

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Analysis of the Los Angeles County Veteran Internship Program

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and  
Leadership

By  
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## Abstract

### Analysis of the Los Angeles County Veteran Internship Program

By

Rigoberto Sanchez

Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and Leadership

Veterans experience a variety of issues when transitioning back to a civilian lifestyle, of note are employment issues. The private and public sector have launched initiatives to combat these employment issues, including the County of Los Angeles. In 2007, the Board of Supervisors approved the creation of the Veteran Internship Program (VIP) whose mission is to expose VIP interns to career opportunities and assist them in gaining skills and knowledge necessary to compete for permanent, full time positions with the County of Los Angeles. The proposed study will analyze factors associated with employment issues and successful internships to help identify key factors that led previous interns to become full time employees. Using a proposed survey, quantitative data can be gathered from current County of Los Angeles employees who were previous participants of the VIP. This study can provide the County of Los Angeles baseline data to assess if and how the program can be improved.

## **Introduction**

Veterans experience a variety of issues when transitioning back to a civilian lifestyle, of note is employment. (Tanielan, Hansen, Martin, Grimm, & Ogletree, 2016; Kukla, Rattray, Salyers, 2015). In 2005, the unemployment rate of Los Angeles County veterans was 5.5% and by 2012 the rate increased to 12.8% (Ong & Ong, 2014). During this time period, the American economy was experiencing the Great Recession which exacerbated veteran unemployment throughout the United States (Faberman & Foster, 2013). Public concern about the unemployment rate and how it was specifically affecting veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars caused the private and public sector to act.

In 2007, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors established the Veteran Internship Program (VIP) and it is still in effect as of the time of this writing. The mission of the program is to expose VIP interns to career opportunities and assist them in gaining skills and knowledge necessary to compete for permanent positions with the County. In 2009, President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13518. The Executive Order, also known as the Veterans Employment Initiative, called for government agencies to increase federal employment opportunities for veterans and for specific agencies to work together to create counseling and training programs (The White House, Office of Press Secretary, 2009). In 2011, a coalition of 11 major private companies came together with the goal of hiring 100,000 veterans, this initiative become known as the 100,000 Jobs Mission. As of 2018, the coalition has evolved to over 200 companies, renamed themselves to Veteran Jobs Mission, and have hired over 500,000 veterans (Veteran Jobs Mission, 2018).

Limited research exists on the evaluation of the Veterans Employment Initiative and the 100,000 Jobs Mission yet no literature associated with the evaluation of the Veteran Internship Program was found by the researcher (Curry Hall, Harrell, Bicksler, Stewart, & Fisher, 2014; Moses-Stanton, 2018). The purpose of this paper is to set a framework to explore the Los Angeles County Veteran Internship Program and its effectiveness in the successful transitioning of interns into permanent employees with the County of Los Angeles. Literature about veteran employment issues will be explored along with literature associated with factors that lead towards a successful internship. This paper will apply the success factors of internship programs to a survey for previous VIP participants, that if conducted, can provide Los Angeles County data needed to assess if and how the program can be improved.

## **Background**

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors established the Veteran Internship Program (VIP) in 2007. The mission of the program is to expose VIP interns to career opportunities and assist them in gaining skills and knowledge necessary to compete for permanent, full time positions with the County. The interns are hired for 12 to 24 months and they are to obtain skills and knowledge necessary by assisting journey-level workers in developmental and training assignments (Los Angeles County Human Resources, 2019). The program is consisting of 6 different classifications: administrative support, technical support, office and clerical support, crafts support, heavy maintenance and operational support and information technology support. Each classification has its own unique classification standards and job duties.

A veteran can apply to the program by applying to any of the classifications through the County's employment website. According to the Los Angeles County Human Resources webpage, eligible applicants must be veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States and must have been discharged under honorable conditions. The applicant must also have a valid copy of their Certificate of Discharge or Separation, also known as a DD214, or any other official documentation providing proof of service. After submission of the application, personnel from the Department of Human Resources evaluate the application and determine the band level of the applicant. Band levels are based on the veteran's experience performing similar job duties as described in the classification.

The County of Los Angeles, like other local governments, uses the banding method, also known as the grouping method, to establish an ordered list of applicants

who are eligible to be interviewed. This recruitment and selection process were established by the Los Angeles County Code, Rule 11 – Certification and Appointment (Los Angeles County – Code of Ordinances, 2019). When Departments want to hire a veteran intern, they request the certification list from their Human Resources section and they are provided a list of candidates, ordered by bands. VIP interns go through the same hiring process as temporary and permanent County employees. Once employed the interns are considered temporary full-time employees and receive County benefits such as a retirement savings account, medical and dental benefits.

On November 2014, Director of Personnel for Los Angeles County reported to the Board of Supervisors the status of the VIP. According to the meeting transcripts, Director Garrett stated that 325 veteran interns had been hired in 21 Departments since the start of the program. Director Garrett further explained that from those 325 VIP interns, 152 have gone on to permanent county employment (Los Angeles County BOS Transcripts, 2014). A search through the Board of Supervisors meeting transcripts repository does not provide current statistics. Considering the numbers available from 2014, it shows that the VIP has a 46% rate in converting interns into full time permanent employees.

The County of Los Angeles also helps veterans in achieving permanent employment through a preferential points system. Local, state, and the federal government honor veterans for their service by treating them preferentially. Regarding states, “four states give [veterans] absolute preference – hiring qualified veterans ahead of more-qualified nonveterans – and the other forty-six use point systems that mirror the traditional federal system” (Lewis and Pathak, 2014, p. 91). Los Angeles County mirrors

the traditional federal system by providing veteran preference points. The County automatically awards 10 points to veterans in open competitive examinations. The County does not provide points to veterans for promotional examinations. The County stands in a unique position, as compared to other local and state governments, as it has two systems that are independent but when complemented with each other can greatly increase the probability of a veteran obtaining a full-time permanent position with the County.

The County of Los Angeles has assisted veterans in obtaining local government employment through the Veteran Internship Program and its preferential point system. As of the time of this writing, the researcher has not found publicly available information identifying key factors that allow for VIP interns to successfully transition to full time permanent County employment. In order to identify key factors that may lead to the successful conversion, the researcher looked at literature associated to veteran employment issues and successful internships. The following review of literature explores these two topics and extracts factors that can provide a path towards identifying the key factors that allow for successful conversion of VIP interns.

## **Review of the Literature**

This review of literature will provide an overview of employment issues experienced by veterans when they attempt to secure employment after their separation from military service and will investigate literature associated to successful internships. Regarding veteran employment issues, this literature review will analyze education level after separation, translation of military experience, meaningful jobs, underemployment, and cultural clash. Regarding successful internships this literature review will focus on proper planning, motivation of participants, and communication. The purpose of exploring these two topics is to identify factors can that be applied to a survey instrument to establish our understanding of the relationship between these factors and successful conversion of VIP interns into permanent employees of the County of Los Angeles.

### **Veteran Employment Issues**

#### *Education level after separation*

Most military recruits tend to be high school graduates and statistics from 2017 show that 80.6% of Active Duty service members have a high school diploma, GED, or some college (Department of Defense, 2018). When the servicemember completes their Active Duty term they enter the labor market with a high school diploma unless further education was pursued during their time in service. It is estimated that by 2020, 65% of all jobs in the United States will require training and education beyond high school (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2013). This is of importance as when the veteran enters the labor market, he or she is competing with individuals who have years of civilian work experience and likely a college degree.

Authors Keeling, Kintzle and Castro (2018) highlight the mentality of veterans when it comes to finding employment and the requirement of needing a college degree. In their research they report how veterans feel as though they have no other recourse than to start from entry level positions which are low paying jobs. A similar sentiment is expressed by those veterans who do obtain a college degree during their military service. According to Keeling et al (2018) veterans who obtained a college degree come across the obstacle of not having enough work experience in their desired position and therefore feel as though they have no other option than obtain entry-level jobs. Keeling et al (2018) show that the reality of some veterans is that with or without a college diploma they will encounter employment issues and tend to resort to low paying jobs.

A low quantity of veterans pursue higher education by using their education benefit, the Post 9/11 GI Bill, after separation of military service. Higher education is defined as education received after the High School level including Associates, Bachelor's, trade certification, etc. An estimate from the Department of Veteran Affairs states that only 13 percent of veterans are using their educational benefits (Hill, Kurzweil, Pisacreta, Schwartz, 2019, p. 4). The Post-9/11 GI bill provides a series of benefits to veterans, servicemembers and their eligible family members. The Post 9/11 GI bill can provide "up to full tuition, a monthly stipend, and money for books and supplies" (Callahan and Jarrat, 2014, p. 37). The true number of veterans who withdrawal from pursuing higher education is unknown (Callahan and Jarrat, 2014, p. 37). One estimation puts completion of higher education at 53.6% (Cate, Lyon, Schmelting & Bogue, 2017, p. 32). The estimate of veterans completing higher education coupled with the amount of

veterans who access their Post 9/11 GI Bill highlights that a very small percentage of the veteran population achieves higher education.

### *Translation of Military Experience*

Veterans face the difficulty of matching their military experience to civilian occupations. The difficulty is compounded with occupations that require occupational certifications and/or licenses. One such occupation is the medical field in where the requirement to obtain certifications and licenses vary per state. There is also the issue of employers who lack understanding and have misperceptions about veterans' skillsets and military experiences (Davis, and Minnis, 2017). The lack of knowledge by human resource professional exacerbates veterans' ability to transfer their skills towards employment. The problem of translating military experience to the private and public sector is a known problem and one that has led to the creation of online tools and an increase in training prior to military service separation. Through a comprehensive approach the problem of translating military experience be minimized.

It takes dedicated personnel who understand their occupational field, the certifications required to work in the field, and willing to create unconventional programs to assist veterans in translating their military experience. In a pilot program based out of San Antonio, Texas, a group of dedicated medical personnel invested their time and effort to assist veterans who held military occupations related to the medical field. In the pilot program, former military medics were trained to become part of a "team-based, shared practice model that focuses on care coordination, interdisciplinary treatment planning, home visits, and health coaching" (Watts, Lawrence, Schaub, Lea, Hasenstaub, Slivka, & Kirsh, 2016, p. e1465). To identify a general perspective of the type of

education a military medic receives, Watts et al (2016) reviewed “military medic and corpsman training manuals, reviewed literature about roles of emergency medical technicians in community paramedicine programs, and spoke with local and regional subject matter experts, including several current and former military medics and corpsmen” (p. e1465). After consulting regulatory issues and focusing their hiring process on specific candidates, Watts et al (2016) designed a program that provided training and skill development that was consistent with regulatory framework for ambulatory and home health care.

The program placed veteran medics in interdisciplinary care teams whose focus was the health care of veteran patients. The program had 3 key goals: 1. Developing role clarification, 2. Designing training programs to address gaps in training and knowledge, and 3. Team development. The result of the pilot program was that the veterans were able to translate the skills gained during their military service and were able to fulfill the need of non-licensed professionals for a patient intensive management program. Preliminary evidence of the training program suggests that the veterans have become key members of the clinical care team (Watts et al. 2016). This innovative program shows that professionals, in this case medical professionals, who are aware of the obstacles presented by the certification process and know about the skillset acquired by the veteran can assist veterans in finding employment that meets their skillset.

At the root of the translation of military experience problem is the fact that some of the skills gained do not directly transfer to civilian employment. Servicemembers are given their military occupational skill through the results of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) and the needs of their service branch. The

servicemember attends a basic course at the beginning of their service and attends additional schools to further improve their knowledge as they move up in rank and experience. In addition to these specific skills, servicemembers also acquire soft skills that military job translators do not account for. Military job translators are typically online resources in where the veteran can input his or her branch of service and military occupational skill and the translator generates a list of comparable civilian occupations (Executive Office of the President, 2012). As Davis and Minnis (2017) state, “veterans need to elucidate how the essence of skills such as planning, leadership, risk mitigation, decision-making, communicating, and military intelligence capabilities developed in the military can be utilized to make employers more successful” (p. 8). To assist veterans in translating skills more is needed than a translator, support from human resources personnel is needed.

Support from human resources personnel can start by reevaluation of their perspective of the military experience. David and Minnis (2017) suggests that people in general have a perspective of the military experience as being combat only. This perspective occurs as fewer Americans are serving in the military and increased security of information causes people to be less aware of the skills gained by servicemembers (David and Minnis, 2017). One way to change the perspective of human resource personnel is by having them obtain specific training on the benefits of employing veterans. Another method is for the human resource professional to engage in conversations with veterans within their organization about their experience in the service. Davis and Minnis (2017) suggest that the creation of affinity groups for veterans within the organization who “could be called upon to contribute in hiring processes and

training around veterans' issues in the organization" (p. 11) can greatly increase the ability of human resources personnel in effectively recruiting and managing veterans. The issue of translating military experience can be minimized by having dedicated people, who are knowledgeable in their field, to create unique programs within their organization and for human resource professionals to increase their knowledge of the military experience.

### *Meaningful Jobs*

Literature highlights the positive correlation that exists between employment and a person deriving a sense of competence, integrity, and feeling of belonging (Bellotti, Laffaye, Weingardt, Fischer, & Schumacher, 2011). According to Bellotti et al (2011), "[p]articipating in positive, constructive, academic, physical, and social activities upon returning home may serve a protective function" (p. 52) for veterans. When the veteran performs work that is meaningful to them Bellotti et al (2011) argue that the feeling of alienation when returning to civilian employment is reduced. Authors Bellotti et al (2011) analyze the Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) job training program which was established by the Washington State Legislature. The Legislature allocated funds for Post 9/11 veterans to be trained in green jobs. Green jobs are those jobs "that contribute to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction, or in new emerging green sectors such as renewable energy or energy efficiency" (International Labour Organization, 2016, para. 1).

The job training program was "very integrative, providing not only vocational training but time spent outdoors, exercise, the opportunity to contribute positively to the environment, and social connection" (Bellotti et al., 2009, p. 53). The authors present five

benefits associated with this type of integrative job training program. First, due to the program requiring physical activity, this type of exertion led to both improved mood and physical health. Second, performing work with meaning within their communities prevented veterans from feeling alienated. Third, the skills they obtained were able to be used for employment opportunities. Fourth, a support system was created between the program participants. Fifth, “close contact with the natural world may provide restorative emotional experiences; cultivating broadened perspectives, promoting psychological healing, and evoking a sense of well-being” (p. 53). This job training program is comprehensive as it not only provides skills that can be transferrable to an emerging labor market, but it also helps veterans improve themselves both mentally and physically.

The vocational outcomes of this program highlight that it was effective as participants were able to obtain green jobs because of the educational and work components of the program. The authors assess that the program assisted in improving the veteran’s ability to address reintegration issues. Bellotti et al (2009) state,

[p]articipants improved their ability to connect with others and sustain friendships and relationships between the beginning and the end of the program. It is reasonable to posit that the [job training program] provided veterans with the structure within which to cultivate friendships and a sense of community, serving the purpose of preventing functional impairment in social settings. (p. 56)

Programs like this one and the medic pilot program allow for veterans to connect with each other and gain new and use previous skillsets to transition into meaningful employment opportunities.

### *Underemployment*

Underemployment occurs when people are employed “at less than full time or regular jobs or at jobs inadequate with respect to their training or economic needs”

(Merriam-Webster, 2019). Research indicates that veterans, at times, have no other option than to resort to underemployment to pay bills and obtain some income rather than being unemployed (Tanielian et al., 2016, Patraeus and Goodfriend, 2014). In terms of statistics, one survey presents that nearly one third of veterans are underemployed in a low paying position (New Hampshire Business Review, 2015). Research by Tanielian et al (2016) suggests that veterans who are underemployed through the acceptance of low paying jobs can lead them to become financially insecure which may ultimately “place pressure on family relationships and ultimately the mental state of the veterans” (p. 38).

Veteran underemployment is further exacerbated when the employer does not plan career development for its employees. In the past decade, many veteran hiring initiatives have been established. These hiring initiatives provide tax breaks and other benefits to employers who employ veterans. Though companies may hire large numbers of veterans they do not commit the necessary resources to ensure that the veteran is able to build a meaningful career (Patraeus & Goodfriend, 2014). Patraeus and Goodfriend (2014) state “companies may report impressive numbers of veterans hired in a year and thus enjoy a public-relations success, but the veterans they hire often end up in part-time, seasonal or dead-end jobs with little training and few opportunities to advance” (para. 7). . This lack of career development planning causes veterans to be left behind as compared to their counterparts at other companies. Employment is not enough for veterans to successfully transition, the right salary, commitment of resources from the employer are needed in order to prevent underemployment.

### *Cultural clash*

When veterans become employed some experience a culture clash. The culture clash exists in many domains, here we will focus on two domains: the work environment, and work ethic. In the domain of work environment, the military is a highly structured environment in where roles and positions are clearly identified and access to leadership is limited to established communication channels. In contrast to civilian employment, some organizations have a more flexible structure allowing immediate access to leadership as well as evolving roles and responsibilities. The difference in work environment is highlighted by a quote from a participant of a mixed methods study, “in the military everything’s in a book[,] ... if you want to know how to do something there is a book that tells you how to do it” (Kukla, Rattray, & Salyers , 2015, p. 485). The difference in work environment causes veterans to become frustrated which leads to voluntary exit from the position or termination (Tanielian, et al, 2015; Keeling et al, 2018; Kukla et al, 2015).

In terms of work ethic, some veterans experience frustration when comparing their work ethic to other employees in their organization. In the Kukla et al., (2015), one participant explains the difference in work ethic as follows, “[w]hen you go to the civilian workplace, civilians take a lot of things for granted...they haven’t had their life depend upon the simple things...” (p. 485). The work ethic point is also highlight in a participant quote from the Keeling et al (2018) in where a participant states, “I’ll be picking up the slack working circles around everybody, its’ just like no respect” (p. 67). In the military service there is a different sense of work ethic when it comes to completing tasks as some tasks need to be completed in a timely manner regardless of the

extended hours the servicemember needs to work. This work ethic of veterans is understandable due to the time sensitivity of certain situations such as the combat environment.

### **Internships**

Internships provide an opportunity for people enter a work environment of their interest and see firsthand whether the environment is what they were expecting. Internships can take place as part of a curriculum or they can be self-initiated. In general, internships are unpaid, last a short amount time, usually 10 weeks to 4 months, and the participant does not need to have actual work experience in the desired work environment. Usually with internships, there is little to no expectation from either party that an employment offer will be given at the end of the internship. There are many benefits to internships such as having firsthand access to a field of interest, establishing a network, and increasing the participants marketability (Reinagel & Gerlach, 2015; Cuyler & Hodges, 2015). Organizations also benefit from internships by “seeking youthful and energetic support that adds new and creative approaches to program and service delivery” (Reinagel & Gerlach, 2015, p. 74). Internships are beneficial to all parties when proper planning is conducted, motivated persons are involved, and effective communication is present.

Proper planning is needed for a successful internship. Part of proper planning for internships is identifying the purpose/goal of the internship. Goals can be as simple as wanting to “improve student learning” (Wright, Wu, Frye, Mathur, Patrick Jr., 2007, p. 28) or the completion of a project (Johari & Bradshaw, 2006). Part of proper planning is also identifying the roles and responsibilities people within the internship experience

have, as well as ensuring that all participants are aware and understand the different roles and responsibilities. It can be argued that the success of the internship experience relies on the internship coordinator as he or she must be aware of the diverse needs and wants of the participants and ensure that the purpose/goal of the internship is going to be met, answer any questions from the parties involved, and problem solve any situations that arise (Hamilton & Pajari, 1997). With proper planning the internship is likely to be a success.

Another contributing factor to a successful internship is the motivation of the participants. Johari & Bradshaw (2006) who focused on project-based internships explain that “motivation keeps learners engaged in the project, thereby increasing the likelihood of success” (p. 339). In their survey Johari & Bradshaw (2006) acknowledge intrinsic motivating factors of individuals who felt as though they had autonomy over their projects which motivated them to ensure that their project was successful. Site mentors also need to be motivated individuals and of high quality for the internship experience to be a success. The site mentor should be motivated to see the success of the internship and this can be established by providing persuading feedback to the participants as well as being encouraging (Johari & Bradshaw, 2006).

Communication is essential in an internship and the internship coordinator is the person who needs to ensure that communication occurs between all participants. The success of the internship starts with the internship coordinator communicating with the intern and understanding the interns overall objectives. Likewise, the internship coordinator needs to communicate with the host agency to ensure a positive outcome for all participants. Hamilton and Pajari (1997) identify that often interactions between

internship stakeholders becomes impaired by “failure to fully recognize the multitude of expectations held by each party” (p. 205). Even though the internship coordinator might attempt to communicate with all parties involved, a breakdown of communication can still occur. The internship coordinator needs to rely on his or her communication skills to either resolve the issue or terminate the internship for the benefit of all parties. Without proper communication and without clear expectations/goals, the internship is not likely to be successful.

Internships, especially those that are unpaid, are not without critique. Discenna (2016) argues that “the argument that interning provides a meaningful educational experience looks increasingly threadbare in light of what many internships actually entail: menial labor with little or no relation to the educational goals of the student” (p. 436). Not all internships are the same and depending on the industry in which the internship is taking place the depiction of Discenna is correct. The internship literature covered by this researcher depicts that carefully planned internships benefit all participants. Of note are unpaid internships and according to Discenna (2016) unpaid internships cause “our youngest workers the expectation that a certain amount of unpaid labor is a necessity for ‘success’ in the contemporary economy” (p. 437). Though Discenna (2016) depiction of internship may hold truth, the current model of internship appears to work and with proper planning, motivated people involved, and effective communication the likelihood of a successful internship is increased.

## **Literature Review Summary**

Veterans tend to experience many employment issues after separating from their service. When it comes to finding employment, many veterans do not have the sufficient education needed to apply for jobs. The lack of education causes veterans to seek entry-level jobs which have lower wages. Veterans also have difficulty in translating their skills in a manner that maximizes their true experience. Veterans tend to want to do jobs that have are meaningful to them. At times Veterans tend to be and feel underemployed taking lower wage positions due to the need of financial security, and the lack of proper employee development programs after the veteran has gain employment. Lastly, veterans experience a culture clash when employed due to their structured environment while serving and a less structure setting throughout their civilian employment. Successful internships occur when proper planning takes place, there are motivated participants in the internship, and there are effective lines of communication between all participants of the internship.

## **Research Gap**

Based on the literature, there are a variety of employment issues that veterans encounter when attempting to find employment. These issues have been discussed at the private and public industry level, yet minimal literature exists discussing employment issues of veterans when they work at the local government level. In addition, literature about internships primarily focuses on college students, and they primarily are for a short time frame and the internship is unlikely to lead to employment. Finally, literature about veteran internship programs created and managed by a local government agency is nonexistent. To build upon previous research regarding veteran employment issues, internship literature, and the local government experience of managing a veteran internship program, further research should investigate the key factors that led program participants of the Veteran Internship Program to successfully obtain permanent employment with the County.

### **Research Question and Aim**

What are the key contributing factors that led program participants of the Veteran Internship Program to successfully compete and obtain permanent, full time positions with Los Angeles County?

The aim is to conduct a study comparing the factors experienced by veterans when seeking employment and factors that tend to make an internship successful to determine key contributing factors that led VIP participants into full time permanent employment with the County of Los Angeles. This study can provide Los Angeles County data needed to assess if and how the program can be improved. In addition, this study can provide a framework which other local governments can use to create their own version of the VIP to assist veterans in their communities in becoming public servants.

## **Research Design**

The researcher proposes non-experimental survey research using a questionnaire to fulfill the requirement for the degree of Master of Public Administration in Public Sector Management and Leadership. The proposed survey consists of 3 parts: collecting data about demographics, experiences in the VIP, and recommendations for changes. The questionnaire is to utilize factors associated with employment issues and successful internships explored in the review of literature. The population of the study will be current LA County employees who successfully transitioned to permanent employment with the County.

### **Approach**

#### *Survey Structure and Delivery*

This survey consists of 17 questions separated into 3 parts. Part I collects demographic information about the veteran. Part I consists of demographic information with 2 questions taken from the American Community Survey and questions specific to participants of the VIP. Part 2 collects information through a 4-point Likert scale questions consisting of level of agreement. Part 3 collects information through an open-ended question where the participant can provide details of his or her experience if they choose to. The unit of analysis for the study is the LA County employee who was previously a VIP participant.

The survey is to be created and distributed using an online survey tool such as SurveyMonkey. The survey will be open for 2 weeks to allow the participant ample time to complete the survey. All questions in the survey will be required. It is estimated that the burden of time to complete the survey is 15 minutes. The results of the survey are to

be downloaded into a spreadsheet format from the online survey tool and transferred to a secured cloud-based account.

### *Review of Survey*

The researcher proposes for the questionnaire to have pilot tests prior to distribution, to ensure that it is clear, and it is easy to use (Blair, 2018). After each pilot test, the lead researcher will review the questionnaire and ensure that it is measuring what it is meant to collect. The pilot tests can be conducted with groups of 3 people who show interest in filling out the survey. Interest can be identified through the initial data collection phase or through conversations the researcher has had with previous VIP participants.

### *Sampling*

In 2014, it was estimated that 152 participants successfully transitioned to full time permanent employment. Due to the low quantity of successful participants, the researcher proposes to contact all prior participants. The researcher anticipates the response rate to be 70% as previous participants may be motivated to voice their opinion on a program that has led them to permanent employment. The researcher anticipates the Department of Human Resources having the current numbers of veterans who have successfully transitioned to full time permanent employment as to date. With this number known, the researcher can calculate the sample size from the number of respondents to the survey.

### *Data Collection*

The researcher proposes to acquire contact information, primarily email and telephone numbers, of previous participants by making requests to the Los Angeles County Department of Human Resources, the Los Angeles County Veteran Employee Association, and performing data mining. An official request for information can be made to the Los Angeles County Department of Human Resources through their Public Information Request webpage (Los Angeles County Department of Human Resources, 2019). A request can also be made to the Los Angeles County Military and Veteran Employee Association to forward an email to its members. The email can include a cover letter describing the survey and its purpose along with contact information for the researcher. Lastly, information about program participants can be captured by data mining the website Transparent California and conducting an advance search with the key term “veteran intern” in the “Name or job title” field. According to their website, Transparent California is a “public service and is dedicated to providing accurate, comprehensive and easily searchable information on the compensation of public employees in California” (Transparent California, 2019). The website appears to be the most comprehensive resource available to capture publicly available information of County employees.

All data collected and its derivative products are to be stored in a secured cloud-based account and kept confidential. Only researchers assigned to this study are to have access to the information. Identifiable information captured throughout the data collection phase is to be kept separate from the research data and be reported in the aggregate.

### *Data Analysis*

The survey consists of 3 components. The first component, Demographics, is includes identifiable information. The first component will not require descriptive statistics as the questions are nominal. The second component, VIP Experience, consists of Likert ordinal questions. The descriptive statistics that can be used for this portion of the survey is the median to establish central tendency and frequencies for variability (Boon Jr. & Boone, 2012). The third component of the survey, Recommendations, is an open-ended question. The responses of this question will be analyzed by identifying the frequency of specific phrases, through a method such as word cloud.

In the scenario outliers become present, the researcher should review the individual survey and decide on the validity of the survey. It is possible that a survey participant quickly responded to the survey without carefully reading the questions. The outliers should not automatically be dismissed as they may provide insightful information of unique experiences. In the situation that the researcher categorizes the survey response to be invalid, the researcher should remove the responses and annotate in the findings.

## **Variables and Hypothesis**

As we study the factors that contribute to successful transition from temporary to full time permanent employment with Los Angeles County, independent and dependent variables must be used to identify the key factors. To assess the variables, a survey (Appendix A) that includes nominal scale questions will be given to all County employees who successfully transitioned from being an intern to permanent full-time employee with the County. The dependent variable for this study is the number of program participants that became full time permanent employees with Los Angeles County. The following are the independent variables with their associated hypothesis.

### *Education level after separation.*

The first independent variable for this survey is education level prior to obtaining employment with the County. The question in the survey that will capture this information is “What was your educational level at the time of being hired?”. This question aims to capture education level to observe the relationship between the minimum requirement of not needing higher education to apply to the position and the type of education applicants have. The researcher hypothesizes that most of the respondents will have education higher than high school. One reasons for this positive correlation may be due to veterans using their Post 9/11 GI Bill after separating from their military service.

### *Translation of Military Experience*

The second independent variable for this survey is the translation of military experience. The question in the survey that will capture this information is “Did your military experience match the job duties of your VIP classification?”. The purpose of this

question is twofold. First, to identify if LA County is accurately capturing the experience of the veteran and translating it to the correct classification. Second, to identify if the veteran accepted a position that was outside his military experience. The researcher hypothesizes that due to the variety of jobs that military veterans have held that their experience will slightly match the job duties of the VIP classification.

### *Meaningful Job*

The third independent variable is whether the VIP participant perceives his position as meaningful. The question in the survey that will capture this information is “Did you feel as though your work as a VIP participant provided you meaningful work?”. The researcher hypothesizes that veterans whose military experience was matched accurately to the VIP classification will exhibit great levels of meaning.

### *Underemployment*

The fourth independent variable is the perception of underemployment. The question in the survey that will capture this information is “Did you feel underemployed as a VIP intern?”. The researcher hypothesizes that veterans felt underemployed due to the soft skills they acquired during their time in service.

### *Cultural Clash*

The fifth independent variable is the cultural clash. This variable is to be tested with two questions: “How difficult was it to adapt to the County work environment?” and “How difficult was it to adapt to the work ethic of other County employees?”. The researcher hypothesizes that the respondents found it difficult to adapt to the work environment and work ethic of County employees. The researcher hypothesizes these answers due to the probability that if VIP participants had extreme difficulty in adapting

to the work environment and work ethic, they would not have continued their participation in the VIP.

### *Planning*

The sixth independent variable is planning support. This variable is to be tested with two questions: “Did you receive planning support from the Department of Human Resources towards applying for a full-time permanent position with the County?” and “Was planning conducted with your Department staff towards the goals and outcomes they expected from you?”. The researcher hypothesizes that the majority of the respondents did have planning support from DHR and their department. It is likely that this support allowed the intern the ability to be aware of more opportunities that led to full time permanent employment.

### *Motivation*

The seventh independent variable is motivation. This variable will be tested by one question: “How would you define the motivation factor of staff willing to assist you in obtaining full time permanent employment with the County?”. The researcher hypothesizes that respondents had motivated staff to help them achieve the goal of the internship program.

### *Communication*

The eighth independent variable is communication. This variable will be tested by two questions: “How would you rate communication between yourself and your department staff?” and “How would you rate communication between yourself and DHR staff?”. The distinction between these two levels of communication can highlight which component has the greater correlation towards successful placement of the program

participant. The researcher hypothesizes that communication between program participants and department staff occurs more frequently than communication between the participant and DHR.

## **Discussion**

### **Methodological Implications**

The researcher opted to use survey research in order to capture factor information from previous VIP participants. The use of a questionnaire allows for the survey to be quickly available to all participants, for the answers to be collected systematically, and allows for the capability for anonymity which may produce more truthful feedback. The researcher anticipates the response rate to be approximately 70%. If the population size of successful VIP participants is 500 and there is a response rate of 70% the margin of error in the results of the survey is 3%. Therefore, if these conditions hold true, it can be assessed that there is a high degree of generalizability. In regard to reliability, the test-retest method can be used 3 months after the original survey deadline (McLeod, 2013). If the test-retest method provides a correlation of over .90 then it can be determined that the questionnaire has a high test-retest reliability. Critics of survey research indicate that surveys tend to have low responder rate (Blair, 2016; Leedy, Ormrod, & Johnson, 2019). Another critique of survey research is that “the people who do return [the surveys] aren’t necessarily representative of the originally selected sample” (Leedy et al., p. 184). The researcher anticipates a medium to large response rate due to the uniqueness of participation in the VIP that previous participants will want to voice their opinion.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher is a current employee of the County of Los Angeles and is a previous participant of the VIP. The researcher has access to current and previous VIP participants as well as access to an email system that provides names and employment title information. The researcher needs to ensure that proper steps are taken to prevent the

spillover of information from normal work duties into the research. To prevent this spillover effect, the researcher intends to use alternative contact information than his employment contact information. In addition, the researcher is to conduct the research outside his normal work hours and duties. Due to the researcher's participation in the VIP, he needs to ensure that his personal experience with the program does not influence the interpretation of the survey results. To prevent biases, the researcher is to conduct ethical and bias training through the review of public administration literature. The researcher intends to communicate with previous professors

### **Research Limitations**

This proposed study will use ordinal questions with predetermined responses and one question allows the participant to fill in their response. One of the limitations of using predetermined responses is that the researcher limits the possibility of responses that a respondent can provide (Visser, Krosnick, & Lavrakas, 2000). This limitation prevents participants from providing a more robust and comprehensive response. The limitation of using fill in responses is that the responses can vary greatly which causes difficulty when coding responses (Visser et al., 2000). Additionally, the results of this survey are limited to only the Los Angeles County experience.

It is currently unknown if the Department of Human Resources keeps track of the career progression of VIP participants and whether they will be able to disclose their contact information. The Los Angeles County Military and Veteran Employee Association is a new association and it is unknown the extent of their membership and whether members specify if they were VIP participants. It is also unknown if the employee association can inform its members of survey opportunities. The usage of

Transparent California requires the resulting names of the search to be captured and transposed into a spreadsheet to create an inventory of names. These names are then to be cross-referenced with social media such as LinkedIn to obtain their contact information. Each person is then to be reached and asked for specific contact information. It is currently unknown the time it would take to collect this information and whether the information available in the social media site is accurate.

### **Survey Population**

It should be noted that the population of the survey will consist of current County of Los Angeles employees who have successfully transitioned from temporary to permanent employee. This specific population was successful in achieving the objective of the program and therefore it is anticipated that the results will be positive. Special attention should be placed on those survey responses that primarily provide a negative perspective of the program. These negative responses can provide additional insight on the factors that caused a participant to continue to work for a system that was not supportive during their internship experience.

## **Conclusion**

Veterans experience a variety of issues when transitioning back to a civilian lifestyle, of note is employment. During the Great Recession, the American economy was in a major downturn which increased levels of unemployment and exacerbated veteran unemployment. Public concern about the unemployment rate and how it was specifically affecting veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars caused the private and public sector to act. In the public sector, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors established the Veteran Internship Program (VIP) in 2007. The purpose of the internship program was to expose VIP interns to career opportunities and assist them in gaining skills and knowledge necessary to compete for permanent positions with the County.

The researcher did not find literature evaluating the effectiveness of the VIP. The researcher reviewed literature associated to veteran employment issues and successful internships to identify factors that can be translated into a survey to gauge effectiveness. Regarding veteran employment issues, education level after separation, translation of military experience, meaningful jobs, underemployment, and cultural clash were identified as important factors. Regarding successful internships, the researcher found proper planning, motivation of participants, and communication to be important factors.

The researcher proposes a questionnaire for previous participants of the VIP who are currently employed by Los Angeles County. The results of the questionnaire can provide the County of Los Angeles a framework to assess if and how the program can be improved.

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## Appendix A

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. Your participation in this survey will increase our knowledge of the Veteran Internship Program and its participants. The following questions will be used to determine the factors that led Veteran Internship Program participants to successfully promote into full time permanent positions with Los Angeles County. Your responses will remain confidential and no one is able to figure out your survey answers from the statistics produced. This survey is voluntary and will not affect your employment situation with the County.

### **Part I - Demographics**

What was your period of service?

- Peacetime only
- Gulf War II
- Gulf War I
- Vietnam Era
- Korean War
- World War II

What was your educational level at the time of being hired?

- Only high school
- Some college education
- Had completed a degree (Associates, Bachelor's, Masters, etc)

What was your age at the time of being hired as a VIP participant?

- 18-29 years
- 30-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65 years or older

How long were you a veteran intern?

- Less than 1 year
- 12-23 months
- Over 24 months

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female
- Intersex

What was your veteran internship classification? (If one than one use the most recent)

- Administrative support
- Technical support

- Office and clerical support
- Crafts support
- Heavy maintenance and operation support
- Information technology support

## **Part II - VIP Experience**

### **Work Experience**

Did your military experience match the job duties of your VIP classification?

- My military experience did not match my job duties
- My military experience slightly matched my job duties
- My military experience matched my job duties
- My military experience greatly matched my job duties

Did you feel as though your work as a VIP participant provided you meaningful work? Meaningful work is defined as the importance of the purposes of work in people's view of life and attitudes.

- My work did not provide a meaningful experience
- My work slightly provided a meaningful experience
- My work provided a meaningful experience
- My work greatly provided a meaningful experience

Did you feel underemployed as a VIP intern? Underemployment occurs when a person is not paid enough for the work they are doing or when the person's employment is not making full use of their skills and abilities.

- I felt strongly underemployed
- I felt slight underemployed
- I felt underemployed
- I did not feel underemployed

### **Work Environment**

How difficult was it to adapt to the County work environment? Work environment refers to decision making process to get things accomplished.

- It was extremely difficult to adapt
- It was difficult to adapt
- It was somewhat difficult to adapt
- It was not difficult to adapt

How difficult was it to adapt to the work ethic of other County employees?

- It was extremely difficult to adapt
- It was difficult to adapt
- It was somewhat difficult to adapt

- It was not difficult to adapt

### **Internship Experience**

Did you receive planning support from the Department of Human Resources towards applying for a full-time permanent position with the County?

- I received no planning support
- I received some planning support
- I received planning support
- I received a lot of planning support

Was planning conducted with your Department staff towards the goals and outcomes they expected from you?

- I received no planning support
- I received some planning support
- I received planning support
- I received a lot of planning support

How would you define the motivation factor of staff willing to assist you in obtaining full time permanent employment with the County?

- The staff I worked with did not exhibit motivation to help me
- The staff I worked with exhibited some motivation to help me
- The staff I worked with exhibited motivation to help me
- The staff I worked with greatly exhibited motivation to help me.

How would you rate communication between yourself and your department staff?

- Communication was non existent
- There was some communication
- There was communication
- There was a lot of communication

How would you rate communication between yourself and DHR staff?

- Communication was non existent
- There was some communication
- There was communication
- There was a lot of communication

### **Part III - Recommendations**

Do you have any recommendations to improve the VIP?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please provide your recommendation in the text box below (3000 max characters)