



# **Veteran Support Center**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22**

## **1. Primary Purpose**

### **Our Mission**

**We serve our military, veterans and families.**

We are committed to establishing a supportive environment and a welcoming campus culture. We enhance the educational experience of military affiliated students by removing barriers; maximizing the academic, psychosocial, and career potentials; and reaching results in unconditional success in the classroom and beyond.

### **Our Vision**

**University of Utah will be the best place**

to foster a vibrant, military-inclusive campus community; Leverage university resources and military benefits; raise awareness of veterans, military-connected members, and family issues among campus and local communities; and provide support to our military community through graduation and graduate education programs.

### **Purpose and Functions**

The University of Utah Veterans Support Center (VSC) is a place for U.S. Armed Forces service members and veterans, and their family members enrolled at the university (military-connected students, MCSs) to find services, support, and camaraderie. The services offered by VSC staff and tenants include advocacy, mentoring, career support, university certification of student enrollment for Veterans Affairs (VA) educational benefits, VA Vocational Rehabilitation/Veterans Readiness & Education program (VR&E) and educational benefits advising, VA counseling and health services referral, and Utah Tuition Gap processing. The center offers computer and printing resources, textbook loans, scholarships, and peer support, as well as a lounge, study area, refreshments, and veterans' events.

The VSC houses tenants who provide specific services for MCSs. Although they are not part of the VSC staff, they are housed in the center for the convenience of the students. There has been no turnover among the tenants. The Registrar's two School Certifying Officers (SCOs) are normally in the office every workday. The VA Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) Coordinator typically works out of an office in the VSC one day each week, and the VA Vet Success on Campus (VSOC) Counselor is normally in the office daily, except for every other Friday. A Career Coach from the U's Career and Professional Development Center (CPDC) typically operates out of the VSC once a week for 2-3 hours.

## **2. Departmental Outcomes (for student-facing departments):**

### **Goal #1:**

- Make military-connected students on campus aware of the services available.
- Demonstrate and elevate the university's commitment to and support of MCSs.

### **Outcome #1:**

- Increased utilization of the VSC.

**Goal #2:**

- Provide a central place for military-connected students to request and obtain academic and individual support.
- Provide a place to receive accurate and up-to-date information about VA benefits.
- Provide a safe place for military-connected students to be themselves and engage others who are experiencing the difficult transition from military service to a campus where they might feel misunderstood and marginalized.

**Outcome #2:**

- Increased utilization of the center's services.

**3. Programs, Services, and Resources:** The VSC provides a wide range of programs, services, and resources in support of MCSs. Their specific outcomes are difficult to measure, given that one cannot attribute a single action or event to an MCS's ability to succeed academically, feel connected to campus, and/or stay healthy. Each case, like each MCS, is different and complex, and support often involves multiple entities and actions. Activities and resources in support of this objective include:

**3a. The VSC facility:** The VSC is open for students from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday – Thursday and 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday. The center offers free coffee, tea, and hot chocolate daily. It contains a computer lab with free printing and Common Access Card readers for those still serving to check their military email. The center includes a lounge and a conference room that has been used primarily as a study hall and tutoring room. The center is a space for MCS to have critical discussion of shared experiences. This open communication allows MCS to share a part of their identities without fear of misunderstanding from those who have not experienced military life.

**3b. Registrar:** Normally, two SCOs are located in the VSC to certify enrollment to the VA for educational benefits and provide information regarding such things as changes in credits and classes and the impact on the students' benefits. The SCOs are Registrar's staff who occupy space in the VSC for the convenience of military-connected students. They are not VSC staff and even use a separate phone system.

**3c. VR&E:** Typically, a VA VR&E Counselor is located in the VSC at least three days a week to assist with the VR&E program. The VR&E program provides specialized services in support of education and employment, such as vocational counseling and vocational rehabilitation services for service-disabled veterans. The VSOC Counselor also provides general benefits information to any student veteran. The VSOC Counselor is a VA employee and not VSC staff.

**3d. VITAL:** The VA VITAL Coordinator is located in the VSC one day a week, but can be reached via phone or email daily. The VITAL program provides collaboration between the VA medical services and the university. The services include counseling, disability support, and assistance with VA healthcare access for student veterans. The VSC has partnered with the VITAL program to provide a part-time counselor/coordinator. The VITAL coordinator is a VA employee and not VSC staff. Collaborating with VITAL, the center has expanded its peer mentoring program with the intent to have every new student veteran meet with a peer.

**3e. Orientation:** The VSC held a military orientation session prior to the fall 2022. The sessions intent was to introduce staff and their functions within the VSC. The other intent is to create a meet and greet between all MCS.

**3f. Scholarships and financial aid:** The VSC currently administers one undergraduate veteran/service member-only endowed scholarship provided by the Stoker family. A member of the family who is a veteran and alumnus established the scholarship. This year, two veterans who are university employees established the Tsuya-Stephens endowed scholarship with a donation of \$25,000. The Union matched funds with the VSC to provide \$7,000 in fall scholarships for MCSs. Thanks to the generosity of the Alumni Association and the strength of its partnership with the VSC, the center was able to award \$50,000 in

scholarships for fall 2022, an increase of \$25,500 from the funds received from the Association the previous year.

**3g. Donations:** The Wagner Foundation donated \$25,000 to the VSC for student support. The funding provides supplies such as paper for free printing, textbooks for the library, SWAG, computers for the lab, and coffee.

**3h. Library:** The center continues to offer books and supplies through a small textbook loan library.

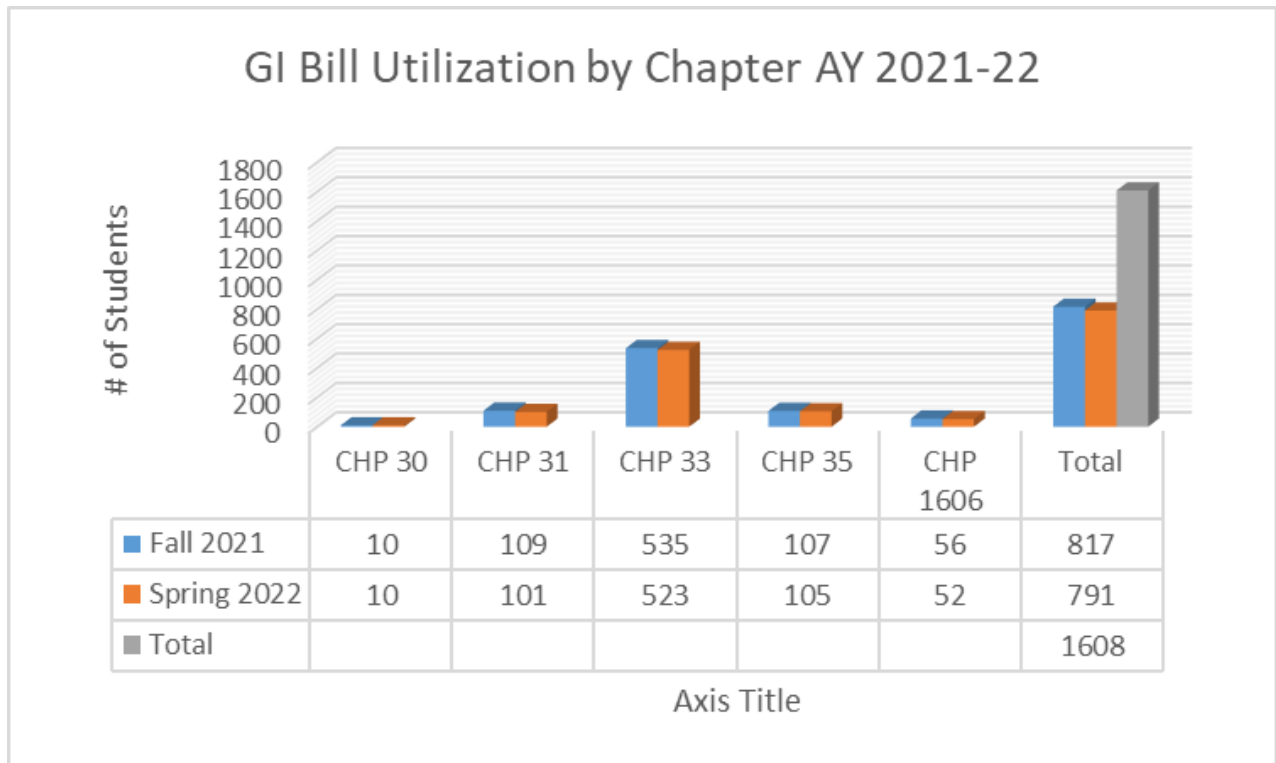
**4. Impact Data**

**Veteran Support Center Student Utilization AY 2021-2022**

| Resources                  | Utilization |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| Study Hall                 | 1324        |
| Socialize                  | 1309        |
| Computers/Printing         | 763         |
| Assistance/Support         | 592         |
| GI Bill/VA Educ Assistance | 370         |
| Other                      | 155         |
| Information                | 148         |
| VSC Event                  | 32          |
| VA Counselor               | 26          |
| Career Coach               | 21          |
| Peer Mentoring             | 4           |
| Total                      | 4744        |

*\*Data was collected from Tableau/check-in*

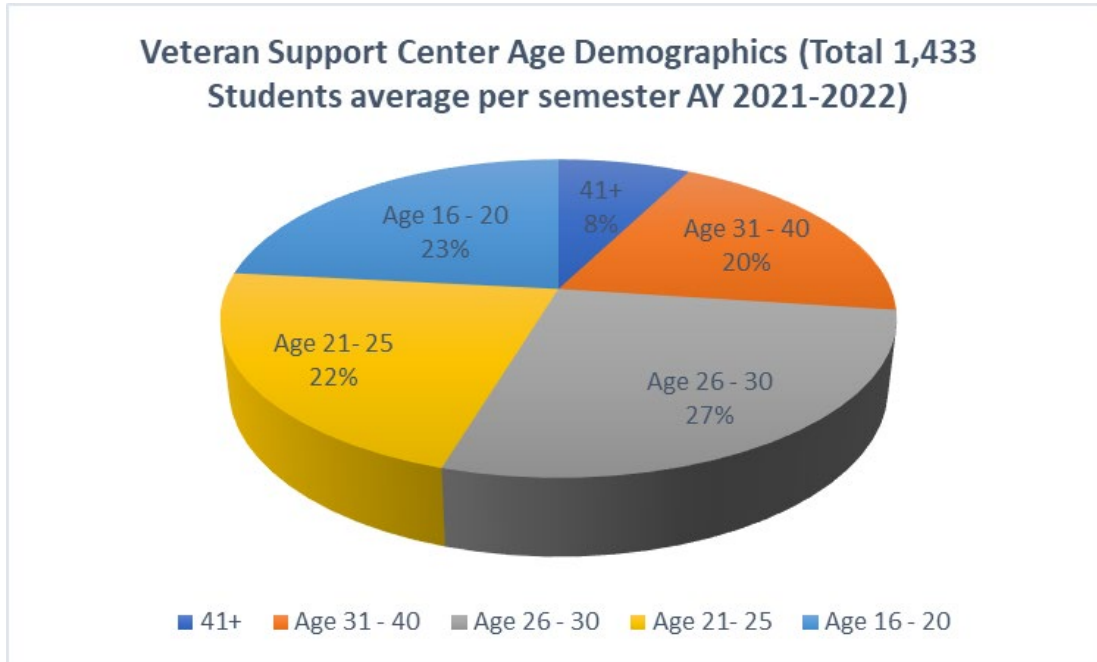
Veteran Support Center Utilization continues to trend upward and is at it's all-time high in AY 2020-21. With the increase of students this upcoming year, we anticipate utilization to continue to trend upwards and reach all-time highs for the upcoming school year.



*\*Data for GI Bill is reported by Veterans Services/Registrars*

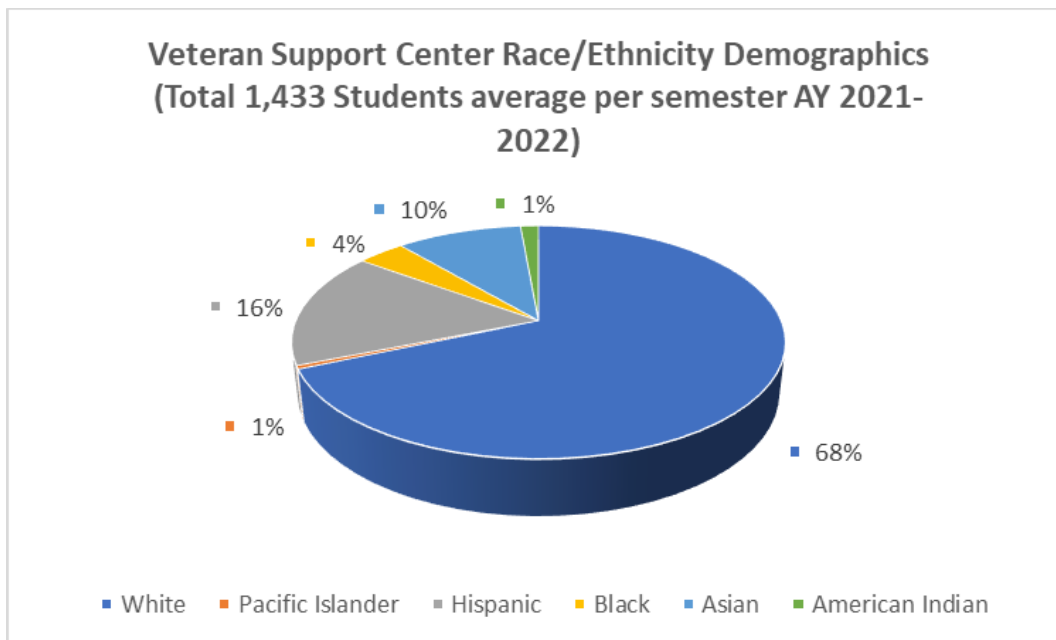
Veteran Support Center GI Bill Utilization is at an average of 804 per semester during the AY 2021-22. This is also currently at an all-time high for GI Bill benefits used in an academic year.





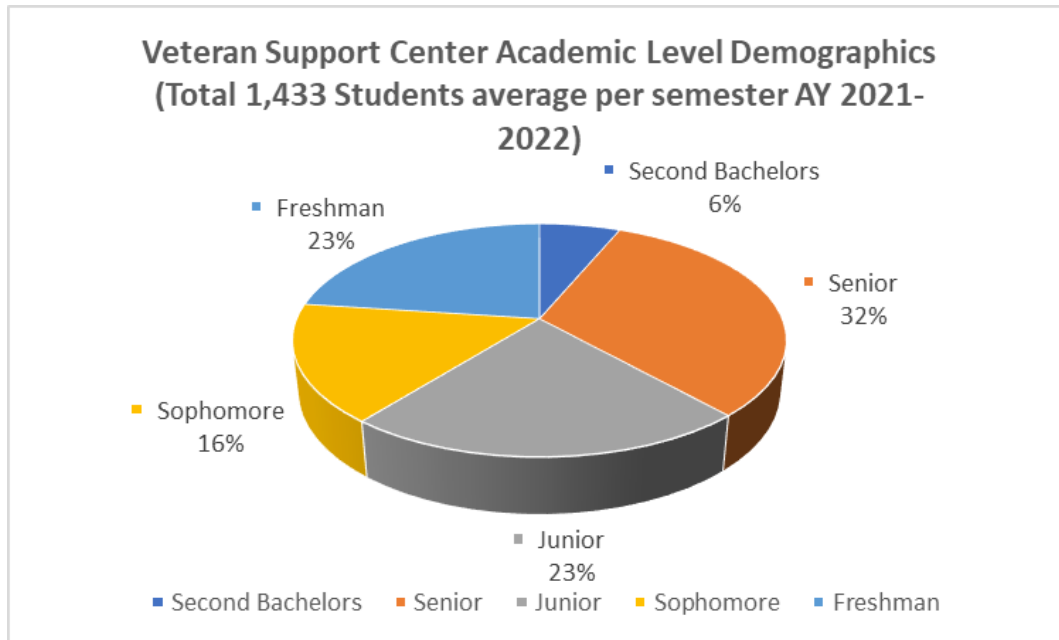
*\*Data is collected by Veterans Services/Registrars and also through tableau*

Veteran Support Center age demographics remains about the same and has no significant changes during the AY 2021-22.



*\*Data is collected by Veterans Services/Registrars and also through tableau*

Race/Ethnicity demographics remains about the same and has no significant changes during the AY 2021-22.



*\*Data is collected by Veterans Services/Registrars and also through tableau*

## 5. Major Accomplishments

5a. Partnering again with the Alumni Association and the Union, the VSC awarded \$57,000 in scholarships for fall 2022.

5b. Partnering with the Military and Veterans Affairs, the VSC awarded \$25,000 in scholarships for spring 2023.

5c. The VSC received a grant from the Utah Department of Veterans & Military Affairs (DVMA) for \$25,000 which will be utilized for scholarships in spring 2023.

5d. In May 2021, the Senior Advancement Director for Student Support Initiatives secured the VSC's second endowed scholarship, made possible through the generosity of two university employees who are veterans.

## 6. Major Challenges:

**6a. Student Engagement:** Engaging student veterans is a nationwide challenge that continues, and the ability to identify and engage every student veteran on the U's campus remains a challenge. The VSC will continue its outreach efforts in order to encourage U Vets to visit the VSC, utilize support resources, and participate in veteran-related events. The VSC must conduct outreach to the entire MCS population and, additionally, to individual student veterans in order to engage them. The VSC will continue to work with the VITAL counselor and will enhance the peer mentoring program by recruiting more MCS peers. As part of this effort, the VSC is working with the University of Utah Registrar's office to require new

student veterans to meet with a peer mentor as a prerequisite for obtaining veterans' priority registration. This will serve as a mechanism for the VSC to reach more new veterans to help them transition successfully to the university and/or to help them with challenges while they are attending the university. The Veterans Program Coordinator will also maintain a focus on outreach and engagement of student veterans.

**6b. Inclusivity & Equity:** The majority of student veterans qualify as a federally protected class of citizens. However, veterans, service members, and their families remain an afterthought on most campuses. Student veterans and service members are significantly more likely than other students to face key risk factors associated with stopping out such as delayed entry into postsecondary education, having dependents, working while attending school, and being first-generation. Not only do most student veterans face these challenges but most of them also face many at once. Whether it be due to their possessing disabilities, being older nontraditional students, being erroneously stigmatized as "broken" or violent, or simply having patriotically served their country, they represent an underserved and marginalized student population in postsecondary education. Despite these challenges, MCSs enrolled at the U for fall 2022 carry a mean cumulative GPA of 3.38, and for U Vets, the mean cumulative GPA was 3.41. This is even more remarkable given that nearly 44% of them were STEM majors. The VSC must continuously increase the time and effort required to educate partners on and off campus, to ensure that MCSs are considered in equity, inclusion, and diversity initiatives, and to garner resources and general support for MCSs.

**6c. Resources:** Historically, veterans have not been important on campus, and VSC budget initiatives, particularly staffing requests, is a work in progress. A growth in enrollment of student veterans, engagement of student veterans, and utilization of VSC resources, particularly personnel, will further challenge the center. The VSC is staffed by only three full-time equivalent (FTE) employees and one quarter-time career coach in support of nearly 1,500 students (nearly 5% of all students). Other personnel in the center are VA employees or Registrar's personnel who are not part of the VSC staff, do not perform VSC tasks, and do not use the same phone system. A February 2021 survey of Chief Student Affairs Officers in Utah revealed the following student veteran-to-staff ratios for veteran's centers. The ratio does not include student family members supported (approximately 300 each semester at the U). For centers in which SCOs are part of the veterans center rather than Registrar's office, the SCOs were considered as 0.5 FTEs for comparison purposes because they share SCO and veterans center responsibilities.

- University of Utah: 398:1
- Utah State University: 333:1
- Salt Lake Community College: 306:1
- Utah Valley University: 300:1
- Southern Utah University: 286:1
- Weber State University: 172:1

Considering the staffing at other institutions and the extended operating hours of the U's center, the VSC remains understaffed.



## 7. Goals (strategic initiatives)

**7a. Satellite Centers:** increase VSC's campus footprint by establishing satellite centers across campus in order to provide access to all MCS. All services provided at the VSC will also be provided at satellite centers.

**7b. Military Alignment:** Align all university military programs within the VSC to facilitate MCS goals and priorities. Also, establish the University of Utah Military Counsel with leaders from our campus and Utah Military Affairs.

**7c. Veteran Studies Certificate:** Launch the Veteran Studies Certificate fall 2022 which is a 24-credit hour certificate where the U will currently be one of four universities in the nation to offer. The intent of the certificate is to offer a course to all students that provide knowledge and insight of military and veteran experiences.

