

Orienting Student Veterans to the Library

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The Texas A&M University Libraries, in partnership with the Texas A&M University Veteran Resource & Support Center, is seeking an IMLS Sparks! grant of \$25,000 in order to develop a prototype app-based library orientation for student veterans.

Statement of Need

Over 1 million students enrolled in institutions of higher learning in 2015 used VA educational benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). Veterans, one of the underserved groups targeted in IMLS' Community Anchors category, are an academically at-risk group in higher education. Recent research has indicated that nearly all veteran and service member undergraduates exhibit at least one U.S. Department of Education risk factor for non-completion of their degrees, with some student veterans exhibiting as many as six risk factors (Molina & Morse, 2015). Risk factors include identifiers such as part-time enrollment and full-time work while in college, which can limit full engagement in the academic community. Because student veterans often experience interruptions in their education as well as frequent transfers, they can be unaware of the major changes in libraries in recent years and unfamiliar with the full extent of the resources available in the modern academic library that aid student success.

To help student veterans become oriented to their academic library, librarians have developed a number of approaches. Many colleges have developed an orientation for veterans, and some libraries have become embedded in these orientations (McBain et al., 2012; Atwood et al., 2016). Other libraries are working to develop marketing materials to draw student veterans into the library (WVU Libraries, 2015). While these efforts are important steps to reaching student veterans, they rely upon outreach and orientation strategies that are native to higher education. To reach student veterans more effectively, librarians should consider employing strategies that are native to the military. By adopting military-style processes in orientations, libraries can build upon student veterans' prior knowledge and experiences to effectively convey their message and provide student veterans with a sense of belonging in the academic environment.

Project Overview

Although veterans' military experiences can vary widely, there are some elements common across military branches and periods of service. One common element is the in-processing checklist, frequently referred to as the "dance card." When arriving at a new military installation, service members are provided with an in-processing checklist. The service member must visit each location to accomplish a specific task and complete this checklist – for example, they might visit the finance office to complete paperwork to receive their paycheck. Service members visit each location on the checklist, and when the form is full of signatures, their orientation is complete. This project proposes to use the dance card model to orient student veterans to library services and resources essential to their academic success and acculturation to campus.

"Orienting Student Veterans to the Library" is a collaborative project between Texas A&M University Libraries and the Veteran Resource and Support Center. All members of the project team are either military veterans or military family members. The proposal includes funding to hire a current student veteran to work on the project and provide their perspective as well as to facilitate feedback from their student veteran peers. This project will focus on developing an app-based dance card for student veterans at the Texas A&M University campus as a pilot project that can be easily adapted to other campuses and other libraries.

Phase 1: Application Selection (October 1-November 30, 2017)

The project team will test existing software applications for usability, accessibility, and feasibility. During this phase, the project team will define a list of requirements for the software application. Preliminary considerations include cost, testing capabilities, geotagging, reporting functionality, and multimedia elements.

Phase 2: Content Development (November 30, 2017-June 1, 2018)

The second phase of the grant will be content development. The project team will develop a self-assessment that incoming student veterans will take to evaluate their knowledge of the University Libraries and library resources. Results will trigger specific modules within the app. This phase will also include the creation of the learning modules including such multimedia elements as tutorials and videos. Finally, developed content will be incorporated into a test implementation of the app.

Phase 3: Testing and Revisions (June 1, 2018-August 15, 2018)

The project team will assess the app and the developed content for accuracy, ease of use, time required to complete, and accessibility. Feedback will be gathered from a focus group of student veterans, which will inform the iterative redesign of the dance card for implementation.

Phase 4: Piloting and Assessment (August 15, -September 30, 2018)

The project team will have a fully-functional prototype dance card ready to be piloted for the Fall 2018 semester. Student veterans entering the university in Fall 2018 will use the dance card as part of their orientation. The project team will gather feedback from student veterans and make necessary adjustments ahead of full implementation in Spring 2019.

Phase 5: Dissemination (2019)

“Orienting Student Veterans to the Library” is a pilot project, but it is intended to support not only student veterans at Texas A&M University, but also staff at other academic libraries who are interested in orienting student veterans to their library resources. This phase will involve sharing the results of the project with other institutions via presentations, publications, and direct sharing of the dance card and its components and structure with other institutions for customizing it to their local library environments.

In conclusion, this project will include a fully-functional prototype of a library orientation dance card app, assessment data from a test implementation, and project notes that can be used by other institutions.

Budget and Justification

The proposal includes a budget of \$25,000 for the project. Time and personnel costs for the PI, Co-PIs, and Senior Personnel account for the majority of the budget (\$16,513); these personnel will be primarily responsible for reviewing available apps, developing content, and constructing the orientation within the app. Next is time for collaborators and undergraduate student veteran labor (\$5,466), who will primarily be responsible for ensuring compatibility with campus veteran center orientations and student veteran testing. Third is software (\$748), as this project will require the acquisition and testing of multiple applications for efficacy, accessibility, and ease of use. Finally, the budget includes indirect costs (\$2,273).

References

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