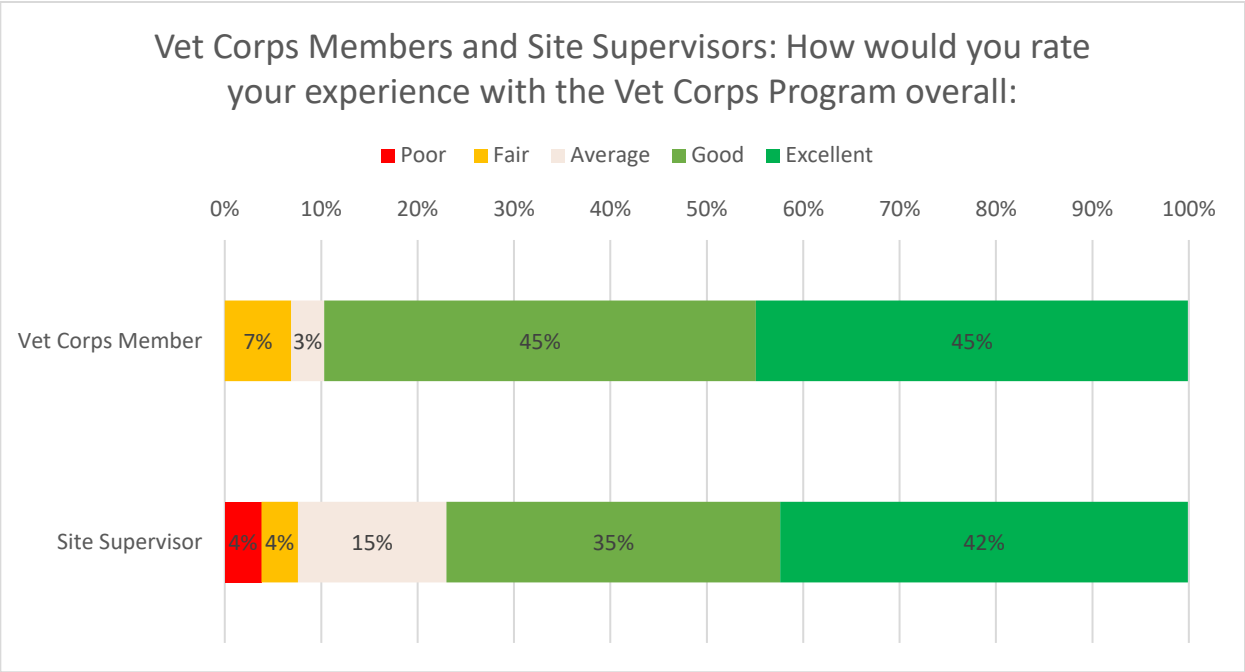
IMPACT ON VETERANS SERVED



IMPACT ON VET CORPS MEMBER

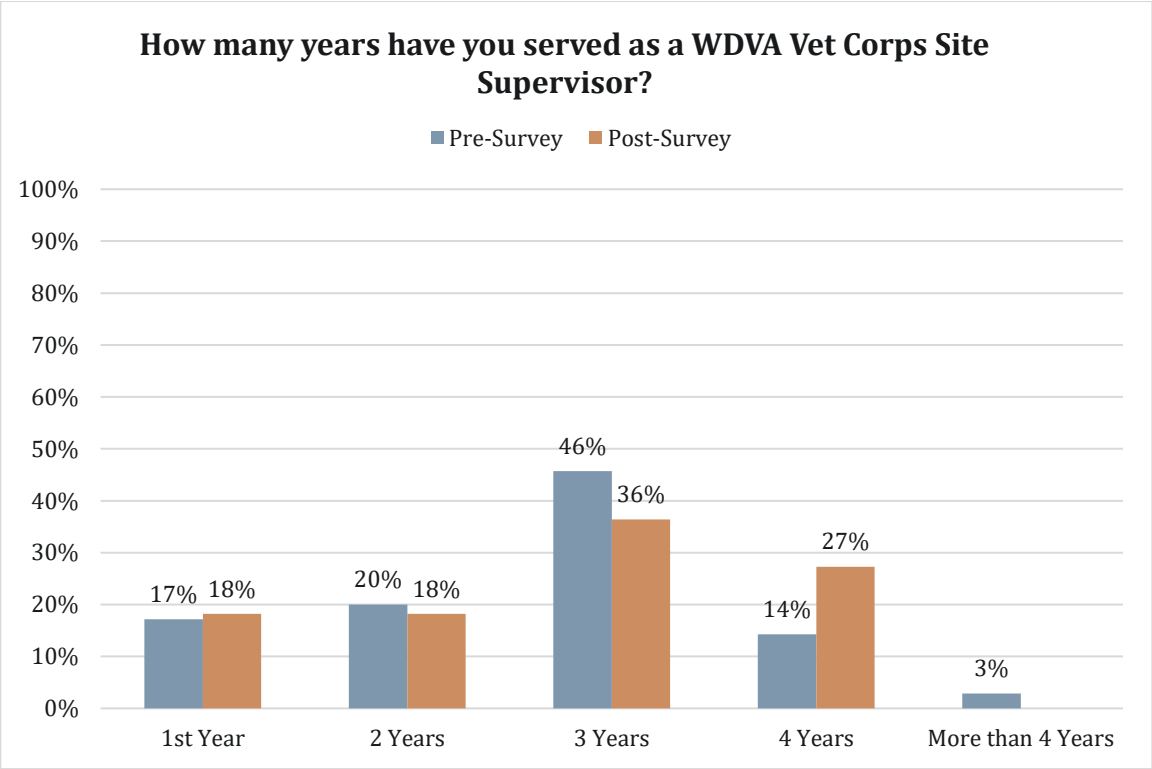


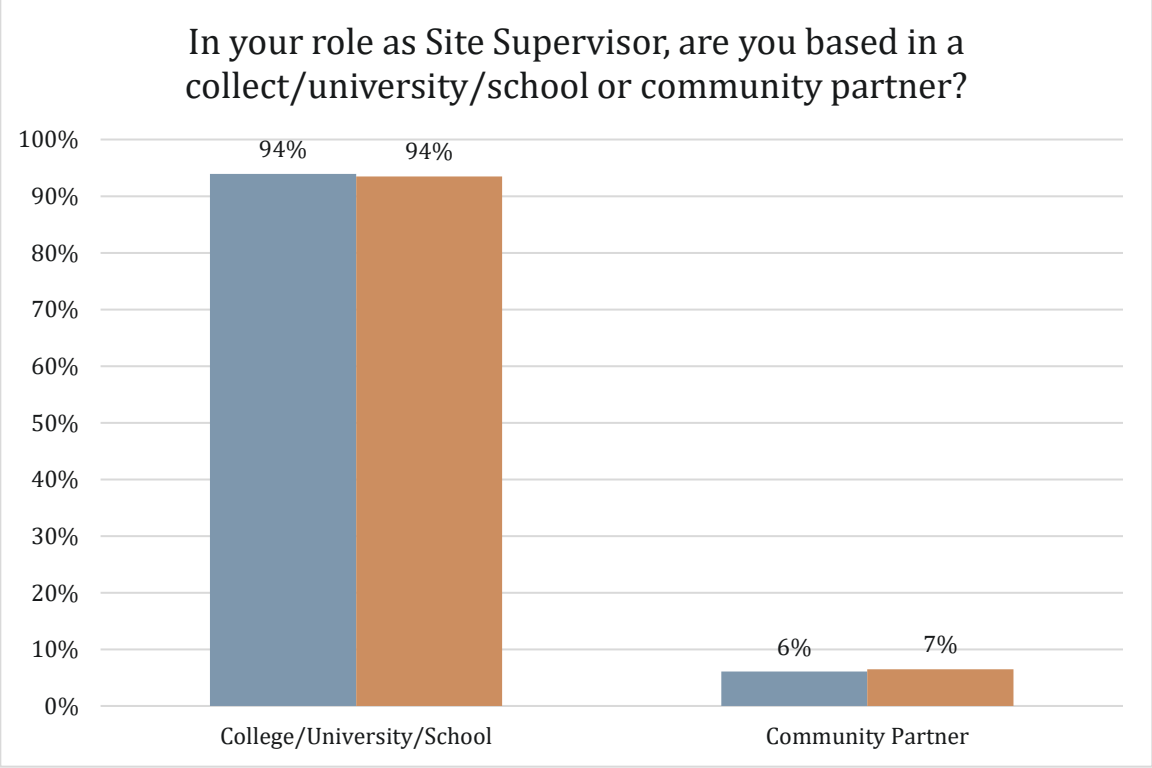
RATINGS OF EXPERIENCE WITH VET CORPS PROGRAM (VET CORPS MEMBERS AND SITE SUPERVISORS)



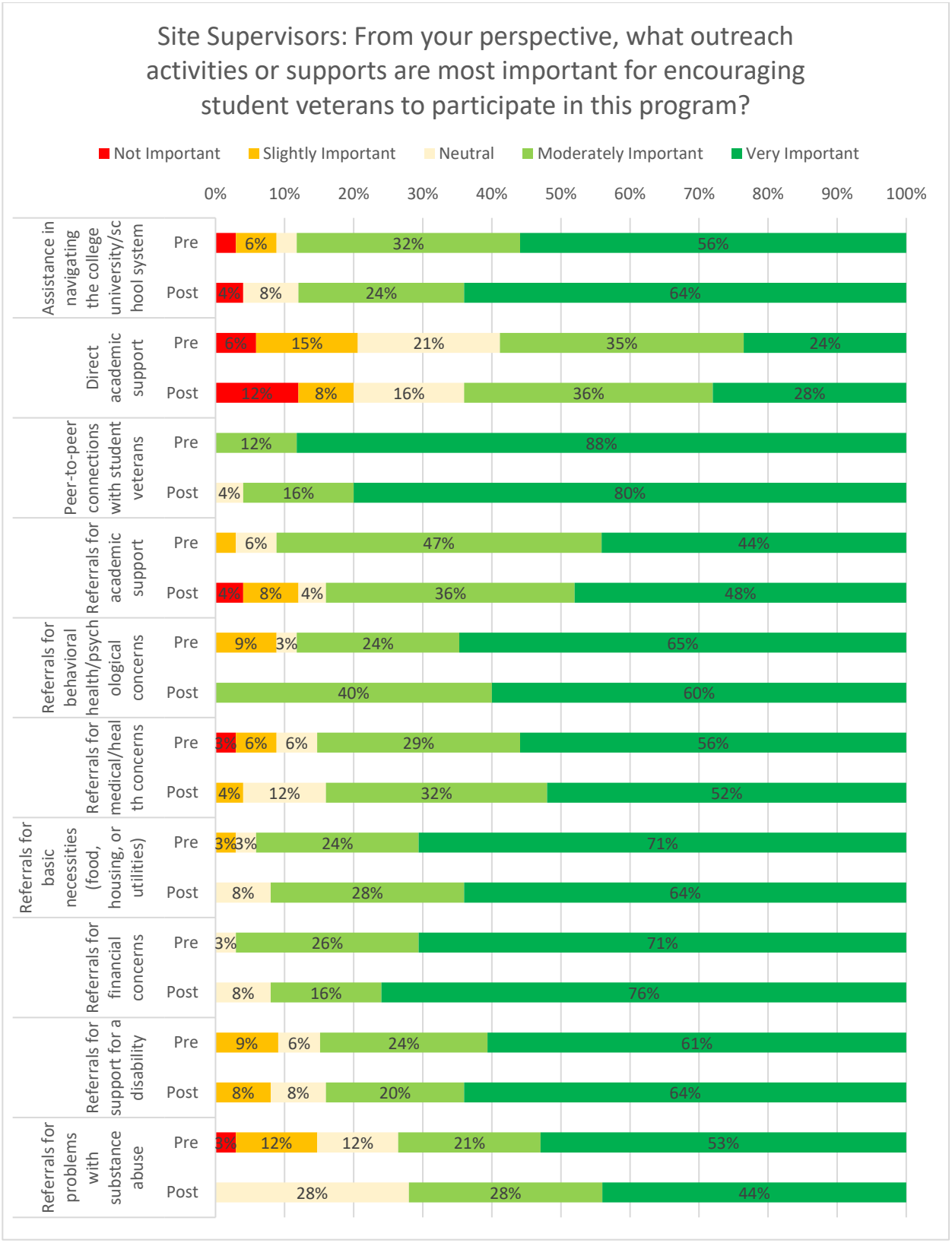
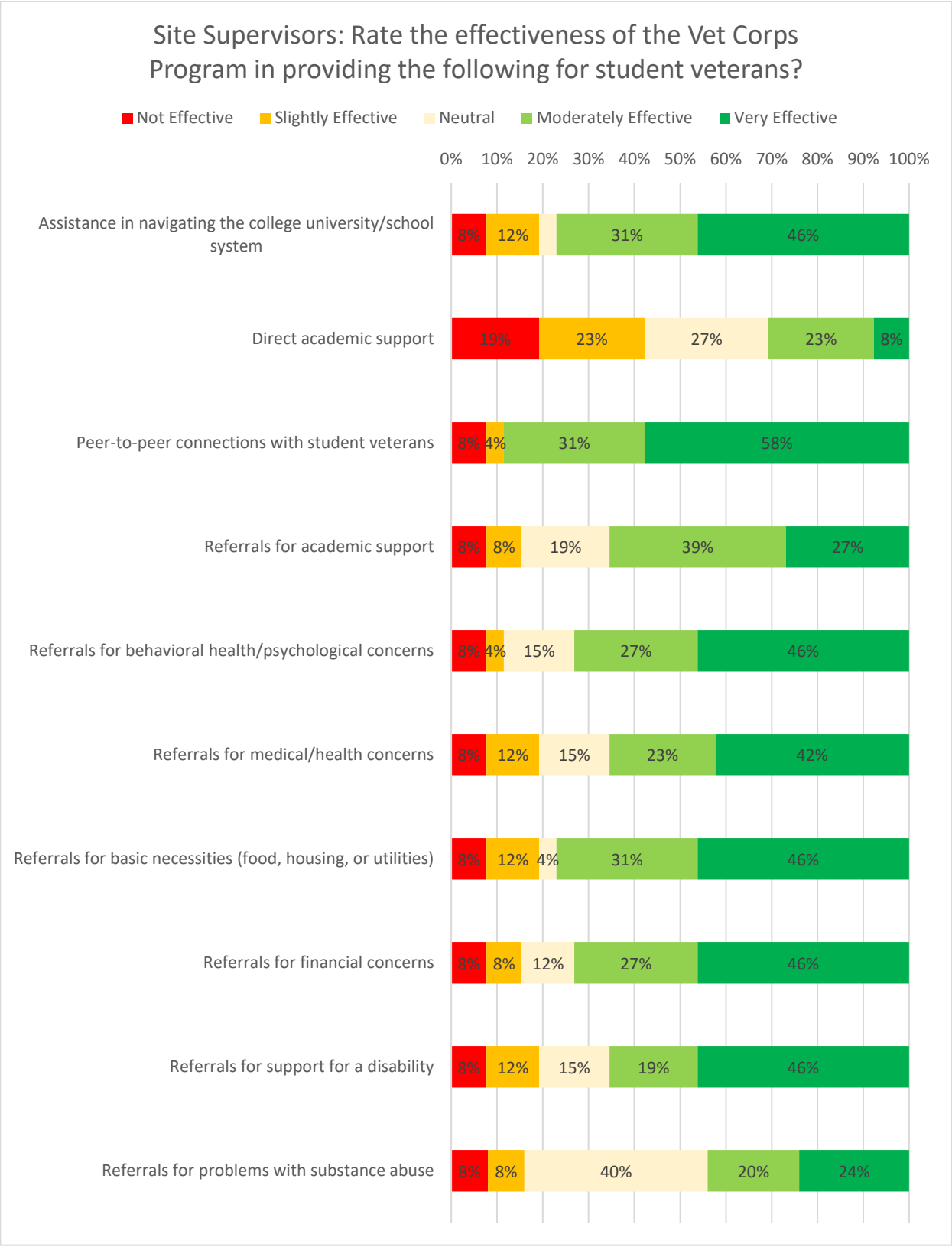
APPENDIX C: SITE SUPERVISOR SURVEY

SITE SUPERVISOR INFORMATION





MOST IMPORTANT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORTS



EFFECTIVENESS OF ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORTS