Rachel E. Scott, Sydnie R. Roberts, and Shelia Gaines

Collaboration to serve military-affiliated students

A textbooks reserves project at the University of Memphis

Military-affiliated students are a diverse campus constituency and may encounter a number of obstacles to their academic success.[1] At the University of Memphis (UM), the Veteran and Military Student Services (VMSS) center provides a wide-ranging suite of services to engage and support military-affiliated students.[2] This article describes how two UM departments, the University Libraries and VMSS, collaborated to facilitate the discovery and circulation of an existing collection of textbooks for military-affiliated students.

The VMSS textbook collection included approximately 130 items covering roughly 120 unique titles that were stored in the VMSS office. VMSS obtained the existing textbooks with grant funding and from donations, including many from military-affiliated students. This speaks strongly to the community that VMSS has fostered within the broader university. Unfortunately, military-affiliated students had no way of knowing if the textbooks they needed were available without first contacting VMSS.

During summer 2019, Sydnie Roberts, the Veteran Transition Specialist at VMSS, reached out to an IT employee in the University Libraries to discuss a potential systems solution to inventorying their textbook collection and allowing students to see which books were available in the collection. The IT employee notified Rachel Scott, interim head of library systems, of this request, and she proposed a meeting to discuss possible solutions. After considering the options discussed in the meeting, all parties agreed that the University Libraries' Integrated Library System, Sierra, provided a viable solution, meeting the urgent need of allowing students to discover which Textbooks for Tiger Veterans were currently available for checkout.

The decision to move the VMSS textbook collection to the library developed from the need to make the collection more sustainable and accessible. The collection is intended to grow, and as it does, VMSS anticipated quickly running out of space to house and appropriately promote it. The collection was housed in the VMSS office, which students could only access during limited hours of operation. The VMSS hours of operation did not necessarily support the needs of busy students with diverse responsibilities on and off campus. There was no direct means of determining the titles or their availability without directly visiting the VMSS office. These parameters were obstacles to military-connected students, as they are often post-traditional students balancing many responsibilities and strict time constraints. Moving the collection to the University Libraries allows students to view the collection on-

Rachel Scott is interim coordinator of Cataloging, Collection Management, and Systems, University Libraries, email: rescott3@memphis.edu, Sydnie Roberts is graduate assistant of Veteran and Military Student Services, email: srrberts@memphis.edu, and Shelia Gaines is head of circulation, University Libraries, email: sgaines1@memphis.edu, at the University of Memphis

line, obtain the books during more convenient hours of operation, supports the sustainable growth and expansion of the program, and allows the VMSS and University Libraries to collaboratively promote these resources.

Technical services considerations

Once the textbooks had been relocated from VMSS to the University Libraries, work began on cataloging the collection to increase discoverability. It is rare that the University Libraries adds to Sierra print materials that it does not own and may not be permanent fixtures of the collection. For that reason, various stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on a proposal for processing. After some discussion, we arrived at the following procedure.

VMSS shared an Excel file with title, author, ISBN, edition, and subject information with the University Libraries. Scott converted this .csv file into MARC records using MARCEdit's Delimited Text Translator and batch loaded these into Sierra using the Data Exchange function.

Before loading, however, there were several cataloging-related considerations. The subjects in the spreadsheet provided aligned with disciplinary subjects—for example, Business, English, and Criminal Justice—and not LCSH. Accordingly, Scott opted not to crosswalk these to a MARC 650 subject field, but rather to use the general MARC 500 note indicating that the text was assigned, for example, in a UM business course. A title is, however, occasionally used in multiple courses and even in courses outside of the primary subject areas associated with it. Accordingly, there was concern about limiting any of these textbooks to a single course number.

The decision to keep the Textbooks for Tiger Veterans entirely discrete from other course reserve materials was informed by local circumstances. We wanted to ensure that these materials would be used exclusively for the intended audience and that they would not be confused with other materials. First, no course number or instructor name was included in the data. Sierra's reserves module collocates all materials by course number and by instructor name. There was concern that this might confuse students with no military affiliation about the availability of the VMSS collection. The Textbooks for Tiger Veterans are, however, physically housed among the other reserves books, behind a service desk and out of reach of nonemployees, which alleviated some of the concern about nonmilitary-affiliated students accessing them.

In addition to the data provided, Scott also added a local genre note, 655_7 $a Textbooks for Tiger Veterans $2 local ($2 is suppressed from view in catalogs). Doing so facilitated the creation of a unique collection that could be linked to by VMSS from their website. One of the chief objectives was to make the collection more visible and searchable online, and this fulfilled that request.[3] University Libraries uses MARC Bibliographic 590 for local holdings notes, including acquisitions information. Accordingly, a standardized 590 was inserted for all of these textbooks with the date and indicating that the title was part of a batch load for this particular collection.

Because the bibliographic and item records were created via a batch load, relatively little personnel time was needed to process the collection. Before the records were loaded, a new item location had to be created. Item records were created by batch, and barcodes were inserted later. The fixed fields were encoded with the same item agency, status, location, item type, copy number (but updated as appropriate; few titles are held in multiple copies), shelf location, call number, and item message ("Textbooks for Tiger Veterans; please confirm student affiliation before checking out this book").

After the batch load was completed, and the data tidied up, the books were barcoded, and the barcode was scanned into the item records. Shelia Gaines, head of circulation, decided that it would work best for her team to arrange the materials alphabetically by title, as author information was sometimes unavailable in the spreadsheet. Accordingly, the first word of each title was added to the end of the local call number (090) stub TigerVet-. Finally, the books were security stripped, spine labeled

with "TigerVet" at the head of the label and transferred to Circulation to be sensitized and shelved behind a service desk. The goal was to make it very clear what books are included and excluded from this collection.

Circulation considerations

Because these textbooks were acquired by VMSS specifically for use by military-affiliated students, it is essential that they only circulate to members of this particular demographic. VMSS checked out these books for one semester and offered no renewals, and this policy continued to be followed once the collection moved to the University Libraries. Scott created a loan rule specific to the newly created item location so that no other reserves materials would be easily confused with the Textbooks for Tiger Veterans.

Ensuring that Circulation staff could clearly identify all military-affiliated students from their Sierra patron record proved the biggest challenge. Scott collaborated closely with Roberts and ITS personnel to automate the load of military-affiliation status into Sierra. The goal was to load military affiliation data in the Sierra patron record message field, which creates a pop-up alert at the point of circulation.

Military-affiliation information is encoded in diverse places within Banner, UM's enterprise administrative software application, for tracking student information and financial transactions. ITS extracted data from both veteran codes and billing detail codes to obtain a more comprehensive list of military-affiliated students. Initial loads only identified 369 students as military affiliated, but 766 students are now listed as qualified to check out needed textbooks for the entire semester. The patron records are only viewed and edited within Sierra by authorized personnel in the Circulation department. Just as we protect the privacy of students' email addresses and other personal information, we protect and do not share students' military affiliation status.

Initially, after scanning the user's ID at the Circulation desk, Circulation employees would see a pop-up message in Sierra patron records reading either "Military:Y" or "Military:N." It became apparent that the pop-up message should be omitted for those with no military affiliation, as it does not present any useful information and requires an additional mouse click for personnel. The circulation process went much more smoothly after this change was made.

Conclusion

The University Libraries is pleased to partner with VMSS to support the educational success of military-affiliated students. After only one month into the first semester, 32 of the 130 items had been checked out. There have been a few instances in which a military-affiliated student came by the Circulation desk to see if a textbook was on general reserve for their course and discovered that although it was not, it was available through the Textbooks for Tiger Veterans collection. Circulation personnel made these students' day by informing them that they could keep the book all semester. As this collaboration between the VMSS and University Libraries develops and students become more aware of these resources, we hope that an increasing proportion of the collection will be checked out and used to promote the academic success of our military-affiliated students.

Notes

1. David T. Vacchi, "Considering Student Veterans on the Twenty-First-Century College Campus," *About Campus* 17, no. 2 (2012): 15-21; Sonya B. Norman, Jay Rosen, Sara Himmerich, Ursula S. Myers, Brittany Davis, Kendall C. Browne, and Neill Piland, "Student Veteran Perceptions of Facilitators and Barriers to Achieving Academic Goals," *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development* 52, no. 6 (2015).

2. University of Memphis, Veterans & Military Student Services, last modified September 3, 2019, https://www.memphis.edu/veterans/.

3. This collection is viewable at https://sierra.memphis.edu/search/dTextbooks+For+Tiger+Veterans. ✌