



*Christopher Sorbello, right, and Juan Pablo Sirri, third from right, lead the Student Veterans Organization at Pierce College in Woodland Hills, California. Nearly one thousand returning veterans are currently attending Pierce College. (Photo by UD)*

## ***Connecting Military Service and Civilian Life***

*California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office  
Jack Scott, Chancellor*



SEPTEMBER 2011

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*Prepared by the  
Chancellor's Office  
Student Services Division  
and the  
Office of Communications*

THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES  
**Connecting Military Service and Civilian Life**

**An Overview: Purpose and Intent**

This report provides an overview of veterans accessing the system’s colleges and highlights several of the innovative steps taken by the board of governors, the Chancellor’s Office, and local campuses to address the critical needs of the growing population of veterans. The report specifically addresses the following:

- The current enrollment of student veterans in the community colleges.
- Statewide and local efforts to provide support services for veterans.
- Promising practices to improve community college support services for veterans.
- The California Community Colleges’ legislative efforts to ensure adequate support services for veterans across the system.

In addition, the report lays the foundation for a broader initiative. It seeks to increase awareness of the needs of student veterans, promote coordination of campus and community services, and advocate for sufficient funding to ensure that veterans at all of the 112 campuses receive the high level of support they need to achieve their educational and career goals.

**Introduction**

With an estimated 2.2 million veterans residing in California, the state’s veteran population leads the nation. That number is expected to increase dramatically as more military personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan complete their service. As these veterans transition back to civilian life, many will take advantage of the education benefits earned while serving in the military.

Many will look to one of the 112 community colleges as the most easily accessible and affordable educational option available. In fact, more than 26,600 veterans utilized education benefits at a community college in 2009. In addition, there were an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 active duty military personnel enrolled in the system during that same period.

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The recession-plagued economy and competitive job market have limited employment options for returning veterans and made a college education even more critical for their transition to civilian life. Community colleges serve as a natural gateway, particularly for those veterans who want to further their technical skills or are ineligible for direct admission to the California State University or University of California systems. Scores from community college placement tests in English and mathematics confirm that many veterans return with inadequate skills in these subject areas to immediately succeed in college-level work, either due to a lack of preparation or because they were out of the classroom for many years.

Experts on veterans' education issues also note that veterans must adjust to civilian life and manage a host of social and health issues, while they attempt to adapt to life on a college campus. Although the campuses can provide the education that veterans need, some veterans are finding it challenging and confusing to utilize their well-earned educational benefits, and even more difficult to find and access the support services they need. Although many community colleges are making noteworthy efforts to address the personal, social, and educational needs of returning veterans, there is an inconsistency in the level of support throughout the system that can only be addressed by system-wide initiatives and a significant infusion of additional public or private resources.

- **Expanded Support and Technical Assistance for Campus Veteran Services**

All California Community College campuses have a veterans' education benefits certifying official, often located in the financial aid office, who helps with the technical process of certifying eligibility for benefits in accordance with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requirements. However, with the growing numbers of veterans entering our system and the re-entry challenges many of them face, colleges have recognized the need to expand support services to help veterans successfully integrate into civilian and college life. To assist the colleges and provide broader statewide leadership and coordination, the Chancellor's Office has established a support and communication infrastructure for veterans program coordinators. Three components are described below:

- **Regional Representation Structure**

The Chancellor's Office has organized a regional representation structure and hosts regular meetings of this group to better identify student veteran needs across the system and encourage the exchange of innovative ideas and effective practices for serving them.  
*(A listing of colleges in each of the 10 regions can be found on page 5.)*

- **Systemwide Email List**

The Chancellor's Office established a systemwide email list, internal to the 112 campuses, through which it communicates information and strategies related to serving student veterans. This list provides an efficient way to rapidly disseminate important or urgent information and is a forum for dialog among the colleges and the Chancellor's Office.

- **Veterans Web Page**

With input from the veterans program regional representatives, the Chancellor's Office redesigned its veterans Web page to better support the colleges by providing information about model programs and GI bill benefits, as well as links to other useful resources.

## Veterans

[Home](#) > [Students](#) > [Succeed in College](#) > [Veterans](#) >



### Troops to College

California's Troops to College initiative showcases services available to veterans at California State University, the University of California, and California Community Colleges. Troops to College helps ensure veterans are aware of their educational options.

<http://www.troopstocollege.ca.gov/>

### California Department of Veterans Affairs

The California Department of Veterans Affairs offers educational resources for veterans including educational benefits, postsecondary education, training and apprentice programs.

<http://www.cdva.ca.gov/Resources/Education.aspx>

### GI Bill Website

Visit this website to learn about educational benefits provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

<http://www.gbill.va.gov/>

### Post-9/11 GI Bill

The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides financial support for education and housing to individuals with at least 90 days of aggregate service on or after Sept. 11, 2001, or individuals discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days.

<http://www.gbill.va.gov/post-911/>

### College Fee Waiver Program

Children or spouses of U.S. veterans may get college fees waived if they attend a California community college, California State University or University of California campus.

<http://www.cacvso.org/contentpage.asp?ContentID=183>

[High School Students](#)  
[Community College Students](#)  
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## California Community College Regions

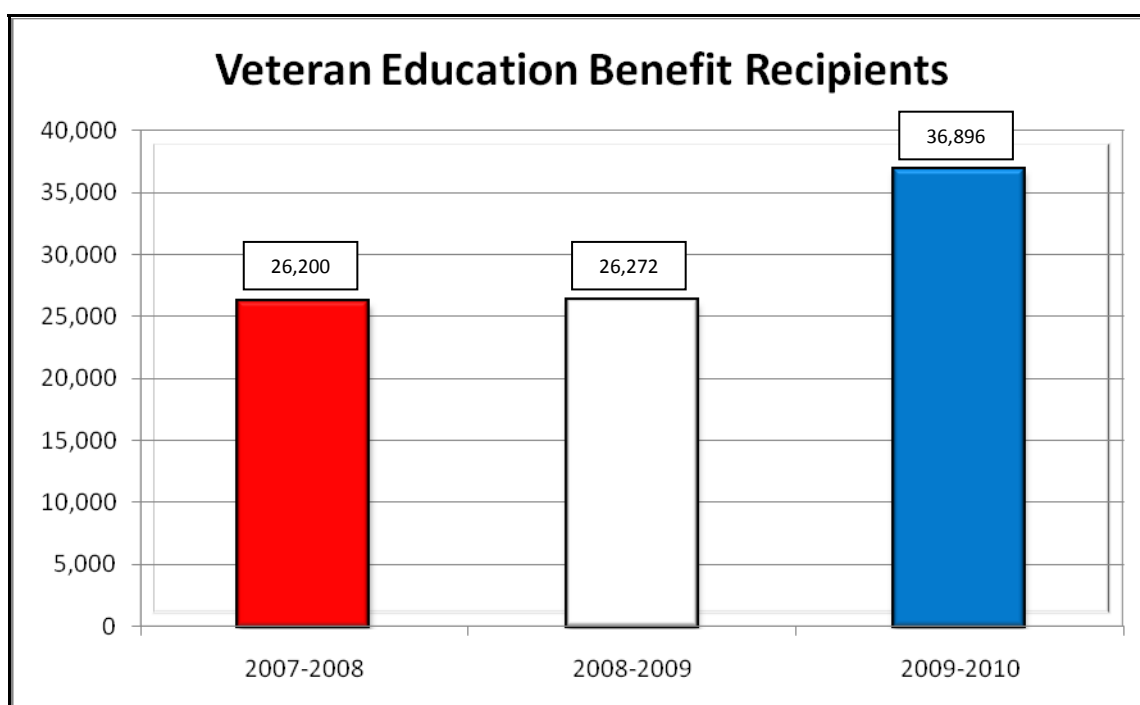
REGION I	REGION II	REGION III
Butte	American River	Alameda
Feather River	Cosumnes River	Berkeley City
Lassen	Folsom Lake	Contra Costa
Redwoods	Lake Tahoe	Diablo Valley
Shasta	Mendocino	Laney
Siskiyou	Napa Valley	Los Medanos
	Sacramento City	Marin
	Sierra	Merritt
	Solano	San Francisco City
	Woodland	San Mateo
	Yuba	Santa Rosa
		Skyline
REGION IV	REGION V	REGION VI
Cabrillo	Bakersfield	Allan Hancock
Chabot	Columbia	Antelope Valley
DeAnza	Fresno City	Canyons
Evergreen Valley	Merced	Cuesta
Foothill	Modesto	Moorpark
Gavilan	Porterville	Moreno
Hartnell	Reedley	Norco
Las Positas	San Joaquin Delta	Oxnard
Mission	Sequoias	Santa Barbara
Monterey Peninsula	West Hills Coalinga	Santa Barbara
Ohlone	West Hills Lemoore	Taft
San Jose City		Ventura
West Valley		
REGION VII	REGION VIII	REGION IX
Compton Educational Center	Cerritos	Barstow
East Los Angeles	Citrus	Cerro Coso
El Camino	Coastline	Chaffey
Glendale	Cypress	Copper Mountain
L.A. City	Fullerton	Crafton Hills
L.A. Harbor	Golden West	Desert
L.A. Mission	Irvine Valley	Mt. San Jacinto
L.A. Pierce	Long Beach	Palo Verde
L.A. Southwest	Mt. San Antonio	Riverside City
L.A. Trade-Tech	Orange Coast	San Bernardino
L.A. Valley	Rio Hondo	Victor Valley
Pasadena City	Saddleback	
Santa Monica	Santa Ana	
West L.A.	Santiago Canyon	
REGION X		
Cuyamaca	Palomar	
Grossmont	San Diego City	
Imperial Valley	San Diego Mesa	
MiraCosta	San Diego Miramar	

## Measuring Enrollment of Student Veterans

The Chancellor's Office currently measures the number of student veterans in the system via an annual report filed by financial aid offices, known as the *Form 3 Report*. This report provides an unduplicated count of student veterans who certify to receive VA educational benefits semester by semester. The four categories of benefit recipients captured in the report are: veterans, reservists, active duty military and dependents of disabled or deceased veterans. By capturing veteran student enrollment each semester, this report provides a fairly accurate representation of students served by the colleges who receive VA educational benefits.

The current data is limited to those student veterans that utilize VA educational benefits. As a result, these numbers do not reflect all active duty military and veterans enrolled in the system. Those veterans who do not apply for or are not eligible to receive VA educational benefits are not represented. To address this data gap, the Chancellor's Office Student Financial Assistance Program staff and Management Information Systems unit staff have worked together to establish two data elements in the California Community Colleges online application/registration system, known as CCCApply. These new data elements will identify veterans, National Guard Reservists, active duty military, and dependents of each, including those not drawing VA education benefits, thus providing more robust data on student veterans in our system. Some data will be available beginning with the 2010-11 academic year.

The chart below represents data from the 2009-10 *Form 3 Report* and shows that 36,896 students received veterans' education benefits while attending a California Community College during that academic year. It demonstrates a 40.8 percent increase in veterans' education benefit recipients from the 2008-09 to the 2009-10 academic years. We anticipate that this rapid growth will continue over the next several academic years as more and more active-duty service members leave the military and enroll in a community college.



## Statewide Veteran Support Services

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, with the strong support of its board of governors, is engaging in several statewide projects to expand support services for veterans entering a system college. The following is a sampling of these efforts.

### Veterans Resource Center Project

Several community colleges have established a Veterans Resource Center (VRC) on campus where student veterans can interact with one another and obtain information and services. Feedback from these colleges indicates that having a VRC lends meaningful support to student veterans transitioning from a military culture to a college culture. To encourage more colleges to develop a VRC, the Chancellor's Office partnered with one of its grantees, the High Tech Center Training Unit (HTCTU) at De Anza College. Using Butte College's VRC as a model, the Chancellor's Office and the HTCTU offered free hardware, software and on-site training in assistive technology to colleges willing to make a commitment to promoting academics, camaraderie, and wellness; provide a dedicated space for student veterans to gather; and offer coordinated services to veterans through the establishment of internal teams comprised of campus partners such as financial aid, counseling, DSP&S and others. As a result, 15 additional colleges have established a VRC on their campus.

The Chancellor's Office and the HTCTU selected the following colleges as pilot sites:

- Butte College
- Chaffey College
- Cuesta College
- El Camino College
- Foothill College
- Fullerton College
- Grossmont College
- Merced College
- Mt. San Antonio College
- Pasadena City College
- Riverside City College
- Sacramento City College
- City College of San Francisco
- San Joaquin Delta College
- Santa Monica College

To further extend the program, the Chancellor's Office and the HTCTU selected 12 additional colleges that will be provided with free software and training.

Colleges receiving the hardware, software and training were encouraged to include the following components and services in their veterans' resource centers:

### Components

- **Academics** – Providing students with tools, strategies and insights that optimize academic success.
- **Camaraderie** - Providing services and counseling directly through fellow veterans, building upon the military traditions of shared values and experiences. This peer assistance should provide a bridge to a wide range of campus services.

- **Wellness** - Providing referrals to on- and off-campus resources, such as the student health clinic and providing consultation to college faculty and staff regarding issues specific to returning veterans and their family members.

### Services

- Access to computers and assistance in the use of assistive technologies, including specialized software for those suffering the effects of traumatic brain injury.
- Academic counseling and tutoring.
- Peer support and mentoring.
- Financial aid and veterans benefit information and application assistance.
- Referral to on- and off-campus resources (e.g., Disabled Students Programs and Services, local VA center, etc.)

### Zellerbach Family Foundation Project: “Welcome Home: Creating a Campus Community of Wellness for Returning Veterans”

In March 2010, the Chancellor’s Office applied for and received a \$75,000 grant from the Zellerbach Family Foundation to support the development, pilot testing, and implementation of a training program for faculty and staff about the mental health needs of student veterans. The major objective of the training is to increase awareness about the signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and depression so that faculty and staff can better recognize and respond to these conditions.

The training was piloted during February 2011 at De Anza College, City College of San Francisco and College of San Mateo. In addition, resources were developed for faculty and staff use after the training. The resources include campus and community referral information, additional reading, and a quick reference guide to recognizing the major signs and symptoms of PTSD, TBI and depression. These resources have been made available to colleges statewide.

### Troops to College Program

California's Troops to College program was initiated in March 2006 to provide educational opportunities and assistance to active duty service members and veterans by the state’s public education segments and related agencies, and was specifically targeted to increase instructional opportunities for men and women on active duty, the National Guard and the reserves.

Through this effort, the Chancellor’s Office joined the previous administration, together with the University of California and California State University systems, in partnering with the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Office of the Secretary of Education, the Labor and Workforce Development Agency and state military branches to provide active duty service members and eligible veterans information, enrollment guidance and assistance about attending California’s public higher education institutions.

### “VetsConnect” Program Pilot

The Chancellor’s Office developed a concept paper for a community college student veteran services project titled VetsConnect, to solicit federal support for enhanced veterans services. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to secure a Congressional earmark or a federal grant. Because these requests were not funded, we continue to seek other funding opportunities for expansion of VRCs throughout the system.

### “Honor a Hero, Hire a Vet” Job and Resource Fairs

The Chancellor’s Office co-sponsors the “Honor a Hero, Hire a Vet” annual job and resource project, and coordinates local campus participation in regional job fairs held throughout the state. These events serve to inform veterans of employment opportunities, as well as available career technical education and workforce training opportunities.

Some of the benefits of attending these fairs include:

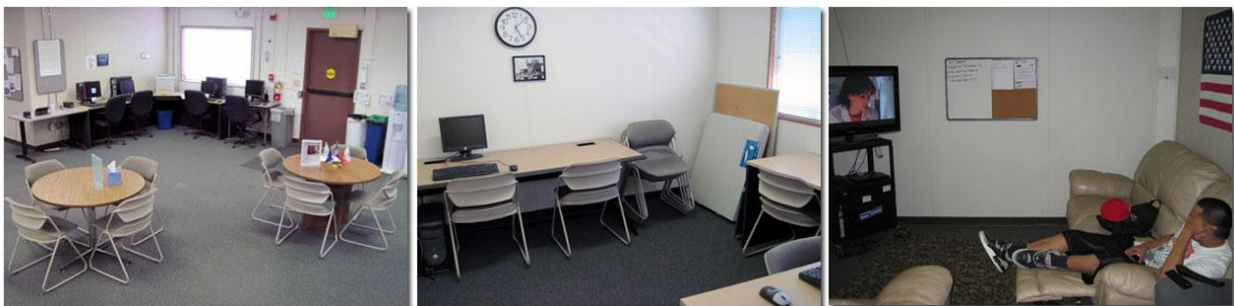
- Finding out about job opportunities
- Meeting and interviewing with employers
- Learning about educational opportunities
- Obtaining benefits, training and career information
- Getting assistance with CalVet financing

### Local Veterans Support Services

While every California community college provides some level of support services to veterans, several campuses have established particularly innovative and/or comprehensive services. These are designed to help veterans feel welcome and to offer the level of support and referral services they need to achieve their educational goals. Below are a few examples of noteworthy veterans programs:

#### Butte College – Veterans Resource Center

Butte College’s Office of Veterans Services offers many services to help its veterans and their dependents achieve their educational goals. In 2008, Butte College established the Veterans Resource Center (*shown below*) as an extension of its Office of Veterans Services. The VRC was created to better serve the needs of student veterans by assisting them in transition to college and civilian life. As noted earlier in this report, Butte College’s VRC is a model veterans resource center.



Services provided by the Veterans Resource Center include:

- Veterans educational benefits information (including CAL-Vet fee waivers and the VA Student Work-Study Allowance Program)
- Referrals to academic support services, such as counseling and disabled student services
- A list of local veterans services agencies and contacts
- Disabled veterans compensation information
- Peer support, mentoring, and textbook exchange
- Free printing, copying, and faxing
- Referrals to the on-campus mental health specialist
- Financial aid information and application assistance
- Lounge area with TV, couches, movies, Internet access, coffee, and study tables

The Butte College VRC staff also assists veterans in their daily life by serving as liaisons to connect veterans with existing community services and help with various issues, including health and mental health issues such as traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse.

### Saddleback College – Veterans Education and Transition Services

The Saddleback College Veterans Education and Transition Services (VETS) program is a major component of the college's services to student veterans. This program was created to serve the needs of veterans, active duty service members and their families. The goal of the VETS program is to help present and past military service members and their families experience a smooth transition from orientation to graduation.



Some of the specific programs and services for student veterans at Saddleback College include:

- Specialized veterans counseling
- Accommodations for veterans with disabilities
- Distance learning
- Board of governors fee waivers
- In-state tuition waivers
- Child development center services
- VA work-study/campus job opportunities
- Healthcare Center

In addition, Saddleback College recently dedicated a memorial sculpture, designed by Saddleback art professor Richard White and ceramicist Fred Olsen, to honor U.S. veterans and military personnel. The concept for this memorial began in 2004 when a campus committee met to discuss ways to permanently honor veterans. This remarkable sculpture, complete with waterfalls and night lighting, may be the most significant tribute to veterans at any college campus in the nation.

## Sierra College Veteran Student Alliance

Sierra College Veterans Office joined forces with members of the Sierra College Veteran Student Alliance to create the Sierra College Veteran Help Center. The center, which is intended to provide a safe and welcoming place for veterans and their dependents to receive support, information, and camaraderie, includes space where vets can work on their homework, unwind, or just interact with fellow veterans.

The center's services include:

- Information on the following:
  - Educational Benefits/GI Bill
  - VA benefits
  - Veteran scholarships and emergency loans
  - Financial aid
- Employment
- Campus tours and help with class registration
- Vet-to-vet tutoring and study groups
- Buddy Sponsorship Program for new veterans
- Access to computers and specialized programs
- The Veteran Student Alliance club ([www.veteranstudentalliance.net](http://www.veteranstudentalliance.net))
- Information about local veterans organizations
- On campus appointments with a veterans county service officer to assist in completing VA disability claims and assist with applying for VA health benefits

## Promising Community College Veterans Services Practices

### “Road Home” Events

A number of community colleges have provided “Road Home” events that are geared toward increasing awareness and providing insights about some of the issues facing veterans as they transition from military life to civilian and college life. These Road Home events are just one of many unique transitional programs from which community college veterans benefit and include not only veterans but also faculty, counselors and support staff from various student services throughout the campus. Some events include student veterans as speakers to share their own first-hand experiences and thoughts about transitioning to campus life.

These events encourage collaboration between veterans, campus communities and local communities and provide yet another welcoming way for community colleges to show their support for returning veterans.

### Veterans Clubs (Student Veterans of America)

Many community colleges have veterans clubs that are connected with the Student Veterans of America (SVA). Founded in 2008, SVA is a coalition of student veterans groups on college campuses across the United States. These groups coordinate campus activities, provide pre-professional networking and generally provide support for student veterans in higher education.

## Boots to Books

Boots to Books is a course for veterans and active duty military, particularly those returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, and their friends and families. The curriculum at Citrus College was developed to help student veterans succeed in academics, work, family and other social settings, and covers interpersonal skills and techniques for managing transition issues. One topic of particular importance is how to manage stress with a focus on post-traumatic stress disorder. At Sierra College, a Boots to Books course is paired with a remedial English course during the same term so that students take both courses simultaneously.

## Conclusion

The Student Veterans of America ([www.studentveterans.org](http://www.studentveterans.org)), a national coalition of student veterans groups, states:

“Presently, a variety of community colleges and universities have adapted their services and programs to adequately serve student veterans. Many others have not. In these cases, veterans rely upon one another for guidance on available services and benefits. This fragmentation of services has been shown to place an additional burden on the transitioning student veteran, who needs easy-to-use services located in one location that address the full range of needs: financial aid, VA benefits, academic support, disability services, employment assistance, social networking, and references to VSOs.”

There are many excellent programs and practices in place within the California Community Colleges for student veterans, some of which can serve as models and can be built upon to provide better services to meet the needs of the many veterans who currently attend or will soon be attending our colleges. The Veterans Resources Centers project is a good example of how a single, comprehensive, veterans’ services program can be successfully replicated at other community college campuses.

Although the California Community Colleges and its campuses have shown themselves to be innovative leaders in providing a broad array of programs and services for student veterans, an infusion of additional resources is needed so that all campuses can ensure the educational success of their student veterans.

## Acknowledgments

Chancellor Jack Scott would like to acknowledge and thank those individuals who have made significant contributions to this report.

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