SAFAB
Student Affairs Fee Advisory Board

Budget Request Form FY2019

Department: Veteran Resource & Support Center

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YES	NO

Program, Service, or Operation Requested
Student Development Specialist II (Full Time – 12 Month)
Campus Partnership & Assessment Coordinator

General Description:
Funding the SDS II position will provide the capability to further build/enhance campus partnerships based on evidence based assessment to facilitate military-affiliated student retention, persistence, graduation, and employment success. This position is critical in truly transforming the TAMU VRSC into a preeminent higher education veteran support office that is fully aligned with DSA/TAMU missions and goals.

Request Type: **X** Full   ☐ Increase   ☐ One-Time   ☐ Partial/Matching

Type of Funds Requested   **X** UAF   ☐ Other

General Questions:
How does this address an important need and positively impact students?
In the first five years (with the smallest staff in the Division), the VRSC has been able to begin collecting limited data on student veteran success. It is important to fully recognize that this is a significant challenge due to a very limited ability to benchmark against existing data and established metrics; higher education has done a very poor job of measuring student veteran success across the nation. While this data now provides small glimpses of "what we know" about our students; it has really demonstrated "what we don't know" and "what we need to know" in order to achieve excellence. Despite our VRSC success, we are similar to most other campuses – A detailed understanding of the population we are trying to serve is inadequate due to a gross lack of a targeted assessment capability that is linked to campus partner and programming (more on this topic in the "data and evidence" paragraph below).

The ability to efficiently obtain and link data with multiple partners, programs and our student needs is the greatest VRSC strategic challenge! Detailed data to support VRSC programming decisions were rarely available in our first few years, however, it wasn't required. Initial decisions were intuitively obvious. As the VRSC matures, this "decision by intuition" no longer works; better data and long-term comparative assessment that focuses on success metrics are now required to better allocate scarce resources and enhance partnerships.

The VRSC also must meet the following DSA assessment related requirements: The new Division of Student Affairs (data intensive) Annual Report and a Comprehensive Program Review (a 5 year requirement). Ideally,

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these would be tied to the university assessment requirement (WEAVE); unfortunately, they are only loosely associated which significantly increases the work load. *The combination of these requirements is beyond the capability of a small VRSC staff if we are going to continue to sustain and improve current services!* The VRSC requires additional resources to develop and implement a comprehensive and complimentary assessment plan to fulfill the new VRSC Strategic Plan and meet existing DSA requirements.

What department/Division Strategic Plan item does this support? What is the impact if not funded?
The Campus Partnership & Assessment Coordinator is instrumental in the accomplishment of all six of the VRSC Strategic Goals. Each of these goals has specific strategies, tactics, and timelines that rely on increased/improved campus partnerships and assessment; this position is the key to enhancing the VRSC "resource & support" mission! The new VRSC Strategic Plan includes the following:

Goal 1. Strengthen Veteran & Military-Affiliated student transitions by engaging students through purposeful and intentional programs and services. (Transition Support) Objective: Through these purposeful and intentional programs and services, the VRSC will contribute to the persistence, retention, and graduation of military-affiliated students at Texas A&M University.

Goal 2. Accurately identify Military-Affiliated students and create a comprehensive student veteran data collection plan to enhance support and awareness. (Data) Objective: The VRSC must gain a better understanding of the student population it serves. In partnership with others, the VRSC will lead the development of key data points to guide programming decisions and to enhance overall support.

Goal 3. Exponentially increase support of military-affiliated students through systematic collaboration to *export the effort* throughout the campus and the community. (Export the Effort) Objective: VRSC effectiveness relies on engaging and facilitating others to actively support military-affiliated students. By establishing internal and external partnerships, the VRSC will proactively collaborate to increase resources for Veterans & Military-Affiliated students and raise awareness.

Goal 4. Strategically manage departmental resources and develop new practices to ensure VRSC effectiveness and sustainability. (Development) Objective: To ensure holistic program effectiveness and sustainability, the VRSC must maximize externally funded resources. Increasing scholarships and continuous program support through endowments and development will create lasting opportunities for military-affiliated students and reduce financial barriers to degree completion.

Goal 5. Invest in VRSC staff development & collaborative processes to accomplish departmental goals. (Mature the VRSC) Objective: To effectively and efficiently mature the VRSC standard of excellence, we must increasingly focus on staff development and the integration of new skills to enhance creative collaboration to foster a climate where individual growth contributes to shared organizational success.

Goal 6. Contribute to the development of transferrable best practices that will advance Military-Affiliated programs and services. (Innovation) Objective: Being a preeminent leader among Veteran & Military-Affiliated centers, we must identify and communicate transferable best practices to other institutions within and beyond the TAMU System.

Additionally, by adding this position, the VRSC will be ideally suited to provide unique contributions to all six of the DSA Strategic Goals, the university mission, Vision 2020, and the TAMU Foundation's "Lead by Example" development campaign.

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If not funded:
- TAMU will continue to be a part of the vast majority of campuses that don't understand their student veteran population successes and failures *(i.e., we will not achieve national excellence)*
- VRSC programming decisions will remain intuition vice assessment based; the potential impact of programming will not be realized *(i.e.., program performance metrics/KPIs will remain elusive)*.
- The VRSC cannot fully meet the DSA Comprehensive Program Review requirement *(this is the result of no funding from last year's request)*.
- The VRSC will only be able to provide minimal annual assessment (WEAVE) documentation.
- The VRSC Annual Report will be a challenge based on limited data *(another result from no funding for last year's request which will carry over to next year)*.
- VRSC development efforts will continue to be negatively impacted and misaligned *(i.e., less ability for the VRSC to contribute to the DSA/TAMU development goals)*.
- The VRSC Strategic Plan will have to be modified to pursue lesser objectives at a much slower pace.

Please provide any data, evidence, input (student faculty, staff, other) you gathered to help you determine the need for additional resources.
To illustrate the need for additional resources, a little benchmarking is helpful. The University of South Florida only has a slightly larger (~10-15%) student veteran population than Texas A&M and they provide comparable programs and resources. They have six full time staff to perform their resource and support mission. At TAMU, we only have three full time staff. Since 2015, in the "Best for Vets" National Ranking, USF went from #5 to #1 while TAMU fell from #7 to #23. Quite simply, the VRSC current staffing is insufficient to remain as a national leader in this area.

The VRSC's ability to grow programs and sustain partnerships will continue to be challenged as our student veteran populations grows exponentially. Student veteran enrollment increased over 38% between calendar year 2015 and 2016. Since 2012, the student veteran population has more than doubled! Initial indications (the final Fall 2017 numbers are still being determined) suggest that TAMU student veteran growth was just over 10% last year with similar increases in applications for 2018.

The Military Admissions Program (now a year old) is a unique campus partnership that is now producing evidence-based success in admissions acceptance and 1st term GPA success for student veterans. This data is being produced by a part-time position that is funded by a DSA College Completion Grant (and with the assistance of 2 VA Work Study students). While this is positive, this program has already outgrown our internal (i.e., part-time/student worker) abilities; to truly maximize student impact with this partnership, the VRSC requires a capability that can produce recurring data on a weekly, monthly and semester basis and link the findings to program refinement.

National organizations are also reporting about the lack of student veteran assessment:

NASPAdocumented the following in the 2013 report, *Measuring Success of Student Veterans and Active Duty Military Students:* "Institutional efforts to support active duty and student veterans are likely to be most effective when guided by timely and accurate data. However, results of our survey indicate that few institutions are disaggregating retention and completion data in ways that allow for unique tracking of active duty and student veteran populations…Specific to student veterans, 33% of responding institutions indicated that they track student veteran retention and/or completion rates separately from the overall population. Twenty-six percent of institutions track

both retention and degree completion, 6% track degree completion only, and 1% track only retention. *Despite increasingly dedicating fiscal and human resources to support active duty and student veterans, only 25% of responding institutions indicate having a detailed understanding of the causes of stop-out or dropout among their active duty military and student veteran populations…"*

Bottom Line: At TAMU, we currently remain as part of the national problem (and falling further behind the national leaders) in understanding our students. While we have dedicated additional resources to support student veterans, we need to work smarter (based on better assessment and collaboration) rather than just throwing scarce resources at a student population.

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

Campus Partnerships: When the VRSC opened in 2012, there we no formal campus partnerships to support student veterans. Without sufficient (DSA provided staff), the VRSC relied on obtaining staff from other sources to begin filling the needs of this fast growing student population. Currently, the VRSC now has two Military Admissions advisors and a VA Vet Success on Campus (VSOC) counselor working in the center. In early 2017, the Academic Success Center provided a coach that was specifically hired to assist student veterans. The VRSC is also currently in discussion with the VA to provide a Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) Initiative staff member to provide world-class healthcare and improve the overall mental health of Veterans. The growth of campus partnerships and programs has exceeded any expectation in just a few short years. The challenge of this growth is now management and assessment to enhance excellence.

Student Workers: The VRSC now employs 15 VA Work Study student workers (at no cost to DSA/TAMU) in an attempt to assist with program coordination and data collection that is now possible with a greater number of campus partners. This works poorly at best due to high turnover and unpredictable schedules. The Director and Assistant Director can no longer fulfill the duties required to maximize the potential of the VRSC; as these partnerships grow, this option will no longer work!

Assessment: In the past four years, the VRSC put together a "patchwork" of resources to obtain the basic and limited data that can support the greatest impact. This includes:

- Using the TAMU Troops to College Committee (the campus veteran advisory committee), we have formed the "Data & Assessment Subcommittee" to periodically address specific assessment deficiencies.
- The Office of Admissions also supports new data collection and student tracking by allowing the VRSC/Military Admissions to be a "Beta Test" user of the new SLATE software.
- The VRSC has used Student Life Studies for assistance in surveys, questionnaires and campus (WEAVE) assessment requirements.
- The Veteran Services Office in Scholarships & Financial Aid provides some assessment metrics, but their focus in only on veterans using benefits (this excludes about 35% of our student veteran population.
- The PAVE Program Office at the University of Michigan has provided some assistance with surveys but, again, this only addresses undergraduates using the Post 9/11 GI Bill.
- Other campus offices that provide data or assessment assistance include Disability Services, the Career Center, and the Office of the Registrar.

While these resources have provided the VRSC with data to enhance programs, the "patchwork approach" is too time consuming for a small staff and is no longer sufficient to meet current or future requirements.

Generally, what assessment tools will you use to evaluate this program/service?
VRSC Strategic Plan: The success of this SDS II position will be measured against the new VRSC Strategic Plan. This plan contains 14 tactics and metrics that are specifically designated and already assigned to this position.

VRSC Development Plan: This plan was published in June 2017. It contains an additional list of tasks for this SDS II position to complete. Aligning donor passions with program needs (evidence-based) is one area that is degrading current development efforts. The success of the SDS II position will also be evaluated against our ability to improve in this area.

Over the next 12 months, the VRSC will again reduce the overall number of programs by linking several existing complimentary programs into a comprehensive Transition Toolkit that provides a full continuum of proactive student veteran support from 'application to vocation.'   This effort will include: An individualized student assessment prior to beginning classes; detailed checklists and resource links to support admissions, academic success, student life, financial wellbeing, social/health, and career fitness. A primary role (and method of evaluation for this new position will be to link assessment with a unified campus partner effort for efficient program refinement.

The number of effective VRSC "Academic Associations" is a fourth metric to evaluate this position. By enhancing campus partnerships, we will continue to improve the Aggie Veteran Network, PAVE, MAPIT, VSOC, VA Work Study as well as increase student veteran awareness and use of services provided by Disability Services, Student Health, Student Counseling, Academic Advisors, Academic Success Center, Scholarships & Financial Aid, and the Career Center.

How have other sources of funding (fundraising, sponsorship, reserves, etc.) been considered?
Please explain.
YES! The long-term goal is to support several VRSC positions (possibly this position) and future programming growth through the recently established VRSC Enrichment Endowment Fund. While recent scholarship development efforts have been very successful, the Enrichment Fund has languished due to a lack of resources (most notably VRSC staff time). Last month, the VRSC Director realigned the VRSC development priorities; the Enrichment Fund is now the #1 priority to facilitate growth and future sustainment. In short, we need the position to maximize future funding opportunities!

VRSC reserves are not an option. Given current funding and growth, the VRSC reserves cannot keep up with the minimum balance requirements (there will be a $3,673 deficit going into this fiscal year).

Funding Description:

	Dollar Amount
Total Estimated Cost	**$50,000.00**
Less Estimated Partial/Matching Funds (if applicable)	
TOTAL INCREASE REQUESTED	**$50,000.00**

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SAFAB Comments/Notes:

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