



Mesa College Veteran's Affairs Survey Report

Fall 2008

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INTRODUCTION

The Veteran's Affairs Office at Mesa College provides counseling and guidance to veterans and assists them in the selection of educational programs which qualify for veteran's benefits. SDCCD and the Mesa College Veteran's Affairs Office strive to continually improve their services to students. In keeping with this standard, in Fall 2008, the Office of Research and Planning developed and administered an online survey to gauge student satisfaction with services received. Findings detail respondents' use of services, identify services that are helpful to respondents, examine student satisfaction with services received, and summarize suggestions for future services and improvement of current services. Charts of results are provided in Appendix A and verbatim responses are grouped by theme and provided in Appendix B.

METHODOLOGY

In Fall 2008, a survey instrument was designed to examine the use of Veteran's Affairs services, helpfulness of services, satisfaction with services received, and suggestions for future improvement of services. The survey instrument contained 2 sets of multiple-choice questions with 9 items in each, 13 questions with a Likert-type rating scale and 5 open-ended questions. The survey was administered to veteran students enrolled at City College, Mesa College, and Miramar College at the beginning of the Fall 2008 term. The survey was administered via email with a link to the online survey. Data were collected for approximately three weeks and one reminder email was sent to students. Of the 2,501 students invited, 357 students completed the survey (a response rate of 14%). Of the total respondents, 133 students (37%) reported they had received services at City College, 138 students (39%) had received services at Mesa College, 80 students (22%) had received services at Miramar College, and 6 students (2%) did not respond. This report highlights the findings of those respondents who received services at Mesa College only.

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FINDINGS

Student Demographics

The majority of respondents who received veteran's services at Mesa College were full-time students (68%).

Of the respondents who received veteran's services at Mesa College, 79% were male and 21% were female. Males were overrepresented while females were underrepresented compared to their collegewide proportions (46% male and 54% female) measured at census in Fall 2008. However, the male-to-female ratio of survey respondents was comparative with students who had been on active military duty at Mesa College (73% male and 27% female).

The largest group of respondents was the 25-29 age group (51%). This was similar to the Mesa College veteran student population (48%). Respondents in the 30-34 age group (18%) were overrepresented compared to the same age group of the Mesa College veteran population (13%), while respondents in the 18-24 age group (17%) were underrepresented compared to the same age group of the Mesa College veteran population (26%). Respondents in the 35 - 39 (7%), 40 - 49 (6%) and 50 or older (1%) age groups were comparative to the same age groups of the Mesa College veteran population (6%, 5%, and 1% respectively),

Among respondents who reported their ethnicity, White students comprised the largest percentage of respondents (58%), followed by Latino students (12%), those students categorized as 'other ethnicities' (9%), African American students (8%), Filipino students (7%), Asian or Pacific Islander students (4%), and American Indian students (2%). All ethnic groups were fairly representative of the Mesa College veteran population (+/- 2%) with the exception of Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander students who were underrepresented by 9% and 4% respectively, and White students and those students categorized as 'other ethnicities' who were overrepresented by 10% and 7% respectively.

Services Obtained by Students

Respondents used the Veteran's Affairs services the most to activate benefits or for tuition assistance (81%). About two-thirds of all respondents (67%) found this service helpful.

Forty-eight percent of respondents used the Veteran's Affairs Office for general information and thirty-seven percent used it for information about the application process or their eligibility status. A smaller proportion found these services helpful (33% and 22% respectively).

Approximately one-quarter of respondents used the Veteran's Affairs Office for academic progress, for funding questions, or for help to withdraw or change classes. Respondents' use of the Veteran's Affairs Office for funding questions (24%) was comparative to the amount of students who found it helpful (21%). However, the ratio between use and helpfulness was more distinct for academic progress (25% used the service and 12% found it helpful) and for help to withdraw or change classes (24% used the service and 10% found it helpful).

A small proportion of respondents used the Veteran's Affairs Office for referrals to other services (4%) or for appeals (2%). A similar percentage of students found these services helpful (7% and 2% respectively).

Student Satisfaction with Services

Respondents were asked to respond to a list of positively-worded statements about satisfaction with Veteran's Affairs services according to a 5-point Likert scale. The majority of respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements. However, this does not provide a clear picture, given that on a 5-point scale, somewhat agree is the mid-point. In this scale agree and strongly agree indicate clear satisfaction with services, somewhat agree indicates moderate satisfaction with services, and disagree and strongly disagree indicate dissatisfaction with services. Thus, the percentage of respondents who were clearly satisfied with services ranged from 46% to 64% across all items, the percentage of those who were somewhat satisfied with services ranged from 17% to 34% across all items, and the percentage of respondents who were dissatisfied with services ranged from 14% to 28% across all items.

Respondents were most satisfied that they had received the correct information and that they had received services in a timely manner (64% each).

About 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the office hours were convenient (63%), that they were confident the department could deliver the services they needed (61%), that the staff who met with them in a one-on-one setting were knowledgeable (60%), that staff took the time to answer their questions (59%).

The greatest dissatisfaction with services tended to focus on staff sentiments toward students requesting help. Over one-quarter of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that staff members seemed to care about their needs (28%). Similarly, over one-quarter of the respondents did not feel comfortable returning to the Veteran's Affairs Office for help (27%).

Overall, over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with services or would recommend the department's services to others (54% and 58%, respectively). About one in five respondents somewhat agreed that they were satisfied with services or would recommend the department's services to others (23% and 21%, respectively) and a comparable number of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with services or would recommend the department's services to others (23% and 20%, respectively).

Student Suggestions for Services

Students provided suggestions for other services they would like to have available to them through written comments. The most common recommendation was for additional counseling and transfer assistance. Students who suggested additional assistance and counseling primarily wanted assistance with the transition back into school, transfer assistance to other institutions, more available academic counseling, or career guidance. Students also desired a more courteous, knowledgeable, and respectful staff to assist them with their educational goals. Also noted was the need for more comprehensive benefits information and aid, improved information systems, and a districtwide Veteran's Affairs Office that would allow simultaneous enrollment at multiple campuses. Those who recommended improved information systems wanted forms and applications to be processed faster, better information on available benefits, and a mechanism developed to track the status of applications and requests.

When asked to recommend changes to improve the services in the Veteran's Affairs Office, the majority of students who chose to respond sought improved customer service. The most frequent suggestions by respondents focused on improving customer service by hiring or training staff and counselors who would be courteous, respectful, considerate, and knowledgeable in the operations of the Veteran's Affairs Office. Additionally, while some respondents had no suggestions and were happy with the services received, other recommendations

included improvement in the process of scheduling appointments, more convenient and accurate office hours, improved access to information, and an increased level of the office's visibility on campus. Respondents also suggested that the office should provide clear information about available benefits, application status, claims, and requests while simultaneously expediting the processes.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments related to the Veteran's Affairs Office and the services provided. A greater number of respondents had comments that focused on dissatisfaction with the services provided by the Veteran's Affairs Office staff (n=14) than comments related to favorable experiences (n=9). Students' comments indicated dissatisfaction with staff members who were rude, ineffectual, and generally unreceptive to their needs. Other comments provided suggestions for a more efficient office that would be inviting to the veterans, improved methods of communicating updates and information related to the office, and better cross-departmental communication.

APPENDIX A. CHARTS

1. Which college did you receive Veteran's services from?

City College		0	0%
Mesa College		138	100%
Miramar College		0	0%
Total		138	100%

2. What is your enrollment status?

Full-time student		94	68%
Part-time student		44	32%
Total		138	100%

3. What is your gender?

Male		109	79%
Female		29	21%
Total		138	100%

4. Which age group are you?

18-24		23	17%
25-29		71	51%
30-34		25	18%
35-39		10	7%
40-49		8	6%
50 or more		1	1%
Total		138	100%

5. Which is your ethnicity?

African American		11	8%
American Indian		3	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander		6	4%
Filipino		9	7%
Latino		16	12%
White		79	58%
Other		12	9%
Total		136	100%

SERVICES PROVIDED

6. Which service(s) did you seek at the Veteran's Affairs Office? (check all that apply)

Academic Progress		32	25%
Activating Benefits/Tuition Assistance		103	81%
Appeals		2	2%
Application Process/Eligibility Status		47	37%
Funding Questions		31	24%
General Information		61	48%
Referral to Other Services		5	4%
Withdrawal/Change of Classes		30	24%
Other (please explain)		3	2%

7. Which services provided by the Veteran's Affairs Office did you find the most helpful? (check all that apply)

Academic Progress		14	12%
Activating Benefits/Tuition Assistance		78	67%
Appeals		2	2%
Application Process/Eligibility Status		26	22%
Funding Questions		24	21%
General Information		39	33%
Referral to Other Services		8	7%
Withdrawal/Change of Classes		12	10%
Other (please explain)		5	4%

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SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES

9. Please rate your level of agreement with each of the statements.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The front counter staff are welcoming.	24 21%	32 27%	40 34%	13 11%	8 7%
The front counter staff are courteous.	23 20%	38 32%	38 32%	11 9%	7 6%
I receive services in a timely manner.	31 26%	44 38%	20 17%	12 10%	10 9%
The staff who met with you one-on-one are knowledgeable.	30 26%	39 34%	28 24%	11 9%	8 7%
I receive correct information.	33 28%	42 36%	24 21%	10 9%	8 7%
Staff members are available to meet one-on-one when need to.	19 17%	35 31%	33 29%	20 18%	6 5%
Staff members seem to care about my needs.	21 18%	33 28%	29 25%	21 18%	12 10%
Staff members take the time to answer all of my questions.	34 29%	35 30%	24 21%	10 9%	13 11%
The office hours are convenient for me.	33 29%	39 34%	26 23%	10 9%	6 5%
I feel comfortable returning to the Veteran's Affairs Office for help.	37 32%	24 21%	23 20%	19 17%	12 10%
I am confident that this department can deliver the Veteran services I need.	35 30%	36 31%	21 18%	12 10%	12 10%
Overall, I am satisfied with services received.	31 26%	33 28%	27 23%	16 14%	10 9%
I would recommend the services that this department provides to other qualified students.	34 29%	34 29%	25 21%	12 10%	12 10%

APPENDIX B. OPEN ENDED RESPONSES

All comments are verbatim and have not been edited except to protect the identity of a specific person or place. For most questions, comments are grouped by theme and themes are ordered by quantity of comments.

Q6) Which service(s) did you seek at the Veteran's Affairs Office?

- GI bill
- I wanted to use services at another sdccd
- Verification of classes

Q7) Which services provided by the Veteran's Affairs Office did you find the most helpful?

- all used
- All were pretty taxing.
- none were "most " helpful.
- NONE!!!
- Nothing this office is horrible

Q8) What other services for Veterans would you like to have available at your college?

Transition Assistance/Counseling

- Employment help
- I would like to see a more interactive program tailored to the needs of the veteran individual. i am a combat veteran and the transition from active duty to student was very difficult. in ecence my organasational and study skills where nonexistent. i would recomend a semester dedicated to improving and making every veteran as efficient as possible. i espect that this step would decrease withdrawals and drops saving the department and the veteran benifits for future use.
- Improved academic advising.
- More assistance in academic planning and time with counselors.
- More counselors, capable of helping VA students create mandatory education plans. The lack of available counselors induces much longer than necessary wait times in the receiving of benefits
- Possibly New Veteran to Student transition class for 1 unit.
- The process of transferring to state college
- Veteran's job connections/appreticeship programs for veterans

Courteous/Knowledgeable/Respectful Staff

- A Vet rep that could answer questions about other benefits.
- Because of the poor customer service that I received both times during my visit to the office, there are no additional services that I wish to parlay onto anyone else.
- Friendly knowlegable staff.
- how about "fast" service from personnel who actually understand the processes
- I would like to see this office actually do something, period. All I have experienced at this site is employees telling veterans they can't help and to go somewhere else.
- The first step would be a courteous staff

Improved Information Systems

- don't have the ed plans on paper. Keep them on electronic databases. Thats all can think of.
- I would like for the services at MC to be provided in a timely manner. Accounts are never up far enough before the semester and are very rarely (if ever) done before the semester starts. And when asked about it I am always given a brush off type of answer and little respect.
- more information regarding technical aspects of the gi bill
- more visibility and access to information on va education programs.
- The initial enrollment verification could be done online, also it would be great if they tracked the changes to your schedule automatically. Having to remember to go into the office and fill out forms everytime you change a class is very 20th century. This could all be automated, so that it would only require a periodic review by the staff. Thanks

Discounts/Aid

- Dental
- Discounted Parking, Discounted Health Care
- in state tutition
- The ability to transfer my benefits to my spouse

Benefits Information

- I wish they offered a better orientation. I, like many others, have made decisions that kept us from making the most of our G.I. Bill. Right now you learn how system works as you go, not right.
- Initial information for the VA programs and the colleges procedures, easier ability to get counseling appt., ability to start routing paperwork prior to paying tuition fees

Scholarship/Financial Aid Assistance

- A scholarship for veterans funded by Mesa college and it's alumni.
- Financial Aid Benefits

Other

- I think it is rediculous that the school encourages students to use all three campuses, and then makes it very difficult to use their VA....having to re-submit at each school.
- the inital activation of my benefits was a nightmare. it seemed very disorganized and a lot of busy work. of course i cannot see what goes on in their offices when im not there, but two people in know have had their records lost, information does not carry over well from one dept to the next and i had to go through 2 indoc processes, after going through TAP in the military. but, after hgaving worked for the gov't for the last 6 years, is pretty standard with any gov't institution.
- The VA offices at all 3 colleges within the district should be affiliated. I shouldn't be locked into a school just because of the office I report to. Sometimes classes that are needed are only available at one school and not another. This is just an extra bureaucracy when the VA office tells me I have to redo all my paperwork including my Ed plan when it was already done at another school within the district

Q10) What changes could we make to improve the services in our Veteran's Affairs Office?

Improve Customer Service

- Assist students as counselor as well and make sure they understand the academic process, schedule, course study.
- Better service.
- Friendly,inviting front desk staff. Better communication with main Vet office.
- Customer service (attitude towards students) needs a lot of work.

- Get rid of the front office personnel with poor attitudes who only refer you to color-coded printed pamphlets instead of taking a little time to help you with your inquiry/visit.
- Give the employees there some friggin' air conditioning!!! There's one worker, she may a student herself, I'm not sure, never smiles, never acts like she is pleased to help, just as emotional as a robot...was never sure if she was a happy person or just a **** who was tolerating me.
- I feel like the people their should feel privileged to serve those who have served our country, instead i feel like I am a big inconvenience every time I walk into the office. Being polite is essential. the most recent time I was there I dealt with a resonable person, whom I had never seen before, besides him all the staff I have encountered have been not friendly and not helpful.
- I felt like I was interrupting them when I came in to ask a question. They helped me but I didn't feel welcome.
- I understand the office is busy at the beginning of each semester but there needs to be more delegation of work to others. I have never been able to get my books before my classes start. I think a 72 working hour turn around is unfair to the veteran. I think they need more temp staff to help process paperwork during these times or more delegation of work to help relieve bottlenecks in the process.
- Improved academic advising. I've received incorrect information on several occasions that might have easily led to very costly errors.
- Maybe fine tune the customer service skills. Sometimes it seems that the customer is more of a hinderance.
- More timely handling of accounts and paperwork. More friendly staff (other than the counter staff). More respect from the staff (other than the counter staff).
- One time I had 12 units and when I filled out my worksheet for that semester I asked one of the employees if I was good to go for full time, she said yes, later on at home I happened to look at my stuff (LUCKILY) and I realized that one of the online classes was not for the full 16 weeks, I returned and told them this and they told that I was NOT good to go, I don't know how you can fix this problem other than having each work-study there double check the amount of weeks for each course before just nodding there heading and re-assuring you when you are not in fact being counted as full time. Many veterans (like myself) can only afford to go to college with the MGI Bill and when little details like this are overlooked it affects our lives.
- Only Veterans should be working there!
- Out of my 4 times at the front desk, only once did I feel welcome. --- I do not like that I must take a majority of my classes at Mesa and not take full advantage of the entire SDCCD. I was forced to transfer to Mesa when I had signed up for more units at Mesa than ****. The process was not smooth as it added additional stress. During the summer I took one class at **** and I was almost forced to transfer. When I submitted the paperwork to get paid for the class I took at **** to my home school, Mesa, as instructed the paperwork first sat at Mesa for about a week. Then it was sent to ****. I was not notified. ****sat on the paperwork for about a month. I went in to Mesa where they could not find my record. After an hour the record was found and I was told ****had the paperwork and that they would call and check on the paperwork the next day. They did do that. I was happy with that. --- The appointment times offered are not geared for working adults that work during the day. More evening appointments needed.
- People at desk being a little more friendly
- screen employees and ensure they are knowledgable enough in the services offered to give clear concise answers instead of a flyer or a 800 number which is very unhelpful.
- Service at this office is horrendous. Employees should be able to provide basic information or direct veterans to help instead of just turning them away.
- Staff should be more receptive to people coming to the office and be available to help.
- Stop employing unknowledgeable kids who know nothing about how the GIBILL works.
- The need to go between the counselors office and VA office to make chnages or start an ed plan.
- The person that was in back just yelled her responses to me. I got the feeling I was not important enough for her to come out in front to talk to. I guess that means my suggestion to improve would be to get out of the chair and walk over to the customer if you are going to help them.
- The staff does not care about student needs. Bad attitudes.

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- The Veteran's Affairs Office at school should be more knowledgeable of the Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans ON-line APPlication (VONAPP) Website.
- The younger front staff members could be more friendly or welcoming. They make it obvious they do not enjoy helping us.
- Train staff to be more courteous and helpful.
- Train staff to be more friendly and willing to help Veterans. Older counselors are helpful, but usually do not want to be bothered with questions. Younger / part-time staff is outright rude and seems to be put out when they have to answer questions or assist in filing for benefits. Working at the Veterans Mesa office is their job and what they are getting paid to do; they need to conduct themselves in a professional manner and serve their customers properly, or be fired!!!! I usually don't feel welcome in the office, and generally feel ill informed about the benefits available to me.

Improve Office Hours

- Add more days (other than Friday alone) to which VA students can receive counseling.
- keep the office available to students the whole duration of college hours. 7am- 8pm
- I feel there are times that you need to speak to your counselor without an appointment, so I feel it would have been nice to have one or two hours a day or a week for drop in time without an appointment
- more online access.
- staying open until the actual closing time, and helping up until that point would be great.

Improve Ease of Access to Information

- get rid of ed plans on paper. Keep them electronic.
- Have more resources with regards to computers.
- orientation and clear guidelines, information on college website, ability to request counselor appointments other than Friday AM maybe online request, have more appointments or counselors, not having to repeat paperwork and work with VA online application program, consistent training for employees at front desk, not having to pay tuition fees weeks ahead just to route paperwork

Happy w/ Services

- No changes they're doing a good job.
- The veterans department at Mesa is very helpful and their new student seminars are a very useful tool.

Other

- Higher visibility and more detailed information of education services.
- less appointments, no "required long-term plan" THEY ensure I am taking the right classes, THEY ensure I am taking enough units. and to send out a monthly notification to "verify enrollment" would be nice!
- Students shouldn't be locked into a school and shouldn't have to do their paperwork all over again if they want to take classes at another school within the district. Sometime one school has a class at a more convenient time than the others. I was told I would have to complete a new EdPlan to take my classes at **** since I originally signed up at Mesa. I get my grades on the same website. I register for classes for both schools at the same place, so I should be able to do my VA paperwork at any of the 3 offices. I shouldn't be locked down into one school when other students aren't

Q11) Are there any other comments that you would like to provide related to this Office and the services provided?

Dissatisfied with Services Provided by Staff

- I think they just need to be reminded that without folks like myself they wouldn't have a job...
- I would like to see customer service improved. Their attitude is not that they are there to support the Vets but that we owe them. They act like they are doing their customers a favor. However, this does not surprise me as customer service throughout the U.S. is declining rapidly. When I deal with them I am patient and courteous to the point of almost being sycophantic. I should not have to kiss butt to get help.
- It almost seems as though the staff try to find ways to not let me get the benefits I have earned.

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- It always seems like it's a problem for someone to help you there. Especially when I was there for the first time and I didn't know their processes; i felt like they treated me like I was stupid. I don't expect much anymore, but fill out my new classes and be on my way.
- One of the front desk workers is extremely rude and makes it seem that asking her a question is so disruptive to her schedule. The best answer you can get is a point at a form which after you read it you find that it has nothing to do with the question. Most of the other employees are very caring and very helpful but the one with the bad attitude brings down the entire office. I was under the impression that the office was there to clear up any misunderstandings we have regarding the VA services, but it is clear through short answers combined with annoyed grunts and moans that asking a question is not right to do and stops the productivity of the office.
- Overall I wasn't satisfied with the veterans office. The people working there were extreme blockheads who were sarcastic and don't know much of what they're doing. THANK GOD I DON'T GO TO MESA COLLEGE ANYMORE!
- Please fire everyone who is not a work-study.
- Students need their accounts set up more than a week before the semester begins. Mainly because it is the time when they should be set up and they rarely are ready by then. On top of this there was one semester when the accounts weren't ready until well after the semester had begun putting me behind in my school work. Finally, the staff that has been disrespectful has been in regards to this situation. When I pay the money to drive to the school twice a day for a week to try and buy my books and they refuse to achieve this simple goal (which is simple because this paper work occurs once a semester, it doesn't sneak up on them) it is very frustrating and aggravating. When a student's disability has stress related implications this does not help matters any.
- The older ladies that run the office appear to not care whatsoever about helping with my benefits. When I wasn't receiving benefits and needed them to get bills paid, they refused to resend info to the VA because they said they don't send it twice, even after I talked with the main office and they said they needed it resent. Luckily the VA counselor talked to them and got them to resend it. I got my money eventually, but had many late fees to pay.
- The staff that gets you started with the initial paper work needs better training and more courtesy.
- There seems to be GREAT confusion and mis-communication between the VA Center staff and the Guidance Counselors in the **** Department. They need to get on the same sheet of music and stop having the student (victim) run back and forth multiple times instead of handling situations via a phone call.
- They didn't help much until I had signed up for classes and was filling out application paperwork. I was had questions and was told to come back when I had signed up.
- Train staff to be more friendly and willing to help Veterans. Older counselors are helpful, but usually do not want to be bothered with questions. Younger / part-time staff is outright rude and seems to be put out when they have to answer questions or assist in filing for benefits. Working at the Veterans Mesa office is their job and what they are getting paid to do; they need to conduct themselves in a professional manner and serve their customers properly, or be fired!!!! I usually don't feel welcome in the office, and generally feel ill informed about the benefits available to me.
- Veterans should be treated with the respect they have earned during their time in service. The employees in this office are the most disrespectful, unhelpful people I have ever had the displeasure of interacting with.

Pleased with Services Provided by Staff

- **** is extremely knowledgeable and has always followed through with what she has said she will do. Her receptionist is also extremely helpful and knowledgeable.
- good job
- Good Service And Knowledgeable Staff
- I sincerely feel that the veteran affairs department is not only capable but responsible for providing the highest quality service possible.
- ok job
- Thank You for their help.

- The front office people have always been friendly and helpful.
- The older lady at the office, I forgot her name but she is the bomb. She knows her stuff, is extremely respectful to veterans and makes the whole office worthy of an A+.
- Your staff has been extremely helpful.

Process Needs Improvement

- I am grateful that they are there however I remain unsatisfied with the amount of hoops I have to jump through to get the benefits I am entitled too
- the process needs to be simplified using technology and should become more flexible
- The Veterans Office should have a better system in paying Veterans for their classes and units they are taking.

Availability/Ease of Information

- Might be helpful to schedule more workshops to facilitate refreshing knowledge and versatility to attend.
- Perhaps the VA could update to a faster system to reduce the time between submitting changes and the time the changes take effect.
- Warn people in advance about how long it takes to process changes or requests, be more understanding for students who cannot get all their classes at one campus, having to deal with two VA offices is BS

Other

- The office set-up is not inviting when you enter. Just not very personable.