

Veteran Student Life Needs Assessment: Campus Engagement and Sense of Belonging

Overview

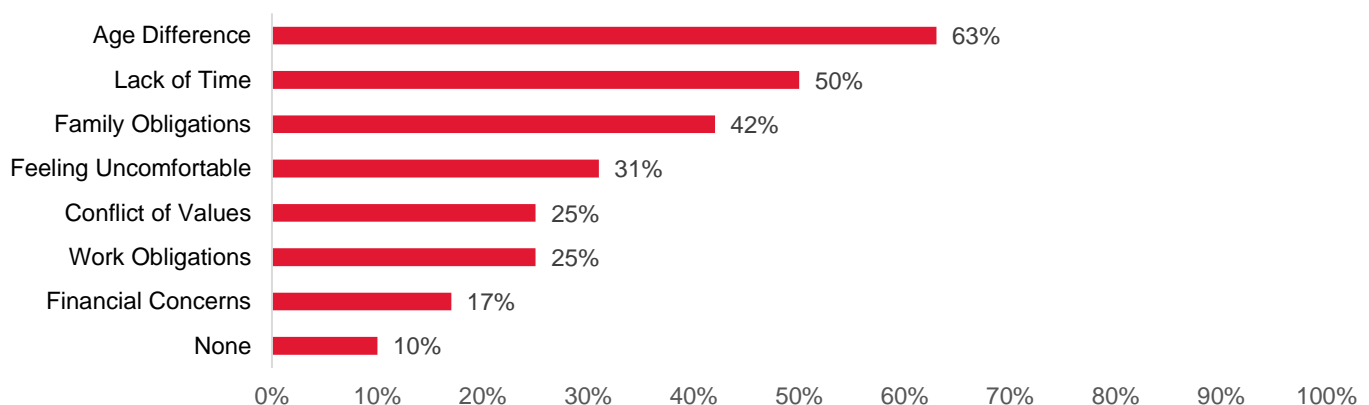
Veteran Student Life (VSL) provides opportunities for University of Maryland Veteran and military-affiliated students to connect and build community, locate needed resources, and advocates for student Veteran issues. In fall 2017, a survey was disseminated to all Veteran and military-affiliated students at the University of Maryland (n = 1,013); 206 (20%) useable responses were collected. Only degree-seeking students are included in the analysis below (n = 203). Of these respondents, 38% reported seeking a graduate degree and 62% reported seeking an undergraduate degree.

Highlights

This report examines student Veterans' campus experiences and sense of belonging. Highlights include:

- More than four in five respondents (84%) would recommend the University of Maryland to other student Veterans.
- Undergraduate students were more likely to agree that they often feel lonely and isolated (24%) than graduate students (10%).
- When asked about barriers to their social success while enrolled at the University of Maryland, only 10% reported there were none. The most commonly selected barrier was the age difference between student Veterans and their civilian peers (63%).
- Undergraduate respondents were more likely to report that counseling/mental health services were important to their success (49%) than graduate respondents (26%).
- Over three-quarters of undergraduate respondents (78%) indicated that recreation and fitness was important to their success at the University of Maryland.
- Although 87% of those attending the Veteran's Student Orientation reported that the program was beneficial to them as a new student, only 59% indicated that it prepared them for the social interactions they would have at the University of Maryland.

Barriers to Social Success

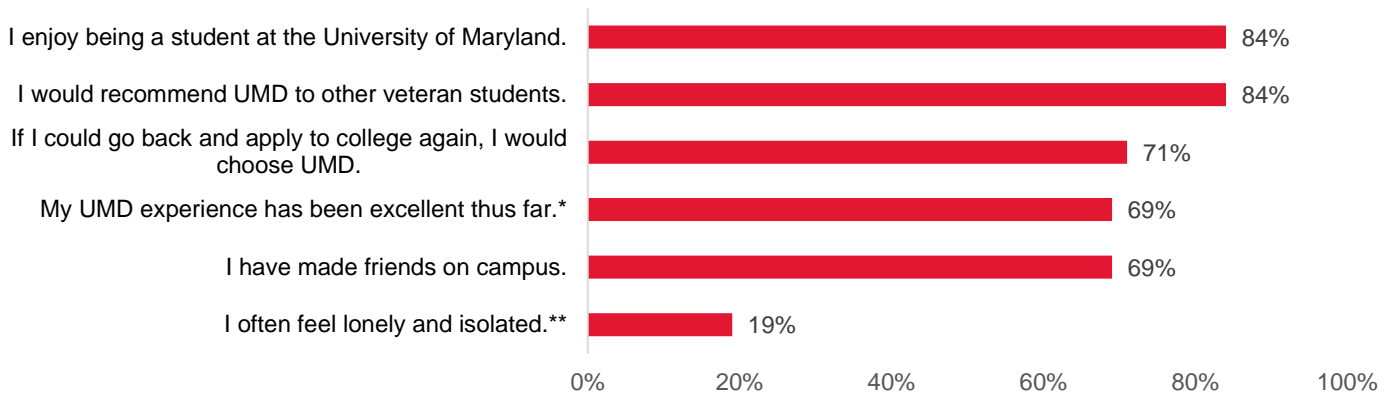


Findings

Overall Belonging

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their sense of belonging and inclusion on campus. Across most of the items, there were no differences between graduate and undergraduate respondents. However, two items did suggest undergraduate and graduate student Veterans may have differences in their feelings of belonging on campus. Undergraduate students were less likely to agree that their University of Maryland experience has been excellent thus far (62%) compared to graduate students (82%). Undergraduate students were also more likely to agree that they often feel lonely and isolated (24%) than graduate students (10%).

Belonging



The remainder of this report explores those factors that are believed to contribute to students' sense of belonging on campus: their involvement and social success, use of campus services, and attendance at the Veteran Student Life Orientation.

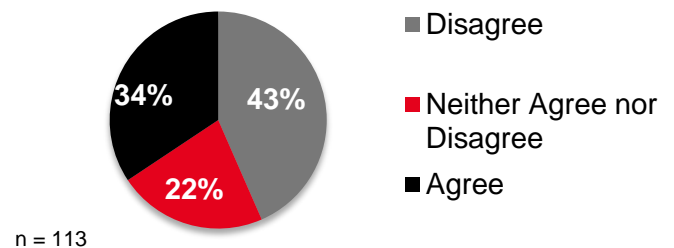
Astericks indicate there is a statistically significant difference between the groups.

Campus Involvement & Social Success

Of respondents, 29% indicated they were not involved in on campus. Just under half (44%) reported they were involved in at least two groups or activities. The most commonly reported ways in which respondents are involved on campus are in student Veteran activities (35%), internships (21%), out-of-class research with faculty (18%), and intramural clubs and sports (15%). It is important to note that although the survey was distributed to all Veteran and military affiliated students on campus, those students who attended Veteran Student Life activities received additional verbal reminders to complete the survey and may therefore be overrepresented in the dataset.

I am as involved as I want to be:

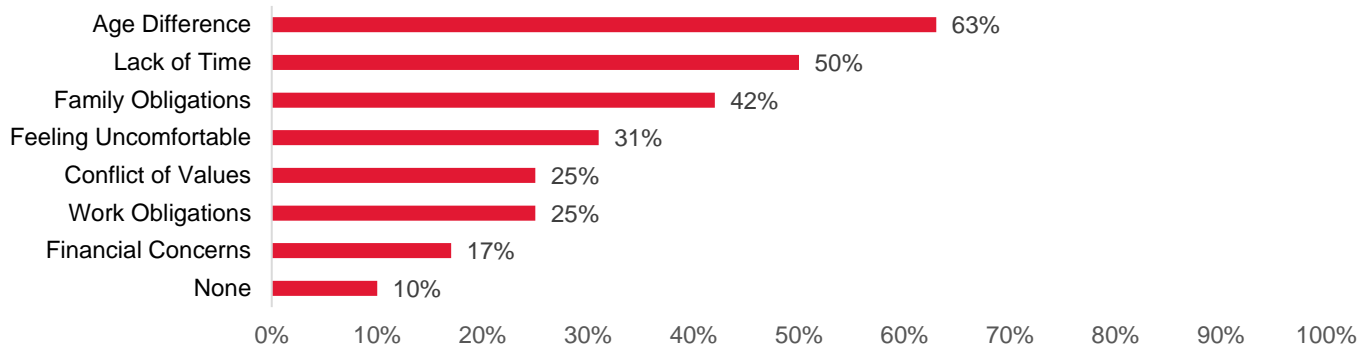
Student veterans who are involved in 0 or 1 activities outside the classroom



Of those who reported they had participated in either one or no campus activities or groups, 43% disagree that they are as involved on campus as they want to be, compared to 34% who agree, suggesting that some Veteran students may face barriers to out-of-classroom involvement.

When asked about barriers to their social success while enrolled at the University of Maryland, only 10% reported there were none. Almost two-thirds (63%) indicated that the age difference between themselves and traditionally aged students was a barrier. Half of respondents (50%) indicated a barrier was their lack the time to participate in campus activities, 31% reported they felt uncomfortable attending social programs on campus, and a quarter (25%) reported a conflict in values between Veteran and non-Veteran students was a barrier to their social success.

Barriers to Social Success



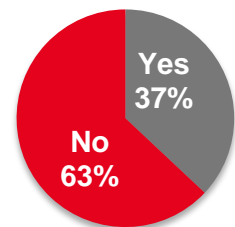
Veteran Student Life Orientation

Veteran Student Life offers an orientation to incoming students, the goal of which is to introduce students to campus resources and to create connections between students attending. The Needs Assessment included a number of items to assess the usefulness and challenges associated with this initiative.

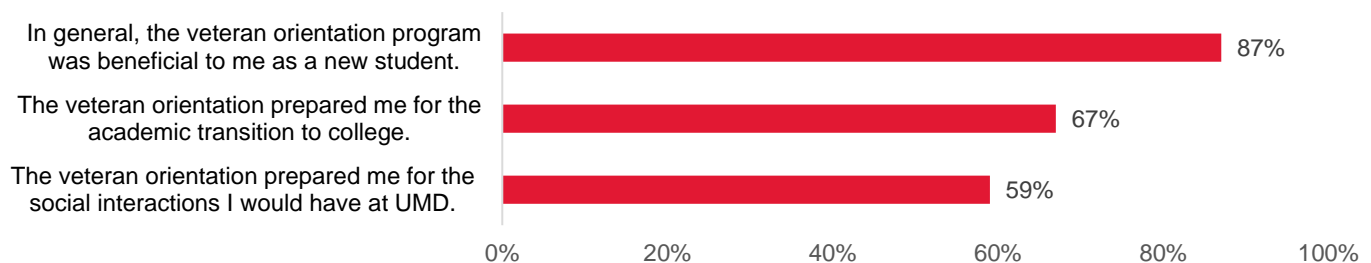
Of undergraduate respondents (n = 126), only 37% reported they attended the Veteran's Orientation. Of those who did not attend, the most common reason students reported was not knowing there was a Veteran's orientation (33%). Other reasons were family (7%) and work (6%) obligations, arriving after the orientation (5%) and conflicts with an academic orientation (4%).

Of the respondents who indicated they attended the Veterans orientation, over 85% reported that the orientation program was beneficial to them, while over 40% did not agree that the orientation prepared them for the social interactions they would have while enrolled at the university.

Attended Veteran's Orientation



Veteran Orientation Outcomes

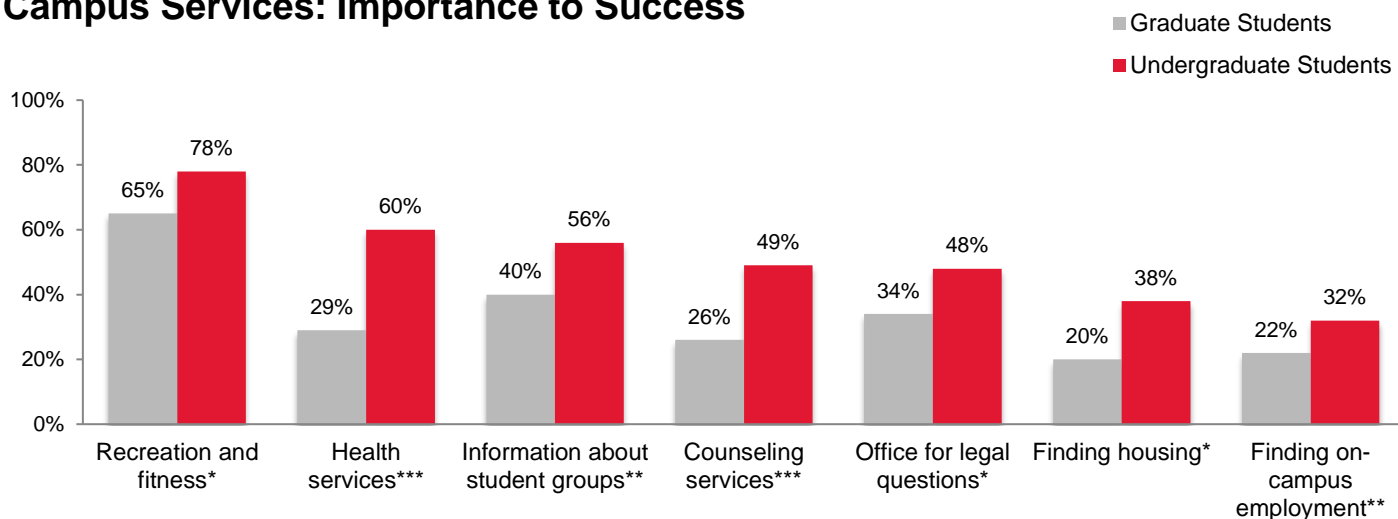


Campus Services

A critical question explored by the Needs Assessment involved the gap between students reported importance of and satisfaction with campus services. Respondents were asked to indicate how important 14 different campus services were to their success at the University of Maryland. Later they were asked to indicate how satisfied they are with each of these resources on campus. The 14 resources and services chosen for inclusion on the survey were those Veteran Student Life staff heard about most often from their students.

No differences exist between undergraduate and graduate respondents in terms of their satisfaction with each of the campus services included on the survey. However, there were a number of differences between what undergraduate and graduate students indicated were important to their success (depicted in the graph below). Graduate and undergraduate student Veterans reported the most significant differences between the importance of counseling/mental health services as well as general health resources. For all services in which differences are observed, undergraduate students indicated the campus service was more important to their success.

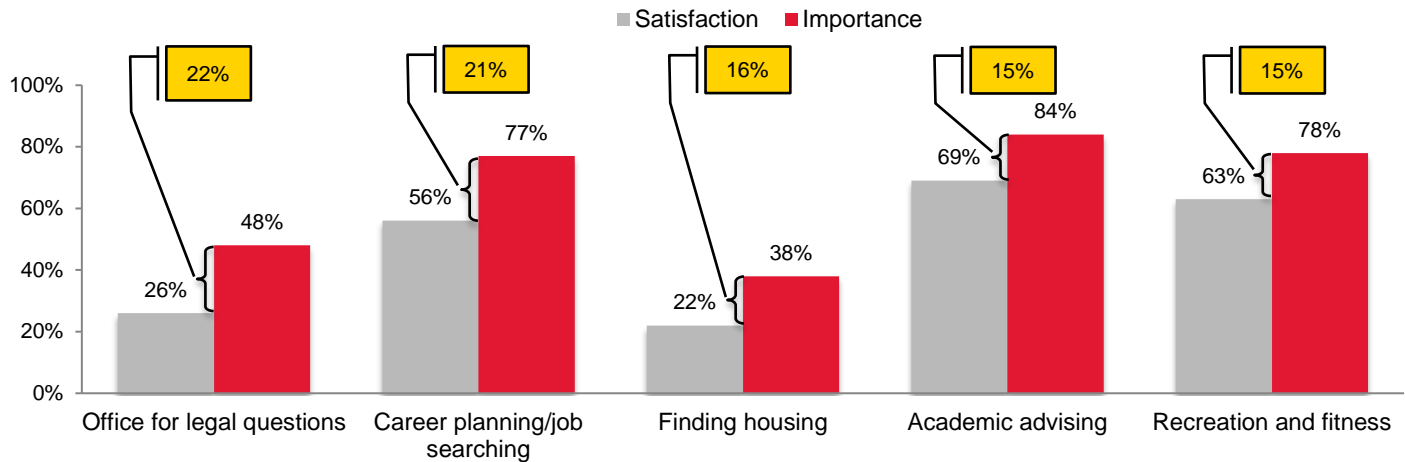
Campus Services: Importance to Success



Astericks indicate there is a statistically significant difference between the groups.

Differences between undergraduate students' reported importance and satisfaction with services were explored further and a graph depicting these differences are found on the next page. Although less than half (48%) of undergraduate respondents reported that an office which is able to answer their legal questions was important to their success, only 26% indicated they were satisfied with this service – the greatest gap between importance and satisfaction evidenced in the responses. It is important to note that it is unknown for what types of legal questions respondents may have needed assistance and therefore with which office(s) they may not be satisfied. It may be that these questions are related to military benefits and therefore fall to the financial aid office rather than the Undergraduate or Graduate Legal Aid Office. Other areas in which there was a 15% or greater gap between students reported importance and satisfaction were: career planning and job searching (21% difference), finding housing (16%), academic advising (15%), and recreation and fitness opportunities (15%).

Campus Services: Importance v. Satisfaction for Undergraduate Students



The percentage in the gold box is the difference between reported importance and satisfaction for undergraduate respondents.

Changes and Recommendations

Based on the data presented above, there are some opportunities to improve programming and resource education efforts:

- Of those undergraduate students who did not attend the Veterans orientation, 33% indicated they were unaware this program existed. Increasing awareness of the program for incoming students, perhaps by working with academic colleges and orientations, may encourage more students to attend.
- Only 59% of those who reported attending the Veteran Student Orientation indicated that it prepared them for the social interactions they would have while at the University of Maryland. Veteran Student Life may want to solicit feedback from past participants on how to improve this aspect of the program specifically and better align it with the student experience. One recommendation might be to add a current student panel to the orientation program specifically to discuss social interactions.
- Of those who reported they had participated in either one or no campus activities or groups, 43% disagree that they are as involved on campus as they want to be, compared to 34% who agree. This suggests that there may be opportunities for Veteran Student Life to educate and encourage student Veterans to get involved on campus. VSL may want to explore reasons as to why student Veterans are not involved if they would like to become involved. Specifically, VSL could explore the barriers that are preventing students from becoming more involved, such as the age difference barrier reported above. Additionally, VSL may consider administering an interest form at the Veterans' orientation program to provide students with directed marketing and information about those opportunities in which they are most interested.
- There are a number of campus services with which respondents reported their satisfaction was over 15% lower than their perceived level of importance. Some of these areas are challenging to address given the number of campus partners who may be involved, for example, answering legal questions. Still, Veteran Student Life may consider creating a frequently asked questions resource or work with the offices on campus to educate them about Veteran specific needs. Before doing so, VSL may consider doing following up investigation using focus groups to explore the aspects that are influencing respondents' lower ratings of satisfaction.