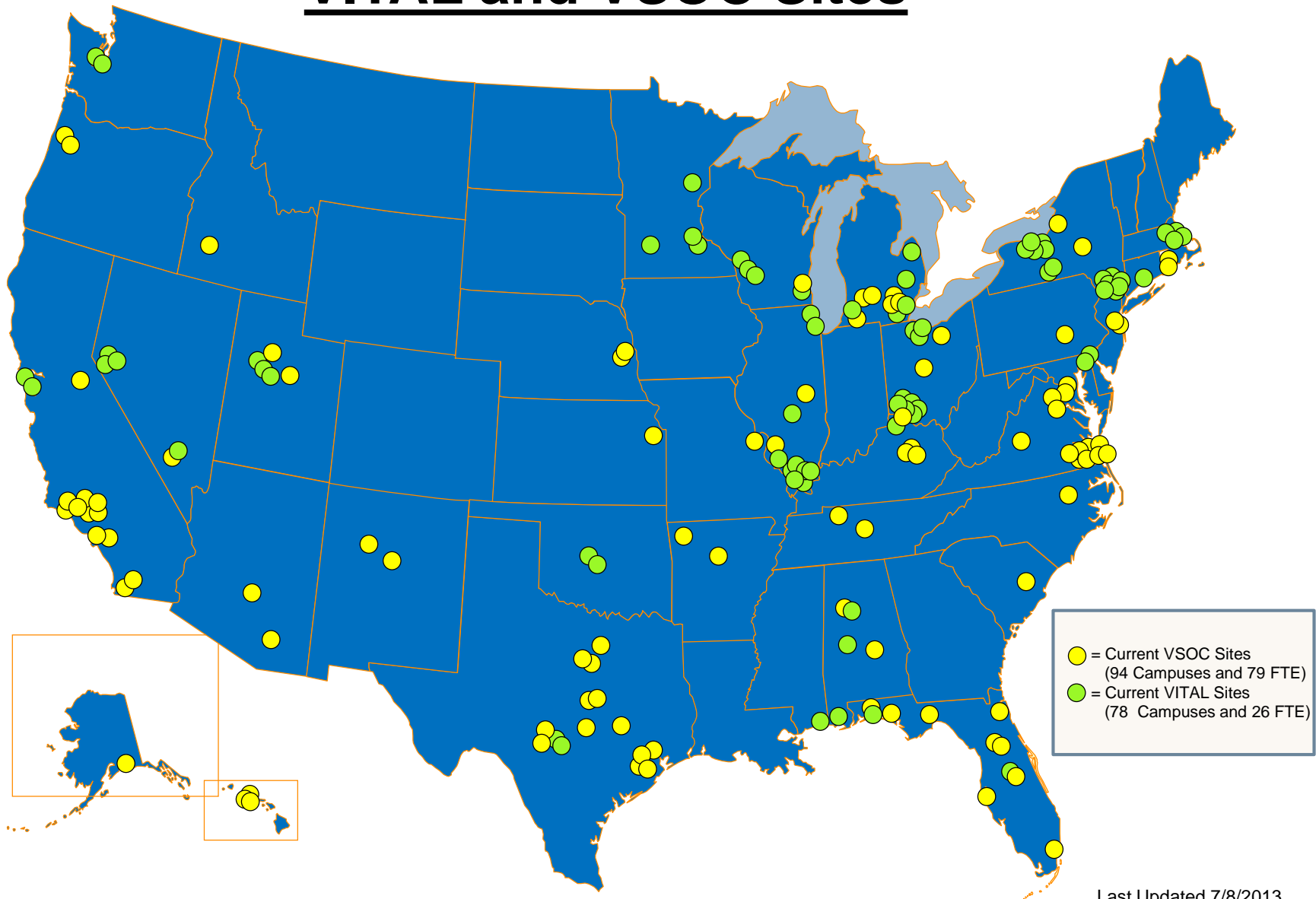


VITAL STUDENT VETERAN OUTREACH PROGRAM

Holly M. Passi, PsyD

VITAL and VSOC Sites



VITAL SVOP Mission

The overall mission of VITAL SVOP is to work with campuses to get veterans involved in their VA medical and mental health care early on and as often as possible.

This greatly reduces risk for all kinds of untreated medical and mental health issues that may impact well being and academic performance.



□ Strategy:

- To decrease barriers to accessing VA services and benefits.
 - Provision of mental health treatment and case management in coordination with campus staff.
 - Coordination of care with medical center.
- To support student veteran academic success through:
 - Advocating for practices and policies that enrich the academic environment for student veterans.
 - Educating the broader campus community with the aim of reducing stigma and increasing staff cultural competency.

Accessibility and Barriers to Care

- Perceptions of accessibility affect utilization of both VA medical and mental health care. (Damron-Rodriguez et al, 2004).
- So do concerns about stigma (particularly mental health stigma). For example:
 - ▣ Veterans with PTSD...
 - Are less knowledgeable about care options and eligibility (Sayer et al., 2009)
 - Have more stigma related concerns (Hoge et al., 2004)
 - Have more negative perceptions of accessibility (Desai, Stefanovic, & Rosenheck, 2005).
 - Those with more severe PTSD have more perceived barriers to care (Ouimette et al., 2011).

Barriers to Accessing Care or Resources

- Lack of awareness of benefits/resources.
- Lack of knowledge on how to access benefits/resources.
- Mental health stigma, Veteran stigma, or other self-stigma.
- Logistical barriers (scheduling, finances, travel).
 - ▣ Telehealth is *rapidly* expanding at VA.

Functional Impact

- ❑ Missed classes.
- ❑ Problems with attention, concentration, memory.
- ❑ Difficulty sitting through class.
- ❑ Lack of emotional engagement both inside and outside of classroom.
- ❑ Reluctance to approach professors about problems or access DRC due to fear of stigma and/or “suck it up” mentality.
- ❑ Missed opportunities for academic mentorship or professional development

SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR



Stigma and Social Disconnection

- Both external and internal
 - ▣ Idealization and devaluation of veteran status.
 - ▣ Preconceived notions about mental health issues.
 - ▣ Struggle with readjustment=“weakness”
 - ▣ Identification as the unfamiliar “Other”
 - ▣ Perpetuation of the veteran-civilian divide.



Social Support and Mental Health

- Research has established a solid link between psychological distress and social support. For example:
 - In OEF/OIF veterans treated for PTSD, higher social support was related to less severe pre-treatment symptoms and better therapy outcomes.
 - Among a sample of student veterans, social support was associated with more adaptive coping skills and fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Social Support

- Perception that one is cared for or has assistance available.
- Can be family, friends, institutions, organizations, etc.
 - ▣ Emotional support- empathy, concern, trust
 - ▣ Tangible support- services, resources, material support
 - ▣ Informational support- advice, guidance, suggestions
 - ▣ Companionship support- social belonging, shared activities

Common Social Support Gaps on Campus

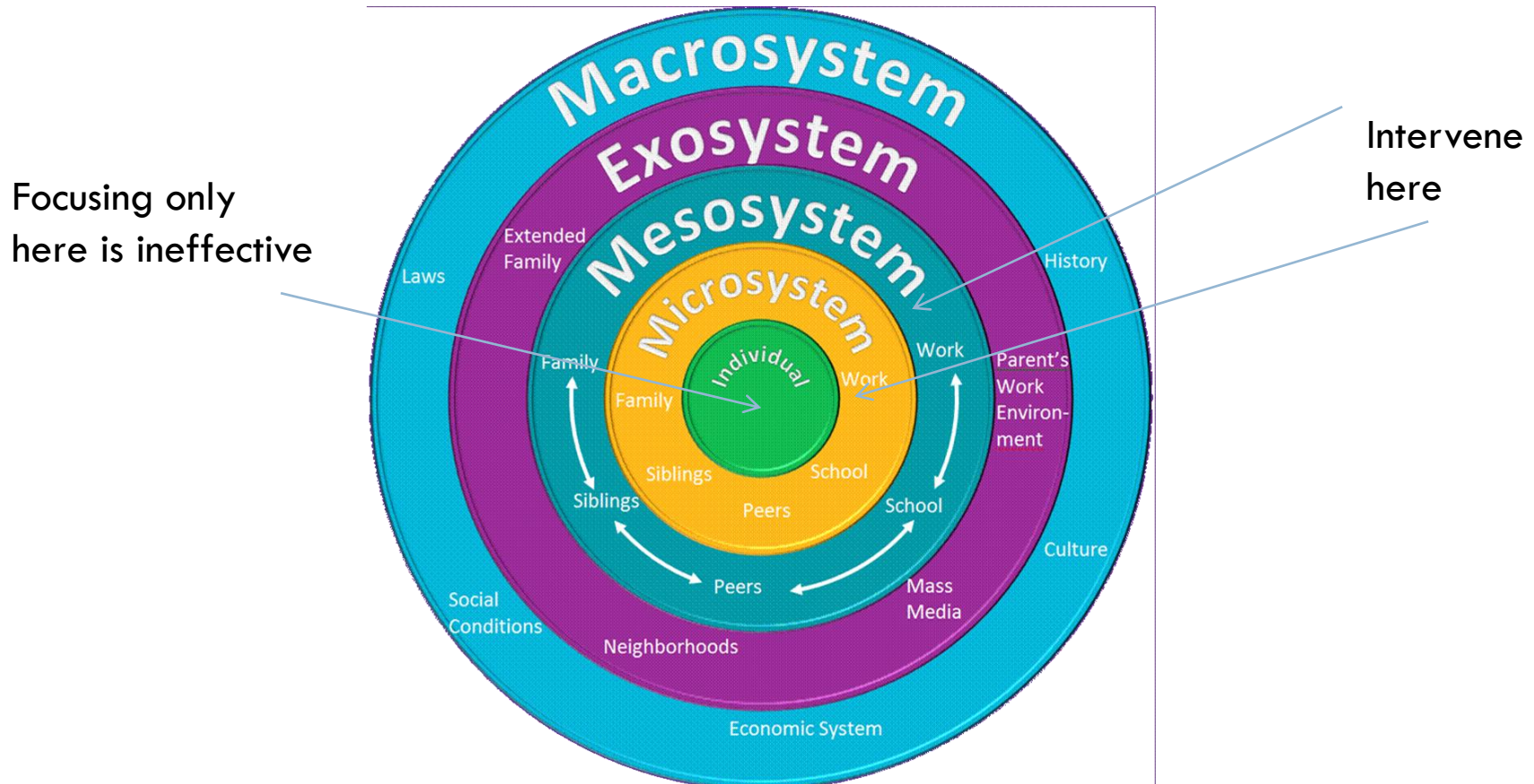
- ❑ Lack of visibility/awareness of veterans on campus.
- ❑ Low staff and faculty cultural competence.
- ❑ **Lack of information/resources.**
- ❑ Gaps in veteran-oriented services.
- ❑ Lack of campus social belonging.
- ❑ Lack of warm-handoffs or personal connection with available supports.

BEST PRACTICES FOR INTERVENING IN THE SYSTEM

The VITAL Model

An ecological perspective...

- The person-environment fit is the area for intervention.



How can VITAL SVOP assist?

VITAL assists both the campus and individual veterans.

Staff & Faculty Engagement

- Vet programming must engage key stakeholders.
 - ▣ Frontline professionals can be trained to better provide forms of social support at critical points.
- VITAL Strategy
 - ▣ Staff and faculty trainings
 - ▣ Collaborative meetings with key departments, administrators, campus officials.
 - ▣ Consultation on service or program development

Direct Outreach to Veterans

- Educate individual veterans and veterans groups on VA benefits and resources
 - *Informational support leading to tangible supports*
- VITAL Strategy
 - Student Veteran Orientations
 - SVA meetings, events
 - Other veteran-specific events.

Peer Support Frameworks

- Cultivate or enhance peer support networks
 - ▣ *Emotional and companionship support*

- VITAL Strategy
 - ▣ Consultation on setting up peer support frameworks.
 - ▣ Direct training of peer advisors on basic mentoring skills and education on VA benefits and services.
 - ▣ Point of contact for peer advisor referrals to VA.

VITAL Informational and Tangible Supports

- Enrollment to VA healthcare.
- Care Coordination with Medical Center.
- General assistance in navigating the VA system/claims process.
- Mental health intake evaluation, individual psychotherapy, and MH specialty referrals.
- ▣ Using me as a point of initial contact is much easier than navigating VA independently.

VA Specialty Services

- ▣ Neuropsychology.
- ▣ PTSD Clinic
- ▣ Pain Clinic
- ▣ Sleep studies
- ▣ Women's Clinic
- ▣ Compensation and Pension (i.e., “Service-Connection” or Disability-Rating examinations).
- ▣ Inpatient Psychiatry, Addiction Program, Homeless Program, and Suicide Prevention for more severe issues.

Specialty Services Cont'd

- MST Coordinator
- Intimate Partner Violence Coordinator
- Transgender Veteran Services Coordinator
- Biofeedback
- Sexual Health Clinic (couples therapy)
- Transition Care Management Clinic (post 9/11 combat vets)

VITAL Consultative Model

□ Features

- Consultation to veteran service coordinator (and other relevant staff) on campus program development.
- Needs assessment consultation/support
- Staff and faculty trainings
- Peer advisor training
- Direct outreach events
- Point of contact for VA enrollment, care coordination, mental health treatment

VITAL On Campus Clinical Services Model

- Features: All of the above with on-campus mental health intake, individual therapy, care coordination, benefits assistance.
- *Long-term, intensive commitment to program development.*
 - ▣ Needs assessment, written strategic plan, and trial consultative model to gauge likely utilization numbers.
- MOU and 5 year Revocable License
 - ▣ Office space must meet privacy and safety standards.

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