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Investigating Student Service Member and Veteran Support in Higher Education

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Investigating Student Service Member and Veteran Support in Higher Education

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Abstract

Since the passing of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, more than 817,000 service members have participated in higher education. In this time, little research has been done to study student veterans as a unique college population; and to gauge whether the current best practices to support these students are impactful and effective. The purpose of this study is to further the scholarship on student veterans by investigating the transition into higher education and the factors that influence their engagement with academia. Both survey and interview data were collected to inform this research. 45 survey responses and 4 interview conversations were recorded during the data collection phase of the research plan. Three themes that influence student veteran transition and engagement in higher education emerged from the data collected: (1) Veteran Camaraderie, (2) Nontraditional Student Status, and (3) Campus Culture. The findings of this research give insight into the relationship that student veterans have with entering and persisting in higher education, that differs from their non-military affiliated peers. In addition to this, findings and conclusions from this research may help to enhance veteran specific services in higher education.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Research suggests that it is a difficult process to transition from military service to being a full-time student in higher education (Alschuler & Yarub, 2018; Bosari et al., 2017; Stone, 2017; McCaslin et al., 2014; Osborne, 2013). This is the result of several factors, including the difference in values between military culture and the culture of higher education, issues with navigating multiple identities as a veteran and as a student, and perishable academic skills that these students have lost proficiency in since completing high school.

In order to support the transition of these incoming students with military backgrounds in higher education, institutions have adopted best practices through the evaluation of current literature on student veterans. Unfortunately, little research has been done to determine the efficacy of such best practices, and to provide evidence of their success in supporting student veterans (Bosari et al., 2017; Stone, 2017).

Study Rationale

As institutions grapple with a public and government more interested than ever in the cost of higher education, certain programs are becoming at risk of being discontinued if they cannot show a measurable benefit to the student body and institution. Contemporary literature on student veterans has directed much of its focus on the difficulty that student veterans may encounter or experience as they transition to higher education but has largely neglected to analyze the affects that the suggested best practices of supporting student veterans have had on their higher education experience. It is imperative that this research be done to inform stakeholders that resources being diverted

to student veteran support systems is being used to a positive end. More importantly, research on the success of student veteran support systems is needed to identify if the literature suggested best practices are producing their intended outcomes, or if adjustments and new best practices to these students should be brought forward.

Problem Background

At the conclusion of World War II (WWII), in order to protect against massive unemployment as individuals returned from wartime service, the United States government passed a law, titled the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, to increase accessibility of higher education to veterans returning from European and Pacific battlefields (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). The GI Bill allows individuals who satisfy military service requirements to receive funding to cover part or all of the cost of attendance at accredited institutions of higher education (Bound & Turner, 2002). As a result of the passage of this bill, approximately 20% of all returning WWII veterans attended higher education. This influx in service members resulted in approximately 70% of all males in higher education being GI Bill beneficiaries, in the period of time immediately following WWII. (Bound & Turner, 2002). Often considered to be the main cause for the democratization of higher education, the GI Bill led to a significant increase in who could attend college; which resulted in a largescale expansion of higher education institutions in the United States (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

With a major revision of the GI Bill occurring in 2008, this entitlement has continued to allow military veterans to access higher education in the modern age. Due largely in part to changing U.S. foreign policy and concurrent drawdowns to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States has experienced its largest return of veterans

from active military service since the Viet Nam War era (Taylor, Parks, & Edwards, 2016). In higher education, approximately 5% of students are military veterans; which is a statistic that is expected to increase (McCaslin et al., 2014).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to focus on the transition from the military into higher education to determine if institutional support systems have a real rather than perceived benefit to the student veteran. Contemporary literature has focused quite heavily on the evidence of there being difficulty in the transition from military life to academia; and in turn has suggested best practices to give support to this student population. However, there has been little research or insight into the efficacy of whether or not the suggested best practices are impactful or successful.

Therefore, this research will investigate the student veteran's perspective on their transition into higher education and if institutional veteran support practices had an impact on their transition and persistence in academia. This research will serve to fill a needed hole in the current literature on student veterans by studying the student veteran experience with institutional support systems enacted.

In order to investigate the experience of student veterans in higher education, the following research questions were created to lead this study:

1. How does military experience affect one's perception of their college campus?
2. What aspects of higher education do student service members feel ill-equipped or under supported in, if any?

3. How does the inclusion of veteran support systems affect the decision-making process for student service members to enroll in a particular institution? And to what degree?

4. How do student service members find formal support systems, such as on campus veteran lounges or networks, supportive? And to what degree?

Design of Study

The research design for this study utilizes a mixed methods approach. Because of the human subjects used in this study, institutional approval and procedures were adhered to, in order to ensure that all testing done is ethical and just. Following institutional review board (IRB) policy, it was determined that this study was exempt, through Exempt Category 2, 45 CFR 46.101, from needing to secure full IRB authorization. Utilizing a roster of student veterans that is maintained by the institution used in the study, and email will be disseminated to approximately 400 student veterans. Enclosed in the email will be an electronic survey (Attachment 2) and invitation to participate in a semi-structured one on one interview with the researcher. Interviews will be conducted by the researcher with participants who have elected to join the study. Data collection will consist of the survey responses, and audio recordings and notes taken during the one on one interviews.

Definition of Terms

Listed below are key terms that may offer utility throughout this research.

- GI Bill: Umbrella term for education entitlements, such as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 or the Post-9/11 GI Bill, that affords military veterans funding for post-secondary education.

- Student Veteran: A student at an institution of higher education that has had an affiliation of the United States military. Inclusive of former military members and those currently serving in a reserve/national guard status.

- Transition: "An event or nonevent that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981, p.8).

Delineations & Limitations

A delineation of the study is the definition that the researcher used to describe a student veteran in the research design. For the scope of this study, a student veteran is any individual who has completed their entry level military training and been assigned a permanent duty station. To be inclusive of students who may have a military identity from military service, this definition of a veteran was used to in order to avoid limiting the sample size to individuals with particular types of military service or experiences. An additional delineation is the use of purposeful sampling in the research design. This decision was made based on the researchers need to use participants that have had military experience and are students at the institution that the research is being conducted at. Sampling outside of this population would have no benefit to the researcher and would not make sense for the research design to include non-veteran student in the study.

A possible limitation of the research is the decision to conduct research at only one institution. This decision was made based on time and resource limitations of conducting research at multiple locations. The consequence of this limitation is that data collected at the large Midwest institution may not be indicative of all institutions; based on a variety of factors relating to the particular is that the research was conducted.

However, the institution used in this research shares similarities with other large Midwest institutions; and could have generalizability to public institutions of a similar size. Beyond this, this research does not investigate the impact that varying social identities can have on one's transition into higher education and treats the population of student veterans as a homogenous entity.

Thesis Organization

The organization of this thesis is as follows. To allow the proper background and analysis of contemporary literature of this subject, the following chapter is composed of a literature review. The literature review is organized thematically; with background information on the origins of the veteran population followed by the theoretical framework of the study. The literature concludes with a synthesis of literature regarding the student service member identity, to be followed by a review of the suggested best practices to support and engage this population of students. Chapter three details the research design, with sections devoted to describing the study participants and protocols for collecting data. Chapter four provides the results and finding of the data collected in this study. Lastly, chapter five concludes the thesis with a discussion on the results, and recommendation for future research and implications for practice on this matter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The study of student veterans in higher education is relatively new; and has largely been driven by a pragmatic need to better understand students with a military identity, as this population has seen significant expansion in the Post 9/11 era. Due to this, the literature concerning student veterans and higher education continues to be developed, with the majority of the literature being published in the last two decades. Although new and continuing to be developed, the contemporary literature regarding the study of student veterans does contain key themes and trends regarding the experience of these students, and subsequent perceived best practices to serve them.

Therefore, the following sections of this chapter will analyze and review the literature of student veterans, thematically. To accomplish this, the chapter will begin by describing the theoretical framework that has informed much of the literature regarding the student veteran experience. Second, this chapter will introduce and analyze the affect that the GI Bill has had on increasing the population of student veterans in academia. Following this, will be an analysis of who student veterans are and their difficulty in transitioning to higher education before reviewing what are considered to be the current best practices for serving and supporting this student population.

Location of Scholarly Material

The literature presented in the subsequent sections of this paper was located exclusively in electronic format; through the use of Google Scholar and the databases Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Education Research Complete (ERC). Articles were located by using distinct terminology as in keywords or phrases in

the search engine. and analysis on the articles that cited the articles returned by the respective search. The distinct terminology used to locate references in this work were retrieved from the aforementioned search engines by utilizing combinations of the terms "student veteran", "higher education OR college OR university", "support" and "campus climate". All work cited is peer reviewed and published within the last 10 years.

Legislation Affecting Student Veterans

One of the most significant pieces of federal legislature to affect the realm of student affairs in the 20th century was the passage of the GI Bill in 1944. Formally known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, this bill exponentially increased the amount of service members that transition to higher education (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Intended as a protection against massive unemployment of service members returning from the battlefields of WWII, the GI Bill provided tuition assistance for 51% of all returning veterans (Mettler, 2002). It is important to note that the GI Bill had an incredible effect on the accessibility of higher education, and democratized education for many individuals who had no ability to attend college in the entitlement's absence. Scholars of American higher education consider the GI Bill to be the catalyst for rapidly evolving higher education for the masses, rather than a privileged few.

Post-9/11 GI Bill

This entitlement remained largely unchanged until 2009; when the GI Bill was revamped as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, formally known as the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act. Individuals who are able to take advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill receive funding for tuition based on the length of their service, with those serving at least 36 months on active duty receiving full benefits (Borsari et al., 2017). Beyond

this, the Post 9/11-GI Bill provides stipends to individuals to be used for school supplies, books, and housing (Borsari et al., 2017). Since the passing of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, more than 817,000 service members from 2008 to the present day have participated in higher education utilizing this entitlement (Sander, 2013). This number is expected to rise as the American Military continues to withdraw from the battlefield in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Over the next two decades, it is estimated that there will be over two million Post-9/11 GI Bill beneficiaries who have participated in higher education (Lange et al., 2016).

As usage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill continues to rise, institutions of higher education are encountering issues in coordinating the delivery of education services to this population of students. Post-secondary institutions are obligated to certify the enrollment status individuals who use their educational benefits, in order to evidence the fact that these individuals are making progress towards a degree or program completion (Taylor et al., 2016). Literature finds that administrative tasks such as this are often secondary responsibilities, rather than primary duties of the individuals assigned to certify a student veteran's attendance (Taylor et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory analyzes and describes the various ways that a transition can impact an individual; and how different factors can affect the length or significance of transition (Schlossberg, 1981). According to Schlossberg, there are a variety of different factors that influence whether or not a transition is positive or negative. Schlossberg describes a positive transition as one that results in growth, and a

negative transition as one that results in deterioration (Schlossberg, 1981). The factors that influence transition include: role change, duration, internal or external, gradual or sudden, and positive or negative (Schlossberg, 1981). The relationship of these factors to student veterans will be outlined below.

Role change in the context of this population is concerned with the process of one beginning to see themselves as a student rather than a member of the military. Schlossberg finds that role change is always accompanied by stress, as new information and knowledge is required to begin navigating the new role (Schlossberg, 1981). Duration references the length that the change is expected to last, and is categorized as either permanent, temporary, or unknown (Schlossberg, 1981). For student veterans, this change from the military to academia is often permanent or unknown, unless the individual serves in the reserve or national guard component of the military while enrolled in higher education or reenlists in the military at a future date. Schlossberg argues that the most stressful duration of change is permanent, followed by unknown (1981). An internal or external factor is concerned with the origin of the transition, as to whether or not the individual decided to enter into the transitional period voluntarily. Due to the format of military contracts and competitiveness for reenlistment, transition out of the military may be involuntary (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). A gradual or sudden factor to transition is concerned with an individual having time to prepare for the transition, as well as mentally preparing to vacate a current situation. Military members can experience both types of this factor; depending on the nature of their separation from service. The last factor of transition to be outlined is whether or not a transition is perceived to be

positive or negative. This factor is very nuanced and is dictated by the individual and their perspective of the change as they are going through the transition.

The importance of the aforementioned description of Schlossberg's Transition Theory is its utility in understanding why some student veterans may experience difficulty in embracing their new identity of students. Often, a combination of the factors described above influence the nature of one's transition, which in turn influences their experience within higher education. Beyond this, an understanding of how one progresses through transition due to a combination of different factors, provides context for the suggested best practices of supporting student veterans, which is included in the latter half of this chapter.

Wenger's Social Learning Theory

Wenger's Social Learning Theory has utility for this research as it provides the necessary theoretical framework to aid in better understanding the impact of student veterans feeling disassociated from their campus community. Student veteran isolation and difficulty in making relationships will be discussed in detail further on in this chapter.

 According to Wenger (2010), social learning involves a dual process of meaning making. This dual process is composed of participation and reification. In the context of this theory, *participation* refers to engagement in social activities, reflections, and conversations (Wenger, 2010). In all of these activities, meaning is established through the relationship that one has with others in the moment that contact with others is established and occurring. *Reification* refers to the moments of social leaning that occur when contact with others has concluded. In this, learning occurs by reflecting on the

experience with others and the implications that has in future interactions with others. Wenger finds that through the interplay of participation and reification of social interactions results in an individual being able to properly use "the repertoire of resources that the community has accumulated through its history of learning" (Wenger, 2010, p. 2).

For student veterans, Wenger's (YEAR) Social Learning Theory makes sense of the impact that feelings of isolation and disconnection to community has on their experience as new members to academia. As Wenger shows, the impact that this isolation can have limits one's ability to properly utilize community resources that engaged students rely on for success in academics and personal relationships. As the literature will show in the proceeding sections, evidence exists that student veterans are disengaged from their campus and non-military peers (Osborne, 2013).

Who are Student Veterans?

Contemporary literature defines a student veteran as any individual who has served in the armed forces of the United States and is either concurrently enrolled or enrolls in higher education at the end of their service obligation (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Kirchner, 2015). Beyond this definition however, are several important defining features of this population. Sharing more similarity with nontraditional students, student veterans are more likely to have dependents and work part or full time, compared to traditional students, aged 18 to 24 (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Borsari et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2016). Due to the break in education caused by their service obligations and training student veterans often do not fit into a traditional high school-to-college transition model (Taylor et al., 2016). Because of this, student veterans are more likely to

need remediation in core classes to bring them back to the level of proficiency required for college, compared to traditional students.

Military Culture

Beyond the indicators of student veterans described above, is this populations shared bond over a unique culture that is engrained into military members throughout the duration of their service. This military culture can be understood by its emphasis on valuing: structure, self-reliance, personal sacrifice for the sake of the group, and an aversion to weakness (Borsari et al., 2017; Kirchner, 2015; McCaslin et al., 2014). Informed by these values, contention often exists between student veterans and the culture of academia which encourages autonomy and individualism rather than emphasis on the group or whole body. Often, student veterans are challenged by an academic environments goal of making individuals think critically and question knowledge, rather than obey orders (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Due to this shared bond amongst service members over these values and culture, student veterans often seek each other out to create social connections and support networks in their civilian lives (Kirchner, 2015).

Difficulty in Transition

The difficulty that student veterans face in transitioning from higher education from military service is often nuanced and the resultant of several factors being at play. Some of the difficulty that student veterans' shoulder is due to the similarities that these students share with other nontraditional students. Courses are often designed with traditional students in mind, rather than nontraditional students who may require more flexibility due to familial obligations or work-life balance (Brown & Gross, 2011). Furthermore, student veterans arrive to higher education with life experiences that are

vastly different than those of a traditional student, which can create a disconnect between them and the majority of students on campus (Osborne, 2013). Specifically, this has been described by student veterans as a difference in maturity and priorities between themselves and their traditional peers (Osborne, 2013). Bearing this in mind, the literature is able to organize these various factors into cohesive themes which will be discussed below.

Challenges in Culture

As was discussed in the proceeding section, there is a unique military culture that is engrained in service members through their shared experiences and training they receive while in uniform. Often for these reasons, student veterans experience a "culture shock" when entering the environment of higher education for the first time (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Military culture and its emphasis on control and the health of the group over that of the individual is often at odds with the openness and individuality of a college campus (Brown & Gross). Discussed in the proceeding section, a defining aspect of the military is its emphasis obedience and clear delineations of power; where one is not encouraged to challenge the status quo (Dillard & Yu, 2018). Veterans may perceive this openness as a lack of structure, causing them to feel adrift in their new roles as students. To counter this, student veterans often search one another out to create networks of support, and social circles with those that they feel they can relate to (Alschuler & Yarab 2018; Borsari et al., 2017; Dillard & Yu, 2016; Kirchner, 2015) A feeling of isolation is often reported by student veterans, who often cannot form these social circles or networks of support, due to the fact that student veterans are approximately only 5% of all US college students (McCaslin et al., 2018). This issue is made worse at private

institutions, as they attract less student veterans than their public counterparts; due to the fact that GI Bill education benefits are calibrated on public in-state tuition (Taylor et al., 2016).

In addition to this, military culture and its "warrior ethos", as discussed above, can be detrimental to the success of student veterans, as it constrains them from fully utilizing campus resources. Utilizing academic resources, such as tutoring, are often perceived to be a sign of "weakness", and therefore less likely to be used by student veterans, compared to traditional students (McCaslin et al., 2018). As a population that is more likely to need additional academic support due to an extended period of time away from academics, this aversion to help can have significant implications on a student veterans' success at the college level (Dillard & Yu, 2016).

Stigmatism

Over reporting in news and other media concerning post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD] and violence in veterans, has resulted in many student veterans feeling stigmatized by their identity as a service member (Osborne, 2013). This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that less than 1% of Americans have served in the military over the last decade, which has often led to these misperceptions that veterans are dangerous or unstable to exist unchecked (Osborne, 2013). American colleges and universities have not been immune to this issue. Within higher education, a shortage of faculty and staff that have firsthand knowledge of military affairs has attributed to some student veterans feeling misunderstood and unwelcome by the same individuals that traditional students look to for support (Kirchner, 2015; Osborne, 2013). Extreme examples of feeling stigmatized in the classroom have been reported by student veterans. According to the

literature, student veterans have been exposed to inappropriate questions on campus regarding their identity as veterans; such as being asked if they have ever killed anyone in combat (Osborne, 2013).

A lack of understanding of military life in the academy has continued to be problematic. Often, student veterans arrive to higher education with stressors carried over from their military service, such as ongoing military obligations or relationships with other service members, that can go unnoticed by faculty and staff; unless they have been exposed to military life or student veterans before (McCaslin et al., 2018). Being ill prepared to recognize problems in these students can have lasting implications, as student veterans often create barriers to seeking help based on a perceived stigma that doing so is an admission of weakness (McCaslin et al., 2018; Kirchner, 2015).

Engaging Student Veterans

Contained in the current literature on engaging student veterans are many different ways of reaching these students as they work to navigate their new identities away from the military to that of a student. Therefore, the following section will describe what are considered to be the current best practices for engaging and supporting student veterans at institutions of higher education.

Raising Campus Awareness and Education

As was stated in the proceeding discussion on student veterans' difficulty in transition, student veterans often feel disconnected and isolated from their peers at institutions of higher education. Literature suggests that one of the most effective implementations to 'bring student veterans into the fold' would be to increase awareness of this population on campus (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

Accomplishing this task can take many forms; however, the most reported method of doing so in the literature is created programming initiatives on campus that educate the nonmilitary population of an institution on the needs of this community (Borsari et al., 2017; Osborne, 2013). By doing so, unpleasant encounters between student veterans and nonmilitary individuals, such as stereotypes or stigmas, can be deconstructed through education (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Borsari et al., 2017). McCaslin et al. (2014), explain the necessity for this programming and education outreach as being intended to lessen implicit marginalization, such as a lack of veteran-specific services, and explicit marginalization, such as anti-military comments.

In addition to the benefit of redirecting behavior that student veterans find detrimental or hostile, campus programming and engagement has the added benefit of making student veterans feel more welcome on their campus by the concern shown for their welfare (Osborne, 2013). Research has shown that faculty interaction has a significant effect on how student veterans perceive their campus environment (Rumann et al., 2011). Feeling welcome to campus is often an important first step for student veterans to feel comfortable to approach and form relationships with an institution's faculty and staff. As is reported in the literature, institutions and student veterans have struggled in the past to build trust in one another (McCaslin et al., 2018). By building and developing trust, administers and faculty will be better positioned to serve as mentors and advocates for this population; rather than a source of mistrust and anxiety (Dillard & Yu, 2016).

Veteran Lounges

According to the literature, an important adaptation to support student veterans is the creation of a physical space or lounge on campus. As was discussed previously in the

description of the student veteran population, these students have a tendency to seek each other out as their first level of support, while transitioning into higher education (Alschuler & Yarab 2018; Borsari et al., 2017; Dillard & Yu, 2016; Kirchner, 2015). By creating a physical space for veterans on campus, institutions are able to accomplish two main things.

By creating a student veteran lounge or space, institutions are able to aid these students in connecting with one another, by providing a common meeting point (Dillard & Yu, 2016). The importance of this has been heavily discussed in the literature, as student veterans often seek out fellow veterans to build social relationships (Alschuler & Yarab 2018; Borsari et al., 2017; Dillard & Yu, 2016; Kirchner, 2015). In the absence of a common space such as a veteran lounge, this is often problematic, as there are traditionally so few veterans on a campus; making instances where veterans can connect, rare.

Beyond this, the inclusion of a veteran lounge signals to the student veteran population that the institution cares about their status and presence on campus (Dillard & Yu, 2016; Osborne, 2013). This affirmation and sense of welcome is beneficial to students who may view higher education with mistrust, as was discussed above. Furthermore, this benefit of increasing student veteran presence on campus is not limited to the particular students in this population. With an increased presence of student veterans as a community on campus, through a veteran lounge, nonmilitary affiliated individuals can become normalized to military students on campus.

Partnerships with Veteran Organizations

In addition to the creation of veteran spaces on campus, the literature finds find that that partnerships should be formed with outside agencies to ease the transition of students from military life into that of a student (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). These relationships or partnerships can be instrumental in aiding student veterans understand their service related benefits. Recognizing which benefits and the correct method of applying for such benefits has been reported as difficult to navigate by student veterans (Borsari et al., 2017). One example of a partnership that could respond to this would be between institutions and the Department of Veterans Affairs, by hosting a VA representative on a university campus that is accessible to students to answer questions about their educational benefits (Lange et al., 2016). Beyond answering questions about education benefits, a school hosted VA representative could be instrumental in helping student veterans search and apply for other service related benefits, related to healthcare or pensions.

Literature suggest that in addition to enacting a VA official on campus, universities should strive to create partnerships with organizations such as the Student Veterans of America [SVA], Veterans of Foreign Wars [VFW] or American Legion (Lange et al., 2016). All of these organizations are composed of veterans that serve and advocate for veterans' issues. Literature suggests that hosting veteran organizations on campus, such as the SVA, can aid in raising the presence of veteran issues to those on campus who may be unaware of this population's existence and specific needs (Dillard & Yu, 2016). In addition to the benefits listed above of universities partnering with veteran organizations, the literature suggests that the inclusion of student organization on campus

would be a way for student veterans to feel more connected to their veteran community (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Having opportunities to engage and network other veterans through these organizations is seen as being a way for students to remain close to this particular community that they identify membership in.

Summary of Materials Presented

To summarize what is contained in the review of literature on student veterans and their engagement to academia, research has shown that student veterans are a unique population that experiences a disconnect on campus that is significant enough to warrant deliberate action. As the literature shows, students who have military experience do not relate well with their peers who have not served in the armed forces. Conversely, myths and false assumptions regarding student veterans may exist in the minds of non-veteran students. In order to ensure that these students who have had military experience are able to become fully integrated into campus life, policies that are enacted would be remiss to not incorporate what is already contained in the current literature on the subject. Specifically, awareness of this population of students should be raised to show support of the veteran experience on campus, as well as to dislodge the many myths that are associated with military members.

Beyond this, the literature can be characterized as having significant gaps in the study of student veterans. Specifically, much of the literature involving student veterans is extremely new and has left many avenues of engaging student veterans unexplored. Furthermore, there is a lack of research into analyzing the affect that veteran support strategies have on student veteran transition. Future research on the subject should be concerned with analyzing the long-term effect of the incorporation of student veteran

support practices or other awareness creating initiatives on campus (Bosari et al., 2017;

Dillard & Yu, 2016). Current initiatives to engage student veterans on campus, such as

the creation of student veteran lounges, without assessment of their effectiveness may

lead them open to scrutiny, as their measurable value has yet to be determined with

contemporary literature.

Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction

The research that was conducted served to collect data about the experience of student veterans in higher education. A mixed-methods research approach was used for this study rather than solely relying on qualitative data gathered in one on one interviews. The usage of online surveys in research has the benefits of being a both low cost and effective at reaching populations that may be inaccessible outside of an online forum (Wright, 2005). Due to the student veteran population being dispersed throughout the institution that research is being conducted at, survey data was used allow the researcher to gain more access to this population (Appendix A). Quantitatively, frequency data and key demographic information was collected through the use of a survey. Details of the survey is described in the instrumentation and data collection sections of this chapter. Qualitatively, the researcher interviewed 4 participants to gain insight as to how their experience with student veteran support systems have impacted their experience in higher education. It was important to the researcher that participants have the ability to share their experiences in their own words through the use of interviews. All questions in the survey and individual one on one interviews were used to collect data about the experiences of being a student veteran, as well as any insight into the efficacy of suggested best practices for supporting this population of students. This focus is derived from the research questions that were introduced in chapter one. The research questions are as follows:

1. How does military experience affect one's perception of their college campus?

2. What aspects of higher education do student service members feel ill-equipped or under supported in, if any?

3. How does the inclusion of veteran support systems affect the decision-making process for student service members to enroll in a particular institution? And to what degree?

4. How do student service members find formal support systems, such as on campus veteran lounges or networks, supportive? And to what degree?

The following sections of this chapter will describe the participants that were used in the research, the instrumentation used to collect data, and the process and procedures that the researcher will use to ensure that data is collected confidently and scientifically for both the survey and one on one interview components.

Participants

All participants that were selected to participate in this study are students at a large Midwestern university in the United States. All participants have served or are serving in the armed forces of the United States. Participants were located by the Office of Institutional Analysis at State University; as this office maintains records on the current veteran population at this institution. There are approximately 400 student veterans at State University; which for the purpose of this study is considered the participant pool.

The duration and type of service for each participant varies. Serving in the armed forces, for this study, encompasses anyone who has completed their branches entry level of training and have been assigned a permanent duty station. All of the participants in this research were contacted via email (Appendix E) to inform them of this study and the

manner in which research would be conducted. The invitation to participate in research email included a copy of the research consent form (Appendix B). Due to the implication of using human research participants in this study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol was followed. As stated earlier, this work was considered to be exempt from needing full IRB authorization.

Instrumentation

Survey Instrumentation

A survey was drafted by the researcher to collect frequency responses and demographic information from the participants of this study, which have pertinence to the research questions (Appendix A). The structure of the survey and survey questions were devised by the researcher. The survey was tested by the researcher to ensure that the flow of the survey and link being disbursed to the population pool was correct and working. The researcher did not run a pilot of the survey, as all questions contained in the survey were focused on demographics and frequency/use data and were in no way ambiguous questions. The survey questions are clear and could only be understood in the same manner that the researcher intended. Each survey question required either a short answer response or numeric response on a Likert scale. A Likert scale is a numeric range or group of statements that allows a respondent to choose a number or phrase to express their agreement or disagreement with a particular item. The survey used in this research used a Likert scale of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* whenever it is inappropriate to require a short answer response.

The focus of the survey questions is informed by contemporary literature on student veterans. Currently, there is a gap of knowledge as to how beneficial student

veterans find formal support networks (Bosari et al., 2017; Dillard & Yu, 2016). The survey was devised to determine the frequency that student veterans utilize resources or support systems; and whether or not they report the experience as useful to their transition of becoming a student. Additionally, the survey sought to analyze the knowledge that student veterans have on the support systems in existence at their institution.

Interview Protocols

One-on-one interviews were conducted by the researcher with the survey participants that elected to participate further in this research. The intended number of interviews to be completed prior to research was six to 8. This quantity was derived by a reasonable expectation of voluntary participants and its feasibility with the researcher's ability and time. 4 research participants were successfully recruited for the interview component of this study. The interviews were semi-structured, with the researcher creating interview questions beforehand (Appendix B). Participants were provided a consent form specific to the in-person interviews (Appendix G) during the scheduling of the interviews, and again at the interview. Interview questions were developed in a way that informs the research questions, by having participant speak to their experience with entering academia and utilizing/not utilizing veteran specific institutional support systems. This was accomplished by identifying a theme for each research question, that informs a respective set of interview questions. The themes that are drawn from the research question are, military identity, campus climate, and institutional support systems. Demographic information is a fourth theme or component of the interviews that was identified to guide part of the interview protocol but is independent of any specific

research question. Under the umbrella of demographic information, there will be certain interview questions that intend to identify information about the interviewees military service; such as branch of service and years of service.

All interview questions remained standardized for each participant. However, the researcher utilized the ability to ask follow up questions to the pre-established questions in instances when more clarification to a point made by the interviewee was needed. All of the interviews were recorded by the interviewer so that interview audio can be transcribed. Transcription was completed through a paid service that the researcher secured. Recorded audio will be collected through the use of an electronic handheld tape recorder.

Anonymity of the interviewees will be protected by the interviewer. Names of the participants in the interviews were not shared or recorded. In order to protect the anonymity and privacy of those that participate in the interviews, the researcher will randomly assign a first name pseudonym for each participant. All correspondence used to schedule interviews for this study that link the identity of those who participated were destroyed by the researcher to protect the anonymity of those involved.

Data collection

Research surveys and invitations to participate in interviews was sent to participants via email. The Responses to these surveys was collected via the software used to create the survey instrument. The researcher utilized a program called *Qualtrics* to create the survey and manage survey responses. *Qualtrics* was elected as the survey platform due to the accessibility the researcher has to the software, and its utilization in similar social science studies. Data collection for the one on one interviews was

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accomplished through handwritten notes of the interviewer and audio recordings. To protect the data collected in this research, all surveys and interview notes were stored in a password protected folder. The audio recordings contained in the electronic recorder were stored in a password protected folder on the researcher's computer.

Data Analysis

After data collection was completed, the researcher analyzed raw data from the interviews by coding the responses of interview participants. Coding is the process of identifying trends in data reoccurring patterns of meaning that is relevant to the study (Merriam, 2009). To code the responses, the interviewer grouped similar responses from the entirety of the interviews together to identify trends that will inform on the research questions. For this work, the researcher identified important phrases and words from the research interview transcriptions that became the codes (Appendix D). These codes were then grouped into categories based on their relevancy with one another. Collections of similar categories became individual themes. A discussion of the themes that were formed will be presented below in Chapter Four.

To analyze the survey response data, the researcher organized the survey responses to the themes developed from the coding of the interview transcripts. Survey responses and frequency rates were used to create frequency tables with the Qualtrics software. This allowed the researcher to examine the student veteran's usage and knowledge of current institutional support systems. Beyond this, survey responses that measured student veterans' feelings toward suggested best practices, and literature-based characteristics of the student veteran population were analyzed through the creation of bar graphs and other visual aid.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

Chapter Four will focus on describing and presenting the findings of the research. It will begin by introducing the context that the research was collected in and the demographic information of those that participated in my research. Following this, it will discuss the findings of both the survey and interview responses. Contained within this chapter will be the specific themes that emerged from my research and data that serve to respond to the guiding research questions of this work.

Context

The setting of this study was a large (more than 24,000 student), public university that is located in the Midwestern region of the United States, referenced through a pseudonym as "State University". The institution is considered to be a predominantly white institution. The chosen university hosts two formal administrative units that are specific to veteran needs; a federally grant funded TRiO Veteran Upward Bound (VUB) program, and a veteran network that acts a point of contact for coordinating education services for student veterans. This institution does not have specific veteran serving office. GI Bill certification occurs at State Universities Registrar's Office. State University provides a Veterans Day breakfast every year that is attended by the institutions leadership and offers a veteran specific graduation ceremony that students who identify as veterans can choose to attend.

Survey participants were recruited by an invitation email that was disseminated by the university's office of institutional analysis; which maintains a roster of all currently enrolled students that self-identify as veteran. All 436 student veterans on this

roster received this research invitation that included a hyperlink to the electronic survey instrument. Of the 436 students that received this invitation to participate in this study, 45 students completed the survey. The conclusion of the survey was a voluntary question, asking that those who would be interested in participating in an interview with the researcher leave their email address so that they could be contacted for interview scheduling. Of the 45 students that competed the survey, 19 students provided contact information. Of these 19 students, six students responded to further correspondence from the researcher to schedule an interview. Two of the six students decided after this point that they could no longer participate in the study. As a result, 4 student veterans were interviewed to provide the narrative in this research.

<div align="center">**Research Participants**</div>

Survey Participants

The survey instrument was completed by 45 students, approximately 10.3% of the survey pool (N=436). 31% (n=14) of the respondents identified as being a first-year student. 53.3% (24) of respondents are between the ages of 21-26. The majority of respondents (71.1%, n=32) served in the military between 4-8 years 57.8% (n=26) of respondents served in either the Marine Corps or the Army. There is great variation in the field of study/major that respondents provided, and no discernable preference can be stated. No personal identifiable information was asked for or received through the survey; with the exception of the optional question that invited survey respondents to provide contact information for interview scheduling.

Interview Participants

The interview participants were all male and currently enrolled full time at the State University. Three of the four interview participants have concluded their military service and served in the active-duty military prior to enrolling at this particular institution. These individuals are no longer affiliated with the military and do not have any current military obligations. The fourth interview participant, Andrew, is currently serving in the reserve component of the Navy, and regularly attends military training while being a full-time student. Andrew discussed being involved on campus with a student organization in his free time; and was the only interview participant that is affiliated with a registered student organization at State University. Three of the four interview participants were between the age of 21-26, with one participant, Dylan, being over 30 years old. Beyond this, Dylan had attended State University in the early 1990s before returning in 2016. Three of the four interview participants are working to complete a bachelor's degree, while one of the four interview participants, Robert, is a graduate student, but received their undergraduate degree from State University. All of the interview participants in this study consented to participate in this research and consented to have their interview session recorded by the researcher. The demographic information for the interview respondents is included below in Table 1. In order to ensure the anonymity and privacy of the interview participants, pseudonyms have been randomly assigned by the researcher; and any identifiable information that could be used to reveal the interview participants has been removed.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Branch	Type of Service	Major/Minor	Standing
Daniel	Army	Active-Duty	Criminal Justice	Undergraduate
Dylan	Marine Corps/Army	Active-Duty	Computer Information Systems	Undergraduate
Andrew	Navy	Reserve-Duty	Political Science	Undergraduate
Robert	Air Force	Active-Duty	Business	Graduate Student

Findings

The following section will present and discuss the findings of the research. To reiterate, the guiding research questions for this study are:

1. How does military experience affect one's perception of their college campus?

2. What aspects of higher education do student service members feel ill-equipped or under supported in, if any?

3. How does the inclusion of veteran support systems affect the decision-making process for student service members to enroll in a particular institution? And to what degree?

4. How do student service members find formal support systems, such as on campus veteran lounges or networks, supportive? And to what degree?

Services and Spaces

Before discussing the themes that have been identified in this research, it is necessary to present a key finding from the survey instrument related to Research Question IV. Related to how student veterans find support in academia, through formal support systems (Research Question III). According to the survey, student veterans are not using the inclusion of veteran-specific support systems as a determinant to enroll in a particular institution of higher education. According to the survey, 44.45% of respondents disagree/strongly disagree that they would leave their institution if the veteran specific resources were discontinued. Furthermore, an additional 33.33% of respondents neither agree/disagree that they would leave their institution if the veteran specific resources were discontinued. Only 11.11% of respondents strongly agreed that they would leave their institution if veteran specific resources were discontinued.

Investigating this further, more information was gained through the in-person interviews. One respondent stated that they do not utilize any resources on campus because they work full-time and are a parent. This sentiment was expressed by all interview participants and will be examined below. In addition to this, two respondents made mention to the fact that they are new students and unaware of the resources afforded to them by their institution. This phenomenon will also be connected back to the discussion presented below.

To conclude this section on services and spaces, items that were expressed by the student veterans but absent in current literature on student veterans was the citing of tutoring centers as a source of support for student veterans. In the literature that was synthesized for this study, no mention or connection was made between student veterans

and the utilization of academic tutoring centers, such as a math lab. An additional service that was cited in this section of the survey that is absent in the literature on student veterans is the on-campus library; which was cited and followed with a description that its space was useful specifically for student veterans because its emphasis on being a calm and quiet area.

Themes

Three themes of student veteran transition and persistence emerged from the qualitative research collected in this study, when the data was processed and coded by the researcher. To reiterate from Chapter Three, coding is the process of identifying trends in data reoccurring patterns of meaning that is relevant to the study (Merriam, 2009, p.205). The themes identified in this work are composed of subthemes or categories, which are themselves developed by the codes or trends contained in the interview data. The themes and categories synthesized in this research are included in Table 2. The themes that emerged from the data are: (1) Camaraderie Seeking, (2) Non-Traditional Status, and (3) Campus Culture. The findings of the research in this study provided insight into how student veterans experience and navigate higher education, due to their military identity and self-perceptions. Furthermore, the findings of this study present evidence as to how student veterans experience and perceive the support systems that institutions have formally arranged to support this student population. Each theme in the latter half of this chapter will be presented with an introduction, description of the categories that compose the theme, and ultimately conclude with a summary of the theme and its relevance to the research questions of this study.

Survey response data, while not coded, will be included when appropriate in the following section if it has utility in presenting numeric information, background, or evidence to the discussion of the findings below. The specific findings that contribute to the discussion on themes will be included below Table 2.

Table 2, Thematic and Categorical Information

Theme	Category
Camaraderie Seeking	Fighting Isolation
	Relationships
	Relatability
Non-Traditional Status	Age
	Other obligations
Campus Culture	Under Cover
	Education Expectations

Survey Data Contributing to Themes

Before proceeding with a description of the themes that constitute the findings of this study, it is important to further discuss the data gained by the survey component of this research that supplements the findings from the in-person interviews. Beyond the survey collected demographic information shared above, the survey collected the following findings.

In regard to student veteran usage at State University, 53.33% (n=24) respondents never utilize this space. Beyond this, 24.44% (n=11) of respondents use the veteran lounge once per month, while 4.44% (n=2) utilize the veteran lounge 2-3 times per week. Survey data collected on the usage of a peer advising network found that 62.22% (n=28) of respondents did not know about the program; with 11.11% (n=5) of respondents having utilized the program and 26.67% (n=12) of respondents not utilizing the program.

In regard to a student veteran network that serves to connect students with specific resources on campus, 37.78% (n=17) found this program to be beneficial to them as a new student, with 20.00% (n=9) finding this program to not be beneficial to them as a new student. In addition to this, 42.22% of respondents did not know about this program's existence.

In regard to TRiO Veteran Upward Bound program, a federally funded grant-based program that aims to increase the educational attainment of first generation or low-income students, 24.44% (n=11) of respondents found this service to be beneficial to them as a new student. 11.11% (n=5) of students did not find this program to be beneficial to them as a new student, with 64.44% (n=29) of students responding that they did not know that this program existed at their institution.

In the survey, when asked how important it is to connect with other veterans, 35.56% (n=16) of respondents strongly agreed. 37.78% (n=17) of respondents somewhat agreed that it is important to connect with other veterans, while 11.11% (n=5) of respondents somewhat disagreed/strongly disagree that it is important to connect with student veterans.

When asked if they would leave their institution if veteran support systems were discontinued, 11.11% (n=5) of respondents strongly agreed with that statement, with an additional 11.11% (n=5) somewhat agreeing with that statement. 33.33% (n=15) of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement. 17.78% (n=8) somewhat disagreed with this statement, with an additional 26.67% (n=12) strongly disagreeing with this statement.

When asked if their institution provided good support for student veterans, 37.78% (n=17) of respondents strongly agreed, with an additional 24.44% (n=11) somewhat agreeing with this statement. 28.89% (n=13) of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. 6.67% (n=3) of respondents somewhat disagreed with this statement, while 2.22% (n=1) strongly disagreed with this statement.

Camaraderie Seeking

The desire and need to connect with other student veterans is a commonality that was discussed by all interview participants. This is supported by the quantitative data collected in this study. According to those surveyed, 35.5% of respondents strongly agree that it is important to connect with other student veterans; with 73.3% of respondents choosing agree or strongly agree to that statement. At length, interview participants spoke about a desire interact with other student veterans at their particular institution of higher education. The origins of this desire emerged from the following categories: (1) Fighting Isolation, (2) Relationships, and (3) Relatability.

Fighting isolation. The feeling of being isolated on a college campus was discussed by the participants in two distinct ways. For two of the interview participants, isolation stemmed from their inability to relate to other students. According to Daniel "There are times that it feels like no one understands me. [Student Veterans] have a messed-up sense of humor, and don't like to complain". This sentiment is something that Robert echoed. According to Robert, there is a different mentality amongst student veterans and non-military affiliated students; which can make it difficult to interact with most students. Dylan believes that some of the isolation can stem from a veteran's desire to not disclose to others that they have military service for fear of being stigmatized.

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According to Dylan, "That is a piece of our identity, and it could become the only thing people recognize about us". The commentary contained above is supported by the survey data contained in this research. As was stated above, 73.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is important for student veterans to connect and form bonds with one another.

The other manner that isolation was spoken about during the interviews was in a geographic sense; and as a result of where they either lived or had classes located. Daniel, Dylan, and Robert discussed the implications of having classes on a campus that was not the campus which hosted the institutions veteran lounge. Dylan stated that "there's not a whole lot of support out on the downtown campus, or in the business school". Daniel, someone who stated that he doesn't use the veteran lounge, stated that part of his social isolation stemmed from living away from campus and not near other students. As will be discussed further in this chapter, student veterans share commonalities with non-tradition, or older, students and often reside off of campus. The implication of this being that student veterans may often be living in different areas than one another; which can create difficulty in forging community and camaraderie.

Relationships. In every interview, each participant discussed their relationship with other veterans in positive terms, and an important part of their academic experience. For some of the interview participants, having relationships with other veterans provided them an opportunity to feel comfortable to "be themselves". According to Dylan, having an opportunity to speak to someone who had a similar military experience gave both of them happiness to have another veteran to talk freely to. Daniel stated that "we all recognize each other, we are all pretty much the same person". In addition to this,

Andrew stated that as a reservist, there can often be relationships that exist both in the military and higher education institution. According to Andrew, "It's hard for me [as a reservist] to keep my student life [outside of the military] because I see a lot of the same people in both places".

Relatability. All of the student veterans that participated in the interviews acknowledged that an important aspect of why they seek out other veterans was that they can relate most easy to others with military experience. Daniel, Dylan, and Robert discussed the impact that the military has on forming one's identity as a young adult. Daniel states "those of us that dived in [enlisted directly after high school] have a different outlook on life than civilians, because we were raised by the Army". Because of this difference in outlook on life, Daniel states that "I don't hang out with anyone that isn't a veteran, or people that I knew before the Army". During a conversation about the relatability amongst veterans, Dylan states that "conversations you have, by default because of some of the [unique] language, is hard to explain [outside of the military]"

Summary of camaraderie seeking. The relevance of camaraderie seeking to this study involves three of the four research questions that guided this study. In regard to Research Question I, student veterans perceive their college environment as isolating if they cannot find and locate other student veterans to engage with. This emphasis on engaging others, specifically non-military affiliated individuals, is an aspect of higher education that student veterans feel ill-equipped or unprepared to navigate (Research Question II). As was discussed above, student veterans who participated in this research discussed their aversion to interact with non-military affiliated students; which is something supported by current literature on this population. Formal support systems that

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emphasize relationship building between veterans, such as camaraderie, are found to be beneficial by those who participated in this study (Research Question IV), in theory. As will be discussed later, this study found that there is an underutilization of veteran specific resources at the institution chosen for this research.

Non-Traditional Status

Interview questions were created to investigate what impacts how student veterans perceive and utilize formal institutional support systems; such as a veteran lounge or student organization. In addition to this, certain interview questions sought to investigate what aspects of higher education student veterans feel unsupported or ill-equipped in. Interview participants described how many of the factors commonly attributed to non-traditional/adult learners impacted their transition into higher education and their ability to utilize the formal support systems. This theme provides insight and evidence into how formal support systems are perceived by student veterans (Research Question III). In addition, the findings of this section provide insight into what aspects of higher education student veterans feel ill-equipped or unprepared for (Research Question II). The specific features of this that were apparent in the interviews conducted by the researcher are categorized as: (1) Age, (2) Outside Obligations, and (3) Education Pragmatism.

Age. Three of the four interview participants mentioned the impact that their age has on their experience in higher education. According to Daniel and Dylan, being an older student in first- and second-year classes had a limiting effect to those that they feel they could interact and make friendships with. According to Daniel, entering higher education as someone older than 25 years of age made him hesitant to talk to some

students because they seemed to be too young to make any meaningful friendships with. Dylan stated that as an individual older than 30 years of age, he felt that he stood out in a class, and was self-conscious that he appeared different than the majority of people in his classes. According to Dylan:

When I was a student, [the first time], I was 25 or 26 years old and I felt like I was the old man. The second time I was 46 years old and [really] am the old man. So that was kind of funny. I don't surely speak for everyone, but I've always felt different. I'm not a regular student and I have talked to other veterans on the business campus that are that way too.

The two individuals that did not report age as a factor to their education experience were 22 years of age or younger.

Outside obligations. All of the interview participants discussed the impact that their life outside of higher education has on their ability to get involved on campus. Andrew, the student who is serving in the reserves while a full-time student, discussed the impact that his military obligation has on his ability to participate in extra-curricular activities. According to Andrew, participating in a student organization is difficult, as their meetings begin after he is released and back from his military training. Andrew stated:

when I do show up, I am usually still in uniform because I just go home, grab clean clothes, before going to the meeting to change. It's hard to keep [the military and the student organization] separate.

For the other participants, having obligations with careers or families hindered their ability to participate in extra-curricular activities and veterans' specific resources.

According to Robert, he would enjoy using the veteran lounge to connect to other veterans but doesn't spend any extra time on campus. Robert stated "If I was out there [on campus], I was either in the library studying or I was in class. I wasn't hanging out at campus or anything". Daniel also shared this sentiment and stated that as a commuter he hasn't sought out the student veteran lounge or other services because he only goes to campus for in-person classes.

Summary of non-traditional status. Student Veterans sharing similarities with non-traditional students serve to inform stakeholders and researchers as to what parts of academia student veterans feel underprepared or supported for (Research Question II). Student veterans in this study reported that they have difficulty in collaborative learning environments because they cannot relate easily to younger traditional college students. In addition to age and a lack of comfort in doing group work with younger students, student veterans expressed frustration in younger students being less mature and in group projects having an influence on group grades.

Beyond this, the similarities between student veterans and non-traditional students help one understand the barriers that prevent these students from being able to utilize institutional support systems that are created for their use (Research Question IV). As was stated above, student veterans often have outside obligations, such as family life or work, and do not spend free time on their campus where most institutional support systems are housed. Furthermore, unless the institutional support system is passive and does not require administrative presence, the support system likely utilizes business hours that may not be conducive to the schedules of an adult population that is likely busy and off campus during traditional business hours.

Campus Culture

Interview questions asked participants to discuss and reflect on differences between the military environment and the environment of higher education. Differences between the military and higher education were reported by the interview participants as being notable to how they experienced their institution. The difference between a military culture and modern higher education culture is something that is often cited in the literature regarding student veterans, as is contained in Chapter Two of this work. However, in the interviews conducted in this research, participants emphasized their place in the campus culture, rather than how their previous military culture meshes with the culture of higher education. The findings of this section provide insight into how student veterans perceive the campus environment through the lens of being veterans (Research Question I), how student veterans feel underprepared/under supported for higher education (Research Question II), and how student veterans perceive the usefulness of formal support systems (Research Question IV). This is composed of the following categories: (1) Under Cover and (2) Education Expectations.

Under cover. An issue that three of the four student veterans reported was that they experienced feeling alone and separated from the environment and support systems that they had known in the military. Daniel states "there is a comfort zone, and an issue of depression and mental illness [in the military]. We don't feel misunderstood, we just don't understand well". Speaking about the effect that this has on one's adjustment to higher education, Dylan states that there is "a bit of a culture shock" when it comes to the way students interact with one another and with faculty members. Because of this culture shock, Dylan speculates that "the younger guys [veterans] want to fit in more and may

hide the fact that they are veterans". One of the interview participants, Dylan, believes that more should be done to raise the profile of student veterans on campus. Dylan states that "the school could do a better job" at promoting the meaning of Veteran's Day or Memorial Day to the campus community. During this conversation on raising campus awareness of veteran issues, Dylan argued that more could be done to improve upon the visibility of student veterans on campus, by the formal institutions on campus that are intended to represent this student population. According to Dylan:

> The school could do a better job in that respect [raising the profile of veterans], but the onus is really on the veteran's groups that are here because, with all due respect, the [Student Veterans of America] are very silent. I never hear from them when I am over here [on campus].

Education expectations. For many of the interview participants, their experience in the classroom and interactions with faculty were much different than they envisioned prior to entering higher education. According to Dylan and Robert, faculty members at their institutions treated them "more like adults" than they expected or observed with their non-military classmates. Robert states that "I don't know if it comes naturally or if the teachers do training, but it's kind of like they treat you more like a responsible adult". This type of interaction was reported to be pleasurable and appreciated by the interview participants. Beyond this, three of the four research participants stated that they were surprised by the collaborative and at times "easy-going" nature of a higher education class. Dylan stated:

Professors were more of facilitators, and that was a big difference educationally

for me, because I liked to be instructed as opposed to trusting someone who isn't

doing their homework to work in my group.

This sentiment of being wearing about non-military classmates as peers was touched

upon in the interview with Robert, who felt that younger students were not as serious

about their academics as they should be. Speaking about his classroom experience with

nonmilitary students, Robert stated:

[There's] 18-year-old or something students going into class, and its kind of the

mentality that if you act like a kid you get treated like a kid. But when your

teacher finds out you're a veteran, this is just my experience with it, usually they

are pretty cool about it, and can put things into real terms that give you all of the

details.

In addition to this, Daniel states that he believes that students should be more respectful

to faculty members, and that the military culture taught him to use "sir and ma'am" when

speaking to individuals with authority. Reconciling this difference between values and

expected behavior when addressing individuals with authority, such as a professor or

university administrator, presented challenge to the interview participants.

Summary of campus culture. Due to feeling anonymous or invisible on campus

and challenged by a different educational environment than found in the military, student

veterans may perceive their institution as difficult to navigate and unsupportive (Research

Question I). As was discussed above, student veterans likely perceive the roles of faculty

and staff members differently than non-military affiliated students. Whereas students who

do not come from the military may be previously exposed to a more collaborative

classroom, veterans may expect rigidity in the interaction between faculty members and students; where the faculty member tells the students what they need to know or how they should think of the material being discussed. As was also discussed in the proceeding section, student veterans may feel anonymous on campus and reported that student veteran support systems (Research Question IV) could be more vocal in raising student veteran issues to the public domain, and by being more visible and collaborative with non-military affiliated entities.

Summary

To surmise what is included in this chapter, I have introduced the data collected by the survey instrument and the interview participants whose responses compose the qualitative data that is concerned with this work. Important data from the survey provided insight into the demographics of the student veteran population at State University. According to the survey, most respondents are between the ages of 22-26. The most important piece of data collected from the survey, is that more than 75% of respondents agree that veterans seek out other veterans for personal relationships.

The emphasis on this chapter was to describe the interview data as it provided the most insight into answering the research questions; although quantitative data from the survey was included where appropriate, if it enhanced one of the three themes being discussed. Throughout the interview process, participants responded very similarly to the prompts; with Daniel, Dylan, and Robert answering more similar than Andrew. To reiterate, Andrew is the one interview participant who is still serving in the military, whereas Daniel, Dylan, and Robert are no longer serving.

With all of the participants, no negative language was used to criticize the higher education institution that they attend; with only slight mentions that the institution could be doing a better job at educating non-military students on student veterans' issues and identity. All four interview participants spoke at great lengths about the necessity for student veterans to connect with one another in a college environment. In the following chapter, I will discuss the importance and implications of these findings in the context of the existing literature, and their impact on future scholarship.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this final chapter the summary of the study will be presented to reinforce the aim and scope of the research. This will be followed by a section containing the conclusion that the researcher reached. Next, a discussion of the research will follow, before the chapter ultimately concludes with pertinent recommendations for practice and recommendations for future research.

Summary

The aim of this research was to investigate the transition faced by student veterans, and the experience of student veterans in higher education. In addition to this, the research also sought to determine the efficacy of contemporary student veteran support systems in higher education. Student veterans who participated in the study were asked to discuss their experience in transitioning into higher education and their experience as students who hold a military identity. The theoretical framework used to guide this study was Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Wenger's Social Learning Theory. Schlossberg provides insight into the transition experienced by students coming into academia from the military by providing a description of factors and stimuli that affect transition; whereas Wenger's work enables a better understanding as to how feelings of isolation and needs to have community impact ones learning and development process. The research questions that guided this study in the formation of both the interview and survey protocol are:

1. How does military experience affect one's perception of their college campus?

2. What aspects of higher education do student service members feel ill-equipped or under supported in, if any?

3. How does the inclusion of veteran support systems affect the decision-making process for student service members to enroll in a particular institution? And to what degree?

4. How do student service members find formal support systems, such as on campus veteran lounges or networks, supportive? And to what degree?

The mixed-methods approach to the research plan yielded 45 survey responses, and 4 interviews led by the researcher. The duration of the interviews varied and lasted between 23-42 minutes. Interviews were recorded by the researcher and then transcribed. The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed line-by-line for meaning and relevancy in a process called "coding". Through the coding, three themes emerged, that were presented in Chapter Four of this work. The themes that emerged are (1) Camaraderie, (2) Non-Traditional Status, and (3) Campus Climate.

Conclusion

The data collected by the research plan responds to the research questions of this study. Student veterans described in detail how they struggle to form relationships with one another, while also describing the importance and necessity of these relationships to form. Additionally, participants provided extensive narrative about feeling isolated on campus and misunderstood by their non-military peers and institutional faculty and staff. Both of these phenomena are supported by contemporary and current literature on veterans in higher education. The following section on concluding remarks and thoughts will present a discussion on the important of veterans trying to forge community in the context of the theoretical framework used in this study.

The impact of student veterans struggling to form relationships with one another while describing the importance of said relationships has implications that are best understood in the lenses of the theoretical framework used in this study. Wenger's theory of social learning informs one that relationships and collaboration are necessary to access group knowledge and ways of understanding to navigate systems within society. Student veterans therefore, as captured by the data in this research, rely on one another to secure equal of access to this "group knowledge". Schlossberg's Transition Theory situates this in the context that role change is always accompanied by stress, as new information and knowledge is required to begin navigating the new role. Through the reliance on one another, and subsequent to access group knowledge, student veterans are better suited to navigate their new role and consequently alleviate stress associated with it. While this is not unique solely to the student veteran population, as one could argue all student experience role change and associated stress with their new roles, student veterans are unique in that they relate best with one another. As such, there is a heightened risk of these student not being able to secure comfort in building relationships with one another by virtue of being a unique institutional population.

Beyond this, all participants that were interviewed spoke highly of their military experience and freely submitted testimonial to the interview questions. Although there was differentiation in the military branches represented and the duties that each individual was assigned in the military, there was a similarity in the responses that the interview participants yielded. This benefited the study, as participants did not hesitate to discuss their academic experience in the context of their military service; and were not private about their experiences as a veteran; but more importantly responded in a

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harmonizing way in such a manner that conclusions could be drawn from the interview data.

To conclude and surmise what was stated above, the research plan provided significant findings on the manner in which student veterans perceive their campus, and their desire to form bonds amongst one another. Furthermore, the study provides evidence that student veterans feel isolated and invisible, as part of the campus community. In addition, the research shows evidence that student veterans may not be able to utilize the services created to support them due to being non-traditional students and often away from the main campus where such initiatives and support systems are enacted.

Discussion

Veteran Services

The contemporary literature on student veterans contain two themes that are of particular interest to the findings of this study. They are that student veterans share similarities with non-traditional students (Alschuler & Yarab, 2018; Borsari et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2016), and that student veterans seek each other out to form relationships (Alschuler & Yarab 2018; Borsari et al., 2017; Dillard & Yu, 2016; Kirchner, 2015). Interview responses and quantitative data from the survey provide strong support that these two components of the literature can be confirmed through this study.

Problematically, the survey provided data that student veteran centered support systems are being underutilized, inadequately advertised, or considered to not be of use to the student veteran community. Per the survey, 53.3% of respondents do not utilize the student veteran lounge, with 17.9% of respondents not knowing what the student veteran

lounge is. At State University, 62.2% of respondents were unaware of a campus mentoring program that pairs incoming student veterans with a mentor. 64.4% of respondents were unaware of the federally funded TRiO program, compared to 42.2% of respondents who did not know what the student veteran network is. Understanding that State University does not have a physical office dedicated to serving veterans, it is possible that this lack of awareness of resources can be contributed to a lack of coordination of services by State University. In addition to this, student services at State University are often only accessible at traditional business hours. This may impact the ability of non-traditional students such as student veterans, from being able to access these services.

What is quite problematic about the survey data provided above, is that these services are intended to respond to the disconnect and desire for camaraderie that this research suggests as being impactful to the student veteran experience. In other words, significant problems are existing in the same space on campus that the solutions for such problems already exist. It can be argued that there appears to be a disconnect between the services that student veterans seek at State University, and the services themselves. Analyzing or providing commentary on why there is a disconnect on the veteran specific services and the student veterans is outside of the scope of this work. However, there is evidence from this study that suggests student veterans do not spend significant time on campus, share close similarities with non-traditional students, and respect and follow directions from faculty members with military obedience. This will be discussed further in the following section on recommendations for practice.

Classroom Expectations

An additional finding of this research that was not found in the current literature on student veterans is that this population struggles with group work and discussion-based learning. As was stated above in chapter 4, this difference in educational/classroom expectations was reported to cause the interview participants to feel distressed. To reiterate what was stated in Chapter Four, the interview participants reported that they expected the institutions faculty to be more authoritative in the classroom, and that they experienced frustration in being assigned group work with traditional students; who they perceive as young and less mature.

Understanding that there is a difference in what student veterans expect in the classroom and that they may have a different learning style from traditional students is new to the scholarship of student veterans. The implications of this will be discussed below in the sections that contain recommendations for practice and recommendations for future research.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Practice</div>

There is significant evidence that student veterans share many similarities with non-traditional students (cites). Non-traditional students often are older in age and may require more flexibility for familial obligations or work-life balance (Brown & Gross, 2011). Because of this, student veteran services should be developed and implemented in a way to ensure that they are accessible for students that have non-traditional characteristics. Three of the four interview participants in this research stated that they are not on campus long enough to utilize a physical veteran specific space; such as a veteran lounge. Bearing this in mind, alternative ways to achieve the ends that a lounge is

intended to facilitate, such as bringing veterans together, should be sought. A possible suggestion to accomplish this task could include the use of a virtual space, that would allow student veterans to connect remotely. Moreover, a virtual space has a benefit of being unbounded by the size constraints of a physical space.

In addition to this, the data and responses collected in this study provide evidence that student veterans wish to become more visible on campus. Efforts should be taken to create student veteran centered events that are of a public forum and create dialogue between the student veterans and non-military affiliated members of the campus community. What is meant by this is that those whose work concerns them with the interest of student veterans should seek out and develop relationships with campus partners that would work in a way to combine student veterans' communities with other nonmilitary students. Efforts such as this could realize the benefit of normalizing student veterans on campus, while increasing the education of nonmilitary students to lessen the risk of bias incidents or stigmas about military affiliated individuals to remain unchecked. The sentiment captured by the interview participants that spoke to this referenced that they perceive the veteran specific services and events at State University to be isolated from the events happening elsewhere on campus.

Regarding the difference in learning style and classroom expectations that was discussed above, future practice should be concerned with educating faculty members of this finding so that they can be trained to accommodate the learning style of student veterans in their classroom. While it may not be possible or even worthwhile to abandon discussion based or collaborative learning, an informed faculty can understand that these students may experience frustration or anxiety with these practices; and because of this

can reach out to student veterans in their classroom to explain to them the purpose of why the classroom is conducted in this manner. Having conversations regarding this and assisting student veterans understand why classrooms have become discussion or collaborative based may be a beneficial first step to helping the student veteran acclimate to their new environment.

To conclude this section on recommendations for practice, there is evidence in this study that current methods to advertise and inform student veterans of veteran specific services are failing. As was stated above, a significant percentage of survey respondents did not know about initiatives on their campus that responded to student veteran issues. Specifically, more than 80% of respondents did not know that a peer mentoring system at their institution existed. Clearly this is problematic, considering the implications of relationship building and role change that student veterans face when learning to navigate academia. To combat this disconnect, the delivery of advertisement of student veteran services should be improved upon and disseminated in a variety of mediums to achieve a higher degree of saturation with this population.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should engage in further quantitative analysis of the student veteran experience, at multiple institution. This research has shown that student veterans responded to an electronic survey at a similar rate to other populations, and can be polled with scientific success, electronically, in future studies.

Further research needs to be done to better understand the interplay that varying social identities can have on the transition into higher education, with concern for veteran or military affiliated individuals. Current literature on this population has neglected to

analyze this and has studied student veterans as a very homogenous population without much regard for diversity, gender, or varying social identities within this group.

Future research is needed to further investigate the learning styles and classroom expectations of student veterans. As this study discovered, student veterans may experience difficulty in engaging a class that is taught in a less-authoritative way; as this is what they are expecting because of their military service and the learning style of that environment. Looking ahead, it is important to understand the impact that this may have on a student veterans' success in the classroom and how this may impact the perception of their higher education career; especially at its beginning. A study devoted to this impact may yield information that can assist faculty members in either adjusting their teaching styles or becoming better at engaging and informing the student veteran on why the modern academic environment utilizes collaborative or discussion-based learning.

Beyond this, future research should concern itself with the levels of participation that contemporary student veteran support systems receive. This study provides evidence that a significant percentage of student veterans are not utilizing the veteran support systems. For example, in this study approximately 77% of respondents use the student veteran lounge once a month or less. Investigating why this is has origins in this work, as it has been demonstrated that student veterans share similarities with non-traditional students and pragmatically choose not to utilize the student veteran lounge because it would be inconvenient for them to do so based on how they spend their time on campus.

To conclude, a study of the retention benefits of student-centered support networks and systems is needed to determine if these programs and initiatives are having the intended effect of retaining students. This is the next logical place for student veteran

literature to progress, as ample scholarship has been developed to suggest best practices to working with this population. Without further investigation into the effect that current "best practices" for student veterans' engagement and success have, outdated and ineffectual policies may persist in place of kinetic and useful initiatives that better serve the modern student veteran.

Survey Protocol – Appendix A

1. Major Theme- Institutional Support
    a. Are you aware of the Student Veteran Lounge?
        i. Y/N
    b. If YES to 3A, how frequently do you utilize the space per month
        i. Short answer*
    c. Are you aware of the PAVE peer advisor program?
        i. Y/N
    d. If YES to 3C, did you use the PAVE peer advisor program?
        i. Y/N
    e. If YES to 3D, did you find the service beneficial as a new student?
        i. Y/N
    f. Are you aware of the (Institutions) Veteran Network?
        i. Y/N
    g. If YES to 3F, did you find the services it provides beneficial as a new student?
        i. Y/N
    h. Can you list what other services or spaces you have found helpful? (Counseling Center, Disability Support Resource Center, etc.)
        i. Short answer*
    i. It is important for me to connect with other veterans
        i. Strongly Disagree…Strongly Agree**
    j. (The Institution) offers good support for student veterans
        i. Strongly Disagree…Strongly Agree**
    k. Without the support systems at (The Institution), I would have had difficulty staying at (The Institution).
        i. Strongly Disagree…Strongly Agree**
    l. How does the support at (The Institution) benefit you?
        i. MULT CHOICE
            1. Sense of community
            2. Referral to VA services
            3. Aid with academic skill
2. Demographics
    a. What year are you at (The Institution)
    b. What is your major?
    c. What is your age?
    d. What branch of service did you serve in?
    e. What component did you serve in?
    f. How many years did you serve in the military

KEY
*denotes a short answer response
**denotes a Likert Scale
MULT CHOICE: multiple choice response

3. Would you be willing to participate in a 30-60-minute interview regarding your experience as a veteran/service member at (The Institution)?

    a. NAME

    b. EMAIL ADDRESS or PHONE NUMBER

Interview Protocol – Appendix B.

1. **Major Theme**- Demographics
   a. What year are you at (The Institution)
   b. What is your major?
   c. What is your age?
   d. What branch of service did you serve in?
   e. What component did you serve in?
2. **Major Theme** - Military Identity
   a. How would you describe yourself to a stranger that you just met?
   b. What would you consider to be some important influences on your life?
   c. Is military service an important part of who you are?
   d. Could you describe yourself as a student service member/veteran?
   e. Could you describe yourself as a student?
   f. Can you describe your experience of entering higher education, what was it like becoming a college student?
   g. Did this (item G) change how you reflect on any of your military experience?
3. **Major Theme** - Campus Climate
   a. Do you feel welcome/comfortable with who you are at (The Institution)?
   b. Do you feel that (The Institution) understands military service or veterans?
   c. Have you ever felt frustrated by something you have heard or witnessed on campus?
   d. In your experience, do traditional students or faculty and staff members understand student service members/veterans?
4. **Major Theme** - Institutional support systems
   a. How successful is (The Institution) at student service members/veterans?
   b. What veteran specific support does (The Institution) offer?
   c. What do you think is the most beneficial to you?
   d. Why is this (item c) useful to you? What is this support giving you?

Appendix C- Survey Instrument

Intro
Consent to Participate: Please read the following text detailing your voluntary
participation in this survey, and respond to the question at the bottom.

Title: Investigating Student Service member Support in Higher Education

Principal Investigators: Andrew McDonough (Email: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu); Dr.
Karyn E. Rabourn (Email: rabournk@gvsu.edu).

Purpose: This study seeks to better understand how institutional support systems affect
the transition of military affiliated individuals into higher education.

Reason for Invitation: You are invited to participate in a research study that we are
conducting about student veterans experience with transitioning into and persisting in
higher education. The research will be conducted at (The Institution) State University by
Andrew McDonough, a current graduate student in the College of Education.

How Participants Will Be Selected: To be interviewed, you must be age 18 or older,
enrolled at (The Institution) State University during the winter 2018 semester, and have
served or are serving in the armed forces of the United States.

Procedures: If you decide to participate in this research, I will ask you to participate in
an online survey. The survey is approximately 20 questions. All responses to the survey
will be anonymous and not linked in any way to your name. The survey will be
completed entirely online.

Risks: In any study, there are risks of a breach of confidentiality, which could reveal your
participation in the study and your conversations with me. We will do everything we can
to assure that what you say to me remains private and confidential. I will make sure that
my research notes, and any conversations or written work about the research, never
includes your name or other information that could let people identify you.

Potential Benefits to You: None.

Potential Benefits to Society: My aspiration is that this research will be used to inform
future administrative decisions as to how best support student veterans or other military

affiliated students; and to provide any stakeholders with evidence or insight into the effectiveness of current student veteran best practices.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may quit at any time without any penalty to you.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Your name will not be given to anyone other than the research team. All information collected from you or about you will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law. In very rare circumstances specially authorized university or government officials may be given access to our research records for purposes of protecting your rights and welfare.

Research Study Results: If you wish to learn about the results of this research study you may request that information by contacting Andrew McDonough (Email: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu).

Agreement to Participate: By participating in this survey, you are agreeing to the following: ·

The details of this research study have been explained to me, including what I am being asked to do and the anticipated risks and benefits; I have had an opportunity to have my questions answered; I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research as described on this form; I may ask more questions or quit participating at any time without penalty. I give my consent to participate in this research project.

Contact: If you have any questions about the study you may contact:

NAME: Andrew McDonough   PHONE: 616-502-4356

E-MAIL: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance & Integrity at (The Institution) State University, 1 Campus Dr. Allendale, MI Phone: 616-331-3197. Email: rci@gvsu.edu

○ Yes, I would like to participate in this study (1)

○ No, I do not wish to participate in this study (2)

Q2 How frequently do you utilize the Student Veteran Lounge?

○ Daily (1)

○ 2-3 times a week (2)

○ Once a week (3)

○ Once a month (4)

○ Never (5)

○ I do not know what the Student Veteran Lounge is. (6)

Q4 Do or did you ever use the PAVE peer adviser program at (The Institution)?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I do not know what the PAVE peer adviser program is. (3)

Q5 Was the PAVE peer adviser program beneficial to you as a new student?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q7 Do or did you find the Veterans Network to be beneficial to you as a new student?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I do not know what the Veterans Network is. (3)

Q21 Do or did you find the TRiO Veteran Upward Bound program to be beneficial to you as a new student?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ I do not know what the TRiO Veteran Upward Bound program is. (3)

Q8 What other services or spaces have you found helpful at (The Institution)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q9 It is important for me to connect with other veterans.

○ Strongly agree (1)

○ Somewhat agree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat disagree (4)

○ Strongly disagree (5)

Q10 (The Institution) offers good support for student veterans.

○ Strongly agree (1)

○ Somewhat agree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat disagree (4)

○ Strongly disagree (5)

Q11 Without the support systems in place at (The Institution), I would have left the institution.

○ Strongly agree (1)

○ Somewhat agree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Somewhat disagree (4)

○ Strongly disagree (5)

Q13 What year are you at (The Institution)

○ 1st year (1)

○ 2nd year (2)

○ 3rd year (3)

○ 4th year (4)

○ 5th year or greater (5)

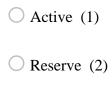Q14 What is your major or field of study?

_____

Q15 What is your age?

○ 18-20 (1)

○ 21-26 (2)

○ 26-35 (3)

○ 35 or older (4)

Q16 What branch of the military did you serve in?

○ Marine Corps (1)

○ Army (2)

○ Navy (3)

○ Air Force (4)

○ Coast Guard (5)

○ National Guard (6)

Q17 What component did you serve in?

○ Active (1)

○ Reserve (2)

Q18 How many years did you serve in the military?

○ 1-2 (1)

○ 3-4 (2)

○ 5-6 (3)

○ 7-8 (4)

○ 8-12 (5)

○ 12 or more years (6)

Q20 I would like to hear more about your (Institution Name) experience! If you are interested in sharing more about your student experience and further participation in this study, please submit your email address below, so that I can contact you.

_____

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix D- Coding Outline

Theme	Category	Codes
Camaraderie Seeking	Fighting Isolation Relationships Relatability	"Find each other" "Brotherhood" "Recognize other Vets" "Raised by the Army" "Unique perspective" "Same Person" Language Connect License Plate Conversation Similar Experience
Non-Traditional Status	Age Other obligations	Old man Different Separate-life Commuter Downtown Off-campus
Campus Culture	Under Cover Education Expectations	Comfort Zone Depression Not Understood Culture Shock Hide "SVA very silent" "More like adults" "Easy going" Facilitator

Appendix E- Recruitment Email

Dear (The Institution) University Student,

I am a current GVSU student that is working on completing a Master's Thesis on the student veteran experience at (The Institution). Specifically, my research aims to investigate the transition from the military into higher education. You are receiving this email due to your affiliation with the armed forces of the United States and current enrollment as a college student.

As a fellow student veteran, I am very interested in this topic, and am excited at the prospect of your voluntary participation. If you decide that you wish to participate in my study, please use the link below to access an online survey. The survey is intended to take 5-10 minutes, and all responses will be anonymous.

https://gvsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_7TH9uhAkDSso3Ih

In order to learn more about the individual experience of student veterans and student service members, I would also like to invite you to participate in a brief interview with me. This interview is meant to be very casual and last between 30-45 minutes. I have attached an informed consent form to this email regarding the interview for you to review. If you wish to participate in an interview, please reach out to me directly at mcdonoan@gvsu.edu. There will also be a prompt at the end of the survey, asking again if you would like to participate in an interview.

Thank you very much for your time. I am looking forward to hearing from you!

Respectfully,

Andrew McDonough

M.Ed. Candidate

mcdonoan@gvsu.edu

Grand Valley State University

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title: Investigating Student Service member Support in Higher Education

Principal Investigators: Dr. Karyn Rabourn (Email: rabournk@gvsu.edu); Andrew McDonough (Phone: 616-502-4356; Email: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu)

Purpose: This study seeks to better understand how institutional support systems affect the transition of military affiliated individuals into higher education.

Reason for Invitation: You are invited to participate in a research study that we are conducting about student veterans experience with transitioning into and persisting in higher education. The research will be conducted at (The Institution) State University by Andrew McDonough, a current graduate student in the College of Education.

How Participants Will Be Selected: To participate in this research, you must be age 18 or older, enrolled at (The Institution)State University during the winter 2018 semester, and have served or are serving in the armed forces of the United States.

Procedures: If you decide to participate in this research, I will ask you to participate in an online survey. The survey is approximately 20 questions. All responses to the survey will be anonymous and not linked in any way to your name. The survey will be completed entirely online.

Risks: In any study, there are risks of a breach of confidentiality, which could reveal your participation in the study and your conversations with me. We will do everything we can to assure that what you say to me remains private and confidential. I will make sure that my research notes, and any conversations or written work about the research, never includes your name or other information that could let people identify you.

Potential Benefits to You: None.

Potential Benefits to Society: My aspiration is that this research will be used to inform future administrative decisions as to how best support student veterans or other military affiliated students; and to provide any stakeholders with evidence or insight into the effectiveness of current student veteran best practices.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may quit at any time without any penalty to you.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Your name will not be given to anyone other than the research team. All information collected from you or about you will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law. In very rare circumstances specially authorized university or government officials may be given access to our research records for purposes of protecting your rights and welfare.

Research Study Results: If you wish to learn about the results of this research study you may request that information by contacting Andrew McDonough (Phone: 616-502-4356; Email: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu)

Agreement to Participate: By participating in this survey, you are agreeing to the following:

- The details of this research study have been explained to me, including what I am being asked to do and the anticipated risks and benefits;
- I have had an opportunity to have my questions answered;
- I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research as described on this form;
- I may ask more questions or quit participating at any time without penalty.
- I give my consent to participate in this research project.

Contact: If you have any questions about the study you may contact:

NAME: Andrew McDonough   PHONE: 616-502-4356

E-MAIL: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance & Integrity at (The Institution) State University, 1 Campus Dr. Allendale, MI Phone: 616-331-3197. Email: rci@gvsu.edu

Appendix G- Participant Consent Form, Interview

Grand Valley State University

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title: Investigating Student Service member Support in Higher Education

Principal Investigators: Dr. Karyn Rabourn (Email: rabournk@gvsu.edu); Andrew McDonough (Phone: 616-502-4356; Email: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu)

Purpose: This study seeks to better understand how institutional support systems affect the transition of military affiliated individuals into higher education.

Reason for Invitation: You are invited to participate in a research study that we are conducting about student veterans experience with transitioning into and persisting in higher education. The research will be conducted at (The Institution)State University by Andrew McDonough, a current graduate student in the College of Education.

How Participants Will Be Selected: To be interviewed, you must be age 18 or older, enrolled at (The Institution) State University during the winter 2018 semester, and have served or are serving in the armed forces of the United States.

Procedures: If you decide to participate in this research, I will ask you to participate in an interview that will last approximately 45 minutes. In the interview, I will ask you about your experiences transitioning into higher education from the military, the effects of any institutional support systems that you utilized, and what if anything has aided you in being a student veteran.

If you allow, I will audio record the interview so that I can write down exactly what was said in the conversation after the interview is over. If you are uncomfortable with the audio recording, I will take notes instead. When I write down what was said on the tapes, I will not include your name, so that what you say to me remains confidential. At any time during the interview, you can tell me that you would like to skip a question I have asked, or that you would like to stop. There will never be any negative consequence for you if you tell me you would like to stop the interview.

Risks: In any study, there are risks of a breach of confidentiality, which could reveal your participation in the study and your conversations with me. We will do everything we can to assure that what you say to me remains private and confidential. I will make sure that my research notes, and any conversations or written work about the research, never includes your name or other information that could let people identify you.

Potential Benefits to You: None.

Potential Benefits to Society: My aspiration is that this research will be used to inform future administrative decisions as to how best support student veterans or other military affiliated students; and to provide any stakeholders with evidence or insight into the effectiveness of current student veteran best practices.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may quit at any time without any penalty to you.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Your name will not be given to anyone other than the research team. All information collected from you or about you will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law. In very rare circumstances specially authorized university or government officials may be given access to our research records for purposes of protecting your rights and welfare.

Research Study Results: If you wish to learn about the results of this research study you may request that information by contacting Andrew McDonough (Phone: 616-502-4356; Email: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu)

Agreement to Participate: By participating in an interview, you are agreeing to the following:

- The details of this research study have been explained to me, including what I am being asked to do and the anticipated risks and benefits;
- I have had an opportunity to have my questions answered;
- I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research as described on this form;
- I may ask more questions or quit participating at any time without penalty.
- I give my consent to participate in this research project.

Contact: If you have any questions about the study you may contact:

NAME: Andrew McDonough   PHONE: 616-502-4356

E-MAIL: mcdonoan@gvsu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance & Integrity at Grand Valley State University, 1 Campus Dr. Allendale, MI Phone: 616-331-3197. Email: rci@gvsu.edu

Appendix H- IRB Determination Letter

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
www.gvsu.edu

DATE: January 10, 2019

TO: Karyn Rabourn
FROM: HRRC
STUDY TITLE: Investigating Student Service member Support in Higher
Education REFERENCE #:   19-193-H
SUBMISSION TYPE: IRB Initial Submission

ACTION: Exempt
Determination EFFECTIVE DATE:
                   January
10, 2019

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of materials for your planned scholarly activity. It has been determined that this project is human subjects research* according to current federal regulations and MEETS eligibility for exempt determination under Exempt Category 2, 45 CFR 46.101. You may now proceed with your research.

Exempt protocols do not require formal approval, renewal or closure by the Human Research Review Committee (HRRC). While not required, it is highly recommended that this research by closed when it is completed by submitting the *HRRC Closure Form.* Any revision to exempt research that alters the risk/benefit ratio or affects eligibility for exempt review must be submitted to the HRRC using the *Change in Approved Protocol* form before changes are implemented.

Any research-related problem or event resulting in a fatality or hospitalization requires immediate notification to the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity (rci@gvsu.edu or 616-331-3197) **and** the Research Integrity Officer Jeffrey Potteiger at 616-331-7207. (See *HRRC policy 1020, Unanticipated problems and adverse events.*)

Exempt research studies are eligible for audits and will remain eligible for these reviews until the research has been closed.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity at 616-331- 3197 or rci@gvsu.edu. Please include your study title and protocol number in all correspondence with our office.

Sincerely,
Office of Research Compliance and Integrity

*Research is a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (45 CFR 46.102 (d)).

Human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or identifiable private information (45 CFR 46.102 (f)).

References

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