

Bakersfield College Veterans Resource Center

Background:

With an estimated 2.2 million veterans residing in California, the state leads the nation in the number of veterans. That number is expected to increase dramatically as more personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan complete their service. The majority of these students enroll in a California Community college. In 2009, more than 26,600 veterans utilized benefits at a California community college. In addition, there are an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 active duty personnel enrolled annually at community colleges across the state, not including dependents. A college education has become an absolute necessity for veterans returning to civilian life, and community colleges provide the majority of this education, as most veterans are ineligible for direct admission to the University of California or the California State University systems. (California Community College web page)

At Bakersfield College we have approximately 325 Veterans enrolled. This number only identifies those individuals who identify as such and are using Veterans benefits to attend. Approximately 20 of these register with DSPS and receive services. There are approximately 12 Veterans that are Chapter 21/Rehabilitation which means that they receive additional services from the government.

Current Services/Resources:

Currently there is a link under the student section of the Bakersfield College webpage titled "Veterans Services". This page first provides a description of Bakersfield College's status as an approved institution of higher learning for the training of veterans and veterans' dependents entitled to educational assistance. The Website further outlines the "Educational Benefits for Veterans and Dependents". This includes information on how to receive benefits through the Veterans Administration. Finally, the webpage directs them to "Window 6 in the Office of Admissions and Records" for additional information.

Within the Office of Admissions and Records, there is a staff member dedicated to assisting veterans and eligible dependents with the enrollment processes and the attainment of their government benefits. Like many of the staff within Student Services, working with veterans and dependents is not the only duties assigned to this staff person. While all Counselors and Educational Advisors are able to assist veteran students, there is one counselor who will work with veterans who have special needs pertaining to their military experiences. Some veterans present with disabilities so this counselor is also able to assist them in determining appropriate accommodations.

Proposal:

Using a "Model Program" established at Sierra College as a guide, it is proposed that we establish a Veterans Resource Center here at Bakersfield College. The center would be designed to provide a safe

and welcoming place for veterans and their dependents to receive support, information, and camaraderie, including a space where they can work on homework, interact with fellow veterans, or as one Veteran student said “Return to Center”. As there are also students who aspire to join the armed forces as officers, the Center would also be a resource for assisting individuals take the appropriate courses to achieve this goal. The following information/resources would be provided:

- Information on the following:
 - Educational Benefits/GI Bill
 - VA Benefits
 - Veteran Scholarships
 - Financial Aid
- Employment
- Campus Tours and help with Registration
- Vet to Vet Tutoring (Study Groups)
- Buddy Sponsorship Program for New Veterans
- Coordination with the Veterans Club
- Information about local veteran organizations
- On campus appointments with County Veterans Services

Request:

In order to help us accomplish our goals, we are seeking assistance with the following donations:

Lounge furniture: Couch and two or three comfortable chairs to add to the lounge area for the center.

Tables: Coffee table/end tables to accommodate resources

Games: Something that could serve as a stress reliever and camaraderie builder (cards, dominoes, dart boards (safe kind).

TV and or DVD Player

Computer(s) and Printer(s): For academic and research purposes.

Compact Refrigerator

Coffee Pot (preferably programmable)

Monetary donations will be used to provide food for events and to support the hiring of staff as appropriate. The cost of a full time Educational Advisor is approximately \$85,000 annually (salary and benefits). Thos cost for a part time Educational Advisor would be approximately \$29,500 (salary and benefits).