

ACCESSING PATHWAYS AND PROMISING PRACTICES OF CALIFORNIA
VETERANS: USING THE GI BILL IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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A Dissertation

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with love to my family and friends. A special dedication for the memory of my late sister, Sahar Batarseh. I want to thank you for enriching our lives beyond measure. I miss you, Sahar (*Ya Sahora*) every day.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a military veteran who benefited from the GI Bill and someone who understands the ambiguity that comes with transition, I felt obligated to contribute to the field of veterans' education. Throughout my doctoral educational journey, there were several people who played a role in helping me throughout the process. I was fortunate to have Dr. Robert Pritchard as my dissertation advisor. I would like to express my deepest gratitude for his mentorship, guidance, caring, and, most importantly, his patience. He was encouraging and supportive. His expertise in education and research was invaluable in helping broaden my knowledge and ideas.

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I am also appreciative of the fellowship given to me from the Wayne K. Miyamoto Foundation that allowed me to complete this project. I promise to continue the important work Mr. Miyamoto began furthering public policy for individuals with disabilities. Finally, my completion of this project could not have been accomplished without the unending encouragement and support of my family. Many heartfelt thanks!

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Abstract

of

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In 1947, veterans constituted 49% of college admissions (Department of Veterans Affairs [VA], 2013). As a result of the GI Bill in 1956, the U.S. labor market benefited from an additional 450,000 engineers, 238,000 school teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 medical doctors, 22,000 dentists, and more than 1 million other college-trained professionals (Haydock, 1996). However, today too many military veterans from the enlisted ranks fall short of achieving their educational goals. While more veterans enroll in college, fewer veterans are graduating (VA, 2009). In recent years, college campuses across the nation have witnessed major enrollments of returning military veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. However, many veterans suffer from higher rates of unemployment, homelessness, and war-incurred disabilities.

There exists little qualitative research that explores the academic and social experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan student veterans, especially factors contributing to their success. The transition from military life to civilian life can be one of the most challenging encounters of any individual. This study investigated the academic and social experiences of student veterans following the transition from military service

through enrollment and graduation in California colleges utilizing the GI Bill benefit. Using a semi-structured interview protocol to identify perceptions and explore the experiences and insights of student veterans, the study demonstrated how this demographic was able to achieve academic success despite various barriers, such as the pressure of the first year of college, despair, physical disabilities, injuries, PTSD, perceptions of other students, and interaction with faculty. The study used a qualitative phenomenological design to determine the essence of the experiences of successful and unsuccessful veterans in higher education.

This study's primary objective was to inform student affairs administrators, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and other higher education constituent groups about the experiences of student veterans and promising best practices to address the unique needs of this student group. The purpose of this study was to create a base of knowledge concerning the overall academic and social experiences of student veterans who enlisted in the military pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher. Furthermore, this study explored new and existing sources of support for student veterans. Implications were provided through the lenses of transformational leadership, policy, and data-based decision-making practices. The study provides recommendations related to the different transitional phases military service members experience upon completion of their military service.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

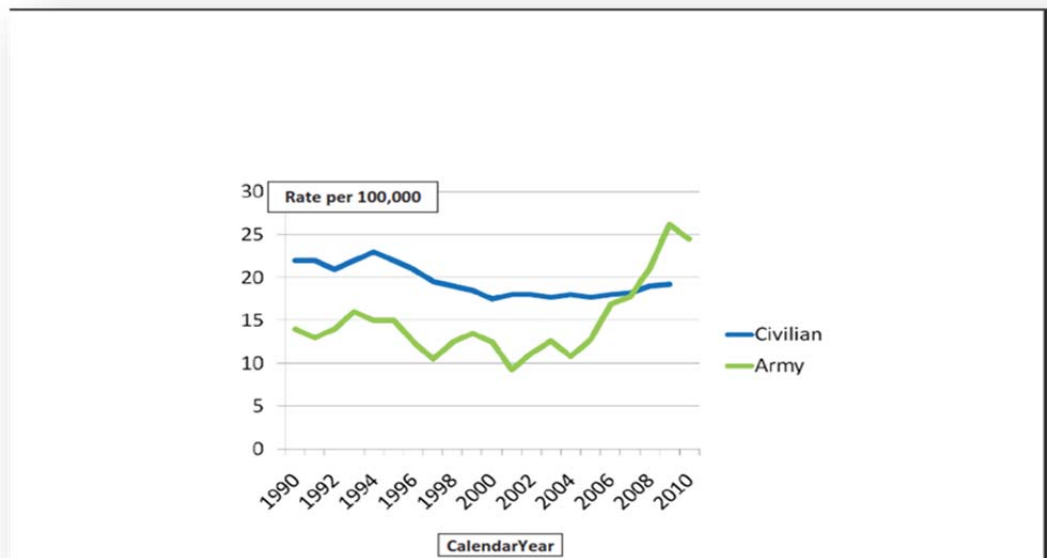
Too trapped in a war to be at peace, too damaged to be at war.

--Daniel Somers (as cited in Heawood, 2013, para. 1)

Daniel Somers, an Iraq War veteran, wrote a powerful note describing his pain, frustration, and final moments before surrendering to his crippling disabilities. Somers's note provides the reader with a clear understanding of what life is like dealing with crippling depression and war-related psychosis. Somers wrote in his note, "My body has become nothing but a cage, a source of pain and constant problems. The illness I have has caused me pain that not even the strongest medicines could dull, and there is no cure" (as cited in Heawood, 2013, para. 1). He went on to say, "All day, every day a screaming agony in every nerve ending in my body. It is nothing short of torture. My mind is a wasteland, filled with visions of incredible horror, unceasing depression, and crippling anxiety" (as cited in Heawood, 2013, para. 1). Somers was a sergeant in a military intelligence unit, with which he participated in approximately 400 combat missions sitting on top of a Humvee as a machine gunner (Heawood, 2013). He suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a brain injury, Gulf War syndrome, fibromyalgia, and a host of other medical problems in 2008, one year after the end of his second deployment (Heawood, 2013). However, Somers's parents felt the military failed to help their son, who they said was more than just a sum of his wartime injuries (Heawood, 2013). He had a sharp mind, constantly dreaming up new ideas. He had a strong

memory and could pick up new skills quickly. He was great with computers and for a while, pursued a career as a car mechanic. Those dreams ended on June 10, 2013 when Somers ended his own life.

Since World War II, the suicide rate among U.S. military members or veterans has been lower compared to that of the civilian population (Griffith, 2012). Moreover, during war conflicts, suicide rates in the military have generally declined. However, the trend changed in 2004, when the U.S. military engaged in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the suicide rate among military members and veterans was seen to be rising; and in 2008, it surpassed the civilian age-adjusted rate (see Figure 1).



Source: (Griffith, 2012, p. 489)

Figure 1. Army suicides.

In early 2013, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the findings of a study indicating 22 U.S. military veterans commit suicide every day (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [VA], 2013). In 2012, the Army alone experienced the highest suicide rate in its history when 325 soldiers took their own lives (VA, 2013). President Barack Obama responded to the alarming rate of PTSD and suicide rate among military veterans by allocating more funding to improve VA resources. In 2012, the president signed an order to improve veterans' and service members' access to mental health services (Heawood, 2013). This extra funding allowed the VA to hire at least 1,600 new mental health professionals (Heawood, 2013). According to the VA, resources are better now than they have ever been, and VA professionals' expertise in PTSD and other mental disorders exceeds that of the private sector (Heawood, 2013).

However, resources are still inadequate to resolve the sheer volume of demands currently placed on the VA's system. An improvement in PTSD expertise itself means little when the backlog of veterans seeking services numbers in the tens of thousands. According to the VA, the main contributing factor to the problem of access is the backlog of cases. Furthermore, the VA announced it is dedicated to eliminating the backlog problem by 2015 (VA, 2013). Yet, the general backlog was not Mr. Somers's only issue. He was advised to attend group therapy or "no therapy at all" (Heawood, 2013, para. 4). Lack of private care for sensitive issues further serves to alienate those veterans who even attempt to seek VA assistance. It is imperative Congressional funding for veterans' benefits be increased substantially in order to cope with the crisis. "The Veterans Health

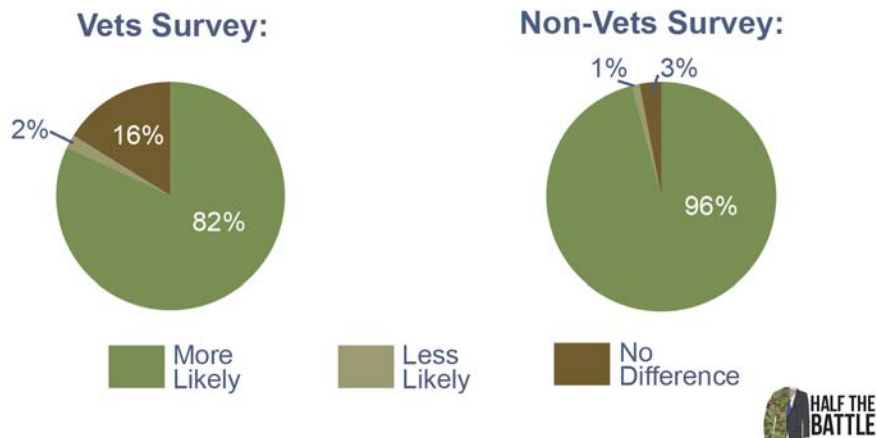
Administration is facing growing demand for services, while medical care and administrative costs skyrocket,” said Barry Jesinoski (as cited in Wilborn, 2013, para. 3), the executive director of the Disabled American Veterans Washington Headquarters. He also said, “The numbers of new veterans and disabled veterans entering the VA health care and benefits systems continue to increase with the end of war in Iraq and the pending U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan” (VA, 2013, p. 1). These are just a few of the problems veterans face on a daily basis.

For veterans and non-veterans alike, coping with psychological problems is a challenging task. According to a survey based on 1,432 interviews with active duty military personnel conducted by journalism students at American University, more than 80% of young U.S. military veterans surveyed between the ages of 18 and 29 stated that transitioning from military to civilian life was one of the most difficult things they had to deal with upon returning home from war (Sugden, 2013). As recognized by both veterans themselves and their civilian counterparts, young veterans experience difficulty finding work, adjusting to a classroom environment, and coping with the mental and emotional impact of war. In the survey, one veteran stated that the most difficult part about returning home was “fitting in and being understood. You feel like you’re still in the military mentally but have to try and train yourself to think as a civilian” (Sugden, 2013, para. 2). A student veteran stated that the most challenging part was “connecting with fellow students and dealing with young people” (Sugden, 2013, para. 3). When asked about PTSD, 90% of survey participants indicated they knew at least one person

with PTSD (Sugden, 2013). In addition, 82% of veterans surveyed said, “young veterans are more likely to have psychological or emotional problems than their civilian counterparts” (Sugden, 2013, para. 5).

SURVEY: MENTAL HEALTH

Are young veterans more or less likely to have psychological or emotional problems than non-veterans?



Source: (Sugden, 2013, para. 14)

Figure 2. A question from mental health survey.

Daniel Somers’s story is just one of many. Like him, many veterans struggle and many are facing challenges and uncertainties. There are those veterans who are crippled with other issues, such as homelessness, as a result of financial burden. According to one study, there are currently approximately 130,000 to 200,000 homeless veterans, which account for nearly 15% of the national homeless population (National Coalition for the

Homeless, 2009). This study investigated the problem California is facing with the rising number of homeless people, more specifically military homeless veterans. A recent study by the National Coalition for the Homeless (2008) indicated approximately 400,000 veterans nationwide experience homelessness each year. This number is expected to grow in the coming year with the return of hundreds of thousands of American war veterans who were deployed to Afghanistan and other areas. The VA found male veterans are 1.3 times more likely to become homeless than non-veteran males, female veterans are 3.6 times more likely to become homeless than non-veteran females, and veterans are twice as likely to be homeless on a long-term basis (VA, 2009). In addition to this, military personnel returning to the United States after serving in Iraq will experience homelessness both sooner and more frequently than previous veterans.

The researcher believes lack of educational support from educational institutions, especially those more focused on profit, is likely to contribute to veteran homelessness and to other problems for veterans. In 2012, President Obama addressed young service members, citing a recent report that for-profit colleges deceive and mislead military veterans and their families and the for-profit colleges target their GI Bill funding. “They don't care about you,” the president said. He added, “They care about your cash” (Bruce, 2012, para. 1). According to President Obama, “For-profit colleges receive the lion's share of GI Bill money” (Bruce, 2012, para. 1). In his remarks, President Obama called it “unethical and immoral” (para. 1). A (for-profit) college recruiter enrolled Marines with brain injuries who could not even remember what courses they had signed up for (Bruce,

2012). For-profit schools currently serve 10% of U.S. students but account for 25% of federal student aid—and nearly half of student loan defaults. While there are some quality programs at for-profit schools, too many for-profit colleges are marked by skyrocketing tuition and high dropout rates (VA, 2013).

For-profit colleges and universities pride themselves on offering open access to the traditionally underserved veteran students. They emphasize the need for free choice among military veterans. They point to the enrollment of Iraq War and Afghanistan War veterans as evidence of this commitment. They promise fast degrees, and many veterans expressed they were told they could finish their associate degree program in 20 months (Lux, 2013). However, the schools do not inform veterans of the staggering cost of their education. On average, a student veteran will have approximately \$30,000 in student loans at the time of completion of his or her undergraduate degree program at a for-profit college (Lux, 2013). Those student veterans who complete their undergraduate degrees at public universities have less than \$5,000 in student loans, and that is because their GI Bill benefits are designed to support their educational financial needs at public schools, which is one-fifth the cost than for-profit schools. A recent study revealed that for-profit companies deployed hundreds of administration recruits to attract veterans and their spouses to their institutions (Lux, 2013).

In 2006, the Department of Veteran Affairs disbursed \$66.6 million in educational benefits to 20 for-profit colleges. In 2010, the VA extended funds to the same 20 for-profit schools in the amount of \$521.2 million, which is an increase of 683% (VA, 2013).

Through manipulation, for-profit companies evade a key regulatory requirement that these schools (companies) must meet under current laws, which states that no more than 90% of their revenues come from federal financial aid. The money provided by the VA is not counted as federal financial aid (Lux, 2013). As a result, for-profit institutions expand the number of non-military students they accept. Because they can generate \$10 million in revenue from the VA funds, they can take in another \$90 million in student loans and grants, all without violating the 90/10 rule of the U.S. Department of Education. The government crafted this 90/10 rule, requiring for-profit schools to generate at least 10% of their revenue from sources other than Title IV student aid. This loophole the for-profit institutions found can be used toward veterans as a means of more recruitment and higher profits (Lux, 2013).

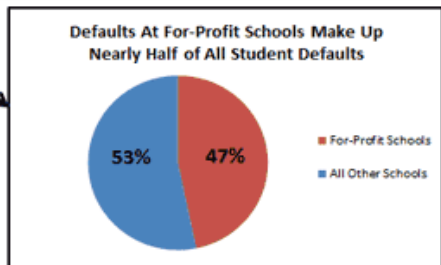
Only in recent years have the issues surrounding for-profit colleges begun to come to light (Lux, 2013). U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chairman Tom Harkin launched a two-year investigation into for-profit colleges, examining their methods and practices. According to the committee's extensive investigation, for-profit colleges charge up to four times more than comparable community colleges or state universities do for the same education (Harkin, 2012). The same report found an enormous amount of money goes from the U.S. Department of Defense and VA to for-profit colleges (Harkin, 2012). The worst part about the finding is graduation rates are significantly lower at for-profit schools than at comparable community colleges and state schools. Well over half of all students who start a degree

program at a for-profit university will not leave with a degree. Fifty-four percent of bachelor’s degree students and 63% of associates degree students do not graduate (Harkin, 2012).

In addition to the deficiency in degree completion, students are faced with financial burdens. For example, student veterans who attended a for-profit college accounted for 47% of all federal student loan defaults in 2008 and 2009. More than one in five students (22%) enrolled in a for-profit college default within three years of entering repayment on their student loans (Harkin, 2012). The financial burden, coupled with possible physical and mental disorders and the difficulty of readjusting to civilian life, is more likely to increase the probability of becoming homeless.

Students at For-Profit Schools are Defaulting at Higher Rates Than Other Sectors

Sector	Number in Default	Number in Repayment	3-Year Cohort Default Rate
Public Schools	196,032	1,778,645	11%
Private, Non-Profit Schools	63,047	835,492	7.5%
For-Profit Schools	229,315	1,006,190	22.7%
All Schools	489,040	3,629,109	13.4%



Source: U. S. Department of Education

Source: (Harkin, 2012, para. 7)

Figure 3. Students at for-profit schools are defaulting at higher rates than other sectors.

For-profit colleges rely on recruitment as one of the main components of their operation (Harkin, 2012). For every career counselor position, for-profit colleges typically hire 10 recruiters (Harkin, 2012). One report indicated that many for-profit colleges place their efforts into “recruiting new students to the effort put into helping current students” (Harkin, 2012, para. 3). Billions of dollars of student aid in the form of grants and loans go to for-profit colleges. To combat the issues with these schools, as mentioned previously, the government crafted the 90/10 rule, requiring for-profit schools to generate at least 10% of their revenue from sources other than Title IV student aid (Harkin, 2012). However, GI Bill funds are not included in Title IV funds and count toward the schools’ 10% outside source quota.

Student veterans have been marginalized in higher education. In general, there are few studies that directly address the needs of military veterans in higher education. More specifically, minimal qualitative research exists exploring the academic and social experiences of students who are veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and examining the factors contributing to their success (Kansas State University [KSU], 2012). The lack of literature, coupled with increasing enrollments of student veterans, provides the rationale for this study. This study’s primary objective is to inform student affairs administrators, the VA, and other higher education constituent groups about the experiences of student veterans and promising best practices to address the unique needs of this student group. A better understanding of the unique experience of student veterans will enable student affairs administrators and higher education professionals to

better understand and support this student population. A qualitative method is necessary because “we cannot observe behavior, feeling or how people interpret the world around them” (Merriam, 2009, p. 12). The researcher is interested in knowing how student veterans feel about higher education and why many veterans gravitate toward for-profit educational institutions despite their high cost. More specifically, no research exists exploring the academic and social experiences of student veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who used the Post-9/11 GI Bill and who were successful in achieving their educational goals.

Problem Statement

On June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill (VA, 2013). The main purpose of the GI Bill was to provide military veterans with educational and training benefits (VA, 2013). In 1947, veterans constituted 49% of college admissions (VA, 2013). As a result of the GI Bill, in 1956, the United States was academically rich, as the U.S. labor market consisted of an additional 450,000 engineers, 238,000 school teachers, 91,000 scientists, 67,000 medical doctors, 22,000 dentists, and more than a million other college-trained professionals (Haydock, 1996). However, today too many military veterans from the enlisted ranks fall short of achieving their educational goals. For example, while more veterans enroll in college, fewer veterans are graduating (VA, 2009). One out of three veterans is not aware of his or her entitlement to educational benefits (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics [NCVAS], 2011). Many

veterans suffer from higher rates of unemployment, homelessness, and war-incurred disabilities. According to the VA, the unemployment rate among Iraq War and Afghanistan War veterans is approximately 13%, which is approximately 4% higher than the national average (VA, 2013). According to the National Coalition for the Homeless journal, there are currently approximately 130,000 to 200,000 homeless veterans, which accounts for roughly 15% of the national homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). The study found that 23% of homeless populations are veterans (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). This study investigated the best practices among veterans who have utilized the GI Bill.

Research Questions

1. What were subjects' expectations of higher education before military service?
2. What resources and support systems contributed to veterans achieving their educational goals?
3. What were the primary factors that led to the subjects' success with transferring and academics, and what barriers did they have to overcome?

Method

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to determine the essence of the experiences of successful and unsuccessful veterans in higher education. Personal interviews and open-ended questions were used to explore the success factors and some of the barriers avoided. The purpose of this study was to create a base of knowledge concerning the overall academic and social experiences of student veterans who enlisted

in the military pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher. Furthermore, this study explored new and existing sources of support for student veterans. Qualitative research was conducted to construct a model for success for military veterans in higher education. The philosophy of phenomenology stems from the focus on the individual's experience, not in the sense of simplifying, categorizing, or reducing a phenomenon to an abstraction. Rather, the focus is more on the lived experience of individuals, which leads the researcher to interact directly with the participants to seek and find a phenomena that had been obscured from sight by the "theoretical patterns" that preceded them (Merriam, 2009, p. 24).

The purpose of this study was to expand understanding of the phenomenon of military veterans' transition and success. Eight student veterans addressed the research questions regarding how veterans experienced and described their military experiences as well as their on-college campus environments. The phenomenological methodology provided an understanding of the thoughts and feelings of the participants.

Significance of the Study

In recent years, college campuses across the nation have witnessed major enrollments of returning military veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. California leads the nation in the number of veterans; between 25,000 and 30,000 return home to the state each year (Agha, 2013). Almost all are using GI Bill education benefits, according to Lindsey Sin, deputy secretary for Women Veterans Affairs at the California Department of Veterans Affairs. According to a VA report, the number of veterans

returning to college and training for new careers is expected to increase dramatically within the next few years (Lux, 2013).

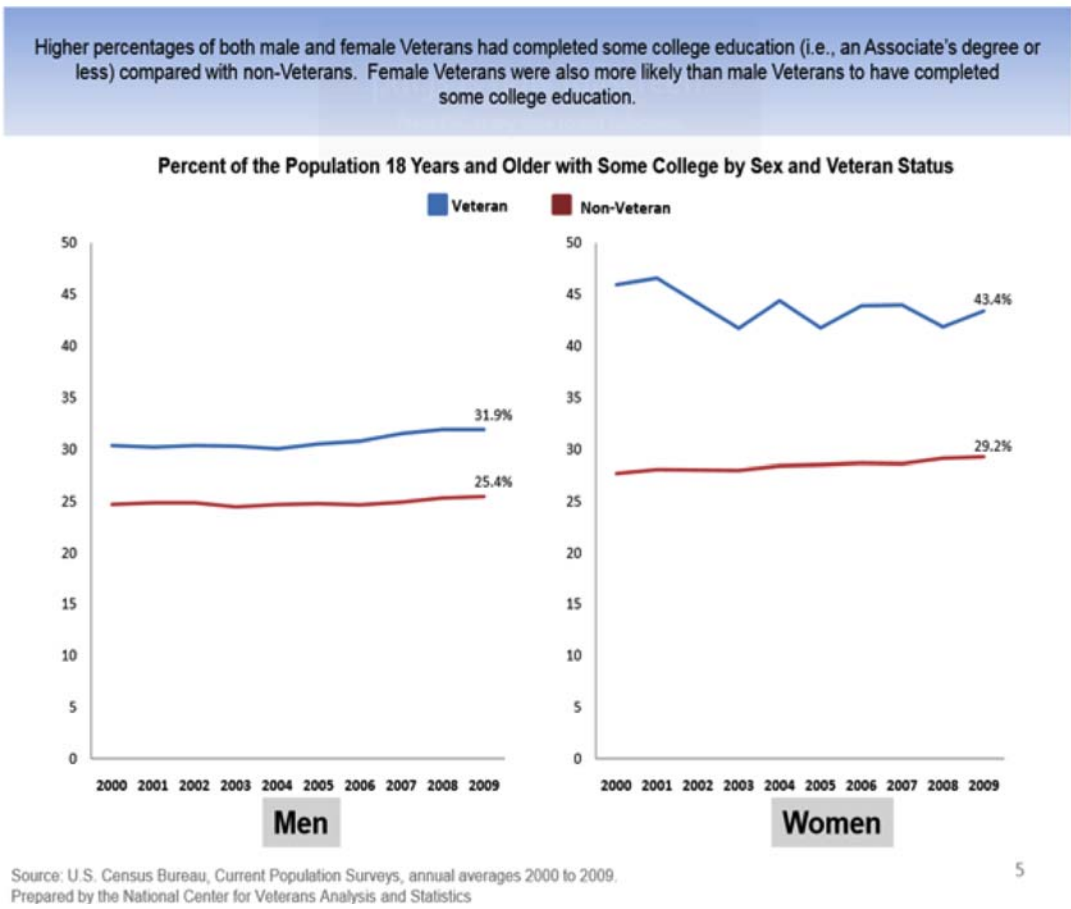
This study specifically explored the experiences of student veterans who had successfully obtained a minimum of a bachelor's degree by utilizing their military education benefits from the GI Bill. This is significant, as it assessed and evaluated best methods and practices this population of veterans has utilized to attain a bachelor's degree or higher. The purpose was to capture their successful experiences and learn about resources, influencers, and best practices to succeed in higher education. This research adds to the body of knowledge and potentially contributes to a future blueprint for the successful education of these students. Thus, the significance of the study is the research will give a voice to veterans who are college students as well as provide community colleges with insights that may enable them to improve their services for this growing population.

The study is timely and important to higher education, as the amount of research on the education of returning Iraq War and Afghanistan War veterans is limited. The current published information on these veterans and education is limited to newspaper and brief journal articles. No interpretive studies with thick descriptive data were found in the current literature on the education of Iraq War- and Afghanistan War-veteran students in higher education that go beyond describing the problems and challenges. By giving veterans a voice and agency, the researcher's goal is to point out best practices and resources for veterans in higher education settings. Finally, the study provides a

framework for examining veterans' concerns as they attempt to re-enter the civilian world via education. As more research is focused on the education of veterans and as colleges respond to veterans in unique and compelling ways, gateways for promising practices will open. Finally, the study is significant because of the following:

- Eight percent of the U.S. population is military veterans; however, military veterans constitute approximately 26% of the homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).
- Forty-five percent of the homeless in California is military veterans; that is approximately 19,000 homeless veterans (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).
- Eighty-nine percent of homeless veterans received “honorable discharge,” meaning the veterans can qualify for educational and housing allowance benefits (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).
- Every military member contributes \$1,200 toward his or her GI Bill benefit in the first year of enlistment (U.S. Department of Defense [DOD], 2013).
- The unemployment rate is approximately 30.2% among Iraq War and Afghanistan War veterans ages 18 to 24, compared to 15.1% for the same age group of non-veterans (National Council, 2012).
- One in three veterans receives mental health care (National Council, 2012).
- The U.S. is currently short of college graduates. By 2025, it will be 1 million short.

Figures 4 and 5 summarize the educational gap between service members and non-service members.

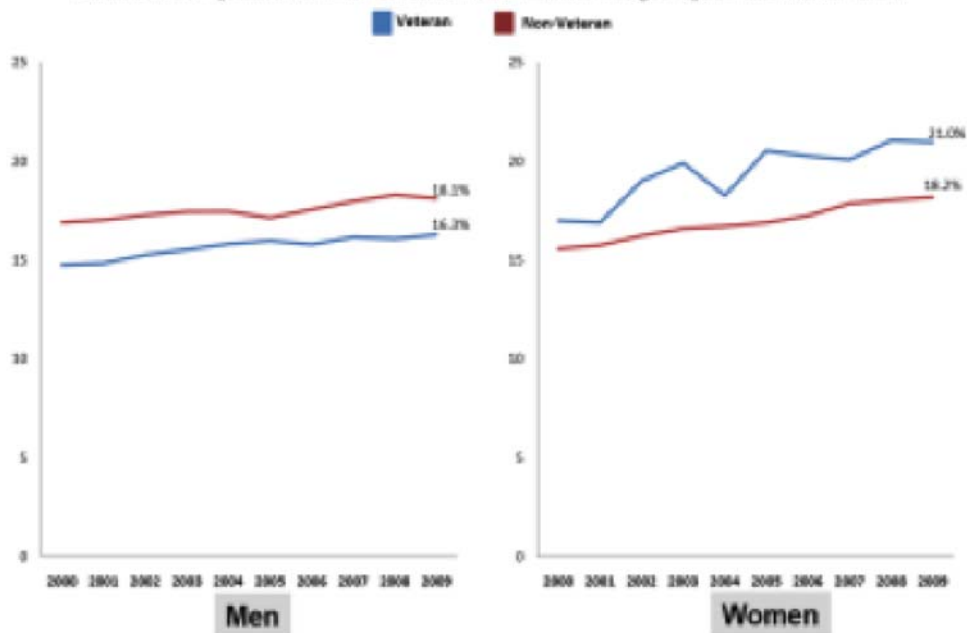


Source: VA (2009)

Figure 4. Comparison of college experience of veterans and non-veterans.

Male Veterans lagged behind male non-Veterans with a Bachelor's degree throughout the decade. In contrast, female Veterans were more likely to have a Bachelor's degree than their non-Veteran counterparts. Since 2002, a higher percentage of female Veterans than male Veterans had completed a Bachelor's degree.

Percent of the Population 18 Years and Older with a Bachelor's Degree by Sex and Veteran Status



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Surveys, annual averages 2000 to 2009.
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics.

6

Source: VA (2009)

Figure 5. Veterans and non-veterans with bachelor's degrees.

Population

The sample of the study included 8-10 student veterans in California. The student participants in this study had a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Participants fit the following criteria: (a) have a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, (b) met their educational goals by using the GI Bill benefits, and (c) enrolled in college after returning from their deployment, training, or self-induced military absence within the past 10 years. The purpose was to capture their successful

experiences and learn about resources, influences, and best practices to succeed in higher education. The sample population was reached through the Veteran Success Center at California State University, Sacramento. The rationales for choosing this population of student veterans were to assess and evaluate support services and formulate pathways of best practices that lead future student veterans to success.

Theoretical Frameworks

The transition from military life to civilian life can be one of the most challenging encounters of any individual (VA, 2013). In one study, researchers found “many veterans could not identify with society in general—as one succinctly stated, ‘Out in society, there is a disconnection’” (Brenner et al., 2011, p. 219). This type of transition typically calls for adjustments in a variety of areas, including personal, social, academic, and vocational.

Thus, this study utilized two theoretical frameworks to address both individual and institutional factors impacting the successful student veterans’ educational goals and achievements in higher education. The first theoretical framework for this study is based on Nancy K. Schlossberg’s (1984) theory of adult transitions. Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1982) asserted that transitions are a source of uncertainty and ambiguity for people. Transitions are defined as events or nonevents that result in change (Schlossberg, 1984, 1990; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Moreover, transitions may change a person’s perceptions, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Military veterans are

often faced with war zone deployments, which present major transitions to their livelihood; moreover, their transition back to civilian life adds to uncertainty and stress. These transitions can be categorized as uneasy and as major life transitions. Schlossberg's theory grew out of a need for a framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and lead them to the help they needed to cope with common and uncommon circumstances. Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1982) asserted transition can be negative or positive. Transitions are a source of uncertainty and ambiguity for people, and to understand the meaning of transition, the context, type, and impact of the transition must be analyzed.

The second framework in this study is based on Social Identity Theory. Originally formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and 1980s, Social Identity Theory introduced the concept of a social identity as a way to explain intergroup behavior. Social Identity Theory has a considerable impact on social psychology. The theory also makes references to the way people deal with social and organizational change (Tajfel, 1981). One of the fundamental propositions is veteran status provides a legitimate criterion by which to differentiate people in the workplace or even among people who are homeless. It states that military experiences continue to influence veterans after discharge from the armed forces (Tajfel, 1981). In addition, Social Identity Theory states an individual's self-definition is based on the person's membership in "numerous social groups and that this membership contributes, positively or negatively, to the image that he has of himself" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 9). Social identity is, therefore,

understood as the aspect of an individual's self-concept derived from "his knowledge of membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 54).

Limitations

Due to the small sample size, the findings of this study are not generalizable to and representative of all student veterans. All participants in this study were successful in obtaining a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Therefore, the barriers and limitations of veterans who are not in this category are not represented in this study. Additionally, the researcher was a military veteran who was deployed to Iraq, other hostile war zones in the Middle East, and elsewhere. As such, the researcher had an inherent bias stemming from his relationship with other veterans and as a college professor.

History of the GI Bill

The GI Bill has been considered one of the most important pieces of legislation ever produced by the federal government—one that impacted the United States socially, economically, and politically. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill of Rights, almost failed in Congress, as policymakers debated provisions of the controversial bill (VA, 2013). Many of them opposed the idea of granting veterans \$20 per week of unemployment benefit because they thought such action would make veterans less motivated and less likely to look for work. Some argued sending military veterans to colleges and universities was a privilege—then only reserved for the wealthy (VA, 2013). Despite the obstacles, policymakers all agreed that something had to be

done to help veterans assimilate into civilian life. U.S. Congress wanted to avoid repeating what was considered a mistake following World War I—upon veterans' discharge, they were issued an allowance of approximately \$60 and a train ticket home (VA, 2013).

In the 1930s during the Great Depression, military veterans had a difficult time making a living. Congress tried to intervene by passing the World War Adjusted Act of 1924, commonly known as the Bonus Act. The law provided a bonus based on the number of days the veteran served. But there was a catch: most veterans would not receive any funds for 20 years. However, when the nation faced the Great Depression, these veterans began to demand payment of their bonuses. The veterans felt shortchanged by the Hoover Administration, which did not grant them their promised benefits (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013). This led to more than 20,000 veterans and their families, most of whom were unemployed, to set up camps around government buildings and public parks in the Washington, DC area in the spring of 1932. An estimated 43,000 people camped in and around Washington, DC (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013). When the protestors refused to leave, President Herbert Hoover ordered the Army to drive the protesters out using force and by burning down the protestors' camp sites; President Hoover was greatly criticized by the public and the press for the severity of his response (Chiodo, 2011). The return of millions of veterans from World War II gave Congress a chance for redemption. Established in part to avoid a repeat of economic and social problems related to the discharge of large numbers of

World War II veterans, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (also known as the GI Bill) granted educational and other economic benefits to returning veterans (Chiodo, 2011). It was introduced in the House of Representatives on January 10, 1944, and in the Senate the following day. Both bodies approved their own versions of the bill (VA, 2013). The VA was responsible for implementing the law's key provisions: education and training; loan guaranty for homes, farms, or businesses; and unemployment pay (VA, 2013). Prior to World War II, for average Americans, homeownership and college education were unreachable dreams. Because of the GI Bill, however, millions who would have flooded the job market instead opted for education. In the peak year of 1947, veterans accounted for 49% of college admissions. By the time the original GI Bill ended on July 25, 1956, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II veterans had participated in an education or training program (VA, 2013). Additionally, early forms of the GI Bill provided home loan guaranties to the military veterans. From 1944 to 1952, approximately 2.4 million World War II veterans took advantage of the VA's home loans program (VA, 2013). Although many veterans took advantage of the education and home loan benefits, few embraced the GI Bill's most controversial unemployment benefit, and only less than 20% of the funds set aside for this purpose were utilized (VA, 2013).

An updated and improved GI Bill was introduced in 1984 by former Mississippi Congressman Gillespie V. "Sonny" Montgomery. The revamped GI Bill, to become known as the "Montgomery GI Bill," assured the legacy of the original GI Bill would live

on, as VA home loan guaranty and education programs continued to work for the generation of combat veterans. Finally, in 2008, the GI Bill was updated and improved upon once again. The new bill provides military veterans who served as of September 11, 2001, with increased benefits that cover more educational expenses. This Post-9/11 GI Bill provides veterans with a living allowance, money for books, and the ability to transfer unused educational benefits to their children and spouses (VA, 2013). Despite the increased benefits, according to the VA, veterans on average use only 17 months out of the 36 months of their Post-9/11 GI Bill educational benefits and only less than 6% had utilized the entire 36 months (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

The Table 1 provides a snapshot comparison of military veterans' education benefit programs.

Table 1

Military Veterans' Education Benefit Programs

	Post-9/11 GI Bill	MGIB-AD	MGIB-SR	REAP	VEAP	DEA
Minimum Length of Service	90 days active aggregate service (after 9/10/01) or 30 days continuous if discharged for disability	2 yr. continuous enlistment (minimum duty varies by service date, branch, etc.)	6 yr. commitment (after 6/30/85)	90 days active continuous service (after 9/10/01)	181 continuous days active service (between 12/31/76 and 7/1/85) ¹	Not applicable
Maximum # of Months of Benefits ²	36	36	36	36	36	45
How Payments Are Made	Tuition: Paid to school Housing stipend: Paid monthly to student Books & Supplies: Paid to student at the beginning of the term	Paid to student	Paid to student	Paid to student	Paid to student	Paid to student

Table 1 continued

	Post-9/11 GI Bill	MGIB-AD	MGIB-SR	REAP	VEAP	DEA
Duration of Benefits	Generally 15 years from last day of active duty	Generally 10 years from last day of active duty	Ends the day you leave Selected Reserve	Generally 10 years from the day you leave the Selected Reserve or the day you leave the IRR ⁴	10 yrs from last day of active duty	Spouse: 10 - 20 years ³ Child: Ages 18-26
Degree Training	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non College Degree Training	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
On-the-Job & Apprenticeship Training	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Flight Training	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Correspondence Courses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Licensing & Certification	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
National Testing Programs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Work-Study Program	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tutorial Assistance ⁵	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Source: VA (2013, para. 8)

Definition of Terms

Activation

Order to active duty (other than for training) in the federal service” (Rubicon, 2013, p. 6).

Active Duty

“Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States. This includes members of the Reserve Components serving on active duty or full-time training duty, but does not include full-time National Guard duty” (Rubicon, 2013, p. 6).

Conscription

“Compulsory enrollment of persons especially for military service” (conscription, 2013, para. 1).

Deployment

The relocation of forces and materiel to desired operational areas. Deployment encompasses all activities from origin or home station through destination, specifically including intra-continental United States, intertheater, and intratheater movement legs, staging, and holding areas. See also deployment order; deployment planning; prepare to deploy order. (Rubicon, 2013, p. 3)

GI Bill

Also known as the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, the GI Bill was passed in 1944 under Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s administration. The GI Bill provides veterans with educational benefits such as tuition assistance (Olson, 1973).

Mobilization

The process by which the Armed Forces or part of them are brought to a state of readiness for war or other national emergency. This includes activating all or part

of the Reserve Components as well as assembling and organizing personnel, supplies, and materiel. (Rubicon, 2013, p. 4)

Post 9/11 GI Bill

In June 2008, U.S. Congress passed a new and improved version of the GI Bill, designed to fill some of the gaps in education benefits that existed in the Montgomery GI Bill. The new bill marked the first and most comprehensive change to the original GI Bill since World War II (DOD, 2013).

Reserve

“Members of the Military Services who are not in active service but who are subject to call to active duty. Reserve Components of the Armed Forces”
(Rubicon, 2013, p. 5).

Transition Assistance Program

Established to meet the needs of separating service members during their period of transition into civilian life by offering job-search assistance and related services. Recently, the DOD and VA have led the efforts of the Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force interagency partners and the White House Economic and Domestic Policy Council staffs in redesigning the Desert Storm-era Transition Assistance Program to better prepare service members for these challenges as they leave the military and become veterans (DOD, 2013).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 presented an overview of the study, which included the background, purpose, research questions, and significance. The chapter also included the theoretical and conceptual frameworks utilized and definition of terms. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature that contextualizes the study of veterans' education, challenges, best practices, and support systems for veterans. Chapter 3 explains the methodology, methods, and data analysis procedures used to study veterans' education at the case institution. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study by answering the research questions and addressing the purpose of the study. Chapter 5 provides recommendations for best practices, a discussion of the findings using two theoretical and conceptual lenses, and conclusions drawn from the study. This chapter also provides insights into the study's implications for higher education regarding the education of veterans and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter discusses the history of legislation regarding veterans in higher education, current socioeconomic trends affecting veterans in pursuit of higher education, the effect of PTSD, and the role and effects of for-profit education. This review also includes some current best practices for addressing veterans' psychological and educational concerns as a unique student population. This qualitative research will add breadth and depth to the literature of this topic by providing relevant knowledge and application of best practices for veterans to graduate with a minimum of a bachelor's degree.

It is important to note the choice to either serve in the military as an enlisted person or become an officer involves different requirements, commitments, and responsibilities. According to the 2012 Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS), enlisted personnel are typically tasked with participating in combat operations: operating, maintaining, and repairing equipment; serving as technicians; and serving as front-line supervisors of junior personnel. Officers typically serve as leaders of ground troops in combat operations; serve as supervisors and managers of enlisted personnel; operate aircraft, ships, or armored vehicles; or serve as medical, legal, engineering, or other professionals (BLS, 2012). Clearly, serving in one service branch can be very different from serving in another service branch. Additionally, National Guard requirements are

different than Active Duty requirements altogether. As an enlisted member in general, there are no college degree requirements, while an officer is usually required to have at least a bachelor's degree prior to joining, unless he or she is attending a U.S. service academy. As such, officers only recently became entitled to utilize the Montgomery GI Bill and other veterans' educational benefits. The few enlistees with a bachelor's degree who chose not to become an officer often use their respective branch's student loan repayment program. The military requires at least 90% of enlisted recruits have a high school diploma (DOD, 2013).

The History of Service Member and Student Veteran and Higher Education

The relationship between the military and higher education began when college campuses became the main source of and place of development for citizen soldiers for military service (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). The connection between the military and higher education was strengthened with the passage of the 1862 Morrill Act, which established military training programs at land-grant institutions (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). One year before the start of World War I, Congress passed the 1916 National Defense Act, which allowed colleges and universities to assume the leading role in training soldiers through the ultimately short-lived Students' Army Training Corps (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). The National Defense Act created the "three components of the American military system still in use today: the active duty forces, the organized reserves, and the National Guard" (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009, p. 26). The National Defense Act also helped create the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, which standardized

the heretofore independently organized training programs at colleges and universities (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

When World War I ended, U.S. Congress enacted a bill that would pay military veterans for their service. The enacted bill was to provide veterans with cash bonuses that would be paid out starting in 1945 (Chiodo, 2011). However, when the nation faced the Great Depression, these veterans began to demand payment of their bonuses. They felt shortchanged by the Hoover Administration, which did not grant the veterans their promised benefits (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013). This led more than 20,000 veterans and with their families, most of whom were unemployed, to set up camps around government buildings and public parks around Washington, D.C. in the spring of 1932. An estimated 43,000 people camped in and around Washington, D.C. (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2013). When the protestors refused to disperse, President Hoover ordered the army to drive the protestors out by force and by burning the campsites, President Hoover was greatly criticized by the public and the press for the severity of his response (Chiodo, 2011). Established in part to avoid a repeat of economic and social problems related to the discharge of large numbers of World War II veterans, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (also known as the GI Bill) granted educational and other economic benefits to returning veterans (Chiodo, 2011).

With the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2008, which provides financial support for education and additional funds for housing to veterans, college campuses have experienced an influx of military veterans (Hamrick, Rumann, & Associates, 2013).

Many higher education institutions are becoming more supportive of student veterans, yet many have been generally underprepared to effectively meet this population's needs (Hamrick et al., 2013). From 2007–2008, there were approximately “657,000 undergraduate student veterans and there were about 215,000 active and reserve military service members, among 2007-2008 graduate students, there were 107,000 veterans and 38,000 active and reserve members” (Hamrick et al., 2013, p. 140). To put this in context, military students constitute 4% of the total student population (Hamrick et al., 2013). Institutions of higher education across the United States are reporting a significant increase in student veterans and service members utilizing military education benefits to fund their education and living expenses. For example, Arizona State University reported the student veteran population rose from “874 students in 2008, to 1,269 students in 2009 and 1,767 students in 2010” (Hamrick et al., 2013, p. 141).

Veterans' Post-deployment Homelessness, Employment, and Education

The casualty rate of U.S. military members in Iraq hit new records when civil war raged in 2005. The Army, the US' largest armed force branch, faced difficulties recruiting soldiers, and it was short of its annual goal by 7,000 soldiers. As a result, the Army had to lower the standards for and quality of recruits while also raise the age ceiling for enlistment from 38 to 42 years (Dao, 2011). Only the collapse of the housing and stock markets in 2008 helped revive a new wave of enlistments.

From 2001 to 2011, more than 2 million service members were sent in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq or Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. More

than 6,000 troops were killed, and approximately 44,000 troops were wounded in action (Dao, 2011). Many of the returning soldiers were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress, major depression, or traumatic brain injury. In addition, more than 1,000 were missing a limb (Dao, 2011). What made matters worse was how many veterans felt neglected by the nation. After two wars in which they were asked to sacrifice so much for their country, many military veterans are now returning home to wait years to receive benefits they were promised. Almost 1 million Iraq War and Afghanistan War veterans were waiting for disability claims they have submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs (Dao, 2011). As stated previously, the new GI Bill offers the best educational benefits for military veterans in the history of the United States.

U.S. military veterans of World War II, the Korean War, and combat throughout the 1960s fulfilled more college degrees than their counterpart civilians (Cohen, Warner, & Segal, 1995). The educational achievement and attainment of military veterans reversed subsequently in 1973 when the United States ended a long period of involuntary military and created the all-volunteer force era at the end of the Vietnam War; ever since, military veterans have averaged less education than non-veterans (Cohen et al., 1995). One consistent factor has been the heightened educational opportunity in the general population with increases in available scholarships, fellowships, and loans. This means that veterans must receive more education than in the past to attain parity with their non-veteran peers (Cohen et al., 1995).

The Department of Sociology at Western Washington, Bellingham conducted a quantitative research study using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, and after examining the long-term result of military service for service members' income, the department found "strong variations in the effect of military service according to race and education" (Teachman & Tedrow, 2007, p. 1447). The study also discovered that while on active duty, military members from disadvantaged backgrounds earn more than their civilian counterparts; however, upon their departure from active duty, the income premium associated with military service they received drops and even for White veterans with at least a high school degree, an income decrease occurs (Teachman & Tedrow, 2007).

Post-deployment Veterans—Homelessness and Employment

Upon their return home, military veterans face numerous problems. For example, unemployment and homelessness could be the fate of many veterans if they do not receive the proper attention and support. There are currently between 130,000 and 200,000 veterans in the United States who are homeless on any given day. The veteran population represents one fourth and one-fifth of all homeless people, and triple that number of veterans are struggling with excessive rental costs and are therefore at higher risk of becoming homeless (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts are more likely to have PTSD or traumatic brain injury and are more likely to become homeless (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

A large number of Americans are homeless or have experienced homelessness in the past (Tsai, Mares, & Rosenheck, 2012). Research has continued to show that individuals in the homeless population are more likely to be male and less educated as well as have psychiatric and substance abuse disorders (Tsai et al. 2012). Socio-demographic and economic and health characteristics were other key factors contributing to individuals' higher risk for homelessness (Tsai et al., 2012). Although there are many risk factors associated with becoming homeless, extreme poverty was cited as an underlying cause (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). The National Coalition for the Homeless stated that poverty and homelessness are inextricably linked, and those affected by poverty are frequently unable to pay for housing.

Military veterans have been found to be at increased risk for homelessness compared to non-veterans (Tsai et al., 2012). A study conducted by Department of Veterans Affairs of New England's Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center compared 162 chronically homeless veterans to 388 non-veterans enrolled in a national-supported housing initiative over a one-year period (Tsai et al., 2012). Results showed that veterans tended to be older, more educated, and more likely to suffer from mental disorders. They were more likely to be in the Vietnam War era age group, were more likely to be male, and were more likely to have completed high school than other chronically homeless adults (Tsai et al., 2012). These results are contrary to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2009) data, which indicated veterans tended to be older and more educated. Eighty-five percent of military veterans completed high school or passed

the General Education Development requirements compared to 56% of non-veterans. Almost 70% of homeless veterans served in the military for more than three years. Thirty-three percent of them were stationed in a war zone and 89% of them received honorable discharge. Finally, 76% experienced alcohol, drug, or mental health problems (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Therefore, given the military veterans circumstance of serving in war zones and being more prone to mental disorders and substance abuse, ample attention should be allocated to this population.

Despite the significant attention veterans' unemployment has received during the slump of the U.S. economy over the past decade and even with the implementation of the Dead Letter Veterans Preference Act—which provides veterans' employment preference with government agencies—veterans still have difficulties finding jobs (Etler, 2013). As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan come to an end and the drawdown of service members from all branches of the U.S. military seems imminent, many observers worry veteran unemployment will increase (Etler, 2013). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the reported unemployment rate for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans has fluctuated: 8.9% in July 2012, 10.9% in August 2012, and 9.7% in September 2012. These statistics are well above the general population's unemployment rate, which is close to 8% (Etler, 2013). Politicians within the federal and local governments claim to support actions that will reduce veteran unemployment and assert veterans bring invaluable skills to the civilian workforce. However, the federal

government itself did not take any meaningful measures to maximize and hire veterans (Etler, 2013).

Veterans return home from active duty to transition into civilian life and are promised job-training programs that are presumably focused on providing for their unique needs. However, jobs veterans are entering do not provide enough support to cover housing costs, particularly in California (Williams, 2012). It is important to note the unemployment rate among post-9/11 veterans ages 18 to 24 is at 30.2%, thus, housing affordability will obviously pose more challenges for this group of veterans.

It is also important to note that many in this group have educational and housing benefits to which they are entitled and that are available to them by the Department of Veterans Affairs (Williams, 2012). Furthermore, it is important to point out that many veterans do not know they are entitled to educational and vocational rehabilitation benefits and services. The Department of Veterans Affairs, with the help of the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, conducted a national survey asking military veterans about “Enrollment and Usage of VA Benefits and Services.” The study found that only 36.9% of veterans ever used Department of Veterans Affairs education and training. In addition, it found that only 14.8% of veterans ever used Department of Veterans Affairs vocational rehabilitation (NCVAS, 2011). When surveyed about the main reason for not applying or using Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and services, 36.6% of veterans expressed that they were not aware of educational benefits, and 32.3% of veterans stated they did not know how to apply for vocational rehabilitation

benefits (NCVAS, 2011). When asked about the main reason for not receiving health care help and benefits, 43.3% of veterans indicated they did not know they had health benefits (NCVAS, 2011).

One of the main problems veterans face upon their discharge from active duty is the transferring of job skills. For military veterans, acquiring employment for jobs they received extensive training for while on active duty is difficult. For example, veterans who worked as truck drivers in the military would need more training to get a commercial driver's license when they return home (Collins, 2013). Even a service member's spouse working as a nurse would need to be recertified to practice if they moved to a base in another state (Collins, 2013). Veterans have several job skills they can carry over into civilian life; but they see hurdles and face retraining and recertification burdens.

Military veterans are categorized as perfect employees for many companies because they are disciplined, resilient, loyal, and have highly valued teamwork skills. Indeed, many companies, such as Amazon, CSX, Wal-Mart, PepsiCo, and General Electric, have hired young officers (Harrell & Berglass, 2012). However, members of the officer class of the military already have a minimum of a bachelor's degree. The problem lies mainly in the enlisted class of the military—those who are typically without formal education. Many companies have pointed to negative attitudes that can decrease the likelihood of hiring military veterans. According to a study conducted by the Center for a New American Security, fear of PTSD is a reason companies have for not hiring veterans

(Harrell & Berglass, 2012). This problem is evident in a similar report by the Center for a New American Security, which found annual unemployment rates for post-9/11 veterans between the ages of 22 and 24 (enlisted class) was double that for non-veterans of the same age (McGregor, 2012).

Since 9/11, U.S. Congress has not passed significant legislation on the federal government's hiring practices (Etler, 2013). For example, the Office of Personnel Management, considered the human resources department of the federal government, has designed rules for the government's hiring practices that effectively strip veterans of preference when they apply to a broad range of positions in the federal government (Etler, 2013). That veterans have a harder time finding jobs than their non-veteran counterparts is evident in some respects. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans have the highest unemployment. The numbers are even worse for veterans between 18 and 24 years of age, who have a 30.1% unemployment rate compared to 15% for non-veterans of the same age group, as Figure 4 outlines.

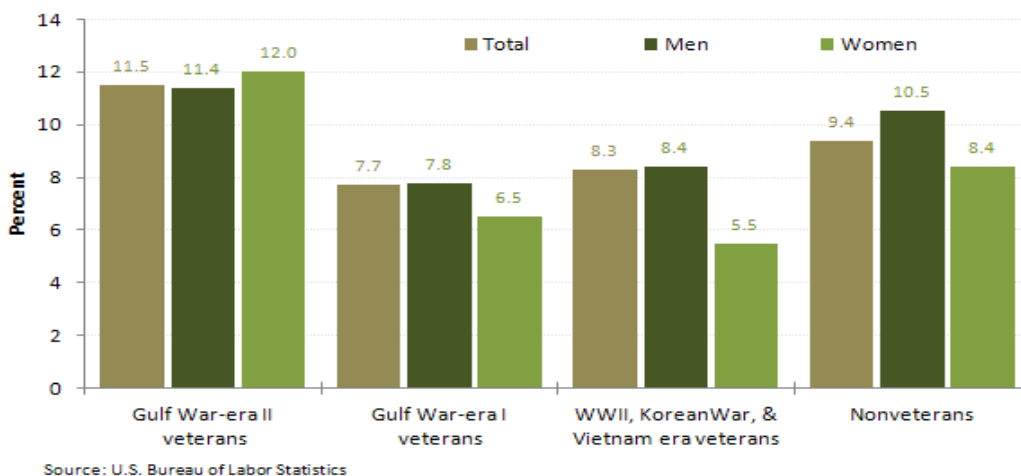


Figure 6. Unemployment rate of persons 18 years and over, by veteran status, sex, and period of service, 2010.

Deployment Related Mental Disorders

Persons with mental illness are over-represented among the veteran homeless population relative to the general population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). The number of combat deployments among Operation Enduring Freedom-era veterans in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom-era veterans continues to rise. One study found that approximately 37% of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom service members had been deployed at least twice. As the number of deployments increases, possible exposure to combat trauma increases, which leads to the increased likelihood of negative psychological outcomes. Multiple deployments increase the likelihood of developing PTSD, and one study showed those with prior deployments

had more PTSD, depressive, and somatic symptoms (Landes, Garovoy, & Burkman, 2013).

Post-traumatic growth is a positive psychological response to trauma, manifesting as improvements in critical life areas such as relationships, personality, self-efficacy, and spirituality. PTSD is an anxiety disorder triggered by trauma. In many studies post-traumatic growth and PTSD are found to stem from similar traumatic events and to be positively correlated. As many of today's veterans are returning from deployment with PTSD, it is important that rehabilitation counselors have a strong understanding of how to effectively treat PTSD as well as facilitate post-traumatic growth in veterans to ensure lasting positive effect. After thorough analysis of PTSD and post-traumatic growth literature, several treatments were determined to be effective for the treatment of PTSD and development of post-traumatic growth in veterans of war (Moran, Schmidt, & Burker, 2013). While combat exposure predicts PTSD trauma, the severity and duration heavily depends on coping skills used. Studies confirmed post-traumatic growth exists among veterans, and there are clear factors associated with veterans having post-traumatic growth. One study indicated that 72% of 272 Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans developed post-traumatic growth after their deployment (Moran et al., 2013). Moreover, the study found that younger veterans are more likely to experience post-traumatic growth than older veterans (Moran et al., 2013).

For-profit Education and the Veteran


As the demand increases for public colleges and universities to meet and exceed their enrollment capacities, for-profit institutions are becoming an attractive option for many students, service members, and student veterans (Hamrick et al., 2013). For-profit institutions often provide flexible scheduling with year-round enrollment, online options, small class sizes, and convenient locations. These characteristics are attracting a large and growing population of students entering the education market—particularly working adults, part-time students, and students with children. A staff report issued by Senator Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, indicated for-profit colleges were the biggest beneficiaries of the 2008 update to the GI Bill (Field, 2010). For-profit colleges received \$640 million, or 36% of the \$1.75 billion in total benefits paid by the Veterans Affairs Department, even though those institutions enroll fewer than 10% of all students in the United States (Associated Press, 2012). The report pointed to the need for stricter federal oversight of for-profit colleges. The report also criticized for-profit colleges for their high costs, aggressive recruiting practices, and heavy reliance on taxpayer funds (Associated Press, 2012). The senator stated, “I want to make sure these veterans are getting the education we promised them and that taxpayers know that their money is adequately safeguarded (AP, 2012, p. 1)” (Field, 2010, para. 4). According to the report, one of the main reasons for-profit colleges target veterans is because their educational benefits can count as a nonfederal source of money, allowing the colleges to remain

eligible for other sources of student aid (Associated Press, 2012). In the past few years, veteran and military tuition benefits that went to 20 of the largest for-profit colleges grew approximately 700%, from \$66.6 million in 2006 to a projected \$521.2 million in 2010 (Associated Press, 2012). For-profit colleges use the 90/10 formula as a loophole. As Figure 7 shows, the formula states that for-profit colleges cannot receive more than 90% of their revenue related to education and institutional charges from Title IV student financial aid programs—which include Pell Grants, federal student loans, and work-study—if it is used to pay for tuition. Colleges unable to attain at least 10% of their income from other sources could lose access to the federal student aid programs (Miller, 2010).

Background: 90/10 Calculation

No More than 90 Percent of a For-Profit School's Total Revenues May Be Obtained from Federal Student Aid

- Only revenues received for a school's educational and institutional charges, such as tuition, fees, and certain required course materials, are included in its 90/10 calculation.*
 - Other revenues, such as those from vending machines and parking lots, are excluded from the calculation.**
- The 90/10 rate must be calculated using a cash basis of accounting.***



No more than 90 percent	At least 10 percent
<p>Only revenues from federal student aid programs authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act are included, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pell Grants, • Stafford Loans, and • Federal Work Study funds. 	<p>Revenues counted include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cash payments from students, • private student loans (including payments for loans made by schools), • state educational grants, • federal education assistance payments for military personnel and veterans, and • federal and state job training grants.

*Federal student aid revenues in excess of a school's educational and institutional charges must be excluded from a school's calculation.
 **For more information, see 20 U.S.C. § 1094(d) and 34 C.F.R. § 668.28.
 ***On a cash basis of accounting, revenues are recorded when they are received regardless of when they are earned. Outside of the 90/10 calculation, schools generally track revenues on an accrual basis of accounting, where revenues are recorded when they are earned.

Source: (Miller, 2010)

Figure 7. Percentage of revenue for-profits can receive from federal student aid.

For-profit colleges put revenues above education and charge students high tuition and loan rates that could leave them in debt for years, a Senate Democratic report stated. While students are aggressively recruited, they drop out in high numbers without the degree or certificate initially sought, according to the report (Associated Press, 2012). A staff report issued by Senator Harkin found that veterans were among those vulnerable to the tactics by for-profit schools, since these colleges receive the largest share of military educational benefit programs. Eighty percent of GI Bill funds since the September 11, 2001 attacks went to for-profit colleges (Associated Press, 2012). The report also found that reaching an enrollment quota was deemed the highest priority for recruiters. Publicly traded companies operating these schools had an average profit margin of 19.7%.

Despite the increasing numbers of student veterans utilizing the Post-9/11 GI Bill, recent data from the Department of Veterans Affairs indicated that only a small number of veterans use all their federal education benefits. Furthermore, information about the success rate of the GI Bill is limited because the federal government does not track retention rates or completion rates for veterans in higher education (O'Herrin, 2011). As previously mentioned, the transition to civilian life and the college environment in particular may present challenges to those veterans with physical and psychological impairments. Therefore, institutions should consider the unique needs of the military veterans as they support their enrollment, transfer, and degree completion.

What prompts services members and veterans to enroll in for-profit institutions?
A study found military veterans are more likely to choose their colleges based on

location, programs offered, and cost (Hamrick et al., 2013). For-profit colleges and universities, unlike their public counterparts, are governed by corporations. During the past decade, enrollment at for-profit institutions increased 225% (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2013). For veterans and service members, the rate of enrollment is even higher. For example, in 2009 and 2010, the University of Phoenix accepted more than 10,000 veterans, the highest rate of enrollment of any educational institution in the United States (Hamrick et al., 2013). One of the main motivating factors for service members and veterans in enrolling in for-profit colleges and universities is the convenience of online learning, which is offered by the University of Phoenix and other for-profit institutions. Despite for-profit colleges' high cost, they tend to attract more service members and veterans mainly because veterans have limited time to use their educational benefits, namely from the GI Bill, and would prefer to obtain their degrees before the benefits expire. This time limit on the benefits could result in more added pressure on the service members and veterans and may contribute to the strong desire to attend for-profit institutions. Nonetheless, the for-profit environment provides many web-based courses, which appeal to service members and student veterans. The web-based environment is a possible sanctuary from other students who might ask the service members and veterans sensitive and inappropriate questions, such as, "Did you kill anyone when you were deployed?" (Hamrick et al., 2013, p. 78). Many service members and veterans cite their struggle with dealing and relating to non-veterans and avoid interaction as a result (Hamrick et al., 2013). In terms of self-identity,

DiRamio and colleagues asserted service members and veterans expressed their desire to assimilate to civilian life and particularly college life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Similarly, Livingston (2009) noted service members and veterans selectively disclosed their affiliation to the military to other students and faculty because they wanted to assimilate to college life (Hamrick et al., 2013). This is important evidence that military service members and veterans have a profound desire to identify themselves as college students and they consider this as an important step in their transition process (Hamrick et al., 2013).

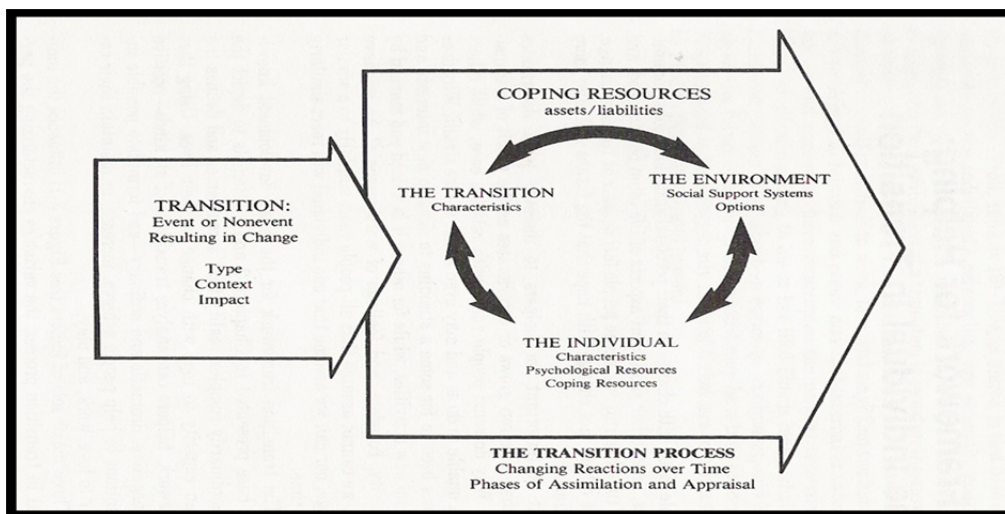
For the military service member and student veteran, cultural differences between the military and higher education can be a difficult process in terms of self-identity. The military culture can be identified as more structured and places emphasis on the team concept, whereas the academic culture is considered “less structured and more individualized, may take a little longer, and can be frustrating” (Student Veterans of America, 2013, para. 2). Moreover, military service members who go back and forth between college and deployment can face greater difficulty in their transition trying to adjust between the less structured academic culture and the more structured and more rigid military culture.

According to Nancy Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory, the context of any type of transition is also important to consider. Schlossberg noted, “The relationship of the individual to the event or nonevent resulting in change is central to our understanding of transitions” (p. 47). The context takes into account the setting of the transition and

whether the transition was personal, interpersonal, or communal. Oftentimes, elements of transition fit into all three categories. Schlossberg pointed out that the degree to which a transition alters an individual's daily life, and not the event itself, is what affects the individual the most. Schlossberg further noted the altered state of a person's life affects the amount of coping resources he or she needs to deal with the transition. As the transition alters one's relationships, routines, and roles, so too does the impact of the transition. This principle underscores the fact that transitions are processes, and the effects of transitions are made evident over a longer period of time than previously thought. In short, a transition is not a quick, simple process.

Schlossberg (2011) highlighted four types of transitions in her theory: anticipated, unanticipated, chronic, and nonevent. Anticipated transitions are those for which individuals can prepare and would generally include events such as going to college, enlisting in the military, and getting married. Unanticipated transitions are those forced upon an individual and typically involve crises. These could be represented by expulsion from an institution; being deployed on short notice as a member of a military service branch's reserve force, reserve, or national guard; or going through a divorce. Also, "hassles" chronic in nature "can erode self-confidence and lead to an inability to initiate necessary changes" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 46). Concerns with health, weight, ongoing employment issues, and tenuous spousal relationships are just some examples of persistent "hassles." Finally, transitions may take the form of a nonevent or an anticipated transition that never occurs.

In addition to transitions themselves, Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) and Schlossberg et al. (1989) noted there are four primary categories of resources an individual may have in coping with a transition. In a broad sense, they are categorized as situational, self, support, and strategy resources. These categories are commonly known as the four S's (Hamrick et al., 2013). The availability of resources in each of these four categories often predicts how an individual copes with transitions (Schlossberg, 1984). Situational resources are found in an individual's survey of the entire context of the transition. The experience, attitude, and awareness a person possesses comprise self-resources. Support resources include financial and emotional support sources and interpersonal networks. Finally, individuals must employ a number of methods of coping with the transition, which constitutes the strategies component. Schlossberg (2011) further expounded on the transition processes related to each segment of the above model: "moving in" constitutes an individual becoming increasingly familiar with norms and expectations, "moving through" involves an individual relinquishing past roles, "moving out" is a tenuous period when the individual may struggle to emotionally conceptualize the transition, and "moving in" is the process of entering a new life phase. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) recently used Schlossberg's model of adult transitions in a study on student combat veterans. The team of researchers developed a grounded theory utilizing the model of moving in, moving through, moving out, and moving in as developed by Schlossberg et al. (1989), which derived from Schlossberg's original theory, as Figure 8 outlines how individuals move through transition phases.



Source: (Scholssberg, 2011)

Figure 8. Coping resources.

As indicated above, changes for an individual and transitioning from one environment to another can trigger a reaction in him or her. There are factors associated with a transitioning military veteran’s journey to the civilian world and college life. These factors, according to Tinto (2011), are manifested in what he calls “attributes,” which are specific characteristics of the student at the time of enrollment in college. Tinto asserted that these attributes—such as family background, socioeconomic status, level of education, and skills—all affect the student before enrolling in college and provides an indication to the level of commitment the student has for reaching his or her goals. One of the top concerns for veterans at the time of enrollment in colleges is the financial burden as a main obstacle in their transition (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Research findings note military veterans are more likely to face financial burdens than non-veteran students due to their transition and the nature of their transition (DiRamio &

Jarvis, 2011). A part of their transition from the military into civilian life is that they no longer have a source of income to sustain basic housing and living. Even those who receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are more likely to need to wait for months before seeing their benefits. Moreover, while the latest GI Bill provides a generous amount of funding compared to previous versions, it still may not cover many other expenses associated with the needs of full-time students, particularly those who have spouses and dependents (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). One of the biggest differences between for-profit colleges and public colleges is their tuition. In 2010–2011, the average annual tuition at a for-profit college was \$13,935 compared to \$2,713 at a public, in-state, two-year college and \$7,605 at a public, in-state, four-year college (Rand, 2013). In addition to the financial needs, military veterans face another problem in the loss of the comprehensive and social support from their military comrades and units they abundantly benefited from while they served. Therefore, there is urgency to find and share best practices across college campuses with the helpful information that could promote the academic achievement of student veterans.

Best Practices

The GI Bill has been one of the major contributing factors for many people who enlist in the military. According to the U.S. Department of Defense's Youth Attitude Tracking Survey, 32% of males and 37% of females between 16 and 24 years of age indicated educational benefits were the top reason they joined the military (Wilson, 2000). According to the survey, a new trend is underway with an increase in the number

of Blacks and Latinos enlisting in the military since the 1990s (Wilson, 2000). This is significant because these minorities are known to struggle and have been trailing in achievement at the collegiate level. Thus, it is imperative for leaders in higher education to acknowledge it is likely many of the student veterans “who attend college after military service may have come from families with lower socioeconomic status and could be first-generation students” (Association for the Study of Higher Education [ASHE], 2011, p. 40).

A study conducted by the American Council on Education shows early results of the implementation of the U.S. Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act. It noted that 24% of veterans believe the Post-9/11 GI Bill contributed to their decision to enroll in higher education, and 38% of the 24% experienced difficulty understanding the benefit options of the act. In addition, the study found that 57% of veterans tried to shift military training to academic credits (American Council on Education [ACE], 2011).

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement, military veterans attending higher education institutions tend to spend more time at work and care for their dependents than their non-veteran counterparts, however, they spend the same amount of time studying (Moltz, 2010). Furthermore, veterans are likely to report a positive college experience; however, they are less likely to be academically engaged than non-veteran students, as “learning and higher-order thinking are areas in which veterans reported lower levels of engagement than nonveterans” (Moltz, 2010, p. 1).

According to Nancy K. Schlossberg, social and academic integration is a critical step in improving the area of reflective thinking and higher-order thinking, and she recommended social and academic integration as a best practice that addresses both veterans' and non-veterans' desired common educational goals (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). According to Schlossberg (as cited in ASHE, 2011), "the new environment leads to persistence not only in attaining academic goals but also in achieving intellectual and social competence that contributes to a sense of purpose and self-awareness" (p. 144). The attainment of belonging and affiliation that was an essential part of being in the military contributed to satisfying the need for achievement and self-esteem. For the student veteran to persist and move into the role of a fulfilled civilian self, he or she must experience this belonging and connectedness in the college environment.

This may suggest that veterans have some distinctive needs and that colleges need to make an effort to meet those needs; however, some needs cannot be met by college administrators, staff, and leaders. For example, student veterans have additional attributes to consider, especially those who have experienced multiple deployments to war zones (ASHE, 2011). A large number of veterans have physical or psychological injuries. For example, more than 30% of veterans of the Iraq War and the Afghanistan War sought treatment at Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare facilities nationwide from 2002 to 2008, and 50,000 of them were diagnosed with PTSD (ASHE, 2011). A Rand study estimated that 31% of veterans overall have PTSD (ASHE, 2011). Women suffer from PTSD at about twice the rate of men; however, female veterans are less likely

to be diagnosed with PTSD. This is because PTSD is considered a combat-related disorder and some have the notion that women are not placed in the frontlines—but rather positioned in support missions in the backlines—so are less likely to have PTSD (ASHE, 2011). Student veterans who suffer from mental disorders can get help from qualified counselors and treatment through the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system, which has dedicated increased resources to the treatment of psychological trauma (Heawood, 2013). Although college and university leaders have limited influence on the broad policy of veterans affairs, they do have the responsibility to spread awareness within their institutions about services and agencies that might be beneficial in providing health, financial, and other services to their students. This can be done through student services programs. For example, the University of Minnesota developed a “One Stop Veterans Office” at the Twin Cities campus, and this initiative was designed to consolidate student services for the student veterans (Hamrick et al., p. 123). The University of California, Berkeley has developed a “Troops to College” initiative aimed to foster programs such as “Cal Veterans Group” and academic courses such as “Veterans in Higher Education” that are designed to welcome student veterans. Both universities incorporated disability resources into these programs, which shows an understanding of student veterans and how disabilities are an important aspect for many of them (Hamrick et al., p. 123).

When it comes to the development of personal identity for young veterans, peer group support and influences are solidified during their active military years and possibly

challenged in the college environment where identity is more broadly defined (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). In 2008, a student veteran at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor founded Student Veterans of America, a student organization that sees the importance of peer connections among student veterans (ASHE, 2011). Comprised of a coalition of campus groups from across the United States, its mission is to provide peer-to-peer networks for veterans who are attending college (Student Veterans of America, 2013). One of its main achievements is being instrumental in helping achieve the passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, the new GI Bill that was signed into law on June 30, 2008 (ASHE, 2011). According to the president of the Student Veterans of America, “Veterans on campuses bond because they have shared experiences that have created a brotherhood, a family so unique to their lives....We have the ability to advocate for the needs of student veterans and change the future for [them] forever” (ASHE, 2011, p. 31). As best practices, college and university leaders should recognize the importance of relationship building with student veterans and should provide veterans with the resources to create their own support groups on campuses. A key element for veterans is the level of trust they have in individuals. Noted in a study, “fellow veterans are nearly always trusted implicitly, whereas nonveterans are treated with skepticism” (Hamrick et al., p. 126).

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study investigated the academic and social experiences of student veterans following the transition from military service through enrollment and graduation in California colleges utilizing the GI Bill benefit. Using a semi-structured interview protocol to identify perceptions and explore the experiences and insights of student veterans, the study demonstrated how this demographic was able to achieve academic success despite various barriers, such as the pressure of the first year of college, despair, physical disabilities, injuries, PTSD, perceptions of other students, and interaction with faculty. Furthermore, this study used qualitative research to explore new sources of support and best practices, given the students' unique needs.

Research Design

This study used a phenomenological qualitative research method described by Creswell (2009) as:

A means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of the situation. (p. 4)

The main purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate the phenomenon associated with military veterans and their experiences working toward

achieving an educational goal. As defined in this study, “phenomenology is a research strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). The researcher chose to conduct this study of military veterans with a qualitative design because the researcher desired the voices and opinions of the research participants to be the direct source of the data, rather than gather numerical results of survey instruments and archival statistics. This qualitative research added breadth and depth to the literature of this topic by providing relevant knowledge and application of best practices for veterans to graduate with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What were the subjects’ expectations of higher education before serving in the military?
2. What resources and support systems contributed to the subjects’ achieving their educational goals?
3. What were the primary factors that led to the subjects’ transfer and academic success, and what barriers did they have to overcome?

Role of the Researcher

The researcher’s service in the U.S. Navy is one of his highest accomplishments. The military lifestyle and structure instilled in him the values of discipline, professionalism, and teamwork. His interest was the military veterans returning home and enrolling in California colleges to re-orient themselves into society and restructure a

way to be of service to society. Are colleges and universities ready for the huge numbers of veterans who have started and will continue to arrive at the front doors of the colleges and universities? Will the relevance of programs, availability of courses, styles of counseling, and possibilities for transferring to universities be in place when the military veterans begin returning from deployment in huge numbers?

The researcher had a particular interest in the educational needs of military veterans; he is a veteran who used the GI Bill and is an educator at a public college who works directly with military veterans as their teacher and, at times, as their academic counselor. The researcher's role in this qualitative research was of particular importance, as he was much "closer" to the research process and, in effect, became part of the process. Describing the researcher's role in qualitative studies, Creswell (2009) explained, "the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study" (p. 200). The researcher's intent was to interact with the participants for the sole purpose of conducting interviews and possibly re-visit them.

Subjects

Upon a grant approval from the Institutional Review Board at California State University, Sacramento, the researcher selected participants for semi-structured interviews. The sample of the study included eight student veterans in California. Participants fit the following criteria: (a) held a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, (b) had met their educational goals by using the GI Bill benefits,

and (c) had enrolled in college after returning from their deployment, training, or self-induced military absence within the past 10 years. The sample population was reached through the Veteran Success Center at California State University, Sacramento. To maximize the neutrality of the researcher, who was an adjunct community college instructor at the time, the researcher did not interview any of students he was teaching at the time of the study. The rationale for choosing this population of student veterans was to assess and evaluate support services and to formulate pathways of best practices that will lead future student veterans to success.

The participants of this study represented four branches of the United States armed forces: the Air Force, Army, Marines, and Navy. The subjects all served in active duty, were enlisted members of the United States armed forces post-9/11, and ranged from 22 to 35 years of age. Six subjects were deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan at least once, and some made multiple deployments to one or both areas of combat operations between November 2001 and June 2010. Five participants were male and three participants were female. Four participants were Caucasian, one was African-American, one was Asian, and two were Latino.

Five participants held an undergraduate degree only and three participants held graduate degrees. One student was then a doctoral student. Four participants obtained their degrees from public educational institutions and four obtained their degrees from private educational institutions. All participants denoted financial reasons for enlisting in the military and for enrolling in college. Four participants denoted they were diagnosed

with PTSD upon their discharge from active duty. One participant noted he received a war wound in Iraq as a result of combat. Seven participants used the Post-9/11 GI Bill and one participant used the Montgomery GI Bill (see Table 2). The Participant demographic data were collected via a profile sheet located in Appendix A.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

#	Name	Gender	Race	Age Group	Marital Status	High School GPA	Degree Obtained
1	Janell	Female	White	26-35	Single	2.5-3.0	MA
2	Annie	Female	White	36-45	Single	3.5-4.0	BA
3	Tammy	Female	Black	26-35	Single	3.5-4.0	BA
4	Sean	Male	Latino	26-35	Single	3.5-4.0	MA
5	Michael	Male	White	26-35	Married	3.5-4.0	MA
6	John	Male	White	26-35	Single	2.5-2.99	BA
7	Chris	Male	Latino	18-25	Single	3.5-4.0	BA
8	Anthony	Male	Asian	26-35	Single	2.5-2.99	BS

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data collection strategies for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews of 60-75 minutes each. Questions were prepared prior to the interviews and answers were open-ended and expanded upon in response to various probes utilized at the researcher's discretion (see Appendix B). All interviews were conducted face-to-face, away from each subject's campus, and at locations where the subjects felt comfortable to speak

freely. The researcher used a tape recorder for recording interviews and transcribing data, and all participants were provided final transcripts of the interview and were given the option to opt out of having their information being used for this study (see Appendix C). A phenomenological research design provides an understanding of the themes and patterns portrayed by the study's participants. Thus, detailed notes were taken to collect the participants' responses. The semi-structured interview questions follow:

1. Please tell me about your upbringing and your pathway to military service. How long did/have you served)?
2. Why did you join the (insert military branch)?
3. Describe your deployment(s). What was your job? Where were you stationed?
4. Were you in college before you enlisted/were called up?
5. How long had you been in school?
6. How would you characterize the enrollment process?
7. What challenges did you face after you enrolled in college?
8. How would you describe your academic transition after enrollment?
9. What avenues of academic support did you utilize upon enrollment?
10. How would you describe your social transition after enrollment?
11. What avenues of social support did you utilize upon enrollment?
12. What personal practices/methods/routines did you utilize to maintain good academic standings/success?

13. What practices/methods/routines did you avoid to maintain good academic standings/success?
14. How would you characterize fellow students' attitudes towards you as a student veteran?
15. How would you characterize your attitude toward fellow students?
16. How would you characterize faculty members' attitudes towards you as a student veteran?
17. Have you found the services at your school to be adequate in addressing the needs of veterans?
18. What further support services would be helpful?

Data Analysis

To compile and analyze the data, all the responses were appropriately coded using a classification coding system described below. This system provided a theme for the responses, thus, offering the ability to create a coding table allowing for data aggregation and analysis. The data were coded into specific areas to disseminate raw data and create rising themes. Furthermore, resulting data were coded and similar topics were grouped together into more highly specific topics. The data collected focused on the positive and negative aspects of their military services, their transitional period and educational experiences, and how all were contributing factors in their educational journey and success. The following are examples of data that emerged from the analysis to be grouped together under the topic of "all participants were interested in attending college."

I knew in high school that I would go to college. College was important to my family. (Annie)

My parents always talked about wanting me to go to college. (Janell)
My Mom worked at – you know with just a high school diploma she couldn't really get anything beyond service type jobs. (Sean)

Both my parents have college degrees from Sac State actually. My Dad went through the GI Bill in the 70s and my Mom went back and forth to school, she put herself through school. (Mike)

Protection of Participants

The respondents received a complete overview of the study process so they could be as objective as possible. The informed consent document communicated to the prospective research subject the purpose, procedures (including the time commitment), risks and benefits of the study, and the confidentiality of their information. The participants were informed they had the freedom to decline or stop at any time and participation was completely voluntary. The identities of all participants were concealed by assigning pseudonyms for all subjects and colleges. To ensure privacy, all collected information was physically locked away and stored on password protected digital media devices. All subjects were 18 years of age or older and received a \$20 gift certificate for their time and participating in the study.

Limitations

Qualitative research can generate more details about expectations and experiences than quantitative research. Nonetheless, limitations exist and must be acknowledged. The limitations of this study include the following:

- Due to small sample size, the information and findings are not generalizable and representative of all student veterans.
- All participants in this study were successful in obtaining a minimum of a bachelor's degree, three at for-profit institutions. Consequently, the barriers and limitations of veterans who are not in these categories are not represented in this study and do not reflect the entire veteran population.
- The researcher is a military veteran who was deployed to Iraq and other hostile war zones in the Middle East, and elsewhere. Thus, the researcher has inherent bias stemming from his relationship with other veterans as a veteran and as a college professor.

Summary

The chapter explained and provided a rationale for the qualitative approach and phenomenological research design, and it explained the selection of the research site. The primary research questions and research methodology were provided. In addition, the population and recruitment of the sample population, as well as the data collection and data analysis components of the study, were described. Also, the role of the researcher was denoted and the protection of the participants explained.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to probe the lived experiences of military veterans who used the GI Bill to obtain a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited academic institution in California. This was done through interviews designed to collect data beyond what would have been possible in a quantitative research study (Green & Thorogood, 2004). A study by Kansas State University indicated that the phenomenon of Post 9-11 veterans' transition and success is not adequately described and currently there is need for more qualitative research to discover (KSU, 2012). More specifically, the interviews investigated the veterans' backgrounds as well as their perceptions of the military, higher education, and best practices that led to their academic success. A qualitative research study method was chosen because it offered "an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meaning that they are not experimentally examined or not measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity and frequency" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). The strategy of this phenomenological research was to identify and understand the essence of the participants' experiences.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What were the subjects' expectations of higher education before military service?
2. What resources and support systems contributed to the subjects' achieving their educational goals?

3. What were the primary factors that led to the subjects' transfer and academic success, and what barriers did they have to overcome?

Interview Results and Data Analysis

Research Question One: What were the subjects' expectations of higher education before military service?

Expectations of military service as a pathway to higher education. Research question 1 asked each participant to define his or her expectations of higher education prior to enlisting in the military. Based on the participants' responses, the following expectations were mentioned:

Table 3

Higher Education Expectations Prior to Military Service

1-	As early as secondary school, all subjects expected to pursue a college education.
2-	Subjects expected earning a college degree would lead to better paying jobs.
3-	Those subjects who attempted some type of postsecondary education prior to military service experienced academic difficulty, and as a result, expected those difficulties to continue when they returned to school.
4-	Subjects expected GI Bill benefits would provide them with the financial means needed to attend a postsecondary institution.
5-	The GI Bill would allow them to attend college without difficulties.

The purpose of the learning expectations prior to military service was to learn if each veteran had either planned or aspired to continue his or her formal education after graduating from high school. The researcher found at this stage, prior to military service, all participants' expectations of higher education were positive. There was an overall interest by the participants to pursue higher education that began during secondary education, and this desire continued into adulthood. In the interviews, some participants mentioned at least one family member had obtained a college degree. Others mentioned their parents did not have higher education. However, the parents understood and promoted education as a tool to obtain higher income employment. This likely became a contributing factor to their own desires to pursue higher education. When asked about their family backgrounds, some of the participants responded:

I knew in high school that I would go to college. College was important to my family. My grandmother, who was born in 1917, had attended college at a time when many women were encouraged not to and after she already had five children. And she was very inspirational in our family to show that education was very important. (Annie)

My mom was an instructional assistant so teacher support in the school district, and a bus driver for the school district, and my father did pest control so we didn't have a lot of money. My parents always talked about wanting me to go to college. (Janell)

My step-father quit college in Oklahoma two months shy of graduation to take a very good paying job at that time, and the company would not wait for him to finish his computer science degree. He now regrets not finishing those two months. (Tammy)

As far as parents go, my mother has a doctorate degree and my father has a bachelor's degree in business administration. (Chris)

My mom worked at—you know—with just a high school diploma. She couldn't really get anything beyond service type jobs. (Sean)

Both my parents have college degrees from Sac State actually. My dad went through the GI Bill in the 70s and my mom went back and forth to school--she put herself through school. (Mike)

Even for my parents, education is the key for unlocking a better life because they knew when they worked, it was manual labor. And they knew education was key to making life better. (Anthony)

Based on the participants' responses, the researcher found this form of parent-to-child interaction seemed to be a factor in determining the children's early ideas of long-term education, thereby influencing the participants' expectations for future success, including attending and obtaining a college degree.

Some participants attempted college courses with an expectation of graduating with a degree; however, lack of discipline, family financial challenges and a lack of focus and or direction ultimately led the students to a crossroads. Despite their initial positive expectations before college attendance, some experiences did not bring them success in achieving their educational goals. The majority of participants in this study decided to postpone college and enlist in the military, making the decision to finish college at a later date. When asked about their levels of motivation and discipline for completing their college degrees, some participants expressed the following:

I tried to take some classes at the local community college, but I failed miserably because I couldn't get up and make myself go to class. So quickly, I failed at that and didn't know what else to do. (Janell)

After high school, I started going to a junior college, but I didn't really have any direction. (Sean)

The first quarter [of UC Davis] was fine, the second quarter was Cs and Bs, and the third semester—if I worked at it—I should have got Bs, but I just didn't want to take those classes that meant nothing to me. And again, those were just basic core classes, like GEs—anthropology, stuff like that. Those were pretty easy classes to begin with. And the only reason why I was struggling is just because I didn't want to study. There was no desire or drive to apply myself. My mind was somewhere else. (Anthony)

I didn't have a clue what I was doing. I started [college] in Augusta, Georgia, and I went two months before I had to, I guess, quit. It was hard. I had to leave school...I couldn't afford to live there anymore. (Chris)

In summary, most participants found their situations prior to military service were not conducive to success in higher education. The participants acknowledged at an early stage of their academic career they were ill equipped to successfully navigate the rigors and stressors of higher education. Their decision to postpone college was a conscious choice to better improve their quality of education whenever the next opportunity would arise. They chose not to squander their college education but instead recognized, and addressed, their barriers to academic success.

The GI Bill would allow them to attend college without difficulties. Another expectation noted during the study was service in the military would provide educational benefits and help them succeed in achieving their higher education goals. To some families, serving in the military is a proud tradition. The family tradition is often justified by pointing out the benefits military services provides. Some participants in this study were motivated to join the military following family tradition as well as learning about certain benefits the military provides such as the GI Bill. Veterans who come from families with a tradition of military service may be more likely to be aware of benefits

such as the GI Bill. When asked about their motivation to join the military, participants responded with the following:

My father was in the Air Force Reserves and also works for the state; my mom works for the state as well. So we really didn't have a lot of money, but it was a good childhood. They made sure we had fun and did a lot of different things, and so...I grew up playing sports with my family being there. But I guess with the military, Dad was in the Air Force Reserves, and so I used to see him wear his uniform to school....My dad went through the GI Bill in the 70s. (Mike)

I remember my grandmother telling me about one of my uncles who was in the Navy at that time. As a young child, I was fascinated by the letters and postcards he sent her and the stamps she collected from his travels. I had another uncle who was in the Army at that time as well and two others who were already veterans. (Tammy)

My dad had always talked about it [military service], my uncle was in the Army, and his dad was in the military. – (John)

It just seemed like the best thing for me. Everybody--all the men in my family--had been in the service other than my father...they said it'd be a good thing for me, grow me up--it was a good career to have. So, I was like, sign me up. (Chris)

Based on the participants' responses, making the decision to join the military was easier due to a long-standing family tradition. Having family members who had served in the military contributed to enlistment, but other factors played a role in the decision process.

Coupled with lack of jobs and weak economic circumstances, the participants sought other avenues of financial support. Economic pressure was an undeniable motivation for joining the military. Hearing or seeing firsthand experiences of how their own family members had obtained financial benefits from military service was a contributing factor to their own desires to enlist. Many expected to achieve higher

educational success through financial stability by serving in the military. When participants were asked why they enlisted in the military, they stated the following:

Money for college, college classes, the signing bonus—all the things you want when you're 17 years old. (Janell)

Part of why I jumped right into it is because I own a house, and I needed that GI Bill to pay my bills. (John)

That it gave me the opportunity to have college money, to get experience in something that I truly enjoyed, and to serve my country. (John)

Also, I was a burden on my family because they were paying for—trying to help me go to school, and they couldn't really afford to just live on their own. So that's kind of one of my motivations. (Sean)

Based on the participants' responses, the researcher found finances and economic benefits were among the motivating factors for many of the participants to join the military. The researcher found all participants who enlisted in the military, having attempted college or not, delayed their completion of college to a later date. Importantly, all the participants had considered college as an option prior to enlisting in the military. The researcher believes this was a contributing factor to their success in obtaining a college degree in the future. Every participant's setting of a goal of attaining college education early in life provided a framework on how to move forward. Therefore, all participants returned to college and graduated after their return from military service. The researcher found most participants sought the military as their primary source of income and stability as a result of the weak economy and lack of jobs.

Higher education expectations post-military service. The researcher found the participants' expectations of higher education changed after serving in the military. After

the participants' military service, they also expected higher education institutions would provide them with sufficient support. It is important to note some had doubts regarding whether or not the institutions' services and support systems would adequately serve them and meet their needs. Participants in this study were divided in their responses regarding expectations of higher education post-military service:

- A. Some expected the academic institutions and corresponding resources would meet all their needs.
- B. Some had low expectations of their respective colleges to understand them as military veterans or be able to adequately provide support.

Many participants had developed physical and mental health issues during their military service. They now had challenges they did not have prior to enlisting in the military. Therefore, some participants did not seek any help; those who did found limited resources not meeting all their needs. For instance, four participants in this study self-identified PTSD as a barrier, which would affect their ability to participate in a learning environment. When discussing available academic resources and support services, the researcher discovered participants had low expectations of the student services at their respective campuses. When asked specifically about their expectations concerning available support at their respective higher education institutions, participants gave the following responses:

[The school counselor's] good, I like her, but I don't think that she knows that different veterans have different experiences--she's a school counselor....so I don't think she understands where different paths and different avenues people come from, and the attitudes of military. (John)

Although there might be some veterans who have had traumatic experiences in combat situations, if this stops them from transitioning well into school then I see this as a matter for therapy and psychiatrists, not as a matter to be helped by university programs. (Annie)

I don't think I really knew too much about it, and I probably would have been reluctant to get any extra help anyways 'cause I figured in the real world no one's going to give me extra time on a proposal at work because of my issues. I gotta learn how to play in the same field everybody else is. (Sean)
I didn't ask for it [help]. I didn't reach out. (Mike)

The academic resource center on campus does provide tutoring assistance for some of the programs the school offers, but you have to be failing a class to get assigned a tutor. (Tammy)

They kind of didn't give you all the information in the beginning like you thought they were. (Janell)

Sac City doesn't even have money for classes, but like having somebody to talk to, like an actual counselor that has experience in the military, that knows the issues that--not everyone's been a war veteran, not even a war veteran. But some people do different things that cause them different problems. But especially the combat veterans that come back and they may have different issues, and somebody that understands those problems, and the hurdles these people are going to have to face. Because yes, getting into school is not a problem; it's easy to sign up for school. But after that, there's all these different things, like I'm having problems in this class because of this, this, this, and this. Well, the disabled services are not going to help that situation at all. (Chris)

Since mid-2009, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has benefited more than 860,000 veterans, service members, and dependents. In 2012, veterans who utilized the Post 9/11-GI Bill enrolled at 3,600 institutions (Talevich, 2014). As a large number of service members transition from the military and enroll in colleges, they face unique challenges in adjusting to their new life. The transition from military service to civilian, college

campus life is fraught with substantive difficulties. Returning veterans could face physical and mental health issues, including PTSD.

Research Question Two: What resources and support systems contributed to veterans' achieving their educational goals?

The researcher found an emerging theme: the majority of veterans utilized and sought academic and social support resources. Table 4 indicates the support systems and resources the veterans used while attending college:

Table 4

Support Systems and Resources Veterans Utilized

1-	Family and social network
2-	Academic advisors
3-	Military veteran professors
4-	Montgomery Post-9/11 GI Bill
5-	Tutor center
6-	Veterans' club
7-	Other veterans
8-	Cognitive therapy

When asked what type of academic and social support participants sought, they provided the following responses:

I think the student services side of the University of Phoenix is better. They work with you, there's somebody there, you kinda feel like, that's where my tuition's going. While it's pricey, you can get the support you paid for. (Janell)

Two of my professors were veterans who were very supportive and open-minded. (Tammy)

If it wasn't for the GI Bill, I couldn't go to school. (Chris)

Well, it turns out I just like having someone to talk to who understands. So they [student veterans] help me emotionally. (Chris)

I've used the tutor center before, which is really great—and that helped a lot in my math classes. (John)

A lot of the teachers that were really great were veterans, and I'd talk to them like right when the class starts and say, here's my situation. And they're like, not a problem, e-mail me beforehand. Even though they wouldn't have slides up online or they wouldn't do this...they would like send me the class work or they would take late work. (John)

Yes, I saw the vet's club, and I realized I was missing that. I had great friends before and after the service, but I was missing being able to talk to a veteran. So I reached out here [CSUS]. (Mike)

My social support were my teachers and the other students in my online classrooms. This particular online school was very disciplined academically and lots of participation was required. This was actually a big blessing for me. We met in online forums, discussed our class work and received guidance from our instructors. (Annie)

While interviewing, the researcher noticed those who sought out either academic or social support were in general more optimistic about future prospects for success.

Additionally, in spite of facing such challenges as physical injury or PTSD, the researcher found those who sought academic and social support on college campuses

spoke positively in regard to their academic experience and social interactions. Those who faced academic challenges used available on-campus resources to address their deficiencies.

When the subjects were asked about any social support received during their academic journeys, the researcher found family and personal relationships played a crucial role in the lives of those who suffered severe trauma and injuries in achieving their academic goals.

I am going to college. So in a wheelchair, I started going to Sac City College. My parents--I lived in their front rooms, I could barely make it in the house--literally rearranged their house for me to live there for eight months when I first got out. And eventually I moved out on my own, or with my brother, which helped with PTSD. And it really provided that ...you know it was really good to live with somebody else. So they started driving me to school. (Mike)

'Cause I don't really have anything here in California. No real friends to speak of. So the people [student veterans] on campus become my family. (Chris)

The researcher found participants in this study developed their own way to cope and deal with their respective challenges throughout their academic journey. Dealing with PTSD is an ongoing, daily, and gradual process. Some veterans found support from their families and some found support from other veterans on campus, either at the individual level or through the veterans club on their respective campuses.

Research Question Three: What are the primary factors that led to veterans' transfer and academic success, and what barriers did they have to overcome?

The United States is expected to withdraw 10,000 troops from Afghanistan in 2014; and by the end of 2015, it is expected to withdraw another 23,000 troops (Newsmax, 2014). In California, the state Veterans Affairs Department estimated

thousands will return to attend college as the wars wind down (Newsmax, 2014). As the troops return from overseas conflicts, many veterans seek higher education as a way to transition to a new career and better their futures. Thus, college campuses will see an increase in veterans' enrollments. Many of the returning veterans will encounter barriers along their academic journey. Based on the responses of the participants in this study, some of these barriers are in Table 5.

Table 5

Barriers along Academic Journey

1-	Physical Disabilities
2-	Cognitive Challenges
3-	Financial Challenges
4-	GI Bill Challenges

The above challenges were the most common and pervasive challenges faced by each student veteran in this study. While not all were involved in direct combat, most faced issues dealing with post-traumatic stress, and all participants faced financial challenges.

Table 6

Participants Linked with Challenges

	Name	Financial Challenges	PTSD	Combat Injuries	GI Bill Challenges
1	Janell	Yes	No	No	Yes
2	Annie	Yes	NO	No	No
3	Tammy	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
4	Sean	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Michael	Yes	No	No	Yes
6	John	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Chris	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Anthony	Yes	No	No	No

The researcher found veteran students, unlike non-veteran students, had additional challenges to wrestle with post-enlistment, such as new physical and cognitive challenges as well as financial issues.

So there were things I wasn't aware of when I was in because, you know, when you're in the military everything is just designed to where you don't feel the repercussions of those different things holding you back...And when I got here, and realized I couldn't spell "committee" or these weird words and, you know. Or I'd spell things backwards. So I ended up doing a couple of years of cognitive therapy with the VA [Veterans Affairs facility] to work on strategies and kind of get back in sync with things. So that was a big challenge at first. (Sean)

I've got a broken back, and then I've also got PTSD. I've got a TBI—traumatic brain injury—that they're assessing right now...some days I can't even get out of bed, but it's not an excused absence so I can technically be kicked out of school. (John)

I was told by the school VA representative that an advance on the [GI Bill] benefits may be available. But after I got to California [from Virginia], she

informed me there would be no advance for the first semester. Finances and housing were persistent and very stressful problems. (Tammy)

The researcher found the participants were aware of the importance of addressing their physical, financial, and cognitive limitations to be successful in college. Therefore, they reached out to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for help. This underscores the important role the VA plays in the lives of veterans, especially those seeking college education.

As mentioned previously, all the participants faced financial burdens prior to their enlistment in the military. Many recounted growing up in families where finances were low. When participants were asked about their socioeconomic background, a theme emerged-, most came from lower- and middle-class backgrounds.

I grew up in a—I guess you could say—lower-middle-class suburban neighborhood. My mom was an instructional assistant—so teacher support—in the school district and a bus driver for the school district. And my father did pest control so we didn't have a lot of money. – (Janell)

Neither my mother nor biological father went to college. My mother somehow landed a job as a computer operator early on with no prior experience and was able to make a decent living as that job sector grew in the 80s. Before she remarried, we struggled a lot, as she insisted on moving every six months or so. (Tammy)

My dad worked for a magazine when we were kids so before that we were pretty well off. My dad had a heart attack. We moved up to Lake Tahoe to get away from LA, and my Mom started working for a company. And from then on we weren't really well off and we were pretty like, low class...in the lower realm. Not a lot of money...my dad is disabled, had polio, so he only has the use of one arm. (John)

My parents were divorced when I was about 10 [or] so, and my dad moved away probably when I was about 13 to Northern California. So most of my adolescence I grew up with my mom and my brother. Lower income. My mom worked at,

you know, with just a high school diploma. She couldn't really get anything beyond service-type jobs. She was a waitress and worked at a gas station and often two jobs at once usually to kind of get by on that. (Sean)

Both my parents had two jobs when we first got here because they just wanted me to focus on education. Education was impressed upon me at a very young age, and they wanted me to be able to go to college and just focus on education and not have to worry about anything else. Because my parents believed that by getting a college degree, you've increased your earning potential. They equate a degree with monetary stability, something that's to look towards. (Anthony)

Both my parents--my father was in the Air Force Reserves and also works for the state. My mom works for the state as well. So we really didn't have a lot of money, but it was a good childhood. (Mike)

Based on the participants' responses, the researcher found their previous financial limitations were not remedied by serving in the military. They would still have to rely on access to student loans and alternative funding to achieve their college goals. Active duty service simply provided access to a pool of funds (from the GI Bill) that would assist qualified veterans in easing the financial burden of college; however, the VA faced numerous funding challenges of its own, further burdening the emerging veteran population with paperwork and unforeseen financial stress. At least two of the respondents were forced to leave their respective schools at least once due to VA benefits delays, and all participants reported experiencing stress from waiting for funds to arrive.

While many of the participants displayed a lack of motivation or direction prior to military enlistment, they now exhibited a strong sense of self-discipline, resilience, and persistence. The researcher found the participants had applied some unique strategies to achieve a positive outcome in college. When faced with mental health issues, some sought family and professional support and some developed their own practices to

address their challenges. When the subjects were asked how to address PTSD in the classroom, for example, the researcher received the following response:

I get very anxious too, because of my PTSD. Usually, I'll sit where a wall's next to me or I will sit in the back of the class, which is a problem too because I don't like people behind me. But when I have to sit in the back of the class I can't pay attention. I'm not getting enough--like I love to sit in the front of the class because I want to be there, so I have a problem where I can't sit in the front of the class. (John

Based on the participants' responses, the researcher found that despite persistent financial burdens due to lack of resources and family income, along with new physical and mental health challenges, all participants exhibited several factors contributing directly to their academic success (see Table 7).

Table 7

Contributing Factors to Academic Success

1-	Participants exhibited self-discipline, resilience, and persistence.
2-	Participants applied unique strategies to overcome challenges.
3-	Participants expected to bear the sole responsibility for their future.

Despite a myriad of difficulties the participants faced during their academic experiences, each participant was able to work through his or her respective challenges and obtain a college degree. When asked about the contributing factors to their academic success, the participants responded with the following:

So part of my success was probably being regimented and just really being prepared and thinking ahead... I definitely think military service was [helpful]. I mean I definitely wasn't like that before I went in, and I didn't know how to be that strict and to have that much self-control. (Annie)

Maybe this is why I do the things that I do, because of this [military] experience in my life... I have this structure, I have this format because what I went through. I learned those lessons in life that it's important. (Janell)

I couldn't spell anymore all of a sudden—and I had always been very good in English and grammar—and I couldn't remember how to spell words... And when I got here and realized I couldn't spell “committee” or... I'd spell things backwards. So I ended up doing a couple of years of cognitive therapy with the VA to work on strategies and kind of get back in sync with things. So that was a big challenge at first. (Sean)

For me, the biggest thing the military taught me was time management and to set priorities... Also, the military taught me accountability and responsibility. You are only as good as your word. I don't want people to view me as a flake. So I have learned how to write stuff down, to make priorities in my life. (Anthony)

The researcher found the student veterans returning to complete their higher education experience would not be deterred by whatever obstacle or challenge they faced. Nearly all participants expected to bear the sole responsibility for their academic successes and failures and did not expect to find social acceptance from their civilian counterparts. They did not expect special treatment by professors or any institutional entity. With these adjusted expectations and a very high level of determination, they were able to overcome their previous assumptions and shortcomings in order to achieve their academic goals.

For me, it's just I know that there's something that needs to be done, there's a date, there's a rubric, there's an outline....I'm independent enough, I'm adult enough to be able to complete it on my own. I don't know, maybe it's my personality. (Janell)

It was as tough as can be. I was terrible at math. I got Ds ...and the GI Bill allowed me to retake it, and I continued to get paid for it. (Mike)

The only challenges I had were just completing the courses...by this time I was taking very high level classes that required a lot of focus, research, and preparation. At that time I was extremely focused and determined. There was nothing that was going to stand in the way of me and my degree. (Annie)

I wound up deploying as a contractor to GTMO [Guantanamo Bay] in May 2005, still as a full-time student. I worked two jobs while there and taking a full course load. The stress of my coworkers was a very, very challenging situation, but I learned a lot from the prisoners there that helped contribute directly to my academic studies. (Tammy)

Absolutely. I got that (discipline) partly from my parents and partly from my time in the military, just because you don't have time to mess around anymore. Besides that point, you know more about yourself, you know your strengths and weaknesses. (Anthony)

Finally, the participants' level of persistence directly contributed to their academic success. Moreover, the researcher found the students' expectations of themselves and their higher education institutions had been altered due to their military experience. Despite these obstacles they encountered, each participant was able to successfully obtain a college degree using the GI Bill.

Summary

The general climate the participants endured and experienced during their academic journey formed the basis for the analysis of emerging themes from this study. The researcher was able to locate emerging themes and coded them in accordance with attributes and environments surrounding the participants as well as how these attributes could have helped them become more resilient, focused, and determined to complete their formal education. The researcher found attributes to success started prior to the veterans enlisting in the military. The participants were all successful in obtaining a degree despite their geographical background, socioeconomic circumstances, and whether they attended public, private, or for-profit institutions. As for the participants' transition, whether from high school to college, high school to military, or military to college, the researcher believes at every juncture, there was some form of discomfort or uncertainty associated with the transition and with the students' ability to adapt and cope with every obstacle.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Overview

This study analyzed subjects' responses to semi-structured interviews in an effort to gain insights into the methods and practices veterans utilized to attain a college degree. In giving a voice to veterans who were successful college students, this researcher was able to identify recommendations related to the different transitional phases military service members experienced upon completion of their military service. This chapter presents these recommendations as well as implications for practices in higher education, and views them through the lens of the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 1.

Analysis and Summary of Findings

In 2012, the ACE released a report titled, "From Soldiers to Students II: Assessing Campus Programs for Veterans and Service Members," which outlined the importance of understanding the issues veterans face upon their enrollment in college. The findings from this study helped provide that understanding by exploring the subjects' perceptions of the military and higher education as well as best practices that led to their academic success. All participants in this study expressed their determination to graduate from college regardless of barriers and challenges they faced. The researcher found attributes to success started before the participants enlisted in the military. The participants were all successful in obtaining a degree despite their geographical background and socioeconomic circumstances and whether or not they attended public,

private, or for-profit institutions. As for the participants' transition—whether from high school to college, high school to military, or military to college—findings indicated that at every juncture, there was some form of discomfort or ambiguity associated with the transition and with the participants' abilities to adapt and cope with every obstacle or challenge.

In general, the participants' parents' lack of higher socioeconomic status did not hinder the student veterans from obtaining a minimum of a bachelor's degree. The military advertises and promotes itself in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods and schools purposely to recruit. The U.S. military has a long history of being the only way out of circumstances for disadvantaged children, especially during difficult economic times. It provides the basic necessities: food, housing, and a salary. Young adults living in wealthier neighborhoods have many more options at their disposal, both pre- and post-high school, and therefore, do not need to use the military as an outlet simply to escape their current financial situation.

Parents' communication with their children at an early age concerning the importance of college education was instrumental in the student veterans' determination to pursue higher education goals. Also, having family members who served in the military had a positive impact on the veterans in terms of knowing about military benefits prior to enlisting. Coupled with family tradition and lack of career opportunities, student veterans seek the military to fulfill many needs, including education. The participants in this study all expressed their desire to obtain a college degree from a young age. The

main contributing factor was their parents' involvement, at an early age, in emphasizing the importance of education and the monetary benefits higher education provides.

Although parents of some of the participants in this study did not have a college education or degree, they were quite supportive and made sure their children understood the value of education. This corroborates a study by the National Education Association (NEA; 2012) citing the importance of parents' involvement with their children from a young age. The study showed parental involvement in education coupled with school and community involvement led children to enjoy education and do better in school.

Participants partially confirmed parents' higher education background and socioeconomic status effects on student intentions, as discussed by Tinto (2011).

I was familiar with Sac City. I took a class there in High School. It just didn't seem as scary as a University did...both my parents have college degrees from Sac State actually. My Dad went through the GI Bill in the 70's and my Mom went back and forth to school- she put herself through school. (Mike)

Both my parents had two jobs...because they just wanted me to focus on education. Education was impressed upon me at a very young age, and they wanted me to be able to go to college and just focus on education, and not have to worry about anything else. B/c my parents believed that by getting a college degree, you've increased your earning potential. They equate a degree with monetary stability, something that's to look towards. (Anthony)

However, all respondents, regardless of parental education or social status, expressed a desire to attend a higher education institution prior to joining the military.

While the participants in this study attended a variety of public, non-profit, private or for-profit universities, three of the eight obtained their degrees from for-profit universities. Despite the research cited in Chapter 1, as well as additional studies like

Hanover (2013) which found only 20% of for-profit institutions provide trained counseling staff to assist student veterans with PTSD, brain injuries and other health issues compared with 54.5% of public colleges, no one from this study expressed any significant challenges that relate exclusively to for-profit institutions.

In fact, responses of some participants confirm Hamrick, Rumann, and Associates (2013) study that indicates for-profit institutions offer the convenience of continual enrollment, large availability of desired coursework, simplicity of enrollment, and overall flexibility.

American Military University was truly the easiest school I ever enrolled in. They had academic support services geared towards deployed veterans and Active Duty military, all of their classes were priced for the GI Bill, and they responded via email within 24 hours of any problem... All the classes I needed to take were mapped out clearly on their website, and I was given a personalized list of the ones I needed to take based on my transcripts. They accepted the maximum of 65 credits for me towards my BA. (Tammy)

Online school was a new thing at the time and because I deployed too often, while I was in the Navy I took a lot of online classes all through the University of Maryland because they made their program very accessible to people like myself who deployed a lot... When I got out of the Navy I called the school and they determined that since I was so far along, I could continue with this department even though I was no longer in the Navy. So I finished my degree through the online classes at the University of Maryland. It was not hard at all. I knew exactly what to do and I did it. (Annie)

Regardless of the range of student services offered by their institutions, several of the veterans did express feeling used by for-profit colleges for their GI Bill money.

When the researcher asked Janell about the adequacy of student services for veterans at the University of Phoenix and National, she responded:

No I think they're just, they're willing to work with you because it is money- it is guaranteed money... They're very supportive in getting you signed on, and they work with you 110%, and then once the money is contracted and in there, that's it. You're done. We have our money, and we're moving on. (Janell)

Despite the research cited earlier showing for-profit colleges using aggressive marketing practices to entice and recruit veterans, at least in part because of the federal funding available to support veterans, the researcher found participants in this study had the resiliency, motivation and determination to complete their educational goals regardless of these practices.

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Table 8

Summary of Participants' Financial College Experiences

#	Name	High School GPA	Degree Obtained	Higher Education Institute	GI Bill	Student Loans
1	Janell	2.5-3.0	MA	Private	Yes	Yes
2	Annie	3.5-4.0	BA	Private	Yes	Yes
3	Tammy	3.5-4.0	BA	Private	Yes	Yes
4	Sean	3.5-4.0	MA	Public	Yes	No
5	Michael	3.5-4.0	MA	Public	Yes	No
6	John	2.5-2.9	BA	Public	Yes	No
7	Chris	3.5-4.0	BA	Private	Yes	No
8	Anthony	2.5-2.9	BS	Public	Yes	No

Livingston's (2009) and Hamrick et al.'s (2013) studies were reinforced by student respondents. While some student veterans found the transition from military to higher education less stressful and challenging than others did, self-identification as a college student, nevertheless, was equally as important as being identified as a veteran. For example, when asked about his experience with transitioning and socialization with other students, Sean responded:

I guess okay, sometimes when people found out I was a Marine they were kind of intimidated... I didn't go around highlighting it or wearing USMC shirts or anything like that... But I also don't know that I made a lot of social friends that weren't veterans... So I guess maybe I didn't go out of my way to purposely contact with too many people either. I would talk in class and be friendly. But I don't necessarily hang out with them on the weekends other than a few people.
(Sean)

So there's always one – if not two or three – in every single room. So I did let everybody know I was a vet. I wasn't ashamed of it. Professors knew, teachers knew, fellow students – it would come out in conversations organically. So by the time I reached out to other students and told them I was a vet- not just a vet but I had just got back from Iraq, you know – they were pretty understanding. And I reached out for help, things of that nature. (Mike)

The financial burden incurred by student veterans by the delayed GI Bill payments discussed by DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) was definitively confirmed by the respondents as a significant source of stress in their higher education experience. Coupled with a lack of jobs and already weak economic circumstances, the participants depended more on their GI Bill funds as the main source of income. When participants were asked about their financial circumstances, they stated the following:

Financial was the biggest problem really. Because not only do you have to pay rent but you have to buy books for class. And without that book stipend how was you supposed to afford the books?...If it wasn't for the GI Bill I couldn't go to school. I mean, here in Sacramento it makes it so easy. It covers everything, everything is smooth, on time. I don't have nothin' to worry about, no stress. In Augusta, GA though, it's a whole different situation. They're constantly behind on everything. I didn't get a check until about 2 months and a week, and I had just left school. (Chris)

But even after relocating, the VA benefits did not kick in right away, and I was borrowing money just to make it to class and to buy cat food. Not to mention the unexpected cost of buying a computer, printer, etc. right away in order to be able to complete my homework assignments. Before leaving Virginia, I was told by the school VA rep that an advance on the benefits may be available. But after I got to California, she informed me there would be no advance for the first semester. Finances and housing were persistent and very stressful problems. Until I was able to get my GI Bill benefit payment, I would have to stay late at the school media lab and drive to San Francisco on the weekends to do my homework. (Tammy)

Part of why I jumped right into it is because I own a house, and I needed that GI Bill to pay my bills. (John)

The researcher found student veterans' expectations prior to military experience to be largely similar to those of their civilian counterparts after graduating high school. These expectations may be no different from a traditional college student's ideas about his or her college experience. However, the student veterans' military experiences significantly altered these initial expectations, particularly for those who were not as successful as they intended to be when they first attended college after high school and prior to serving in the military.

Through the Lens of the Theoretical Framework

In every phase of their lives, service members experience some form of transition, whether it is a transition from civilian to military life or a transition from military to college life. All participants in this study enrolled in college immediately upon their discharge from military service. According to Schlossberg's (1984) theory of transition, which can be described as a psychosocial model of development that examines life events affecting different aspects of a persons' life, transitions are defined as events or nonevents that result in change. Most participants' responses were consistent with this theory, which noted surrounding environmental factors are more determinate of a giving outcome (positive or negative) than a person's age or ethnicity. Schlosberg (1984) also pointed out that when any type of transition happens, most individuals become introspective and ask themselves: "Who am I?"; "Do I belong?"; "Do I matter?"; and "Can I master new tasks?" When asked about his transition back to civilian life, participant Sean said the following:

I had a traumatic brain injury a couple times in Iraq and also when I got back I had another head injury, and probably a little PTSD going on as well. So there were things I wasn't aware of when I was in because you know, when you're in the military everything is just designed to where you don't feel the repercussions of those different things holding you back. For instance spelling- I couldn't spell any more all of a sudden- and I had always been very good in English and grammar, and I couldn't remember how to spell words ...and you know in the military I was never writing, so I didn't even think about spelling, you know. And when I got here and realized I couldn't spell committee or these weird words and you know- or I'd spell things backwards. So I ended up doing a couple of years of cognitive therapy with the VA to work on strategies, and kind of get back in sync with things. So that was a big challenge at first. (Sean)

Another component of Schlossberg's (1984) theory states people go through a phase of self-assessment during their transitions. Schlossberg called this phase the three S's, the first of which is:

- Situation: How does the person view the changes occurring in his or her life, and are these changes coming at a high point or a low point? Is the person at the beginning or end of his or her transition? Is this transition voluntary, or is it being imposed upon the individual?

The participants in this study faced a large transition upon their discharge from the military. Unlike traditional students' transition from secondary education to higher education, service members' transition to college from military life can cause them to experience a variety of challenges with which the majority of traditional students may not be familiar, such as war wounds and PTSD. Four participants in this study were clinically diagnosed with PTSD, making their situations more difficult and adding additional financial burdens.

The next component of Schlosberg's (1984) theory is:

- Self: Does the person have previous experience in making a similar transition? How do his or her strengths and weaknesses factor into the scenario? Does he or she possess a basic level of optimism with which to deal with uncertainty? Does the individual believe there are options available?

Most participants found their situations prior to military service were not conducive to success in higher education. The participants acknowledged at an early stage of their academic career they were ill equipped to successfully navigate the rigors and stressors of higher education. Their decisions to postpone college were conscious choices to better improve their quality of education whenever the next opportunity would arise. They chose not to squander their college education and recognized and addressed their barriers to academic success. Enlisting in the military was viewed as an important "next step" by all veterans interviewed, prior to completing their college education.

The final S in Schlosberg's (1984) theory is:

- Supports: This refers to those who will most likely assist or hurt the person experiencing a transition. These people can include advisors, friends, family, and peers. How do these people give support, if they do at all? How can they possibly hinder the person's attempts to transition?

The researcher found an emerging theme in subjects' responses: the majority of veterans interviewed utilized and sought academic and social support resources at some point during their college experiences. While not an exhaustive list, the following

represents the most commonly utilized resources available to participants: family and social networks, academic advisors, military veteran professors, financial resources from the Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI bills, campus tutor centers, veterans' clubs, and other veterans themselves. The researcher also found family and personal relationships played a crucial role in achieving academic goals for those who suffered severe trauma and injuries.

While interviewing, the researcher noticed those who sought either academic or social support were in general more optimistic about future prospects for success. Additionally, in spite of facing such challenges as physical injury or PTSD, the researcher found those who sought academic and social support on college campuses spoke positively in regard to their academic experience and social interactions. Those who faced academic challenges used available on-campus resources to address their deficiencies.

These three S's are part of the self-assessment process. Once these have been evaluated, the next part of the process is to:

- Develop a strategic plan: Developing strategies for coping includes a sound action plan for increasing strengths and skills to adapt to the transition. How many coping strategies can people use at one time successfully? Are they able to view the situation through a different lens, change the situation entirely, or manage their reactions to the stress associated with the change?

Based on the participants' responses, the researcher found in the post-military service stage, the participants realized the importance of addressing their academic weaknesses and the need to understand and navigate through the available support systems in their respective higher education institutions. In addition to the aforementioned needs such as academic skills, some veterans developed new needs as a result of combat and other stressful sources in the post-military service stage. For example, many returned to school with physical and mental impairments. Therefore, their expectations at the post-military service stage made them aware of their needs at a different level.

Many of participants had developed physical and mental health issues during their military service. They had new challenges from what existed prior to enlisting in the military. Therefore, some participants did not seek any help, and those who did found limited resources not meeting all their needs. For instance, four participants in this study were diagnosed with PTSD, which would affect their ability to participate in a learning environment. When discussing available academic resources and support services, the researcher discovered participants had low expectations of the student services at their respective campuses.

The most common and pervasive challenges faced by each student veteran in this study were physical disabilities, cognitive challenges, financial burdens, and GI Bill challenges. While not all participants were involved in direct combat, most faced issues dealing with post-traumatic stress, and all participants faced financial challenges. The

researcher found the participants had applied some unique strategies to achieve a positive outcome in college. When faced with mental health issues, some sought family and professional support and some developed their own practices to address their challenges.

The researcher also found the student veterans returning to complete their higher education experience would not be deterred by whatever obstacle or challenge they faced. Nearly all participants expected to bear the sole responsibility for their academic successes and failures and did not expect to find social acceptance from their civilian counterparts. They did not expect special treatment by professors or any institutional entity. With these adjusted expectations and a very high level of determination, they were able to overcome their previous assumptions and shortcomings in order to achieve their academic goals. As Schlossberg (1988) pointed out, there is no single, predictable, universal adult experience.

These are the basic "themes that trigger adults to learn and grow" (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 59). Adults then explore their feelings and try to understand their new circumstances. A sense of belonging is that inclusive, peaceful feeling when you understand your circumstances and know what is expected. The opposite of belonging—exclusion—is what many adults feel when they make transitions. When adults go back to school, for example, they feel awkwardly suspended between the old role and the new role or perhaps suspended between many roles. During this period, they need special help, such as an adult learner orientation and support systems.

Transformational Leadership Implication

This study was guided by the Doctorate in Educational Leadership program at California State University, Sacramento which focuses in part on how sound leadership would elevate the process of change for the better. Thus, this study used that lens to examine veterans' educational success. Leadership and leadership styles have been identified as being one of the most effective factors in the innovation of any organization, including educational institutions. Many colleges and universities are becoming more supportive of military veterans by providing different types of support systems and resources, yet many colleges and universities are generally less prepared to meet the needs of this unique student population. It is important to note that previous useful knowledge and practices used to assist veterans are considered outdated and not applicable to the current emerging veteran population (Hamrick et al., 2013).

To improve the lives and academic experience of students, higher education leadership needs to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis based on current best practices and adjust resource and support systems accordingly to best serve student veterans, especially the disabled student veterans. The responsibility of ensuring access and success should be part of the tactical goals and strategic missions for educational leaders at all levels. The researcher found the student veterans returning to complete their higher education experience would not be deterred by whatever obstacle or challenge they faced. Nearly all participants expected to bear the sole responsibility for their academic successes and failures and did not expect to find social acceptance from

their civilian counterparts. They did not expect special treatment by professors or any institutional entity. With these adjusted expectations and a very high level of determination, they were able to overcome their previous assumptions and shortcomings in order to achieve their academic goals. Schlossberg (1988) pointed out there is no single, predictable, universal adult experience.

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Implications were provided through the lenses of transformational leadership, policy, and data-based decision-making practices, which are the cornerstones of the Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program at CSU, Sacramento and bear relevance to the study conducted and to previous research. Effective educational leadership makes a difference in improving learning outcome (Yukl, 1994). Effective leadership determines the types of outcome in any organization. While many differ in their definition of “leadership,” most definitions of leadership reflect the evaluation of leadership effectiveness in terms of leaders’ actions and consequences of decisions (Yukl, 1994).

This final chapter of this study provides a discussion of the researcher's findings in relation to Schlossberg's (1984) theory of adult transitions. Additionally, implications for practice are noted. Finally, the researcher notes the limitations of the study, makes recommendations for further study, and provides further strategies to fulfill the gap of success rate among veterans.

Following are the implications related educational leadership.

Implication One: There is an urgent need for college personnel to reach out to mentally and physically disabled student veterans

Society often views disability from the medical lens and it is often looked at as an impairment requiring attention and cure. However, military veterans are trained—stemming from training in “boot camp”—to not show any signs of weakness because their career depends on mental and physical fitness. As a result, many veterans leave the military with the notion disability equals weakness or unfitness (Hamrick et al., 2013). For example, participant John could have revealed his invisible impairment (PTSD) to the school administrators or teachers; however, he chose to hide it from everyone, including his fellow students. A problem with some veterans is they equate disability with failure, and this could hinder their academic progress; but most importantly, this could make their injuries and disabilities worse, if not treated.

As an educator who teaches at a local community college and who has military veterans attending his classes, the researcher can attest non-veteran students with disabilities are more likely to disclose their disabilities than the veterans. John indicated

that due to his PTSD he found it difficult to concentrate in class, but because of his resilience and determination, he was able to adapt by finding his ideal seat in class. It is important to note John did not mention that any of his professors offered any help. The researcher found the participants who suffered from PTSD and/or other injuries did not mention their faculty, counselors, and administrative staff had any training they offered to the participants at enrollment in their academic journey. The researcher also found when it comes to self-identity, student veterans were less likely to identify themselves in higher education as military veterans, and they were more likely to open up to professors who identified themselves as military veterans. Based on his personal experience, the researcher found military veterans approached him whenever he revealed he was a veteran himself.

Implication Two: It is essential to understand the context of veterans' experiences in the military and the intensity with which they experience daily life.

This includes the values consistently referenced by veterans in this study such as time management and camaraderie instilled in them in many cases during life or death responses. Therefore, in post-service and especially in college, service members perceive college life as a hostile environment and seek like-minded groups or individuals (Lowe, 2012). As a result, it is imperative to conduct group-level analysis as the most comprehensive approach to understanding PTSD in the student veteran population. The social identity theory conceptualizes the framework needed to understand the importance of how group social and political events affect individuals' attitudes, health, and

behavior. According to Tejfel and Turner (1986), the social identity approach underscores the integral nature of groups and group association in daily life interactions. It emphasizes the inseparable bond between groups and the individual's behavior. For example, when participant John was asked about his daily experience in the classroom, he responded:

It's difficult- I'm older, I'm 32 now, and I don't get...I'm in a class now where she's like – oh call me by my first name. I could never do that, like I don't understand that, like you give the teachers respect, like they earned that to me. Just like, I know I call you sir and you're like, quit, no you don't have to. But it's like 11 years [military service] also, I mean...but I have a problem where people call teachers by their first name and they don't show respect for people and you know- people talking in class and yelling and screaming. I get very anxious too, because of my PTSD. (John)

Consistent with Tafel's and Turner's (1986) social identity, the researcher found John continued to identify himself as an individual with 11 years of military service, and he brought that identity with him to college. He very much believed his college professors deserved the same level of respect and recognition as his military superiors. Furthermore, John became frustrated with his classmates' inability to conform to his military expectations. Therefore, like John, military veterans on college campuses are more likely to seek out and engage with other veterans who have had a similar level of intensity in their military service. The researcher found bonding amongst veterans on college campuses typically corresponded to the level of intensity they experienced during their military service. For example, combat veterans are more likely to engage with fellow combat veterans rather than with those who never experienced life inside a war

zone. When participant Chris was asked about his student veteran colleagues, he explained:

[They] are more mature. Well, I mean, you take a 19 or 25-year-old child that's never been anywhere, and you take a combat deployed veteran there's a big difference there. That's the difference between a child and a man, so... (Chris)

A similar sentiment was expressed by participant Sean when asked about his relationships with other veterans on the college campus:

That camaraderie, that team-building spirit at the time. So that's probably why I gravitated towards the military [veterans]. You just feel a little safer around them. (Sean)

Participant Sean indicated he was more inclined to integrate with military veterans to fulfill his social needs. As a result of his PTSD, he could better identify with those not only with clinically diagnosed PTSD, but also with those who had shared similar military experiences. Table 9 is a list of possible PTSD symptoms.

Table 9

Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder (PTSD) --Possible Symptoms

Re-Experiencing Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently having upsetting thoughts of memories about a traumatic event • Having recurrent nightmares • Flashbacks
Avoidance Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making an effort to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations about traumatic events • A loss of interest in important, once positive, activities • Feeling distant from others • Feeling as though life may be cut short
Hyper arousal Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a difficult time falling or staying asleep • Having difficulty concentrating • Being jumpy or easily startled
Other Common Symptoms of PTSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger and irritability • Guilt, shame, or self-blame • Depression and hopelessness • Feeling of mistrust and betrayal

Implication Three: The researcher discovered most participants emphasized the importance of time management as a vital skill for their success in college, which was instilled in veterans through their military service

All the participants in the study successfully achieved their academic goals while in full-time student status. In addition, many reported they worked full-time while

attending college. These two factors, coupled with mental and/or physical challenges, made it essential for them to adopt time management strategies in order to complete their college education.

The military lifestyle places an emphasis on time management. Starting at boot camp, military recruits are put through rigorous exercises measured in minutes and not in hours or days. Every moment of the military recruit's life is measured and lived according to a precise schedule that cannot be altered by the recruits. This precise level of scheduling continues throughout the military service and most likely beyond.

I just make a schedule for myself and I follow it. Getting into a routine is essential. Having study dates, having days you need to write your paper, having days you need to turn things in... just getting on that schedule and being responsible for your own education. (Janell)

For me, the biggest thing the military taught me was time management and to set priorities. Now I am not the best at time management but I try to manage my time as best as possible. But then again I had a crash course to learn that. I had 5 years to learn how to do it. (Anthony)

Probably the most important habit for me was to make sure all of my obligations were met for the day before I sat down to do homework. (Tammy)

Find a veteran and develop a battle buddy system. In between two people, you can figure out what's going on. And it's a whole lot easier to ask a question and to ask for help when you got somebody else with you. It's too much for one person to take on all by themselves.... So not just in the military unit, but even on college campus, team work, the buddy system still applies (Chris)

For me I think I just had a lot of stubbornness. I was very regimented, and I kinda didn't let anything distract me or take me off course, and that's what helped me. Like I said, that's probably why I didn't have a huge social life. When I was going to undergrad, I was just very focused and regimented...I would schedule out times, and do my homework, otherwise I wouldn't get it done. (Sean)

For the veterans interviewed, the continuation of time management skills learned from having a regimented schedule in the military was imperative to post-military life and obtaining a college education. While some possessed more developed management skills than others prior to enlistment, all participants cited stringent military scheduling benefiting them throughout their transitions from the military and throughout college.

Recommendations

During High School

Since many service members first encounter a military recruiter during their secondary education, parental involvement is something to be considered. At this juncture of their lives and while living at home with their parents, young men and women are in need of guidance as well as clarification on the responsibilities and the benefits military service entails. The following are recommendations that could be implemented during the secondary education level:

1. High school guidance counselors and leadership should facilitate conferences involving local military recruits from the hometown recruiting program (where applicable), high school students, and the students' families to discuss the GI Bill and other military benefits. Alternatively, educational meetings could be scheduled by high schools with local veterans' organizations such as a VFW or American Legion chapter. This will allow interested students and parents to address questions to veterans themselves and learn valuable perspectives prior to

making any decision. Counselors should explain current Tuition Assistance Programs and Active Duty college opportunities.

2. Family members and interested recruits should be properly informed of long-term positive and negative effects and consequences of military service, as well as relevant statistics and where to find available resources while on active duty.
3. In a prospective military recruit conference, information should be provided on how to access resources to assist family members continue providing moral and emotional support for their loved ones throughout their military service. Policies need to be clearly articulated to spread awareness and to void confusion.

During Military Service

What is certain is that the VA, via the GI Bill, provided many veterans with the opportunity to obtain college degrees. What is not certain is the number of veterans who were not able to take advantage of such an opportunity. The following recommendations could be implemented during military service:

1. The Department of Defense should promote post-secondary educational services, especially to service members who signed short-term enlistment contracts. The leadership will make service members aware of the Tuition Assistance Program, which has provided 100% tuition assistance for active duty members; many service members have been unaware of this program. This program is separate from the GI Bill, which is only available to most veterans upon release from active duty. The Tuition Assistance Program provides service members with the

ability to take unlimited college-level classes to prepare them for four-year universities upon their discharge, prior to accessing their 36-month educational benefit entitlement. The researcher also recommends military leadership provide adequate and across the board access to the educational resources available to their subordinates on military bases.

2. Military leadership to establish and regulate protocol to help identify service members with physical or psychological disabilities such as PTSD, prior to discharge from active duty. In addition to knowledge of physical and mental health issues, military leadership should provide cognitive and physical therapy to service members and continue to follow through via the VA upon service members' discharge from active duty. Leadership should also seek to de-stigmatize mental disorders amongst current and future leadership. The Department of Defense to provide suicide prevention programs, part of which entails including service members' social network of family and friends. This will help ensure service members can feel valued and respected.
3. The Department of Defense should enhance the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) by providing clear understanding of all VA benefits and services, including educational benefits and vocational rehabilitation benefits. Instead of offering the class in as little as a week prior to discharge, TAP would be offered at least six months prior to discharge so service members would have ample time to apply to colleges.

4. The Department of Defense should connect service members prior to their discharge with regional and local veteran clubs to reduce the anxiety associated with transition from military to civilian life.
5. The Department of Defense should require all transition assistance programs for exiting service members to include a referral to the Department of Veterans Affairs for further assistance.

Post-military Service, Family, and Social Relationships

Family influence plays an important role in the development of service members' quality of life before and after their military service. Family of service members should play an integral role in helping veterans' transition from military back to civilian life. Many families believe their family member who served is stronger as a result of his or her military service. While this might be true, many veterans leave the military with physical and psychological disabilities requiring guidance and care. When asked about their social relations, the following responses underscored the important role families and friends play in the successes of service members during their academic journey:

I saw the Vet's Club, and I realized I was missing that. I had great friends before and after the service, but I was missing being able to talk to a veteran. So I reached out here (CSUS). (Mike)

Cause I don't really have anything here in California. No real friends to speak of. So the people on campus [student veterans] become my family. (Chris)

Well, it turns out I just like having someone to talk to who understands. So they [student veterans] help me emotionally. (Chris)

Two of my professors were veterans who were very supportive and open-minded. (Tammy)

Participant Mike expressed the following:

I am going to college. So in a wheelchair, I started going to Sac City College. My parents- I lived in their front rooms I could barely make it in the house- literally rearranged their house for me to live there for 8 months when I first got out, and eventually I moved out on my own, or with my brother, which helped with PTSD, and it really provided that ...you know it was really good to live with somebody else. So they started driving me to school. (Mike)

For all the participants in this study, family and social support was instrumental in their success. The researcher found the participants made no mention of any programs promoting the interaction between student veterans and non-veterans. Programs promoting the integration between veterans and non-veterans could help mutual understanding between both groups and eventually could help veterans adjust to campus life.

An essential element of trauma recovery, as recognized by many psychologists and scientists, is support from family and friends within the community. With the ongoing conflicts overseas in which the United States is involved, there will continue to be an increase in the number of service members with PTSD and other disabilities resulting from direct exposure to traumatizing events. In light of these increasing numbers of service members, it is more important than ever to understand the role expected of social support. Currently, more than 40% of service members are affected by various physical and psychological traumas (Money et al., 2011).

During basic military training, service members are compelled to work and communicate with one another as part of a single disciplined, cohesive unit. This

underscores the importance of unquestioned teamwork and of quickly and effectively mobilizing all available resources. This basic training lays the groundwork for life on the battlefield where service members rely on each other for physical protection and moral and psychological support. Therefore, service member peers can be the most accessible support resource off the battlefield as well (Money et al., 2011). As a result of this intense training and lifestyle, service members implicitly trust one another much more than their non-military counterparts.

The following recommendations could be implemented after separation from the military:

1. The VA establish a VA virtual peer-to-peer program allowing service members to address a wide range of issues, including educational resources, in synchronous or in asynchronous format.
2. Leadership in higher education to collaborate with the VA regional office by creating a mandatory orientation session for all student veterans upon enrollment in college. This mandatory session will address the physical, mental, and financial needs the service members might face while attending college.
3. Leadership in higher education to collaborate with the VA in providing faculty and administrators with quarterly training session on how to better serve veterans.
4. Development of programs at the college level promoting veteran and non-veteran student integration and interaction.

Conclusion

There are multiple actionable recommendations for further study, as well as for implementation. While some items may require a substantive review of existing Department of Education, Department of Defense, and VA policies, it is nonetheless critical for measurable steps to be taken in the near future to shore up pitfalls many current veterans have already fallen into. As mentioned previously, female veterans are 14% more likely to attend college and 3% more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree than their non-veteran counterparts (VA, 2009). Further study should examine motivational rationale and the availability of resources to determine the elevated success rate of women compared to their non-veteran counterparts. This study focused simply on successful veterans who completed their education and was not focused on success rates and the type of institutions they attended—whether the institution was private, public, or for-profit. Further studies should shed light on veterans who attempted but were unable to complete their college education.

There is substantive statistical data to back each recommendation, and veterans themselves have proven a valuable resource in terms of addressing and solving the current Department of Defense and VA policy deficiencies. Veterans' organizations working in tandem with high schools nationwide to provide access to existing resources can increase awareness and communication between community members. Taking a proactive approach at this juncture is the most cost-effective long-term solution to the

challenges and barriers current and future veterans face in achieving their educational and professional goals.

The passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009 increased the educational benefits available to veterans by helping defray the cost of tuition and fees at a wider range of educational institutions and training providers (Morin, 2011). Many colleges and universities have made great strides by creating outreach programs to veterans due to the guaranteed income involved. Furthermore, despite the fact some of these colleges and universities have hired academic counselors and established campus organizations, more and more veterans are out of jobs and disoriented. These programs are not entirely successful because they are designed to patch a large wound with a small Band-Aid. Veterans can still follow instructions if the instructions come from someone that understands them; most counselors are not military veterans. Veterans are faced with more problems than they anticipate; as previously indicated, studies show once veterans are enrolled in colleges, they start falling behind due to their inability to transition smoothly to civilian life because of abrupt changes in their routine and due to the harsh war background they had to endure for years. To many veterans, their ability to learn and progress in colleges is impaired by financial needs and also coupled with emotional, physical, and psychological scars. Also, veterans lag behind with a higher unemployment rate than other students (Morin, 2011). As a community, the returns of veterans are welcome news, and, from the perspective of higher education, witnessing veterans enroll in colleges and universities is encouraging and satisfying. However, we

have to be mindful of the challenges our veterans bring with them. Many of the veterans come back with combat-related injuries that affect their ability to succeed in college (Church, 2009).

Thomas Church, a consultant who has provided over 20 years of rehabilitation services to clients, including student veterans, remarked, “soldiers are more likely to sustain injuries than to die [in the Afghanistan and Iraqi wars] as they did in past wars based on the ratio of injuries to deaths,” and the reason was “medical advancements and improved equipment, especially protective body armor, contribute to the improved survival rate” (Church, 2009, p. 44). In other words, progress in saving lives and increasing longevity among veterans are positive attributes; however, as a society we need to adapt our communities and our educational system to accommodate these new changes and challenges. Colleges and universities ought to understand providing veterans-specialized counselors is no less important than providing handicap parking spots. Staff and faculty members need to understand and receive specialized training to learn how to deal with veterans who have invisible wounds affecting their cognitive abilities. In addition, colleges and universities need to understand the unique characteristics of the returning veterans. In general, veterans are nontraditional students. They are typically older and many are “technically considered transfer students because they often bring with them credit earned through college courses they completed while in the military, or American Council on Education credit recommendations” (ACE, 2011). While some veterans view college as an obligatory box to be checked to enhance

prospects for gainful employment after military service, other veterans embrace the opportunity to immerse themselves in the traditional college experience.

Several studies were conducted, mainly through interviews with student veterans. The student veterans vigorously voiced similar needs compared to traditional undergraduates. Because veterans are a diverse population, it is impossible to take a one-size-fits-all approach to serving them. Thus, one of the most important steps campus leadership can take is to gauge the specific needs of veterans at their institution before devoting resources to new initiatives (Bailey, 2011). Student veterans are more likely to succeed if they have a direct input communication line with school administrators. Transformational leadership in higher education would emphasize this approach by providing such a supportive program. But to implement such a plan, a method of input with different criteria is necessary to gauge and evaluate feedback from student veterans. Furthermore, leaders in higher education should examine their admission forms to include ways to enable any given institute to track incoming student veterans. Such action will allow them to advocate and develop a method of collaboration with surrounding community and organizations to provide comprehensive services. This collaboration is not inclusive solely of military veterans' organizations but also of minority organizations since the majority of military veterans demographically are minorities.

Returning veterans deserve better schools—schools that are sensitive enough to understand the students' backgrounds, which may include disadvantages and challenges,

nonetheless, that are strong enough to stand up for the status quo and determined to make the changes needed to serve all students regardless of their backgrounds. Many veterans do not transition out of the military in time to attend traditional orientation sessions, which often take place several weeks before a term begins (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Many veterans do not attend the basic introduction to the campus nor receive resources that other incoming students receive; this can result in feelings of disorientation from the outset (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Student veterans most likely will require specific information on benefits and other resources not typically included in the orientation for incoming students. To meet this need, there should be a program allowing any student to access benefits throughout the entire year. This can be done by promoting community service, collaboration, and volunteerism within the college and throughout the community. In addition, through awareness-building among administrators, staff, faculty, and students, opportunities to better understand the kinds of military experiences that may be absent from their own set of experiences or knowledge base can be created. One part of this program is promoting open debates; exploring psychological issues related to war could be a powerful way to foster critical thinking. Another part of the program is credited courses that help promote peace and conflict resolutions. Student veterans can accumulate credit by participating in these courses and representing the military or themselves, giving their perspectives on relevant topics.

As an advocate of multiculturalism, the researcher sees our nation's strength derives from our differences and unique qualities; therefore, it is important to celebrate

differences by providing support and encourage an atmosphere of family-like organization. Leadership needs to call for equal attention to all our minority groups, including military veterans. It is in the public's interest that the nation stands with service members as they struggle to assimilate back into society. The community will benefit in having culturally sensitive educational leaders who understand the types of emotional states our veterans might experience and be able to help make the veterans' transition from military life to civilian life a pleasant one. Indeed, if we can help pave the way for military veterans to make their journey back to the doors of the academia more meaningfully and efficiently, our mission will be complete.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Profile Sheet

- Name: _____
- Gender: Male Female Other: _____
- Age: _____
- Race: White/Caucasian African-American Hispanic Native American Pacific
4. Islander/ Other: _____
- Marital status _____
- Year deployed: _____
- Anticipated duration of deployment: _____
- Actual duration of deployment: _____
- Year first enrolled in college: _____
- Year re-enrolled in college: _____
- Nature of deployment: Combat Non-combat Other: _____
- Service branch: Army Navy Air Force Marine Corps Coast Guard
- At time of deployment, were you considered 'Reserve' personnel? Yes ___ No ___
- At time of deployment, were you considered 'National Guard' personnel?
Yes___ No___

APPENDIX B

Semi-structured Interview Questions

- Tell me about your military service. How long did/have you served?
- Why join the (insert military branch)?
- Describe your deployment(s) – what was your job? Where were you stationed?
- You were in college before you (enlisted/were called up).
- How long had you been in school?
- How would you characterize the enrollment process?
- What challenges did you face after you enrolled in college?
- How would you describe your academic transition after enrollment?
- What avenues of academic support did you utilize upon enrollment?
- How would you describe your social transition after enrollment?
- What avenues of social support did you utilize upon enrollment?
- How would you characterize fellow students' attitudes towards you as a student veteran?
- How would you characterize your attitude toward fellow students?
- How would you characterize faculty members' attitudes towards you as student veteran?
- Have you found the services at your school to be adequate in addressing the needs of veterans?
- What further support services would be helpful?

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Yousef M. Batarseh in the EDD program in the College of Education Department at California State University, Sacramento.

The number of military veterans returning to college has been growing over the past several years and will continue to grow as troops come home from Iraq and Afghanistan. Colleges and universities need to be as prepared as possible to serve the needs of these student veterans. As a participant in this research, you can help let policymakers and instructors and administrators know about your experiences coming back to school and civilian life.

The research itself will hopefully seem more like a conversation, as the “data” collected will be from one or more interviews I have with you. The interview(s) will be held in an agreed upon location. If you agree to participate, know that your identity will remain confidential and any identifiable information from our conversations will be made anonymous in my dissertation.

This study will investigate the academic and social experiences of student veterans following the transition from military service to enrollment in colleges in California. Further, the purpose of this study is to examine the needs of military veterans who are attending or have graduated from college with a threshold of a bachelor’s degree, and to discover what they deemed to be their needs, met or unmet, and how they used that knowledge to navigate around the items that may become barriers to success.

During this interview, you will be asked questions about your educational journey, perceptions and challenges of higher education, helpful resources and best support systems that contributed to your success.

With your permission the interview will be audiotaped and any writing pertaining to you will be done through a pseudo name. You have the right to skip any questions, stop the interview at any time, as well as the recording. Personal information on this consent form will remain with the researcher in a locked file cabinet at home. The transcripts from the interviews and the dissertation will be available for your review. This interview will take approximately one hour to complete.

You will receive \$20 gift certificate for your time and participating in the study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Dr. Robert Pritchard at (916) 278-4587 or by e-mail at Pritchard@csus.edu.

You may decline to be a participant in this study without any consequences. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

Signature of Participant

Date

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