

UW-River Falls Office of Veterans' Services 2013 Feedback Survey Summary

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the 2013 UW-River Falls Veteran's Survey was to gather feedback on the needs and experiences of this population as they transition to and move through their undergraduate program. The 2013 survey was similar to student-veteran surveys done by the Survey Research Center (SRC) in 2010 and 2011. The SRC also did a survey for the Office of Veterans Services in 2012 but it focused on the dependents of veterans and is not, generally, comparable to the 2010, 2011 and 2013 surveys.

The 72 survey responses received in 2013, are expected to provide estimates of student-veterans' opinions that are accurate to within plus or minus 9.3%; there is little evidence that the views of these veterans differ in systematic ways (little evidence of "non-response bias, Appendix A) from the entire student-veteran population on campus.

The 2013 sample is heavily male (nearly two-thirds), older than the traditional college student (more than half are 26 or older), unmarried and living off-campus with at least one other adult and no children. More than one-third reported household incomes of greater than \$50,000 per year. A majority of respondents are veterans who served in the army and about half have been deployed within the last 5 years. Most of the respondents were upper classmen who are attending UW-River Falls on a full-time basis and most are using Veteran Administration (VA) benefits to cover at least some of the costs of their education (**Table 1 and Figure 1**).

There is relatively little dissatisfaction among veterans with respect to the effectiveness of UW-River Falls in smoothing their transition to college; only 9% rated the university's effectiveness as only "somewhat ineffective" or worse (**Figure 2**). Student-veterans' rating of UW-River Falls' effectiveness in easing their transition to college has improved since the initial survey in 2010. The most pressing needs for additional assistance during the college transition focused on improving their social integration with campus life and with other veterans (**Figure 3**).

Four types of UW-River Falls' services were rated as very important by roughly half or more of the 2013 respondents (**Figure 4**): veterans services and benefits counseling (67%), career services (54%), academic support and tutoring (53%), and financial aid counseling (49%). The Office of Veterans Services (79%) and staff and faculty support (76%) had the highest proportions of respondents reporting that they have had a positive with them (**Figure 5**). If a respondent said they had a poor or very poor experience with a service or office, they were invited to suggest ways in which UW-River Falls could improve its performance. The general theme of these comments focused on shortcomings in how veterans feel they are treated and about the quality of information provided by the university.

The Veterans Service Office is the primary source of information about veteran's benefits for this population of students (**Figure 6**). In addition, dependence on the UW-River Falls Veterans' Service Office for information has increased significantly over time, growing from 68% of respondents identifying this office as a key source of information in 2010 to 92% in 2013. The preferred means of communication with this population, by far (94%), is email.

Large majorities of student-veterans agree that they've understood the paperwork associated with VA educational benefits and they know where they can go on campus if they have questions about veterans' services (**Figure 7**). Since the primary source of information for this population of students is the Office of Veterans Services, the statistically significant decline in the proportion of student-veterans reporting delays in receiving the VA benefits, suggests that office is meeting the needs of its constituents.

There is relatively little dissatisfaction with progress on strategic priorities of the Office of Veterans' Services. However, there is a noticeable lack of knowledge about movement toward achieving these objectives (**Figure 8**).

Relatively few student-veterans (13%) reported experiencing difficulties of sufficient magnitude that they might cause them to stop attending UW–River Falls. Half of those facing challenges of this magnitude identified financial pressures as the concern.

Respondents were asked to identify one thing that UW–River Falls could do to improve their experience. The largest group of comments focused on supporting the Office of Veterans' Services (**Table 4**). Other things noted by respondents included improvements in communications, a desire to be treated somewhat differently than the traditional population of recent high school graduates, assistance with accessing benefits to which they are entitled, and efforts to improve connections with other veterans and with campus.

Survey Purpose and Process

The purpose of the 2013 UW-River Falls Veteran’s Survey was to gather feedback on the needs and experiences of this population as they transition to and move through their undergraduate program. The 2013 survey was similar to student-veteran surveys done by the Survey Research Center in 2010 and 2011. When questions included in the 2013 survey were also in the 2010 and 2011 surveys, results will be compared across time.

As indicated in the following table, in 2013, the SRC sent email invitations to 204 UWRF student-veterans. The email contact list was supplied by the campus veterans’ office. The target population received three invitations to participate from the SRC and Nicole Lillis, manager of the veterans’ office, also sent an email to the target population urging participation. The 35% response rate in 2013 was substantially weaker than in previous years. Because of the lower response rate, the confidence interval for the 2013 results are relatively wide (plus/minus 9.3%) compared to the confidence intervals in 2010 and 2011 (plus/minus 7%).

Year	Responses	Population	Response Rate
2013	72	204	35%
2011	97	211	46%
2010	114	262	44%

Any survey has to be concerned about non-response bias – the situation where those who don’t respond to a survey have systematically different opinions than those who responded. Based on a standard statistical approach, described in **Appendix A**, the SRC sees little evidence to suggest that non-response bias exists in this dataset.

Respondents also provided written comments, which are included in **Appendix B**. As appropriate, selected quotes from this appendix will be used throughout the report.

Data summaries for each quantitative survey question are included in **Appendix C**.

Profile of Respondents

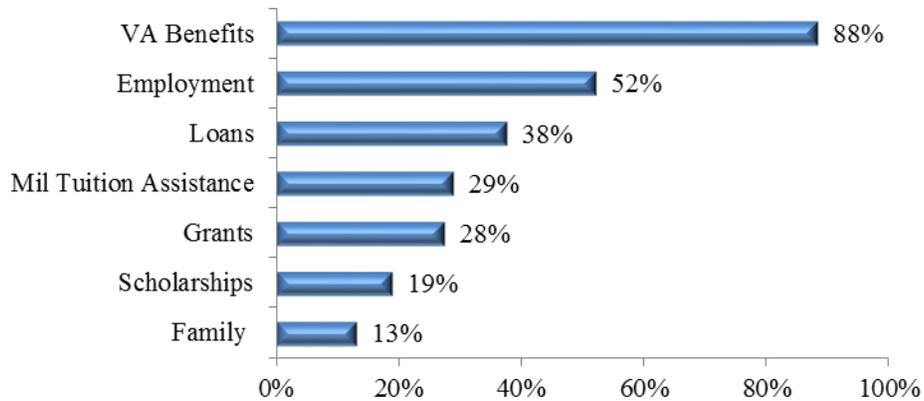
Table 2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the UW-River Falls veterans who responded to the 2013 survey. The 2013 sample is heavily male (nearly two-thirds), older than the traditional college student (more than half are 26 or older), unmarried and living off-campus with at least one other adult and no children. More than one-third reported household incomes of greater than \$50,000 per year. A majority of respondents are veterans who served in the army and about half have been deployed within the last 5 years. Most of the respondents were upper classmen who are attending UW-River Falls on a full-time basis. Throughout the report, we will note when there are significant differences of opinion (at a 5% confidence level) across demographic groups (e.g. men versus women).

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents - 2013

	Number	Male	Female				
Gender	68	63%	37%				
	Number	18 - 22	23 - 25	26 - 29	30 - 35	36 - 39	40+
Age	71	24%	20%	28%	13%	4%	11%
	Number	Single	Married/ Partner	Divorced/ Separated			
Marital Status	69	58%	38%	4%			
	Number	0	1	2	3+		
Adults	68		31%	40%	29%		
Children	70	70%	16%	10%	4%		
	Number	Res Hall	Off- Campus	Own Home	Parent's Home	Deployed	Other
Living Arrangements	70	14%	44%	31%	9%	0%	1%
	Number	<\$15,000	\$15- \$24,999	\$25- \$49,999	\$50- \$74,999	\$75- \$99,999	\$100,000+
Income	68	31%	15%	16%	19%	9%	10%
	Yes	No					
Activated Last 5 Years	47%	53%					
	Number	Veteran	Active Duty	Nat'l Guard	Reserves	Family/ Dependent	
Military Status	71	55%	0%	18%	8%	18%	
	Number	Air Force	Army	Coast Guard	Marines	Navy	
Branch of Service	33	6%	73%	0%	12%	9%	
	Number	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate	Continuing Ed
Class Standing	71	7%	13%	32%	38%	8%	1%
	Number	Full-Time	Part-Time	Other			
Academic Status	71	87%	10%	3%			

Figure 1 indicates that a large majority of student-veterans at UW–River Falls access benefits from the Veterans’ Administration to fund their university education. Approximately half reported funding at least part of their education through employment and a somewhat surprisingly high proportion (38%) use student loans to pay for college.

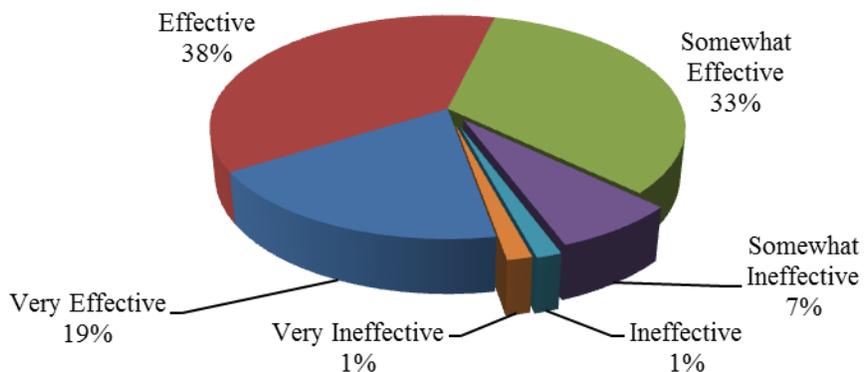
Figure 1: Sources of Funding for University Education, 2013



Veterans’ Transition to College at UW-River Falls

There is relatively little dissatisfaction among veterans with respect to the effectiveness of UW-River Falls in smoothing their transition to college. As Figure 2 indicates, only 9% rated the university’s effectiveness as only “somewhat ineffective” or worse. However, the one-third who said that UW-River Falls was only “somewhat effective” in easing their transition suggests that there is ample room for improvement.

Figure 2: Effectiveness of UW-River Falls During Transition to College



There were no statistically significant differences across demographic groups with respect to their opinions about the effectiveness of the university during their transition to college.

There was a slight decline between 2011 and 2013 in the proportion of respondents rating UW-River Falls as somewhat ineffective or worse but the difference is not statistically significant. This question was not asked in 2010.

As Figure 3 suggests, there is no dominant issue with which veterans seem to feel a need for additional assistance. However, the message of Figure 3 seems to be that the primary need is with respect to improving the social integration of veterans. The top two items both speak to this need: connecting veterans more effectively to life on campus (40%) and to other veterans (38%). There is not a strong correlation between these expressed needs for more efforts to improve veterans' social integration. It is not generally the case that if someone wanted to see more efforts to integrate veterans into campus life that they also felt a need for more outreach to other veterans. Roughly a quarter of respondents indicated they could have used additional assistance with academic adjustments, improving their time management skills, financial management assistance, and dealing with personal issues.

Figure 3: Needed Additional Assistance During College Transition, 2013

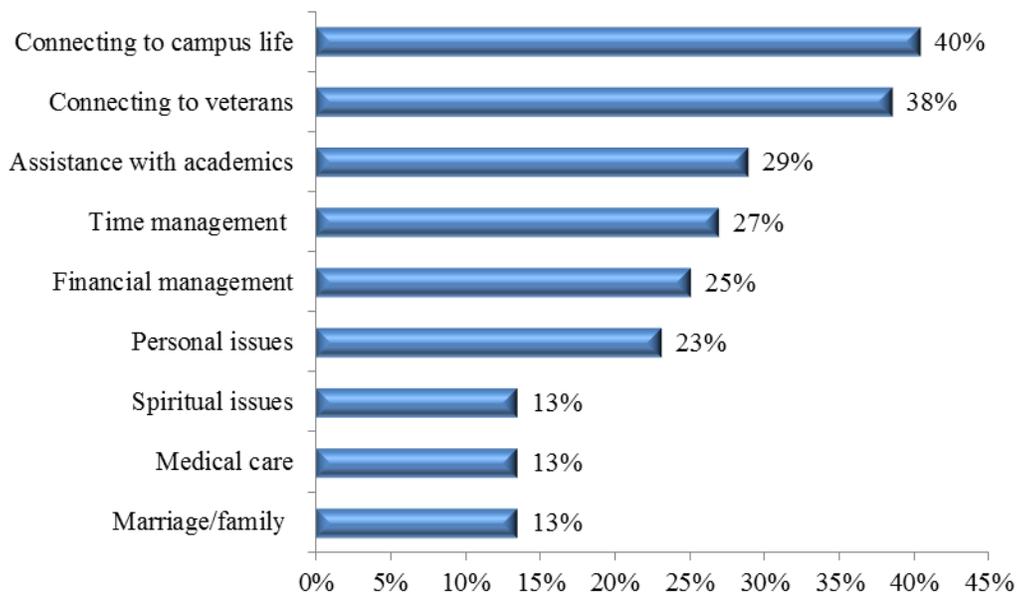


Table 3 indicates that additional assistance needs have been fairly stable over the 2011 and 2013 period. The only significant change is with respect to spiritual needs, which, even with the increase, remains a need for a relatively small minority of respondents.

Table 3: Changes in Additional Assistance Needed, 2011 – 2013		
	2013	2011
Connecting to campus life	40%	35%
Connecting to veterans	38%	35%
Assistance with academics	29%	38%
Time management	27%	30%
Financial management	25%	37%
Personal issues	23%	27%
Marriage/family	13%	10%
Medical care	13%	22%
Spiritual issues	13%	2%

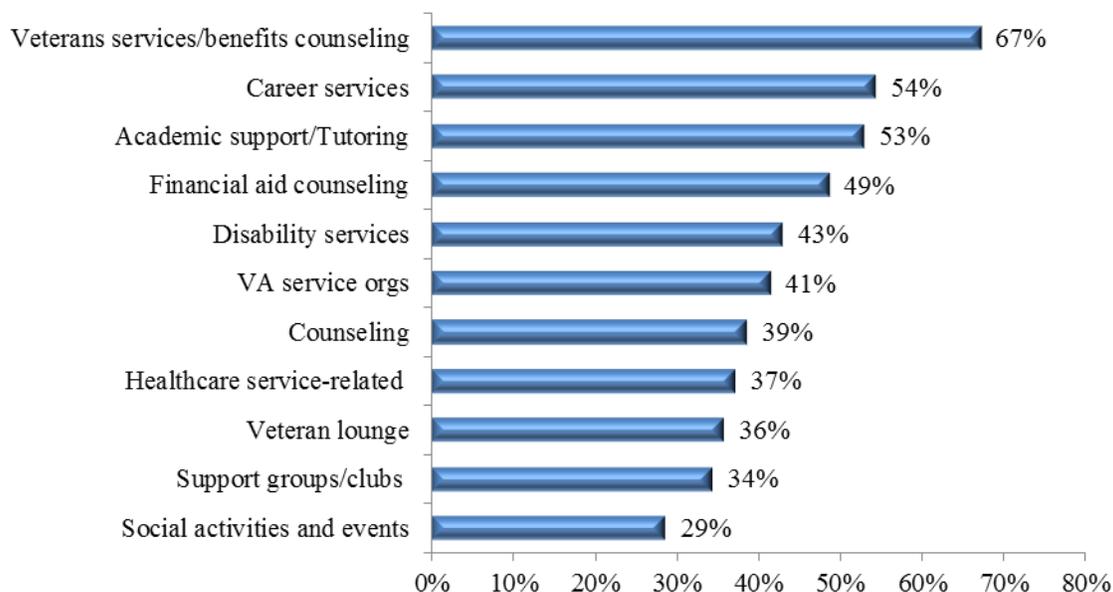
Two potential means of improving the connection between veterans and campus life and to other veterans are the Veterans’ Services Office and the Veterans’ Club. A very large majority (89%) of the respondents said they knew where the Veterans’ Services Office is located on campus but only 77% were aware that there is an active Veterans’ Club on campus and only 22% of those considered themselves to be active members. Expanding awareness of and involvement in the Veterans’ Club could be an important step toward addressing the additional transition-to-college needs of this population.

Veterans’ Assessment of Importance of Resources/Services

Approximately two-thirds of the 2013 respondents said that counseling on the services and benefits to which they are entitled is very important to them (Figure 4). About half said that career services, academic support and financial aid counseling were very important to them. It is interesting, and somewhat surprising, that social activities and events were the services of least importance to veterans (Figure 4), given that improving connections between veterans and campus and with other veterans were the top priorities for facilitating their transition to college (Figure 3), and social events would likely be a key means of achieving those goals.

There are few demographic differences in terms of the importance attached to these services. For several services (service-related health care, counseling, support groups/clubs, VA service organizations), the proportion of respondents with “no opinion” declines with class rank (freshman to senior), but these declines don’t result in distinctly different levels of importance of these services to demographic subgroups. In short, the longer veterans are at UW-River Falls, the more likely they are to have an opinion about a service but they don’t gravitate to a consistent level of importance they attach to that service.

Figure 4: UW-River Falls' Veterans Rating Services Very Important, 2013

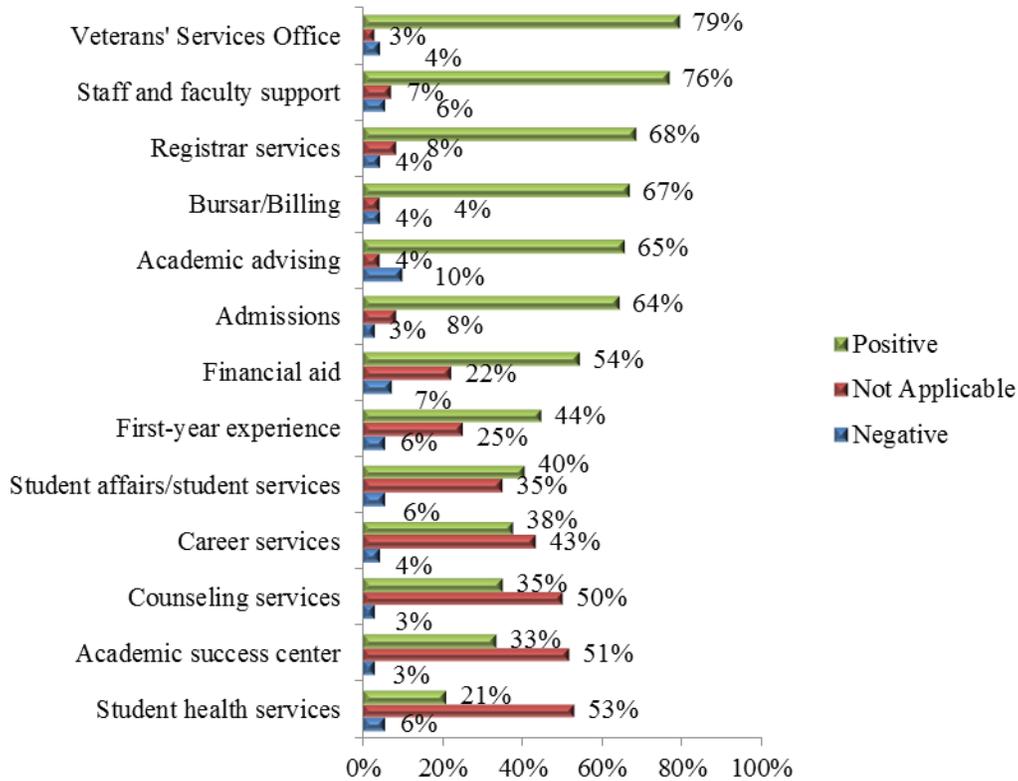


There are no statistically significant differences across the years (2010, 2011, and 2013) in the importance veterans attached to the services included in Figure 4. The stability of these results suggests that Figure 4 accurately indicates the order and level of importance to UW-River Falls veterans of these services.

Veterans' Experiences with UW-River Falls Resources/Services

Respondents were asked to rate a variety of resources, offices and services available to them at UW-River Falls. Rating options were very good, good, fair, poor very poor and not applicable. In Figure 5, we've combined the proportions who gave a rating of good or very good into positive (top/green bar) and poor and very poor ratings into the single category of negative (bottom/blue bar). Because large percentages said some of the items were not applicable to them, these percentages are reported as well (middle/red bar).

Figure 5: Veterans' Ratings of UW-River Falls Services, 2013



The veterans' service office and support from staff and faculty had the highest proportion of positive experiences; roughly three-quarters of all respondents rated these offices as good or very good. Academic advising is the only item in Figure 5 for which at least 10% of respondents reported a negative experience. Between approximately one-fifth and one-half of all respondents appear not to have interacted with the office of financial aid, the first-year experience, the office of student affairs/student services, career services, counseling services, the academic success center and student health services.

Another way to consider the data summarized in Figure 5 is comparing the ratio of positive to negative responses. There are many more respondents who reported a positive experience with the offices/services included in Figure 5 than reported negative ones. The weakest ratio of positive experiences to negative ones is with respect to student health services (3.75 positive/negative rating) and the strongest is admissions (23 positive/negative rating).

Compared to men, women rated academic advising and the first year experience lower and were more likely to rate the academic success center and the registrar as "not applicable".

If a veteran rated one of the services listed in Figure 5 as "poor" or "very poor," they were asked to offer suggestions as to how UW-River Falls could improve. The complete list of suggestions

is included in Appendix B. Of the nineteen respondents who rated at least one office poor or very poor, eighteen offered suggestions for improvement. Eight respondents identified more than 1 office as coming up short of their expectations. In some instances their written comments were clearly associated with a particular office or service and in others, their comment was more generic. In the later cases, the comment is repeated for each office rated as poor by the respondent. The general theme of the comments focused on shortcomings in how veterans feel they are treated and about the quality of information provided by the university.

The largest number of comments (5) was for the office of financial aid and a typical comment was:

“Treated like a child. Misleading information. The attitude in their office was very unprofessional.”

The themes of not being treated with respect and given questionable information also tend to characterize the five comments received about academic advisors.

“Academic Advising - my current advisor is rather unhelpful and disinterested. I feel like I'm a burden every time I go in.”

Likewise, with respect to the first year experience:

“My WOW leader was very detached; the events were also uninteresting to most of the new students. I discovered services and found information out about the UWRF campus on my own that should have been presented to us.”

In summary, to the extent that veterans have utilized services offered by UW-River Falls, their experiences have been generally positive. The relatively high proportion of veterans who have not taken advantage of some of the university's services (health, counseling, career, academic success center) probably reflects lack of need or access to alternative providers of these services through the VA or related agencies. The suggestions offered by veterans to improve performance of offices across campus focus heavily on training (ensuring those staffing offices understand the details of the services offered) and customer service (making sure veterans and others are treated with respect).

Finally, there were a few significant differences in the ratings given various offices over the three years in which the SRC conducted a survey of veterans.

- The proportion of veterans rating the Academic Success Center as good or very good has fallen, from 50% in 2010 to 40% in 2011 to only 33% in 2013. Most of this decline is the result of more veterans rating this office as “don't know” (35% in 2010, 44% in 2011 and 51% in 2013). This either means the veterans have had a declining need for the services offered by the Academic Success Center or they have become less aware of what those services are.

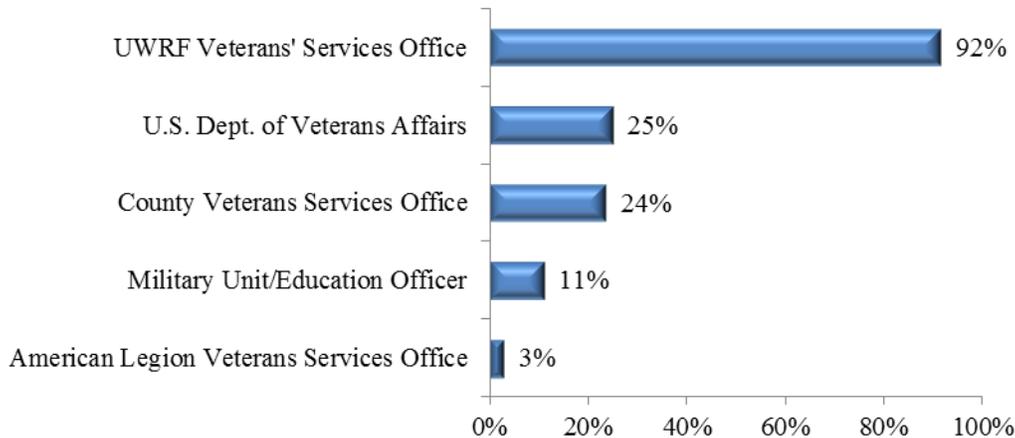
- Both the Admissions and Student Services areas saw significant reductions in 2013 compared to earlier years in the proportion of veterans rating their experiences as good or very good. In the case of admissions, 2013 saw a significant rise in “fair” ratings, while Student Services had a sharp up-tick in the number of “not applicable” responses.
- The Office of Veteran Services jumped from 65% rating their experiences as good or very good in 2010 to 83% (2011) and 79% (2013).

Information Sources and Preferences

Clearly, the UW-River Falls Veterans’ Service Office is the primary source of information about veteran’s benefits for this population of students (Figure 6). More than nine out of every ten student-veterans identified the Veterans’ Service Office as a place they go for veterans’ benefit information. In addition, dependence on the UW-River Falls Veterans’ Service Office has increased significantly over time, growing from 68% of respondents identifying this office as a key source of information in 2010 to 92% in 2013.

Only about one-quarter get this type of information from either the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs or from the County Veterans’ Services Officer.

Figure 6: Veterans' Benefit Information Sources, 2013



The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs is more important to older students and to upperclassment than to their counterparts. Interestingly, compared to 2010 and 2011, use of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs fell significantly in 2013.

In a somewhat related question, respondents were asked about the best way to communicate with them and a large majority (94%) said email was their preferred route. Traditional mail, at a mere three percent, was the second most popular communications vehicle for this group.

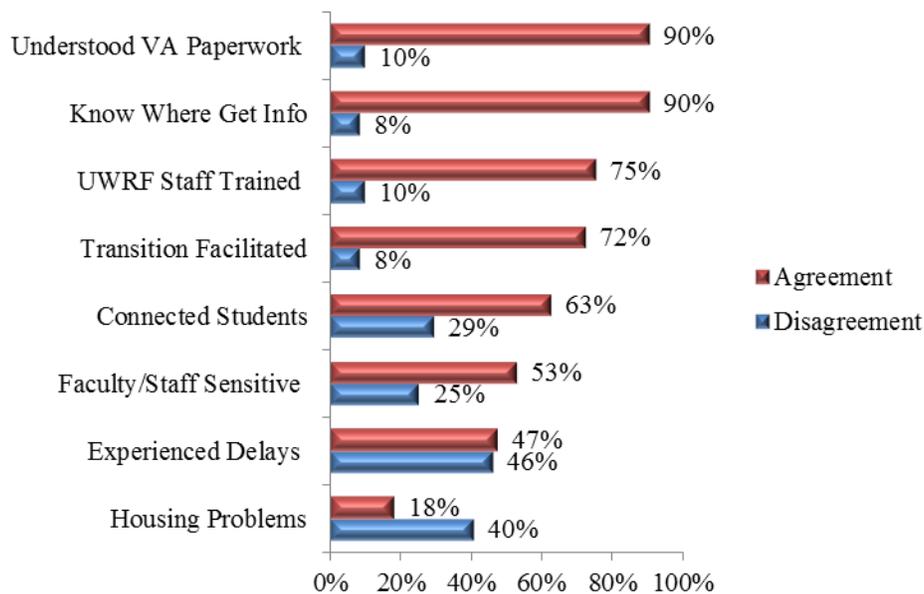
UW-River Falls Veteran Opinions

The survey also asked for the opinions of respondents on a number of topics.

One set of opinion-based questions asked veterans their opinions about a number of transition-to-college types of issues. Answer options included strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and not applicable. In Figure 7, we combined strongly agree and agree into “agreement”/top bar in each pair and strongly disagree and disagree into “disagreement”/bottom bar in each pair). The difference between the percentages attached to these groupings in Figure 7 represent those selecting the not applicable option.

There is strong agreement that student-veterans at UW–River Falls believe they’ve understood the paperwork associated with VA educational benefits and they know where they can go on campus if they have questions about veterans’ services. Given the results summarized in Figure 6, the campus’ office of veterans’ services would likely be the campus source of information to which they would turn.

Figure 7: Opinions about Transition to UW-River Falls, 2013



Between two-thirds and three-quarters of respondents agreed that staff at the university are qualified to address veterans’ needs, that UW–River Falls personnel have made their transition to college easier, and that they feel connected to other students. Only about half the respondents felt that faculty and staff at UW–River Falls are sensitive to the unique needs of veterans.

Interestingly, the proportion of veterans at the university who feel they have experienced delays in receiving their VA educational benefits is roughly equal to those who don’t feel they’ve experienced delays. Relatively few have experienced housing problems while attending the university.

Respondents who are single agreed in significantly higher proportions that they knew where to go on campus for information than did married or separated/divorced veterans.

There are several interesting, and statistically significant, changes over time in veterans' opinions about the items in Figure 7. Between 2010 and 2013:

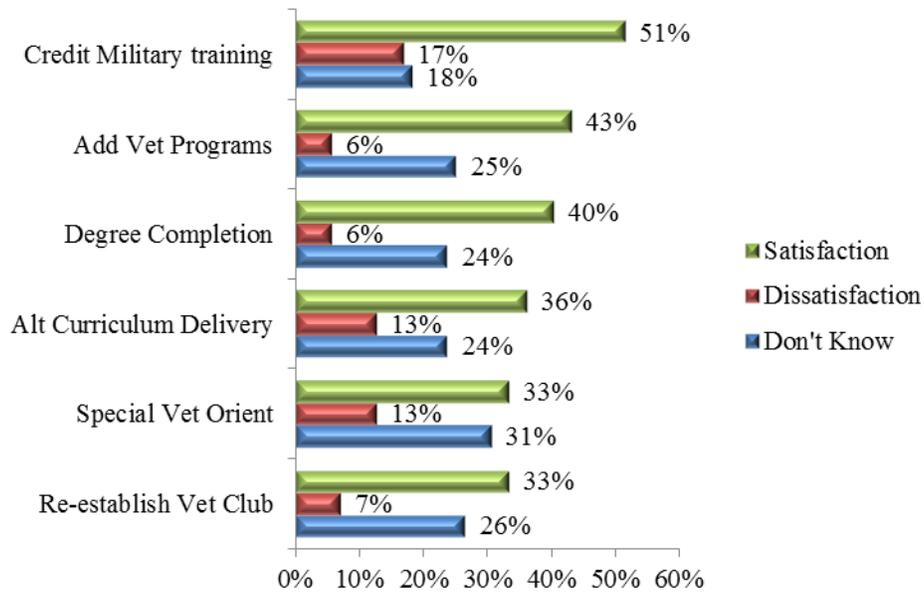
- The proportion of veterans reporting that they have experienced delays in receiving benefits has declined.
- The proportion who strongly agree that they know where to go on campus for information has gone up.
- The proportion strongly agreeing that UW–River Falls' personnel have helped them transition to campus has gone up
- The proportion who strongly agree that UW–River Falls has qualified staff trained to address service members' needs has gone up.

A second set of questions asked respondents for their level of satisfaction with six strategic priorities of the Office of Veterans' Services. Answer options included very satisfied, satisfied (combined into "satisfaction"/top bar in each pair in Figure 8), neutral, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied (combined into "dissatisfaction"/middle bar) and don't know/bottom bar. As Figure 8 indicates, there is relatively little dissatisfaction with progress on these initiatives; there is, however, a noticeable lack of knowledge about movements toward achieving these objectives.

Men, compared to women, were significantly more satisfied with the University's progress toward providing additional programs and services for veterans and with the alternative curriculum delivery options now available to them.

The question about progress on program priorities was also included in the 2011 questionnaire. The only significant change of opinion in this bank of questions was with respect to developing a special orientation for veterans and more respondents were satisfied in 2013 than in 2011.

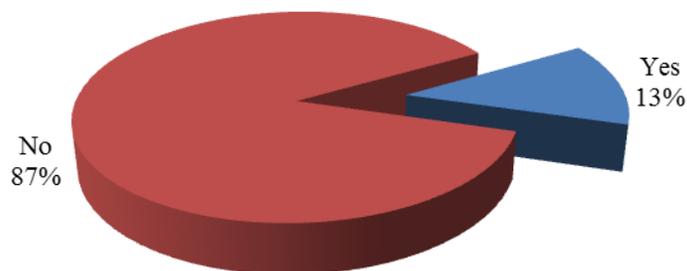
Figure 8: Veterans' Opinions about Program Priorities, 2013



Current Risks Facing Veterans and Suggestions for Improvement

Finally, respondents were asked if they were experiencing any difficulties that might cause them to stop attending UW–River Falls. As Figure 9 indicates, only a relatively small proportion (13%) agreed that this was the case.

Figure 9: Difficulties Might Cause Veteran to Stop Attending College, 2013



For reasons that are not clear, a disproportionate number of UW–River Falls veterans with junior status indicated that they are facing challenges that might cause them to stop attending. Though not quite statistically significant, there were 3 times as many women as men who said that challenges might cause them to drop out of college.

There are no discernible trends in the proportion of veterans facing difficulties that might cause them to interrupt their college career over time.

Those who said they were facing major challenges in terms of continuing their education at UW–River Falls, were asked to explain what those problems were. Ten people provided comments and half of those identified financial pressures as the challenge that might preclude finishing their degree. The following is typical of this sort of comment:

Financial burden of being in school full time and working part time instead of working full time.

The remaining five comments covered a variety of issues, including switching to a major not offered at UW–River Falls, a work-driven travel schedule that makes it difficult to complete traditional lecture-based courses, and moving from the area. Appendix B includes all the reasons offered by respondents.

Finally, respondents were asked what “one thing” UWRF could do to provide better service to student-veterans at UW–River Falls. A total of 52 respondents offered suggestions, the SRC grouped these comments into categories, and Table 4 provides a breakdown of the number of comments in a given category. The complete set of comments are included in Appendix B. As

indicated by Table 4 and supported by other parts of this report, the largest number of comments focused on supporting the existing Veterans’ Services Office on campus. The majority of these comments were variations on a theme of maintaining a full-time position for that office. A typical comment from this set of suggested improvements was:

Table 4: Suggested Improvement Topics, 2013	
Topic	Number
Support Veterans’ Office	11
Various UWRF Shortcomings	9
Help with Benefits	7
Improving Veteran Connections	7
More Flexible Class Schedules	4
Academic Credit for Military Training	3
Better Communications from Vets’ Office	3
Faculty Shortcomings	2
Housing Issues	2
Other	2
Don’t Know/Nothing	2

“Continue having a full-time, veteran dedicated staff position. It was really bad trying to get services when there wasn’t.”

As noted above, the Veterans’ Services Office garners strong support from the students it serves:

- The benefits counseling it offers was rated as the most important service the campus offers (92% rated this very important – Figure 4).
- It has the highest percentage of positive ratings from respondents across the range of UWRF offices/services (79% positive – Figure 5) and the proportion of respondents rating the office in a positive fashion has increased significantly over time.
- It is, by far, the primary source of information about veterans’ benefits (92% use it for information – Figure 6).

For all these reasons, it is not surprising that the Veterans' Services Office was a major focus of respondents' comments.

The second most common set of comments was a grab bag of things that student-veterans feel the university could do better. Some of these comments focused on improving communication channels ("*Create a way for student complaints to be seriously heard and addressed.*"), some called for the university to recognize that they want to be treated somewhat differently than the traditional population of recent high school graduates ("*Drop the first year experience and have a program tailored to older students and vets.. .*" and "*Provide an opportunity for veterans to use their experience and leadership as an RA or similar position without the 1 year required time in the dorms. . .*").

The "Help with Benefits" observations tend to fall into two categories. Some comments expressed on-going frustration with the Veterans' Administration ("*I know that it's not the fault of the local office but it seems like we have to wait forever for anything from VA.*"). The second category includes suggestions on how the campus office could assist veterans with their benefits ("*Have a required meeting with Vets at least once a year as a checkup, and a way to inform Vets of new benefits . . .*").

The comments included in the Improving Veteran Connections grouping echo the results from Figure 3/Table 3 which identified *improving connections with other veterans and with campus* as the changes most needed to improve the transition. A typical comment was:

"Provide more transfer/nontraditional student welcoming activities. We tend to be older/more mature than the incoming freshman and even other transfers. Eventually finding peers of my age and background has made going to UWRF much more rewarding. I wish I had found these supportive friends sooner."

The reader is encouraged to read the other suggestions for improving veterans' experiences included in this portion (Question 10) of Appendix B.

Conclusions

The feedback received from UW–River Falls student-veterans about their needs and experiences from the 2013 survey is generally positive. Fewer than 10% felt that the university had been somewhat ineffective or worse in terms of helping them transition to college. On the other hand, one-third said UW–River Falls was only “somewhat effective” in helping with this transition, indicating room for improvement. A relatively small proportion (13%) reported that they faced difficulties of such magnitude that they might be forced to withdraw from UW–River Falls

The Office of Veterans Services appears central to the generally positive view that student-veterans have of UW–River Falls and is a key element of their experience with this campus. This office is the primary source of information used by veterans regarding educational benefits to which they are entitled, the veterans value these counseling services quite highly, and, as a result, give good ratings to the performance of this office. The proportion of veterans reporting delays in receipt of benefits has declined over time and, in written comments, there are many testimonials as to the importance our student-veterans attach to this office.

Appendix A – Non-Response Bias Test

Any survey has to be concerned with “non-response bias.” Non-response bias refers to a situation in which people who do not return a questionnaire have opinions that are systematically different from the opinions of those who return their surveys. For example, suppose that only people who are particularly devoted to the UWRF Veterans Service Office responded to this survey. In that case, we would expect that the percentage saying that the Office meets their needs very well to be greater than would be true if a truly random sample of UWRF veterans responded to the survey.

A standard way to test for non-response bias is to compare the responses of those who responded to the first invitation to take the questionnaire to those who responded to subsequent invitations. Those who respond to subsequent invitations are, in effect, samples of non-respondents (to the first invitation), and we assume that they are representative of that group. In this survey, 35 people responded to a first invitation and 37 responded to subsequent invitations.

We tested 67 variables and found 3 with statistically significant differences between the mean responses of these two groups of respondents. These differences are summarized in the following table.

Compared to those who responded to the first invitation to participate in the survey, those responding to second or subsequent invitations were more likely to say they understood the paperwork associated with VA educational benefits, that the services received at Career Services are more important, and were more likely to be women.

The Survey Research Center (SRC) concludes that, given the few statistically significant differences, the evidence that non-response bias is a concern for this sample is not strong. We believe, therefore, that the results summarized in this report are likely to represent accurately the opinions of UWRF’s veterans.

Appendix B – Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Q1 - Where do you go for information about veteran's services and benefits? Other.

- Ask my Veteran spouse
- Under grad. School
- Vamc

Q4 - In question 3, you rated one or more of the UWRF resources/services as poor or very poor. Please tell us how UWRF could improve.

Note: *Eight respondents identified more than 1 office as coming up short of their expectations. In some instances their written comments were clearly associated with a particular office or service and in others, their comment was more generic. In the later cases, the comment is repeated for each office rated as poor by the respondent.*

Academic Advisors

- Academic Advising - my current advisor is rather unhelpful and disinterested. I feel like I'm a burden every time I go in.
- Advisors suck
- I have not been given proper guidance with respect to my schooling.
- My advisor does nothing I show up they ask me for my grad plan looks at it gives me my pin and tells me to leave, if you're to advise me actually do something say something.
- Provide better support

Academic Success Center

- All in all, UWRF is a horrible place in terms of being vet-friendly and non-traditional-friendly. Predominantly, the staff at UWRF in the Registrar office, academic success center, and billing/financial aid is condescending and do not treat students as adults. Perhaps the worst is residence life. The parking office is also a corrupt scam. If these were working for a company in the real world they would be out of jobs quickly. Several of these offices harass and extort students on a regular basis, and commit fraud continually.

Admissions - Application and Transfer

- All in all, UWRF is a horrible place in terms of being vet-friendly and non-traditional-friendly. Predominantly, the staff at UWRF in the Registrar office, academic success center, and billing/financial aid is condescending and do not treat students as adults. Perhaps the worst is residence life. The parking office is also a corrupt scam. If these were working for a company in the real world they would be out of jobs quickly. Several of these offices harass and extort students on a regular basis, and commit fraud continually.
- The staff was of no help and had quite an attitude when asked specific questions. I have felt belittled and the faculty have made me feel stupid. The only people that have worked with me one on one have been Veterans Services and Career Counseling. They have never made me feel in anyway like I am stupid.

Career Services

- Inaccessible and inefficient

Counseling Services

- 2 -rated poor/very poor - neither had comment

Financial Aid

- All in all, UWRF is a horrible place in terms of being vet-friendly and non-traditional-friendly. Predominantly, the staff at UWRF in the Registrar office, academic success center, and billing/financial aid is condescending and do not treat students as adults. Perhaps the worst is residence life. The parking office is also a corrupt scam. If these were working for a company in the real world they would be out of jobs quickly. Several of these offices harass and extort students on a regular basis, and commit fraud continually.
- Financial Aid - Very hard for someone like me to get any aid. I've witnessed other students having issues getting and applying for it as well. E.g., I accompanied a student to the Financial Aid office. This was the 3rd or 4th time he had gone in, each time there was suddenly a new form or series of paper work to fill out. Caused him to receive his aid late and almost forced him out of school.
- The staff was of no help and had quite an attitude when asked specific questions. I have felt belittled and the faculty have made me feel stupid. The only people that have worked with me one on one have been Veterans Services and Career Counseling. They have never made me feel in anyway like I am stupid.
- Treated like a child. Misleading information. The attitude in their office was very unprofessional.
- When I asked some questions pertaining to my situation they said they couldn't help with my FAFSA, but told me to go to someone else, they said only financial aid could help me and gave me the run around.

First-Year Experience

- First-year Experience - My Wow leader was very detached, the events were also uninteresting to most of the new students. I discovered services and found information out about the UWRF campus on my own that should have been presented to us.
- I personally did not feel like a member of the community as an older veteran. This is probably my own fault for not allowing me to integrate. I really don't have any suggestions. The Veterans service office, especially Nicole is doing a great job.
- Initially I was admitted as a non-resident for tuition despite State Statutes stating eligibility for in state tuition. Admissions office gave the "don't worry it will work out" answer to my concerns for this. VA office on campus was helpful in locating and submitting the correct forms required to overturn the admission decision, however, there was no forward progress in the admissions office at any step in the process except following personal visits to get the status.
- The staff was of no help and had quite an attitude when asked specific questions. I have

felt belittled and the faculty have made me feel stupid. The only people that have worked with me one on one have been Veterans Services and Career Counseling. They have never made me feel in anyway like I am stupid.

Registrar

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- The constant need for a re-entry form, and then waiting for it to be reviewed and status updated, is ridiculous. Being a non-traditional student is already difficult at UWRF, and trying to finish the degree online is virtually impossible. There are very few classes offered online (which are the only classes I can take), so if I'm not taking classes during any given semester it's not because I don't want to, it's because the same classes are offered over, and over, and over again. And then I have to go through the entire re-entry process again. I've filled out the form no less than 5 times.
- They are rude and treat people like children.

Staff and Faculty Support

- All in all, UWRF is a horrible place in terms of being vet-friendly and non-traditional-friendly. Predominantly, the staff at UWRF in the Registrar office, academic success center, and billing/financial aid is condescending and do not treat students as adults. Perhaps the worst is residence life. The parking office is also a corrupt scam. If these were working for a company in the real world they would be out of jobs quickly. Several of these offices harass and extort students on a regular basis, and commit fraud continually.
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- Most of staff are rude if they are not in a direct student role. Student services doesn't listen. I don't use health services, I don't see a point. I can go to hospital for attention.
- Provide better support

Student Affairs

- All in all, UWRF is a horrible place in terms of being vet-friendly and non-traditional-friendly. Predominantly, the staff at UWRF in the Registrar office, academic success center, and billing/financial aid is condescending and do not treat students as adults. Perhaps the worst is residence life. The parking office is also a corrupt scam. If these were working for a company in the real world they would be out of jobs quickly. Several of these offices harass and extort students on a regular basis, and commit fraud continually.
- Most of staff is rude if they are not in a direct student role. Student services doesn't listen. I don't use health services, I don't see a point. I can go to hospital for attention.
- The staff was of no help and had quite an attitude when asked specific questions. I have felt belittled and the faculty have made me feel stupid. The only people that have worked with me one on one have been Veterans Services and Career Counseling. They have never made me feel in anyway like I am stupid.

Student Health Services

- It would be nice if there were a nurse on campus we could just ask questions of.
- Most of staff is rude if they are not in a direct student role. Student services doesn't listen. I don't use health services, I don't see a point. I can go to hospital for attention.
- The health services here is atrocious. The clinic is not helpful and I tell people not to go to the clinic. I tell everyone to go to Stillwater, MN instead
- There should be a health center on campus, rather than having to go to the River Falls Clinic

Veterans Services Office

- All in all, UWRF is a horrible place in terms of being vet-friendly and non-traditional-friendly. Predominantly, the staff at UWRF in the Registrar office, academic success center, and billing/financial aid is condescending and do not treat students as adults. Perhaps the worst is residence life. The parking office is also a corrupt scam. If these were working for a company in the real world they would be out of jobs quickly. Several of these offices harass and extort students on a regular basis, and commit fraud continually.
- I have been to another school (UND) and my experience there with the veteran's services office was substantially better. At that school they allow you to register for classes before anyone else when you are coming back from deployment, they also had many other benefits for student veterans.

Question 6. As a current student-veteran and/or family member or dependent, please rate the level of importance you place on the following services as they apply to your particular situation. Other.

- Professional staff

Question 7a. Describe any difficulties that may cause you to stop attending UWRF.

Financial Issues (5)

- Being able to afford going to school while trying to maintain a job and do full time classes seems to be making attending school that much more difficult, and the fact that I am from Minnesota and can't use some of the benefits I earned as a veteran here in Wisconsin, such as my GI bill.
- Financial burden of being in school full time and working part time instead of working full time.
- Finding ways to pay for tuition
- I am currently unemployed and because I am attending school full time the state of Wisconsin Unemployment Laws have determined I am unavailable for work and therefore not eligible for unemployment benefits while attending school. This puts the decision on me to either go broke to finish my school or quit school to go back to work.
- Not enough money. I don't get Tuition Assistance due to PT failure.

Other (5)

- I think I might change my major, and the major I want to do isn't offered here.
- I won't stop attending because I'm too close to completion, but there have been countless difficulties just getting to this point and I anticipate even more in the future.
- Non-traditional student with full time job that requires periodic travel, which makes scheduling and attending traditional lecture hall classes very difficult. I would like to see UWRF begin offering online classes in the 100 level, and some 200 level, for the general elective courses.
- See previous remarks
- Significant other being transferred to another country.

Question 9. Please identify areas where you could use or could have used additional assistance in making the transition to university life. Other.

- Academic advisement
- Career path planning
- Flexibility of courses: online classes
- I am stubborn, I'd rather get by fine by myself.
- To be treated like an adult not some 18 year old high school graduate.

Question 10. What one thing could UWRF do to provide better service for you as a student-veteran at UWRF?

Support Veterans' Office (11)

- Cannot think of anything that needs changing. / Nicole is the best asset they have. She is the very core of the program and everything should be done to retain her.
- Continue having a full-time, veteran dedicated staff position. It was really bad trying to get services when there wasn't.
- Don't cut the hours of the staff working in the veteran's services office!
- I think Veteran services does an outstanding job!
- In addition to keeping the veterans office open 5 days a week, a veteran lounge would be beneficial.
- Keep full time VA representative available. This means that the assistant needed can be attended to in a reasonable time and there would be support at all times.
- Keep Nicole Lillis at 100% she does great work and actually cares. Helped write part of the New GI Bill legislation, so she's knowledgeable. When things go wrong with benefits it really sucks and takes a lot of time to get things fixed.
- Keep your veterans program manager in place.
- Maintain a full-time VA representative at UWRF. The school I transferred from did not have a full time VA rep and it was difficult even to communicate issues with paperwork or finances when the representative was there only part-time. Having staff there Monday through Friday really helps.
- Maintain the Veterans office full time to ensure assistance with paperwork for our GI Bill tuition assistance
- More Staff at Veteran Services

Various UWRF Shortcomings (9)

- Better registration for veterans returning from active duty or deployment. I was treated like a first year student and had to wait to enroll in classes.
- Career path planning.
- Create a way for student complaints to be seriously heard and addressed.
- Drop the first year experience and have a program tailored to older students and vets. For me this would have been great because at 24 I did not need or want the same things as a new 18 year old student.
- Make it clear that Veterans mean something to the UWRF. Talk is cheap. Action speaks volumes
- Make sure all students that work in the veteran's office are trained. My experience with dealing with UWRF was that I felt the student staff was trained properly. I had to do an extra step in order to sign up for my benefits when they could have transferred all information from my undergrad university.
- Provide an opportunity for veterans to use their experience and leadership as an RA or similar position without the 1 year required time in the dorms. I lived in dorms 2 years as well as barracks which are similar for 5. I think if the RA option was open for me I

would do it if I did not need to pay to live in the dorms 1 year first. It would help out veterans with housing and help RF with our experience in this setting.

- Receive confirmation of forms being received via email.
- Remove late fees for late tuition payment since payment date is out of our hands.

Help with Benefits (7)

- A seminar to explain some of the typical paperwork associated with GI Bill and other military programs.
- Have a required meeting with Vets at least once a year as a checkup, and a way to inform Vets of new benefits, etc.
- Help to explain the available financial aid for veterans.
- I feel that we could have a more efficient way of communicating between the VA services and the campus to have a faster application process. The delay in my benefits could have cost me my place where I call home at the moment if I would not have had additional funds for other purposes.
- I know that it's not the fault of the local office but it seems like we have to wait forever for anything from VA
- Offer an annual personally scheduled advisement meeting to explain benefits as they pertain to the individual veteran.
- Provide a workshop or host a meeting for student-veterans where all the available benefits are presented and explained.

Improving Veteran Connections (7)

- For me, I would like to see more gatherings outside of the university; picnic at a park, a day doing volunteer work, a weekend camping or hiking; I feel like drinking away the past is the only common ground with some members.
- I didn't even know about the Veteran group until my last year :/ I still don't know what they offer, who they are or why I should be involved.
- Provide more transfer/nontraditional student welcoming activities. We tend to be older/more mature than the incoming freshman and even other transfers. Eventually finding peers of my age and background has made going to UWRF much more rewarding. I wish I had found these supportive friends sooner.
- Student veterans can sometimes have a hard time reaching out to each other so a lounge that is always open for study and meeting would be a great idea, There is always more ask of veterans and especially those with family and sometime things come up that take priority and cannot make it to class not all instructors are sensitive to this, thus hurting our grades for trying to come back to school with families, spouse kids, etc.
- Veterans club could post signup for veterans intramural sports teams in the Veterans service office.
- We really need a veterans room
- When I first arrived here I was under the impression that there was a student group for non-trad students. However I could not find any information anywhere in the system. Like the veterans group, it would also be beneficial to have a non-trad group as well.

More Flexible Class Schedules (4)

- Could have more night and weekend classes for not traditional students
- I would like if some professors could be more accommodating when the instance arises that I need to miss class time for military required work (orders which cause absence on a Thursday and Friday).
- Maybe more connection with other veteran's for veterans that take online courses
- On-line courses

Academic Credit for Military Training (3)

- A better understand of military schools and credits that cross over to UWRF credits.
- Contact each member's education office at their base to get correct information since it often occurs that the base will tell me one thing and veteran affairs tells me another.
- Find better ways to transfer over military credits, most people have over 300 hours of credit military schooling, plus other in class military credits.

Better Communication from Veterans Office (3)

- Better communication between veteran services and billing office of delays in my benefits
- Have information sent out to us instead of us seeking it out or finding out about it too late or after the fact. I had no idea about half of the benefits I was supposed to get and still aren't
- To reach out more, give personalized emails, rather than just a monthly newsletter.

Faculty Shortcomings (2)

- My first advisor did not advise me at all, which led to me taking a semester of classes that I did not need to take.
- The teachers should be more approachable. I find some of them hard to talk to outside of class.

Housing Issues (2)

- A possibility of veteran housing.
- Work with students if there is a housing problem. Last year, I had a horrible roommate, and it took them about a month longer than they claimed to get it taken care of. Overall I haven't had a good experience with Res Life. Campus life in general is awesome though.

Other (2)

- I wish I had an answer to this. I believe it is the attitude the military cultivates in each veteran which hurts them in the long run. This school has done a lot to help me feel part of a whole, it just takes time I guess.
- This is a difficult question that will take some consideration. The biggest challenge I have personally is the change in lifestyle that come with the change of income, finding employment that does not take away from academics, and building relationships with other students.

Don't Know/Nothing (2)

Question 13. My academic status is: Other

- 2/3 time
- Part-time when a class is offered that I can actually take, otherwise I'm on leave from school

Question 19. What are your current living Arrangements? Other

- Living with Family Member

Question 21. What are your sources of funding for your university education? Other

- Disability
- Minnesota military tuition reimbursement
- My money
- VA Comp

Appendix C – Frequency of Responses by Question

The data presented in this Appendix include partial responses that were excluded from the analysis presented in the body of this report.

1. Where do you go for veterans' services info and benefits?

	Response	%
UWRF Veterans' Services Office	69	88%
U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs	19	24%
County Veterans Services Office	17	22%
American Legion Veterans Services Office	2	3%
Military Unit/Education Officer	9	12%
Other, specify	4	5%

2. Satisfaction with identified priorities?

	Very Sat	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Don't Know	Count
Credit for military training and service	27%	23%	15%	9%	8%	18%	74
Additional veterans services and programs	18%	24%	26%	3%	4%	26%	74
Degree completion assistance	16%	23%	30%	3%	4%	24%	74
Alternative curriculum delivery formats (on-line, evening, weekend, etc.)	14%	22%	27%	8%	5%	24%	74
Special orientation for veterans	12%	20%	24%	8%	4%	31%	74
Re-establishment of the Veterans Club	12%	20%	34%	5%	1%	27%	74

3. Rate experience with UWRF resources/services

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Total Responses
Academic advising	32%	36%	22%	6%	4%	69
Academic success center	37%	31%	26%	3%	3%	35
Admissions - application and transfer	29%	41%	27%	3%	0%	66
Bursar/billing/tuition payment	26%	43%	26%	1%	3%	69
Career services	32%	34%	27%	5%	2%	41
Counseling services	31%	39%	25%	3%	3%	36
Financial aid	34%	36%	21%	4%	5%	56
First-year experience	22%	37%	33%	4%	4%	54
Registrar services/enrollment verification	24%	50%	21%	2%	3%	66
Staff and faculty support	33%	49%	12%	6%	0%	67
Student affairs/student services	21%	40%	30%	6%	2%	47
Student health services	21%	24%	44%	9%	3%	34
Veterans' Services Office	51%	30%	14%	3%	1%	70

5. Please choose the response that best represents your opinion:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
I have understood the paperwork associated with VA education benefits	29%	61%	10%	0%	72
I have experienced delays in receiving my VA education benefits	13%	37%	30%	19%	67
I know where to go on campus if I have questions regarding veterans services	69%	23%	7%	1%	71
My transition to college has been made easier by the assistance provided to me by UWRF personnel	34%	55%	7%	3%	58
I have had difficulty in finding adequate housing while attending UWRF	7%	24%	40%	29%	42
I feel connected with other UWRF students	21%	47%	20%	12%	66
UWRF faculty/staff are sensitive to the needs of the veterans on campus	18%	50%	25%	7%	56
UWRF has qualified staff trained to address service members'/veterans' needs	34%	54%	8%	3%	61

6. Level of importance of services

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Unsure	Total Responses
Academic support/tutoring	53%	30%	11%	6%	70
Career services/planning	54%	33%	9%	4%	70
Disability services/support	43%	31%	19%	7%	70
Financial aid counseling	49%	34%	10%	7%	70
Healthcare for service-related conditions (injuries, TBI, etc.)	37%	24%	24%	14%	70
Individual personal counseling or mental health (PTSD, depression, MST, etc.)	39%	23%	21%	17%	70
Social activities and events	29%	34%	27%	10%	70
Support groups and/or clubs specifically for active-duty and veteran students	34%	36%	19%	11%	70
VA service organizations (American Legion, DAV, etc.)	41%	34%	13%	11%	70
Veterans services/benefits counseling	67%	24%	3%	6%	70
Student-veteran lounge or gathering place	36%	34%	19%	11%	70
Other, specify	14%	0%	7%	79%	14

7. Experiencing difficulties that might cause you to stop attending UWRF?

	Response	%
Yes	9	13%
No	61	87%
Total	70	100%

8. Effectiveness of UWRF transition to university life

	Response	%
Very Effective	13	19%
Effective	26	38%
Somewhat Effective	23	33%
Somewhat Ineffective	5	7%
Ineffective	1	1%
Very Ineffective	1	1%
Total	69	100%

9. Areas of additional transition assistance needed

	Response	%
Assistance connecting to campus life/organizations	21	40%
Assistance connecting to other veterans	20	38%
Assistance with academics	15	29%
Financial management	13	25%
Marriage/family issues	7	13%
Medical care	7	13%
Personal issues	12	23%
Spiritual issues	7	13%
Time management assistance	14	27%
Other, please specify	5	10%

11. What is your current military status

	Response	%
Veteran	39	55%
Active Duty Military	0	0%
National Guard	13	18%
Reserves	6	8%
Family Member/Dependent of Veteran	13	18%
Total	71	100%

12. Have you been activated within last 5 years

	Response	%
Yes	33	47%
No	37	53%
Total	70	100%

12a. Which branch of service activated you

	Response	%
Air Force	2	6%
Army	24	73%
Coast Guard	0	0%
Marines	4	12%
Navy	3	9%
Other, specify	0	0%
Total	33	100%

13. What is your academic status

	Response	%
Full-Time Student	62	87%
Part-Time Student	7	10%
Recently Graduated	0	0%
Currently on Leave from School	0	0%
Other, specify	2	3%
Total	71	100%

14. What is your class standing

	Response	%
Freshman (less than 30 credits)	5	7%
Sophomore (30 - 59 credits)	9	13%
Junior (60 - 89 credits)	23	32%
Senior (90+ credits)	27	38%
Graduate Student	6	8%
Continuing Education	1	1%
Total	71	100%

15. What is your age

	Response	%
18 - 22	17	24%
23 - 25	14	20%
26 - 29	20	28%
30 - 35	9	13%
36 - 39	3	4%
40+	8	11%
Total	71	100%

16. What is your gender

	Response	%
Male	43	63%
Female	25	37%
Total	68	100%

17. What is your marital status

	Response	%
Single	40	58%
Married/Have a partner	26	38%
Divorced/Separated	3	4%
Widowed	0	0%
Total	69	100%

18a. How many adults, including you, live in your household

	1	2	3+	Total Responses	Mean
Adults (18+ years old)	31%	40%	29%	68	2

18b. How many children live in your household

	0	1	2	3+	Total Responses	Mean
Children	70%	16%	10%	4%	70	1

19. What are your current living arrangements

		Response	%
Residence Hall		10	14%
Off campus rental apartment or home		31	44%
Own home		22	31%
Parent's home		6	9%
Deployed		0	0%
Other, specify		1	1%
Total		70	100%

20. What is your household income range

		Response	%
Less than \$15,000		21	31%
\$15,000 - 24,999		10	15%
\$25,000 - 49,999		11	16%
\$50,000 - 74,999		13	19%
\$75,000 - 99,999		6	9%
\$100,000 or more		7	10%
Total		68	100%

21. What are your sources of funding for your education

		Response	%
Employment		36	52%
Family Resources/Support		9	13%
Loans		26	38%
Grants		19	28%
Scholarships		13	19%
VA Educational Benefits		61	88%
Military Tuition Assistance		20	29%
Other, specify		4	6%

22. Are you aware that there is a Veterans' Club on campus?

		Response	%
Yes		55	77%
No		16	23%
Total		71	100%

23. Are you a member of the Veterans' Club?

		Response	%
Yes		12	22%
No		42	78%
Total		54	100%

24. What is the best way to communicate with you?

		Response	%
Veterans' Services Office Website		1	1%
Emails		66	94%
Mailings		2	3%
Twitter		0	0%
Veterans' Club Facebook page		1	1%
Other, please specify		0	0%
Total		70	100%

25. Do you know the UWRF Veterans' Services Office Location?

		Response	%
Yes		62	89%
No		8	11%
Total		70	100%