

DOCUMENT RESUME

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[Survey of the Veterans Administration Veterans Representative on Campus Program]. September 20, 1977. 4 pp.

Report to Wallace E. Busbee, Director, Veterans Administration: Internal Audit Service; by George D. Peck, Assistant Director, Human Resources Div.


Issue Area: Education, Training, and Employment Programs (1100).
Contact: Human Resources Div.

Budget Function: Veterans Benefits and Services: Veterans Education, Training, and Rehabilitation (702).

Organization Concerned: Veterans Administration.

Authority: 38 U.S.C. 1685. 38 U.S.C. 241.

A survey of the Veterans Administration (VA) Veterans Representative on Campus Program indicated various problems with the program, although the problems identified may not necessarily be representative of the national program. Findings/Conclusions: Problems noted at some of the locations visited included: VA educational assistance inquiries had not been reported in a timely manner; monthly reports of the timeliness of educational assistance inquiries resolution were misleading; reports prepared by the Veterans Representative supervisors were not comprehensive enough; and school officials prohibited Veterans Representatives from supervising work-study students. Recommendations: The Chief Benefits Director, Department of Veterans Benefits, should continuously monitor the timeliness of educational assistance inquiries reporting, the accuracy of reported educational assistance inquiries resolution time, and the quality of Veteran Representative supervisor reporting, and should take proper action to resolve any problems noted. The Chief Benefits Director should also seek whatever clarification of the Veterans Representatives' responsibility for supervising work-study personnel may be needed and then take appropriate steps to see that the responsibility is met. (SC)

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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

HUMAN RESOURCES
DIVISION

SEP 20 1977

03405
Mr. Wallace E. Busbee, Director
Internal Audit Service
Veterans Administration

Dear Mr. Busbee:

The General Accounting Office has surveyed the Veterans Administration (VA) Veterans Representative (Vet-Rep) on Campus program administered by VA's Department of Veterans Benefits (DVB). Our survey was conducted at VA's central office, Washington, D.C.; the Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., regional offices; and selected educational institutions within the jurisdiction of the VA regional offices visited. Limited information also was obtained via telephone discussions with officials of the New York, Houston, St. Petersburg, and Waco VA regional offices.

The objective of our survey was to get indications of whether program requirements were being met and program goals were being accomplished.

Our survey indicated various problems with the program. We noted at some of the locations visited that:

- VA educational assistance inquiries (EAIs) had not been reported timely.
- monthly reports of the timeliness of EAI resolution were misleading.
- reports prepared by Vet-Rep supervisors were not comprehensive enough.
- school officials prohibited Vet-Reps to supervise work-study students.

Since the locations visited during the survey do not represent a scientific sample, problems identified may not necessarily be representative of the national program. Presently, we do not plan to initiate a review of the program.

Reporting of EAIs

At selected educational institutions, we noted that some of the Vet-Reps were not calling in to regional offices EAIs involving non-receipt of benefit checks as required by VA instructions. An official at the Los Angeles regional office subsequently reviewed all EAIs for a week and found that a significant number of such EAIs were mailed to the regional office via regular mail or VA courier. Many of these were a week old by the time they were received at the regional office. The official said that some of these EAIs were batch mailed, i.e., mailed when a certain number of EAIs were received without regard to the date of the receipt. The VA official indicated he would recommend action to correct the situation.

We also noted that certain monthly reports submitted to the VA central office by the Los Angeles regional office showed that 97 percent of the EAIs handled from January through June 1976 were resolved in less than 5 days. We found that the regional office defined the resolution period to be from the date the regional office received an EAI to the date it relayed the answer to the Vet-Rep. This does not represent the total resolution period because it does not include the time for getting (1) the inquiry from the veteran to the regional office and (2) the resolution from the regional office to the veteran.

Reporting by Vet-Rep supervisors

VA requires two supervisory visits a year to each school having a Vet-Rep(s). After each visit, the Vet-Rep supervisor is to prepare a written report summarizing the matters considered during the visit. We noted that the majority of 22 reports prepared by the Washington VA regional office's Vet-Rep supervisor during an 8 1/2 month period did not contain sufficient information to assist other regional personnel in evaluating the Vet-Rep's performance.

Supervision by Vet-Reps

According to 38 U.S.C. 1685, VA work-study students performing outreach under 38 U.S.C. 241 must work under the supervision of a VA employee. At educational institutions serviced by a full-time Vet-Rep, the Vet-Rep has been designated as the VA employee to provide such supervision.

We found that Vet-Reps had not provided direct supervision to the work-study students involved in outreach at four educational institutions--three were under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles regional office and one the Washington regional office. School

officials at these institutions had prohibited Vet-Reps from supervising such students. VA regional office officials, however, continued to authorize payments to the work-study students.

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We discussed the observations outlined above with the Director of Veterans Assistance Service. He said that EAI's not requiring supporting documentation should be called into the regional office rather than sent by mail and that the resolution time for EAIs should be computed from the time the EAI is received by the Vet-Rep to the time the reply is forwarded to the veteran. He also said that reports prepared by Vet-Rep supervisors should contain sufficient information to enable other regional personnel to evaluate Vet-Rep performance.

The Director said that clarification of Vet-Reps' responsibility for supervising work-study personnel may be needed, and that such clarification may be sought from VA's General Counsel.

The Director said that as a result of our discussing the above problems with him, central office officials have emphasized the importance of detailed supervisory reporting by Veterans Services Division field elements during hot-line discussions between the central office and the regional offices. He also stated that central office staff members conducting staff visits at field stations have been alerted to review the quality of supervisory reports as well as the timeliness of EAI reporting and resolution.

Recommendations to the Chief Benefits Director

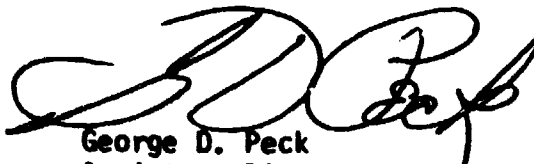
The actions taken by VA should help to resolve the problems noted in our survey; however, the Chief Benefits Director, DVB should:

- continuously monitor the (1) timeliness of EAI reporting, (2) accuracy of reported EAI resolution time, and (3) quality of Vet-Rep Supervisor reporting, and take appropriate action to resolve any problems noted.
- seek whatever clarification of the Vet-Reps' responsibility for supervising work-study personnel that may be needed and then take appropriate steps to see that the responsibility is met.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesy extended to us by VA personnel during this survey.

Please advise us of any action taken or planned on the matters discussed in this report.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. D. Peck', written in a cursive style.

George D. Peck
Assistant Director

cc: Director, DVB