



**VA**

U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Leeward CC and VA: partnering to promote veterans' success in college

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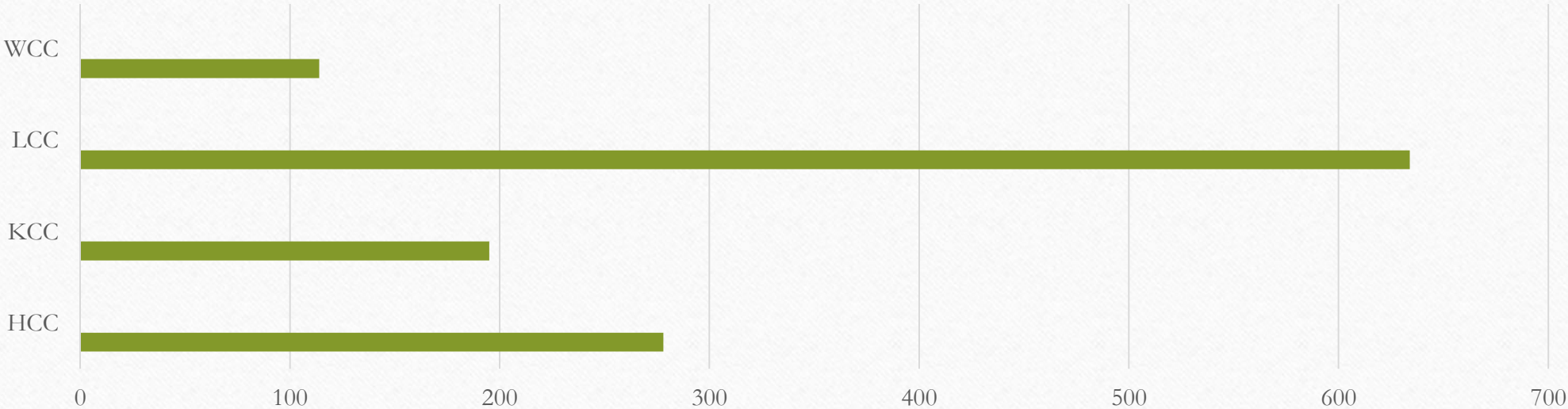
**and**

**Claire Kusakabe, M.Ed.**

# Number of Veterans Enrolled in Oahu Community Colleges as of January 2016

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Community Colleges on Oahu

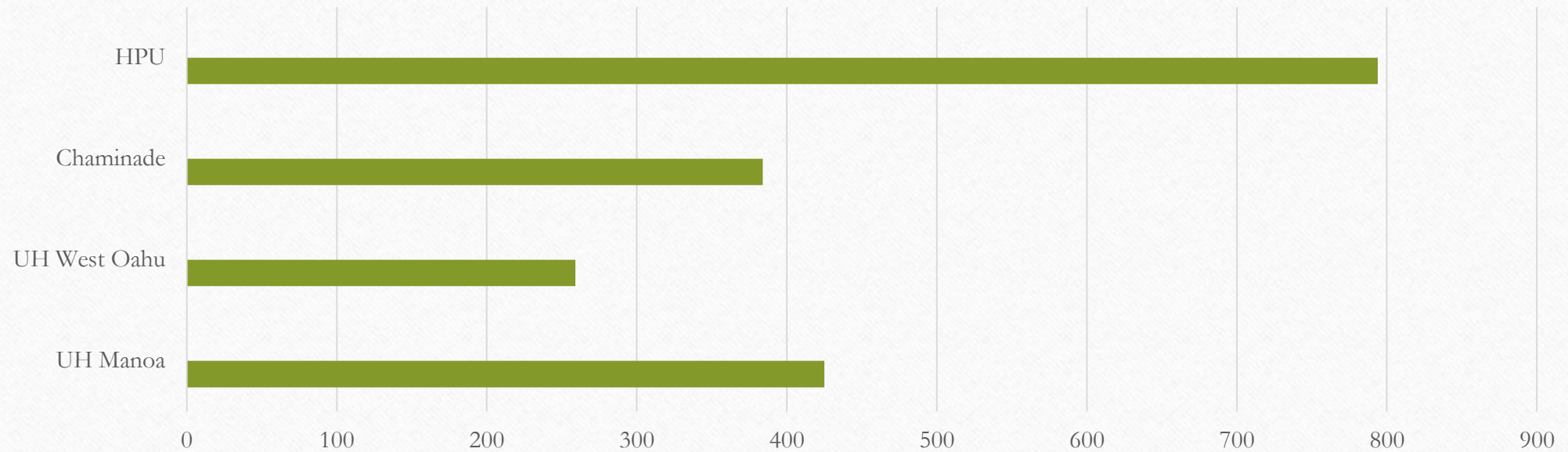




# Number of Veterans Enrolled in Oahu Universities as of January 2016

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Universities On Oahu



# Greater number of veterans enrolling in college

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- Post 9/11 GI Bill led to significant increases in education benefits provided to military members
- Conflicts Ending- personnel reductions of military forces resulting in large numbers of veterans seeking to begin or return to higher education
- 2014: Armed forces expected to shed 250K members each year for the next 5 yrs
- State of the Economy- most jobs require at least some higher education



*Veterans Integration  
To Academic Leadership*

# Pop Quiz Question

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- How much has been paid out for GI Bill?





# Pop Quiz Answer

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- 2009-2013: 30 billion
- It was expected to reach 42 billion through 2014
- In addition, the VA's budget for medical services in 2017 will be 65 billion
- In contrast, Hawaii DOE spent 1.9 billion in 2015
- UH FY 2012 902 million
- In California 2 out of every 3 GI Bill dollars is spent in a for profit school such as University of Phoenix

# Secondary Gains

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- In addition to paying tuition, the Post 9/11 GI Bill provides Monthly Housing Allowance for full-time students which is currently \$2,679 /month.
- Students also receive a book and supply stipend of \$1,000 per academic year.
- Single vets without dependents may have VA SCD compensation adding \$133.17 (for 10% SCD) up to \$2906.83 (100% SCD) per month. These rates are higher if they have a spouse and children
- They also are likely to qualify for financial aid which could be up to \$4500 per year
- Possible Total: \$3000 to more than \$6000 a month tax free (but don't forget unemployment, SSDI, VA caregiver's support stipend, military retirement pension)
- Unfortunately, some vets are in school more for the money than for an education



# Bottom line: Why should we care?

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- GI Bill is a huge investment in the future of our veterans. As taxpayers, we ALL have a stake in wanting to ensure GI bill money is well spent
- 2015: 73.4% of all vets have a VA Service-Connected Disability
- College education will play a key role in maintaining veterans' productivity and functionality, hopefully minimizing detrimental effects of their disabilities and allowing them to reduce or end reliance on disability income
- Should the UH system be interested in trying to get more of the veterans currently enrolled in for profits schools?



# Who are our Student Veterans?

- They have travelled the world and have a wider range of experiences than your average college student.
- Various backgrounds and reasons for joining the military
- Different military branches, lengths of service, occupations
- Single or multiple job skills and schools of training (snipers, medics, pilots, mechanics, paralegals, musicians, cooks, infantry, HR, IT, etc.)
- Differences in military service culture (i.e., enlisted vs. officer)
- Majority of veterans have a service-connected disability rating of some type from the VA even if they are not a combat veteran.



# Transitioning from active duty to civilian

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## Active Duty

- Trained with their peers for specific military qualifications and training schools. Rare to fail.
- Trained to stay awake and alert. Taught to “sleep when you can”
- Fellow service members are a support system. Close bonds were fostered through shared identity and assigned groups
- Identity formed around their military cohorts and military structure.

## Veteran

- 62% are first-generation students. They may lack foundational reading, writing, and math skills for college.
- May be taking medications that make them drowsy, or interfere with concentration (pain meds or possibly marijuana).
- Loss of military support system and must initiate their own support system (VA or SVA).
- Identity often remains with military culture, vets do not want to be considered civilians



# College Student vs Student Veteran

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- Average age 22
  - Single
  - Many do not work, relying on parents to support them financially
  - Priority: school and social interactions
  - Typically flexible
- Average age 33
  - 47.3% are married; 47% have children
  - Work full or part-time; Reserve and Guard have monthly or weekend drills
  - Priority: financial responsibilities/family
  - Trained to adhere to structure and routine, be on-time, respect instructor

# What are some common obstacles or challenges faced by our student veterans?

- A gap in formal education and frustration with taking remedial classes to earn their degree.
- Adjustment to less structured civilian life: more women as authority figures, political correctness
- Chronic pain and/or decreased physical abilities (ex. hearing loss, back/knee pain)
- And for about 15-30% of the vets it MAY BE: PTSD/depression, TBI, substance abuse





# Obstacles and Challenges Continued

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- Loss of confidence: Feel intimidated or out of place with younger students
- Anxious and depressed at belief that they are starting all over again, and from the bottom after having faced challenges beyond their classmates' comprehension
- Many feel behind in life at their ages
- Many have multiple doctor appointments
- Sleep problems are a common complaint
- Fear of failure and rejection; believe no one can understand them except other vets
- Worry that they may lose control in some manner (anger, tears)

# Veterans Resource Center is Launched!

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- November 2013: Leeward CC established the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) with the support of Dr. Chris Manaseri, Dean of Student Services, and Mrs. Tracey Betts, Director of VBA, Department of Veterans Affairs—Honolulu Region
- Original VRC Staff:
  - Veterans Counselor—LeeAnn Santos-Egan
  - VSOC Counselor—Bill Newton



# The VRC: Reimagined

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- Fall 2015: the VRC was reopened after a semester of transition, and new partnerships were created with the VA
- **VRC Staff:**
  - Veterans Counselor—Kardyn Flores
  - VSOC—Claire Kusakabe
  - VITAL Psychologist—Nadine Shigezawa
- **VRC Student Assistants:**
  - Fall 2015 and Spring 2016-2 volunteers
  - Fall 2016- VRC became a VA Work Study site and hired 2 VA work study students

# VRC Data for FALL 2016 (Aug-

Reason Breakdown		Percentages
Appointment with Kardyn	151	21.82%
Appointment with Claire	15	2.17%
Appointment with Nadine	9	1.30%
Computer Use	69	9.97%
Hanging Out	58	8.38%
Lending Library	15	2.17%
New Student Orientation	3	0.43%
Printer Use	41	5.92%
Study	46	6.65%
Walk-In (School Related)	84	12.14%
Pickup/Drop-off Forms	111	16.04%
Work-Peer Facilitator	0	0.00%
Other	46	6.65%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

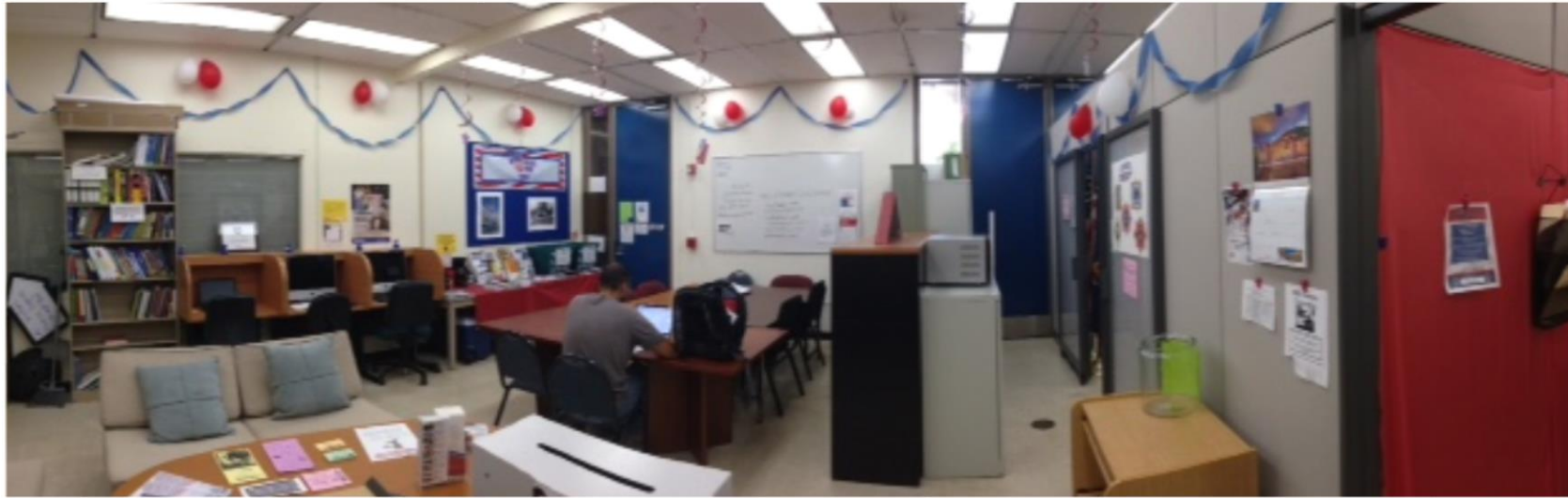


# Veterans Resource Center Goals

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- To provide student Veterans with the support and resources available from the VA, Leeward CC and other Community agencies to foster a positive adjustment from military to civilian roles
- Promote student veterans' academic success by assisting their emotional, social/relational, and financial well-being in conjunction with their aptitudes and abilities.
- To enable and empower student veterans to complete their college education, so that they may participate in the civilian workforce, regain pride and confidence in themselves, and ultimately benefit their families and the community.

# Veterans Resource Center





# Veterans Resource Center Lounge

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- A comfortable place on campus where student veterans and their dependents can be with their peers.
- Lending library consists of books donated by veterans and Leeward CC faculty.
- Computers and printer, other office supplies available
- Microwave and refrigerator
- Study area

# Veterans Counselor-Kardyn

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- Directs the daily operations and management of the Veterans Resource Center.
- Performs academic and counseling duties of the other Leeward Counselors while enhancing services for the veteran student population.
- Responsible for design, implementation, evaluation, and improvement of college services for veterans, military personnel and their families.
- Organizes events and workshops on campus geared toward veteran needs.



# VHA vs. VBA

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- Veterans Healthcare Administration (VHA): Provides medical evaluation and treatment (primary care, mental health, women's health, optometry, dental, physical therapy, Community Living Center, etc.)
- Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA): Services and Monetary Entitlements (Compensation and Benefits, Burial, Home Loans, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, etc.)

# Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL)-Dr. Nadine Shigezawa

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- Veterans Healthcare Administration Initiative to Support Student Veterans to:
  - Successfully integrate to an academic setting
  - Obtain a degree or advance in a career





# Roles of VITAL on campus

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- Enroll/register student Veterans into VHA
- Provide immediate assistance to schedule student Veteran appointments for Primary care, Well Woman, and to access specialty care
- Assist in getting med refills, TB tests, immunizations or other medical needs met
- Provide psychotherapy: individual and group
- Psychodiagnostic testing
- Provide education to staff/faculty on Veteran culture, PTSD, other MH conditions or topics

# VetSuccess on Campus (VSOCC)-Claire Kusakabe

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- Veteran Benefits Administration program
- Goal: Provide educational assistance so that disabled vets will find employment



# VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC)

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- VSOC program began as pilot program in 2009 and expanded to 32 schools by end of Fiscal Year 2012. In Fiscal Year 2013, VSOC program expanded again to an additional 62 campuses, including Leeward CC and UH Manoa.
- VSOC services are available to Service members and Veterans eligible for any of VA's educational programs, including the Post 9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill, as well as VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program. VSOC counselors can also assist dependents of Veterans who are receiving VA education benefits, including eligible spouses attending school through the Post 9/11 GI Bill and eligible children.
- VA's Education and Career Counseling Program offers a great opportunity for transitioning Service members and Veterans to get personalized counseling and support to guide their career paths, ensure most effective use of their VA benefits, and help them achieve their goals

# Leeward CC/VA partnership

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- Bridging the gap between Leeward CC requirements, academic demands, and VA resources
- LCC and VA partnership exists beyond shared space
- It involves the sharing of ideas and working together cooperatively and with enthusiasm to enhance services, special events for the vets, and outreach opportunities
- How?



# Negotiating Post 911 GI Education Bill

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- Most vets report Post 911 GI Bill helped with their adjustment to school
- 25% report it was a major influence in their decision to pursue higher education
- However, vets routinely report getting GI bill started is confusing and frustrating, while lag-time to receive their first payment is stressful. Sometimes it may take as long as 6 weeks to receive their first payment following enrollment in school
- Vets have also experienced late enrollment in classes or getting dropped from a class because of late payment from the VA
- Leeward CC counselor and VSOC educate the vets on the GI bill, deadlines, and work together with Certifying Officials on campus in attempt to minimize snags

# Negotiating stress of school and transition to civilian life

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- Leeward CC counselor as academic advisor works closely with student veterans as they identify their educational goals assisting in their development of a plan of study, while monitoring their progress toward graduation,
- In noting emotional, familial, or healthcare obstacles in their academic functioning, she may either consult with, or refer, the vet to VITAL
- Regular collaboration in support of VITAL through publicizing availability of services to staff and students, ensuring access to needed infrastructure, and working together to nurture ideas into tangible results



# Leeward and VA TOGETHER

- Serve as a “one-stop shop” for veteran services and support
  - Past events: Flu shot drive
  - Workshops for vets and dependents (Resume Writing, Veterans Benefits, Financial Management)
  - Spring Lecture Series for Faculty/Staff
  - Tabling at Leeward CC events (College Bash, Halau Wellness Fair, LCC Carnival)
  - Informal holiday or end of the semester celebrations



# FALL 2016 Workshops/Events

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## Workshops/Events

- Participation or tabling at multiple campus events
- Veterans Resource Fair—10/26/16
- VRC 2016 Spring Lecture Series

## Ongoing Ventures

- Combat vet group
- Discussion with faculty on offering classes specifically for Veterans
- Participation in reorganization of Team Care
- Hosting workshops for veterans
  
- Building membership and enhancing identity of Student Veterans of America Leeward Chapter



# Thank-you for your attention!

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- Questions?
- Suggestions?