Veterans Education and Transition Services (VETS) continues to serve as a national leader for student access, retention, and success. We achieve this by incorporating academics, institutional access, student involvement, research, and the phenomenal support from the Student Services Fee Advisory Board (SSFAB). This support has been key in allowing us to stay proactive, cutting edge, and goal driven, while also fostering an environment of success for all military-connected students (Active Duty, Guard/Reserve, Veterans, Spouses, and Children) at the University of Arizona (UA). Here we discuss how the SSFAB has helped define our role as national leaders in the veteran and military-connected student space and how it has shaped our foundational core of business ethos.

While VETS has made a name for itself by focusing on understanding the veterans’ experience more authentically, we have branched out to become more inclusive of the entire military-connected community. During the Fall of 2017 there were 1,725 student veterans attending UA, while the total military-connected population was 3,891. Spring 2018 and future forecasts indicate an increase to the total military-connected student population and arriving at approximately 10% of the student body. VETS strives to engage the total military-connected population with programs that foster academic success such as informational sessions, workshops, and improving faculty and staff training so they may better serve the military-connected student populace.

The VETS Centers act as the epicenter for military-connected student engagement at UA. During any given semester, 40+ military-connected students who have successfully transitioned into the academic environment and are knowledgeable about campus help to staff the VETS Centers as VA work studies. We provide academic support services such as our SERV curriculum and a military-connected student tutoring program across a broad range of subjects from math, sciences, writing, and languages. We strongly believe in empowering our students with career preparation opportunities; we facilitate résumé writing, interview, and 30s elevator pitch workshops, along with career fairs with employers looking to directly hire from our population. We provide access to scholarships and financial aid information along with awarding our first UA scholarships for veterans and dependents as of Spring 2018.

Significance of Maintaining Veterans Education and Transition Services

The depth of services currently provided by VETS will not be possible without the continued support from the Student Services Fee. Currently VETS is supported by SSFAB. In addition to current and previous funding, VETS is requesting funding for a second .50 ERE graduate assistant to assist with program development and coordination in the VETS Center. We are also requesting funding to enable students without GI-Bill to participate in the Federal Work Study Program such as dependents who were not transferred GI-Bill or student veterans who have exhausted their 36 months of GI-Bill. This would create more opportunities for both Undergraduate and Graduate & Professional students to have an on-campus job opportunity and coincides with the ranking services provided by VETS within the top five priorities for funding (see figure 1 and 2 in the Appendix).

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1 2016 VA.gov FY Annual Benefits Report - Education Section
2 The VA work study program is an educational benefit that provides students using GI-Bill tax-free, minimum wage income as long as they are enrolled in at least ¾ time
3 Supportive Education for Returning Veterans (SERV) incorporates five college credit courses designed to increase retention, succeed in college, and increase employability.
Assessment Success for Veterans Education and Transition Services

Two Primary Goals have been identified to measure the success of VETS.

Primary Goal # 1: **Increase Retention and Graduation Rates of Student Veterans.**

The primary measure of success will be comparing retention rates of student veterans who utilize VETS with the overall student veteran retention rates.

Primary Goal #2: **Increase specific military-connected student populations and their utilization of VETS services**

The Post-9/11 GI Bill allows those eligible for the program to transfer their educational benefits to one or more dependents if they meet Department of Defense eligibility criteria. During fiscal year 2016, there were 132,666 beneficiaries nationally who received transferred benefits from a Servicemember or Veteran. Of those 98,099 were children and 34,567 were spouses. We have recently rebranded the VETS Center to the VETS Military Connected Student Center to facilitate more engagement with all military-connected students. At UA, military spouses and children make up more than half of the military-connected student population which demonstrates a need to capture this audience and their unique needs. The primary measure of success will be in comparing current usage numbers with future usage numbers of these populations.

**VETS Support of the Student Affairs Mission**

The Student Affairs Mission references creating innovative programs, staying cutting-edge, inspiring leadership and collaboration in our community, and dedication to the success of every student. VETS meets the Student Affairs mission as is evidenced by the national recognition of UA’s exemplary VETS program, services, and resources.

The Student Services Fee Advisory Board has continued to shape how we do business in VETS and also allowed for the development of critical programs that foster engagement and camaraderie with our students and larger community. For example, the SSF has contributed to improvements to our tutoring amenities such as supplies, computer programs, and marketing. SSF has also contributed to the creation of VETS Center non-credit 100% engagement opportunities like the PALs (Peer Advocacy Liaisons) program where student veterans train to serve as mentors for other military-connected students. Other non-credit 100% engagement opportunities for our students are based on Leadership and Professional Development and encompass a broad range of projects like our Vietnam-era dog tag reunification program TOP Legacy, Student Veterans of America at UA club, and military-connected student admissions and outreach programs. SSF also provides funding for us to create more career preparation opportunities with a wide-range of employers interested in hiring from our community.

SSFAB funding will allow VETS to continue developing long-term strategies to address the specific needs of the ever-increasing military-connected student population at UA. VETS is developing important relationships for potential long term sustainable funding via donors, federal, and grant dollars. It is our hope SSFAB will agree to fund this grant proposal for three years in our joint effort to continue to provide exemplary programs, services, and resources to our student population at the University of Arizona.

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4 VA.gov 2016 FY Annual Benefits Report - Education Section
5 A new tracking system provided by SASG allows us to track finer details about our population