

## Expanded review of Assessment #1

Federal Audit main problems identified:

1. **We were not completing all work in the 30-day window we have with the VA.**

### Reviewed Current process

- To have at least two people working on the different tasks at the same time to try and get each task done faster.
- Jobs determined to have higher priority were those that impacted the students and the VA with processing the Veterans school stipend.
- Other tasks took a back seat while we tried to complete chapter 33 processes
  - With the increase in steps to complete chapter 33 processes it takes longer
- We have work-study employees that had been in our office a semester and had been accurately completing the work they had been assigned, we taught them a few additional steps to assist us in completing the workload.
- VS employees had their specific jobs and the work-study employees had theirs.
- There are jobs we cannot allow the work-study employees to complete.

### Next we identified common tasks we must complete for all chapters of benefits, which are

1. We must certify veterans classes for them to get their living stipend so their certifications must be done quickly when they request to use their benefits.
2. We must let the VA know of changes to students schedules
3. We must complete a 3<sup>rd</sup> week audit to determine if the student has changed their classes and notify the VA for each change made
4. We must now report graduation of each veteran
5. We must monitor students GPA and report to the VA when we place a student on VA probation.
6. We must monitor all 'I' grades for the year to ensure the students grade is changed to an 'E'

### Then identified some of the different tasks for chapter 33 students which is now our largest group of students which are

1. We have been asked by the VA to certify the student at 0 tuition and fees and then 3 weeks later we must go back and certify for tuition and fees
2. We must make a change on VAOnce for every change in credit hours students make after the term begins even if it does not make a tuition difference
3. We must track and monitor payments from the VA to ensure we have the proper amount
4. When we make adjustments to a student's certification because of changes in schedules, we must wait for the remittance letter and return money to the VA in a timely manner to avoid garnishments.

### Changed duties and division of work to complete tasks

We divided the workload, so each of the SCO's have their individual primary responsibilities and serve as back up for another SCO. This way we would ensure each task is being worked on and when they are complete they will assist the other SCO. Or if we need to push to get one task done they work together to get the task done and then go back to their job. This allowed us to cover if someone is gone or if one person feels overwhelmed because of the workload.

With the new division of jobs, each employee also looked at the duties and the procedures currently written to ensure clear process instructions are available for new employees and for work-studies. This way we could look at the way we had been doing it, evaluate the efficiency and possibly change functions. We determined that the way we complete the work and processes was fine. There were no changes we could or needed to do.

Each semester we hope we have work-study employees available to assist, but cannot always count on there being trained work-studies available due to the turnaround of their employment due to school and family. Each time we lose a work-study employee, we must hire, train and monitor a new employee to ensure they are completing tasks correctly. That process takes the college employees away from their work to manage and monitor the work of the new employees.

### **Changed process of students notifying Veterans Services of intent to receive benefits each term**

We did see that the process of having the students submit a schedule to notify us they wanted to use their benefits was not efficient. When the veteran submitted schedules, there were two to four pages. It was a challenge to keep the pages together, sometimes the schedules printed did not have names on them and it took longer to scan.

We now ask veterans to notify us through the veterans email. This allows us to track requests by students, save paper since our schedules are printed on one page. We print out the requests once a day and email them back that we received their schedule and will process it. We hoped it would also make it easier for the student to notify us they were attending, or changing classes, etc. We are also able to identify if the student had previously submitted a schedule, which has saved us from looking for files that have already been processed. It also saves time and money for students by electronically notifying us.

### **Evaluation of changes in procedures**

This process seemed to work fairly well the first semester we used it, which was summer semester. We had mostly trained employees and it was fairly smooth. We moved through the processes fairly quickly and completed most all of our processes in the time we needed to complete it. The Full time employee had the larger tasks and the more complicated complex jobs as their main tasks and the part-time employees had other jobs divided. Granted, enrollment during the summer semester is much smaller than the Fall and Spring semesters.

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We hit some major bumps during Fall semester. One of our full time employees missed many days because of personal problems; the other full time employee was gone on military training leave. Then one of our part time employees was offered a full time position at another college and we experienced a large turnover in our work-study employees. With all of the change and holes in staffing, and training new employees, we were challenged in completing the work again in the 30 days allotted.

Spring semester we again experienced staffing challenges with a full time employee leaving again for military training, new work study employees that did not work out and added duties of working on debt management issues, and auditing older flight issues made completing the work in the 30 days a challenge.

This did not end like I had hoped. I wanted to have everything fixed with no more problems. I think I have identified that when we are fully staffed with trained employees, we can work through the work. The challenge is getting and keeping the staff members.

## **2. Problems with the College Flight program as identified by our 2012 audit:**

- a. The college flight department was not monitoring every closeout sheet to ensure only approved charges were being paid to the vendor from the VA funds and monitoring for flights. Thus, unapproved charges were being made and charged to the VA and unapproved flights were being charged.
- b. The math done by the vendor was incorrect thus the amount of money the vendor said the student used on the closeout sheet was not the same amount the school one-card or blackboard showed should be charged.
- c. The college Flight department was not checking each file and did not have records kept at the college for each student, thus, the VA has now required Veterans Services to now maintain and verify each final close out of each flight lab. This process has added time to the close out process by the VS SCO.
- d. The time to complete the close out sheets after each lab was not complete in the 30-day time limit. This is because when the closeout sheets come to VS, they often have errors that must send back to have the Vendor correct.

In the Informed Budget process, were given an additional Full time employee responsible for the Flight program and SAT. That employee does not be assist with any of the work required at the main campus. The addition of this full time employee has been a blessing.

### **History of flight process**

Since Fall 2009, the number of students in the flight program has grown to approximately 180 in the Spring of 2013. For Veterans Services, it is an intense program to monitor an especially since the VA audit Spring 2012.

In 2009 during early discussion with the Director of the Flight program at the time, it was our understanding the college flight department checked and kept records of students in their program and reviewed all records to ensure accuracy of charges before the closing Flight Billing Sheet was signed by the flight coordinator and sent to Veterans Services to complete VA certification process. The vendor was also to keep records of students flying at their institution. It was never discussed that VS was going to monitor students' records.

Our job as Veterans Services was to certify the veterans for VA benefits only. I trusted the department was keeping records and when the open billing sheet was signed and the close out billing sheet was signed, that all records were reviewed by the flight coordinator.

### **Change in processes due to audit- explanation of problem**

In 2012, a VA auditor came to SLCC to conduct an audit. It was discovered that neither the SLCC flight coordinators nor the vendors had all the records to prove the veteran's flights, charges and grades were accurate. When flight sheets were sent to VS, we found some errors when the closeout sheets and the amount on the one card did not match. We informed the flight department and the vendors of the errors and had them make the adjustments and refund the college the amount overpaid. Because the billing sheets were duplicates and we sent forms back to the department, and because the coordinators said they talked to each student after each lab, we assumed the records were being kept by the flight department.

As part of the VA audit, the auditor asked the interim Flight program director to see the complete records of 15 flight students. The records could not be produced because they kept no records in their area, not even a copy of the closeout sheets. The auditor asked if they checked the flight records kept at the vendors to ensure the students flew what the vendor said they did, the auditor was told the department checks a few students once a term only because they do not have the time

to check all the students records. When asked if they verify flight records, one card charges and the end charge as listed on the closeout sheet completed by the vendor which the flight coordinator signs and sends to VS, the auditor was told no, they just sign it and send it to Veterans Services. They check nothing.

The VA auditor told the interim Flight program director and the Manager of Veterans Services that this is the colleges program not the vendors program. The college is required to maintain records and review every file because the VA is paying the college for the Veterans tuition and fees and it is our degrees that are approved by the VA. The program approved is the colleges program, the VA pays the college and we pay the vendor for the student's flights. Again, the auditor said the college must monitor the records and again the interim Flight program director said they did not have time to monitor every student's records and charges. At that point the auditor directed that Veterans Services would have to monitor the records if the department will not because if we did not, we would be liable for improper charges, the program would be shut down and the college would be in violation of not monitoring our records.

At that point, under protest, it became the responsibility of Veterans Services to monitor all records, charges, and flights of every student in the flight program. At that time we only had approximately 100 veterans in the flight program. Now there are 180. It also became our responsibility to audit past flights and records and get all records in the students file in Veterans Services.

### **Reviewing the records, Identifying problems and reconciling charges**

Since we have gone back through the students records to try and reconcile charges, outstanding balances and debts we have found many problems in the files prior to our checking records that would have been caught if the department had monitored from 9-09 through 04-12. Veteran's flight money is placed on each students one-card which they are to swipe at the vendors when they fly. We are not complete with checking records, however, some of the problems we have found are:

1. Students used the one card to charge un-approved flights
2. Students used the one card to charge unapproved items, i.e. hats, etc.
3. Flight charges were found on many different students one-card but there was no record of the student having a flight.
4. Flight charges were found on one students one card for another flight students flight
5. One vendor's front desk was keeping all the students one cards unsecured at their front desk and when the student came in they would find the card and swipe it. This led to many charges incorrectly being charged to wrong students. The vendor had been told by VS Manager not to hold on to student's cards, but vendor still did it.
6. Students were flying on money from an old flight lab that had not been closed out yet and the excess money returned to the VA as required which the VS Manager told them from the beginning was not approved to do.
7. The vendor was charging the college/VA for students missed flights, which the VS Manager had told them from the beginning, was not approved.

These problems were not found because the process from the beginning was established that the Flight coordinator was monitoring the flights and charges.

### **Recent problems we have discovered within the last month:**

8. Many students were not completing labs and receiving 'I's for the lab and never finishing the lab. The college is still holding on to hundreds of thousands of dollars in flight fees the students never completed as shown in a recent Blackboard report. When VS has requested closeout sheets to prepare the money to be returned to the VA, the vendors say they do not have records, the flight department says they have no records and VS continues to receive no cooperation in cleaning up the problems.

9. While trying to reconcile a student's account, we just found out at least one student was allowed to swipe their one card and take out \$4,000 cash out of his VA flight fees, which is absolutely unapproved.

These charges from the one card have been already paid to the Vendor by the college. Because the records were not checked, the incorrect charges were paid.

### **Evaluation and Problems after one year of our change in our procedures requirements**

It has been difficult for us to manage this program and the many processes. It is so much extra work for VS to monitor each record, complete the certifications, reconcile the records for close out on each lab, and monitor student's attendance along with all the other requirements we must complete. When the closeout billing sheets come to our office they often have errors. There are still unapproved charges on the one card, the math on the close out sheet is not correct, not all the records are sent with the closeout sheets. When we ask for the records, sometimes we must wait and request the records multiple times. Even when we ask the college coordinators to assist us to get the records, we still wait. We are given many excuses as to why the documents are not sent or not available.

Listing out the problems:

- The flight department does not check student files before signing and sending documents to VS.
- We do not have cooperation from the Vendor or the Flight Coordinators to ensure documents are received by VS in a timely manner.
- There are still charges being made by the vendor that are not approved charges.
- There are errors in the math on closeout.
- From the college Flight Coordinator, we receive 50 plus closeout sheets and documents at one time, which we must review all the records to close the lab taking time.
  - We repeatedly have requested we receive these closeout sheets as the student completes the lab to allow us to refund the VA in a timely manner.
  - If the VS Coordinator cannot get the documents to a 0 balance, the student cannot move on to the next lab until it is clear. VS contact the college flight coordinator and the vendor to notify them there is a problem. We do not always receive the corrections quickly.
  - Students are often told VS has not finished their closeout and told to call us to find when it will be done when the flight coordinator and the vendor knows the closeout sheet is wrong.
- Often the next day after receiving the large group of closeout sheets, we receive 50 open lab sheets from the flight department to sign the students up for the next lab.
  - Students and employees from the vendor call Veterans Services to see why the student has no money to fly only days after documents have been sent to VS.
  - When told we have 5 business days to process the documents, sometime we get flack from the students and one vendor's employees.
- The VS Coordinator has often had to go to the Vendor office to find out where the problems are on the billing sheet. This takes the VS employee away from doing the work they need to do.

### **Solution**

The reason VS was tasked with monitoring and maintaining all flight records is because the SLCC flight department refused to keep and monitor each record because it was too much work. Monitoring records of the flight students should be the responsibility of the flight department not of Veteran Services. It also should not be the responsibility of VS to ensure the math is done correctly or that the charges approved on the students close out sheets is only the approved charges.

It is our opinion that the responsibility of the flight program should be in the SLCC flight department, which includes monitoring all records. VS do not monitor any records of students in any other program at SLCC. The final closeout sheets when signed by the flight department and sent to VS should be checked and be at a 0 balance to allow VS to quickly process the closeout sheets.

My solution is to move the responsibility of monitoring all students in the flight program to the flight department. They would be required to monitor all parts of the veteran's records as identified by the VA auditor one year ago. When the final closeout billing sheet is sent to VS, it should balance and all accounts should be at the 0 balance. If it is not, it will be sent back to the flight coordinators to work with the vendors to clear it up.

The only reason it was ever required to be completed by VS is because the Flight department would not comply with the VA auditor's directive. However, this is the Flight departments program. The Flight department should monitor it and the student's records should be kept in their department. When Flight Lab Billing sheets are sent from the college Flight Coordinator, we will know they have reviewed the files, verified the charges and flights and the tuition is reconciled to a 0 balance. Records will be kept at the Flight department and will be available to VS and the VA at any time to use for audits.

The VS Coordinator will continue to work with Accounts Receivable to reconcile records of flight students from past terms from Fall 2009-Spring 2013 to reconcile the records in the files due to no review before. The college Flight Coordinates and the Vendors will be responsible for sending VS all records requested within 3 days to allow VS to clear up the records in a timely manner.

#### **New Additional Concerns with Flight program responsibilities**

A new issue that is impacting the college flight program at SLCC is the 85-15 requirement by the VA to ensure a balance of Veterans using VA benefits and those who are self-pay students. A year ago during our VA audit, the auditor informed us of this VA rule. At that time I notified the college Flight coordinators and the two vendors of the rule and cautioned about bringing too many students too fast and meeting our max in the flight program. I had push back from one of the vendors, Upper Limit.

Again in January when I was told of the large number of new students they planned to enroll, I cautioned them about the numbers and the 85-15 ruling. Spring semester when the flight billing sheets were processed, we hit that maximum in the program. When I notified the department and the vendor to notify them we are at the maximum, again there was push back and problems.

The interim Flight Director has said it is the responsibility of VS to monitor the program numbers and notify them once a week of the number of students in their program and the percentage between the veterans and non-veterans. Again, it is not the responsibility of VS to monitor students in the Flight program. The Flight coordinators can identify students in their program, students that drop out of the program, students ready to graduate and students that are self-pay. VS ran a program written by IR but there are limitations in that program that make accurate reporting impossible based on the areas listed above.

I propose the Flight coordinators keep a separate list of their students in each specialty and degree seeking, fixed wing and rotor wing. They will be able to identify the students and their status and the percentage of Vets to self-pay that they identify. They can forward their list to the VS coordinator who can double check the numbers and update our list and verify with the Flight coordinator our agreement of the percentage. Based on the number of spaces available, the flight coordinator will notify VS of students to admit into the program. VS will admit students until we meet the maximum

percentage. We will add the names of the students added by the college Flight coordinators to the running list we have.

Students are being told daily to call me and see if they can get into the program, if they are on our wait list which we do not have, to have us explain why they can't get into the program when the vendor, ULA, told them they are on the wait list and they are ready to start the program. They want VS to explain why when they moved to Utah because they were told they could start the program by ULA, why we, VS would deny them being able to start. Again, this is an additional problem we are experiencing.

A concern VS shares with Accounts Receivable is there should never be unapproved charges to the one card made by the vendor. The college pays the Vendor every two weeks so if there is an unapproved charge, the college pays that charge with no question. We have, on many occasions over the last year, had to have the Vendor reverse charges because of unapproved charges. The billing is never reviewed until at until the closeout. We feel this is a concern to the college due to the fact the college is paying the vendor without verifying the charges are approved charges.