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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Effective Institutional Practices

Supporting Student Veterans in Higher Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Shant A. Barmak

Committee in Charge:

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2020

The dissertation of Shant A. Barmak is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for

publication on microfilm and electronically:

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<div align="right">Chair</div>

University of California San Diego

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2020

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family for their love and unwavering support. My wife, Claudia, has always encouraged and believed in my pursuit to advance my education and professional goals. My daughter, Naris, who I am always inspired by, to be the best I can be. I would like to thank the U.S. Military Veterans for their sacrifice and service. I hope my efforts reflect my profound admiration for our military and veterans in their resilience and perseverance to advance their own personal goals and dreams.

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Effective Institutional Practice

Supporting Student Veterans in Higher Education

by

Shant A. Barmak

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2020
California State University, San Marcos, 2020

Carolyn Hofstetter, Chair

Despite high enrollment rates of Post-9/11 U.S. Military Student Veterans in higher education, identification of effective institutional practices that promote successful outcomes is an understudied topic. Although some studies have addressed the transition from military into postsecondary education, more research is needed to improve our knowledge about the experiences of student veterans and how non-profit higher educational institutions, especially student support services, can better help student veterans succeed. Through the lens of university

student support staff, as well as student veterans, this qualitative study examines which factors student veterans and support staff perceive in contributing to successful attainment of a baccalaureate degree. For this study, in-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with a diverse group of 12 student support staff and 6 junior and senior undergraduate student veterans at a four-year public university in California. This study applied the Schlossberg Transition Conceptual Model by extending the *support* factor to include the critical role of four types of student support services: academic, mental health, disability, and career services. Several major overlapping and non-overlapping themes emerged from both student and staff interviews.

The most salient theme was the critical role of the Veterans Center. The Center assists student veterans in their transition and adjustment to the university. It plays a central role in providing a physical space, a hub that facilitates connectedness and student engagement on campus and assist with access to vital services and resources on campus, as well as off campus. The assistance of the Veterans Center is critical in ensuring that students receive their financial benefits, as well as verifying their coursework, so they get the courses needed for graduation and meet all GI Bill requirements. Additionally, many of the on-campus services have *liaisons* between the Veterans Center and their corresponding service department, where identified liaisons help ensure student veterans receive the necessary support when needed. These findings can help inform higher educational institutions, its staff, faculty, and administrators about the best practices in serving the needs of veterans toward successful transition to college, retention, and undergraduate degree attainment, as the number of student veterans in higher education is growing nationally.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

In 2016, approximately 21 million U.S. Military Veterans (Pew Research Center, 2016), and nearly two million Veterans attended community colleges or four-year universities in the U.S. (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Cook & Kim, 2009; U.S. Government Accounting Office, 2011). A military veteran is defined as a person who served for any length of time in any military service branch (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines). Certain Coast Guard personnel operating under the War Department, Navy Department, or Department of Defense are also military veterans (American War Library, 1988). In 2015, over 600,000 Veterans enrolled in postsecondary education, and this number is growing (National Center for Veterans Analytics and Statistics, 2015).

More than 2.6 million troops have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 (Hoge, Castro, Messer, McGurck, Cotting, & Koffman, 2004). As service members return to civilian life, many continue their education, or become students, to build upon the skills they have learned in their military training and service and prepare for the civilian job market. Over one million veterans received Veterans Affairs Educational Benefits in 2013 through the Post-9/11 GI Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014), and there is an increasing volume of service members separating from the military.

Since 1973, when the military draft ended, the U.S. has had an all-volunteer military. Educational benefits after completing one's military service stand out as one of the major incentives to serve for many who enlist. This incentive dates even further back to the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (also known as the GI Bill), enacted in the waning days

of World War II (WWII), to provide veterans with benefits, including home mortgages, low interest business loans, health benefits, unemployment payments, disability, and educational benefits. The GI Bill has gone through a number of revisions in the past 70 years, most recently as the Post-9/11 GI Bill of 2008, which provides educational benefits for veterans of the most recent wars to attend postsecondary educational and vocational training programs. More than 500,000 veterans and their families received unprecedented financial support in the first year when benefits were offered through the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Hussar & Bailey, 2011). Educational benefits, under this new legislation, are available to veterans or their dependents. Many veterans and service members have used the benefit to enroll in or, in some cases, return to higher education. Department of Veterans Affairs data from 2013 shows an increase of 3,233,744 education program beneficiaries between fiscal years 2008 and 2012.

While higher educational institutions are beginning to develop practices to respond to the needs of student veterans, there continues to be poor retention and low graduation rates among these students (Kappell, Boersma, DeVita, & Parker, 2017). Student veterans face many difficult challenges integrating into higher education. Having lived a regimented life in the military, veterans often find that their new lives as college students are vastly different. In the military, all instructions are given and seldom do service members question given orders. In contrast, college students typically have no strict schedule, have the ability to question authority, a great deal of independence, and no direct orders to follow. The unique needs of this distinct population of students, as they prepare to transition from military to college, and the importance of effective institutional practices, warrant further discussion in the literature.

The GI Bill

The Servicemen Readjustment Act of 1944 was the original GI Bill, which provided large-scale funding opportunities for all qualified veterans to pursue additional training and post-secondary education. By 1950, about two million of the 14 million eligible WWII veterans used their GI Bill benefits for higher education (Thelin, 2004). To accommodate the WWII student veterans, some institutional changes, such as receiving credits for prior coursework, course design, instructional delivery, and revised curricula, among other changes, were implemented (Allen, 1946; Anderson, 1947; Carpenter & Glick, 1946; Howard, 1945; Washton, 1945).

A few decades later, the Readjustment Assessment Act of 1972 expanded the original GI Bill and increased educational stipends, when more than half of all Vietnam veterans enrolled in post-secondary education (Angrist, 1993). Research studies on transitional experiences of Vietnam student veterans focused on academic achievements and the impact of physical and emotional factors on their transition to higher education (Joanning, 1975; La Barre, 1985). During these times, when a number of college campuses and universities became sites for anti-war demonstrations, student veterans often down played their veteran status to other students, in order to avoid stigmatization (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Furthermore, according to Figley & Leventman (1980), during this era, few universities developed student veteran support or outreach programs, since many universities faced economic difficulties.

Since many National Guard and Reserve personnel were deployed during the 1991 Persian Gulf War (August 1990-August 2001), some student veterans experienced disruptions in their college or university enrollment, which prompted loan deferments (Rumman & Hamrick, 2009; DeLoughry, 1991). Starting in September 2001 (Post-9/11), the military forces for the Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) continued to deploy

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activated National Guard and Reserve personnel, including student veterans, in addition to enlisting new volunteers.

The Post-9/11 Veterans Assistance Act of 2008 (Post-9/11 GI Bill), which took effect in 2009, expanded service-related educational benefits to military personnel, who served on active duty in the U.S. military since September 11, 2001 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2008). This new GI Bill introduced new guidelines, where the educational benefits are based on length of service, reaching maximum benefits after 36-months of active duty service (Grossman, 2009). According to Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods, & Liu (2013),

> The Post-9/11 GI Bill pays tuition directly to the institution, and it provides a separate stipend for books and a monthly housing allowance directly to the student veteran. In some cases, educational benefits not used by veterans can be transferred to dependents. The Post-9/11 GI Bill does not require service members to pay money into the program to be eligible. The Yellow Ribbon GI Education Enhancement Program that was created along with the Post-9/11 GI Bill provides a matching program for tuition expenses not covered by the bill, wherein the federal government matches supplementary aid provided by the institution (p. 130).

Additionally, the provisions in the GI Bill 2.0, which was passed in December 2010, further expanded the educational benefits of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and included additional coverage of all in-state tuition and benefits to vocational, technical, certificate, and apprenticeship programs (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). These new Post-9/11 GI Bill guidelines may have encouraged more U.S. Military Veterans to pursue higher education. Student veterans must be enrolled in classes, in order to receive housing stipends (Wurster et al., 2013). During breaks, student veterans have to find employment to cover their housing expenses and provide for their families. Nevertheless, with the end of the OIF/OEF era, there is an increase in student veterans on college campuses and universities (Wurster et al., 2013).

Student Veteran Population

The vast majority of the student veteran population is a segment of Post-9/11 veterans. With regard to the socioeconomic characteristics of veterans attending U.S. colleges and universities, recent research from the University of California systems suggests that student veterans are more likely to come from families with lower income levels than their non-veteran peers (Durdella & Kim, 2012). Moreover, according to the 2010 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), among combat veterans, 66% reported that they were first-generation, which might suggest that the characteristics of first-generation students likely apply to student veterans (Wurster et al., 2013). They arrive at college with weaker academic preparation, lower educational aspirations, and a lack of knowledge in navigating the college environment (Durdella & Kim, 2012).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2011, the unemployment rate of male veterans between 18-24 years of age was 29.1% compared to 17.6% for their non-veteran counterparts (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). The more commonly known characteristic of student veterans is that they tend to be non-traditional students, which means they are older, since they are entering colleges and/or universities after serving in the military (O'Herrin, 2011). According to the 2010 NSSE, 79% of first-year combat veterans vs. 6% of non-veteran first-year non-veterans were at least 24 years of age. Similarly, 97% of senior combat veterans vs. 33% of senior non-veterans were at least 24 years of age. Moreover, compared to their non-veteran peers, student veterans were more likely to be married and/or with dependents, meaning that they had additional familial and financial responsibilities (Lang & Powers, 2011).

According to Grossman (2009), it is unclear how many student veterans, who have disabilities, are entering or returning to higher education. An estimate of 40% is not

unreasonable, given the high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, substance abuse, hearing and vision related injuries, substantial mobility limitations, and other disabilities among OEF/OIF veterans (Church, 2009; RAND, Center for Military Health Policy Research, 2011, Grossman 2009). According to the 2010 NSSE, 1 in 5 combat veterans reported a disability compared with 1 in 10 non-veteran students.

Barriers To Transitioning To Campus Life

Since the inception of the original GI Bill of 1944, adjustment to college life for student veterans has been a concern. The Post-9/11 student veterans, as well as WWII veterans, have faced challenges toward developing their identity and a sense of belonging within institutions of higher learning. As discussed earlier in this chapter, institutional changes were implemented in the mid-1940s and later to accommodate the WWII, Vietnam, and Korean War veterans. However, current institutional practices need to take into consideration the needs of the new, Post-9/11 veterans by developing greater awareness throughout the campus community to prevent stigmatization and provide services that meet the needs of all student veteran subpopulations.

There are various issues student veterans must negotiate once they embark on their college experience. Challenges may range from relationships, where they fit with regard to maturity, role incongruities, and identity renegotiation. In terms of role incongruities, there is incompatibility of military life, with the effects of stress and anxiety, still lingering when returning to college and adjusting to the student role (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). For some veterans, there is an increased level of motivation to complete their degrees upon completion of their service (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Returning student veterans appear to confront varying degrees of difficulty with student peer relationships compared to non-veteran students. In most

instances, this is because non-veteran students are often further along in their coursework compared to returning veterans, whose college attendance was disrupted because of being called to serve.

Many veterans experience a sense of isolation and have difficulty initiating and maintaining relationships on campus (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). While many student veterans have learned to be successful in navigating the complexities of military culture, some are frustrated and overwhelmed by the bureaucratic system of higher education (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; O'Herrin, 2011). Recent research (Cook & Kim, 2009; Ford, Northrup & Wiley, 2009; Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Flemming, 2011; O'Herrin, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Van Dusen, 2011) highlights the need for college and university adminstrators to raise awareness of the needs of student veterans as a first step in developing effective campus support services. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' staff, especially trained counselors, serve a critical role in helping veterans in their transition back to college; but with the increasing number of veterans, they may become overburdened (Persky & Oliver, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Although student veteran transitions are not novel for colleges and universities, the intersecting and mulitiple roles of being a student, a service member, and a veteran, are at times not clear and often experienced simultaneously (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

To facilitate the transition for student veterans to successfully navigate the higher educational organizations and multiple agencies, it is imperative to establish proactive and working partnerships between key members of the campus community to help create a more seamless environment for student veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Student services, including counseling and academic concerns, must be addressed in the transition process. The

college curricula must be designed to include the lived experiences of student veterans and, in particular, those with disabilities. Of the 2.2 million soldiers who returned home from the OIF/OEF conflicts, 620,000 made claims with the VA (Veterans for Common Sense, 2011). This underscores the necessity for developing collaborative practices, involving the Disability Student Services (DSS) and Veterans Services Offices, campus programs, and community agencies (Burnett & Segoria, 2009). There appears to be a reluctance of veterans to reach out to DSS services and utilize available accommodations and support. This common occurrence may be explained by the warrior mentality of many returning veterans, who may otherwise qualify for on-campus services. Successful practices identified to help improve educational success of veterans include: campus mentors, student groups, on-campus committees, and training aimed at faculty and staff to understand the needs of student veterans (Persky & Oliver, 2011). Greater acceptance and utilization of collaborative relationships have been effective in helping veterans with disabilities receive support for both on-campus and off-campus military support programs (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Persky & Oliver, 2011).

Research suggests that colleges should establish specific points of contact in each department to help student veterans navigate the institution (O'Herrin, 2011). DiRamio et al. (2008) discussed transition theories and applied the "Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out" model, formulated by Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman (1995) and Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989), to veterans during their combat deployment and during their transition into college. When addressing transition during active duty deployment, the "Moving In" stage explains why student veterans joined and where they joined (DiRamio et al., 2008). The "Moving Through" stage is addressed through discussions of combat duty, memorable

experiences, and earning credits. The "Moving Out" stage is identified through discussion of transition programs, returning home, and academic preparation.

A holistic and personalized approach has been suggested as a strategy that university administrators should implement to aid veterans. The transition issues include addressing financial concerns, connecting with peers and faculty, as well as mental health and disability services (DiRamio et al., 2008). Having institutions utilize the help of mentors, who are "veteran friendly" and trained to provide critical assistance to veterans throughout the campus, can serve a vital advocacy role. Veteran-friendly mentors can help inform veterans how best to access available resources (i.e. financial aid, counseling, disability services, and academic advising). In the summer of 2009, the American Council of Education (2008) released a report that discussed how institutions of higher education are currently structuring their veterans' services and also interviewed student veterans to identify their concerns (Cook & Kim, 2009). In serving the female student veteran, it is important to recognize risk factors, such as having higher levels of financial strain (DiRamio et al., 2008) and awareness of the increased likelihood of being a victim of Military Sexual Trauma (MST).

It has been estimated that a majority of institutions are moving toward the implementation of various veterans services programs. Public universities and community colleges have been identified as being more likely to utilize services geared toward assisting student veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009). Increased efforts toward grant funding are sought in order to improve student services geared for veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009; O'Herrin, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2011). Student veterans have expressed various frustrations about areas specific to their experience, such as lack of flexibility with various school programs in adjusting to the students' deployment schedule, as deployments are often unpredictable. Other student veteran concerns

include: difficulties with gettinge the appropriate credits for civilian courses taken previously, and a lack of support in assisting with navigating the GI Bill education benefits (Persky & Oliver, 2011). These aforementioned concerns expressed appear to be consistent for student veterans across all branches of the military.

The Student Veterans of America (2011) have identified the various degrees of challenges for student veterans to be successful in transitioning to college. The barriers are many and include: inflexibility of higher education and its lack of preparedness to better serve student veteans, difficulty connecting with others, social barriers, loss of purpose, more emphasis on individual goals and less dependence on teamwork and camaraderie experienced during service, physical and mental health barriers. Consequently, this calls for the higher education community to develop new and transformative methods and models of student support services to help ensure successful transition, retention, and degree attainment for student veterans.

Statement of the Problem

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the GI Bill into law, changing the lives of generations of American Veterans. Since then, over 25 million American Veterans have used the GI Bill to pay for education and pursue vocational training. Despite improvements over the past few decades, there are still gaps both in research and practice, and a dire need to adequately address the multiple stressors that hinder student veterans to succeed in higher education. Some institutions of higher education are lagging in their understanding and ability to provide appropriate resources, support, and guidance to help student veterans overcome physical and mental health barriers so they can succeed in the classroom. While higher education has begun to make some inroads to better understand the unique needs of non-traditional, non-veteran students, there is a wide gap in their understanding of the background of student veterans and the

unique challenges they face in transitioning from military to civilian, and campus life. Colleges and universities are at a crossroads and have the opportunity to play a critical role helping student veterans meet their financial, social, and health needs, so student veterans can thrive. The campus climate must increase its awareness and ability to respond to the complexity of stressors faced by student veterans and provide a support system, which embraces and empowers each student veteran.

Student veterans have unique needs and face a variety of challenges as they transition from military to college-campus life. More importantly, student veterans have characteristics that might make them susceptible to not completing their college degree. They have diverse socioeconomic and ethnic/racial backgrounds. Over 60% of student veterans have been identified as first-generation college students, and the majority of student veterans are older and considered non-traditional students. Some need veteran-specific services to help with military connected disabilities and post deployment support services, especially for those that have experienced combat exposure. This population is in need of support services that are committed to helping them with retention and persistence toward achieving their educational goals. Approximiately 25% of female veterans are surviviors of MST and tend to have higher prevalence of depression, PTSD, and difficulty readjusting after returning from military service. Moreover, women who have experienced MST are less likely to report and seek help.

There is a gap in research, as student veterans have not been studied as closely as other subgroups, such as first-generation college students. The existing limited literature, however, shows that many factors contribute to a difficult transition from military service, as many student veterans grapple with different challenges than non-veteran students (Rumann & Hamrick,

2010). This study examines what factors lead to successful transition from the military into higher education and attainment of a baccalaureate degree.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the influences that are most salient for student veterans in attaining baccalaureate degrees through the lens of university student support staff, as well as the student veterans themselves. Veteran performance in higher education is not yet clear in the Post-9/11 era, despite higher enrollment rates in higher education than the general population (Holder, 2011). Although some recent studies have addressed the transition out of military and into higher education, more research is needed to improve our knowledge about the experiences of student veterans and how public higher educational institutions can help student veterans succeed.

This study applies Schlossberg's Transition Model and extends the *support* factor to include the critical role of student support services. This study seeks to identify best practices and better understand which strategies within the four types of services: academic, mental health, disability, and career services, will nurture success among student veterans. This study also examines the undergraduate student veterans' life experiences to further understand what factors influence success.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study is: What factors do student veterans and support staff perceive contribute to successful attainment of a baccalaureate degree? The three subquestions are:

1) What specific institutional practice contribute to student veteran success?

2) What are the biggest barriers to student veteran success?

3) What are the strengths of this institution in promoting student veteran success?

Overview of the Methods

Given that there is a lack of extensive research on student veterans, inductive studies are well suited to not only inform practice, but also identify policies and programs that are urgently needed to better address the needs of student veterans in higher education. Grounded theory that is based on emergent thematic analytic approach will be used to discover nuances and processes that are not yet identified in the current literature on student veterans. This approach will add to our knowledge on how student veterans can be better served to achieve success in public university. Focused narrative life stories approach will also be used to capture the lived experiences of student veterans in their own voices.

In-depth semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with a diverse group of university support services personnel were conducted within the four types of support services (academic, career, mental health, and disability) at one public four-year university in California. In addition, in-depth semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with junior and senior student veterans at the same university site to triangulate the collected qualitative data from staff. In 2017, this public university in California had more than 500 student veterans and was ranked within the top 30 of 600 colleges that participated in the Military Times Best Colleges survey in 2019 (Best for Vets: Colleges, 2019).

Significance of Study

As veterans are separating from the military and reintegrating into civilian life, they are faced with complex challenges. Post-9/11 veterans have experienced trauma as a result of multiple deployments. Consequently, many have physical and mental wounds impairing their functioning. The Post-9/11 Bill has provided financial and tuition benefits for veterans, enabling

many to pursue their college education in order to advance their career goals. The barriers to integrating into campus life, and adapting to the new role as college students, provide additional challenges, which make it imperative for higher educational institutions to understand the complexities of the needs of this unique student population. It is critical for higher education to identify and implement services which best address and advance student veterans toward success. The student veteran population in higher education is growing nationally. Therefore, more studies are needed to identify effective institutional practices toward improving retention and persistence of student veterans, who have enrolled in colleges/universities after serving in the military during the Post-9/11 era. The findings from this study can help inform higher educational institutions, its staff, faculty, and administrators, how best serve the needs of veterans toward successful transition to college retention and academic success.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

When utilizing a social justice lens toward understanding the aspects of student veteran

success, it is imperative to understand what distinguishes this population from those in

previously studied literature on student retention. In particular, Post-9/11 veterans have specific

characteristics that call attention to having a better understanding for how they must be supported

toward overcoming obstacles to achieving success within higher education. In this chapter, I will

discuss which lens I will use to examine student veteran success. I will also discuss the concept

of a veteran friendly campus and what makes it more responsive to the unique needs of the

student veteran population. Next, I will review the Post-9/11 GI Bill and other efforts

contributing to student veteran success. I will also examine theories of student retention

including first generation, non-traditional, and student engagement theories and how they explain

the academic achievement of student veterans. Student veteran inquiry is more appropriately

connected with non-traditional student theory and studies looking at the impact of transitions to

college from military service.

A veteran is identified as any member of the military, who regardless of deployment

status, combat experience, or legal status as a veteran, was a member of the active duty military,

the National Guard, or Reserves (Vacchi, 2012). The socialization process and the military

culture experienced by veterans vary by each service branch, which further highlights the

importance of having a deeper understanding of the distinct military cultural background of

student veterans. Student veterans come from a very different culture, which may require

different organizational models, approaches, and accommodations to succeed in higher education

(Vacchi, 2012). These issues may be particularly glaring for one particular subpopulation of

veterans. Most notably, those who served in combat may require more accommodations due to their deployments (Cook & Kim, 2009; Radford, 2009; Steele, Salcedo & Coley, 2010).

Another perspective that should be considered in understanding the needs of student veterans is the conceptual framework of overlapping identities. While examining the veterans' intersecting identities, it is clear that military identity becomes integrated into an individual's basic view of self (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). However, in addition to their military identity, other characteristics, such as gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, employment status, disability, and combat experience, should also be considered. Moreover, student veterans have distinguishing characteristics from traditional, as well as non-traditional, college students, which involves what they do, who they are, and what they believe.

In order for student veterans to succeed, institutional practices need to incorporate veteran-specific support services, which provide accommodations, resources, and methods of delivery that will assist enhancing student veteran success. Therefore, it is essential to pay close attention to the methods of support service delivery, as well as the type of resources and accommodations being provided. Certain characteristics have also been identified as being beneficial, including the need to connect with those who share similar experiences, veteran clubs/organizations, and vet-to-vet counseling services that help veterans in collegiate transitions, as well as assist with the acculturation process to campus life. Moreover, proactive support programs, which focus on specific educational goals and the needs of veterans, contribute to a "veteran-friendly" campus. Veterans respond positively, and are attracted to, attending colleges and universities that help create a smooth transition from military life to college life. These campuses are distinct in providing information to veterans about available

benefits and services. Also, veteran-friendly colleges help bring campus awareness of the student veteran population (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Finally, a college is veteran-friendly when the institution takes measures to accommodate student veterans with a dedicated office geared toward serving student veterans.

Additionally, student veterans/service members are selective about the campus life and academic activities in which they invest their time. Student veterans are more likely to be first-generation students, which means that they are the first in their families to attend a college or university, and are often older than non-veteran/civilian students (Wurster et al., 2013). They, therefore, tend to have responsibilities outside of higher education that put constraints on their time. Student veterans often place greater emphasis on academic progress than getting involved in university life and activities. Therefore, student veterans are less likely to participate in co-curricular activities, and they dedicate less time to relaxing and socializing, when compared to non-veteran/civilian students (Saenz et al., 2007).

Post-9/11 Veterans

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) projections and the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS), in 2016, there were 4.2 million Post-9/11 veterans, and this cohort will continue to grow to just under 5.1 million by 2021, a 22% increase between 2016 and 2021 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). According to the 2016 American Community Survey, Post-9/11 veterans are the youngest cohort, where 73.5% of Post-9/11 veterans were under age 45 compared to 49.6% of all other veterans. Post-9/11 veterans were less likely to be married compared to all other veterans (56% vs. 65%); and more racially diverse than all other veterans: 67.5% of Post-9/11 veterans were white vs. 81.1% of all other veterans; 20.5% vs. 13.3% were non-white, non-Hispanic; 12% vs. 5.7% were Hispanic.

Compared to all other veterans, a higher percentage of Post-9/11 veterans had a service-connected disability (35.9% vs. 18.6%), lived in a household that received food stamps (7.1% vs. 6.4%), had no health insurance coverage (5.6% vs. 2.3%), lived in poverty (7.6% vs. 6.8%), and had no income (4.8% vs. 3%).

Characteristics of Student Veterans

For many veterans, an educational career was not an aspiration. Often, entering the armed forces was a temporary career choice, whereas for some, separation from the military was not voluntary (Jenner, 2017). There are similarities to traditional college students with regard to barriers to post-secondary education, such as the need for additional academic support, financial concerns, and balancing social demands. Student veterans often have additional obstacles such as mental health problems, PTSD, TBI, and depression/anxiety. Veteran students often have questions about GI Bill benefits and difficulty readjusting to civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Radford, 2009; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

The transition from military life to their role as a student in higher education is a major obstacle. There are distinct differences in the transition of student veterans from the traditional student (Boettcher, 2017; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012; Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014; Radford, 2009; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Vacchi & Berger, 2014; Wheeler, 2012). This is exemplified for many student veterans, who may have entered higher education in response to a circumstance, such as an injury, compared to traditional students who chose to pursue postsecondary education. Most researchers have cited financial issues as the most significant barrier for student veterans to persist in higher education (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; McBain et al., 2012; Radford, 2009; Schiavone &

Gentry, 2014; Wheeler, 2012). Non-traditional students have a greater likelihood of leaving college during their first year than traditional students (Bowl, 2001; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Radford, Cominole, & Skomsvold, 2015), which is indicative of difficulties with the transition to higher education (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metzner & Bean, 1987).

While the financial benefits of the GI Bill may be helpful, they are often insufficient, and financial difficulty is a significant factor for many discontinuing their education (DiRamio et al., 2008; Wheeler, 2012). The GI Bill is often not adequate in managing to afford a college education when factoring in the high cost of private, as well as many public institutions. For many student veterans, such as those who are first generation college students, there is difficulty with taking on loans to cover education costs (Burdman, 2005).

First-generation Status

Research on first-generation students suggest obstacles to academic preparation for college. This includes less knowledge and support for academic preparation, including lower aspirations towards educational attainment and limited knowledge about the application process (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007). Many of these student veterans are years removed from high school and the support that was available at that time. First-generation students tend to be less engaged than other students, perhaps because they know less about the importance of engagement or how to get involved in productive activities (Pike & Kuh 2005). Pike and Kuh (2005) suggest that low levels of engagement are an *indirect* result of being the first in one's family to go to college, and they are more a function of lower educational aspirations and living off campus. Thus, those committed to improving success rates of first-generation students should address both the gaps as a result of being a first-generation college student, as well as the consequential lower level of aspirations. Most studies of first-generation

students tend to attribute their lower levels of academic, social engagement, learning, and intellectual development to being born to parents who did not go to college (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Military To Campus Culture

Student veterans often have difficulty acculturating to college and civilian life. This is often exemplified by difficulties in identifying with student peers and college faculty (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; McBain et al., 2012; Olsen et al., 2014; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Wheeler, 2012). There are physical, emotional, and psychological factors, interpersonal issues, and family responsibilities, which need to be negotiated while attending school (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Radford, 2009). Also cited are problems associated with difficulties associated with transfer of credits as well as veterans' education benefits (Radford, 2009). Similar to non-traditional students, student veterans often have a primary identity other than being a student often associated with a previous career. The acculturation process can be confounded by efforts to adjust their identity, with respect to their veteran status (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Student veterans' transition from the highly structured system of the military, with clear rules and chain of command, is in contrast to the college environment (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; DiRamio & Spires, 2009). Student veterans have difficulty trying to identify with traditional-aged students (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008). The identity of veterans entering into, and transitioning to, higher education must adapt to the campus environment and respond to its role expectations, thus incorporating the identity of being a veteran into that of a student. For many student veterans, who have suffered mental and physical injury, invariably experience greater alienation (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Ways of coping with the stresses of college life may also vary between student groups (Hurtado, 1994;

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Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996). A study of Latino students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) indicated the importance of belonging to campus religious and social-community organizations and discussing course topics with student peers outside of class.

Mental Health Needs

It is estimated that over 19% of Veterans have suffered some form of TBI, and over 20% have experienced PTSD (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006; RAND Corporation, 2011). The Department of Defense (DOD) has identified suicide as the second leading cause of death for U.S. military service members (Ritchie, Keppler, & Rothberg, 2003, Kang & Bullman, 2008). Suicide risk of active-duty males with combat exposure is geater than civilian males of the same age (American Medical Institute, 2010).

University counseling centers may not have adequate resources to respond to the level of severity of psychopathology of many student veterans (e.g., Gallagher, Zhang, & Taylor, 2004; Kettmann et al., 2007; Stone & Archer, 1990). The high rates of PTSD, TBI, and suicidality, in particular, make this an even greater challenge. Over two-thirds of military service members, who returned from Iraq, experienced traumatic events, which increased their risk for mental health problems (Milliken, Auchterlonie, & Hoge, 2007). Of those deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq since 9/11, about a third accessed mental health services (Oimette & Brown, 2003). However, the majority of these veterans do not seek services for various reasons, including fear of stigma (Hoge et al. 2004). When student veterans get the mental health treatment they need, it will improve the likelihood that they will be successful in achieving their education goals (Mattocks et al., 2013).

Institutional Practices

Research on college student development shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the best predictor of their learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pace, 1990). Studies have shown that greater student engagement in campus activities contribute to better student outcomes (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Despite there being a considerable amount of student veterans who suffer from various physical and psychological disabilities, one study (Kim, 2009) found only 22% of schools provide veteran-specific transition support for veterans. The paucity of literature related to student veterans in higher education since WWII underscores the need for consideration of transformative modes of service delivery.

A significant body of literature has identified certain institutional practices that lead to high levels of student engagement (Astin, 1991; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" may be the best-known set of engagement indicators (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). These principles include: high expectations, student-faculty contact, active learning, cooperation among students, prompt feedback, time on task, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. On-campus services that have these traits are those that are perceived by students as inclusive and affirming and where expectations for performance are clearly communicated and set at reasonably high levels (Education Commission of the States, 1995; Kuh, 2001; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarellla, 2001). These factors and conditions are positively related to student satisfaction and achievement on a variety of dimensions (Astin, 1984, 1985, 1993; Bruffee, 1993; Goodsell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992). Thus, educationally effective

colleges and universities channel students' energies toward appropriate activities and engage them at a high level (Education Commission of the States, 1995; The Study Group, 1984).

Emphasis on good educational practices can help faculty, staff, students, and others to focus on tasks and activities that are associated with greater student learning outcomes. This suggests the benefits of faculty and administrators to arrange the curriculum, as well as other aspects of the college experience, to align with best practices, in order to encourage students toward greater effort (e.g., write more papers, read more books, meet more frequently with faculty and peers, use information technology appropriately). As a result, there will be great gains in areas, such as effective communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and responsible citizenship.

Research studies suggest that MSIs (minority serving institutions) can be powerful and nurturing learning environments that provide a safe haven from racial discrimination, emphasizing the value and success of each student. The NCES found that student veterans were more likely to leave college early when they had difficulty in being able to engage with their academic program (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Again, this illustrates the importance of students engaging with their campus environment. If institutions want their students to persist, they must offer opportunities and assistance to engage them actively and frequently. All institutions are grappling with the same fundamental issue: how to obtain the kind of information that will help the institution improve, or enhance, the quality of student experience in student engagement.

Academic advising is the most effective support service toward retention efforts and success (Thomas, 1990). Astin (1985) and Crockett (1985) emphasize the key role of academic advisers in guiding students through their postsecondary education. Advising also provides a

connection to all support services such as career planning, counseling, financial aid, and tutoring. The advisor role is essential in helping students become integrated at the college, both academically and socially. This contributes to student growth, satisfaction, and persistence. The advisor also provides the level of support and guidance necessary to transfer from the community college to the university.

According to Tinto's model (1987, 1993), when the student's level of integration increases (interaction between student, faculty and staff), the student's commitment is strengthened, and he/she will more likely persist towards his/her goals. Conversely, the student is less likely to persist when they are not integrated within the academic and social systems of the college. Often, faculty and staff are lacking the necessary knowledge and tools to provide student veterans with the support needed toward school success. In order for veterans to be a part of an inclusive and supportive campus, higher educational institutions must bring awareness to its faculty and staff (Sander, 2012). Some faculty have developed negative stereotypes of veterans as being damaged by war. This can be attributed to negative feelings of their political views and past wars (Barnard-Brak, Burley, & Crooks, 2010). When a faculty member is unwilling to work with student veterans due to negative perceptions of them, this further compounds the issue.

It is estimated that about 20% of student veterans who were in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan have TBI. Student veterans who come to college, who are still suffering from physical wounds of war, can experience added challenges. As many as one in five veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have brain injuries (Carlson et al., 2010; Terrio et al., 2009). TBI can affect the student's ability to concentrate, negatively impacting the student's ability to complete class assignments. Additionally, these veterans are at an increased likelihood of suffering from depression and PTSD (Maguen, Lau, Madden, & Seal, 2012). These mental

health challenges are exacerbated when veterans frequently experience long delays when seeking assistance at university disability resource centers. This is compounded by delays in getting documentation at the college and necessary treatment at the VA (Shackelford, 2009).

Impact of Disabilities on Education

To properly help student veterans succeed academically, disability service providers and faculty must accept the role of providing reasonable and appropriate accommodations for wounded warrior students. Many of their wounds are "invisible", which means that they are not readily noticeable to staff and faculty (Wurster et al., 2013), and in some cases, the veteran student might not even be aware that he/she has a disability. Often times, these disabilities affect performance in the classroom (Shackelford, 2009) when the student veteran does not get the proper attention and support. Stigma associated with military culture views complaining about mental health issues as a sign of weakness, and it decreases the likelihood of student veterans to seek help and self-advocate for support services (Brown, Creel, Engel, Herrell & Hoge, 2011). Therefore, there must be a collaborative effort between faculty and disability service providers to make sure certain academic accommodations are provided to effectively meet the needs of all individuals. Also, there must be flexibility to adapt and assess adjustments for future accommodations.

There are a variety of accommodations for student veterans with visible or sensory disabilities, such as amputations, injuries of the musculoskeletal system, burns, visual impairments, and hearing impairments. The impact of these disabilities can be limited when appropriate accommodations are provided. Invisible disabilities, such as PTSD, depression, and TBI, on the other hand, are more difficult for disability service providers and faculty to recognize, and they affect behavioral health and cognitive functioning (Church, 2009; DiRamio

& Spires, 2009). However, many student veterans with invisible disabilities expect colleges and

universities to provide accommodations and address their needs. This presupposes that faculty

and service providers have the knowledge and ability to address student cognitive deficits and

that they are able to implement accommodations to limit the impact of these disabilities in the

classroom. Unfortunately, in many instances, that's not the case, and additional training and

education should be provided to better equip faculty and staff.

Accommodations for students with disabilities must be responsive to each student's

unique needs. In addressing the specific needs for both physical and psychological wounds, it is

imperative to have a collaborative and fluid process in maintaining ongoing communication and

assessment to ensure the student's needs and goals are met. By understanding the impact of these

signature wounds, faculty and disability services providers can work together to provide student

veterans with the services and support they need, are legally due, and deserved.

In recent years, the American with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA)

expanded the scope of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of

the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1974 to more individuals (Grossman, 2009). Even though

the words to define a disability in the ADAAA has remained the same as ADA, "a physical or

mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities," Grossman (2009)

explains that ADAAA does not take into account mitigating measures, such as medication and

mobility devices, in determining whether a person has a disability.

> Prior to the passage of the ADAAA, an individual whose legs were amputated in
> battle might not be covered by the ADA or Section 504 because, with his/her
> prostheses (mitigating measure) in place, he/she could walk as well at the
> 'average person in the general population.' Under the ADAAA there should be
> little doubt that an individual missing his/her legs is covered by the ADA and
> Section 504 (p. 5).

With these new changes, the impact of ADAAA on college campuses is likely to respond to the disabilities of individuals, who were historically excluded from coverage, and pertain to psychological and cognitive disabilities (Grossman, 2009).

Schlossberg's Transition Model

When veterans make the transition from military to college, they are leaving a system with a high level of structure to one which lacks the chains of command and clear rules (Ackerman et al., 2009). In addition to making this adjustment, veterans are joining traditional aged students (DiRamio et al., 2008). Also, student veterans are faced with academic challenges, in addition to the disabilities many are coping with (DiRamio & Spires, 2009). Transition support, which addresses veteran-specific issues, represent only 22% of schools (Cook & Kim, 2009). Schlossberg's transition theory has been identified as a potential tool for higher education to use toward providing effective resources and support for student veterans. Practice recommendations have been made for faculty and staff, which may serve student veteran needs (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

While Schlossberg's model has not been used on a broad scale, it may be applicable and a useful tool in addressing the needs of veterans on campus. There are various factors which influence the students' ability to transition to college successfully (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Transitions are influenced by the type, the nature of the process, the context within which it takes place, and specific resources and assets. These key factors are referred to as "the 4 S's" (i.e. self, situation, support, and strategies), and they are viewed as critical factors which influence the student's ability to cope. The Schlossberg model can be applied to student veterans by identifying resources and support

services that student veterans can effectively access in response to academic, disability, and financial challenges during the transition from the military to institutions of higher education.
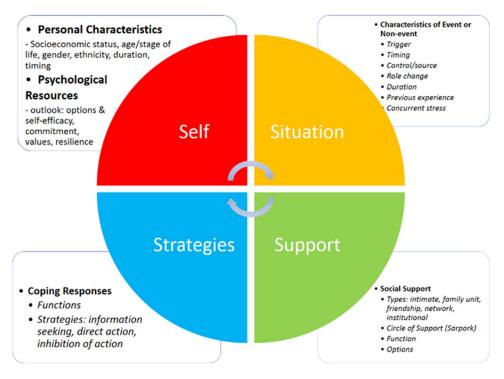

Figure 1. Schlossberg's Transition Model (2012)

Schlossberg's *self* refers to the ability to cope, and it is influenced by internal resources and personal characteristics. There are two dimensions: personal characteristics and psychological resources (Evans et al., 2011). Personal characteristics include: age, gender, and socioeconomic status, among other items. Psychological resources take into account one's personality and ability to manage transitions. In addressing the *self*, there appears to be a gap. In addition to personal characteristics listed above, veterans' intersecting identities should also include military identity. Schlossberg's *situation* factor refers to how the student perceives his/her control over the situation in the transition process (Evans et al., 2011). The student veteran's assessment is viewed as being permanent or temporary, and good or bad. When veterans view a stressor, it may have a negative impact toward their transition process

(Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). *Support* is the third factor identified in Schlossberg's transition model. When support is perceived as caring, with affirmation, and positive feedback, it can have a positive effect on the transition process. It is evident that multiple forms of support, such as family, friends, institutional policies, and services, are needed in assisting student veterans. The last "S" factor, *strategies*, refers to coping responses - how a student manages his/her own behavior (Evans et al., 2010; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The coping responses refer to their ability to modify the situation, control the meaning of the problem, and manage stress after the transition. The individual is able to utilize various coping modes, such as information seeking and direction action (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Student Support Services

The purpose of this study is to advance the understanding of effective institutional practices toward improved retention and persistence of student veterans who have enrolled in colleges/universities after serving in the military during the Post-9/11 era. Many OEF/OIF Veterans have served multiple deployments and have suffered consequences of trauma associated with combat. The student veteran population is growing nationally, and higher education leadership and campus personnel need to provide additional support services to better meet the unique needs of these students. While the U.S. government has made commitments to support this student population with the new GI Bill, additional campus-wide resources are needed to assist student veterans to complete their college degrees.

Veteran-friendly institutions, which work to remove barriers to transitioning successfully, provide support and assist with student veterans' social reintegration (Norman et al., 2015). These institutions provide different levels of support as they recognize the complex needs and

dynamics veterans face (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Examples of different needs include: social, financial, and familial (Altman, 2015). Veteran-friendly institutions are also committed toward educating, advocating for, and seeking to develop an acceptance of military/veteran culture. The services these institutions are committed to go beyond the academic and social support services needed in transitioning to becoming a college student (Wilson, 2014).

This study explores the transition experiences of college student veterans who have returned from military service and re-enrolled in college. In order to understand these students' experiences from their unique perspectives, Schlossberg's theory of transition will be expanded to include higher educational student support services. The findings from this study can help inform higher educational institutions, its staff, faculty, and administrators about the best practices in serving the needs of veterans toward successful transition to college. The goal of this research project is to identify the best practices and institutional support services that will increase student veteran retention and persistence in four-year universities.

Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

This study attempts to fill the gap in knowledge regarding what factors influence successful postsecondary degree attainment by student veterans. As detailed in Chapter 2, the Schlossberg Conceptual Model on student transition focuses on four factors: *self*, *support*, *situation*, and *strategies*. This study specifically focuses on the *support* factor and expands the Schlossberg's transition model to include academic, mental health, disability, and career support services at one public university in California. The services provided often include: tutoring, remedial education, guidance, counseling, psychoeducation, on-campus and off-site referral resources, crisis intervention, and accommodations for learning differences. This chapter includes the review of the research question and three subquestions, review of the research design, research context, participant selection procedures, data collection, study instruments, and analysis procedures.

The overarching research question for this study was: What factors do student veterans and support staff perceive contribute to successful attainment of a baccalaureate degree? The three subquestions are:

1) What specific institutional practice contribute to student veteran success?

2) What are the biggest barriers to student veteran success?

3) What are the strengths of this institution in promoting student veteran success?

Research Design

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse groups of university student support staff/personnel, which included program directors, managers, counselors, healthcare providers, specialists, and administrators, at three distinct programs: academic, mental

health, disability, and career services, from one four-year public university in California. Triangulation is important to ensure trustworthiness in a qualitative study (Yin, 2014). As such, for this study, interviews with staff alone are a limited means for collecting data and developing findings. In addition to the one-on-one interviews with student support staff members, one-on-one interviews with undergraduate junior and senior student veterans were conducted to provide supplementary data on the success of veterans.

Developing a flexible interview guide is critical for identifying processes, policies, and programs that help student veterans achieve a baccalaureate. Two separate semi-structured interview guides were used to facilitate both staff and student veteran interviews. The staff interview guide focused on main concerns that student veterans face while on campus, as well as the types of services available to support student veteran success in higher education. The student veteran interview guide focused primarily on life stories and their experiences at the university specifically, discussing what support services they utilized, or found helpful, in navigating campus life and successfully meeting graduation requirement. Since the main purpose of this study is to explain processes and identify best institutional practices that help student veterans succeed, a grounded theory research design was used. There are several types of grounded theory designs, and the approach best suited for this study is the emerging design (Creswell, 2008), since we allowed the theory to emerge from the data without using preset, or *a priori* categories. This approach will help develop explanations of factors that contribute to student veterans' ability to succeed in higher education.

Research Context

Student veterans are often underrepresented at public universities, while they are overrepresented in for-profit universities. In 2015-2016, 20% of student veterans were enrolled

in four-year for-profit universities. By contrast, only 5% of student veterans were enrolled in public/private non-profit four-year universities. According to a recent study "…of the nearly 900,000 veterans enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs using Post-9/11 GI Bill and Yellow Ribbon funds, only 722 undergraduate veterans are enrolled at 36 of the most selective private, non-profit colleges in the United States" (Hill et al., 2019).

Given these patterns, the question remains: What new institutional practices should be incorporated to increase student veteran enrollment at higher-graduating institutions? In recent trends, more for-profit institutions are filing for bankruptcy and closing their doors, which jeopardize student veterans' ability to attain their undergraduate degrees (Vasquez, 2019). Given these reasons, it is important to study the role of student support services at non-profit four-year universities and how they can provide the necessary resources to help student veterans overcome barriers to achieving academic success. The research site for this study is one public four-year university in California. The inclusion of this educational system is imperative to have a better understanding of the availability and access of different resources, policies, programs, and effective implementation of student support services.

The study site has more than 500 student veterans and was ranked within the top 30 of 600 colleges who participated in the Military Times Best Colleges survey in 2019 (Best for Vets, 2019), which evaluates factors that help make colleges and universities a good fit for service members, military veterans, and their families. About 11% of the student body is composed of military-connected students. The university's Veterans Center is a one-stop shop for their student veterans and military-connected students, such as dependents. Services include: VA education benefit information and certification, Cal Vet application assistance, a computer lab, lounge

areas, monthly access to VA Compensation and Vocational Rehabilitation representatives, and other community resources.

Study Participants

The research on student veterans consistently highlights the need for various forms of support, as student veterans often feel unsupported on college campuses **(**Cook & Kim, 2009; Herman, Hopkins, Wilson, & Allen, 2009). Student support services at higher educational institutions, which are dedicated to providing assistance specifically to student veterans, are crucial. This study focuses specifically on four main support services: academic, mental health, disability, and career services. This can help further illuminate the practices, policies, programs, and resources, which are most effective toward advancing the needs of student's veterans. Therefore, for the purpose of this project, the study participants included a wide range of personnel within the above-mentioned four types of support services. Purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit staff participants, which included a total of 12 university student support staff/personnel, including program directors, managers, counselors, healthcare providerse, specialists, and administrators at the four different types of support systems from one public university in California.

In addition to collecting data from student service personnel, data were also collected from junior and senior undergraduate student veterans. Six student veterans participated in 30 to 60-minute, one-on-one interviews, which included three females and three males. All interviewed students had transferred from local community colleges, except for one. They were military veterans from all four branches of the military.

Recruitment and data collection. The recruitment for staff interviews began by first identifying a site contact for each of the four student support services (academic, mental health,

disability, and career services). Recruitment emails (see Appendix A) were sent to 30 university

student support staff/personnel, which included counselors, healthcare providers program

directors, administrators, and other student support staff. A total of 12 staff participated, 5

responded to the initial recruitment email by referring to one of the 12 study participants, 10 did

not respond to the initial recruitment email, and 3 declined to participate. The recruitment of

student veterans was facilitated by a site coordinator at the university's Veterans Center. All six

recruited student veterans participated in the study, and they were all interviewed in-person on

the same day. For staff, only three interviews were conducted in-person and the rest, nine

interviews, were conducted over the telephone. The average length of staff interviews was 48

minutes. For student interviews, the average interview length was 46 minutes.

All interviews were tape-recorded and professionally transcribed. Identities of all study

participants and institutions were masked for confidentiality. The information sheet for both staff

and student veterans were shared with each study participant, which indicated that their

participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. This study was approved by the study

site's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Procedures. The initial contact with potential staff interviewees was initiated via e-mail,

introducing the purpose of the study and sharing information about details of the interview

process (see Appendix B). Up to three follow-up attempts via e-mail and/or telephone calls were

conducted to contact the potential respondent. Once the potential interviewee agreed to

participate in the study, a one-on-one interview day/time and location was set, at the

respondent's convenience. With the permission of the respondent, the interview was audiotaped.

The one-on-one interviews were conducted either in-person or via telephone, depending on the

preference of the interviewee. The interviews lasted less than one hour. A nominal token of appreciation, in the form of a $10 Starbucks gift card, was offered to all study participants.

The recruitment process for student veterans was initiated by a site coordinator at the Veterans Center, where six junior and senior student veterans were invited to participate. The information sheet (see Appendix C) was shared with each study participant, indicating that their participation was voluntary and confidential. A $10 Starbucks gift card was given to each study participant. Each study participant was asked to give permission to be audiotaped, and their identity in the audio recording remained anonymous, as pseudo first names were used during the interviews.

All audiotaped recordings of one-on-one interviews were transcribed. All transcribed qualitative data were analyzed and coded by two researchers using Atlas.ti (v.8).

Instrumentation. The Schlossberg's Transition Model (2012), which focuses on the Four S's (Situation, Self, Support and Strategies), guided the development of both interview guides for staff, as well as student veterans. More specifically, for this study, three of the Four S's (Situation, Support and Strategies) guided the development of the interview protocol for university student support staff, whereas all Four S's, including Self, guided the development of the student veteran interview protocol.

For the one-on-one interviews, university staff and personnel were asked to share information regarding the types of services and resources that are available and referred to student veterans. More specifically, interviewees were asked to discuss main concerns that student veterans face while attending the university, type of services that are available and are most beneficial, most commonly referred resources, types of approaches used for student veterans compared to non-veteran students, educational opportunities for transition from military

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to campus life, types of trainings provided for staff and faculty to better understand the needs of student veterans, types of services to address physical and psychological disabilities of student veterans, and finally, any suggestions on how universities can better meet the needs of student veterans (see Appendix D).

A semi-structured interview guide was used for one-on-one student veteran interviews. This guide included questions about the background of student veterans, the decision-making process in choosing the university, the expectations about the admission process, possible challenges for entering the university and navigating campus life, types of student support services used, level of engagement at the university, and experiences interacting with veteran, as well as non-veteran students, on-campus (see Appendix E).

Analysis of Qualitative Data

The collected raw, audiotaped data were first transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber and saved in a Word file. The transcribed text notes were then verified for accuracy before starting the qualitative coding process. The Atlas.ti (v.8) software, designed to analyze text-data, was used, where study text notes converted from Word file into .rtf file format, were coded electronically.

The coding process for this study involved two coders. Each transcribed interview was coded using *a priori* codes as well as newly emerged codes. The initial list of *a priori* codes was based on the interview guide, as well as the relevant literature. As new themes emerged from the transcribed interview data, new codes were added. All codes were grouped by themes. Two study team members independently coded each transcript and reconciled coding differences through multiple discussions. Memos were also used to develop code categories in Atlas.ti (v.8). During the initial phase, two researchers conducted an independent preliminary line by line

coding analysis to identify emerging themes. Researchers used the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002) to sort the codes by shared findings. The resulting group codes were compared, contrasted, and sorted into themes that characterized the perspectives of interviewed university staff and student veterans. When there were discrepancies in the coding, researchers provided the rationale for the code and expanded the theme to encompass the relevant components. During the last phase of the data analysis, the finalized list of code categories (which included both *a priori* as well as emerged codes) were then used in Atlas.ti (v.8) to identify all relevant narratives (quotes) from the transcribed interviews.

Conclusion

Due to a lack of comprehensive survey data on the use of institutional student support services by student veterans, comparing veteran students to non-veteran students, this study utilizes a qualitative approach to identify types of student support services and resources used by student veterans to achieve academic success in higher education.

Given that there is a lack of extensive research on student veterans, inductive studies are well suited to not only inform practice, but also identify policies and programs that are urgently needed to better address the needs of student veterans. Although some recent studies have addressed the transition out of military and into higher education, more research is needed to improve our knowledge about the experiences of student veterans and how non-profit higher educational institutions can help student veterans succeed.

By specifically focusing on the critical role of student support services and the perspectives of university staff, this study seeks to identify best practices and better understand which strategies within the four types of services: academic, mental health, disability, and career, will nurture success. This study also examines the undergraduate student veterans' life

experiences to further understand what factors influence academic success. Documenting the life stories of student veterans allowed us to capture their lived experiences in their own voices. The Schlossberg Conceptual Model of transition guided the theoretical framework for this study, with a specific focus on the role of university student support services. Finally, grounded theory that is based on emergent thematic analytic approach allowed the discovery of nuances and processes, which were not identified in the current literature on student veterans. This approach will add to our knowledge on how student veterans can be better served to achieve success in non-profit higher educational settings.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

In an effort to understand what factors are perceived to support student veterans on their path to success at a public university, two groups of interviews were conducted. One group included 12 student support staff, and the other group included 6 student veterans. Ten major themes emerged from the qualitative analyses. From these ten major themes, there were four overlapping themes between student and staff interviews. Table 1 lists the overlapping emerged themes from both student and staff interviews: transition from military to civilian/campus life, differentness and unique characteristics of student veterans, the Veterans Center, and access & utilization of services. Each overlapping theme is described below.

Table 1. Overlapping Themes – Student Veterans & Support Staff

Transition from Military to Civilian/Campus Life
Differentness & Unique Characteristics of Student Veterans
The Veterans Center
Access and Utilization of Services

Table 2 lists the non-overlapping themes from student and staff interviews. The non-overlapping themes for student veterans include: transition from community college to university, involvement in student organizations, and size of the student veteran population. For staff, the non-overlapping themes include: main concerns about student veterans, effective practices to assist student veterans, and VET NET Ally Workshop.

Table 2. Non-Overlapping Themes

Student Veteans
Transition from Community College to University
Student Organization Involvement
Size of the Student Veteran Population
Support Staff
Main Concerns about Student Veterans
Effective Practices to Assist Student Veterans
VET NET Ally Workshop

Figures 2 and 3 list the study participants for each group. Pseudonyms were used to personalize the narratives and protect the identity of study respondents. Student charactersitics include: gender, race, military branch, and community college transfer. For support staff, participant characteristics include: their role at the university and where healthcare provider represents staff from disabilities, physical, and mental health services.

Student Veterans	Gender, Race, Military Branch, Transfer Student
Jane	Female, Asian, Marine Corps, Transfer Student
Lisa	Female, White, Army, Transfer Student
Becky	Female, White, Army, Transfer Student
John	Male, White, Navy, non-Transfer Student
Frank	Male, African American, Air Force, Transfer Student
James	Male, Hispanic, Marine Corps, Transfer Student

Figure 2. Characteristics of Student Veteran Study Participants

Support Staff	Role at the University
Tina	Academic Counselor
Mary	Academic Counselor
Jackie	Healthcare Provider
Tim	Healthcare Administrator/Liaison
Ted	Healthcare Provider/Liaison
Joe	Academic Counselor
Lee	Career Counselor/Liaison
Susan	Healthcare Provider
Karen	Healthcare Counselor
Mark	Academic Administrator
William	Academic Administrator/Liaison
Serena	Healthcare Administrator

Figure 3. Characteristics of Support Staff Study Participants

Overlapping Themes

Transition From Military To Civilian/Campus Life

With regards to transitioning from *military to civilian/campus life*, student veterans explained that while in the military, they worked in teams, and their dependence on each other was critical to their survival during deployments. In contrast, in a university environment, the focus is less on collaboration and more on individuals being self-reliant. At times, this can result in feeling isolated and alienated. However, Jane, a female Asian Marine Corps transfer student, explained that this university is "here to help us transition into civilian life. And so, it's really helping us a lot because we're slowly letting go of the rigid ways of the military, but yet we still have that commonality that ties us together. And, it's just nice to have that support." Student veterans also shared that the military and universities have two distinct cultures. The military has

a rigid, hierarchical structure that promotes teamwork and collaboration, whereas the university

environment promotes flexibility, where students are encouraged to explore and find their own

individual paths. Therefore, letting go of the rigid ways in the military is important to a

successful transition to campus life. Becky, a white female Army transfer student, elaborated:

> At first, it was really hard to figure out how to communicate with other people.
> So, what we expect in the military is definitely not like in the civilian life. I used
> to get mad because people would walk on grass. We're not allowed to do that in
> the military! You're not allowed to walk on grass, but here, oh, people walk on the
> grass. It is what it is.

University support staff also expressed that many student veterans, regardless of their

disability status, have transitional issues. The military culture is highly structured, where

everything is laid out. Their days are highly predictable. They know what to eat, where to go,

what time to get up, etc. In an environment like the university, student veterans have to find the

structure, and often times, this process can throw them off. In the military, others make decisions

for them, while in civilian life, the onus is on the individual to make his/her/their own decisions.

Time management is another concern elaborated by William, an academic administrator/liaison:

> Okay, so the sergeant, the lieutenant, or the captain is not managing your time
> anymore. Now you have to manage it and it's the most precious thing. You spend
> a second, and it's gone. So now you've got to manage your own time. So, making
> that adjustment to where you have two kids at home, and the wife might be
> working … so you try to paint those scenarios where time is critical and they
> become their best time managers and they have to set priorities for that.

Also, many student veterans do not realize that, often times ,their military credentials do not

translate to credits outside of the military. Joe, an academic counselor, elaborated:

> They're not educated in the fact that their military experience doesn't really
> translate in the way that they thought and that they might have to do an entry-
> level position upon graduating because, while [they] might have been an E-5 or E-
> 6 in the military, 75% of all veteran degree holders hold positions that are in no
> way related to their MOS [military specific occupation category]. So that means,
> no matter what position you were in the military, you are now an entry-level.

In sum, one of the biggest challenges for many student veterans is to embrace college campus life, which is less structured with many options. For some, this might cause frustration and difficulty adapting when transitioning from highly structured military culture to the university environment, which is flexible and encourages individuality.

Differentness & Unique Characteristics Of Student Veterans

Student veterans discussed factors and characteristics that distinguished them from traditional college students. Student veterans tend to be *older, married, and employed*. Therefore, they are more likely to have *family and work obligations*. Having additional responsibilities at home makes it more challenging to balance the expectations of academic, work, as well as family life. Jane, a female Asian transfer student, explained:

> I'm not the traditional student. I'm a little bit older than the average and the fact that I'm a former Marine also plays a big factor into that, as well, so... It was nice to know that I was coming into a community that was going to be welcoming and accepting of that.

Regarding family obligations, James, who is a Hispanic single father former Marine student veteran, shared:

> Oh, I think the two biggest things, or the first, would probably be being a single father, worrying about child care, having the time to study, and having the time to look for that [child care].

Students also shared about the impact of their *different life experiences* when compared to traditional college students. Being older helped some to connect with faculty on a different level compared to their younger peers. They also shared that compared to college students, they are more likely to have more conservative political views, which might conflict with less conservative political perspectives at the university. When interacting with younger college-age students, there is a disconnect often times. However, with more interactions in classrooms and throughout the campus overtime, student veterans felt more comfortable and accepted. The time

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lag from high school to entering a college or a university was another distinguishing

characteristic that student veterans shared during the interviews. Some student veterans did not

feel prepared when applying to college compared to other traditional college students, who

typically enter college right after high school.

With regards to differentness, some support staff also shared that most student veterans

tend to have different backgrounds and life experiences compared to other non-veteran students,

which might make it more challenging when transitioning to campus life. Tim, who is a

healthcare administrator, shared:

> Their life experiences are different, than anybody over here, even within their
> own age group, unless they're prior military. So that's going to be different.

William, an academic administrator who is a liaison with the Veterans Center, also elaborated:

> They're the older students, not the oldest, but they're in that middle ground, so
> they have to adjust.

The different characteristics of student veterans impacts their experiences on campus. Jackie,

who is a healthcare provider, discussed the implications of differentness of student veterans in

terms of obstacles and challenges they often encounter.

> I assume when someone comes in as a veteran, they're going to probably be an
> older student, or a returning student, and that there's very likely a physical, and/or
> mental health concerns that might be barriers for them.

In sum, the different characteristics discussed in this section distinguishes many student veterans

from traditional college-age students. Student veterans tend to be older, employed, married, some

with children, and all of these circumstances compete with academic and degree expectations,

which might make it more challenging to succeed in higher education.

The Veterans Center

The staff and students, all discussed at length about the benefits of having a Veterans Center on campus. This Center provides different types of services including working closely with the Veterans Administration (VA) to verify military service-connected benefits (such as the GI Bill), making sure the appropriate coursework is verified for their intended major, verification of access to housing and living expenses, educating and connecting student veterans to services on campus, a physical space for student veterans to connect with their peers, career and professional development (e.g., LinkedIn profile for future employers, branding, internships open to relevant majors). The Center staff are predominantly military veterans, which helps create a veteran-friendly environment on campus.

Tim, who is healthcare provider and a liaison, explained the critical services available at the Veterans Center.

> Other programs on campus know about the Veteran Services Office on campus, and that's where they [student veterans] go to get their GI bill, Post-9/11 stuff, all that kind of stuff, vetted and verifies they're taking the right courses for their funding. So, they'll spend a lot of time over there [Veterans Center] making sure they get their work signed off so they get their money, for housing and also for living, based on verifying the courses they are enrolled in and are going towards their intended degree. So that's important for them.

At the Veterans Center, student veterans have the space to work with peers, as well as independently. The Center staff is the *primary referral source* that personally help student veterans to access the various available services and resources on campus, including career and job placement, health and mental health services, disability support services, etc. The Center collaborates closely with on-campus and off-campus services. Many of the on-campus services have *liaisons* between the Veterans Center and their corresponding service department. For example, at the Career Center, counselors help with writing resumes, interview preparation,

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clothes for interviews (free wardrobe), etc. *Collaborations* between on-campus student support

services and the Veterans Center, through identified liaisons, is key to ensure that student

veterans are receiving the necessary support to meet their unique needs. Lee, who is a career

counselor and a liaison at the Veterans Center, explained:

> I'm in regular contact with them [Veterans Center] as far as choosing some
> different things we have going on, like job fairs. Any outside, other events are
> related. I also get requested to go to speak to one of their classes and do
> workshops - resume preparation, job search, and those type of things. I kind of
> work closely with them and support their activities, as well as try to get them to
> be involved with ours.

Ted, who provides mental health services, also explained that in his position as liaison, he also

provides outreach services to the Veterans Center.

> I do see some of the student veterans and their dependents in therapy, and I try to
> do a lot of outreach as well, I'm the main liaison with our center and student
> veterans on campus, so I attend a lot of their meetings and try to do outreach to
> them.

The Center also provides workshops on academic success, stress management, and how to utilize

services at the Center and other services on campus. Susan, who is a student healthcare provider,

elaborated on the benefits of having a Veterans Center on campus, as it is also the primary source

of *orienting and educating* student veterans to what types of services are available both on

campus as well as off campus (such as the VA).

> Well, we certainly have counseling services available on campus, as well as
> psychiatric services on campus. Generally, though, because of our model here for
> counseling and health services on campus that if student veterans do have
> insurance through the VA, they will probably have more opportunity for long-
> term and ongoing mental health treatment than they do here just because our
> policy does have limited, short-term treatments, even though, there is unlimited
> amount of groups [on campus].

> The Veterans Center highlights the importance of having a distinct, *separate space,* or a

hub for student veterans, to come together and get connected to their peers. Students can hang

out and socialize with like-minded folks. The Center is a place to *connect* with people like themselves with a prior military experience to feel more at ease on a college campus. Students discussed the benefits of having a Veterans Center on campus, which offers opportunities for student veterans, as well as their spouses and dependents, to connect and get involved in various activities and programs, helping student veterans to become more engaged on campus. Jane, a student veteran, explained:

> This Veterans Center support in general is pretty much my family here, because I don't have any family here in the United States. They're all in Japan. So, they've really become my family, and sometimes have good days, but sometimes you have bad days. And I think we all just tend to help each other out on those rough days. And we're just here for each other, and we know that. And knowing that just really helps you get through the day.

William, an academic administrator and a liaison, elaborated:

> If you stop and talk to any veteran on campus, you discover that they know that they have these support systems here and they have a place to go if they just want to chill out. And, you know, one of the rooms is just designed for them to play their video games, and others are more academic or where they can hold their own meetings with their friends, and stuff like that … I think these are well-supported programs, well-funded.

Student veterans shared that connecting with non-veterans is also an important part of them feeling engaged with the university community at large. Even though most of the interactions at the Veterans Center is with other veterans, the Center does provide opportunities to meet other non-veterans. At the Center, the staff encourages student veterans to become engaged in classroom activities, connect with classmates, and get involved in student organizations. The Veterans Center, often times, notifies faculty that they have a student veteran in their class, so student veterans receive the proper accommodations when, and if, needed. John, a white male student veteran, explained:

> My interactions with faculty have been mostly positive. I think they [Veterans Center] give them notice that they have veteran students in class. I don't know if

they're something that they do about that, but most of my professors know and they're very understanding and they understand that basically you can't really be treated the same as the other students because we're just in different place of our lives.

Frank, an African American male Air Force transfer student, also elaborated:

Faculty are pretty much just an email away, and are willing to work with you, especially if you have a valid reason for maybe, a delay with stuff, or something like that.

The Veterans Center also provides a *Student Veteran Orientation Course,* where students earn one-unit credit. Student veterans are automatically signed up for this orientation class. The main purpose of the class is to orient them to campus and acquainte them to all the resources available at the university. Mary, an academic counselor, explained:

The orientation class is specifically designated and assigned to veteran students where they are addressing the specific challenges that they experience … many of the veteran students on campus participate in this course.

Oftentimes, during the student orientation course, counselors and representatives from different campus-wide, as well as off-site services, such as the VA, are invited to discuss what types of resources are available.

The Veterans Center also offers *peer-to-peer mentoring* and advising, which is of paramount importance. Staff explained that, often times, the best counseling and support is provided from peers, since the students feel that they can openly and freely share their personal knowledge and experience. The Veterans Center also provides support to spouses and dependents of student veterans, as well as those who are military connected.

Access And Utilization Of Services

Access to student support services at the university, as well as utilization of these services, is critical for student success. All student respondents discussed their use of services offered at the Veterans Center, as well as other on-campus services. Student respondents also

discussed connecting with resources available for student veterans off-campus – such as the VA. The Veterans Center encourages participation in accessing available student support services, including *work-study* opportunities on campus. However, the onus is on the students to follow-up, seek services, and advocate for themselves. Students remarked that when they connected with the Veterans Center at the university when they transferred from community college, they were encouraged to seek help from student support services when necessary. Lisa, a white female student veteran, expressed the importance of taking ownership and seeking the available resources and services:

> Defaults upon the student to go out and find those services, and that's where the veteran community really comes in because we share those things. So, when I was coming here, I already knew where I needed to go, what facilities I needed to visit to make sure that I had success here.

> Students also discussed utilizing a wide variety of services, such as financial aid,

disability services, health and wellness services, academic counseling, career development, and other services. Compared to community college, students expressed that financial assistance at the university was accessible and exceeded their expectations. John explained how he accessed financial assistance beyond his GI benefits.

> It's no secret. I'm a GI student so, my school gets paid for but it was also nice to find out that I can still apply to financial aid and then it was really helpful to be able to work here as a work study student through our Veterans Center.

Jane, another student veteran, utilized mental health services at the student health center.

> Okay, right now actually I just signed up to use the counseling services at the Student Health to speak to a counselor, just about some stuff ... usually for these kind of things, I would have gone through the VA, but, I think I just wanted to see how the services on campus could help me.

Frank, an African American male student, shared how he accessed resources from the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP).

As of right now, I'm engaged in vocational rehabilitation. I was also trying to find out about EOP… Or I'd like, find out any other type of organization that can help me … make the transition to graduating smoother.

The support staff also discussed the importance for student veterans to access on-campus support services, when needed. For example, in order for some student veterans to succeed academically, they need appropriate accommodations, taking into account their various physical and mental health concerns. Tim, a healthcare administrator/liaison, remarked:

We work with students who have some type of a documented disability. We get a lot of veterans who come in with post-traumatic stress due to combat, military sexual trauma, traumatic brain injury, various orthopedic issues, chronic pain issues, weird auto-immune stuff, so they'll have symptoms that would quality disability … we could get some accommodations.

In addition to utilizing on-campus services, support staff encourage student veterans to follow-up with the VA in regards to receiving ongoing treatments for identified disabilities. The issue of military sexual trauma was discussed at length as an example of an issue that women, often times, are less likely to seek assistance to treat. Tim, a support staff, elaborated:

If they were a victim of a sexual assault in the military, I make damn sure they're receiving support from the VA for that, because we get females that are coming in, and as part of my intake when I talk to them about military sexual trauma. And if it's not on her rating sheet, it needs to be. Because if it's on their rating sheet, it gets factored into their overall PTSD rating. So, we talk about that, and that's happened more than a few times where it wasn't reported to the VA. And I try and convince them to go back to the VA, get that reported, get that on their rating sheet, and tap into the VA system in terms of support that's available for MST, because there are services available for them. So, for me that's a big one. And then even if they are getting support from the VA for MST, I'm still going to refer them to the on-site support we've got here for sexual assault. That's important to me, very important.

Non-Overlapping Themes (Student Veterans)

This section covers three non-overlapping themes that emerged from the student veteran interviews. The three themes are: transition from community college to university, student organization involvement, and size of student veteran population.

Transition From Community College To University

Five out of the six student veterans were transfer students from local community colleges.

This is another transitional stage that was noted by students. Lisa, a white female Army transfer

student, explained the challenges of transitioning from a community college to a four-year

university and how universities can improve access to resources during the transition process.

> My community college really set the tone for me and let me know you know what
> services were available. So, when I did transfer, the Veterans Center wasn't open,
> but there were a couple people I was able to speak to at the disability support
> services and orientation … I do think we could do better with helping people
> because a lot of the veterans come in as late transfers, maybe spring transfers and
> we get whatever classes are left. A lot of us just have to take whatever classes are
> available, now these classes have to fit in with our degree plan or we won't get our
> GI bill stipend … So, I think that we can look into a system that's a little more
> efficient for the veterans that are transferring to get priority registration even in
> their first semester which they do get the following semesters.

James, a Hispanic male Marine Corps transfer student, also remarked about his positive

experience transitioning from community college to the university.

> At the beginning of my academic journey, I took a lot of in-person classes. And
> then, towards the last half of my AA, there was a lot of online stuff, very rarely in
> person. So, I liked to hear it in person. I feel like I learn a lot better, and it's nice
> since here at the university we get the hands-on approach.

Student Organization Involvement

Another important way to get involved in the university is *volunteering in student*

organizations. Two students discussed their *involvement with the Student Veteran Organization*

(SVO) on campus, which is organized and coordinated by student veterans, for student veterans.

Students shared their experiences within the SVO, often resulting in leadership opportunities.

Their involvement led to being engaged on campus throughout the day during the school year.

Lisa explained her involvement at the SVO:

> I am involved in the Student Veterans Organization. I'm also a sexual trauma
> survivor from the army. This last semester, I gave a speech "take back the night".

So, I was able to influence and motivate a lot of the people on this campus about sexual assault and being a survivor and not feeling bad. So, I've been able to share my story and I have been reaching out to other students … I would say that I do spend a great amount of time out with others on campus just sharing my information and getting theirs.

James, a male Hispanic transfer student, shared his involvement with the SVO, as well as being an active member at other student organizations, such as the Global Supply Chain Society and Latino Business Student Association. In addition to being involved with the SVO, Frank, an African-American student, shared his involvement with *other on-campus student organizations*:

In addition to being part of SVO, I'm also part of the Black Student Union Organization. Within that group, we talk more along social inequalities, differences minorities might face within our everyday life, as well as their transition through school.

Size Of Student Veteran Population

According to students, one of the factors that impacted their decision to attend this university, was the size of the student veteran population. At the study site, over 12% of the student body is military-connected and student veterans. Therefore, having a significant on-campus presence provides student veterans the opportunity to connect with peers and contributes to their sense of belonging. John, a white male Navy non-transfer student, explained the importance of attending a university that has a large student veteran population. He shared:

And it's honestly very helpful to know that there's so many more students like me that are veterans, older, and trying to figure out what they want to do in life and going to school because I know a lot of campuses probably don't have as many veterans as we have. And it's, it's super helpful to just be able to find people that are in the exact same situation as me and be able to engage with them and discuss with them and just work with them.

<center>**Non-Overlapping Themes (Support Staff)**</center>

In this section, the three non-overlapping themes that emerged from the support staff interviews will be discussed. The three main themes are: main concerns about student veterans, effective practices to assist student veterans, and VET NET Ally Workshop.

Main Concerns about Student Veterans

Additional subthemes emerged from staff respondents when they were asked: *In your opinion, what are the main concerns that student veterans face on campus?* The subthemes are: academic concerns, financial concerns, physical and mental health concerns, and stigma.

Academic concerns. For academic concerns, staff shared that student veterans, at times, have difficulty getting the classes that they need to utilize their benefits in time. Serena, a healthcare administrator, explained that it is critical for student veterans to sign up for the correct coursework, so they complete their degree on time. She elaborated: "Connectedness with their coursework and concerns around being able to get the appropriate questions answered in order for them to complete the degree is very important." Mark, an academic administrator, also elaborated:

> So, if a student [veteran] has benefits that are limited to a certain time frame, then the concern would be that they get the classes that they need in time to utilize those benefits. So, if they have four years of benefits, then are they getting the classes that they need with what they need to complete in those four years? Or if they have two years left on their benefits, do they have the classes that they need to complete those, if they're transferring in, to complete in two years?

For student veterans, the main concern goes beyond just getting the appropriate coursework for their major, since they also have to make sure that their coursework falls within the guidelines of their GI benefits. William, an academic administrator and liaison, discussed the importance of being mindful of how students spend their GI benefits and take accurate account of credits earned. Unfortunately, the path to graduation is not straightforward, as many students

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have taken classes online while in the military, and many enter the university with an AA degree.

William underscored the limit of 36 months of GI Bill:

> And so a lot of times, if they've spent it [GI Bill], at a for-profit university, and then all the time, those courses don't necessarily apply when they get to a CSU or a UC and so, they may have trouble, … it becomes a little bit complicated and time-consuming.

Therefore, for student veterans, successful navigation of how best to use their GI benefits is critical to ensure that they have sufficient funds to complete their degree.

Financial concerns. In addition to managing their GI Bill so student veterans get their benefits in a timely manner, staff members also discussed other financial concerns. Student veterans are not the typical college students. They have family and work responsibilities. Tim, a healthcare administrator liaison, remarked:

> Their GI Bill verifies that they're taking the right courses for their funding. So, they'll spend a lot of time making sure they get their work signed off so they can get their money for housing and living expenses, based on verifying the courses they are enrolled in and that these courses are going toward their intended degree.

Often times, even after receiving all of the qualified financial benefits, student veterans have to balance work responsibilities, in order to meet living expenses and family obligations.

Physical and mental health concerns. The support staff identified challenges that many veterans face when juggling health or mental health concerns with academic progress. The life events of student veterans are unlike what non-veteran students have experienced. This is particularly true for those who have suffered a disability due to some form of trauma. Susan, a healthcare provider, remarked:

> I certainly think mental illness, and understanding... and having others understand certain mental health challenges that might be unique or more pronounced in the student veteran population, is critical.

Regarding sexual trauma, Karen, a healthcare counselor, elaborated:

Okay, in my position, I certainly offer confidential services to any military survivor of any kind of sexual harm, sexual harassment, stalking, dating, domestic violence, sexual assault … I can also offer academic advocacy as students are dealing with impacts of trauma that may impact their ability to attend a class or to turn in an assignment, just their whole ability to feel safe on campus.

Campus-wide awareness and understanding of how best to support student veterans is critical especially given the higher likelihood of trauma and disabilities among this student population.

Stigma. Some staff, faculty, and non-veteran students might stigmatize veterans based on stereotypes. Susan, a healthcare provider, elaborated on how student veterans may encounter negative stereotypes projected by the campus community at large.

In considering the kind of political and social climate is right now, I think some veterans may often meet with messages … like overt or covert messages, like anti-government or against our president, or even, frankly, against our military and what's going on, which can come across as not supportive, and not conducive to, I think, a successful learning environment, and so I think that's going on as well. It might be a challenge in the classroom or when working with other staff or faculty.

Karen, a healthcare counselor, was concerned about some faculty not understanding the impact of trauma experienced by student veterans while in the military.

Some feel a lack of understanding from faculty staff and community members about trauma in general, as well as utilizing a trauma-informed care model. … As students are dealing with impacts of trauma that may impact their ability to attend a class or to turn in an assignment, just their whole ability to feel safe on campus.

Some female veterans face an additional layer of stigmatization carried over from their military experiences, including MST. Tim, healthcare administrator liaison, explained that, often times, female veterans avoid seeking help.

They [female veterans] will not go see the medic, they will not go see the corpsman, they'll do it on the side. And the corpsman will go to their tent and patch them up for a busted-up ankle that they don't want to be seen going into the front door to get help. Because they understand that it shows weakness … So, what happens to females when they get out [from the military] is that they are some of the last ones who come in and get services to the VA for mental health,

or even MST type stuff, because they don't want to show any type of weakness,
that mindset is still there.

Stigma has a negative impact on student veterans' successful integration into the classroom and

within the campus community, and reduces the likelihood of accessing mental health services.

Effective Practices to Assist Student Veterans

This section illustrates several effective practices identified by support staff, which have

served to advance student veterans in areas of health, disability, academics, and career.

Expressed in staff interviews are implemented practices, which display an understanding of the

needs specific to student veterans and methods that will enhance their ability to succeed in higher

education.

One identified practice is *building trust and credibility* with student veterans, which is

key to successfully engaging them in accessing and utilizing services. Tim explained:

You have to. So when they [student veterans] come into your office (and I've
lectured on this, and I've presented on this at conferences), and if you're prior
military yourself, and you're the one that's been tasked on campus to work with
veterans, you have to build credibility with this population pretty quickly. So,
when they come into my office, everything I've got up is very deliberate. I've got
on my bulletin board … is a fish poster. It's pretty innocuous, it's a bunch of
rainbow trout, different kinds of trout. And, it's positioned where they can see it
when they sit down. There's also a healing cloth from Pakistan that's on my right
side of my office, and they'll see that when they come in and sit down as well.

Several support staff discussed the importance for student veterans to *expand their*

networks to help advance their careers. This is an intentional focus on helping student veterans to

develop skills and utilize resources to prepare them in advancing their career objectives post-

graduation.

The importance of teaching *time management* was also discussed. Many veterans must

adjust to lack of structure relative to military life, while managing their own time effectively. In

the military, the way they managed their time was dictated. When transitioning to

civilian/campus life, student veterans must learn to manage their own time independently, so they can successfully meet academic expectations and demands.

Support staff also shared that some student veterans might prefer taking *classes online,* since they were accustomed to taking online courses while they were in the military. This can provide flexibility in terms of work and family obligations, and it can also help those individuals who struggle with anxiety and managing stressors of PTSD.

Another identified effective leadership practice at the university is *reciprocal collaboration between university administration and student support staff*, including the Veterans Center. Tina, an academic counselor, explained:

> One effective practice - the whole honesty, be upfront, address certain things, because I think as a whole at the university, we speak in general terms. They're [university administrators] really supportive of student veterans and they want to collaborate, but I think it's also vice versa. Because I'm [Veterans Center] willing to collaborate too, and they're willing to collaborate … collaboration is amazing at this campus.

Collabration between student support services and the community at large can help student veterans access essential resources both on-campus and off-campus, as needed. Empowering student veterans to better manage their time, seek assistance, and expand their network are important and effective practices that were implemented at the study site to help student veterans to succeed.

VET NET Ally Workshop

University staff at different service departments remarked about the VET NET Ally workshop, which is a widely accepted program created almost a decade ago at the California State University, Long Beach. The focus of this one-day seminar is to educate faculty, staff, and students, so they can have a better understanding on how to create a welcoming and supportive

campus environment for student veterans. Susan, who is a healthcare provider, explained the

VET NET Ally program:

> We have trainings for our interns and ongoing trainings for our counseling
> faculty. Everyone goes through the VET NET Ally program. Everyone has a
> different approach … we do have an annual seminar for training new faculty on
> the mental health treatment of veterans, but in terms of knowledge about military
> life, there's nothing ongoing except for the VET NET Ally training that's on
> campus, and so everyone does that.

Conclusion

The study results illustrated in this chapter indicate four major overlapping themes that

emerged from both student veteran and staff interviews: transition from military to

civilian/campus life, differentness and unique characteristics of student veterans, the Veterans

Center, and access and utilization of services (both on- and off-campus). In addition to the

emerged overlapping themes from the qualitative analyses, study findings also allude to non-

overlapping themes that were specific to each group of interviewees. The non-overlapping

themes from the student veteran interviews included: transition from community college to

university, student organization involvement (such as SVOs), and size of the student veteran

population. For support staff, the non-overlapping themes included: main concerns about student

veterans, effective practices to assist student veterans, and the VET NET Ally campus-wide

workshop.

Among all emerged themes, the most salient finding was the critical role of the Veterans

Center, which serves student veterans in many different ways. The Center assists student

veterans in their transition and adjustment to the university. It plays a central role in providing a

physical space, a hub that facilitates access to vital services and resources on campus, as well as

off campus. The assistance of the Veterans Center is critical in ensuring that students receive

their financial benefits, as well as verifying their coursework, so they get the courses needed for

graduation, following GI Bill guidelines and requirements. Connectedness and increased student engagement on campus is enhanced, as the Veterans Center links student veterans to academic and co-curricular activities. Furthermore, the Center acts as a bridge to student support services on campus, such as the DSS, and the community at large, such as the VA.

Collaboration between the Center and staff at student support services plays a significant role in student veterans accessing and utilizing services at the university. Central to this collaboration are education and outreach programs and activities, which are provided by counselors at the Center and liaisons, who are located at the University's Health and Student Counseling Center, DSS, and the Career Center. Awareness and understanding of how student veterans may benefit from these services, and how to access them when necessary, are important factors that contribute to the utilization of these services.

The Center provides a safe space for student veterans to interact with other, like-minded student veterans, which also helps develop camaraderie, a sense of belonging, and peer mentorship. Currently, all Center staff are military veterans, which contributes to student veterans' ability to relate and trust the guidance and mentorship of the Center staff. Student veterans confirmed benefitting from the expertise and encouragement of staff and students at the Center. Student veterans also recognized that they need to play an active role in pursuing these available services and resources. The Center staff also encourages student veterans to connect with other non-veteran students, as well as faculty and staff. The campus, as a whole, promotes inclusiveness and provides opportunities for student engagement, which makes this university a veteran-friendly campus.

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Chapter Five: Discussion

The study findings identify key factors that student veterans and staff perceived to contribute to the success of attaining a baccalaureate degree. These factors include: 1) having a designated physical space on campus, such as the Veterans Center, 2) on-campus programs and activities that promote student veteran engagement, 3) trainings which increase familiarity and awareness of distinct student veteran characteristics, 4) promoting flexible and instructional practices, 5) the role of liaisons at student support services to advocate and encourage self-advocacy by connecting student veterans to on-campus and off-campus resources and services, 6) effective collaborative practices between student support services, the Veterans Center, and the community at large. In this chapter, the major identified themes from both sets of interviews (staff and students) are discussed within the larger context of the relevant literature and Schlossberg's transition model.

Student Veteran Characteristics

With regards to student veteran characteristics, study participants, both staff and students, shared that student veterans are more likely to be older, married (and some with children and dependents), and employed, compared to traditional college-age students, as well as to other non-traditional students, who are not veterans. Student veterans also elaborated that, compared to their non-veteran student peers, they have different life experiences and additional family and work obligations. These findings confirm previous studies that have shown student veterans being non-traditional students, which means they are older (since they are entering colleges and/or universities after serving in the military), more likely to be married and/or with dependents, and many have additional familial and financial responsibilities (O'Herrin, 2011, Lang & Powers, 2011, 2010 NSSE). According to the 2010 National Survey of Student

Engagement (NSSE), among combat veterans, 66% reported that they were first-generation, which suggests that the characteristics of first-generation students likely apply to student veterans (Wurster et al., 2013). In this study, however, student veterans did not identify themselves as first-generation. Similarly, the staff also did not characterize student veterans as first-generation. Regardless, according to previous studies, non-traditional students have a greater likelihood of leaving college during their first year than traditional students (Bowl, 2001; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Radford, Cominole, & Skomsvold, 2015; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metzner & Bean, 1987).

While student veterans did not discuss in detail the specifics of any physical or mental health disabilities, they did share that they utilized student health and/or disability services on or off campus. The university staff, on the other hand, discussed being concerned about some of the physical and mental health problems that many of the student veterans face. These results confirm previous studies, which revealed that many student veterans do face challenges related to PTSD, TBI, substance abuse, and other disabilities (Church, 2009; National Academy of Sciences, 2008; Rand Center for Military Health Policy Research, 2011, Grossman 2009), which can negatively impact their ability to successfully integrate into higher education.

In serving the female student veterans, previous studies recognize risk factors, such as having higher levels of financial strain (DiRamio et al., 2008) and awareness of the increased likelihood of being a victim of MST (Kimerling et al. 2016). Similarly, in this study, healthcare providers did discuss at length that women student veterans were less likely to seek help associated with combat- or sexual-related trauma (or MST) experienced while in the military. Stigma was mentioned as one of the barriers to seeking mental health services among women student veterans.

Challenges of Transitioning

The study findings from student veterans and staff show that transitioning from military to civilian life has many challenges. The military is highly structured, and many of the tasks in the military are dictated or clearly strategized. When transitioning to civilian life, many student veterans struggle with a lack of structure and guidance when navigating the university or community college system on their own. The student veteran has to adjust to an environment where the onus is on the student, which means that they have to determine which path to take to achieve their goals. In the study, staff also recognized the challenges that student veterans often face when trying to find their own path toward their educational and career goals. It should be noted that most student veterans in the study had transferred from community college to a four-year university as juniors. So, the college experience was not new for this group of students, as they had already completed two-years of coursework at local community colleges.

Overall, the study findings confirm the existing literature, which shows that many factors contribute to a difficult transition from military service, as many student veterans grapple with different challenges than non-veteran students (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Others have noted various issues student veterans must negotiate once they embark on their college experience. Challenges may range from relationships, where they fit with regard to maturity, role incongruities, and identity renegotiation (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). The students in this study mainly discussed positive aspects of being able to "fit" in the classroom and within the campus-community. They pointed out that being older was an advantage with regards to feeling more confident in classroom participation and interacting with students and faculty. They also shared

that they have successfully participated in various student organizations, such as Latino/Latinx, African American, professional, and other student organizations on campus.

There are studies that show some student veterans arrive at college with weaker academic preparation, lower educational aspirations, and a lack of knowledge in navigating the college environment (Durdella & Kim, 2012). The staff in this study shared some of these academic concerns and lack of preparedness. The staff also discussed student veterans having difficulty with time and stress management. Another concern was about having the knowledge and skills to successfully navigate the school system, including student support services and meeting classroom expectations. Another main concern was regarding student veterans getting the classes they need, in order to complete their coursework within the guidelines of the GI benefits. These findings are consistent with other studies, where student veterans have expressed various frustrations about areas specific to their experience, including: a lack of flexibility with various school programs, difficulties with getting appropriate credit for civilian courses taken previously, and a lack of support in assisting with navigating the GI Bill education benefits (Persky & Oliver, 2011). Similarly, student veterans often have difficulty acculturating to college and civilian life. This is often exemplified by difficulties in identifying with student peers and college faculty (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; McBain et al., 2012; Olsen et al., 2014; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Wheeler, 2012).

Institutional Practices

In order for student veterans to succeed, institutional practices need to incorporate veteran-specific support services, which provide accommodations, resources, and methods of delivery that will assist with enhancing student veteran success. Therefore, it is essential to pay close attention to the methods of support service delivery, as well as the type of resources and

accommodations being provided. Certain characteristics have also been identified as being

beneficial, including the need to connect with those who share similar experiences, veteran

clubs/organizations, and vet-to-vet counseling services, which help veterans in collegiate

transitions and assist with the acculturation process to campus life. Unfortunately, in 2009, only

22% of higher educational institutions provided veteran-specific transition support (Cook &

Kim, 2009). Moreover, proactive support programs, which focus on specific educational goals

and the needs of veterans, contribute to a veteran-friendly campus. The next sections highlight

six effective institutional practices: a designated physical space, student engagement, educating

the campus community, flexible instructional practices, student support liaisons, and

collaborative practices.

A Designated Physical Space

One major feature of the study site is the Veterans Center. Both staff and student veterans

discussed at length about the benefits of having a safe, physical space for all students, including

military-connected student veterans, to connect and have the opportunity to meet other, like-

minded student peers. The Center also acts and serves as a hub in connecting and collaborating

with student support services, including academic advising, financial aid, disability support,

health, and career services. The Center staff provide assistance with verification of the GI

benefits, ensuring that student veterans are taking the appropriate coursework that will guarantee

receipt of benefits, advocate for meeting the needs of student veterans, encourage them to

advocate for themselves by becoming familiar with resources available on campus, as well as off

campus (such as the VA), and help them to access these resources. It should also be noted that

the Center is staffed with military veterans who serve as counselors and mentors, creating a safe

environment where student veterans can identify with the Center staff and feel welcomed and

understood. In addition to providing a safe space for student veterans to feel connected, the

Center also welcomes military-connected families and provides activities to engage all members

of the campus community, with the opportunity for student veterans to connect to other non-

veteran college students, staff, and faculty. As noted in the literature, college campuses that are

distinct in providing information to veterans about available benefits and services help to create a

veteran-friendly campus climate and help bring campus awareness of the student veteran

population (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Furthermore, a college is veteran-friendly when the

institution takes measures to accommodate student veterans with a dedicated office geared

toward serving student veterans (Vacchi & Berger, 2014)

Student Engagement

Previous studies have shown that student engagement in educationally purposeful

activities at colleges and universities can greatly impact the success of student veterans (Astin,

1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pace, 1990). Colleges and universities that fully engage

students in a variety of activities contribute to greater outcomes and can claim to be of higher

quality, compared with other colleges and universities where students are less engaged. The

"Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" may be the best-known set of

engagement indicators (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). These principles include: high

expectations, student-faculty contact, active learning, cooperation among students, prompt

feedback, time on task, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. College

environments that are perceived by students as inclusive and affirming, and where expectations

for performance are clearly communicated and set at reasonably high levels (Education

Commission of the States, 1995; Kuh, 2001; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarellla, 2001), are positively

related to student satisfaction and achievement on a variety of dimensions (Astin, 1984, 1985,

1993; Bruffee, 1993; Goodsell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992). The findings from this current study reaffirm previous studies, where student engagement was a key factor in helping attain student success. Student veteran study participants shared their involvement at the Veterans Center, volunteering at the Student Veteran Organization, membership in other student organizations tied to their ethnic/racial/cultural background, interest and/or career goals, classroom involvement, and participation in the work-study program. According to Tinto's model (1987), when the student's level of integration increases (interaction between student, faculty and staff), the student's commitment is strengthened, and he/she/they will more likely persist towards his/her/their goals. Research on college student development shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the best predictor of their learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pace, 1990).

Educating the Campus Community

In order to create a veteran-friendly campus climate, the campus community at large should be educated about the needs and the lived experiences of student veterans and, in particular, those with disabilities. The campus community also needs to understand the best practices in addressing and overcoming barriers to achieving academic success. The study participants discussed two specific programs: the student veteran orientation class and the Vet Net Ally workshop. The orientation class is offered to all student veterans and is geared toward providing tools and developing skills to transition to college or university. The course also discusses the availability of resources and services on campus (including academic, health, disability, and career services), as well as off campus. During this course, counselors and student support service liaisons are invited to share and disseminate information regarding services available both on- and off-campus. The Vet Net Ally is a well-respected and widely used four-

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hour workshop (offered each semester), with the specific purpose of educating the campus community, including staff and faculty, about the needs and concerns of military service members and student veterans. This workshop helps to better understand the unique needs and challenges student veterans face as they transition from the military. This workshop also highlights effective practices in how best to respond when addressing the challenges student veterans face as they transition to campus life. In order for veterans to be a part of an inclusive and supportive campus, higher educational institutions must bring awareness to its faculty and staff (Sander, 2012).

Flexible Instructional Practices

In the military, online instruction is common. Therefore, student veterans are accustomed to taking online classes. Academic institutions that offer flexible learning opportunities, such as online courses, and accept course credits from alternative online programs, can better meet the needs of student veterans. Furthermore, since academic advising is the most effective support service toward retention efforts and success (Thomas, 1990), consideration of alternative modes of teaching delivery by academic advisors can greatly help accommodate student veterans. As Astin (1985) and Crockett (1985) emphasize, academic advisers play a key role in connecting students with their course of study. Therefore, it is critical for advisors to be responsive to the individual needs and circumstances.

Student Support Liaisons

To facilitate successful navigation of the educational stystem, it is imperative for all student support services to be familiar with how they can best understand and serve student veterans. One important finding of this study was the key role that the student support liaisons play in connecting student veterans to key resources and services. The study findings indicate

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that in each area of student support (DSS, academic, health, and career), there are staff who are identified as being knowledgeable and having an expertise in understanding the needs of veterans. The liaisons counsel and advocate for student veterans by collaborating with the Veterans Center, as well as off-campus services (such as the VA), to ensure that each student veteran is connected with appropriate resources and is able to access services when needed. They also promote self-advocacy, so student veterans take the responsibility and initiative to seek help whenever needed. These identified practices establish proactive and working partnerships between key members of the campus community to help create a more seamless environment for student veterans. As other studies have shown, there appears to be a reluctance of veterans to reach out to DSS services and utilize available accommodations and support. This common occurrence may be explained by the warrior mentality of many returning veterans, who may otherwise qualify for services on the college or university campus (Persky & Oliver, 2011). Therefore, it is critical for support staff and liaisons to continue to educate and encourage student veterans to pursue accessing services as necessary.

Collaborative Practices

The study participants discussed how collaborations between various departments, students, faculty, and staff take place on campus to disseminate information about available programs and resources and how these resources can benefit student veterans. The Veterans Center was identified as a hub, where liaisons from each identified student support service area share and provide outreach to student veterans on campus as well as educate staff, faculty, and administrators about the needs of student veterans. The Veterans Center's staff also works closely with other departments and support services on campus to identify areas of concern for student veterans.

In serving the needs of student veterans, it requires the ability to work with multiple systems and utilize effective intra- and inter-collaborative methods, in order to bridge campus-wide services and departments, the VA, community-based agencies, and other institutions in the community. These collaborative partnerships are fostered and maintained to continue development of effective responsiveness to student veteran needs, as well as toward developing programs, which have been found particularly beneficial to addressing key areas of need. Two key examples are the establishment of the Vet Net Ally program, as well as on-going partnership with the VA. The study findings confirm previous studies, which underscore the necessity for developing collaborative practices, involving DSS and Veterans Services Offices, campus programs, and community agencies (Burnett & Segoria, 2009: Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Moreover, greater acceptance and utilization of collaborative relationships have been effective in helping veterans with disabilities receive support for both on-campus and off-campus military support programs (Burnett & Segoria, 2009: Persky & Oliver, 2011).

Schlossberg's Transition Model

The Schlossberg's Transition Theory has been identified as a potential tool for higher education to use toward providing effective resources and support for student veterans. Accordingly, practice recommendations have been made for faculty and staff, which may serve student veteran needs (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). This study was grounded *a priori* in the Schlossberg's Transition Model (1995), and the study findings reinforce Schlossberg's four S's (situation, self, support, and strategy) as being important factors impacting student veterans' success within higher education. The Veterans Center at the study site plays a key role in responding to each of the four S's identified in the Schlossberg's Model. In addition to the Veterans Center, all six identified institutional practices – designated physical space, student

engagement, educating the campus community, flexible and instructional practices, student support liaisons, and collaborative practices – align with each of the four S's and contribute to the successful transition of student veterans. For *situation*, the student support liaisons play a critical role in addressing stressors that can address transitional challenges, such as making sure schedules and policies are clearly articulated and outlined. Similarly, student engagement campus wide, as well as having counseling and advising expertise rooted in how to address the needs of student veterans, can help the *self* to promote internal resources through counseling and assistance. Additionally, a dedicated veterans office, such as the Veterans Center, can help *support* the needs of all student veterans. Furthermore, time, stress, and organizational-management *strategies* can help veterans better navigate different response options and cope with challenges while in college.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The study includes only one site, which does not allow for generalizability to other public or private universities. The number of student veteran interviewees and university staff/personnel interviewees is also limited. The study, however, did include 3 male and 3 female student veterans. In terms of racial/ethnic background of student veterans, 3 Whites, 1 African American, 1 Hispanic, 1 Asian, were also included in the study. With a relatively low rate of women and racial minorities among student veterans, the researcher made every attempt to include a representative sample of these underrepresented student veterans.

Another limitation is that the scope of the study is limited to the experiences of student veteran undergraduates. Clearly, the experiences of graduate and undergraduate experiences are quite different. However, given that a large proportion of student veterans are undergraduates, the study intentionally focused solely on undergraduates. Another limitation of the study is that

only juniors and seniors were included, which, on one hand, helps highlight the successful transition of student veterans from military life to campus life. On the other hand, by not including the experiences of freshman and sophomore veteran students, discussions on some of the barriers to advancing to upper-division courses are not included in this study. It should also be noted that all student veterans in this study were involved at the Veterans Center, which limits the generalizability, and the study findings do not reflect the perspectives of all student veterans at the university.

Implications for Policy and Practice

College campuses nationwide, which have a high prevalence of student veterans, should strive to adopt institutional practices identified in this study. The success of student veterans in higher education depends on the successful implementation of identified institutional practices and create a "veteran-friendly" campus climate. In order to successfully implement these practices, it requires staff within student support services to become knowledgeable and skilled at understanding military culture and the barriers student veterans face in adjusting from military to civilian life. This expertise is one in which the university must commit to when hiring professional staff. University administration must be dedicated to both understanding the needs and concerns of veterans and developing research-based policies, in order to create a program where student veterans are made to feel they belong and can integrate seamlessly into the campus community. While all institutions can attempt to emulate effective institutional practices identified in this study, it must be underscored the importance of not only having knowledgeable individuals, but also skilled at implementing collaborative approaches. In serving the needs of student veterans on campus, it requires the ability to work with multiple systems and utilize

effective collaborative methods in bridging campus-wide services and departments, the VA, community-based agencies, and other institutions.

The Veterans Center is a key component in providing services, including counseling and guidance, assistance with GI benefits, academic and career resources, socialization, and a physical space, where student veterans can connect with others who they share commonalities and identify with. All study participants, students and staff, acknowledged the key role that the Veterans Center serves to keep students engaged and on track towards graduating. The students explained that they selected to attend this university mainly because of the designated space of the Veterans Center and the individualized attention that they received after their initial contact with the university. In conclusion, all universities committed to the success of their student veterans must adopt policies which reflect best practices including those discussed in this study.

Implications for Social Justice

The necessity to provide the support and institutional practices necessary to meet the needs of student veterans in higher education is a national imperative, particularly in light of the sacrifices our Nation's Veterans have made serving this country. Many have suffered from both physical and mental health wounds, which, for so many, are invisible. Many of our Nation's Veterans enrolled in colleges and universities today continue to suffer from having served multiple deployments. Our nation, together with higher education institutions, must continue to seek a commitment to better understand student veterans and to implement research-based practices, responding to complex challenges that our veteran students face.

Our student veterans are vulnerable in their transition to civilian life, as well as being students and their ability to successfully navigate the expectations of the university. The proportion of veterans with PTSD and TBI is of particular concern. Anxiety, depression, and other mental health and/or substance abuse issues are also common among the military

population. Military suicide is at a crisis rate of approximately 22 veterans committing suicide every day, and female veterans are six times more likely to commit suicide than female non-veterans. Beyond these invisible struggles, many soldiers, who have been physically injured in combat, require ongoing medical care after returning from deployment. Others may require assistance with housing, healthcare, care coordination, and a variety of other services. Since many student veterans have "invisible wounds" and/or physical disabilities, it is critical for the entire university campus to be "trauma informed." In order to effectively address the mental health and other health-related concerns, the university student support staff should encourage student veterans to advocate for themselves towards getting the care they need. Similarly, with regard to disability services, student support staff should be responsive in addressing these concerns and help secure accommodations when warranted.

The responsibilty to provide best practices in higher education should not over rely on the individual staff, who is identified as an expert and/or liaison. The administration should take on the responsibility to ensure sufficient support is being provided throughout campus, and the responsibility is shared between student support services, faculty, staff and administrators. It is also imperative to seek input from student veterans to ensure the university is maintaining responsiveness in addressing their needs and concerns. The university must hire staff with expertise, preferably from military backgrounds, which might facilitate effective mentoring of student veterans.

Concluding Remarks

While higher educational institutions are beginning to develop practices to respond to the needs of student veterans, there continues to be obstacles to retention and graduation attainment among this student population. This study site is a veteran-friendly institution in higher

education, dedicated to implementing best practices in serving and promoting success of student veterans. Veteran-friendly institutions provide support, which work to remove barriers to transitioning successfully and assist with social reintegration for student veterans. These institutions provide different levels of support, as they recognize the complex needs of veterans.

Ultimately, the success of student veterans depends on the implementation of effective practices on campus. The Veterans Center is a key component in providing services, including counseling and guidance, assistance with GI benefits, academic and career resources, socialization, and a designated physical space for students to connect. The campus community needs knowledgeable and skilled university staff, who understand military culture and the barriers student veterans face in adjusting from military to civilian life, and to becoming a college student. Additionally, serving the needs of student veterans requires the ability to work with multiple systems and utilizing effective intra- and inter-collaborative methods in bridging campus-wide services and departments, the VA, community-based agencies, and other institutions. Similarly, campus-wide education of faculty, staff, students, and administrators is needed, in order to understand military and veteran culture, so the campus community can do a better job integrating student veterans and meeting their needs. Future research studies should attempt to understand the experiences of student veterans at community colleges, as many enter into universities as transfer students. It is also important to understand the needs and experiences of student veteran at public versus private and not-for-profit universities, as well as understand the experiences of student veterans who enter four-year universities as freshman. Lessons learned from this study can be applied to other student populations, who share similar characteristics and life experiences, as student veterans.

Dear <NAME>:

My name is Shant Barmak, and I am a doctoral student at the University of California, San Diego/Cal State San Marcos Joint Doctoral Program in Education Leadership. I would like to invite you to participate in a qualitative study on *Student Veteran Success: Effective Institutional Support Services in Higher Education*. The purpose of this study is to explore which factors are most important for U.S. Military student veterans to attain a baccalaureate degree.

Veteran performance in higher education is not yet clear in the Post-9/11 era, despite higher enrollment rates in higher education than the general population. Although some recent studies have addressed the transition out of military and into higher education, more research is needed to improve our knowledge about the experiences of student veterans and how non-profit higher educational institutions can help student veterans succeed.

The interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes. Participation in the interview is completely voluntary and information shared in the interview will be kept private and confidential. A nominal $10 Starbucks gift card will be provided to study participants.

I hope you agree to participate. Please let me know when I can set up a day and time for the interview, either in-person or over the telephone.

Please see attached information sheet for this IRB approved study.

If you have any questions, please let me know either via phone (858) 220-8526 or email sbarmak@ucsd.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shant Barmak
Doctoral Student
UCSD/CSUSM JDP Program

Appendix B
Information Sheet For Interviewees (Staff)

My name is Shant Barmak, and I am a doctoral student at the University of California, San Diego/California State University, San Marcos Joint-Doctoral Program in Education Leadership (UCSD/CSUSM JDP Program). I am conducting a qualitative study on Student Veteran Success: Effective Institutional Support Services in Higher Education.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influences that are most important for student veterans in attaining a baccalaureate degree through the lens of university student support staff. Veteran performance in higher education is not yet clear in the Post-9/11 era, despite higher enrollment rates in higher education than the general population. Although some recent studies have addressed the transition out of military and into higher education, more research is needed to improve our knowledge about the experiences of student veterans and how higher educational institutions can help student veterans succeed.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The interview will take 60 minutes. I would like to hear your thoughts and ideas about how your programs help student veterans to achieve their academic goals. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your job or on any work-related evaluations or reports. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier. The information that we collect from this research project will be kept private and confidential. Your name and your affiliation will not be shared with anyone outside of this study as all collected data will be de-identified and only aggregated data will be reported in the study results. The interview will be audiotaped to assist with note-taking, but only my faculty advisor and I will have access to this recording.

Study investigator contact information, Shant Barmak at sbarmak@ucsd.edu or call (858) 220-8526.

California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB): irb@csusm.edu or call (760) 750-4029.

Appendix C
Information Sheet For Interviewees (Student Veterans)

My name is Shant Barmak, and I am a doctoral student at the University of California, San Diego/Cal State San Marcos Joint-Doctoral Program in Education Leadership. I am conducting a qualitative study on *Student Veteran Success: Effective Institutional Support Services in Higher Education.*

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that are most important in attaining a baccalaureate degree. Although some recent studies have addressed the transition out of military and into higher education, more research is needed to improve our knowledge about the experiences of student veterans and how non-profit higher educational institutions can help student veterans succeed.

I would like to invite you to participate in a 60-minute interview. I would like to hear your perceptions and experiences related to university student services, and how these programs can better meet the needs of student veterans.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. The choice that you make will have no bearing on any school-related evaluations or reports. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier. The information that we collect from this research project will be kept private and confidential. Your name and your affiliation will not be shared with anyone outside of this study as all collected data will be de-identified and only aggregated data will be reported in the study results. The interview session will be audio-taped to assist with note-taking, but only I will have access to this recording.

Study investigator contact information, Shant Barmak at sbarmak@ucsd.edu or call (858) 220-8526.

California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB): irb@csusm.edu or call (760) 750-4029.

Appendix D
Interview Protocol (University Staff)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the *Student Veteran Success: Effective Institutional Support Services in Higher Education* study. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. I'd like to remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary, and anything you share will be kept confidential. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Let's start the interview!

Q1: What is your position at the university?

Q2: In your opinion, what are the main concerns that student veterans face on campus?

Q3: What type of services are available for student veterans on campus and/or off-campus?

Q4: In your opinion, what resources do student veterans benefit from the most?

    Q4a: What resources do you refer to them?

    Q4b: How often do you refer student veterans to veteran-specific resources on-campus or off-campus?

Q5: Do you approach helping student veterans differently compared to non-veteran students? If so, how?

Q6: What type of educational opportunities are available to prepare student veterans to transition into college campus life?

Q7: What type of trainings are available for staff/faculty to better understand military culture and the specific needs of student veterans?

Q8: What types of services are available to address physical and psychological disabilities unique to student veterans?

Q9: In your opinion what can the university do to better meet the needs of student veterans?

Q10: Are there any other comments or ideas that you would like to share?

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix E

Interview Protocol (Student Veterans)

Q1. Let's start by having you give a little background about yourself.

Prompts:
- Upbringing
- Educational background/experiences prior to joining military or during military service
- Will you be the first person in your family to graduate from college
- Reasons for joining the military
- Military experiences
- Deciding to enter or reenter college
- Expectations prior to entry

Q2. What contributed to your decision-making process in choosing this particular university?

Prompts:
- How did you find this university?
- Particular qualities or services or options that this particular institution advertised in general or specifically geared to Veteran students
- Program of study
- Program delivery options e.g. classroom, on-line, alternative calendars, primarily day, primarily night, hybrid, etc.

Q3. How would you describe your expectations from the point of:

a) making the decision to attend this university,

b) applying for admission,

c) acceptance decision, and

d) registering for your first semester of coursework?

Prompts: Admissions application process; Navigating the system; Transfer of credit, credit for prior learning and training; New student orientation; Registration for classes

Q4. Describe possible challenges you thought you might encounter while attending university.

Prompts: Academic concerns e.g. readiness, rigor of program, delivery mode; Physical limitations; ease of getting around campus; Possible mental or cognitive limitations; Disclosure of Veteran status or possible needs; Other obligations e.g. dependents, work

Q5. What expectations did you have as to the kinds of support services that would be available to you?

Prompts:
- Dedicated services for Veteran students on campus; if so, types?
- Academic support services e.g. tutoring, study groups, academic advising, support services related to disabilities or special accommodations, major exploration/career planning/post-bac assistance
- Social support services e.g. student life activities, student organization, ability to connect with other Vets, wellness services
- Financial/bureaucratic e.g. financial assistance, assistance with benefits paperwork

Q6. What were your expectations, as a military Veteran or service member, as to what your experiences might entail when interacting with others on campus?

Prompts: Faculty, staff, students, other Veterans, the university campus in general

Q7. To what extent, including your participation related to your academic coursework, have you been actively involved on campus outside the classroom?

Prompts: Activities primarily designed for Veteran students or to promote Veterans on campus; Extracurricular-intramurals, athletic events, student organizations; Tutoring or mentoring; Study groups; Student Life programming

Q8. What student services have you used or are currently using?

Prompts:
- Financial
- University-sponsored benefits/services dedicated to Veterans
- Delivered what was advertised
- Possible services lacking or needing improvement particularly for Veterans
- Post-bac Planning/Assistance

Q9. How would you describe your level of engagement/involvement in the classroom and on campus?

Prompts: Level of engagement; Extent of interaction with non-Veteran students; Campus life- any extracurriculars-intramurals, athletic events, student organizations; Activities primarily designed for Veteran students or to promote Veterans on campus

Q10. Do you have any final thoughts you would like to express about your experiences as a Veteran student?

Thank you for your participation!

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