



September 25, 2014

Budget Request Form FY2016

Department should complete one form for each individual request

Department: Veteran Resource & Support Center

| SAFAB Use Only | |
|----------------|----|
| YES | NO |
| | |

Program, Service, or Operation Requested

Student Development Specialist II Position (Fulltime – 12 Month)

General Description:

Funding for an SDS II position will provide the VRSC with the minimum staff depth and continuity that is required to meet a significantly increased demand for military-affiliated student programs and outreach.

Request Type: Full Increase One-Time Partial/Matching

Type of Funds Requested UAF Other

General Questions:

Why is this important to your department? How does this increase impact students, and what motivated this request?

In the first year, the VRSC initiated numerous partnerships, programs, and events to ensure that TAMU provided minimum basic student veteran support that is consistent with national and TAMU System “best practices.” Initially, the workload was reasonably manageable; the staff could meet both the daily student demand and initial program development requirements. In our second year, the VRSC became a better “known resource.” Our ability to improve and formalize programs (See Attachment A) was reduced due to the significant increase in daily student contact requirements/demands. The ability to initiate new programs (or even maintain current programming) while also **meeting daily student needs cannot be met with the current staffing**. This new position must be filled for the VRSC to meet its stated mission and serve well those Aggies who have served.

Is it part of your strategic plan? What will be the impact if it is not funded?

The VRSC is still developing both the office and the University military-affiliated student strategic plan. Much of the first year focused on meeting the easily identifiable immediate student veteran needs. Without additional staff, the VRSC will be forced to remain focused on “short term” requirements to the detriment of strategic planning that is required to make Texas A&M truly “veteran friendly.”

While the entire strategic plan is not yet fully developed, we do know the following. In the first 2 years, the VRSC has been successful in developing procedures to identify all student veterans on campus (vice just those on educational benefits). Now that we can better identify the population, the next strategic task is to develop procedures to assess their academic success (graduation/retention/dropout rates, grade distributions, etc.) and focus programming to improve these rates. Without this new position, the VRSC will be unable to make progress in this area.

In a formal assessment focus group, one student veteran summed up recent TAMU veteran support by stating, “Most faculty, students and people in the community think that A&M is veteran friendly, but it is really just Corps friendly.” **Bottom Line: If unfunded, adequate support for a growing student veteran population will remain a myth at Texas A&M.** Given our Aggie military legacy and heritage, we can, and should be, better than this!

How do other sources of funding (fundraising, sponsorship, reserves, etc.) been considered? Please explain.

The VRSC has fully maximized other sources of funding, resources, and support to meet increasing student requirements. The office opened with only two staff; the Director and an assistant. These two positions remain as the only Division of Student Affairs funded positions. The following (externally funded/sponsored positions) have been incorporated into the VRSC staffing structure to meet student demand:

- **Two Military Admissions Advisors:** Funded by the Office of Admissions but co-located in the VRSC (in Jan '13) to enhance/streamline student veteran support. A second Military Admissions Advisor was added in Nov '13 to support the 200+ new prospective student veteran contacts per month.
- **Vet Success on Campus (VSOC) Counselor:** Funded by the VA and works in the VRSC but also supports the Scholarships & Financial Aid Veteran Services Office to connect student veterans and dependents with VA resources.
- **Student Internships:** Two unfunded interns supported VRSC programs during the spring '13 semester. A Texas State University Master's in Social Work intern focused on program development, student support, and event coordination. The second Master's intern from the TAMU Agrilife Communications Department focused on social media and web page development.
- **VA Student Work Study Program:** The VRSC initially hired two VA funded Work Study positions (maximum of 20 hours per week each) in June 2013 to replace the interns. The VRSC now has 9 Work Study positions in an attempt to manage the work load.
- **Graduate Assistant:** The Performing Arts Department has sponsored a Graduate Assistant for 10 hours per week for two semesters (through May '14) to assist the VRSC with a significant event called “Telling Aggieland.”

While these positions continue to help the VRSC, they are specifically focused on a narrow part of the overall VRSC mission. Additionally, their “part time” status and high turnover rate do not provide the continuity required to meet the increasing student demand and program requirements.

In the first two years, the VRSC was successful in obtaining over \$115,000 in donations to support programs, scholarships and student organizations. We already have another \$56,000 pledged for this year. This amount is more than twice the annual VRSC operating budget. To date, the nature of “donor wishes” typically direct these funds to direct support of student veterans (i.e., scholarships, text book loans, Aggie Rings, recognition, etc.). For now, very little of this money can be used at the discretion of the VRSC. With the addition of this SDS II position, the VRSC Director can devote more time to proactive development. Our goal is to ultimately

endow a minimum level of financial support for the VRSC and reduce the amount of funding required from the Division of Student Affairs budget.

What sort of input did you receive (student, faculty, staff, other) to determine this need?

Student Government has been instrumental in identifying needs of student veterans. In May 2012, the TAMU Student Government Veterans' Affairs Task Force Report was published. This report made numerous recommendations regarding Academic Services, Student Services, Strategic Planning and Long Term Programs. While many of the easier recommendations have been accomplished, additional VRSC staffing is required to work on the remaining items. In March 2013, the Student Senate passed S.B. 65-56, "The Veteran Resource and Support Center Bill." This bill stated that "...an allotment of \$58,000, through the University Advancement Fee, should be apportioned to the Veteran Resource and Support Center to add immediate support in the form of student workers, additional permanent or part time staffing, additional supplies and programming and recruiting funds..."

Other sources that have been used to identify programming (and ultimately VRSC staffing) requirements include: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education pertaining to "the Role of Veterans and Military Programs and Services;" Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) Standards; and the Texas A&M University System "Best Practices for Military and Veterans Support Services."

The VRSC has been able to track the growth of the TAMU student veteran population in the past 2 years. Between 2013 and 2014, student veteran growth has been 37%; this population is growing at a rate four times faster than the general student population. Military dependent growth is at 16%.

What actions have you implemented internally to address the identified need?

As mentioned above, the VRSC continues to resourcefully cultivate opportunities by finding additional support from other sources. The accomplishments of the VRSC in the first two years were only possible through these additional 12 externally provided positions and the actions of generous donors. In 24 months, the VRSC has grown from 2 staff members to 14 total staff (including student workers). The VRSC has maximized these opportunities; future success will mandate one additional full time position to provide sufficient depth in the staff and continuity.

Generally, what assessment tools will you use to evaluate this program/service?

The VRSC Director chairs the Troops to College Data & Assessment Subcommittee. This committee is responsible for conducting, developing and analyzing on-going assessment of military-affiliated student needs. In the first two years, the VRSC partnered with Student Life Studies to conduct student veteran needs assessments. These assessments (and follow-on focus groups) provided baseline data that will be used as a benchmark for future assessments. Future efforts will expand to include assessment of faculty/staff student veteran issues awareness and more specific needs assessment of military dependents and veteran spouses/families.

While these large survey type assessments provide useful data to increase overall effectiveness, the VRSC must begin to assess programs and events with short, simple surveys on a routine basis. Of the numerous programs and events initiated or supported by the VRSC last year, only a few were directly assessed. Quite simply, these types of assessments are currently beyond the VRSC staff's ability to conduct. The addition of this SDS II position will allow the VRSC to enhance assessment efforts to better support our students.

In August 2014, the VRSC partnered with the University of Michigan Peer Advising for Veteran Education (P.A.V.E.) Program. This program is fully funded by U-M and will include significant assessment support.

Funding Description:

| | Dollar Amount |
|--|--------------------|
| Total Estimated Cost | \$47,500.00 |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| <i>Less Estimated Partial/Matching Funds (if applicable)</i> | |
| TOTAL UAF INCREASE REQUEST | \$47,500.00 |

SAFAB Comments/Notes: