

Tactical Transitions: Examining Military-Affiliate Needs



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Purpose

To provide a better understanding of student veterans and military-affiliated student needs on Appalachian State University's (ASU) campus by attempting to identify areas of improvement in regards to programming, communication and mentorship.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived programming needs of the Student Veterans Resource Center as reported by student veterans and other military-affiliated students at ASU?
2. What is the best method of communication to reach student veterans and other military-affiliated students at ASU?
3. What type of mentorship program, if any, do ASU student veterans and other military-affiliated students perceive as beneficial?

Participants

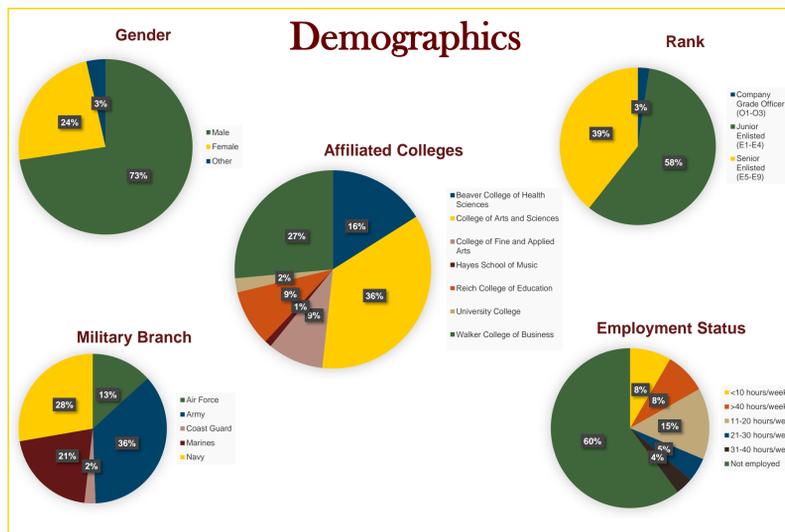
- 302 military-affiliated students
- Identified as active duty, reserve, separated, veteran
- Enrolled at Appalachian State University (ASU)
- Ages 18 to 59 years old

Methods

- A Qualtrics Survey was created with several sections: awareness, satisfaction, mentor program, ASU, student veterans services, communication, and demographic.
- The survey was sent by the researchers over the listserv provided by the coordinator of student veterans services.
- The coordinator of student veterans services mentioned the survey in the newsletter that week.
- The researchers attended the Student Veterans Association meeting to advertise and answer any questions.
- Reminder emails were sent over the listserv each week.
- The survey was open for one month during the fall semester.

Sample Questions

- I am aware of the specific military-affiliated contacts in the following offices: Financial Aid - General Financial Aid & GI Bill: Jennifer Coffey...
- Please rate your level of satisfaction with the services offered by the following Appalachian State University individuals and departments: Admissions...
- Do you believe a mentor program would be helpful and/or beneficial when transitioning from the military to Appalachian State University?
- What stereotypes, if any, do you feel members of the AppState campus community have about military service?
- What type of programs/services (events, workshops, socials, information sessions, etc.), if any, would you like to see provided by the Student Veterans Services, that are not already provided?
- What kind of information would you like included in a newsletter?
- Following discharge from military service, how long was it before you began attending a higher education institution?



Quotes

- “It is hard to relate to people who were graduating from high school last year when I was serving in Afghanistan.”
- “I don't really tell anyone [about my service] because I don't want the attention”
- “Doesn't really have anything to do with being a military-affiliated student in particular, but I really think I need to socialize more and put myself out there with making friends. But it would probably be even more difficult as a transfer student who is affiliated with the military.”
- “I think it would be helpful, especially for younger more traditional students. Old guys like me just want to go to class and go home.”
- It would be nice to talk to someone who's made the transition from military life to student life.”
- “Military is an entirely different world. Mindset of military members is different from the traditional student and age can be an issue.”
- “In the military, we are often not encouraged to make decisions or think on our own, so transitioning can be confusing, as we are used to just showing up and stuff gets done as we are told”
- “Transferring up to the mountains is a challenge in itself, adding a military background with limited resources is hard. Especially medical resources for medically retired students.”
- “Getting out of military can be a daunting task and major transition in itself. A mentor would be help to fill in the blanks and decrease stress from unknown pitfalls.”

Results

- 106 responses with 84 usable responses for a 28% response rate
- Three overarching themes were uncovered

Discussion

Importance of Support Networks

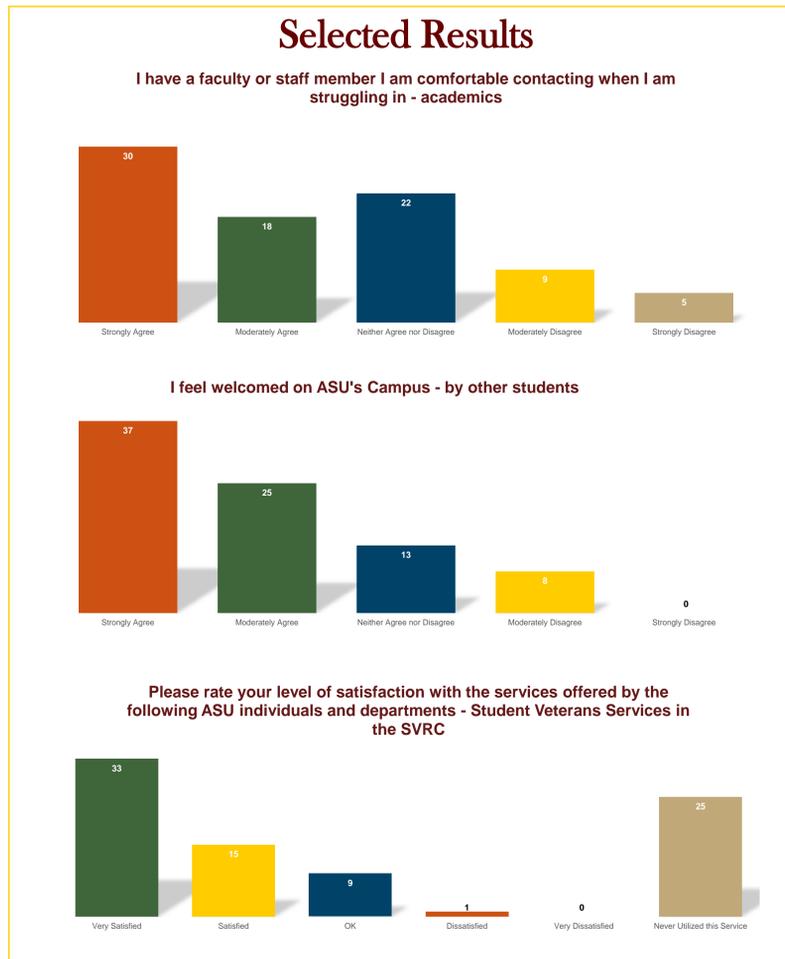
- Self-reported difficulty connecting socially with traditional students
- Perception that traditional students are just “kids”
- Often uncomfortable or unappealing to integrate into the typical student lifestyle because of their classmates though about them
- Social support networks are an important part of transitioning to higher education, but little agreement on how that looks

Direct Communication

- E-mail is the most preferred method of communication for academics and Facebook for socializing and being aware of campus events
- Did not want to be contacted via personal email or text messaging
- Rarely use phone conversations

Mentorship Programming

- Beneficial for all or just new/younger service members
- Prefer mentor with a similar major or in the same branch
- No preference on gender for a mentor
- Split between preference on a mentor who has completed at least two semesters or no preference at all



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