

**Navigating Flagstaff's Housing Emergency: Strategies to Address Housing Insecurity  
among Student Veterans at Northern Arizona University**

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## 2. Introduction

Flagstaff serves as a cultural hub for Northern Arizona. Its proximity to the Grand Canyon, the San Francisco Mountains, and Oak Creek Canyon are just a few of its draws. It is a popular tourist destination and home to Northern Arizona University, but the cost of housing is a major challenge for Flagstaff residents (Solop, 2001). 45% of all households in Flagstaff are defined as housing cost burdened, meaning that they spend over 30% of their monthly income on housing expenses (City of Flagstaff, 2022). In a survey of 1,833 homeowners, 943 renters, and 81 homeless individuals residing in Flagstaff, 18.9% claimed that they were “very likely” to leave Flagstaff due to housing costs. 31.7% reported being “somewhat likely” and 7.8% were “nearly certain” they would be leaving for the same reason (City of Flagstaff, 2022).

Veterans are already at an increased risk for homelessness and suicide (Bossarte et al., 2013). They make up 14% of the overall homeless population within the United States, but only 6.2% of Americans are veterans (US Census Bureau, 2023). To address this issue, it is critical to consider additional factors specific to this demographic. For example, veterans seeking treatment for opiate use are 10 times more likely to be homeless than others using VA healthcare, and veterans using both VA healthcare and Medicare in 2012 were 3 times more likely to be exposed to high doses of opioids (Bachhuber et al., 2015; Walid et al., 2018). Consideration of factors such as these is necessary to effectively connecting veteran students to the appropriate resources. The housing situation has specifically created some challenges for Northern Arizona University’s incoming veteran students.

The City of Flagstaff is well aware of the difficult situation, and declared a housing emergency in December of 2020. Military members are almost always forced to relocate in fulfillment of military orders. Separation from service and going back to school is a challenging transition on

its own. Housing insecurity can make this time of transition even more stressful for veteran students. City of Flagstaff Housing Section, NAU Department of Veteran and Military Services, U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs (2022), and various non-governmental organizations (Nation's Finest, 2022; Lewis 2023) are attempting to provide solutions through financial assistance for qualified applicants.

These solutions have included early outreach from NAU's Department of Veteran and Military Services through emails, phone calls, student surveys and public conferences (Jordan 2023; Veteran and Military Services 2023). These were performed to provide student veterans time to prepare for the unique housing challenges they may face in Flagstaff. The difficulties of finding available housing are exaggerated when the term begins. Students often have a heavy academic workload and many need to seek employment to support themselves and their families financially (Bossarte et al., 2013; Cusack et al., 2019). By streamlining the flow of effective resources, they have been made more accessible to the students who need them. One difficulty identified by feedback from student veterans is introducing students to resources in a manner that is not overwhelming. Activation of VA Educational Benefits (e.g. GI Bill) already requires veteran student to complete additional tasks when arriving at NAU (Veteran and Military Services, 2022). Many incoming students are unaware that the VA can take up to 30 days to process the enrollment certification that initiates GI Bill payments (Veterans Affairs, 2022), which has resulted in delayed payments for some students. This must be carefully considered when making modifications to the workflow of incoming veteran students.

The main objective for this project is to reduce housing insecurity among student veterans at NAU. This is a complex issue, and its objective has been broken down into four parts. Part one, eliminate existing housing insecurity among NAU's student veterans. Part two, streamline the

acquisition of housing for incoming veteran students to prevent instances of housing insecurity. Part three, network with local governmental and non-governmental organizations to advocate for student needs and increase their accessibility to relevant resources. Part four, develop long term mitigating strategies to be used by the department of Veteran and Military Services at NAU.

## **2.1 Background**

Veteran students at Northern Arizona University (NAU) encounter various challenges in securing suitable housing, each contributing to the overall housing crisis in Flagstaff. Property managers, in many instances, set income requirements that exceed the realistic financial situations of students, creating an obstacle to finding affordable housing. Additionally, the utilization of GI Bill benefits, a vital resource for veteran students, necessitates the completion of supplementary tasks, adding to the workload of these students.

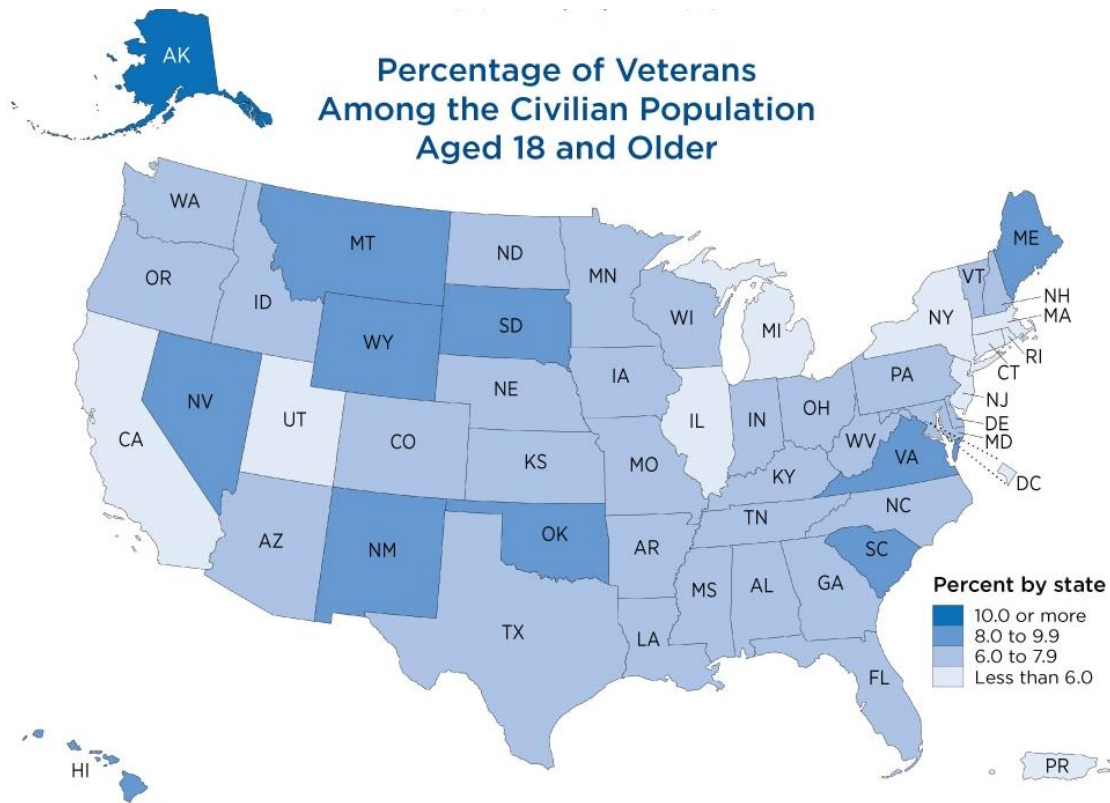


Figure 1: Percentage of veterans per state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)

The timing of initial contact with students in need of assistance is another hurdle. Late outreach to students who require support in their housing search exacerbates the difficulties they face, reducing the effectiveness of potential interventions (Cusack et al., 2019). Moreover, the housing landscape in Flagstaff is further affected by the prevalence of vacation homes and short-term rentals, contributing to the inflation of rent prices and rendering many options financially inaccessible for veteran students (Flagstaff Housing Section, 2022).

A general scarcity of affordable housing compounds the housing crisis, which makes it challenging for veteran students to find residences that fall within their budget constraints. Adding to the challenge, the distribution timeline of GI Bill housing stipend payments poses



another obstacle, often occurring too late to be utilized for initial rent payments, creating financial strains for veteran students during critical periods of housing transition.

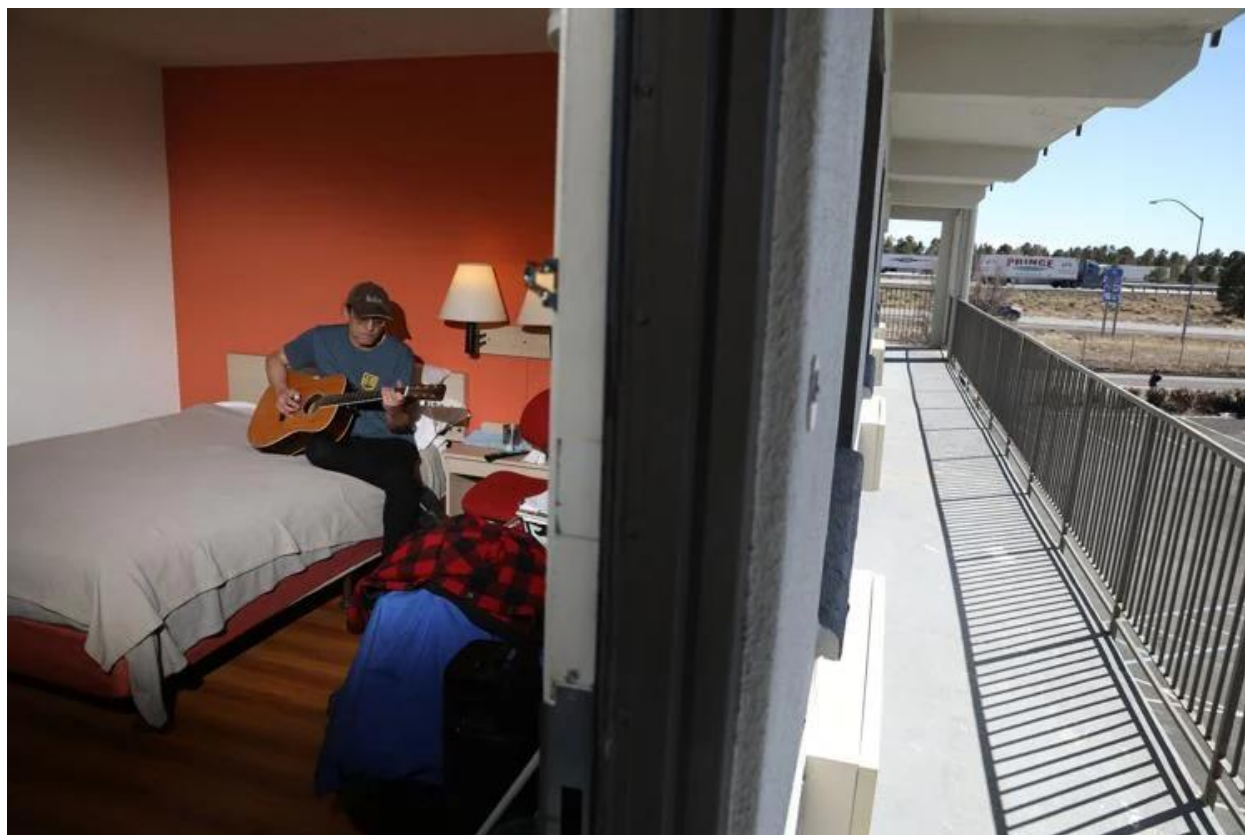


Figure 2: Flagstaff veteran faces housing insecurity (Bacon, 2022)

Many from Flagstaff's veteran population have struggled to maintain housing security. Figure 2 shows one veteran living out of a Motel 6 in town after losing his job, as reported in the Flagstaff local newspaper by Golightly (2022). Some of NAU's current student veterans have shared the same experience. Arizona's veteran population is higher than average at 7.9% compared to the national rate of 6.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Early identification of students in need of assistance would allow ample time to provide individualized resources before the student is fully engaged with required tasks for the approaching term. This early outreach can also reduce

financial stress at the beginning of the term by ensuring that their VA Educational Benefits are implemented in a timely manner. The goal for this project was to reduce the amount of veteran students at NAU facing housing insecurity through analysis of the current situation and development of mitigating strategies. The analysis consisted of performing interviews, creating cartographic displays, and summarizing student survey data. The mitigating strategies were early outreach in the form of emails, phone calls, and video conferences as well as orientations, one on one meetings, and in-person conferences when the students arrived in Flagstaff (Jordan 2023; Veteran and Military Services 2023). The development of this housing workflow came at the recommendation of NAU's student veterans, and incoming veteran students have already started to receive housing assistance through the Department of Veteran and Military Services at NAU. These strategies were incorporated into the standard student onboarding process and will now assist future incoming students at NAU.

### **3. Methods**

A key aspect of this project was to increase the accessibility of housing resources for NAU's student veterans. The restrictive nature of dormitories on campus make them unsuitable for a majority of veterans attending NAU (Campus Living, 2023). To assess the availability of housing information on the NAU Department of Military Services website (2023), the online workflow to locate housing and associated resources was explored. It is quite simple and adequately efficient. It turns out this was not the problem at all. After receiving feedback from several veterans at NAU, it was determined that the housing challenges in Flagstaff had surprised them when they arrived (Veteran, 2023). Including housing information in early outreach became the new focus in order to allow incoming students ample time to secure housing in Flagstaff's competitive housing environment. There was also a need to network directly with housing agencies to

identify which can most effectively help students in need of housing assistance. There were organizations that provide housing resources listed on the Veteran and Military Services website, but little guidance on who is qualified for assistance and what is offered. The department utilized student surveys to identify the needs of veteran students at NAU (Jordan, 2023). This information was used to formulate the mitigating strategies used throughout this practicum.

The workflow for students in need of housing resources was also explored. All of the organizations listed can be of great help to students, but identification of those whose services would best fit NAU's student veterans was paramount. Through interagency networking and student feedback it was determined that some of the most helpful organizations were missing from the list (Veteran, 2023).




<b>NAU Family Housing &amp; Residence Life</b>	∨
<b>Catholic Charities</b>	∨
<b>City of Flagstaff Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation</b>	∨
<b>Coconino County Community Services</b>	∨
<b>Department of Economic Security (DES)</b>	∨
<b>Family Resource Center</b>	∨
<b>Flagstaff Housing Authority</b>	∨
<b>Flagstaff Shelter Services</b>	∨
<b>Housing Solutions of Northern Arizona &amp; Sharon Manor</b>	∨
<b>Veteran Resource Centers of America</b>	∨

Figure 3: Housing resources online workflow (NAU Veteran and Military Services, 2023)

The down arrow to the right of each title in Figure 3 displays contact information a brief description of the resources provided when selected. The online workflow is easy to navigate, but still many veterans have reported being unaware of the resources available to them. It was concluded that the Department of Veteran and Military Services should perform early outreach to make veteran students aware of the challenging housing situation in Flagstaff and connect them to relevant resources. This subject matter is now part of the existing early outreach, which was previously oriented on utilizing VA Educational Benefits, and connecting students with their peer

mentor. Incorporating housing information and resources into the existing outreach methods of emails, phone calls, video conferences, and one on one meetings offered the most assistance without increasing the expenditure of department funds. Housing resources were compiled and are sent to students to well before the beginning of the academic term, but to better understand the needs of NAU student veterans it was necessary to gather more information. This was accomplished through student interviews, surveys, and geospatial analysis. The interviews were particularly useful for identifying the full range of variables that affect housing security outcomes for incoming veteran students, and were used to improve the student outreach process.

### **3.1 Student Veteran Feedback**

The following is a summary of veteran feedback received through multiple forms of communication: student interactions in the office Veteran and Military Services at NAU, a public panel of student veterans at the 2023 Military Connected Conference at NAU, and a series of interviews with veteran students and staff. This feedback sheds light on the challenges faced by veterans, particularly in securing housing in Flagstaff, a crucial part of their transition to academic life (Veteran and Military Services, 2023). The stories shared by these veterans revealed some of the struggles and hurdles encountered during their search for housing in Flagstaff.

One common theme revealed by the students was the unexpected difficulty of finding suitable housing in Flagstaff. Many veterans expressed surprise at the limited availability of affordable options and the lengthy search process. One member of the student panel, described initiating the housing search in early December of 2022, only to find it far more challenging than anticipated. Despite proactive efforts and assistance from various organizations, including the NAU Care

Center, the search dragged on for over a month, forcing the individual to temporarily reside in an extended-stay hotel.

The prolonged stay in temporary accommodations took a toll on some of the veterans, both emotionally and financially. They described the stress of living out of hotel rooms while simultaneously attending classes at NAU. Balancing academic responsibilities with the demands of the housing search proved to be a daunting task, highlighting the need for comprehensive support services tailored to the unique challenges faced by student veterans. One student recounted the relief of finally securing stable housing through the assistance of the Flagstaff branch of Nation's Finest. The organization provided immediate financial assistance, enabling the individual to move into an apartment at the Ridge at Clear Creek on February 5th, 2023. The support extended beyond financial assistance, with essential household items such as a mattress also provided, easing the transition to permanent housing.

Reflecting on their experiences, the veterans offered valuable insights into areas where institutional support could be enhanced to better serve the veteran student population.

Suggestions included incorporating housing information into existing outreach programs, such as the Vet Jack peer mentoring program, to ensure that incoming veteran students are equipped with essential resources from the outset of their academic journey. Additionally, the use of social media platforms like Discord was proposed as a means of fostering community among veteran students and facilitating the sharing of housing-related information and resources. This feedback also highlights the need for greater awareness and accessibility of housing options that accommodate veterans receiving benefits such as the GI Bill. Many veterans reported facing challenges in finding landlords and property management companies willing to accept the GI Bill as proof of income, highlighting a systemic barrier to housing access for this population.

Beyond the individual anecdotes shared, a broader narrative emerged regarding the systemic issues contributing to housing insecurity among veteran students at NAU. Despite the presence of housing resources, many students cited a lack of awareness as a significant obstacle, exacerbating the difficulties they encountered in securing suitable accommodations. This is an indicator for the need of proactive measures to address housing insecurity within the veteran student community and support their successful integration into academic life at NAU. The student feedback received provided valuable insights into the experiences of student veterans navigating the housing market in Flagstaff. By shedding light on the challenges they face, these stories serve as a call to action for the implementation of targeted support services and mitigating strategies to ensure that veteran students have equitable access to housing and the resources they need to thrive at NAU.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Veteran Housing Data Analysis**

NAU's student veterans located in Flagstaff face the challenges unique to this area, but many student veterans take classes online and live in different states, countries, and continents. To assess the challenges specific to each geographical area, student residence data was compiled, anonymized, and analyzed. Local factors were also taken into consideration, such as cost of housing at NAU's Flagstaff Campus and the demographics of the veterans who may be seeking assistance. This analysis was performed in conjunction with the department of Veteran and Military Services at NAU and its cartographic displays were presented at various conferences to raise awareness for the needs of student veterans.



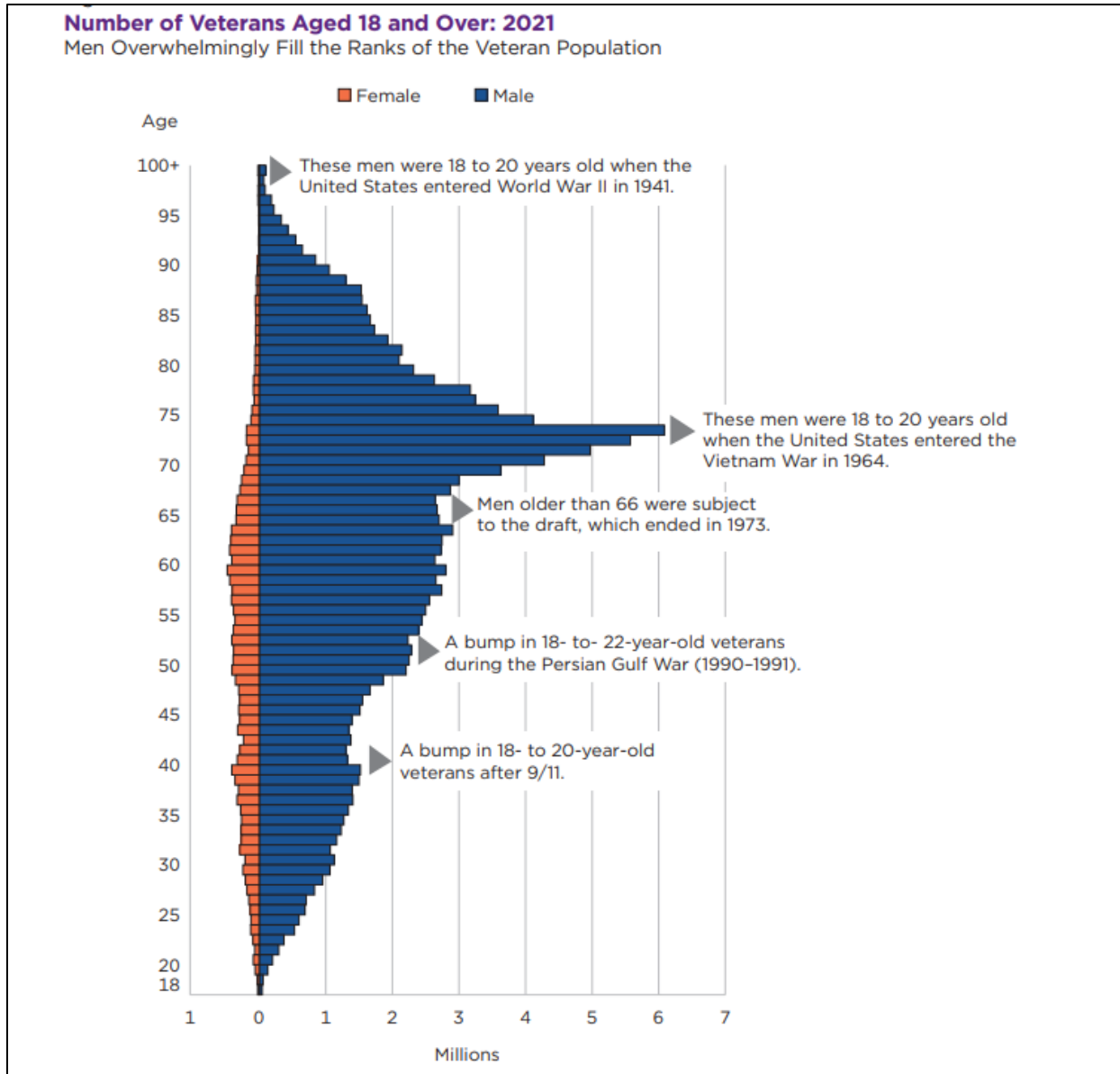


Figure 4: Ages of the veteran population and associated conflicts (Vespa, 2023)

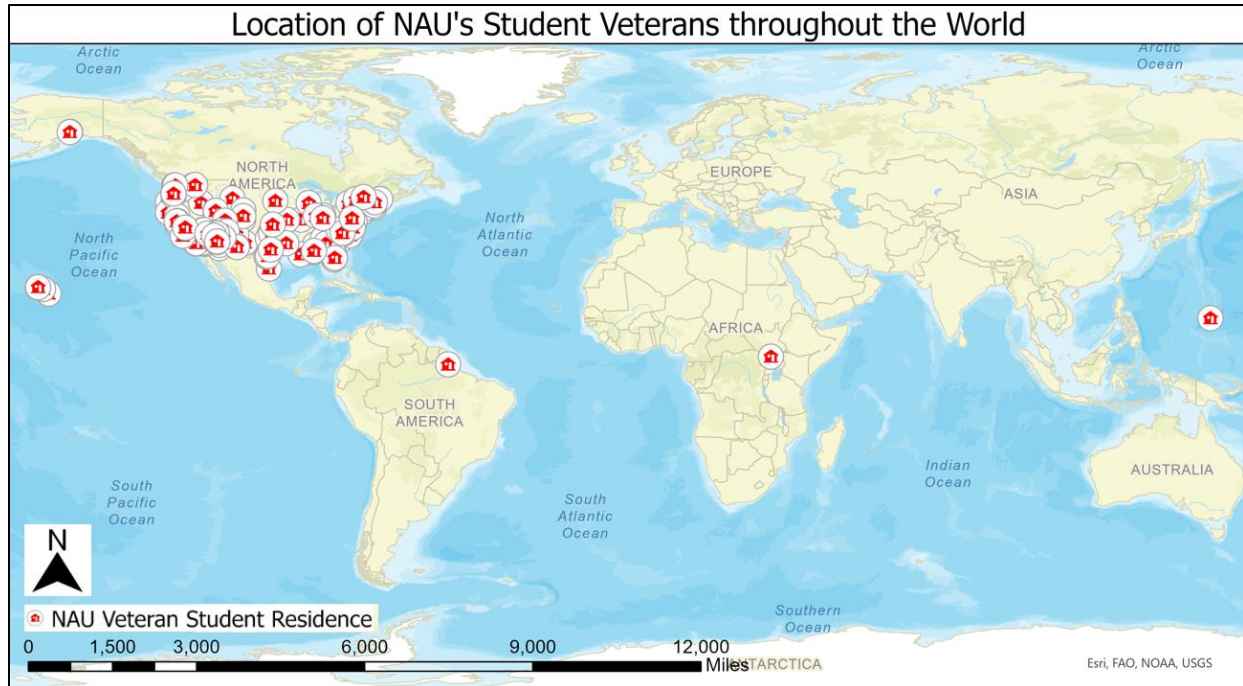


Figure 5: Residence locations of NAU's student veterans, global.

Figure 5 shows the locations of NAU's student veterans' residences throughout the world. This does not include deployment locations, only the permanent residence listed by the veteran. At any given time, there are multiple active duty students deployed throughout the world. Military personnel often have unusual housing challenges, such as finding accommodations in another country or changing location every 1-3 years. For such reasons, it is important to consider the individual circumstances of each service member and the unavoidable external factors that affect them (Tsai et al., 2022).

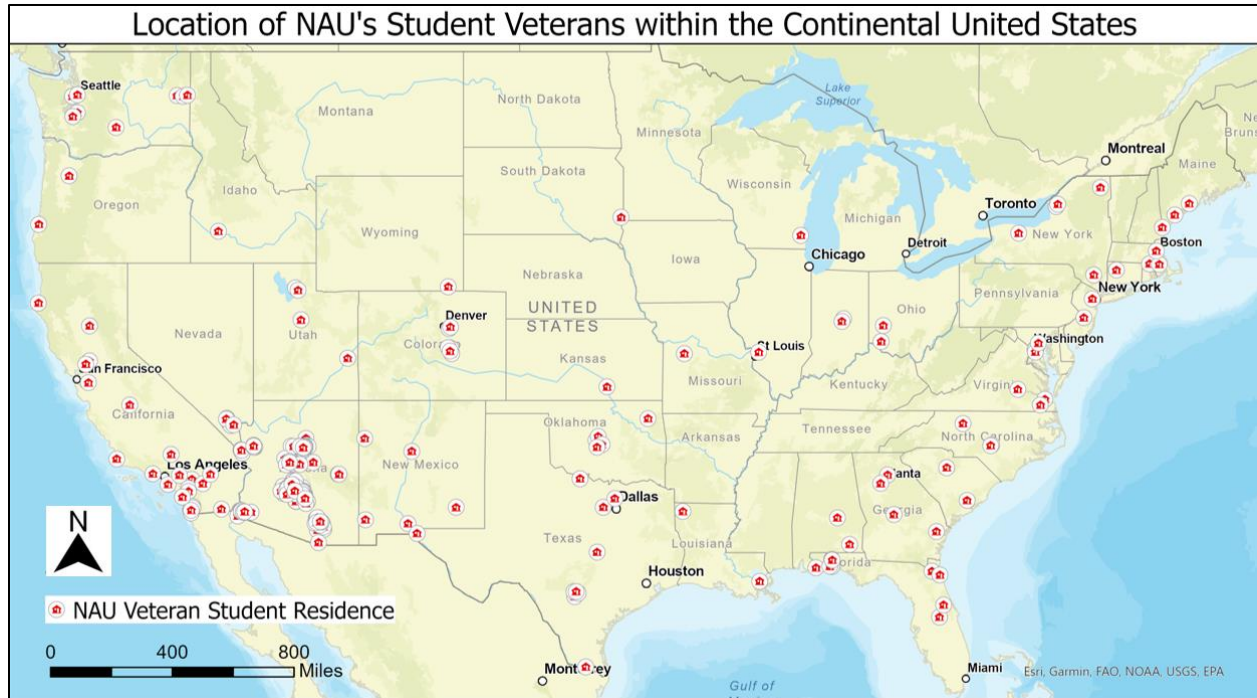


Figure 6: Residence locations of NAU's student veterans, U.S.

In an effort to gain a comprehensive understanding of the housing challenges faced by Northern Arizona University's (NAU) student veterans, an examination of their residence data was conducted. The analysis encompasses not only the local Flagstaff area but extends globally to account for student veterans taking classes online and residing in various states, countries, and continents. The maps presented in Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the geographic distribution of NAU's student veterans' residences worldwide (Additional information can be found in Appendix C). This diverse representation highlights the global nature of NAU's student veteran population. Zooming in on Flagstaff, the heat maps below provide a visual representation of student veterans' housing patterns. The majority of student veterans opt to live off-campus, facing additional challenges such as limited transportation options and potential financial constraints, given that certain expenses like parking passes are not covered by the standard GI Bill (Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2022). The inclusion of Flagstaff's bikeways on the map underscores the

additional difficulties and safety concerns faced by those commuting to NAU by alternative means, such as biking, skateboarding, or using scooters.



# NAU Student Veteran Locations in Flagstaff

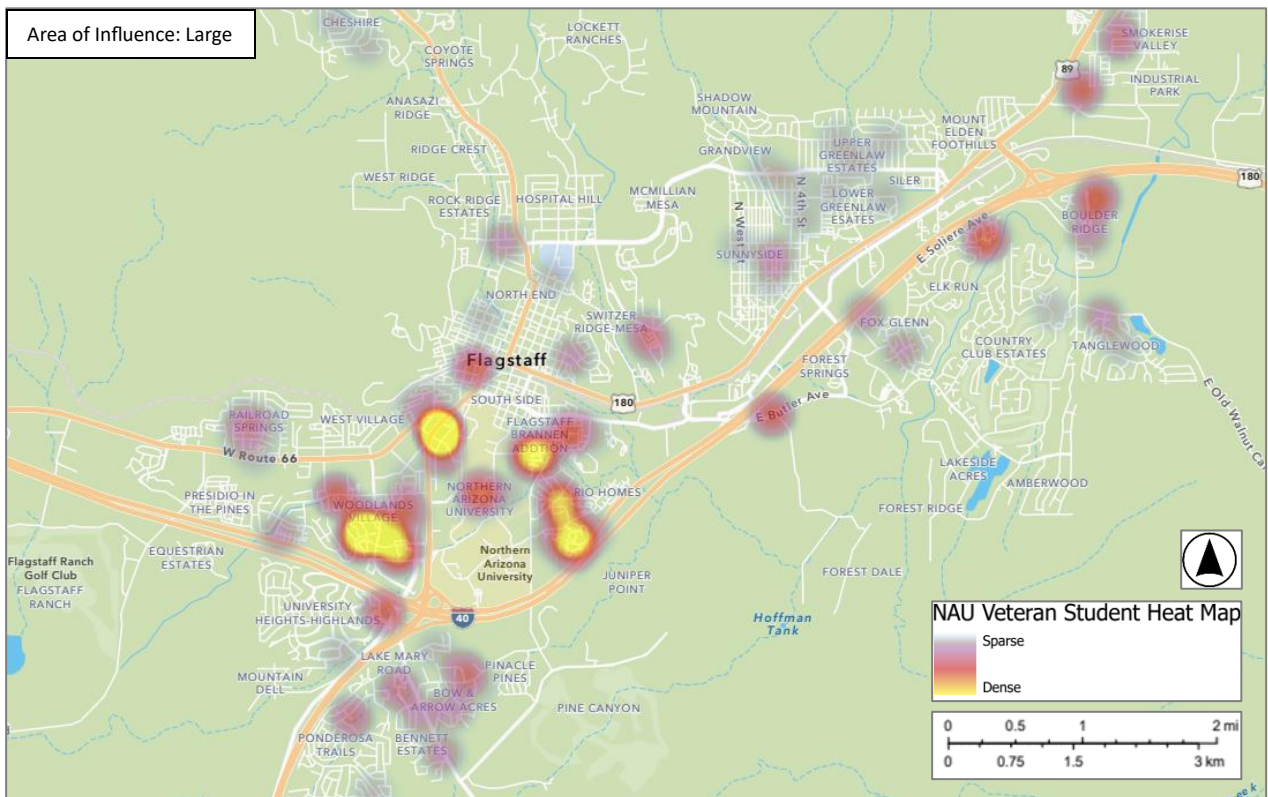
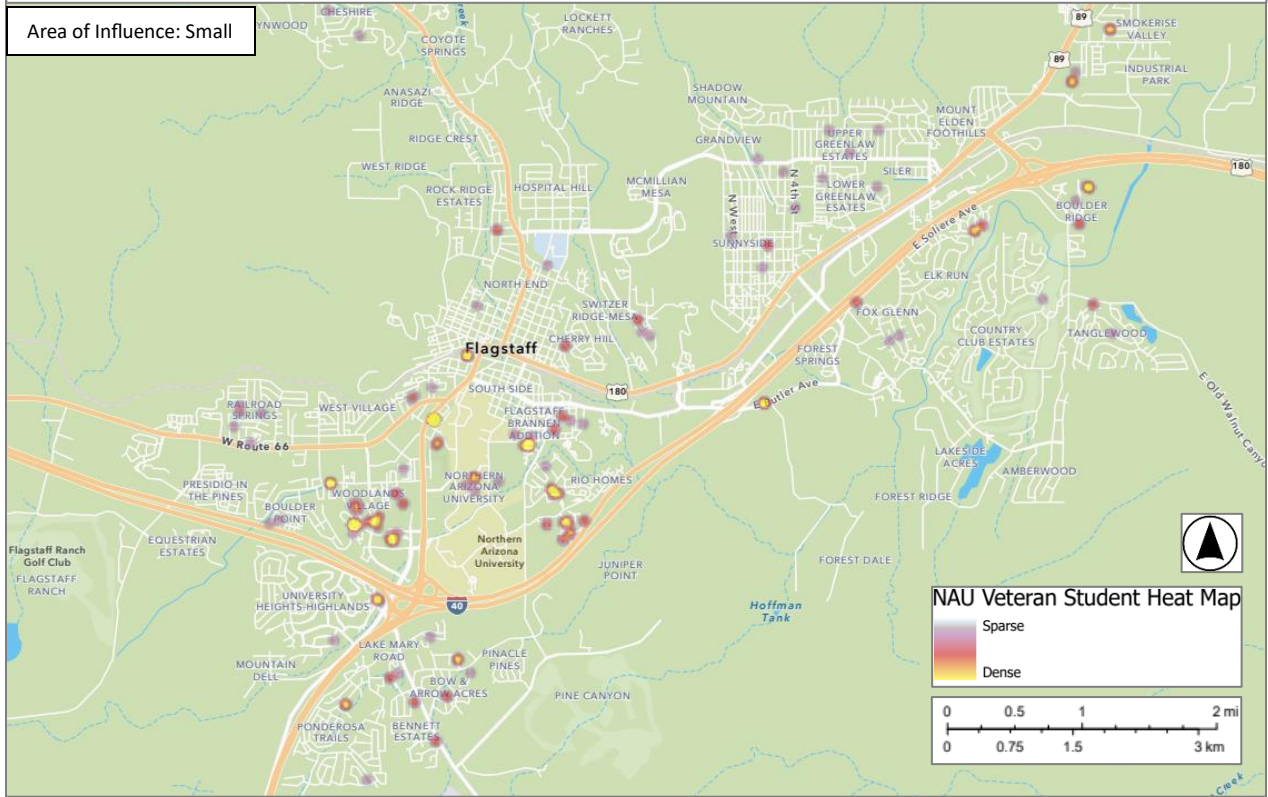
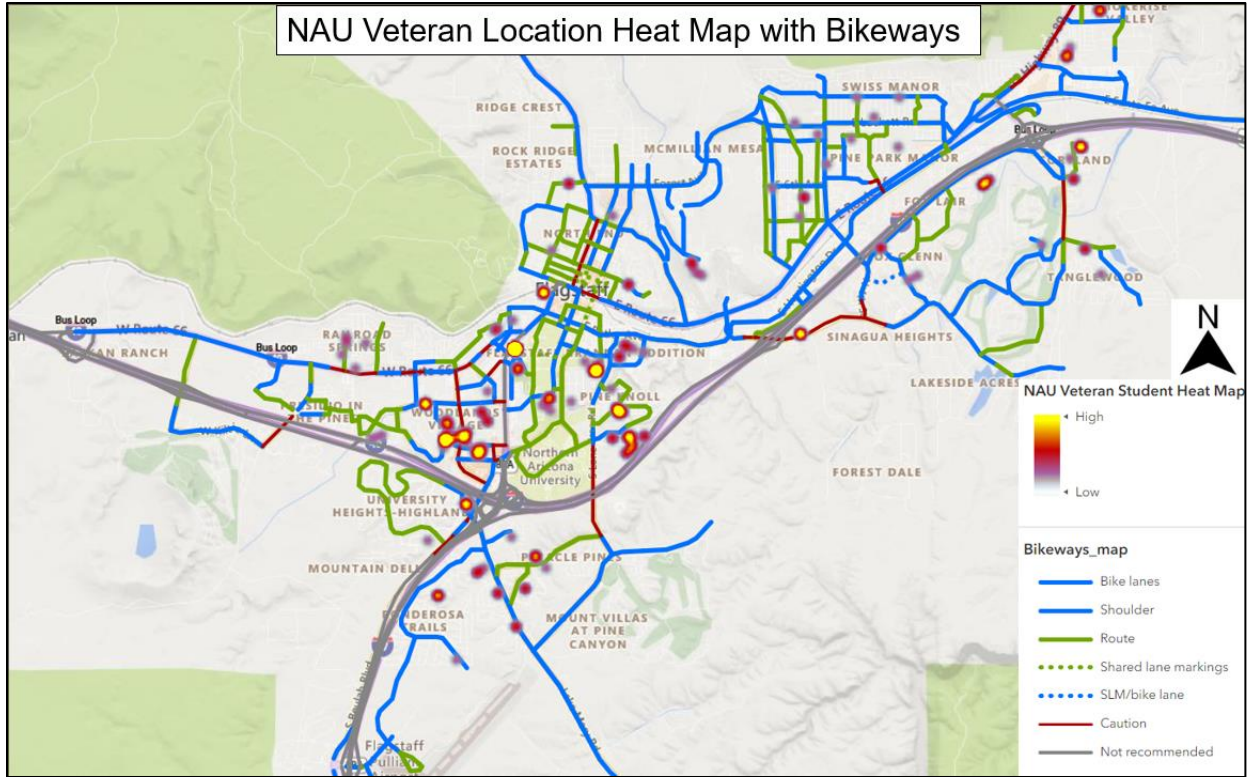


Figure 7: Residence locations of NAU's student veterans, Flagstaff.

As you can see in Figure 7, the vast majority of student veterans live off campus. Some of them do not own vehicles or cannot afford to pay \$375 per term out of pocket for a parking pass (this expense is not covered by the standard GI Bill). Flagstaff's bikeways were added to the map to show the additional difficulties and dangers they may face when commuting to NAU by bike (skateboard, scooter, etc.).



At-Risk Statistics for Veteran Populated Area  
World (1-mile Ring)

1-mile demographic buffer around concentration of student veterans.  
Latitude: 4188336.91050  
Longitude: -12451067.31670

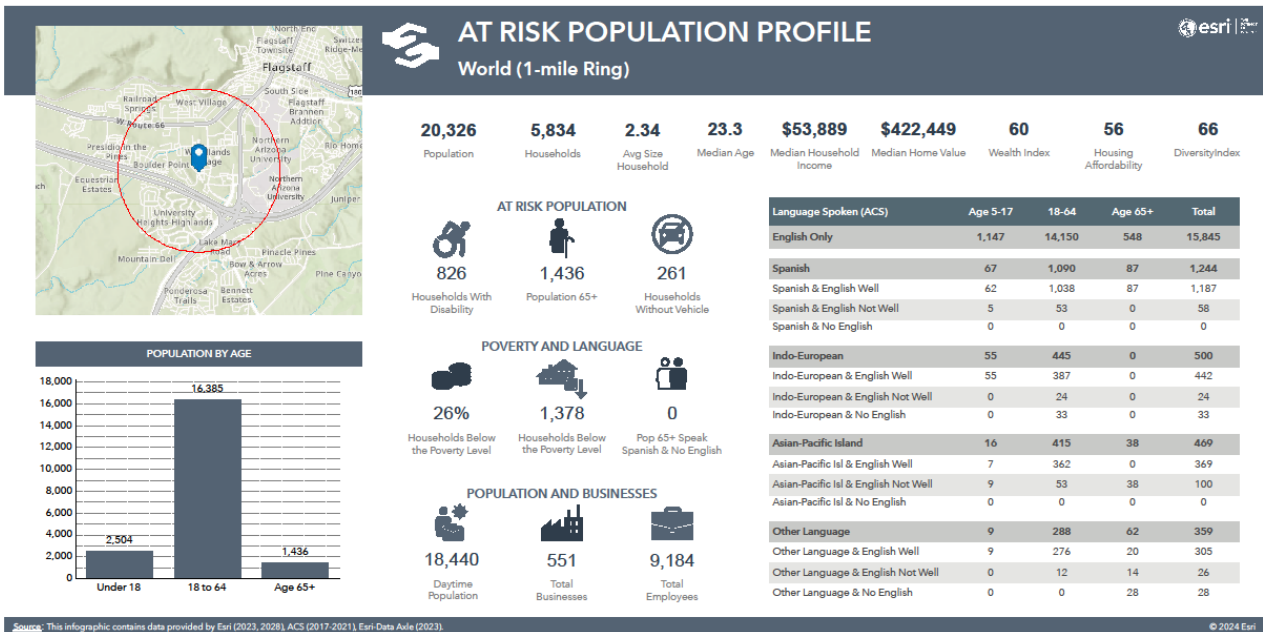


Figure 8: Residence Locations with Bikeways and Hotspot Statistics

As shown in Figure 8, many would be forced to ride in vehicle lanes marked “caution” due to the high level of danger present for cyclists. This analysis was conducted to better understand the specific challenges posed by the housing crisis in this region. The findings from this data analysis shed light on the complex interplay of factors affecting housing security for veteran students. The data serves as a foundation for future initiatives aimed at improving housing accessibility and addressing the unique needs of NAU's diverse veteran student population.

## **4.2 Housing Plan**

The purpose of this plan is to connect this demographic with housing resources at least 60 days prior to the beginning of their first term at NAU. Incoming student veterans that are aware of the difficult housing situation in Flagstaff are able to allocate more time to find housing before the term begins. This was found to be a key indicator of success in student interviews. Utilizing educational benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs requires additional tasks to be completed at the beginning of each semester. Veteran students are often adjusting to the unfamiliar world of modern higher education after long breaks from academic pursuits. These factors, along with the regular stressors of university life, have been reported to be overwhelming for some students. The goal of this early outreach is to mitigate these issues through student awareness, enabling them to formulate a housing plan before they are inundated with academic and GI Bill related tasks. The following emails were written for this purpose, they include a rough draft, and two revised emails aimed at incoming and returning veteran students. The revised versions were sent out to their respective student groups as a part of early outreach before the Fall 2023 term.



## **Original Email**

If you are relocating to Flagstaff to attend NAU, please be aware that you may encounter challenges when seeking out affordable housing. The City of Flagstaff published a Housing Emergency Declaration on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, that states, “55% percent of renters and 27% of homeowners are living in housing cost burdened households, meaning that households are paying more than 30% of their gross monthly income toward housing costs.” Many veterans we assist are unaware of these challenges before they relocate to Flagstaff. The links below show housing resources available to veterans, pedestrian and bicycle paths within Flagstaff, as well as local affordable housing options.

[Housing Options | Veteran And Military Services \(nau.edu\)](#)

[Mapping the Housing Continuum in Flagstaff | City of Flagstaff GIS Open Data Portal \(flagstaffaz.gov\)](#)

[Flagstaff Urban Trails & Bikeways Map | City of Flagstaff Official Website \(az.gov\)](#)

Students will need to contact third party organizations directly if they wish to utilize the resources they provide, but we will be happy to answer any general questions you may have.

## **Revised Email- Incoming Veteran Students**

We are excited to have you at NAU. In regard to housing, there are some things to keep in mind when searching for a place to live. As you may already know, Flagstaff is a great city with a lot

to offer its visitors. This has caused a recent increase in housing demand within the city, but the supply of housing has not increased at the same rate. The popularity of vacation homes and short term rentals has increased the severity of this issue. Thankfully, there are many houses and apartments available for rent at rates which would be covered by the Post 9/11 GI Bill housing stipend for full-time in-person students with 100% rate of eligibility. There is housing available within the city of Flagstaff, but finding the right option for you may require some time. We encourage you to begin your search for housing as soon as possible.

The City of Flagstaff published a Housing Emergency Declaration on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, that states, “55% percent of renters and 27% of homeowners are living in housing cost burdened households, meaning that households are paying more than 30% of their gross monthly income toward housing costs.” Many veterans we assist are unaware of these challenges before they relocate to Flagstaff. The links below show housing resources available to veterans, pedestrian and bicycle paths within Flagstaff, as well as local affordable housing options.

Here you can find a list of housing resources, and information regarding on/off campus housing.

[Housing Options | Veteran And Military Services \(nau.edu\)](#)

Here you can find a map of Flagstaff’s Urban Trail System, which allows for pedestrian/cyclist access throughout the city.

[Flagstaff Urban Trails & Bikeways Map | City of Flagstaff Official Website \(az.gov\)](#)

These are online maps published by the City of Flagstaff that display affordable housing options and emergency housing resources.

[Mapping the Housing Continuum in Flagstaff | City of Flagstaff GIS Open Data Portal \(flagstaffaz.gov\)](#)

Students will need to contact an organization directly if they wish to utilize the resources they provide, but we will be happy to answer any general questions you may have.

### **Revised Email- Returning Veteran Students**

As you are a returning NAU student veteran, I am sure you are aware that you may encounter challenges when seeking out affordable housing. The City of Flagstaff published a Housing Emergency Declaration on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, that states, “55% percent of renters and 27% of homeowners are living in housing cost burdened households, meaning that households are paying more than 30% of their gross monthly income toward housing costs.” Many veterans are unaware of the housing resources available to them. The links below show housing resources available to veterans, pedestrian and bicycle paths within Flagstaff, as well as local affordable housing options.

Here you can find a list of housing resources, and information regarding on/off campus housing.

[Housing Options | Veteran And Military Services \(nau.edu\)](#)

Here you can find a map of Flagstaff’s Urban Trail System, which allows for pedestrian/cyclist access throughout the city.

[Flagstaff Urban Trails & Bikeways Map | City of Flagstaff Official Website \(az.gov\)](#)

These are online maps published by the City of Flagstaff that display affordable housing options and emergency housing resources.

[Mapping the Housing Continuum in Flagstaff | City of Flagstaff GIS Open Data Portal](#)  
([flagstaffaz.gov](http://flagstaffaz.gov))

Students will need to contact an organization directly if they wish to utilize the resources they provide, but we will be happy to answer any general questions you may have

#### **4.3 Streamlining the Housing Search for Incoming Students**

Increasing accessibility of housing resources for incoming veteran students was a critical part of this project. As you can see in the table below, the organization “Nation’s Finest” was added to the resource list on the Veteran and Military Services website. This was done at the request of veteran students who received assistance from them.

<b>NAU Family Housing &amp; Residence Life</b>	∨
<b>Catholic Charities</b>	∨
<b>Nation's Finest</b>	∨
<b>City of Flagstaff Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation</b>	∨
<b>Coconino County Community Services</b>	∨
<b>Department of Economic Security (DES)</b>	∨
<b>Family Resource Center</b>	∨
<b>Flagstaff Housing Authority</b>	∨
<b>Flagstaff Shelter Services</b>	∨
<b>Housing Solutions of Northern Arizona &amp; Sharon Manor</b>	∨
<b>Veteran Resource Centers of America</b>	∨

Figure 9: New VMS Housing Resources Page

Early outreach as a part of the veteran peer mentoring program has always been emphasized. The primary goal of this was to give students ample time for initiating educational benefits provided by the Department of Veteran's Affairs, such as the GI Bill (2022). Figure 10 shows an 84% success rate for early outreach to veteran students. Housing information and resources have been effectively integrated in this same early outreach program through the emails shown previously, and through one on one conversations with the students.

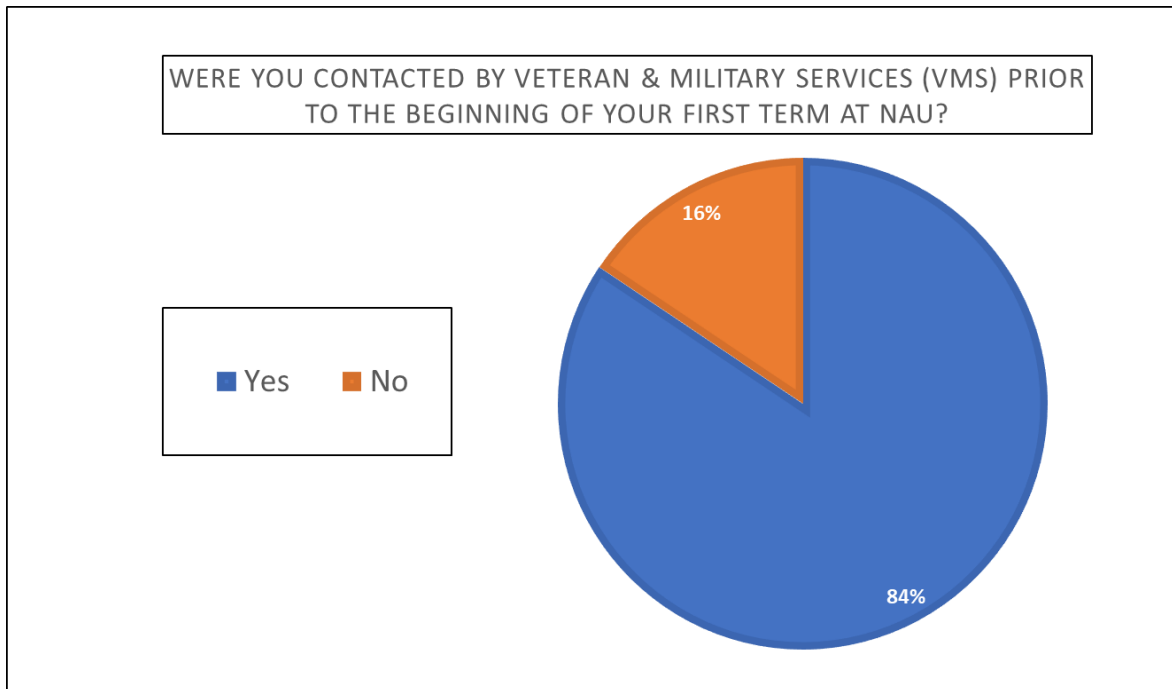


Figure 10: Early outreach survey results

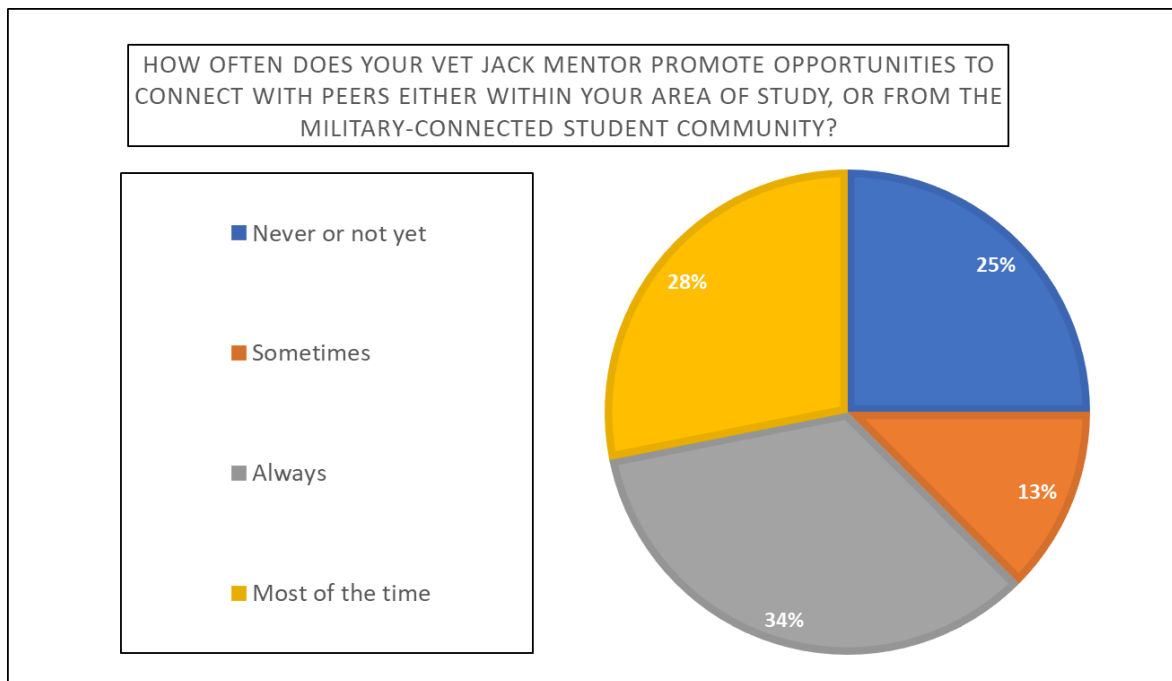


Figure 11: Peer networking survey results

Another area of focus was to encourage veteran students to network with one another. This can not only ease the social challenges of transitioning to university life, but also connect students with housing opportunities. Many military affiliated students at NAU choose to become roommates, easing the burden of an independent search for housing in an unfamiliar area. The Department of Veteran and Military Services hosts video conferences approximately two months before the start of each term. The purpose of these is to inform incoming students of the necessary actions they must take to utilize education benefits provided by the VA. It also provides a great opportunity to discuss the housing challenges students face when relocating to Flagstaff, providing ample time for the students to plan accordingly. This is in addition to the individual outreach incoming students receive from the department and their peer mentor.

#### **4.4 Opioid Epidemic and Contributing Factors**

It is difficult to have a holistic discussion of veteran housing challenges without considering a few contributing factors. The student veteran population at NAU is quite diverse in background and age. The majority of them are in their 20s and 30s, but many are in their 40s and 50s as well. To fully understand how to provide effective assistance to this population, it is critical to consider the contributing factors that could be affecting those who served at particular times.

The opioid crisis adds a critical dimension to the challenges faced by student veterans in Flagstaff, influencing both their housing stability and overall well-being (Ching, 2021; Tsai et al., 2014). Research has highlighted the severity of the issue, revealing that veterans enrolled in both VA Healthcare and Medicare Part D were three times more likely to be exposed to high doses of

opioids in 2012 (Walid et al., 2018; Gellad et al., 2018). This heightened exposure contributes to the complexities of housing insecurity, as veterans entering addiction treatment programs for opiate use are found to be ten times more likely to experience homelessness compared to their counterparts enrolled in VA Healthcare (Bachhuber et al., 2015).

The mental health ramifications of opioid use disorder among veterans are profound and interconnected with housing challenges. Streck et al. (2022) found that among adults with opiate use disorder, a staggering 26% seriously considered suicide within the last year, with 10% reporting plans to commit suicide and 6% attempting suicide. Moreover, opioid-dependent individuals face a drastically reduced life expectancy, averaging 14.7 and 15.8 years less than their sober counterparts.

The legal consequences for pharmaceutical companies involved in the opioid crisis resonate with the broader context of the housing crisis in Flagstaff. Johnson & Johnson, Cardinal, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen collectively faced a \$26 billion fine for the unlawful marketing of opiates, prompting Johnson & Johnson's discontinuation of opioid sales (Wisconsin Department of Justice, 2023). Pfizer's \$2.3 billion fine for fraudulent marketing of various drugs (Department of Justice, 2009) and Insys Therapeutics' \$225 million penalty for the illegal promotion of their opioid, Subsys (Department of Justice, 2019), underscore the far-reaching consequences of the opioid epidemic, which undoubtedly intersects with the housing challenges faced by student veterans.

In response to this, the American Medical Association's call for a ban on direct-to-consumer advertising for prescription drugs (Applequist, 2018) aligns with the broader efforts to streamline housing resources for veterans. Meanwhile, the Department of Veteran's Affairs, as the largest healthcare provider in the U.S., employs various treatments, including methadone,



buprenorphine, and injectable naltrexone, to effectively combat opioid use disorder (Wyse et al., 2018). The availability of Naloxone (Narcan) in Coconino County serves as a tangible resource in preventing opioid overdoses, linking healthcare interventions with broader community support (Bazazi et al., 2010).

Securing housing for these individuals should be a process that occurs alongside established methods for treating opioid use disorder, such as counseling, behavioral therapies, residential, and hospital-based treatments, are crucial components of a comprehensive approach (Medline Plus, 2023). Advocating for a ban on direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising, as proposed by Applequist (2018), emerges not only as a potential strategy to decrease overall opioid use but also as part of a holistic approach to enhancing the well-being of student veterans.

The National Treatment Facility Database serves as a pivotal resource, reflecting the necessity of centralized information to guide broader initiatives addressing both opioid-related challenges and housing instability. These issues are associated with an individual's health and life expectancy (Lewer et al., 2020). The interconnectedness of these issues emphasizes the urgency for a coordinated and comprehensive response to support student veterans in navigating the unique challenges posed by the housing situation in Flagstaff.

#### **4.5 Housing in Flagstaff**

Flagstaff is often known as a tourist destination, a place where people want to be. The many famous natural areas attract visitors from all over the world. That said, experiences may vary. As nice as it is to live in Flagstaff, there is no denying its obvious challenges. For residents of Flagstaff, high costs of housing, and low salaries take their toll.

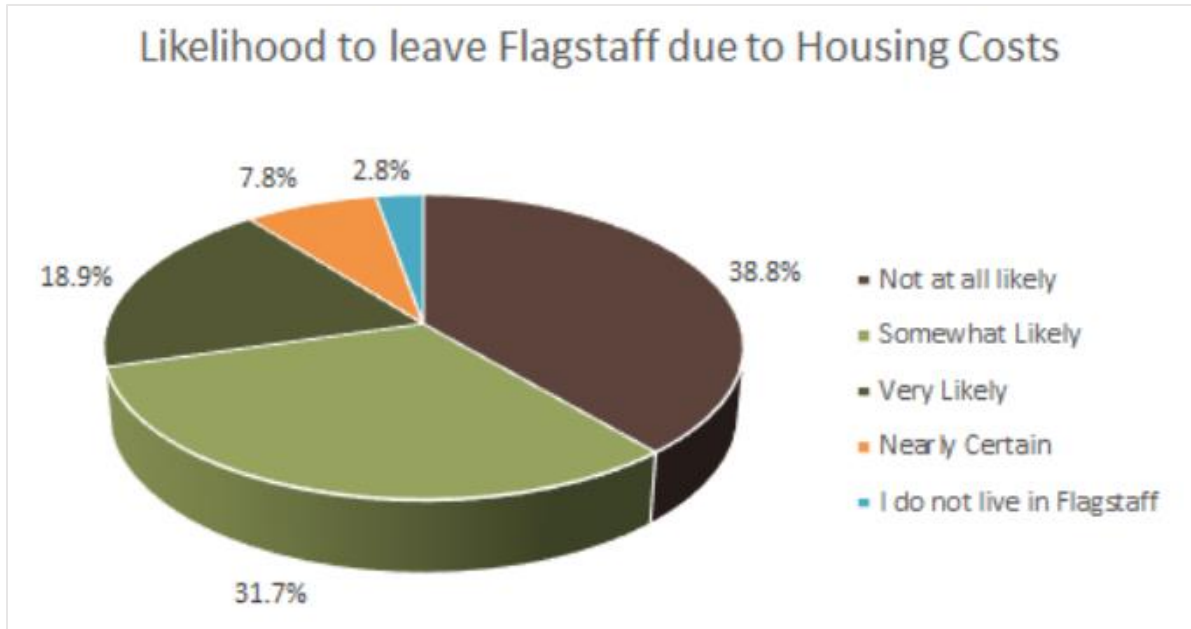


Figure 12: Relocation due to housing costs (Flagstaff Housing Section, 2022)

Many people in the city are considering relocation due to the high costs of housing in Flagstaff. Housing costs have skyrocketed, but salaries have not been adjusting accordingly. 65% of households in Flagstaff live off of low or moderate income levels. Flagstaff residents have expressed frustration with the inability to purchase a home, or find an affordable rental. The imbalance of inflated housing prices and nearly stagnant salaries have created difficulties for many people groups within the city.

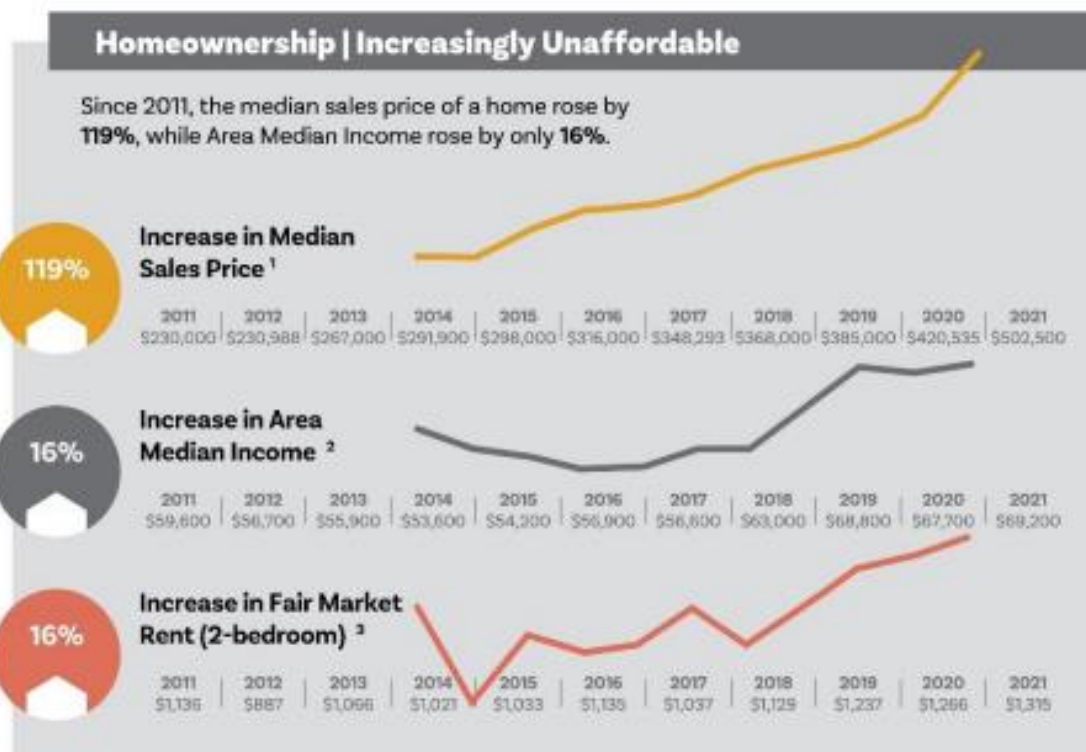


Figure 13: Housing costs vs. median income (Flagstaff Housing Section, 2022)

The housing crisis in Flagstaff is a pressing issue, with over 58% of residents expressing intentions to relocate due to housing costs. Recognizing the severity of the problem, the City of Flagstaff declared a housing emergency in December 2020, emphasizing that addressing this crisis as a top community priority (City of Flagstaff, 2022). This declaration underscores the gravity of the situation and the need for collaborative efforts to find viable solutions. The City of Flagstaff Housing Section has implemented some public programs to serve those in need of housing assistance. Some of these programs include Flagstaff Housing West, Clark Homes, East Flagstaff Housing, and Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers (Flagstaff Housing Section, 2022). Still, the amount of public assistance provided has not matched the increasing demand for affordable housing.

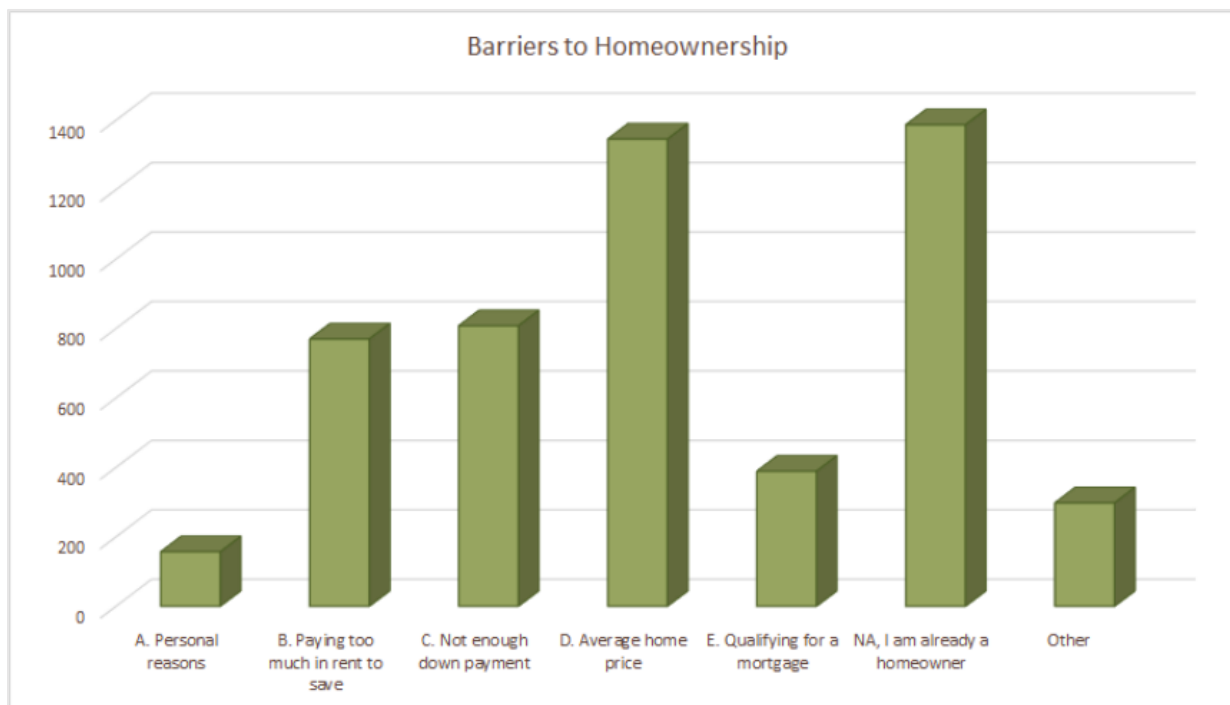


Figure 14: Barriers to homeownership in Flagstaff (Flagstaff Housing Section, 2022)

For service members transitioning from active duty to civilian life, the challenges are compounded. Many have just lost their primary source of income. Separation from service often necessitates relocation, a process that may not align with the beginning of academic terms at Northern Arizona University (NAU). Consequently, veterans may find themselves facing the need for multiple moves within a short time span, adding complexity to an already demanding transition. These factors combined with the housing challenges found in Flagstaff can be major stressors for veterans when moving to Flagstaff to attend NAU.

## 5. Conclusion

The Flagstaff housing crisis represents a series of challenges that significantly impact the incoming veteran students at Northern Arizona University. The concerted efforts by multiple entities, including the City of Flagstaff Housing Section, the Department of Veteran's Affairs,

Department of Veteran and Military Services, and other non-governmental organizations, demonstrate a commitment to addressing the housing insecurity issue. The narratives shared by student veterans provide a more personal understanding of the urgency and intricacies involved in finding suitable housing in Flagstaff. The NAU Veteran and Military Services Housing Plan emerged as a sustainable method of assisting student veterans. By connecting them with housing resources at least 60 days before the commencement of their first term, the plan aims to afford these individuals the necessary time and information to navigate the challenging housing landscape unique to Flagstaff. The early outreach initiatives, including the dissemination of informative emails and the integration of housing awareness into peer mentoring programs, exemplify a proactive approach to assisting both incoming and returning veteran students to strategically plan for their housing needs ahead of the academic term.

The addition of "Nation's Finest" to the list of housing resources on the Veteran and Military Services website reflects an adaptive response to student feedback, which improved the accessibility of relevant housing information. Furthermore, the emphasis on fostering networking opportunities among veteran students not only addresses social challenges associated with transitioning to university life but also holds the potential to provide practical housing solutions through shared accommodations and peer support.

The analysis of student residence data, encompassed both local and global perspectives, and can contribute valuable insights into the diverse needs of NAU's student veterans. By considering factors such as transportation challenges and the geographic distribution of student veterans through geospatial analysis, the university can adapt its support mechanisms to better assist veteran students with their housing needs. It is critical to recognize and address the unique challenges faced by this demographic (Wong et al., 2022). Contributing factors for this

population were also discussed, notably the opioid epidemic, and its potential effects on housing stability. Recognizing and understanding these contributing factors is pivotal for crafting holistic solutions that comprehensively address the complex needs of student veterans.

The overall objective for this project is to reduce housing instability among student veterans at NAU. The strategies described in this document led to marginal success in regards to veteran student outcomes. There were several reports to the department of Veteran and Military Services of students achieving housing stability using resources introduced to them as a part of this effort. Still, there is an ongoing issue of incoming veteran students struggling with housing stability. It has been difficult to establish a direct correlation between the methods used and student success, but reports of housing insecurity among student veterans were reduced after this project was initiated (Veteran and Military Services, 2023). Strategies for long term success through early outreach have been successfully developed and incorporated into existing programs.

It is recommended that the department of Veteran and Military Services continue to include housing information and resources in their early outreach programs. Networking with housing resource providers has been useful in advocating for the needs of students. It is crucial that the department continues to effectively receive and address feedback from veteran students.

Additionally, adding a housing resources section to the GI Bill Checklist used by incoming student veterans would provide another opportunity to connect students to the appropriate resources. Development of a housing specific survey can also provide more details on the challenges faced by veteran students.

The initiatives outlined in this document support a commitment to mitigating the housing crisis for veteran students at NAU. Through strategies focused on awareness-building, resource accessibility, and early outreach, the university and its associated organizations aspire to create a

supportive environment that enhances the overall well-being of student veterans throughout their academic journey at NAU.

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## 7. Appendices

### Appendix A

2023 Military Connected Conference web page

# Spring 2023 Military Connected Conference

**Friday April 14th, 2023**

**Sessions hosted from 8:30-12:30**

*The goal of this conference is to better understand the steps that our military-connected students take to pursue their education along with examining the different lenses they use to reach their educational goals.*

[Join the Military Connected Conference via Zoom](#)

[Keynote Speaker](#)

[Schedule](#)

[Presenter Bios](#)

[Session Summaries -](#)

Figure A.1 Home Page

### **Housing Challenges for Veteran Students**

The Flagstaff housing crisis has created major challenges for Northern Arizona University's incoming veteran students. The purpose of this project is to connect this demographic with housing resources at least 60 days prior to the beginning of the Fall 2023 term. Separation from military service to go back to school is a challenging transition on its own. Housing insecurity can make this time of transition even more stressful for veteran students. The City of Flagstaff Housing Authority, Department of Veteran's Affairs, and various non-governmental organizations are attempting to provide solutions through financial assistance for qualified applicants. Through extensive communication with veteran students, our department has determined that many are unaware of the resources available to them. We are aiming to connect students with the housing resources they need by implementing an early outreach program designed to prevent housing insecurity among veteran students.

Figure A.2 Session Summary

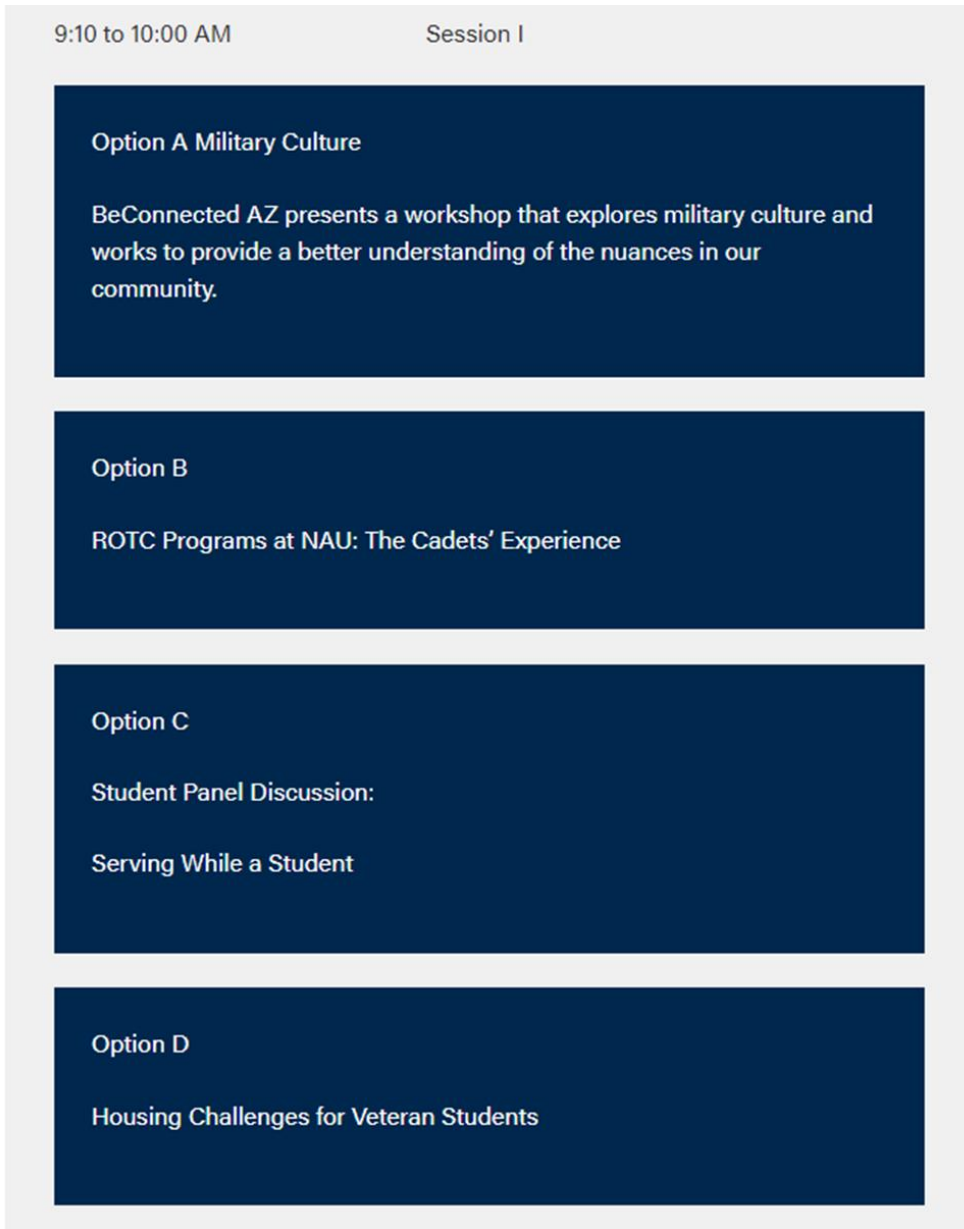


Figure A.3 Session Schedule



Appendix B

Department of Veteran and Military Services Housing Options web page

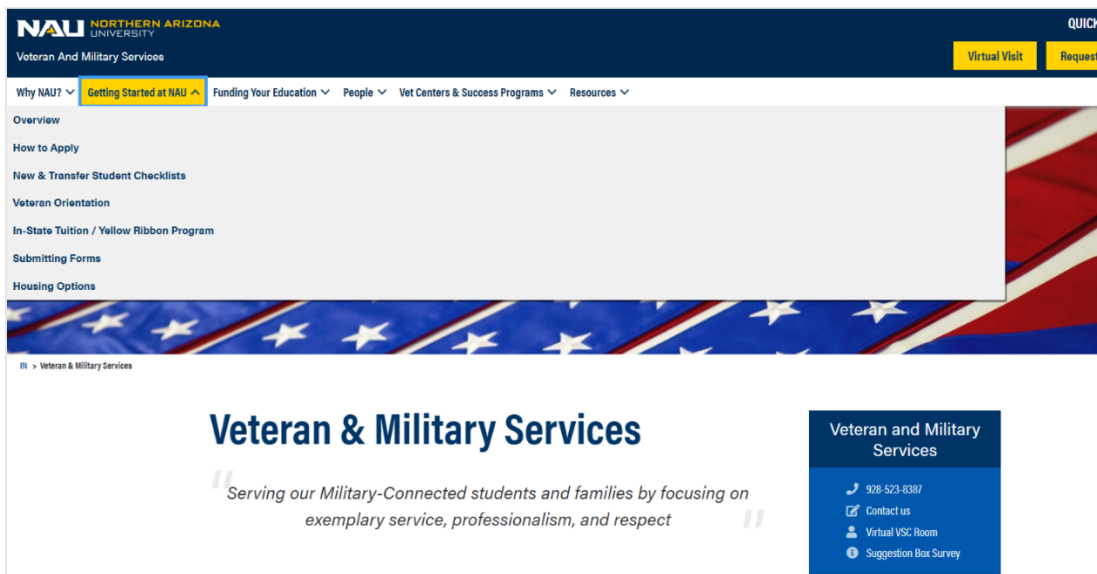


Figure B.1 Home Page

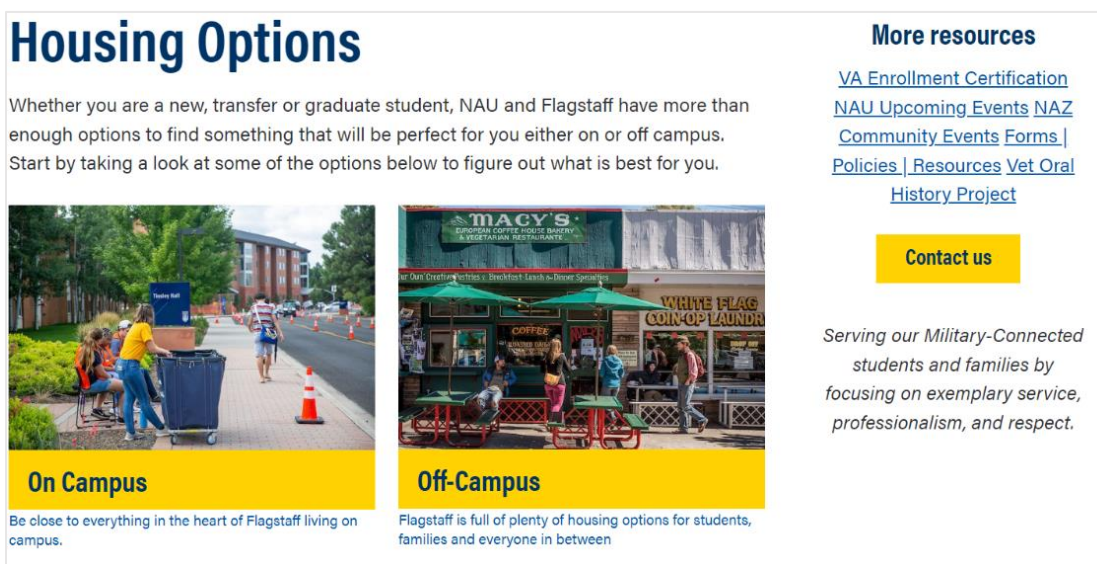


Figure B.2 Housing Options

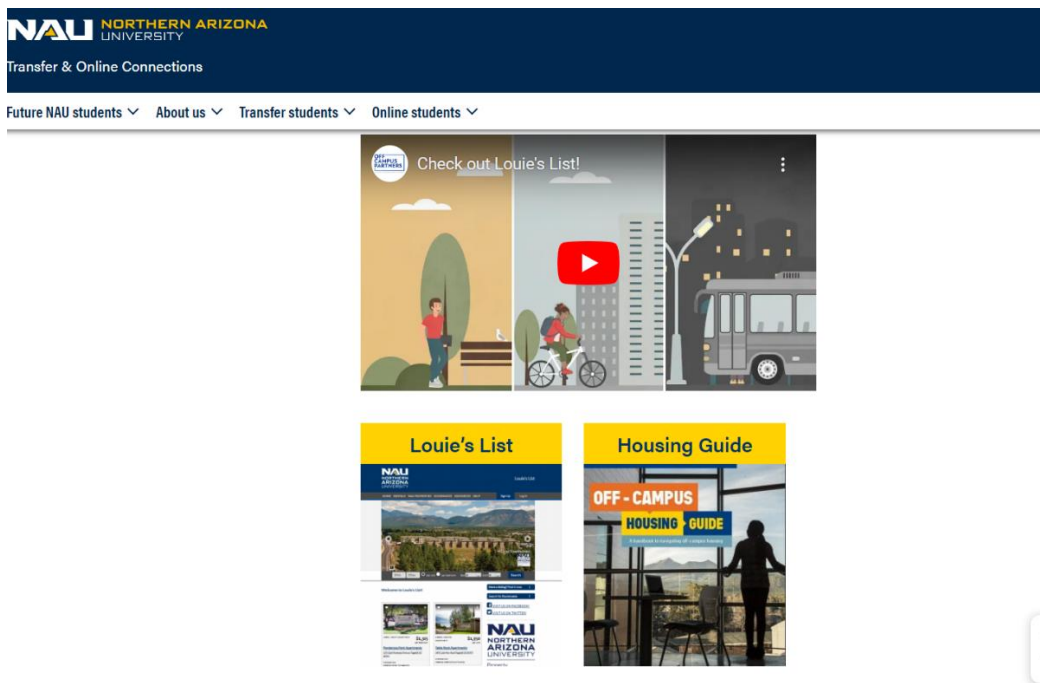


Figure B.3 Off Campus Housing Options

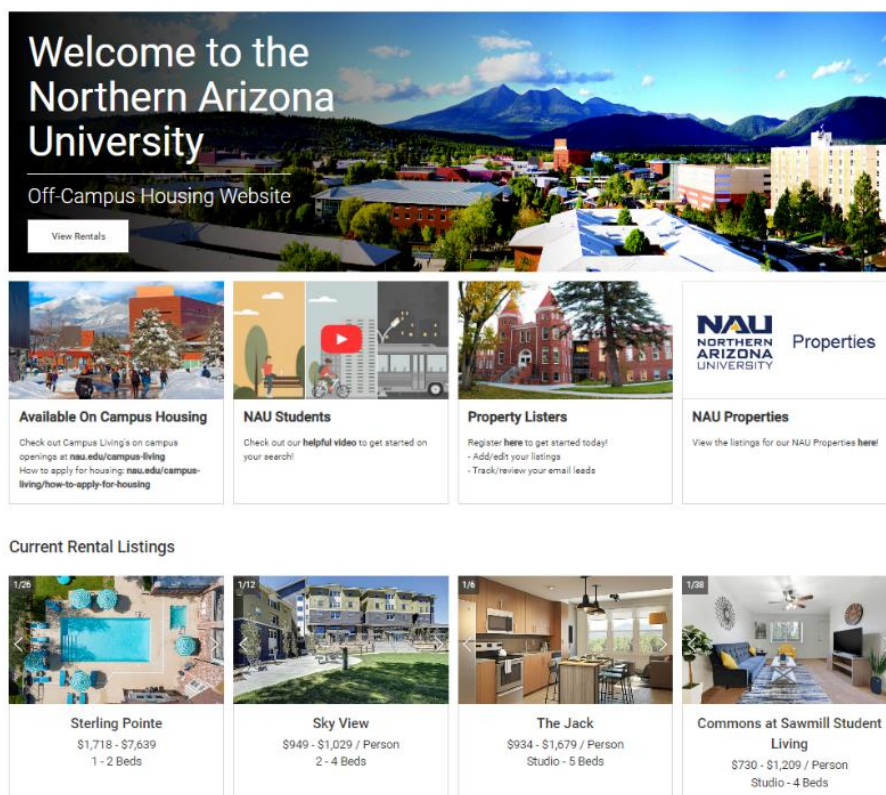


Figure B.4 Louie's List

Appendix C

Distribution of NAU student Veterans throughout the state of Arizona.

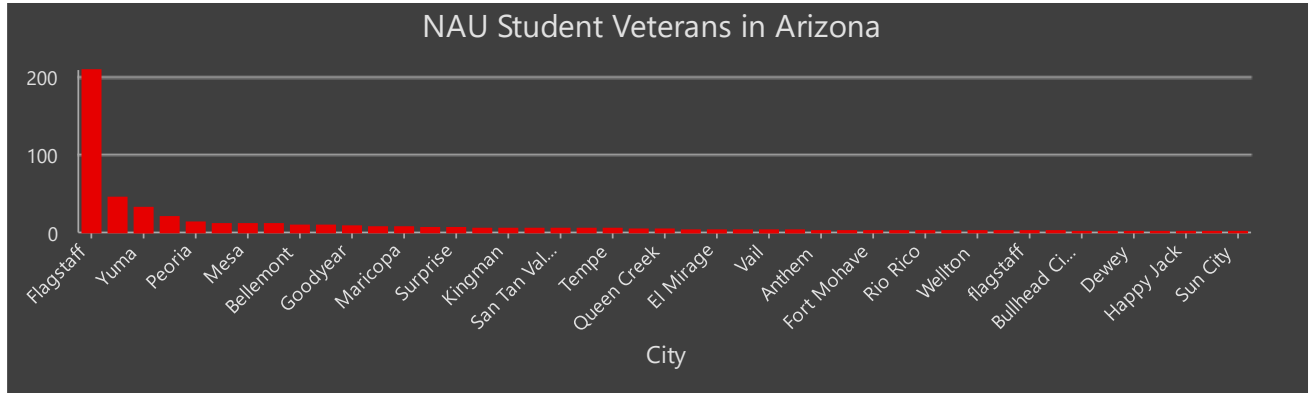


Figure C.1 NAU Student Veterans in Arizona

City	Count
Flagstaff	209
Phoenix	45
Yuma	32
Tucson	20
Peoria	13
Gilbert	11
Mesa	11
Prescott Valley	11
Bellemont	9
Glendale	9
Goodyear	8
Buckeye	7
Maricopa	7
Avondale	6
Surprise	6
Chandler	5
Kingman	5
Prescott	5
San Tan Valley	5
Scottsdale	5
Tempe	5
Lakeside	4
Queen Creek	4
Camp Verde	3
El Mirage	3
New River	3
Vail	3
Waddell	3
Anthem	2
flagstaff	2
Florence	2
Fort Mohave	2
litchfield Park	2
Litchfield Park	2
Rio Rico	2
San Luis	2
Wellton	2
Williams	2
Bullhead City	1
Coolidge	1
Dewey	1
Fountain Hills	1
Happy Jack	1
Sahuarita	1
Sun City	1

Figure C.2 Number of Student Veterans by AZ City

Appendix D

Peer Mentoring Survey Question

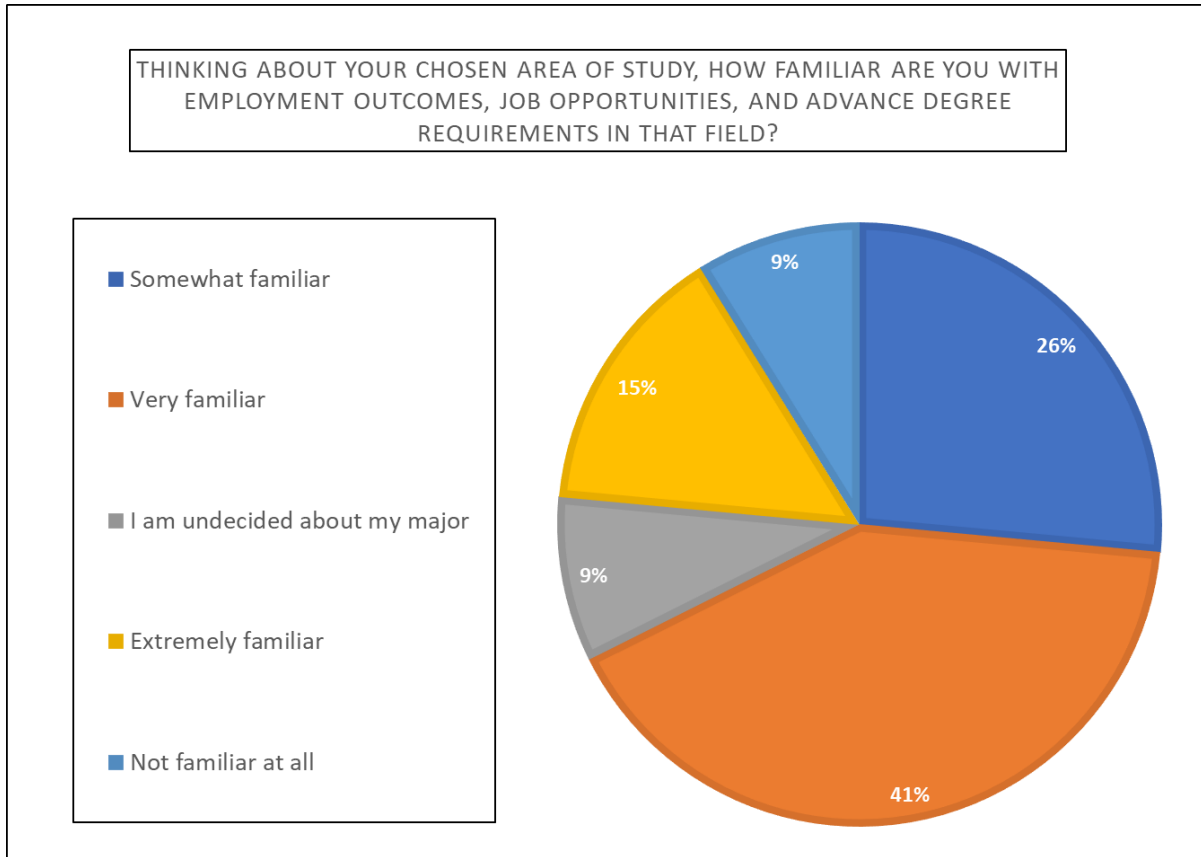


Figure D.1 Survey Results