



VIRTUAL VETERANS COMMUNITIES

Case Study



GOLDEN GATE
UNIVERSITY

**THE HELEN DILLER CENTER
FOR VETERANS OF U.S.
MILITARY SERVICE**



GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

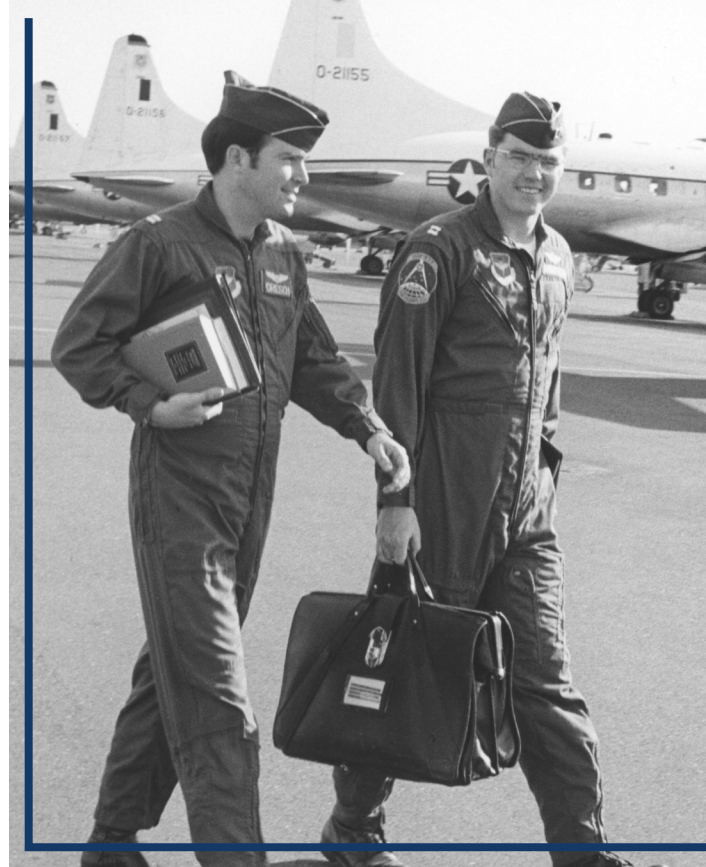
Golden Gate University (GGU) is a regionally accredited, private, non-profit institution focused on high-quality degree programs for working adults. GGU has a history of serving veterans, dating to its founding by the YMCA and service to those veterans returning from World War I. Members of the military, veterans, and their families continue to be a significant and important part of GGU's student population.

Recognizing the importance of military students to the institution's mission and continued growth, GGU committed to a multi-year strategy designed to refresh the university's approach and to cement its position as a leader in military-friendly postsecondary education.

Results

- **30% military student enrollment growth**
(12 months)
- **60% net promoter score increase**
(12 months)
- **117% return on investment**
(18 months)

As this effort began, the head of enrollment stated, "We referred to ourselves as a military-friendly school. But we didn't really know what that meant." This is a common sentiment across universities that



GGU students at Mather AFB circa 1970s

desire to serve military and veteran students. The will to serve is there, but is limited by a lack of deep understanding of this unique population.

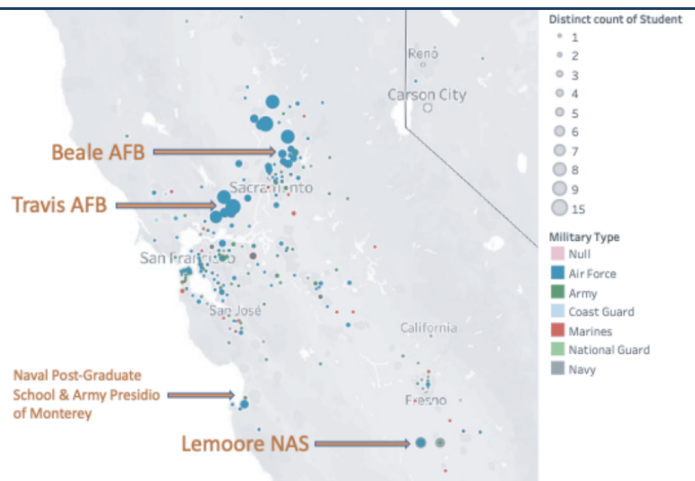
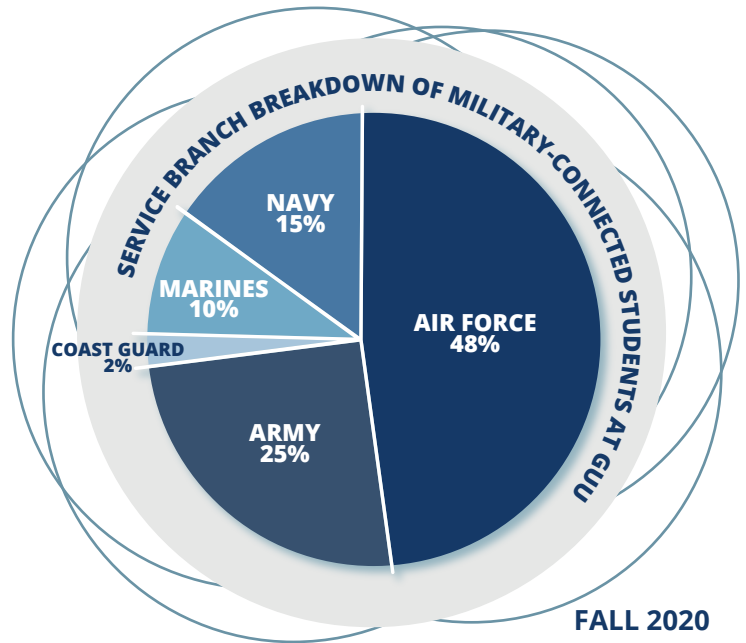
Increasing understanding is therefore a first step to providing better services and, ultimately, attracting more military and veteran students to campus.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT VETERANS

"The challenge is that the veteran population has many specific needs," said Dr. David Fike, president of Golden Gate University. "They have many commonalities with other students we serve, but also certain specific needs and challenges." Appropriately serving military students requires a more detailed understanding that extends well beyond the information that universities typically collect.

Gathering additional information about veteran students can help institutions tailor their services and programming, and better understand the needs of their student veteran community. Details such as which branch of service military students are coming from, their last duty station, their MOS (military occupational specialty), as well as other demographic insights can provide valuable insights into the unique circumstances and needs of a university's military student population.

By gathering this type of information, institutions can create targeted programming and services that will be most beneficial to military students.



Nearly half of GGU's military-connected students are Air Force affiliated, when the Air Force only makes up about 24% of the active duty military force overall. This discrepancy can largely be explained by GGU's location, and proximity to Travis AFB and Beale AFB.

SERVING STUDENT VETERANS



GOLDEN GATE UNIVERSITY

THE HELEN DILLER CENTER FOR VETERANS OF U.S. MILITARY SERVICE

VVC brought a range of experience, their networks, and their understanding of the veteran community. They knew how to communicate with veterans, so it wasn't something we had to build.

- DR. DAVID FIKE, PRESIDENT

In 2020, GGU enlisted the help of Virtual Veterans Communities to access the military student population, identify gaps in existing services, and suggest ways to both improve services and grow enrollment. Together they approached the Helen Diller Family Foundation for support, and GGU was awarded a two million dollar grant to launch a Veterans Center that would support military students on their educational journey.

Launched in 2021, The Helen Diller Center for Veterans of U.S. Military Service provides a set of coordinated resources supporting the specific needs of military students to ensure that they have the best possible experience at GGU. Virtual Veterans Communities was hired to lead the planning and execution of this vision.

With focused recruiting efforts that drove military student enrollment growth, **the services provided by the Diller Center were fully funded within a year of opening.**

THE DILLER CENTER SERVICES



Military Marketing & Recruitment



Military Student Onboarding
Orientation & Coaching



Military Student Success Coaching



Transition and Career Coaching



Virtual and In-Person Events



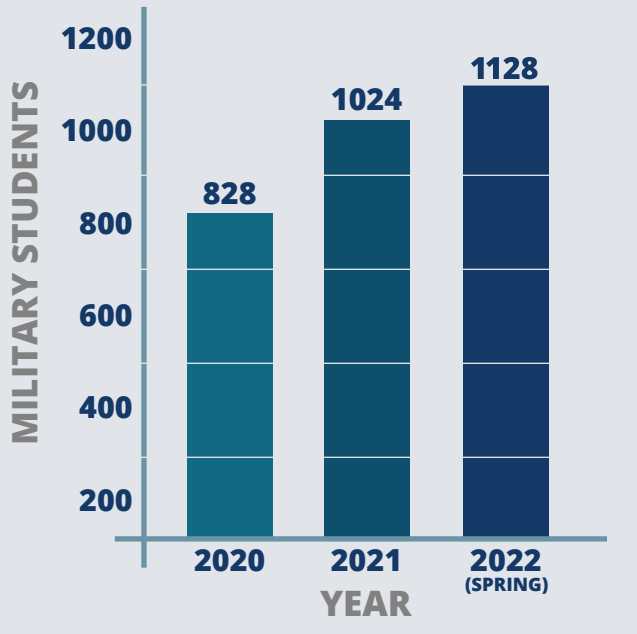
Digital Community

Microsite, Newsletter, & Social Media Group

RESULTS

The military student population grew quickly after the Diller Center opened, and, as President Fike puts it, "GGU had an organized, recognizable story for current and future veteran students."

ENROLLMENT GROWTH



The seed costs for this endeavor were fully funded by the Helen Diller Family Foundation. By the end of the first year, the Center had driven so many additional military student enrollments that it was already contributing net resources back to GGU (Fall 2021).

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

In year one, the Diller Center held a training session for faculty and staff at GGU to bring awareness of student veterans' unique needs. Academic deans and faculty meet with the Diller Center team regularly to learn about the population and address student veteran concerns.

THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

FOR GGU OVER THE FIRST 18 MONTHS WAS **117%**

JUMP IN MILITARY STUDENT SATISFACTION

Military students' attitudes improved significantly in the first year of Diller Center operations, with an overall NPS increase from 37 to 59, a **60% improvement**.

NET PROMOTER SCORE INCREASE

BEFORE 2020 | **37** | AFTER 2021 | **59**

YEAR ONE ACTIVITIES

Services

322 new students met with the Military Student Onboarding Coach
285 new students attended a Military Student Orientation Session

Content

GGU Military microsite generated
42,000 unique visits and **67,000 page views**

52 Blog posts and 18 Benefits Basics videos reached
1,500 average subscribers

The Dispatch, GGU Military's monthly newsletter, had a 38% open rate with a **distribution of 5,500 military alumni and students**.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING

THIS IS REAL.

When Ryan Greene, a veteran in his third year at Golden Gate University School of Law, sought to leave the Navy and pursue a law degree, he considered many options. The lawyers he worked with at the time pointed him to GGU and highlighted the school's camaraderie. Greene added that GGU allowed him, as a student and veteran, **"to continue his studies in a way that supported him and his goals."**

"I think you must consider more than just the degree itself, but the community from which that degree is coming," Greene said.

When a friend of Greene's recommended a visit to the Diller Center, he was surprised by how they greeted him. He described more than a friendly atmosphere but an intentionally engaging one. He said, **"they were actively trying to understand where I was and what I needed to get where I wanted to go."**

Veterans can tell when the offer of support and resources is not genuine, and Greene walked into the Diller Center with that expectation. But he admits he couldn't have been more wrong.

"This is a real, genuine team committed to you and your success."

THEY MADE IT EASIER.

"My challenge was that I had a pretty intense work schedule, and I needed a university that focused on the needs of the non-traditional adult learner," explained GGU student Joe Leroux.

Leroux just completed his undergraduate degree at GGU and plans to continue his graduate education there as well. When researching GGU, he read an article about the Diller Center that assuaged concerns he had about going back to school. He wanted to attend a school that understood its veteran student population, not a school that didn't understand his unique background and circumstances.

The Diller Center showed him that GGU was willing to invest in its veteran student population, which Leroux found encouraging. The staff showed him this was not just an extra job for them; taking care of veteran students was their primary focus.

"It's staggering the difference in stress level when a school can speak your language as a military student," he explained. **"It really is impactful to have access to staff and services that better understand you and the military community you've come from."**



GGU 2023 COMMENCEMENT
JOE LEROUX, STUDENT SPEAKER

WHAT FACULTY ARE SAYING

ONE OF THE BEST THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED TO GGU IN MY 16 YEARS HERE.

Nate Hinerman, the dean of undergraduate programs at Golden Gate University and a psychology professor, interacts daily with student veterans.

"Currently, in undergraduate programs, about 60% of our overall student body are veterans." He said. "So I interact daily with student veterans in the classes I teach, but also through all the social activities, programs and student services we provide."

Hinerman loves the level of engagement that the Diller Center and VVC have brought to campus and the military-connected student community. "It's high touch, high quality, and they are quick to respond," he said.

"My recommendation to any other dean that wants to effectively serve the veteran population is to be very intentional, structured and responsive," Hinerman said. "The information that VVC provides is crucial, but that's only one part. They are empathic, patient and knowledgeable while reaching out and being present for students."

LESSONS LEARNED & THOUGHTS TO SHARE FROM GGU



INVESTING IN MILITARY STUDENTS PAYS FOR ITSELF.

Student veterans notice improved and expanded services that are tailored to their needs, and will promote those efforts via word-of-mouth across the military community. Increased enrollment follows, paying quickly for the specialized services and creating a strong ROI. Financial sustainability is at the core of a well-structured approach.

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS.

Members of the military tend to be assigned with others with similar skills. Knowing where these service members are stationed, and which academic programs most appeal to them, allows for highly-targeted marketing. Learn what programs at your institution might most appeal to student veterans and focus your efforts there.

We were surprised by how rapidly our veteran student population grew [and we] had a pretty good jump in our net promoter score in the first year of launching this project.

Golden Gate University | *Dr. David Fike, President*

MILITARY STUDENTS TALK TO ONE ANOTHER.

They are less brand-loyal than their peers, partly because they move so often, which makes word-of-mouth powerful. Students share stories about authentic, high-quality experiences with one another, which drives enrollment.

THINK HOLISTICALLY.

Connecting with student veterans is about more than just knowing how to process VA education benefits or giving veterans a place to hang out.

PARTNER WITH OTHERS.

Look at opportunities to partner with organizations already connected to veterans and active-duty military communities. The Diller Center has partnered with several organizations that support veterans and their educational goals, including the San Francisco VA Healthcare office and VetsinTech, Disabled Veterans of America, Swords to Plowshares, Boots to Books, and the Marines' Memorial Club & Hotel.



WHO WE ARE



VIRTUAL VETERANS COMMUNITIES

MILITARY-CONNECTED STUDENT SUPPORT MADE EASY

ABOUT

Virtual Veterans Communities (VVC) is a mission-driven organization dedicated to improving higher education outcomes for military-connected students. We partner with colleges, universities, foundations and others to increase enrollment, completion and career readiness of students who are active-duty military, veterans, or military family members. Our approach combines best practices in marketing, enrollment and persistence for military-connected students with digital communities, one-on-one student coaching and institutional capacity building. The result is a scalable, cost-effective approach to meeting the unique needs of this important and high-potential student population. Learn how VVC can help your institution enroll and retain high-quality military-connected students.



vetscommunities.com

 (301) 615-3208

 info@virtualveteranscommunities.com

     [@virtualvetscommunities](https://www.linkedin.com/company/virtualvetscommunities)