

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**  
VETERAN SERVICES



**Student Fee  
Advisory  
Committee  
(SFAC)**

Program Questionnaire  
FY 2016-2017



1. Please provide a one-page executive summary of your questionnaire responses. This summary should include, in brief terms: your unit's mission, how you accomplish your unit's mission, and a justification of your unit's student fee allocation in terms of benefits for students.

### Executive Summary

#### MISSION

The University of Houston recognizes that our military and veteran population is a very diverse group that brings to our campus vast experiences and knowledge. The Mission of UH Veteran Services is to acknowledge these experiences and accomplishments by supporting the interests of our Nation's current and former military service members and their families. We recognize the importance of providing our unwavering support and advocacy to our Student Veterans, to help foster success in their academic, personal, and career goals. UH Veteran Services will accomplish this mission through education, collaboration, and outreach utilizing all available resources within and outside of the University of Houston.

#### VISION

UH Veteran Services (VS) will provide student veterans with the highest level of support and dedication, fostering personal growth and academic success through graduation and rewarding careers. In doing so, we will strive to be a benchmark institute and a leader in veteran support and advocacy.

Veteran Services serves prospective and current veterans, military personnel, and their dependents by providing services that include:

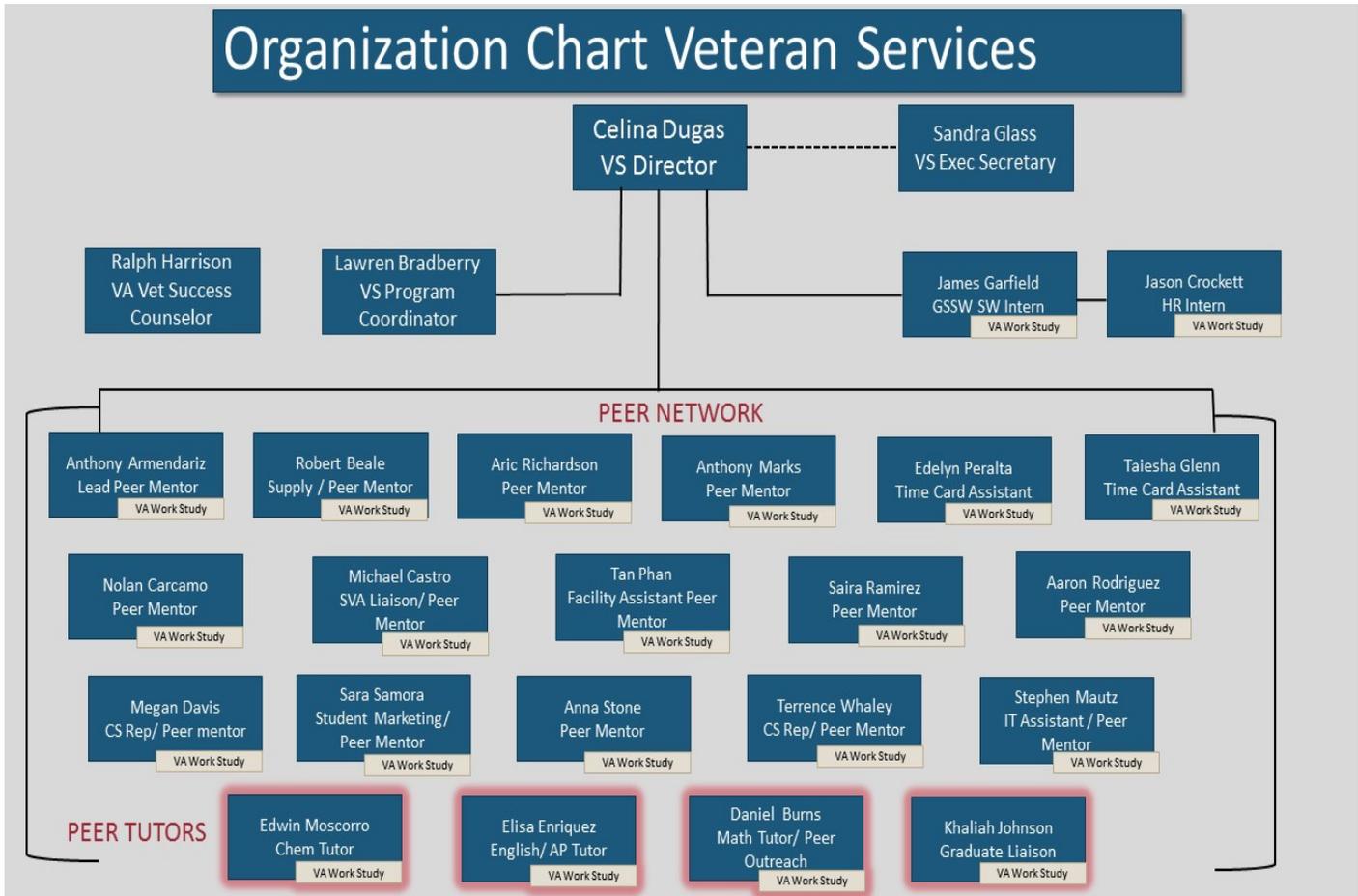
- professional and student staff with a wealth of knowledge and experience in using military benefits and transitioning from service to higher education;
- supportive services for academic, psychological, financial, vocational, and academic challenges;
- information on University policies and procedures, federal and state education benefits, and changes in legislative regulations that affect veterans;
- camaraderie and peer to peer mentoring;
- student engagement through a safe, casual, and familiar space for students to study, relax, and network, including a computer lab, within the UH campus;
- referrals to the Veterans Administration, other University departments, and community agencies; and
- faculty advisor for the SVA

VS fosters a "military friendly" campus community by engaging in strategic partnerships with University departments and community agencies to increase awareness of student veterans' issues. These partnerships encourage a sense of belonging, community and well-being for all student veterans on campus. With 2150 veterans and their dependents enrolled for fall 2015, VS provides resources to meet their unique needs. The Fall 2015 numbers represent a 16% increase over fall 2013 (1,856 veterans and

dependents).

- Provide an organization chart of your unit. Large units may need to have an overview chart and then more specific charts for each program. Where you have multiple staff in the same position (e.g. counselor, advisor, etc.), note this on your chart. Student employees should be cited on the chart and identified as students.

### Organizational Chart



- List your unit’s strategic initiatives and action steps identified for the 2014-2015 academic year and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services (DSAES) Strategic Initiatives and University of Houston Strategic Goals to which they relate (links below). Please comment on your success in achieving these strategic initiatives/action steps. If a strategic initiative/action step changed during the year, please note this and explain. Also, list any new strategic initiatives/action steps, the rationale for the addition, and comment on your success in achieving these items.

DSAES Plan: ([http://www.uh.edu/dsaes/about/strategic\\_plan.html](http://www.uh.edu/dsaes/about/strategic_plan.html))

UH Goals: (<http://www.uh.edu/president/vision-priorities/>)

## Strategic Initiatives

**Initiative 1:** Interact with newly-enrolled student-veterans early in their college careers to foster student engagement and student success. (DSAES Strategic Initiative: 1a, 2a, 6a; UH Goals: 2)

### **Action Steps:**

1. Collaborate with Enrollment Management Production Services to establish a query for prospective and current student-veterans.
2. Survey participants after each event
3. Compare the rate at which students who attend orientation apply for VA education benefits versus those who do not attend orientation
4. Conduct focus groups to assess needs of new students prior to acceptance through their first semester

**Status:** Ongoing. VS implemented several welcome week initiatives aimed at engaging newly enrolled Student Veterans early into their career at UH. Veteran services along with our Student Veterans Org, implemented a new student mixer during the first week of school. This event brings new student veterans together with seasoned students setting a positive tone for students as they begin their new semester.

VS continues to work with Enrollment Management seeking methods to obtain the most accurate data regarding prospective students. Changes in the Orientation program during the summer of 2015 caused a change in the way that VS accessed students during the orientation process, and we continue to work with the Orientation program to streamline the process for student veterans. We also focused on increasing our marketing to new students by offering a new student "Coog Vet" t-shirt and used social media to draw in new students to the VS office. We continue to work on branding our department and market our services to our population.

**Initiative 2:** Support student success and engagement by fostering leadership development and a peer mentoring initiative in the Student-Veteran Organization (DSAES Initiative: 1a, 1c, 1d, 1f; UH Goals: 2, 6)

### **Action Steps:**

1. Veteran student leaders and Veteran peer mentors will receive on-line and face to face training specific to assisting student-veterans.
2. Survey participants before, during, and after each mentorship cycle
3. Conduct focus groups with participants to assess the effectiveness of the program

**Status:** Achieved. VS continues to support initiatives within the Student Veterans of America that foster leadership development and mentoring. In January 2015, VS sent 15 Student Veteran leaders to the SVA national conference in San Antonio, Texas. The Conference is the biggest meeting of Student Veterans in the country, bringing Student Veterans together for leadership development and mentoring opportunities. UH Student Veterans were stand outs among the country's top Student Veteran Leaders. They attended meetings led by Robert McDonald, Secretary of the VA, Retired Army General Casey, Purple Heart recipient Kyle Carpenter, and Vice President Joe Biden. As a result, the Student Org returned invigorated and excited about their charge and membership has grown to over 200 members.

VS along with SVA also hosted Fortune 500 Accounting and Consulting Firm Deloitte in the Summer 15, bringing over 50 of Deloitte's talented staff to campus to provide a day of mentorship and development. Student Veterans focused on how to network, developing a brand, and building a strong network. VS and Deloitte also brought in top executives from Shell, Deloitte, and ConocoPhillips to conduct a Q&A session with our Student Veterans. Student Veteran participants expressed a high level of satisfaction after attending each event.

Also, VS had the opportunity to invite Active duty Major General Barrye Price (UH Class of '85) back to the University. We held a private luncheon for 60 of our student veterans and ROTC leaders. MG Price was a charismatic speaker who had a great message for our students.

VS and the SVA continue to seek out to provide mentorship opportunities to our students and continue to work with many community organizations, building strong relationships along the way.

**Initiative 3:** Implement an early alert system to ensure all Veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming. (DSAES Strategic Initiative: 4c, 6e)

**Action Steps:**

1. Collaborate with the office of institutional research to establish a uniform set of data tools to collect and track student-veteran information.
2. Collaborate with LSS, CAPS, and UH Wellness to develop targeted Interventions for student-veterans.

**Status:** Success/ On-going. VS has continued to work with the office of institutional research to establish these tools and last check in, the office was still working on this request. Also, VS has explored some additional options as to how we can determine which student veterans are at risk. Map Works is one of the methods that we have explored. Currently, it is being used in Residential Life and DOS Commuter Programs. We know that it does have a Veteran module that can be implemented; however, at this time Veteran Services does not have the financial means to support adding a veteran cohort to the Map Works System.

Currently, we rely on our marketing efforts and peer network to bring in those students who are facing challenges. We continue to have conversations with LSS, CAPS and UH Wellness about how we can better serve our Veterans. In addition, based on student request, we developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Veteran Affairs Vet Center to bring in Licensed Clinical Social Workers who specialize in providing readjustment counseling to Combat Veterans and Veterans who have a history of Military Sexual Trauma. We have also partnered with the Harris County Veterans Office to bring in a Veteran Service Officer who specializes in filing disability Claims for our Veterans. This can help our Student Veterans with financial compensation for disabilities incurred in the military easing the financial burden while in school.

Also, UH Veteran Services is one of the few Universities across the nation who has a full time VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) Counselor. These Counselors are full time VA employees and specialize in Veteran

vocational rehabilitation. In 2015, we worked to ensure that our VSOC counselor had UH access and capabilities to assist veterans who were struggling academically and guide them on a path to success.

As requested by our student veterans, we increased our office hours during finals week, from 7am- to midnight to accommodate students' needs. We partnered with some community organizations who provided coffee and snacks to help sustain our students during finals week.

**Initiative 4:** Collaborate with the administrative and academic departments in developing and implementing methodologies to educate the campus community about issues facing student-veterans and inform the campus community about the programs and services offered by Veterans' Services. (DSAES Strategic Initiative: 1b, 6a; UH Goals: 2, 6)

**Action Steps:**

1. Collaborate with LSS, CAPS, and UH Wellness to develop targeted interventions for student-veterans.
2. Collaborate with key DSAES and academic departments for programs
3. Conduct focus groups to gauge areas of interest and concern.

**Status:** Success/ On-going. As we continue to provide services for more and more Student Veterans, VS will continue to educate our administrative and academic partners about issues facing Student Veterans. During the year, we partnered with UH Wellness on the topic of Sexual Assault Prevention bringing attention to Military Sexual Trauma in both men and women in the military. We partnered with WGRC to educate our campus community on the impact of women in the military and bring light to the issues that they may face. In addition, we have begun conversations with Academic Affairs about how we can begin to educate our staff and faculty on Veterans issues. As we move forward, we have already scheduled future professional development seminars on Veterans issues for 2015-2016.

**Initiative 5:** Cultivate the development of a broad-based standing Veterans Services Advisory Committee, encompassing individuals and organizations within the University community as well as external entities who are actively committed to serving the educational and developmental needs of student-veterans. This goal will carry-over into FY 2015 (DSAES Initiative: 1b, 3a, 3b, 4a, 5d)

**Action Steps:**

1. Form a committee of Collaborators with key departments and stakeholders to select members for the Veterans Services Advisory Committee

**Status:** On-going. Bylaws have been drafted and reviewed by Dean of Student and are pending review from VP of Student affairs and Enrollment Services. We hope to move forward with board selection and implement as soon as bylaws are approved. We are very excited and understand the importance of developing this Veteran Advisory Board.

**Initiative 6:** Create and implement a comprehensive training program for VA Work-Study Peer Counselors to ensure, including delineation of responsibilities, customer service, reception of guests, conflict resolution, attendance and punctuality, and knowledge required to address the most frequently-asked questions. (DSAES Initiative: 2a, 2e; UH Goals: 2, 6)

**Action Steps:**

1. Coordinate with, HR, VA certifying officials, and other key departments to develop training program.
2. Provide VA peer counselors with comprehensive on-line and face to face training specific to assisting student-veterans
3. Test student proficiency using computer based tests each term; a passing score of 80% or above will be considered a demonstration of a basic understanding of VS services and VA benefits process at UH.

**Status:** Achieved. With the addition of 12 more peer counselors bringing our total VA Work Study Peer Counselors to 22; Veteran Services has a commitment to our student veterans to continue to provide top-notch customer service via our Peer Mentor Program. We have added an HR Intern, whose primary duty is to continue to develop our training program. The addition of staff brings some challenges to our office as we work on effective ways to manage and train this many student staff. The addition of an HR intern helps to deviate some of the responsibility from the Director, and gives them a real hands on practicum experience.

The addition of extra staff and Student Veterans who utilize our space, VS has continued to focus on making our space more user friendly. We have added lockers to accommodate staff and student books and bags to help decrease clutter and we also added increased seating to our lounge area. Also, we added a larger white board to our lounge area to make a more user friendly area for our Peer Tutors. While we have had to make some changes and considerations for our new peer staff, the added benefit and value to our department cannot be ignored. The graph below represents the cost paid by the VA on an annual basis to fund our work study staff. VS has a strong commitment to train and support our student workers.

Number of Workers	Hourly pay	Average length of annual contract	Total Annual Paid by VA for UH student Peer Mentors
	\$7.25	1133	\$8214.25
22	\$7.25	24,926	\$180,713.00

**4. Please discuss the means that you are utilizing to evaluate both your success in achieving the aforementioned strategic initiatives and/or action steps and their importance as compared to others that you might pursue. Where data exist, discuss the number of persons served by each of your programs and any assessment measures and/or learning outcomes used to evaluate program success. Please provide the method for collecting these data.**

#### **Means to Evaluate Success**

Currently, VS evaluates the delivery of its services based on student usage and participation. Developing and implementing a more effective evaluation methodology is a key deliverable from the current program evaluation.

VS collects data for student usage via a *myUH* id check-in system. Prospect and applicant data is currently collected manually. This year the VSO experienced a significant increase in student participation and requests for service. The VSO has approximately 350 student “visits” per week. The VSO experiences a significant increase in student traffic associated with the opening of each term’s enrollment cycle as well as the start of a new term.

Also, as charged by the previous SFAC Committee, VS explored the addition of a Veteran Focused Living Community within our Residential Program by conducting several interviews with Students, and University administrators across the country. In addition, we conducted a survey of over 1000 veterans and dependents regarding veteran housing using Baseline services.

The Survey was sent out to approximately 1000 beneficiaries of GI Bill benefits and we had a less than 10% response rate with 89 recipients. The results were almost even with 48% of the respondents stating they would or would probably live on campus and 52% reporting they would not or would probably not live on campus. Of those who would like to live on Campus, most reported they would want to live in the Lofts dorms. Many of the respondents stated the availability of family housing and the affordability and safety of the housing would influence them to move on campus.

# Veteran Learning Community Exploratory Baseline Survey Results Summary

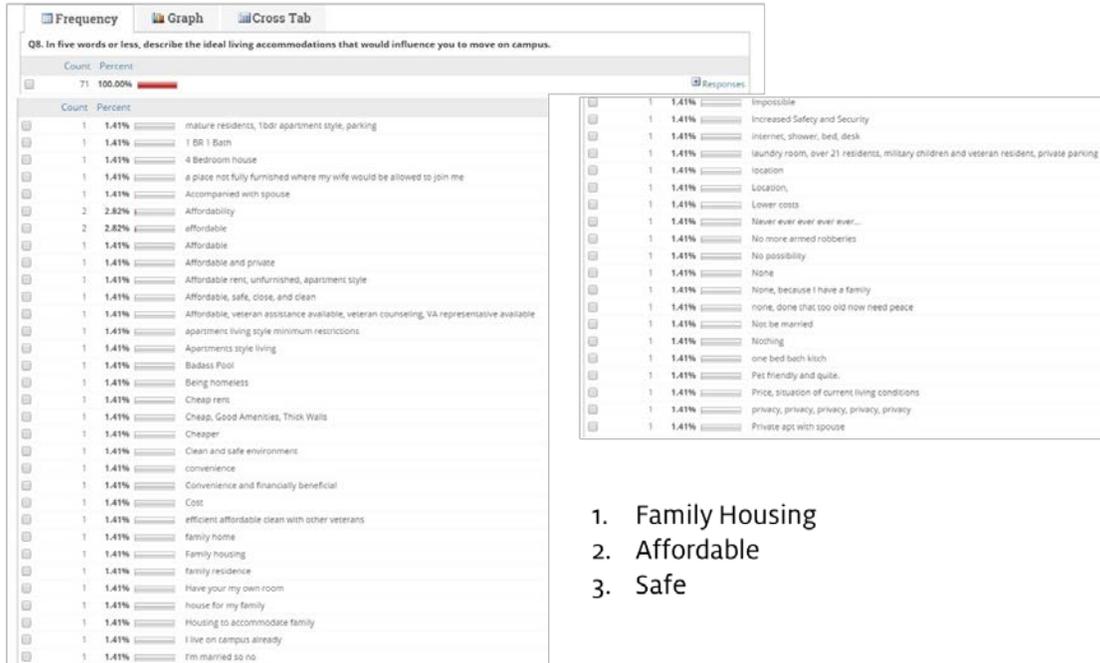
## 1. Do you live on Campus?



## 2. Would you live on Campus if you could?



## In 5 words or less what would influence you to live on campus:



1. Family Housing
2. Affordable
3. Safe

The following data represents program participation and office utilization for AY 2013/ 2014 and for AY 2014/2015. The department uses an access database to track each student visit using their PeopleSoft ID.

Key Program Objectives	Attendance	
	AY 14	AY 15
Student Engagement	317	2067
Student Success	1	366
Advocacy and Recognition	28	875
Civic Engagement	25	604
Fundraising	\$1150.00	\$5,000.00

Number of Veteran Services Visits

Office Utilization	AY 13/14	AY 14/15	% Increase
September	468	1561	234%
October	408	1498	267%
November	244	1025	320%
December	115	470	308%
January	362	796	119%
February	620	1592	156%
March	468	1279	173%
April	564	1468	160%
May	107	642	500%
June	231	497	115%
July	189	474	150%
August	373	864	131%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4149</b>	<b>12166</b>	<b>193%</b>

5. Please discuss any budget or organizational changes experienced since your last (FY2016) SFAC request, their impact on your programs, and your reason for implementing them. SFAC recognizes that some programs did not receive the funds that they requested, that some programs were impacted by additional expenses after the conclusion of the budget cycle, and that some programs may be ahead of or behind their self-generated income projections. In addition, if your unit concluded FY2015 with a Fund 3 addition to Fund Equity, please describe the conditions which caused the addition.

## Budget and Organizational Changes

In December 2015 VS welcomed new director Celina A. Dugas. In an effort to broaden our reach and provide support to a wide range of students, VS increased its work study student staff from 10 VA funded Work study positions to 22, with 4 of the students serving as peer tutors in Subjects of Math, Chemistry, Science, and English and 16 of the student workers serving as peer mentors. In addition, we brought on a Social work Intern from Graduate School of Social Work and a Human Resource Intern from the College of Technology. The additional staff was added to help with the increased office utilization and to help develop a robust peer mentoring and tutoring network to help foster student success.

As the result of DSAES reorganization, Veteran Services was responsible for paying a mandatory IT Fee which reduced our M&O budget.

- 6. Please list your 2016-2017 strategic initiatives and action steps in priority order and cite the specific Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services Strategic Initiatives and University of Houston Strategic Goals to which they relate. Larger units may wish to group responses by subprogram. Under each strategic initiative, please state the specific action steps (programs, activities, services, policies/procedures, etc.) that you intend to implement to accomplish your stated initiative.**

Initiative 1: Expand collaboration and networking with our University and Community Partners by increasing programming and community involvement. (6)

Initiative 2: Support Student Success and engagement by fostering leadership development and a peer mentoring initiative within our Student Worker Staff. (1)

Initiative 3: Assist Student Veterans with Successful transition from Military to Classroom by providing a variety of services and programs to help foster success in all areas of their lives. (3)

Initiative 4: Collaborate with DSAES Marketing and UH branding to develop marketing strategies to increase awareness to the campus Community about issues faced by Student Veterans and increase awareness of the programs and services offered by Veteran Services. (5)

- 7. What are the other possible sources of funding available to your unit and what efforts are being made to access them (e.g. grants, donations, etc.)? If you receive funds from other sources, please briefly describe the source, purpose, and duration of the funding and report the amounts received in the appropriate rows/columns on the SFAC Spreadsheet.**

## Possible Funding Sources

In 2015 with the assistance of a division development officer, VS was awarded a one-time donation of \$5000 from the Disabled American Veterans. That donation was awarded to 10 Student Veterans as \$500 scholarships as designated by the DAV for summer session 2015. Currently, we are not anticipating any additional funds for 2016-2017.

8. Please describe any services that are similar to yours and/or any overlap between your unit and any other unit(s) providing services to students and the rationale for the overlap.

#### Similar Services

The Veterans Certification unit within the Office of the University Registrar processes VA benefits for students. This unit processes certification and ensures that veteran students are making progress towards their degree as required by law. This unit is a much like financial aid- in that they are responsible for timely and accurate processing and the disbursement of federal dollars. The VSO works closely with the Certification unit and is most often the initial point of entry for veteran students who need to know next steps at the University.

Making effective referrals as well as fostering a supportive path to University services is a critical component to the VSO's mission. Veterans start at the VSO because they have a significant comfort level discussing their issues and identifying their needs with other veterans. Helping veterans take advantage of the services available both at the University and in the community is key to the office's success.