AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF POST-9/11
GI BILL ERA STUDENT/VETERANS FROM ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY SERVICE
TO COLLEGE STUDENT

by

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A Dissertation
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of
Doctor of Arts
Community College Education

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DEDICATION

For my husband, who exemplifies duty, honor, and courage: Thank you for introducing me to the military and sharing your life with me. I greatly appreciate your support, your unerring insight, expertise, and wise counsel—I am eternally grateful. To our children, Mark, Elizabeth, and John, who so generously supported me, cheered me on, and believed in me—you bring such joy to my life and I thank each of you for being who you are and your unique and invaluable contributions.

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF POST-9/11 GI BILL ERA STUDENT/VETERANS FROM ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY SERVICE TO COLLEGE STUDENT

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George Mason University, 2014

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This qualitative study explores the transition experiences of Post-9/11 Era military veterans from active duty military service to college students for the purpose of adding to the body of knowledge about this student population. The subjects, who voluntarily offered to participate, were 15 community college student/veterans and 10 four-year institution student/veterans. Each interview was transcribed to create a written manuscript and the data was analyzed and coded. The themes which emerged from analysis of the interview transcripts were financial issues, interpersonal issues, academic issues, community issues, isolation, and inconsistency of information received from academic institutions.

Community college students reported high levels of interaction with faculty and virtually no interaction with other students, including other student/veterans, while the four-year institution students reported low levels of interaction with faculty, high levels

of interaction with other student/veterans, and minimal interaction with nonveteran

students. The information suggests the need and opportunity for future in-depth studies of

the student/veteran transition experience.

I. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since the end of World War II, millions of military personnel have transitioned from active duty service to college student under the auspices of some type of educational assistance programs, known colloquially as the GI Bills. The details of the type of assistance have changed over the years, but in general, the very generous benefits initiated after World War II gradually declined to a minimal level of financial support requiring contributions from the military member for coverage. This was particularly true after the Vietnam War (Wilson, 1995a). Additionally, the social climate on campus was often antimilitary and not supportive of student/veterans. Eventually, student/veterans on campus became nearly invisible. Over the years, interest and numbers of student/veterans declined. Many campuses maintained offices to process paperwork associated with students attending college under the GI Bill, but provided few, if any, services other than document management.

The recent passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill has reinvigorated public support for educational assistance to military veterans (Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). One of the aftereffects of the New York World Trade Center decimation on September 11, 2001 was renewed interest in military service. This event served as a catalyst for many young people to volunteer for military service (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Many

of the Post-9/11 Era veterans ended up serving in the conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2007).

Former Senator James Webb of Virginia was an active advocate for today's military members during his tenure in Congress. He believed that many of today's leaders received educational assistance through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, and one of his first initiatives after his election to the United States Senate was to build recognition for today's service members and veterans through improved educational benefits. He spoke eloquently about the need to provide benefits comparable to those received in the post-World War II era. His interest and efforts led to the development and passage of the Post-9/11Veterans' Educational Assistance Act on Thursday, June 19, 2008, effective on May 1, 2009 (Mitchell, 2009). This bill was part of Fiscal Year 2008 Supplemental Appropriations Act. It is also known as the Webb–Mitchell GI Bill and is frequently referred to as the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Background

The Post-9/11 GI Bill has been heralded as the most generous veterans' education benefit package since the GI Bill of 1944 (Webb, 2008). The bill provides tuition, a cost of living stipend for full-time students who are not on active duty, an annual payment of $1,000 for books and fees, and includes some transferability features. Benefits are tied to length of service and the service members are not required to make a financial contribution to this program. Coverage for vocational education is limited to that taken at accredited colleges and universities. Veterans are eligible to receive up to 36 months, comparable to 8 semesters in a traditional college or university system, of educational

benefits. The federal government (through the Veterans' Administration) makes direct tuition and fees payments to colleges and universities for each eligible student/veteran enrolled in an accredited institution.

A review of the literature indicates interest in higher education is very high in the military population. According to Patrick Dunne, the Veterans' Administration's under secretary for benefits, over 25,000 applications have been received by the Veterans' Administration (U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, May 15, 2009). Further, it shows that the veterans of both the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts have had experiences which may hinder the ease with which they transition to higher education (Bannier, 2006; Lafferty, Alford, Davis, & O'Connor, 2008). The continuing nature of these conflicts and the generous education benefits under the Post-9/11 Era GI Bill indicate that the student/veteran population will continue to grow as these volunteer soldiers leave military service and transition to postsecondary education.

Purpose of the Study

This exploratory study was designed to discover information about the transition experiences of the Post-9/11 Era military veterans from active duty military service to college student. The purpose was to provide data and information for postsecondary educators about the student/veteran population and their perceptions of the transition experiences from military service to higher education. It is hoped this data and information will serve as a base of knowledge so that further studies can be conducted which may be used to determine development of appropriate campus programs to attract and support this new population.

Educators have an opportunity to help integrate the student/veteran population into society through both academic preparation and socialization. However, this is not a simple proposition. Along with the opportunity for increased enrollment which has the potential to positively impact institutions' revenue from tuition, the new veterans' education benefits bring a new population to colleges and universities. There is some question about whether institutions are prepared to meet the needs of this new population. The Chancellor of California State University, Charlie Reed, stated in the 2008 American Council on Education (ACE) Annual Meeting:

> I'm going to give you an assignment. Go back to your institution. Do an assessment of how you're doing with programs and services for service members and veterans. You won't find a pretty picture. What you will find is that you need to reorganize and reprioritize. (Cook & Kim, 2009, p. iii)

According to Field (2008), many of today's veterans prefer to attend institutions that offer 2-year degrees or provide vocational training. Assuming that this trend continues, the community colleges can expect an increase in enrollment with the more generous benefits of the new GI Bill. It is incumbent on community colleges to ensure they have the necessary programs in place to support the veterans. The veterans choose these institutions because they are convenient and offer a variety of educational opportunities.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The problem is that available information about the Post-9/11student/veteran is limited. The rapid development, passage, and implementation of the Post-9/11 Era GI

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Bill has left many institutions unprepared for the anticipated increase in student/veteran enrollment through the development of targeted programs and services for this population. It is also necessary for institutions of higher education to be knowledgeable about the demographics of the new student/veteran population so that the academic and social needs of this population are well served.

Understanding and identifying characteristics of the current student/veteran population should provide the foundation necessary to develop institutional programs which will support and serve this population. This study explored the data and answered the following questions:

1. How do Post9/11 Era student/veterans perceive their college experiences at one 2-year institution in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

2. How do Post-9/11 Era student/veterans perceive their college experiences at one 4-year institution in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

3. What campus programs, practices, or policies affect the transition from military to college student for the Post-9/11 Era student/veterans?

Significance of This Study

The need for detailed, qualitative information about this new student population is immediate. Two recent studies encourage postsecondary institutions to develop programs and practices to serve the student/veteran population (American Council on Education [ACE], 2009; Cook & Kim, 2009). Additionally, the student/veteran population is asking for the support of academic institutions (Johnson, 2010).

At the third annual conference of the Student Veterans of America (SVA), held at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, Chairman of the Board Rodrigo Garcia spoke about the problems he faced when he began attending college after his military service in the United States Marine Corps (Student Veterans of America [SVA], 2010). In his address to the membership entitled "Adapt and Overcome" he spoke about his transition to college life. In addition to being a first-generation Hispanic student, he noted the difficulty of "tackling the military stereotypes he experienced in college classrooms." Michael Dakduk, the Deputy Executive Director of Student Veterans of America, echoed the need for student/veteran support on college campuses in his opening address to the conference participants. He described their transition to college student as a "culture shock that's hard to adjust to" (Johnson, 2010).

The Lumina Foundation for Education (Cook & Young, 2009) published a report entitled *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus* which provided detailed results of a survey conducted on 723 institutions of higher education. The survey asked these institutions to share information about their policies and programs designed to serve veterans. The study reported that more than 68% of the public, 2-year responding institutions reported "providing programs for military service members and veterans is a part of their long-term strategic plan" (p. vii). Of the responding institutions, 63% of public, 2-year institutions indicated that they would be making "veteran-friendly changes to their institutions in the next five years as part of their long-term strategic plans" (p. 5). The report identified three proposed changes being considered by participating institutions: (a) providing faculty and staff with professional

development to help them understand and accommodate issues unique to the student veteran population, (b) finding public or private funding to support programs for student/veterans, and (c) increasing the numbers and types of programs to support student/veterans (p. 5).

In addition to the Lumina Foundation report, a 2010 policy paper produced by The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) identified the top 10 higher education state policy issues for 2010. Although all 10 issues involve the public colleges and universities in the United States, one issue is particularly relevant for public community colleges: Veterans' education through implementation of the Post-9/11 Era GI Bill is identified as Issue 8 in the top 10 policy issues for institutions of higher education (AASCU, 2010). A report by the American Council on Education in 2007-2008 states that 43% of military undergraduates enrolled in public 2-year institutions (ACE, 2010).

Framework for the Study

The qualitative approach to obtaining information from student/veterans was used for this study of student/veterans at a public, 2-year institution and student/veterans at a public, 4-year institution. Both institutions are located in the metropolitan Washington, DC area. The study's goal was to provide information helpful for similar institutions to better understand needs of student/veterans so that they might develop programs to assist the student/veteran from recruitment, through enrollment, matriculation, and program completion.

O'Banion (1997) describes a "learning college" as being based on six key beliefs, one of which states, "The learning college defines the roles of learning facilitators by the needs of the learners" (p. 47). Acceptance of this belief as an underlying assumption about a learning college reinforces two of the three findings of the aforementioned ACE report *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus* (2009) which identified faculty training and program support and services for veteran students as important issues for institutions of higher education to develop in their strategic plans.

An understanding of the transition experiences of the student/veteran population is important because this issue was identified by the ACE as a key initiative for colleges and universities (2009). In addition to the ACE's position, most campuses responding to the Lumina Foundation Survey (Cook & Kim, 2009) reported that their strategic plans for the next five years identified the creation and development of services for the Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients as a key issue, which adds construct validity to this current study.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study was limited to the student/veteran population at two public institutions, both located in the metropolitan Washington, DC, area. One is a 2-year community college and one is a 4-year research institution. Another delimitation was the size of the study. The relatively small sample size used to collect data through in-depth interviews with individuals selected through purposive sampling, was necessary to keep the data collection manageable for one researcher given the time and resources available.

Limitations which affected the study were the sparse data available on student/veterans from the Post-9/11 Era. Two major sources of data on student/veterans are the Veterans' Administration and institutional reports. This limitation is due, in part, to the manner in which the Veterans' Administration collects its data versus data collection by academic institutions: Discrepancies in the categories used by each data collector make accurate identification and correlation of data difficult (Adelman, 2008).

The second limitation was related to the time of the study relative to the passage of the legislation. The relatively short period of time that students have been attending institutions under the Post-9/11 Era GI Bill has precluded much collection of statistics about this population. There simply has not been enough time to collect significant amounts of data.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the Post-9/11 Era GI Bill refers to legislation which is also identified as the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 and, more informally, The New GI Bill. These terms are used interchangeably in this study.

Organizations that were beginning to collect data on student/veterans in the Post-9/11 Era include the American Council on Education (ACE), the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), the Association of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), Servicemembers Opportunity College (SOC), the National Association of Veterans' Program Administrators (NAVPA), the Student Veterans of America (SVA), Supportive Education for Returning Veterans (Project S.E.R.V.), and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA). Finally, the

Veterans' Administration (VA) provides available current and projected data on student/veterans in its Veterans Affairs Veteran Population Model – National Level Estimates and Projections.

Summary

The data collected and generated by this study will contribute to the body of knowledge about the Post-9/11 Era student/veteran population. An important article by Rey (2009) indicates that research shows the Post-9/11 Era student/veterans have needs unique to their population. The findings of this current study, therefore, provide additional and in-depth information about a subset of the student/veteran population. It identifies the types of academic and social support today's student/veterans perceive would be helpful as they transition to higher education and provides data necessary to assist in developing relevant institutional programs.

Institutions of higher education need such data about today's student veteran population. It is hoped that knowledge of the profile and characteristics of the student/veteran population will allow institutions to develop programs and services designed to enhance the success of those seeking higher education under the Post-9/11 Era GI Bill.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review addresses the topics in the study's three research questions. Information from books, journals, Internet sites, research reports, speeches, proceedings, and conferences were the basis of information for the study. The databases EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, Congressional, Project Muse, and JSTOR were searched. Some of the search terms used were higher education, adult learning, military veterans, and student veterans. The research questions were:

- How do Post-9/11 Era student/veterans perceive their college experiences at one 2-year institution in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

- How do Post-9/11 Era student/veterans perceive their college experiences at one 4-year institution in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

- What campus programs, practices, or policies affect the transition from military service to college student for the Post-9/11 Era student/veterans?

This research viewed student/veterans' experiences through the lenses of adult learning theory, which served as the underpinning of this study's programs, practices, and policy recommendations. In addition to exploring selected adult learning theories and practices, this chapter provides a brief history of the GI Bill including the initial interactions of higher education and the military, the evolution of support for educating postwar veterans, and the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 through the

Montgomery Educational Assistance Act. This literature review also includes an overview of emerging issues in adult learning theory, examines the Post-9/11 GI Bill and its benefits, and discusses particular challenges facing student/veterans. Finally, current practices with student/veterans are presented.

History of Adult Learning

To fully understand the characteristics of the adult learner, it is necessary to review the development of the practice of adult education. Interest in learning and adult education can be found in the ancient writings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Hummel, 1993). Unfortunately, the writings of Aristotle have not survived in their complete form, leaving many unanswered questions about the extent and depth of his beliefs about education. It is clear from Aristotle's comments in the *The Nichomachean Ethics* (384-322 BC) that he believes that education is a road to individual fulfillment (as cited in Hummel, 1993, p. 11). Aristotle differentiates between the ways in which individuals acquire knowledge, using the terms "habituation" and "teaching" (as cited in Hummel, 1993). Hummel equates the term "habituation" with the more modern term "active learning" (1993, p. 7).

Teaching, as used by Aristotle and interpreted by Hummel (1993), is complementary to habituation and can be described as learning that extends beyond individual experiences. In other words, learning through teaching is acquired through a combination of developing habits and discovering why something happens. The second type of learning, habituation or active learning, is acquired through the role of the student with a subject matter expert as a guide. The teaching supplements the individual's

experiences and allows him or her to understand the cause of the phenomena. Thus Aristotle's concept of learning involved individual, self-directed learning combined with guided instruction by a teacher. This belief is reflected in Tough's work in the latter part of the 20th century (1979, 1982).

America has a long history of learning in adulthood. Long (1976) discussed the importance of self-directed learning during Colonial times. Education was the responsibility of the family. More affluent families often used tutors, while less affluent families relied on the parents to educate children. Families in which the parents did not know how to read were restricted in their opportunities to learn. Eventually, public education evolved.

Two national events fueled the growth of higher education in the 19th century. Although the Civil War (1861-1865) caused some institutions to suspend operations while students and faculty served in the conflict, other institutions benefited from the distraction the war provided and promoted legislation that was favorable to higher education (Thelin, 2004, p. 75). The second event which helped higher education was the Morrill Land Grant Act which was passed in 1862 (as cited in Thelin, 2004, p. 74). This Act provided states with land to be used for the express purpose of institutions of higher education and created a partnership between the federal government and the states to provide incentives to states to fund higher education programs. Land grant colleges were often referred to as "democracy's colleges" (Thelin, 2004, p. 75) because they were considered affordable institutions that provided practical higher education.

The development of higher education in America was strongly influenced by practices in England because American colonial colleges were based on the Oxford-Cambridge model (Thelin, 2004, p. 7). The term *adult education* gained popularity in the 1880s and 1890s (Stubblefield & Rachal, 1992). Three significant events promoted the use of the term adult education (Stubblefield & Rachal, 1992): the World Association for Adult Education was established, the Carnegie Corporation became involved with promoting the field of adult education, and a publication devoted to the status of adult education was published in Britain.

The increased number of institutions of higher education and the diversification of the curricula was well entrenched in America in the post-World War II era, when the distinction between K-12 and postsecondary education was evolving and many adult learning theories were promulgated (Thelin, 2004, p. 260). The evolution of learning theory continues today as evidenced by work in brain studies (Janik, 2007), planetary theory (O'Sullivan, 1999), and cultural/spiritual theory (Brooks, 2000; Tisdell, 2005). From the perspective of Merriam and Brockett (1997), adult education is the "activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults" (p. 8), thus further separating primary and secondary education from postsecondary education.

Overview of Adult Learning Theory

Research on adult learning indicates that certain educational practices can enhance adult learners' college experiences (Taylor, 2008). The usefulness of this knowledge is limited if it does not improve the efficacy of education delivery for the

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target population. Identifying relevant theory provides a framework for practice by linking by theory with practice. Minter (2011) reinforces this belief by reminding adult educators that they should be conversant with the plethora of theoretical approaches available to educators when working with adult learners.

The application of theory to practice is particularly important when working with the student/veteran population which brings new challenges to higher education (Cook & Kim, 2009). The student/veteran enters postsecondary education in the midst of life changes and under a variety of circumstances. The change may be the transition from military to civilian life; this change may also encompass other major life changes including psychological or physical changes, requiring new ways of adapting to life. The pursuit of higher education may be a means to a long-established goal or it may be a recent choice based on changing circumstances. The one unifying factor for all student/veterans is that entering higher education involves change in their lives and institutions need to plan how they will maximize this population's opportunity for success. Academic institutions can enhance the transition experience for the student/veteran population by being cognizant of the underlying theory which drives good practice and developing programs and policies which utilize this theory.

This portion of the literature review summarizes some of the significant theoretical foundations which guide adult education. It includes an overview of today's emerging theories about adult education because understanding these theoretical foundations is crucial to this current study on student/veterans and higher education. While all theories have a place in consideration, this section provides an overview of

some popular learning theories associated with a learner-centered environment with the goal of identifying the most appropriate theory or theories to enhance the transition experience for student/veterans.

Aslanian (2007) acknowledges the importance of change as an incentive for adults to pursue education and provides a portrait of the adult learner that indicates key life events occur which stimulate the adult learner's pursuit of education. Certainly this is true of student/veterans who are experiencing a multitude of changes in their lives. These key events are called "trigger" (p. 17) events. Trigger events are not limited to the students' experiences. They also can reflect societal changes. For example, the advances in technology which promote the growth of distance learning are creating new domains in adult education and may serve as a catalyst for the pursuit of postsecondary education. For this study, trigger events focus on the transition experience.

Behaviorism

Adult education formally began as a field of practice in the first half of the 20th century (Merriam, 1993, p. 6) and was focused on behaviorism (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 73). Behaviorism promotes the belief that the learner is conditioned to react in a specific manner. The conditioning is considered successful if the behavior is repeated. Emphasis is placed on control of the learning environment by the teacher or expert. Behaviorism shares three characteristics: learning is observable and results in a change in behavior, environment influences learning, and learned behavior may be repeated (Watson, 1913, p. 251). The well-known behaviorist Skinner is best known for operant

conditioning, which means if an action is positively rewarded, the learner is more likely to repeat the action (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 252; Pavlov, 1927).

Thorndike, Bregman, Tilton, and Woodyard (1928) expanded on behaviorism and identified stimulus response theory, which notes that the time lapse between stimulus and response is relevant to learning. The more quickly a behavior is reinforced, the more likely it is to be retained. This relationship is also described as connectionism, which means the stimulus and resulting behavior are positively or negatively affected by the consequences of the behavior.

Thorndike et al. (1928) are identified with the concept of three "laws of learning": The Law of Effect, which states that learners will acquire and remember responses that lead to satisfying aftereffects; the Law of Exercise, which asserts that repeating a meaningful connection results in substantial learning; and the Law of Readiness, which notes that if the organism is ready for the connection, learning is enhanced; otherwise learning is inhibited. A common criticism of early behaviorist theory was that it relied on observable behavior and did not address higher learning processes (Hull, 1943; Spence, 1942).

Cognitive Learning Theory

In contrast with behaviorists, Gestalt psychologists believed that learning was not limited to a stimulus/response relationship, but rather involved the whole learning organism. This view became very popular in the mid-20th century and gradually evolved into cognitive learning theory (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 253).

Cognitive learning theory focuses on an individual's control over learning. Grounded in Gestalt psychology, Bode (1929) explained learning as a broader process which involves interpreting and processing information by the individual. The outcome is that the learner assigns meaning to the information. Bode's research combined both behaviorist and Gestalt beliefs. Piaget (1966) believed that as individuals learn, the cognitive structure of their brains actually changes. He attributed this change to the increasing maturity of the individual as well as the individual's interaction with ideas, experiences, and the environment. This is relevant for those working with student/veterans because of the increased potential of this population for stress or changes in the brain due to shock or injury.

Humanism

Humanism, as described by Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1983), promoted the idea that an individual's potential for growth is limited only by his or her self-imposed constraints. Maslow explained this in his Hierarchy of Needs which focuses on the individual's desire to become his or her best-self. The epitome of development in the needs hierarchy is called self-actualization.

Rogers (1983) combined his work in therapy with his work in education and identified three characteristics of education: Learning requires personal involvement by the learner, it is self-initiated, and it is pervasive. The learning experience is evaluated by the learner and the essence of the learning becomes its meaning to the learner. The relevance of a humanistic view of learning for the student/veteran is that there is no limit

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to one's ability to learn. Individuals whose psychological or physical situations may be impaired are limited only to the extent that they believe they are.

Social Learning Theory

A combination of behaviorist and cognitive learning theory comprises social learning theory. Bandura states, "Virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people's behavior and its consequences for the observer" (1976, p. 392). Bandura introduced the difference between observation and imitation in learning theory. Those who subscribe to social learning theory believe that it is not necessary for the learner to do something to learn something.

Social learning theory is a three-part process: the learner, the environment, and the interaction of the learner and the environment (Bandura, 1986). The interaction of the learner and the environment results in changes for both the learner and the environment, and learning occurs as a result of these changes. This is similar to what Carl Rogers, a proponent of behaviorism, believed about there being three aspects of learning. However, Bandura's social learning theory differs from behaviorism because it promotes the belief that the learner may vicariously experience learning without actually performing the learning, while Rogers believed that learning occurs by doing.

Hegenhahn (1988), although a social learning theorist by categorization, added a fourth dimension to social learning theory and opened the door to constructivism when he added the practice of a behavior as a necessary component of his learning theory. This distinguishes his social learning theory from that of Bandura. Recall that Bandura

believed (1976) that the learner did not need to experience something to learn it. The desire to learn aspect reflects Bandura's belief that an individual can initiate or instigate his or her learning by creating a mental image of the outcome of the learning (1976).

Constructivism

Constructivism may be simply explained as learners making meaning out of their experiences. The emphasis in learning is focused on each learner's experience. Cognitive theory, as defined by Piaget (1966), is included under the umbrella of constructive learning theory. Another view of constructivism describes it as a type of discovery process in which the learner finds relevance in the learning process (Bruner, 1961). The element of discovery as a central factor in constructivism reappears in the early 1990s when theorists emphasized that in constructivism, the learning should be relatively unstructured so that the learner can create learning out of a body of knowledge, using what is meaningful and significant to the learner (Duffy, 1991; Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). In this theory, the emphasis is on the learner creating meaning based on individual experience and the instructor's role is to model and coach the learner by providing feedback to the learner's perceptions.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning emphasizes what and how people learn. The implication is that learners will selectively identify relevant pieces of learning which will then transform or change the learner forever, creating a new slate on which to build or relate learning. Both the Chain of Response (COR) and the Characteristics of Adult Learner (CAL) models provide a framework for viewing how adults learn (Cross, 1981, p. 248).

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Cross acknowledges that adults experience various stages of transition which affects how they learn (p. 238).

Mezirow expanded on the belief that learning is a causative factor in change and described adult learning as awareness and understanding of changing experiences (1990). Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning described how the perspectives of adults changed as they experienced the learning process. The theory was further developed in 1996 when Mezirow stated, "learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 162). Another way of explaining this is that individuals experience or develop learning through their own cumulative life experiences. Mezirow identified these life experiences as "(a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience" (1996, p. 163). Key events in a person's life can trigger transformative learning (Aslanian, 2007; Mezirow, 1997). To restate, Mezirow is saying that when individuals experience a problem, they perform self-examination to determine what they can do about the problem; they choose a course of action, possibly based on what other individuals have done; after taking the action the learners reflect on the action to determine whether they deem it positive or negative; and finally the learners decide whether or not to incorporate it into their being.

Mezirow's theory is reminiscent of Maslow's Theory of Self-Actualization (1970), in which individuals progress through various stages of life with the ultimate goal of achieving self-actualization. Holzknecht (2007) describes self-actualization as the

ultimate stage of individual awareness and growth while Mezirow emphasizes the transitional aspects of adult learning. Merriam (1993) explains Mezirow's theory as the process through which "consciousness and learning mean becoming aware of and transforming one's perspective, which is composed of meaning structures similar to the structures of consciousness" (p. 65). This process, called critical reflectivity, is a current conversation for postsecondary educators who are urged to utilize critical thinking across all disciplines. "No need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 11). Recent interpretations of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning have expanded the types of life experiences that contribute to adult learning theories.

Andragogy

The term *andragogy* was originally coined by Alexander Kapp in 1833 (Reischman, 2005) and means a philosophical approach to learning; some writings offers a prescriptive approach to using andragogy as a process in adult learning. Andragogy moves adult education away from behaviorism because it proposes that learning is not a conditioned response, but is a function of the characteristics and life experiences the learner brings to the process. Andragogy differs from transformative learning which emphasizes that change occurs in the learner through the learner's experience. Andragogy focuses on the learner selectively deciding when and how learning will occur. Knowles (1989) emphasizes the importance of recognizing that adult learners are mature individuals. He describes six assumptions about adult learners which are the foundation of andragogy: Adult learners (a) need to know why they are learning something, (b) are

capable of self-direction, (c) have greater life experience than children, (d) will be ready to learn when it serves them, (e) are life-centered, and (f) are driven by intrinsic motivators (1989, pp. 82-84).

More recently, Zmeyov (1998) suggested that in andragogic terms, adult learners bring an established life context to the learning environment and that adult learners are more interested in developing a cooperative relationship with the educator than that desired by traditional students. Andragogy is promoted today by Henschke, who has continued Knowles' work with andragogy and has developed assessment instruments for this theory (2011).

Emerging Transformative Learning Theories

The transformative learning theories have particular relevance for student/veterans transition to higher education. Kenner and Weinerman (2011) write about the needs of nontraditional college students—who include student/veterans—and remind postsecondary educators that "college instructors will need to realize that these adult learners differ from the traditional college student" (p. 87). The definition of nontraditional college students includes students who are financially independent, have completed one semester or less of college, have earned a high school diploma or GED, and are between the ages of 25 and 50 (p. 88). They cite reasons for an increase in nontraditional students entering postsecondary education including individuals who have experienced job loss and need to improve their competitive position in the job marketplace, veterans who are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and are transitioning

from the military to the civilian world of work, and adults who have recently completed their general education diploma, known as the GED.

There are many approaches to transformative learning. Most recently, neurobiological and cultural/spiritual have been added as approaches to transformative learning. A brief overview of recent research on biology and the brain is presented here as it has particular relevance for this current study.

Biology and the Brain

Janik (2007) defines the neurobiological approach to transformative learning as "the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, and the hypothalamic-pituitary pitocin-secreting endocrine system to alter learning during period of search and discovery" (p. 12). Taylor (2008) explains this as meaning "brain structure actually changes during the learning process" (p. 8).

Brain studies are of special interest to the National Research Council (NRC). In 2005 the staff of the Research and Advanced Concepts Office of the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) requested assistance from the NRC in identifying opportunities for research in the behavioral and social science fields (Blascovich, 2008). As a result of this request the NRC created the Committee on Opportunities in Basic Research in the Behavioral and Social Sciences for the U.S. Military. To identify these key opportunities for military research, the committee requested research from representatives of academia. The military was interested in identifying key areas to effectively spend their limited research dollars and recognized that, technology notwithstanding, an effective and efficient military relies on people. The

emphasis on personnel has focused the U.S. Army's research dollars on behavioral and social sciences, including personnel, training and learning, leadership, and organization (Blascovich, 2008, p. 1). Because military service can be filled with stress, frequent relocation, continual training requirements, and varied occupational situations, the committee stated, "behavioral and social research, from behavioral neurophysiology to sociology, is critical to understanding these kinds of stresses and developing ways to monitor, reduce, or counteract them" (p. 9).

As learning theory continues to evolve, learning and brain function have been popular topics for adult educators. Taylor and Lamoreaux (2008) identity three parts of brain functioning related to learning: anatomy and memory, complexity of mind, and plasticity—"the brain's capacity to 'rewire' or modify existing neural networks" (p. 52). *Plasticity*, as used by Taylor and Lamoreaux, is compatible with the definition of plasticity described by Lovden, Backman, Lindenberger, Schaefer, and Schmiedek (2010, p. 660) that the evolving knowledge of the brain is helping educators understand the learning process by providing insight into how the brain processes information (Hill, 2001). The relatively recent discoveries related to the brain's ability to compensate for damage have broad implications for the student/veteran who may have experienced brain injury as a result of stress or trauma.

Over 40 sections of functions have been identified within the brain, each section related to a behavior or activity. These functional sections are finished developing about 20 weeks after conception (Kotulak, 1997). The brain is stimulated by the environment and is in a constant state of change. If stimulus for a particular part of the brain is

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blocked, the brain will fail to develop in that area (Kotulak, 1997; Ornstein, 1991). The

brain functions through neurons, which are "specialized nerve cells" (Parnavelas, 1998)

connected to each other by synapses (Hill, 2001). Sensory perceptions serve as stimuli to

trigger activity in the brain. The neurons receive and send both chemical and electrical

signals (Robbins, 1997, p. 53).

The terms plasticity and *neuroflexibility* appear frequently in the literature

referring to the brain's capability. Neuroflexibility is interchangeably used with

neuroplasticity by some researchers (Dowling, 1998; Hill, 2001). Kotulak (1997) also

uses the terms neuroplasticity and neuroflexibility interchangeably. He describes the

brain as the source of intelligence and as a constantly changing organ affected and

changed by experiences. Unlike Kotulak (1997), researchers Schmiedek, Loveden, and

Lindenberger (2010), Backman and Dixon (1992), and Huxhold, Schmiedek, and

Lindenberger (2006) differentiate between the terms neuroflexibilty and neuroplasticity.

Their definition of each of the terms, although beyond the scope of this paper, may be

summarized as follows. Plasticity is a broad, generally inclusive, umbrella term which

refers to the brain's ability to change, while flexibility refers to the brain's ability to

function. Plasticity suggests some type of structural change in the brain, while flexibility

is linked with the brain's ability to produce an action or thought (Lovden et al., 2010, p.

661). This distinction is important to understanding learning theory because it suggests

that learning not only produces a behavior or thought, but actually can improve one's

ability to learn, thereby improving the brain's plasticity (Bavelier, Green, Pouget, &

Schrater, 2012, p. 392).

Stimulating the brain to make more connections between neurons enhances

learning; connections are called *neural branching*. If neural branching is not encouraged

through using the brain's higher functions, the brain will tend to simplify events (Hill,

2001), which is described as *neural pruning* by Cardillichio and Field (1997), who also

address neuroflexibility, learning and memory, emotions and learning, and the aging

brain. Siegel (1999) believes that plasticity is reduced as a function of aging, while Hill

(2001) agrees that some brain processes appear to slow with aging but believes that

increased age also offers more experiences with which to connect new learning. Hill's

work resonates with cognitive learning theory by reinforcing that the brain actually

changes as learning occurs. It also is reflective of Kotulak's work which states that

learners are able to retain information if they have relevant background with which to

associate the new data. According to Kotulak (1997), memory improves when the

individual has a context with which to associate new information. We remember things

that are important to us. The aging brain also can create new pathways, with the passage

of time and with appropriate stimulation, when the existing ones are hampered in some

way. Carper (2000) counters this viewpoint by describing the aging brain as using past

experiences to interpret and react to current experiences.

Another viewpoint of the brain is identified by Damasio (2000) who suggests that

the relationship between learning and emotions is interrelated and cannot be separated.

This belief is supported by Pert who believes that learning and memory result in a

biochemical change in the brain (1997, p. 143). The brain's hippocampus is the center of

long-term memory. Extended stress and severe depression may decrease the

hippocampus's ability to remember because the effects of stress and depression can actually decrease the size of the hippocampus. Conversely, it is also possible that when living under these conditions people fail to develop a new experience which minimizes the opportunities to create new experiences—which can enhance the context-driven retention of information (Jensen, 1995).

Planetary

O'Sullivan (1999) added the planetary viewpoint as a learning theory and expanded the discussion of learning as a multidimensional experience (Merriam, 2008, p. 10). In planetary theory, the environment or context in which learning occurs is considered an important factor of learning process; this is "not only about how we view our human counterparts; it explores how we, as humans, relate with the physical world" (Merriam, 2008, p. 10). Planetary learning theory reflects a more holistic approach with its inclusivity of human interaction with the planets. Learning does not exist in a vacuum, but is a product of that environment and whatever affects that environment; that is, intellectual, physiological, psychological, cultural, experiential, and physical aspects affect learning.

Cultural/Spiritual

Brooks (2000) and Tisdell (2003, 2005) identify understanding the cultural and spiritual experiences of an individual as an important consideration in transformative learning. Cultural/spiritual considerations in transformative learning are those ideas individuals hold about the meaning of life. Tisdell (2003) describes this as how learners construct knowledge (narratives) as part of the transformative learning experience.

Basically this means how the cultural backgrounds and spiritual beliefs which people hold affect their interpretation of the information to which they are being exposed, with the assumption that their experiences are unique to each of them—so everyone's perceptions will be slightly different belief systems.

These additions to the theory of transformative learning have significantly broadened the factors which affect learning, making the theory more complex and yet offering further opportunity to explain and understand the adult learning experiences as they relate to student/veterans.

Summary of Learning Theory

Several themes emerge from this discussion of learning theory. Overall, the discipline is increasingly inclusive, recognizing that multiple factors affect learning. Transformative learning theory's emphasis on what adults learn and how they learn it made it an ideal framework through which to explore the experiences of the student/veteran in this current study. It is compatible with a learner-centered philosophy in that student involvement in the learning process is crucial. This concept begins with Aristotle and segues through the early days of learning theory development. Increased understanding of the physiological and biological changes which occur in the brain as a result of learning create the opportunity to explore different alternatives for addressing impairments to learning. Situational considerations continue to enjoy popularity in learning theory, reinforcing the belief that students must be comfortable in the learning environment (Grippin & Peters, 1984), a common belief shared by those who embrace behaviorism. Although each learning theory has the potential to be relevant to

student/veterans in postsecondary education, the broad umbrella under which transformative learning theory operates makes it ideal for designing programs to help student/veterans transition to higher education. Transformative learning draws on key changes in the learner's life and life experiences, resulting in additional changes in the learner. The focus of this research, then, was on transformative learning and how it may be used to facilitate higher education learning experiences for student/veterans.

History of Educating Student/Veterans in the United States

America's tradition of educating its military veterans began with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, generally referred to as the GI Bill. This legislation facilitated the growth of higher education in the United States by making higher education more accessible to a variety of socioeconomic groups who had not previously had access to higher education. World War II ended on August 14, 1945, and as described by Bennett (1996) "within a month after Truman declared victory, GIs were being mustered out at the rate of one hundred thousand a month" (p. 5). Although this was the end of the war, it was the beginning of a new era for higher education in America. Bennett refers to the period of time between 1945 and 1948 as "a silent revolution that would first transform college campuses and then create a new suburban society. America was about to become a predominantly middle-class nation" (1996, p. 5).

Researchers, historians, and educators agree that college enrollments increased dramatically when service personnel returned to civilian status after their military service. The impact of the GI Bill of 1944 included expanding the availability of higher education to a much broader cross section of society, showing that students who had been prevented

from accessing higher education because of gender, race, or socioeconomic status could be successful.

Van Valey (2001) writes that with the GI Bill, by pushing the veterans into higher education, society avoided the unemployment problem that was sure to develop with so many men and women returning home from war. He identifies this as a threshold event because it changed the purpose of higher education from a right available to society's upper echelons to a right available to people all levels. In short, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 is credited with making education a right, not a privilege. This watershed moment is important to this current research because, according to Field (2008), the new GI Bill—the Post-9/11 GI Bill—was heralded as the bill that "would give veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the same educational opportunities of half a century ago" (p. 1). To recognize the significance of the comparison of today's legislation with the legislation of 1944, it is necessary to understand the impact the 1944 GI Bill had on American society.

The Partnership Between Higher Education and the Military

The partnership between higher education and the military has evolved over the past 64 years, as has the type of military service. The United States has moved from required military service in World War II, to volunteer service, back to a draft in the Vietnam War, and now to an all-volunteer military force. Some think that the newly enacted educational benefits are a marketing tool for the military, while others think they recognize the service members' sacrifices on behalf of their country. I suggest that the

Post-9/11 GI Bill is an opportunity for postsecondary institutions to increase enrollment and expand access to a broader cross section of society.

The US's entrance into World War II in December of 1941 brought an overwhelming and immediate need to train thousands of personnel to support the war effort. A logical place to look for assistance was America's colleges and universities. The American Council on Education (ACE), the organization that has represented higher education since 1918, readily recognized and promoted the role that academic institutions could play in support of the war effort. Fincher (2001) writes:

> Prior to America's entry in to WWII and as early as June 1940, the American Council on Education, under the leadership of George F. Zook, issued a statement on "Education and the National Defense." All "agencies of education" would be needed in the event of war and consideration must be given to the conservation of educational resources and values. Education should remain the responsibility of schools and colleges and thereby ensure a high quality of instruction, research, and administration. (p. 1)

> Initially, the concern was with allowing enrolled students to continue their education. Fincher (2001) continues that, with the declaration of war in 1941, the nation's colleges accelerated the progress of students in college as one way of fulfilling their pledge of cooperation. Faculties, students, and facilities became national resources to be used in the preparation of "broadly educated and highly trained men and women' for national service. (p. 1)

These institutions had the physical plants needed to accommodate personnel during the training period and were well versed in the education process. While modifications were needed to change from academic institutions to training facilities for the military, it was a relatively smooth transition. Using colleges and universities as training sites for military personnel brought colleges and universities to the forefront in the public eye and helped familiarize a broader segment of society with their existence (Fincher, 2001). Fincher describes the transitions that took place when over 300 colleges were used by the military as sites for training programs. These training programs worked so well and colleges and universities so quickly adapted to their new role that it became apparent that a partnership could exist between the military and higher education. "Thus, on-campus training programs became the forerunner of the GI Bill and other post-World War II programs involved cooperation between the military services and institutions of higher education" (2001, p. 1).

One of the results of this partnership between higher education and the military services was the realization that there were mutual benefits for both parties. Colleges learned to revise their programs to include a more pragmatic approach to teaching and the military learned that the colleges could very quickly adapt to provide training for military personnel:

Following enactment of a lower draft age (18 years), the military services established cooperative on-campus programs for the training of officers, pilots, and other specialized personnel. Despite various problems, the mutual benefits to

colleges and the armed services quickly became significant and substantial. (Fincher, 2001, p. 1)

The partnership between colleges and the military had another consequence, which was perhaps, unintended. The GI Bill of 1944 extended equal benefits to all members of the military regardless of race, social class, religion, or gender. This opened higher education to many individuals who previously would not have been able to attend college as access to college education had been heretofore limited to White, upper-middle class males. The legislation established the foundation for the "democratization" of education. Fincher (2001) quotes Malcolm Willey who wrote, "the outcome of such programs was not only 'training for military service,' but 'education for democracy'" (p. 2).

The Evolution of the GI Bill

Legislators began thinking about the impact of returning veterans on American society as early as 1942, the second year of the war. Legislators were concerned about the postwar economic conditions in the United States and wanted to put legislation in place to minimize the possibility of another era of economic depression. As described by Bannier (2006), "Pragmatism, not altruism, was the driving force behind those proposals" (p. 36). White (2004) suggests that memories of the post-World War I economic conditions brought fears that these conditions would be repeated when the World War II veterans returned to civilian society. Bannier (2006) supports that contention: "There was great concern that a sudden return to peacetime government spending levels, coupled with the simultaneous attempts of millions of veterans to reenter the civilian workforce,

might cause the United States' economy to plummet into a new depression" (p. 36). The possibility of so many returning veterans, without assistance, created the very real possibility that they could overwhelm society and that another economic depression could occur.

Historically, President Roosevelt was known for not being supportive of assistance for military personnel. According to Ford and Miller (1995), "Indeed, in 1935 Roosevelt vetoed a bill legislating bonuses for veterans, stating that wearing a uniform did not accord a citizen special treatment" (p. 12). Roosevelt experienced a change of heart about postwar veterans' benefits because he was seeking reelection in 1944 and realized that veterans were a huge voting bloc. President Roosevelt quickly requested that a committee be formed to propose ideas to Congress for postwar planning (Edmondson, 2002). The outcome of the committee's work was the realization that a strategy was needed to assimilate returning veterans into society. The sheer numbers of returning men and women combined with the slowed production as a result of war-related efforts had the potential to push the economy toward another period of declining economic growth. The committee recommended that a formal plan be developed to support veterans during the period that they reentered society.

Roosevelt asked a variety of groups to propose ways in which to handle the returning veterans in postwar America (Edmondson, 2002). Both government and private groups, which had been tasked by Roosevelt to develop some postwar plans, worked diligently and their efforts resulted in numerous bills. According to Buckley (2004), over 640 bills to assist veterans were presented to Congress by early 1942, but none passed.

Many of these bills were endorsed by the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB); Mettler (2005) called them attempts to expand on Roosevelt's New Deal of "social rights for all citizens" (p. 16). Many of these bills were considered too generous and too reminiscent of socialism to receive universal support from the legislature. Efforts to develop a postwar plan to accommodate the returning veterans continued.

One of the ideas that had been suggested for a veterans' assistance package came from Wisconsin, which had developed a program in 1919 that was considered as a possible model for post-World War II veterans' assistance (Ford & Miller, 1995). The Wisconsin Educational Bonus Law of 1919 (TWEBL) and provided educational support for World War II veterans. "Under TWEBL, World War II veterans in the state of Wisconsin were offered a stipend of $30 per month for up to 48 months to attend any nonprofit school, from elementary school through university, in Wisconsin" (Bannier, 2006, p. 37).

The American Legion, which was established in 1919, was a strong proponent of providing veterans' benefits to World War II veterans, and its members were interested in helping veterans reintegrate themselves into society at war's end. Eventually, the American Legion got involved and in 1943 proposed the "core ideas of the GI Bill" (Mettler, 2005, p. 20) which became the foundation for the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. The American Legion took strong exception to Roosevelt's opposition to veterans' benefits and took an active role in representing the interests of post-World War II veterans. According to Kiester, "The proposal that was to become the GI Bill was written in longhand by Legionnaire Harry Colmery in a Washington, DC hotel room in

1943" (1994, p. 128). This bill, originally titled A Bill of Rights for GI Joe and GI Jane

(Edmondson, 2002), was astonishingly comprehensive. In addition to educational

benefits, the GI Bill included unemployment allowances, hospital services, career

counseling, and mortgage loans (2002). Despite bickering among legislators, the

Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, Public Law 346, was signed into law by

President Roosevelt on June 22, 1944 (Pedigo, 1994). "Roosevelt declared that the GI

Bill 'gives emphatic notice to men and women in our armed forces that the American

people do not intend to let them down'" (Bannier, 2006). Other supporters of assistance

for postwar veterans were Congressman Hamilton Fish from New York, Senator Bennett

Clark from Missouri, and Senator John Rankin from Mississippi (Wilson, 1995b). Clark

and Rankin, both Democrats, supported assistance for the veterans, despite their

apparently contradictory views. Clark, as a conservative Democrat, did not support

President Roosevelt's New Deal legislation, yet was an advocate for positive treatment of

veterans through the proposed Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. Likewise,

Rankin, a segregationist Democrat, supported the proposed legislation for the bill which

would allow veterans to choose how they would spend their education benefits and

provided unemployment allowances that were the same for everyone, regardless of race

or gender.

Interestingly, the social climate in which the GI Bill was developed was not

universally supportive of veterans' benefits. Roosevelt was not alone in his opposition

and despite its passage, the GI Bill was not supported by everyone. In fact, it passed the

House of Representatives with a margin of only one vote (Bannier, 2006). Some

legislators were concerned about whether states or the federal government should administer the bill. "Other Congressmen voiced the concerns of the Disabled Veterans of America (DVA), who worried that disabled veterans might lose needed funds if financial assistance was offered to all World War II veterans" (p. 37). The Disabled Veterans of America (DVA) were concerned that the proposed assistance to World War II veterans might diminish the attention and funds available for World War I veterans (Kiester, as cited in Bannier, 2006, p. 37).

The training benefit the bill made available to returning veterans was very generous. It provided "educational opportunities—collegiate, vocational, or on-the-job apprenticeships—with tuition, fees, and books paid for, and supporting stipends for living expenses provided, for up to 48 months depending upon length of service" (Greenberg, 2004). The GI Bill provided much more than education benefits, although this is what is normally thought of as the primary benefit. In addition, the legislation provided

> No means test, no tax credits, and minimal red tape were required to receive an unemployment allowance of $20 per week for up to 52 weeks (the so-called 52-20 Club); [and] loan guarantees for the purchase of a home, a farm, or a business. (Greenberg, 2004, p. 49)

The unemployment benefit was unpopular with some legislators from the Southern region of the United States where many states adhered to the practice of paying Blacks and Whites on the basis of different pay scales. The GI Bill required that everyone, regardless of race, would receive the same amount of unemployment compensation

(Bannier, 2006). In addition to compensation, segregationists did not embrace proposed legislation which would equalize treatment of all veterans.

Many legislators were concerned that the unemployment benefit, particularly, was going to be an extremely costly benefit. In practice, only about 8 million or 50% of the eligible veterans used the unemployment benefit (Humes, 2006, p. 52). Those who did use the benefit generally used it for a short period of time, instead of the year-long period for which they were eligible (p. 52). The reasons for this low level of usage are opportunities for further research.

The Korean War veterans, according to Stanley (2003), were the next group to be covered by educational benefits that "were similar to but somewhat less than that of the WWII GI Bill" (p. 674). Stanley reports that about 40% of eligible Korean War veterans used the education benefits within the first five years of its passage. Of the two million service members who used the educational benefits, more than one million used it for college, with the remaining individuals using it for training and vocational coursework. Like today's GI Bill, the veterans had 36 months of eligibility. Anyone who served at least one day of his or her term of service during the period of June 1950 to January 31, 1955, was eligible for the full term of benefits. In June 1966 a second education benefit was passed which was called the Post-Korean War GI Bill. Stanley (2003) writes, "This bill retroactively made all post-Korean War veterans eligible for new education benefits" (p. 679) which were similar to, but not as generous as, the original Korean War GI Bill. The Vietnam Era GI Bill served veterans who had active duty service between January 31, 1955, and January 1, 1977. It was followed by the Montgomery GI Bill in 1984, but

this one was significantly different than its predecessors. The benefits administration in the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (2004) noted that it required the service member to make an election to participate in the bill, as well as to make a financial contribution. Prior to the Montgomery GI Bill, benefits were given to the eligible veterans without a contributory requirement for the service member.

The New GI Bill

The new GI Bill, which was passed in 2008, provides Post-9/11 Era veterans with updated and improved educational benefits. This legislation, which is officially named The Post-9/11Veterans Educational Assistance Act, was passed on Thursday, June 19, 2008 as part of the FY 2008 Supplemental Appropriations Act. Mitchell (2009) notes that it is also known as the Webb–Mitchell GI Bill and became effective May 1, 2009. Today's GI Bill is being heralded as the most generous veterans' education benefit package since the GI Bill of 1944. The improved payment schedule for tuition, books, and tutoring, plus the transferability features, are reminiscent of, although not equal to, the benefits provided under the original GI Bill. The federal government (through the Veterans' Administration) is making direct tuition and fees payments to colleges and universities for each eligible service member enrolled in an accredited college or university. Prior to this bill, the payments were made directly to the veteran who was then responsible for ensuring that the educational institution received payment. This had added an additional burden of cash flow management to the veteran and the institutions who were thrust into the role of collection agencies.

The new GI Bill serves veterans primarily from the Iraq and Afghanistan era wars. Veterans appear to be very interested in the post-9/11 GI Bill as evidenced by the over 25 thousand applications submitted in the first two weeks of the bill's effective date. According to Dunne (2009), the Veterans' Administration under secretary for benefits, the veterans' intense interest in pursuing postsecondary education at a time when institutions of higher education are experiencing budget cuts and other financial challenges lays the groundwork for an opportunity that is mutually beneficial to the military, higher education, and society.

Higher education faces challenging budget-related problems. Public funding is declining, the economy is in a recession which has left many people unemployed or underemployed, and financial aid is less available (Garza & Fattah, 2005). In the midst of this discouraging scenario, the Post-9/11 Era GI Bill is a new piece of legislation with generous benefits which has the potential to increase enrollment at America's colleges and universities. What makes this bill more generous than the Korean War GI Bill, the Vietnam War GI Bill, the Veterans' Educational Assistance Act of 1973, and the most recent Montgomery GI Bill are the breadth and amount of the benefits provided. Stone (2008) describes the fields of eligibility for the new legislation, noting that the law not only applies to all regular active duty personnel, but also includes Reservists and members of the National Guard. This expanded population increases the potential number of individuals eligible to use the educational benefits.

Veterans' Administration Secretary Eric K. Shinseki, as reported by Miles (2009), believes that the Post-9/11 GI Bill will replicate the effect the original GI Bill had on

society in terms of expanding the middle class and reducing homelessness among veterans. Veterans who reenter the civilian community with education and marketable skills are more likely to find reliable employment, which decreases their chances of becoming victims of homelessness and increases job and economic mobility.

Not everyone agrees that the new legislation is as significant as the 1944 legislation. As noted by Greenberg (2008), Professor Emeritus of Government at American University and author of the book entitled *The GI Bill: The Law That Changed America* (1997), the new GI Bill does not have the same importance for society that the original GI Bill did. However, Greenberg did acknowledge that it is a significant piece of legislation that will positively impact society because more veterans will have the financial assistance necessary to pursue postsecondary education, resulting in more productivity and employability, which minimizes the chance of homelessness in veterans, as well as enhances the reintegration of veterans into society (2008).

Veterans and Higher Education in the 21st Century

Student/veterans represent a different population than previous beneficiaries of military education assistance or previous GI Bill recipients (Morreale, 2011). Today's student/veterans bring many challenges to higher education, such as relocation, academic skills, lack of continuity in education, physical issues, psychological issues, and social isolation (Hopkins, Herrmann, Wilson, Allen, & Malley, 2010). Financial concerns continue to be problematic for student/veterans. The Post-9/11 GI Bill does provide more generous benefits for education than did prior versions of military educational assistance packages. However, it does not eliminate these issues. The cost of supporting a family is

still the veteran's responsibility. The resulting need for employment while enrolled in school provides an additional challenge. Although becoming a college student may represent a positive transition, the fact is that the experience can be difficult, if not overwhelming.

Direct input from student/veterans is the source of findings in the recent report on *Service Members in School* (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). Their study, which had a sample size of 500, reflects that student/veterans identified multiple challenges when transitioning to the role of college student.

Transition

Transition involves reintegration into the civilian community after active duty service (Quillen-Armstrong, 2007; Stiglitz, 2008, p. 51). The changes from life in the military community to life as a civilian may include relocation, loss of social support systems, reintegration into civilian lifestyle, different or nonexistent health care services, and possibly a new job or career path. While adjusting to the civilian community the student/veteran may also be adjusting to life as a college student.

Although returning veterans may bring maturity and a broader understanding of global issues to the learning experience because of their military service (Byman, 2007), it is important for educators to understand the perceptions of the student/veterans as they transition to college students. Early awareness by the institutions of this population's needs provides opportunities for the college community to develop appropriate techniques to minimize attrition and increase the chances of success. This section of the literature review explores some of the transition experiences of student/veterans.

Studies that address the transition from secondary education to college indicate that the transition into higher education can be especially challenging for the adult learner who enters college after having a break in academic studies (Coreyman, 2001; Diyanni, 1997). This applies to student/veterans who frequently experience a significant break in academic attendance as a result of the requirements of military service, which requires the student to readjust to the college environment and develop or recall appropriate study habits. Additionally, curriculum requirements may have changed during the student/veterans' service, requiring updating some academic skills.

Student/veterans experience a major change when they enter postsecondary education. Campus culture is quite different than military culture, so campus life, often referred to as campus culture, is one of the biggest adjustments for the student/veteran (Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011). The college environment is typically designed to encourage creativity and individualism (Rumann et al., 2011); independence and individuality are embraced in academic communities while the military structure requires conformity and adherence to predetermined behavior rules. Transition from a highly structured environment to a less structured environment may be problematic for some student/veterans and institutions need to be prepared to assist student/veterans with this potential difficulty. The relatively unstructured campus atmosphere can be an impediment to student veterans' abilities to work within the system. The military provides a highly structured, regulated, and well-documented environment. There is a schedule for every hour of every day. The steps necessary to accomplish a task or complete an assignment are provided in detail (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Although the

institution may offer a comprehensive orientation program, timing constraints may prevent the student/veteran from attending the orientation so they may begin college without the benefit of an orientation. If the student/veteran does attend the orientation, the event is not typically devoted to specific issues facing student/veterans. The bureaucracy of academic institutions may be puzzling to those individuals who are unfamiliar with it (Rumann, 2010). The unique campus culture of each institution is also a potential stumbling block for some student/veterans (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). According to the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support Agency (2004), some institutions have developed military services offices which are separate from the veterans' benefits processing offices. The offices may focus on the transition experience from an academic and social standpoint.

According to Herrmann (2007, 2009) the student/veteran's success relies not only on the individual, but also on the institution. Selection of an institution by the student/veteran is an important choice, but it is not as easy as it may seem. Murphy (2011) explains that what happens in the higher education process may be described as a "black box" (p. 45). Outward appearances of structure and program descriptions may not represent what is happening at the institution. It is difficult to understand the dynamics of a situation strictly from outside observations. An example of how a student/veteran and an institution might be incompatible are things as elusive as not acknowledging the presence of veterans on campus, a faculty member penalizing a student/veteran for missing class because of an appointment with the Veterans Administration, or an institution which does not recognize Veterans Day. Some institutions provide the

requisite Veterans Services office and define themselves as military friendly

organizations, but there is little to no support behind the self-assigned designation.

Although the Veterans Administration (VA) website refers to and lists colleges which

proclaim to be veteran friendly, what does the term "veteran-friendly school" mean?

According to Harmeyer (2007) this is a general term used to describe those schools which

have an awareness and sensitivity to military culture, which immediately establishes a

common base of knowledge between the student/veteran and the institution. It is a loosely

used term which is self-assigned by the institution. It is not a standardized term and is not

monitored by the Veterans' Administration for its quality, nor is it a reflection of uniform

institutional policies and practices for student/veterans. The VA website does list schools

which have been approved by the VA to certify whether a student is a veteran. This

"approval" does not reflect the treatment which veterans may receive at the institution,

nor the institution's awareness of student/veteran issues (Herrmann et al., 2009).

Student/veterans must assess institutions for indications of a military-friendly

environment. For example, the presence of a Reserve Officer Training Corps, commonly

referred to as ROTC, unit on campus or at a minimum the lack of prohibition against

ROTC creates a more military-friendly environment (Herrmann et al., 2009, p. 45). The

veteran-friendly school is more likely to have administrative and faculty members with

prior military service, which means some of the employees of the institution likely have a

familiarity with various the challenges of military life. The process of selecting an

institution is compounded by the fact that the military person is often faced with the need

to select an institution far in advance of the actual date of matriculation. The geographical

location of the prospective school may be across the world from the service member's current location. Information about the institution may not be readily available or the service member's ability to access such information may be limited as a result of mission requirements. This means that finding an appropriate school may be a difficult task for the student/veteran.

Student/Veterans as Nontraditional Students

Multiple definitions for what constitutes an adult learner exist. As early as 20 years ago, Cross (1981) described nontraditional students as including those who were employed full-time, had dependents, and were financially independent from their parents. Nontraditional college students have been identified as "adults beginning or continuing their enrollment as college students at a later-than-typical age" according to Ross-Gordon (2011, p. 26). Kenner and Weinerman (2011) define adult learners as "entry-level adult learners who are between the ages of 25 and 50, have a high school diploma or a GED, are financially independent and have one semester or less of college-level coursework" (p. 88). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (Choy, 2002) defines nontraditional students as those students who meet one or more of the following criteria: college entry was delayed after high school by one or more years, single parents, do not have a high school diploma, students attending college part time, or 25 years of age or older. These definitions, depending on which one is used, indicate that nontraditional students range from 38% to 73% of the student population. Using the NCES definition of nontraditional students puts the categorization of nontraditional students at 73% of the student population (Choy, 2001).

Despite the relatively high percentage of nontraditional adult students, the field is open to research for programs that address these emerging populations' needs. Three groups that have been under addressed in the growing body of literature on the needs of adult students have been identified as adults with disabilities (Rocco, 2001), students of color (Ross-Gordon, 2003), veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Other research identifies three groups of students who would benefit from supportive attention from faculty and staff: Veterans appear again, identified as veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq who delayed their education to serve in the armed forces; unemployed workers; and post-GED students moving into college coursework (Katopes, 2009; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). In addition to specific support services to address the needs of each of these groups, these students often need developmental education. Student/veterans are generally older than traditional students, they are often transfer students because of prior credits earned, and they are considered nontraditional students (Herrmann et al., 2009; O'Herrin, 2011). Nontraditional students have a high attrition rate according to Kenner and Weinerman (2011). One body of research indicates that a counterpoint to high attrition is successfully integrating the nontraditional students into the college environment (Andres & Carpenter, 1997; Sandler, 1999; Weldman, 1985). An important motivator for adult students according to Clark (1999) is an effective support network.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill brings an increase in older students, an increase in minority students, and students with life experiences which are very different than those of other college students (Lum, 2009). It is interesting to note that Sander minimizes the age

difference between student/veterans and traditional students, stating some student/veterans are "only a few years older than the traditional freshmen they sit next to in class" (2012c, p. 2). The difference, according to Sander, is not the age of the students, but rather the maturity level of student/veterans who have had more life experiences than traditional aged students (O'Herrin, 2011).

Student/veterans are adult learners and they are a campus minority (about 3% of a higher education institution's population (Herrmann et al., 2009), although O'Herrin (2011) states that the student/veteran population has increased to about 4% of the postsecondary education population.

Although the student/veteran has participated in numerous training programs in the military, the difference between skills training and academic success is marked by an increased emphasis on cognitive ability in the latter. The skills and competencies through which accomplishment is earned on college campuses may not readily transfer from military life. Lack of preparation or review of study skills for college as well as forced absences as a result of military duty requirements can be additional impediments for student/veteran success. Institutions need to be prepared to assist students in understanding how they can develop and adapt the necessary skills to perform competently in higher education.

Problems Faced by Today's Student/Veterans

Even though the recently passed Post-9/11 GI Bill provides the most generous education benefits for military veterans since the first GI Bill was implemented in 1944 (Mitchell, 2009), benefits alone are not enough to help student veterans succeed in higher

education. A question arises: Why does it matter if the student/veterans succeed in higher education? During times of high unemployment, and a less-than-robust economy, education plays a major part in and helping veterans assimilate into society. Is it the role of the Veterans' Administration or the educational institution to help student/veterans transition to the academic environment? Both: The VA is responsible for providing military-related services and benefits, and the institution is responsible for helping the student/veteran acclimate to the academic environment. These groups must work together to maximize benefits to the student/veterans.

Veterans and Developmental Education

Student/veterans may bring a need for remedial education and colleges should be prepared to accommodate this need. A historic basis for a strong relationship between developmental education and veterans was established in the post-World War II era (Bannier, 2006), and "Developmental education must remain prepared to assist these new veterans with the same vigor that our own predecessors used 60 years ago" (p. 41). Today's college students bring challenges with them, whether or not they are transitioning from the military. Many students from various backgrounds have difficulty with basic math and writing skills which puts them at a disadvantage as they begin their college studies. Levine (1997) says today's postsecondary students, "are not as well-prepared to enter college as their predecessors" (p. 9). Levine's comments are echoed by Van Valey (2001), who notes that modern students do not write well.

Another form of student diversity is the lack of strong backgrounds in math and writing skills. This presents special challenges to institutions of higher education. Some

institutions are more interested than others in providing such remediation. The Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (SUNY) decided to offer noncredit developmental courses soon after they adopted an open admissions policy (SUNY Office of Finance and Management, 1996). However, a report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy on the decision of Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (1999) voted to eliminate remediation on its campuses and shifted the development work to junior colleges. The Board chair explained that they were not eliminating remediation, but rather shifting it to a different location.

Student/Veterans' Support Groups and Services

Student/veterans will also need on-campus support groups to improve their chances of success in the academic environment. Doc Foglesong, president of Mississippi State and a retired Air Force general, refers to his campus serving as a "halfway house for veterans coming back from the war and getting re-acclimated to civilian and academic life" (as cited in Kingsbury, 2007, p. 71). Mississippi State has about 400 veterans on campus and is one of the country's largest programs providing education benefits to veterans. The returning veterans bring needs not found in the typical student population, including readjustment to civilian life.

Litz (2007), Associate Director of the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, suggests that the veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are at risk for "life course disturbances" and that these disturbances can continue throughout their lifetimes. This presents an additional challenge to those institutions which want to prepare to assist veterans returning to the academic community.

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Student Veterans and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), not to be confused with traumatic brain injury (TBI), is another challenge facing many of the post-9/11 student veterans. This condition is often not readily apparent to those interacting with the student/veteran and yet affects a person's interaction with others and outlook on life as reported in a 2008 monograph entitled *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery* (Tanelian & Jaycox, 2008). Westgard (2009), a nursing instructor at Temple University, cites PTSD as being a challenge to diagnose. Sometimes the symptoms do not immediately appear, but may be delayed by "months or years" (p. 11). This complicates the student/veterans' access to treatment because of the delay between the appearance of symptoms and military service. It can also affect student/veterans' academic performance.

Many student/veterans come back with PTSD (Lafferty et al., 2008) and the institutions to which they return need to be prepared to help them with the reintegration process:

> Since the earliest record of warfare, the returning warrior has struggled to rejoin the society left behind. It has never been an easy transition, but the war on terror brings new and unanticipated complications for the combat veteran. New technology means survival for those who would have died in prior wars, yet that very survival is fraught with challenges we are only now learning to address. (p. 1)

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A study of 2,530 soldiers indicates that "more than 40% of soldiers with injuries associated with loss of consciousness met the criteria for PTSD" (Hoge et al., 2004). Greenwald's (2006) findings report that about 30% of the returning veterans will experience PTSD symptoms or diagnosis, with that percentage rising to 70% for those returning from a second deployment. The Millennium Cohort Study, started in 2000, studied 77,047 military members for concerns related to health surrounding deployments and other service connected experiences. The preliminary results indicate that 40% of the participants who reported combat exposure and were on active duty between 2001 and 2006 had three times the likelihood to experience PTSD symptoms or diagnosis (Smith, 2007).

This information indicates that the Post-9/11 Era veterans who return to campus are likely to need on-campus support beyond that of merely readjusting to the academic world. The implications of PTSD on psychological and sociological adjustments are still not fully understood by mental health experts (Hoge et al., 2004), but are an evolving discipline.

Veterans and Traumatic Brain Injury

Another consideration institutions must address is the way in which student/veterans' injuries will impact their studies. Institutions of higher education must be prepared to identify, recognize, and accommodate the unique needs of injured student/veterans. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) has been identified by the Veterans' Affairs as one of the "signature injuries" of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (2007). TBI causes problems with thinking, memory, focus, and various other functions. Individuals

who experience TBI often suffer with pain and mood disorders. The student/veteran who enters college with the burden of TBI requires special support such as knowledge and training to manage symptoms and to "live, work, learn and socialize" in different conditions (MacDonald-Wilson, McReynolds, & Accordino, 2009, p. 4). Institutions that put support in place make themselves more attractive to the potential student/veteran.

Institutional Responses to the Post-9/11 GI Bill

Student/veterans are not a new presence on campus, but this population has the potential to increase as a result of the Post-9/11 GI Bill which will enable more veterans to participate in postsecondary education (O'Herrin, 2011). The anticipated increase in the student/veteran population (O'Herrin, 2011) suggests that postsecondary institutions prepare to serve this group by identifying their needs and characteristics. This section discusses what institutions are doing to prepare for student/veterans.

To help student/veterans sort out the multiple options available to them in higher education, The American Council of Education in conjunction with the Lumina Foundation for Education (2009) created a website called TodaysGIBill.org. This site provides information to help veterans who are interested in pursuing their education by providing details about specific colleges and their programs for student/veterans. One veteran who took advantage the website TodaysGIBill.org applied and was accepted to Dartmouth College in 2007 and relates that he has had a very positive educational experience on campus. Kingsbury (2007) reports that President James Wright of Dartmouth College, who previously served as a Marine, is highly supportive of having

veterans on campus: "A student who has a gunshot wound from a battle in Fallujah is going to bring something intangible to any classroom discussion" (p. 71).

Despite the abundance of literature about the transition experiences of the student/veterans covered under the original GI Bill in 1944, relatively little is known about today's student/veteran population. Two seminal studies provide information for institutions about the anticipated student/veteran population and some of the issues the student/veterans face. The studies, *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus* (Cook & Kim, 2009) and *Issue Tables: A Profile of Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education* (Radford & Wun, 2009) describe a basis of information from which to begin planning programs, practices, and policies to serve today's student/veterans.

From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus (Cook & Kim, 2009) presents the results of a survey of 723 institutions which asked colleges and universities what they plan to do in preparation for an increased student/veteran population as a result of the new GI Bill. The survey presented the data in three categories of institutions: 2-year public, 4-year public, and 4-year private. The three categories were shown individually and as a total. The results, in decreasing order of popularity were:

- Provide professional development and training for faculty and staff in how to work with veterans.

- Pursue federal and state funding sources and search for grants to assist with the cost of offering programs for veterans.

- Increase the number of programs and train counseling staff to accommodate veterans' health issues including post-traumatic brain injury, were tied for third place.

- Establish a center and increase staff.

- Increase budget. (p. 22)

The surveyed institutions plan to implement their plans within five years from the date the data was collected in 2008.

Another report, by the American Council on Education (2009), surveyed academic institutions, asking them to identify their most urgent student problems; 75% listed financial aid and retention. It is interesting to note that although retention is rated at 75%, less than a quarter of the institutions who serve veterans have a streamlined reenrollment process to help students who are deployed mid-semester and must therefore leave mid-semester. The majority of institutions require the students to reenroll through the traditional avenue when they return from deployment: "Only 22 percent of institutions with program and services for military personnel have developed an expedited re-enrollment process to help them restart their academic efforts" (ACE, 2009, p. 3). Of the 22% of institutions that reported an expedited reenrollment process for veterans, 16% of the institutions actually require students to begin the application process again, with no acknowledgement of their previous enrollment and interrupted status. Sixty-two percent of the institutions allow students returning from deployment to utilize the standard reenrollment process. The message given by the institutions is a confusing one. The majority of institutions identify retention as one of their primary concerns, but

the processes to accommodate students who must interrupt their studies due to military

service do not facilitate reentry and eventual completion of an academic program.

According to *Issue Tables: A Profile of Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education* (Radford & Wun, 2009), student/veterans enrolled in undergraduate education in public, postsecondary institutions in 2007 to 2008 represented 64.7% of the total student body. Of the 64.7% attending public postsecondary institutions, 43.3% chose public, 2-year institutions (ACE, 2009). The American Council on Education report entitled *Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education: What the New GI Bill May Mean for Postsecondary Institutions* include the following information. The gender distribution of the student/veteran population is 73.1% male and 26.9% female, which is the opposite of the nonmilitary independent undergraduate population which is 35.2% male and 64.8% female. The ethnicity of the student/veteran undergraduates is 60.1% White, 18.3% Black, 12.8% Hispanic, 3.2% Asian, and 5.7% other. The age ranges of student/veterans are similar to those of the nonmilitary independent undergraduate population, with the largest percentage of student veteran attendees in the 24 to 29 age range, followed by the 30 to 39 age range at 28.2%. The over-40 age group represents 24.9% of the student/veteran population and the students under 23 represent 15.5% of the student/veteran population. Regarding marital status, 35.3% of the student/veteran population is unmarried with no dependents and 32.5% of the independent student/veteran population is married with children. Those married with no dependents and single parents comprise about 29.3% of the independent

undergraduate student/veteran population with 14.8% and 14.5% respectively (ACE, 2009).

In 2007 to 2008 (ACE, 2009), military undergraduate students made up 4% of all postsecondary undergraduates. Within this group, 43% chose to attend public, 2-year community colleges. There are two schools of thought about whether this trend will continue. The authors of the American Council on Education report recently hypothesized that because the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are more financially generous than previous veterans educational assistance programs, the new student/veteran population may choose 4-year institutions (generally more expensive) because the benefits will make it possible for them to attend (2009). However, statistics indicate that the student/veteran population has historically chosen public, 2-year community colleges (Rumann et al., 2011).

A third study, although smaller in scale than those of Cook and Kim (2009) and Radford (2009), was presented by Adelman, Senior Associate at Institute for Higher Education Policy Veterans Summit, in 2008. "What Do We Know and Not Know about Service Members as College Students?" described a major problem in understanding and obtaining information about the student/veteran population. As recipients of the Veterans Education Project there are two services, The Sailor/Marine American Council on Education Registry Transcripts (SMARTS) and the Army/America Council on Education Registry Transcript Service, which are not integrated with the American Institute for Higher Education. This is in direct contrast to the Community College of the Air Force, which is integrated. The number of students in Veterans Affairs studies is based on

students new to postsecondary education, which eliminates those students who entered

postsecondary education and left it to join the military and then reentered postsecondary

education (Adelman, 2008).

What is apparent is that U.S. colleges and universities have seen an increase in

student/veterans' enrollment as a result of the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits (Adelman,

2008).This is confirmed by O'Herrin (2011) who describes troops increasingly taking

advantage of the Post- 9/11 GI Bill as the drawdown of military troops in Iraq and

Afghanistan continues. According to Carr (2009), Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for

Military Personnel, 97% of service members plan to use the new GI Bill for education

benefits based on a survey conducted by the Department of Defense in August 2009.

In terms of the number of students applying for or using the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the

numbers range from over half a million applications for certification (p. 1) with more

than 300,000 individuals using the benefits (Carter, 2009) increasing the workload of

administrators in postsecondary institutions. Reasons for this increased workload include

increased enrollment, the need to understand/learn the ramifications of the new

legislation and track its effects, and the need to provide student assistance in

understanding their new benefits (Steele et al., 2010, p. vii).

O'Herrin expanded on this topic in 2011:

One of the most important steps that campus leadership can take is to gauge the

specific needs of veterans at their institution before devoting resources to new

initiatives…. Both student veterans and campus administrators have spoken to the

success of efforts that have been created with direct input from the enrolled

> student veteran population and have emphasized this is the best approach to
> designing supportive programs. (p. 3)

O'Herrin identifies six practices implemented by institutions attempting to proactively meet the needs of this population: (a) identify specific points of contact on campus for student/veterans; (b) create a multidiscipline campus working group; (c) collaborate with community organizations to provide services; (d) establish a student veterans campus group, educate faculty and staff about student/veteran issues, and establish a space designated for veterans use only; (e) veteran-specific campus learning communities; and (f) streamline veteran and disability services.

The services that colleges and universities are most likely to offer to veterans are financial aid counseling, employment assistance, and academic advising (ACE, 2009), services offered by 57%, 49%, and 48% of the institutions, respectively. Another finding is that schools with a small percentage of student/veterans are less likely to have special programs or offices devoted to assisting this population (Schuster, 2009). However, this is understandable considering institutions' emphasis on cost control and cost benefit relationships.

Services to student/veterans which were offered in fewer than 25% of the institutions included transition assistance to college, a veteran student lounge, and an orientation tailored to veterans (ACE, 2009). However, student/veterans, when asked, have reported the need to connect with other veterans on campus as being very important to them. A veteran student lounge and veteran orientation would be beneficial in providing opportunities for veterans on campus to get acquainted with each and establish

some type of informal support system. Clubs or other veteran support organizations exist on only 32% of the campuses. At community colleges, only 7% of the campuses have veterans clubs or organizations (ACE, 2009).

Examples of Institutional Programs

Current literature contains numerous articles about developing issues related to the Post-9/11 GI Bill. On November 9, 2009, the *Staten Island Real-Time News* reported on the efforts being made by the College of Staten Island to welcome and support the recipients of the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Slepian, 2009). The staff and faculty had worked with the already existing on-campus Veterans Centers to facilitate veterans' registration process. The college had tailored an existing general education class to meet the needs of the veteran/students. A student, Adam Gramegna, was quoted as saying, "They really take care of us here" (Slepian, 2009, p. 1). His sentiments are echoed by student/veterans Lee Siegfried and Maria Durham who note that the veteran-specific general education course at College of Staten Island has created a niche in the college in which they feel very comfortable (Slepian, 2009).

Michael Johnson, Director of Military and Veterans Office at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, was at the helm of a one-stop resource center for veterans, active duty personnel, and dependents (Lum, 2009). He planned to hire a part-time counselor to help with the Veterans' Administration's delay in providing these services (p. 2). This program continued under the direction of Jennifer Connors, Director of Military Services, and the site is now an established college unit. It provides a dedicated lounge area for student/veterans and is outfitted in a manner conducive to studying and

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well as providing a quiet place for reflection and decompression in a supportive environment.

Montgomery Community College in Rockville, MD, has instituted a program called Combat to College: Facilitating College Success for Combat Veterans (Sander, 2012d). The program, often referred to as C2C which stands for Combat to College, was developed in conjunction with the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Washington, DC, the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Palo Alto, CA (currently housed at UCLA/National Center for Child Traumatic Stress), the VA Medical center in DC, and the U.S. Navy. The purpose of the program is to help student/veterans find a campus community and use the skills and characteristics developed as a result of military service to create a successful academic experience. Included in this program is recognition that some of the veterans have conditions beyond the "normal" adjustment from military to civilian to college student. Another consideration is that it can be implemented by maximizing existing college programs of student support and with minimal cost to adapting these programs to serve/apply to the student/veteran population.

A partnership between San Diego Community College and Balboa Naval Hospital provides continuity between recovery and life as a student/veteran. Carroll, chancellor of the San Diego Community College District, wrote about the American Council on Education's initiative Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dreams project which began in April 2007 and has assisted more than two hundred service members. This initiative, according to Carroll (2008), "aims to help these veterans by ensuring they receive the full support of the higher education community" (p. 17). The assistance

program begins as veterans are still recovering in the hospital. They meet with academic advisors who help them identify career and/or academic goals and then determine a path of action to achieve those goals. Carroll (2008) continues to describe how the initiative supports veterans: They receive therapy and curriculum to help them understand the nature of their injury; "They are learning to develop new life skills, memory enhancement techniques, and other strategies" (p. 17) for coping with traumatic brain injury.

The needs of student/veterans on campus go beyond academic challenges. Describing aspects of the adjustment for student/veterans, Schwartz and Kay state "Academic difficulties are often the least of their issues" (2010, p. 2). Campus mental health services need to be proactive in serving student/veterans. Ideally, these programs would be offered cooperatively with the Veterans' Administration (Chang, 2010). Community college counselors confirm that student/veterans seek help for PTSD and other problems and report that they are often overwhelmed with students needing assistance with personal and/or mental health problems (Sewell, 2010, p. 1). Michael Dakduk, the former Deputy Executive Director of Student Veterans of America, stated, "one in five combat veterans reported having a disability, compared with one in 10 nonveterans. Veterans also spend more time working or caring for a family than do traditional college students" (as cited in Johnson, 2010, p. A6). This parallels the four categories of Thomas' (1991) classifications of challenges facing adults in postsecondary education: entry challenges, individual life cycles, societal changes, and the unique circumstances accompanying individuals as they enter the academic community (p. 81). These statements are further reinforced by Tanielian and Jaycox (2008), who report that

approximately one-third of the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have one or more of these after effects of the war.

Querry of Columbus State Community College in Columbus, OH, is the campus' Mental Health Coordinator and he echoes the needs for campus mental health services (2010). He identifies the population as having unique sets of needs as a result of their military experiences. He is also a consultant for U.S. military and works extensively with the veteran/student population both on campus and in his consulting work. Querry (2010) advocates strong faculty involvement in identifying and treating student/veteran issues.

Student/Veterans and Learning

Educators recognize that the student's frame of mind impacts his or her ability to learn (Palethorpe & Wilson, 2011). College performance is affected by physiological, psychological, and social functioning (Schwartz & Kay, 2010). Describing aspects of the adjustment for student/veterans, Schwartz and Kay state "Academic difficulties are often the least of their issues" (2010, p. 2). Campus mental health services need to be proactive in serving student/veterans. Ideally, these programs would be offered cooperatively with the VA (Chang, 2010). Palethorpe and Wilson (2011) discuss the impact of stress on a student's ability to learn, explaining that high levels of stress can hinder the ability to learn, while moderate levels of stress can enhance the ability to learn. Some individuals experience such high levels of stress that they are debilitated and therefore unable to learn, which can lead to high dropout rates and poor academic performance. For student/veterans the risk of high stress levels is probable, especially for those returning from combat zones. These individuals may need assistance in identifying academic

situations that could become stressful before they become problematic. Another study of stress on nontraditional students (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011) explored the possible results in terms of lifestyle adjustments. Excessive stress on nontraditional students could result in various stress coping behaviors, negative attitudes about the institution and the college experience, and lower grade point averages.

Faculty members, who are often the first line contact with the student/veterans, need to be aware of the types of problems student/veterans may bring to the campus. The American Council on Education (Cook & Kim, 2009) identified faculty training related to needs of the student/veteran population was the primary activity institutions planned to initiate in response to the new GI Bill. This need is reflected in the works of Herrmann (2007) and Herrmann, Raybeck, and Wilson (2008). Faculty members are often not familiar with the challenges facing the student veteran. Statements made unwittingly by faculty members in the classroom can distress the student/veteran (Persky & Oliver, 2010). Unintentional statements made may cause sensitivity and may be perceived as negative to the student/veteran. This problem may not be limited to faculty. Students may be insensitive in their interactions with student/veterans. Finally, the student/veteran may become impatient with the students who have not had military service, further complicating the transition process (Sander, 2012c).

A large percentage of students, 83%, report that while transitioning to college they were also dealing with "career, family, health, religious, or citizen changes" (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, p. 65). The career, family, and health categories have a strong probability of being present in the student/veteran population. Many

student/veterans are transitioning from fulltime employment in the military to the role of full or part time college student. While making this transition they may also be reuniting with family members after long periods of absence. In some cases they will be adjusting to children born during their time of service while they were deployed. The health issues student/veterans may experience range from severe, in the form or some physical challenges due to loss of limb or other catastrophic injuries they may be in less visible forms such as post traumatic stress syndrome. Regardless of the level of severity and visibility of the impairment, this has relevance for the study of student/veterans because not only are they are transitioning from the military (career) which is a significant lifestyle change, but they also may be adjusting to physical or emotional challenges.

Reuniting veterans with their families post deployment requires careful attention and integration with the other aspects of their lives. An example of this is Lum's (2009) interview with Tess Banjko, a former Marine, who stated that she felt "more scared when she began college in 2004 than in her three years as a Marine" (p. 9). Banjko attributes this fear to the difference between the highly structured military life, to which she quickly became accustomed, and the relatively unstructured aspects of college life. She was also dealing with the loss of a spouse and injuries sustained in the Marine Corps which ended her career.

The Veterans Administration website, as well as sources on military bases, provide information about the transition to civilian life. However, the information offers limited discussion of the details of becoming a college student. This is a role for the academic institution. Many colleges and universities have offices to assist students who

receive GI Bill assistance, but the primary activity of these offices is as certifying authorities for veterans' benefits. They also may do some academic advising and may assist veterans in registration for classes. The identification of student/veterans as an under addressed group reinforces the importance of research for this population (Katopes, 2009; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

Postsecondary Institutions and the New GI Bill

What do institutions have to do to attract federally funded veterans? One suggestion is to revive the partnership between the military and higher education with the goal of boosting enrollment, which would improve revenue flow for the institutions. Institutions must develop programs designed to attract and support veterans as they pursue their academic training. Jon Henry, Dean of Enrollment Services at University of Maine at Augusta, began gearing up to attract veterans as soon as he became aware of the legislation (Stone, 2008). The institution has a veterans' support team of more than 12 people whose goal is to provide support services to veterans including academic guidance, personal counseling and a student/veteran campus group. Roughly 5% of the University of Maine at Augusta's student population consists of veterans. The college hopes to attract more veterans, and their federally paid tuition, to strengthen their budget position in the coming years.

Research suggests that the student/veteran population pursuing postsecondary education faces unique circumstances (Lum, 2009; Rey, 2009) and reports that student/veterans may face unique problems as they transition from active duty military service to college student. The American Council on Education reports that one of the

top two changes all institutions are considering are providing professional

development for faculty and staff on dealing with the issues facing many service

members and veterans, and exploring state or federal funding sources or private

grant proposal to fund campus programs. A third change for many public

institutions involves plans to increase the number of veteran services and

programs on campus. (as cited in Cook & Kim, 2009, p. 5)

Summary

Because the student/veteran population brings unique experiences to the learning

stage it is important to develop programs which accommodate these experiences. Both

Merriam and Brockett (1997) and Malley (2010) of the Creative Conflict Engagement

Service identify colleges and universities as being in good position to assist

student/veterans with their education and their reintegration into civilian society. At the

2009 Conference on Improving College Education for Veterans, Malley (2010) stated,

"Effective re-integration into civilian society requires flexibility and adaptation, not only

from the service member, but from those in the community" (p. 239). At the same

conference Gomez (2010), Strategic Alliances Executive at Educational Testing Service,

emphasized the need for institutions of higher education to recognize and utilize the

human resources student/veterans bring. Gomez contended that emphasis is placed on K-

12 education and that adult learning is often overlooked not only for veterans, but also

other populations. He noted that veterans can be instrumental in improving our global

competitiveness and productivity by improving educational attainment (pp. 94-96). This

was also mentioned by Merriam (1993), who describes the learning process as being

capable of being viewed from the perspective of "learner, process or context: considered together, we have a broadened understanding of the complex nature of learning in adulthood" (p. 105). Merriam and Caffarella (1991) first introduced this model of adult learning.

Student/veterans' success relies not only on the individual student, but also on the institution (Herrmann, 2007, 2008). The unique campus culture of each institution is a potential stumbling block for some student/veterans (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). A holistic approach by the institution is needed to address the needs of the student/veterans. Meeting these needs is not limited to one department but is a college-wide challenge and requires the coordinated efforts of all campus departments to support and serve this population. The need to develop interdepartmental programs requires coordinated effort, knowledge, and ability to support and serve this population.

Institutions of higher education have the potential to increase enrollment by attracting eligible veterans who will receive generous educational benefits under the new G I Bill. However, in return for the possibility of increased tuition dollars, the institutions must be prepared to create a campus environment which will enhance the chances of the veterans' academic and social success. Institutions will be well served by developing a campus environment that supports veterans. This study, therefore, provides information about today's student/veteran population and their perceptions of their experiences as they transition from active duty military personnel to college students from a transformative learning perspective.

III. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The purpose of this exploratory study was to help identify information that would be helpful for institution as they develop programs to better serve the student/veteran population as they transition from military service to college student. To ensure focus on the purpose of the study, a protocol was developed and followed which specified procedures to be followed in recruiting study participants, interview format and questions, transcription of interviews, study participants' review of transcribed interviews, and chain of evidence. The protocol also stated that a database would be developed for each set of information. A set of information was the information collected from study participants at each college. Although the interviews focused on a series of predetermined and standard interview questions, the exploratory case studies had an iterative nature to them. The interviewer used open-ended question which often elicited new information, providing more information about the case and offering new topics for exploration for both this study and future studies.

Why student/veterans succeed or fail in their adjustment and academic performance as they transition from military service member to college student is a topic of increasing interest to institutions of higher education. The higher numbers of student/veterans (ACE, 2009) attending school under the Post-9/11 GI Bill which became effective August 1, 2009, has resulted in a greater awareness by institutions of higher

education of the needs of campus the student/veteran population. The recent conflicts in

Iraq and Afghanistan have produced veterans who return to civilian society with varied

needs. The most visible needs are for those who return with some type of physical

challenge. However, the veterans who return with the unseen needs also require attention.

These unseen needs can include traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress

disorder (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). The student/veterans may also be experiencing

psychological and sociological adjustments that do not fit the parameters of a disorder,

but still have an impact on the student's academic and social performance (Tanielian &

Jaycox, 2008).

The Method

This exploratory study used individual interviews as the primary method of

inquiry to study the perceptions of Post-9/11 Era veterans about their transition

experiences to postsecondary education. This method was chosen because it was

conducive to in-depth exploration of the topic with selected individuals. The intent of the

study was not to survey in quantity, but rather to attempt to identify key issues for this

population (Yin, 2009, p. 79). The qualitative method of research provides information

from the subjects about their perceptions of their college experiences. Aspects of the case

study method of inquiry (Yin, 2009, p. 18) were incorporated in the study. Gay (1992)

defines the case study method as a means to gather in-depth information about the subject

population (p. 207). The U.S. General Accounting Office (1990) defines the case study

method as, "a method for learning about a complex instance, based on a comprehensive

understanding of that instance taken as a whole and in its context" (p. 14). Within the

constraint of the sample size, effort was made to collect in-depth information about the subject population.

The Plan of Inquiry

Three research questions were the core of this study. The intent of the research questions was to discover information about the student/veterans' experiences as they transitioned from military service to higher education. The goal was to find out what institutional policies and/or practices hindered or enhanced their transition and matriculation experiences. The research questions were:

1. How do Post-9/11 Era student/veterans perceive their college experiences at one 2-year institution in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

2. How do Post-9/11 Era student/veterans perceive their college experiences at one 4-year institution in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

3. What campus programs, practices, or policies affect the transition from military student to college student of the Post-9/11 Era student/veterans?

Ten interview questions were developed to elicit information from the student/veterans to answer the research questions. The following questions were used in the individual interviews with each study participant:

1. With reference to college employees, with whom do you have the most frequent contact?

2. Why did you choose to attend your institution?

3. What could the institution provide that would facilitate the administrative processes for you?

4. What could the institution provide that would facilitate the learning   process for you?

5. What specific institutional practices or policies helped you in transition to the role of college student?

6. What characteristics do you attribute to faculty members who have positively or negatively affected your college experience?

7. How do you perceive the role of the academic advisor in your transition experiences?

8. Does a support group for veterans exist on your campus?

9. Do you participate in a veterans' support group on campus?

10. What would you do differently if you could redo your transition experience?

Focus Groups

A pilot study, consisting of two small focus groups of three student/veterans from each of the institutions, selected through purposeful sampling (Schram, 2006, p. 37), was conducted to develop the interview questions to ensure the wording of the questions elicited the desired information for the informational interviews. This was the first activity conducted after receiving approval to proceed with the study. One focus group was held at the 2-year institution (January 23, 2012). The second focus group was held at the 4-year institution (February 22, 2012). The procedure followed in each of the focus groups was an informal discussion between the researcher and the three participants to identify areas issues of interest to student/veterans as they transitioned from military

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service to college life. The focus groups were held in a quiet room on each respective campus. The time dedicated to the focus group was 2 hours per group.

As the researcher, I opened the discussion by explaining that I was trying to understand the experience student/veterans encounter as they transition from military service to college student. I emphasized that my interest was to understand their perceptions of the process and that would include their feelings about the experiences they encountered. Further, the information would not be categorized as negative or positive, but rather as informative and illuminating.

I began by asking each individual to briefly summarize his or her transition experience for the group. As each individual spoke, I made notes on topics to revisit later in the session. The perceptions of each individual's experiences were varied; however, a few themes began to emerge from the groups. These themes led to the development of interview questions 1, 3, 4, and 5, which grew out of the discussion of what was helpful and what was frustrating during the transition experience. Question 2 grew out of the discussion of the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits, if and how these benefits affected their choice of institution. Questions 6 and 7 evolved from the groups' frequent mentions of their experiences with faculty members and academic advisors. Questions 8 and 9 arose as a result of each group member's frequent mention of missing the peer support, camaraderie, and structure of the military. Finally, question 10 was added in response to the reaction at the end of each focus group when I asked if anyone would like to add anything about their transition experiences. The focus group participants willingly and thoughtfully added information about their experiences, most of which was unrelated to

prior parts of the discussion. However, in a few instances, the group participants restated something that had emerged during the focus group, noting its significance and importance to them.

The Interviews

The sources of evidence in this exploratory study were 26 interviews with student/veterans. The interviews were conducted on the campuses of a 2-year community college and a 4-year university, both in the Mid-Atlantic region, between March 26, 2012 and May 15, 2012. The proposal had designed the study around 8 interviews from each institution. However, I expanded this to 15 interviews from the 2-year institution and 11 interviews from the 4-year institution to ensure that I had confirmatory evidence for the main topics in the study (the 3 research questions) and the 10 interview questions. This interview method of data collection was selected because it provided an opportunity to elicit information from volunteer participants and to explore information with the interviewees beyond the answers to the questions. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed into documents by the researcher. Interviews varied in length of time spent, with the average time being 1.5 hours per interview.

The subjects included 15 veterans who were attending a public, 2-year institution and 11 veterans who were attending a public, 4-year institution. All subjects were undergraduate, full-time students. The definition of full-time students for this study was students who were enrolled in 12 or more credits per semesters. They were selected using purposeful sampling (Schram, 2006, p. 37) of information provided from volunteer responses to a general call for student/veteran study participants. Purposeful sampling

was selected because it provided subjects who met certain conditions. Another reason that purposeful sampling using a volunteer group was selected was because of the lack of standardization in the way colleges identify student/veterans. At the time this study was conducted, student/veterans were asked to self-identify to the college enrollment offices. College applications did not include identification of student/veteran status as a required item. By using purposeful sampling I was able to ensure diversity in age, gender, combat experience, and noncombat experience. Specifically, this sample population was limited to student/veterans attending under the Post-9/11 GI Bill program. The study included male and female students under age 46. Both combat veterans and noncombat veterans were included in the study. Combat veterans were defined as those individuals who had deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan for a minimum of 90 consecutive days. The interviews were conducted face to face, individually with each subject. The face-to-face interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher with the intent of identifying categories and patterns of similarities and differences in the information provided. I observed, recorded, and analyzed the information, looking for patterns of similarity and differences that represent and define this population.

It was important to understand that I became an instrument in the research process. Warren (1988) writes about the role of the researcher and cautions that the researcher must be aware of his or her own cultural and contextual biases that may be brought to the research process. The process of recording the interview and then transcribing the interview ensured descriptive validity (Patten, 2002, p. 123). Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews allowed me to use direct quotations from the interviewees

which minimized the possibility of incorrect inferences. Interpretive validity (Patten, 2002, p. 125) was achieved through conducting participant feedback sessions. In those sessions, each participant was given the opportunity to review the interview transcript for correctness to discuss any conclusions or comments the researcher had made about the interview to verify the researcher's correct interpretation of the participant's comments and perceptions.

Method of Analysis

Each recorded interview was transcribed to create a written manuscript. The data from the interview was analyzed and coded. During the analysis process, the information was reviewed and examined to identify emerging themes or patterns which were then defined and assigned a code. I considered a variety of tools to manage and analyze the material collected. The final tool selected was NVivo10, software designed to assist qualitative researchers with the organization, analyses, and sharing of collected data. For this study, NVivo10 software was used along with Excel spreadsheets to organize and manage information (the software integrates with Excel). An additional reason for selecting the software was that it may be used in combination with quantitative software for future studies.

I transcribed interviews by replaying the tapes and creating a text document using verbatim words from the interview. The text documents were then uploaded into NVivo10 for review and analysis. The first step in analyzing the data was to create a composite interview response based on each set of interviews. Each institution's files were grouped into a composite interview summary. After completing the evidence

collection and the transcription, I used the interviewees' responses to create answers to the 10 research questions, summarizing and noting information sources (i.e. interview number). This provided the beginning of data analysis to develop the database.

The transcribed interviews were imported into the software for easy reference. An initial perusal of the interviews was performed for the purpose of identifying broad categories of common answers. After the initial broad categories were established the interview transcriptions were searched for subsidiary categories under each broad/main topic by using the Query function in NVivo10. Subsidiary topics were then developed and established as categories for data collection. Multiple references to the same topic were collected. I wrote analytical memos, coding them to correspond with the interview for future source information. The purpose of the analytical memos was to elaborate on thoughts about the data as well as provide explanatory background information where appropriate. The analytical memos were extremely helpful when it was time to summarize the results.

A second review of the transcriptions was used to code comments from the interviewees and to adjust categories where necessary to more accurately reflect interviewees' responses. The third review of the transcriptions provided an opportunity to review the initial coding for consistency and recode where appropriate. Subsequent reviews of the transcriptions resulted in increased familiarity with the participants' responses and the ability to identify patterns of similarities or differences.

Category Development

After completion of the coding and analysis of individual interviews, cross-case analysis was conducted to identity similarities and differences that were used to develop a conceptual framework to describe how student/veterans perceived their college experiences. After the entire set of interviews had been transcribed from the audio recordings, I reread each interview, making note of any items of interest in a separate document. During the second reading of the interviews I looked for any patterns of similarities in responses. It is important to note that the sets of interviews from each institution were completed and analyzed separately. I continued to look for key phrases, themes, words, or patterns of response during subsequent readings of the interviews. The emerging patterns were financial issues, interpersonal issues, academic issues, community issues, isolation, and information inconsistency from the academic institution. These topics were used as framework for organizing additional information that emerged from the interviews.

Validity Issues

The research process was monitored for any threats to the validity of the data such as researcher bias or the existence of undue influence upon the subjects. Babbie (1998) describes the importance of the researcher maintaining a neutral role in the investigative process (p. 188) to not unduly influence the subjects. I introduced myself to the subject and began a general, informal conversation to establish rapport with the individual. I explained the purpose of the study and offered to answer any questions or concerns the interviewee might have. When this section of the interview was completed, the interview

was clearly focused on the on the topic of the study, the interview questions, and the information the interview provided.

Using the recommendations of both Fowler (1993) and Babbie (1990), each interview was conducted in a similar manner and in a similar, quiet location on the campus of the study participants. The intent was to create an interview environment conducive to the interviewee's comfort level with regard to confidentiality and my nonjudgmental response to information provided by the interviewee. For each interview, the information and questions were presented in a consistent manner, the sessions were recorded and annotated, and consistent interpersonal relations were maintained. The subjects were individuals with whom I interacted only in the role of researcher and not in an academic or social environment. The individuals selected for the study were not previously known to the researcher.

Ethical Issues

The study was conducted in accordance with all institutional research guidelines and procedures. At the 4-year institution, permission was obtained from the Office of Research Subject Protections on June 30, 2011, prior to beginning the study. I completed the 8 modules of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program and passed the course on February 4, 2011, certificate number 5432372. At the 2-year insitution, permission was obtained from the Office of Planning and Institutional Research on October 6, 2011, prior to beginning the study.

The potential for harm to the participants was minimal. The identity of all participants was known only to the researcher and has not been disclosed, nor will it be in

the future. The results are presented in ways which ensure the anonymity of the participants. Each volunteer participant completed an informed consent form and was encouraged to ask any questions prior to beginning the interview. Participants had the right to refuse to participate in the study and to discontinue the interview at any time. The study did not attempt to change or affect human behavior. The study captured information which was voluntarily provided by the study participants.

Summary

Using qualitative research methods to study the Post-9/11 Era student/veterans' college experiences, the intent of this study was to find out how student/veterans perceived their transitional experiences from active duty military members to full-time college students. The findings were analyzed and organized in an attempt to identify patterns of perception which may be helpful to institutions as they prepare to help student/veterans transition to postsecondary studies. I attempted to explain the findings in terms of existing theory using the theories of Aslanian and Brickell (1980), Cross (1981), Hiemstra (1991), Mezirow (1991), and Merriam and Brockett (1997). The goal of this study was to collect information from student/veterans about their transition experiences from military service to college student with the hopes that increased awareness of these perceptions will provide institutions information from which they may identify institutional practices that will help the student/veteran achieve academic and social success in the college community. Good principles of data collection were maintained by adhering to the following guidelines (Yin, 2009, p. 114).

Principle 1: Multiple Sources of Evidence

The in-depth interviews were conducted with two purposes in mind. The first purpose was to collect information about student/veterans and their transition experiences and collect information through the use of guided conversations. The researcher attempted to create a nonthreatening, nonconfrontational environment during the interview, while simultaneously pursuing follow-up questions to better understand the evidence and to identify any conflicting information that might have been discovered during the interview. This fluid interview technique provided feedback from the participants and was continued until the point at which the same themes and answers appeared and were documented.

Observational evidence was included by the researcher. This was based on noting any distinctive behaviors by the interviewee during the interview. An example of observational evidence is a notation that an interviewee may have appeared nervous during the interview, as evidenced by heavy foot tapping, nervous tics, and frequent laughter.

Triangulation of data (evidence) was achieved by comparing the interview results with study results of *Service Members in School: Military Veterans' Experiences Using the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Pursuing Postsecondary Education* (Steele et al., 2010), *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus* (Cook & Kim, 2009), and *Military Service Members and Veterans in Higher Education: What the New GI Bill May Mean for Postsecondary Institutions* (Radford, 2009). This added validity to the evidence collected and identified convergence. Access to academic files would have

provided additional validity to the evidence collected but they were not available to the researcher.

Principle 2: Create a Study Database

I used multiple sources to collect evidence by including student/veterans from two different institutions. The study evidence was used to create a database using Nvivo10 software. Care was made to create a clean chain of evidence so statements, summaries, and conclusions could be linked to a specific interview source.

Principle 3: Maintain a Chain of Evidence

To increase evidential reliability a chain of evidence was established and followed so that other interested parties would be able to trace my research steps. This was accomplished by developing and using a set of interview questions which were used as the basis for each interview to ensure consistency of a core discussion present in all interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed into text. The interviews were supplemented by researcher's note taking during each interview and the notes were filed with the text of the interviews. A database of the interviews was created using NVivo10 software. After an initial review of the interviews I created a set of nodes (codes) to identify in each interview. The process began with 27 nodes and through a series of review and refinements, was reduced to 7 primary nodes which became the framework for the analysis within the interviews. Each interview was coded with the appropriate node or nodes, using phrases or key words to cite evidentiary sources.

IV. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis of responses to 26 interviews conducted with student/veterans about their transition experiences from military service to college student. The interviews were conducted at two public institutions of higher education located in the metropolitan Washington, DC, area. A 4-year public research institution in Virginia was the source of 11 subjects and a public 2-year community college in Maryland was the source of 15 subjects. The study was designed using a small sample size so the in-depth interviews could be conducted in an exploratory format, allowing ample time for discussion with the participants. It is important to note that some subjects mentioned schools other than the schools specified in the study. The schools mentioned by the subjects were not part of my study and I did not examine any part of the interviewees' references to those other schools, including, but not limited to, veterans' programs, admissions policies, orientation procedures, academic requirements, and housing allowances related to the schools' locations. Nothing that was mentioned by interviewees, unless specifically specified in the study's problem statement and purpose has been evaluated or researched by me. The only two institutions which were part of the study were the 2-year community college and the 4-year university, both located in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

GI Bill Research Questions

As noted in earlier chapters, three research questions were proposed as the core of this study:

1. How do Post-9/11 Era student/veterans perceive their college experiences at one 2-year institution in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

2. How do Post-9/11 Era student/veterans perceive their college experiences at one 4-year institution in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

3. What campus programs, practices, or policies affect the transition from military student to college student of the Post-9/11 Era student/veterans?

Ten interview questions were developed to elicit information from the student/veterans to answer the research questions

1. With reference to college employees, with whom do you have the most frequent contact?

2. Why did you choose to attend your institution?

3. What could the institution provide that would facilitate the administrative processes for you?

4. What could the institution provide that would facilitate the learning process for you?

5. What specific institutional practices or policies helped you in transition to the role of college student?

6. What characteristics do you attribute to faculty members who have positively or negatively affected your college experience?

7. How do you perceive the role of the academic advisor in your transition experiences?

8. Does a support group for veterans exist on your campus?

9. Do you participate in a veterans' support group on campus?

10. What would you do differently if you could redo your transition experience?

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

The major findings are noted here, followed by an in-depth analysis of the results. The 4-year college students reported more contact with fellow student/veterans with 7 of 11 reporting that their most frequent contacts were with student/veterans. This contrasts dramatically with the responses to the same question from the 2-year student/veterans with 10 of 15 reporting that their most frequent contact was with their faculty members. Not one 2-year student/veteran identified peers as the most frequent contact, although there were general comments about missing the camaraderie of the military and feeling very isolated on campus.

Location was the most frequent response for 4-year student/veterans as to why they selected their campus. Further explanation revealed that they were already established in Northern Virginia at the time of separation from military service and were able to enter the 4-year institution as in-state tuition students. One student/veteran who was not a resident of Virginia at the time of his separation mentioned the need to pay out-of-state tuition rates as unfair. His reason for selecting the 4-year institution was its reputation as a military friendly school. A generalization did not emerge from the 2-year student/veterans as to why they selected that 2-year institution as their school. Six of the

respondents cited the open enrollment policy of the school as being the reason for their attendance or previous attendance for their choice. The remaining responses were varied and nongeneralizable.

The students at the 4-year institution were generally satisfied with the administrative aspects of their enrollment (6 of 11), and 2 of 11 did specify a desire for more advice and counseling.

There was a major disconnect between the perceptions of the 2-year institution student/veterans and the 4-year institution student/veterans relative to administrative issues at their respective institutions. Eleven of the 15 2-year institution students interviewed were dissatisfied with administrative issues at the institution. The dissatisfaction centered around students' perceptions that they were receiving conflicting or incorrect information, and a general sense of disorganization manifested in being required to backtrack, repeat processes, return multiples days and times, and general confusion about how to get enrolled. The 2 students who did not express dissatisfaction with the administrative procedures had previously attended college and considered themselves experienced college students. It is interesting to note that they both used the college web page extensively and were able to complete most of their registration and administrative issues online, thereby minimizing their on-campus time. The remaining 2 students from the 2-year institution had no opinion about administrative issues.

The interesting comparison in the question about learning issues is that none of the 2-year institution's students identified learning as primarily their own responsibility. The 3 of 15 respondents who said nothing needed to be done to assist them did not

identify individual responsibility as a reason that nothing needed to be done by instructors. Of the remaining 12 2-year college students, 4 reported that they were satisfied with the assistance they received from their instructors, while the 5 other reported various levels of need for more assistance or information from the instructor.

Question 5 asked what specific institutional practices or policies helped in the transition to role of college student. The most frequent response from the 4-year institution students was no comment. They did not identify with this question. The most frequent response from the 2-year institution students was that they were satisfied with the transition experience—which is not really a direct answer to the question. When a follow-up question for specific examples was asked, the respondents did not identify anything. This is puzzling in comparison to the question about administrative practices in which the responses indicated dissatisfaction with the processes.

The responses to the questions about faculty members' characteristics which had positively or negatively affected them were notably different between the 4-year institution student/veterans' responses and the 2-year institution student/veterans' responses. The most frequent response from 4-year institution student/veterans was neutral: They couldn't identify any positive or negative attributes that affect their college experience, while over one-half of the 2-year institution student/veterans reported that their professors were helpful and they defined this as meaning the professors initiated contact with individual students and provided individualized advice and guidance on learning-related issues. One-third of the 2-year college students indicated a neutral opinion for this question and did not identify any positive or negative traits.

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Seven of 11 respondents from the 4-year institution indicated that they either did not use an advisor and that they self-advised, or that they had no response. Of the 2-year college students, 11 of 15 indicated that they either self-advised or had no response to this question. Three students still used the military education office on a nearby base for their advising questions and 1 student relied on the Veterans' Administration in DC.

The 4-year college student/veterans generally were aware of a campus student/veterans support group, but the 2-year college student/veterans were about equally divided between being sure one did exist, being sure one did not exist, and not knowing whether one did or did not exist. The response of the 4-year college student/veterans was consistent with the question in which they were asked if they participated in a campus student/veterans group. About one-half of the responding students mirrored their previous response by indicating either yes, they did participate, or no, they did not participate. The remaining 2 subjects did not answer this question.

The final question asked what the subjects would do differently if they could redo their transition experience. Only 3 of the 11 4-year college participants definitively and confidently answered "nothing." Two students stated that they would have connected much earlier with the Office of Military Services had they known about it. The remaining responses were varied and highly individualized. Of the 11 4-year college students who provided an answer to this question, 4 of the students clearly stated that they would do more planning and research before beginning school. An underlying concern, although not their primary response, was that they would use their GI Bill benefits prior to earning a bachelor's degree.

Unanticipated Results

An unexpected finding of the study was that at the 2-year college, each student/veteran was grateful for the opportunity to just talk about their experiences and expressed amazement that someone wanted to listen to them. It seemed very important to allow the interviewees just to talk; the interview format and questions provided that outlet. Each student/veteran expressed a need for some type of assistance with their studies, but generally they were unable to describe what type of assistance would be helpful. I was surprised at the number of interviewees who did not have an answer for some of the questions. The use of the phrase "no response" in the results and charts does not necessarily mean that the participants did not respond to the question during the interview. It also does not mean they did not understand the question. It indicates that they spoke around the question and did not directly answer the question. When I pursued an answer more specifically directed to the question, the interviewees often stated that they had no idea what was needed. They indicated that they recognized some type of assistance or change was needed, but had no idea what would "fix" the situation. I attribute this to their relative lack of familiarity with how a college campus operates— which is an indication that additional communication about the nature of college might be beneficial for those who have had minimal contact with such an environment.

Summary of Responses by Question

This section summarizes each question's responses in writing and visually displays the qualitative data captured by the interviews conducted with the

student/veterans at the 2-year community college and the 4-year university. Full transcriptions of the interviews are provided in Appendix A.

The data is disparate, which is not unexpected in an exploratory study. The sample sizes were different with the sample size at the 2-year college almost half again larger than the sample size at the 4-year college. The responses were normalized by converting the raw data collected into percentages of the sample size.

The written summaries are segregated by institution. The data is then displayed graphically in two formats, pie charts and bar charts, to facilitate comparing the data. The pie charts are segregated by institution; both institutions are shown together on the bar charts. The responses shown in the pie charts use the same color scheme in the keys to allow for easy comparison.

Question 1: Contact With College Employees

With reference to college employees, with whom do you have the most frequent contact?

Three categories evolved from the 4-year college student/veterans' answers. The largest category was other student veterans in the campus's Office of Military Services at 7/11, 1/11 reported faculty, 1/11 reported other, while 2/11 had no response.

The answers from the 2-year college students were more varied and included the following categories: faculty, the Veterans Office on campus, the college web site, a satellite campus site, and no response. Faculty were identified as the student/veterans' most frequent contact in 10/15 responses from the 2-year college students; 2/15 identified the campus Veterans Office as their most frequent college contact, while 1/15 student stated that the Internet was the most frequent contact, and 1/15 had no response (Figure 1).

4 YEAR

2 YEAR

Key	4 YR Response % (*n* = 11)	2 YR Response % (*n* = 15)	Responses
	64	0	Other Students
	9	67	Faculty Members
	9	0	Other Sources
	0	13	Campus Veterans Office
	0	7	Internet
	0	7	Education Office at Nearby Military Base
	18	7	No Response
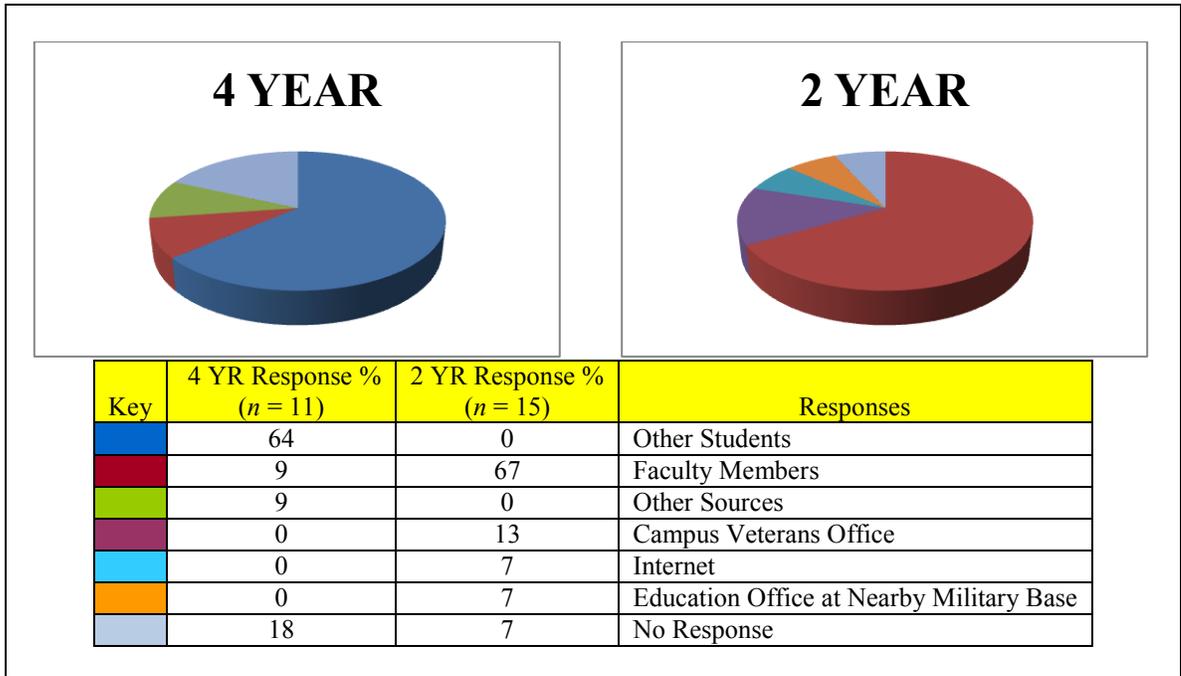
Figure 1. Contact with college employees: Pie charts.

Question 2: Reason for Attending Institution

Why did you choose to attend your institution?

Among student/veterans at the 4-year institution, the most frequent response as to the reason student/veterans chose to attend their institution was location, with 6/11 citing this as the primary reason for their decision. Two students cited previous attendance at the institution as the primary factor in their college selection. One student cited convenience as the reason but did not define convenience, 1 student cited the rolling admission policy as the main reason for selecting the campus, and 1 student chose the school because it was military friendly.

The responses from the 2-year college student/veterans were more varied than those of the 4-year college students. Three respondents cited location as the primary reason; 3/15 cited convenience, but again did not specify how they defined convenience; 4/15 cited the open enrollment policy of the college; 2/15 cited the post-9/11 GI Bill as the reason for becoming students and equated the GI Bill with their campus selection; and 2/15 students stated that they had previously attended the college and decided to return (Figure 2).

Key	4 YR % ($n = 11$)	2 YR Response % ($n = 15$)	Responses
	55	20	School's Location
	18	20	Had Previously Attended
	9	7	Convenience
	9	0	Rolling Admissions
	9	0	Military Friendly
	0	27	Open Enrollment
	0	13	Had Post-9/11 GI Bill
	0	7	To Get Used to Being a Student
	0	7	No Response
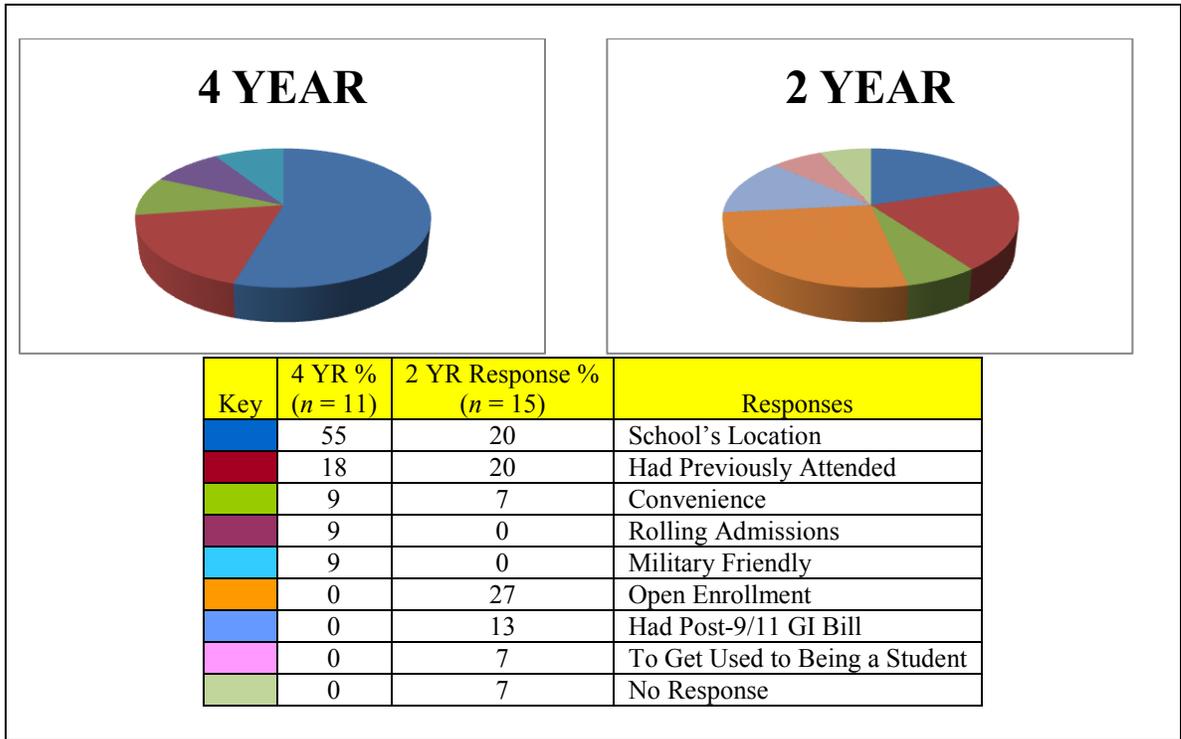
Figure 2. Reason for attending institution: Pie charts.

Question 3: Facilitate Administrative Processes

What could the institution provide that would facilitate the administrative

processes for you?

For student/veterans from the 4-year institution, nothing (3/11) and no comment

(3/11) were the most frequent responses with a total of 5/11. One student wanted more

printed information, 1 specified need for longer night hours, 1 student said military

veterans should immediately get in-state tuition, and 2 students desired more advice and

counseling.

The most frequent responses of the 2-year college students were the need for

more advice and counseling and no response, with 3 students responding in each

category. The remaining student responses reflected problems with registration issues,

including reporting feeling overwhelmed by the entire process (Figure 3).

4 YEAR

2 YEAR

Key	4 YR Response % ($n = 11$)	2 YR Response % ($n = 15$)	Responses
	27	7	Nothing
	18	20	More Advice and Counseling
	9	0	Immediate In-State Tuition for Military Vets
	9	0	Military Friendly
	9	0	Identify and Assist Veterans
	0	7	Better Access to Campus Veterans Office
	0	13	Have More Knowledge of Veterans' Problems
	0	27	Registration Issues
	0	7	Everything is Overwhelming
	27	20	No Response

Figure 3. Facilitate administrative processes: Pie charts.

Question 4: Facilitate Learning Process

What could the institution provide that would facilitate the learning process for you?

Four of the 11 four-year institution students interviewed noted that they thought the learning process was their responsibility and they did not expect anything from the institution, while 3/11 had no response to the question. Teaching issues were identified by 3/11 students, by which 2 students thought the teaching was inadequate/problematic, and 1 student identified the teachers as being willing to help, but the student needed to initiate the conversation.

Four of 15 students from the 2-year college reported the instructors as being helpful, 3/15 said nothing needed to be done to assist them, 3/15 had no comment, 2/15 identified classroom practice as being needed, 2/15 did not know what is needed but found the learning process difficult, and 1/15 identified the need for more specific information about testing from the instructor (Figure 4).

Key	4 YR Response % ($n = 11$)	2 YR Response % ($n = 15$)	Responses
	36	20	Nothing, No Expectation
	27	20	Individual Responsibility
	27	0	No Response
	9	0	Teaching Issues, Need Improvement
	0	27	Teaching Issues, Good Teachers
	0	13	More Classroom Practice
	0	13	Do Not Know But I Need Help
	0	7	Need Test Information From Teacher
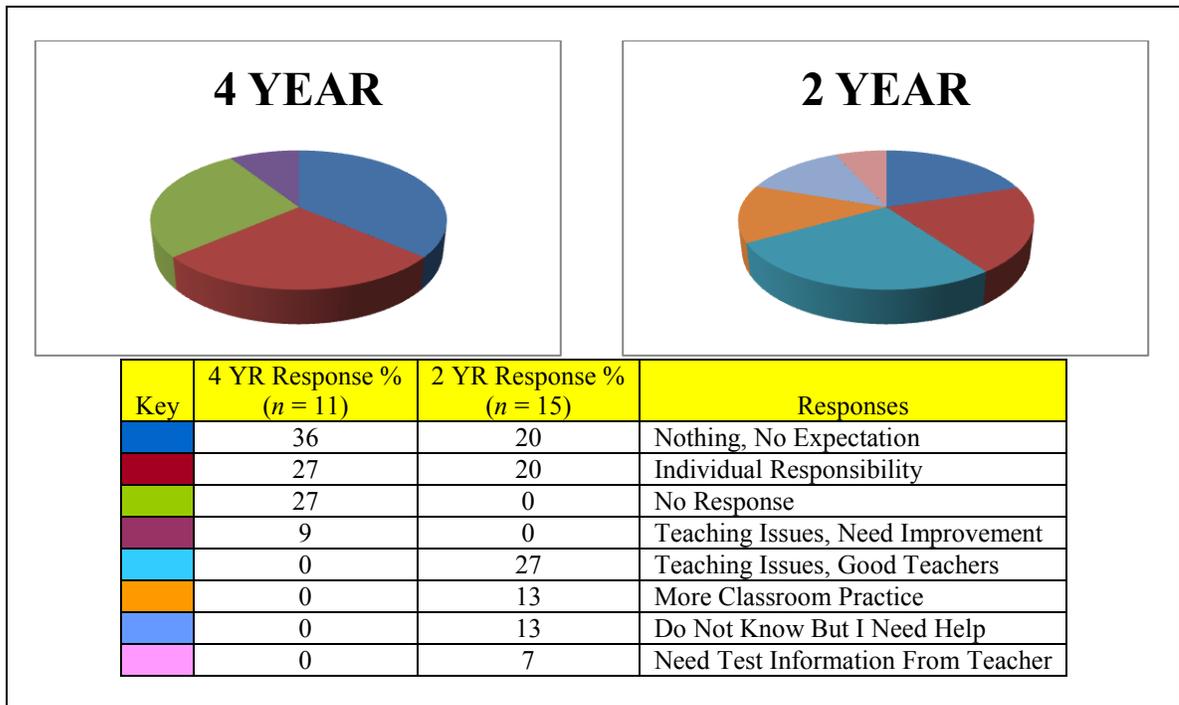
Figure 4. Facilitate learning process: Pie charts.

Question 5: Institutional Practices That Helped Transition

What specific institutional practices or policies helped you in transition to the role of college student?

The largest response to this question among 4-year student/veterans was no comment at 5/11. The remaining responses were spread into six different categories. One student did not expect any assistance with transition, 1 was satisfied with the experience, 1 desired a special veterans' orientation, 1 wanted more evening hours, 1 thought faculty should be better informed about military students, and 1 cited individual persistence as the answer.

At the 2-year institution the largest group was that 5/15 were satisfied with the experience, 4/15 had not comment, 3/15 stated they did not need assistance with transition, 1 was self-motivated to find the answers, 1 need more individual support, and 1 reported still adjusting (Figure 5).

Key	4 YR Response % (n = 11)	2 YR Response % (n = 15)	Responses
	17	0	None Expected
	17	45	Satisfied With Current Practices or Policies
	17	0	Special Veteran Issues Orientation Needed
	17	0	Have More Orientation Hours in the Evenings
	17	0	Faculty Needs More Awareness of Veteran Issues
	17	9	Individual Persistence
	0	27	Do Not Need Anything Additional
	0	9	Still Adjusting With Difficulty
	0	9	Self-Motivated to Find Answers

Figure 5. Institutional practices that helped transition: Pie charts.

Question 6: Faculty Characteristics

What characteristics do you attribute to faculty members who have had positively or negatively affected your college experience?

The most prevalent response from the 4-year college student/veterans was that they (5/11) could not identify any faculty characteristics that affected them positively or negatively. Five of 11 students identified professors who were personable, competent, helpful, detail oriented, and supportive as being especially notable to their college experience and 1/11 student identified faculty members with "hands-on experience" as positively affecting the college experience.

The most frequently cited characteristic (8/15) noted by student/veterans interviewed at the 2-year college was that they perceived the professors as helpful, meaning that the professors initiated contact with students, provided personal guidance and assistance with academic-related issues like study techniques, problem solving, and test-taking. Worthy of note is that 1 of these students identified a negative experience in which the faculty member made what the student/veteran considered to be disparaging remarks about the military and that negatively affected her perception of the faculty member. One-third (5/15) of the 2-year college student/veterans did not identify any faculty characteristics that affected them positively or negatively and 1/15 stated that faculty members assumed students knew more than they did. This student was currently enrolled in developmental classes (Figure 6).

Key	4 YR Response % (n = 11)	2 YR Response % (n = 15)	Responses
	45	33	Could Not Identify Anything
	45	0	Personable, Competent, Helpful, Supportive
	9	0	"Hands-On Experience"
	0	53	Helpful, Initiated Contact, Detail About Tests/Assignments
	0	7	Negative: Assume Students Know More Than They Do
	0	7	Negative: Made Negative Comments About Military
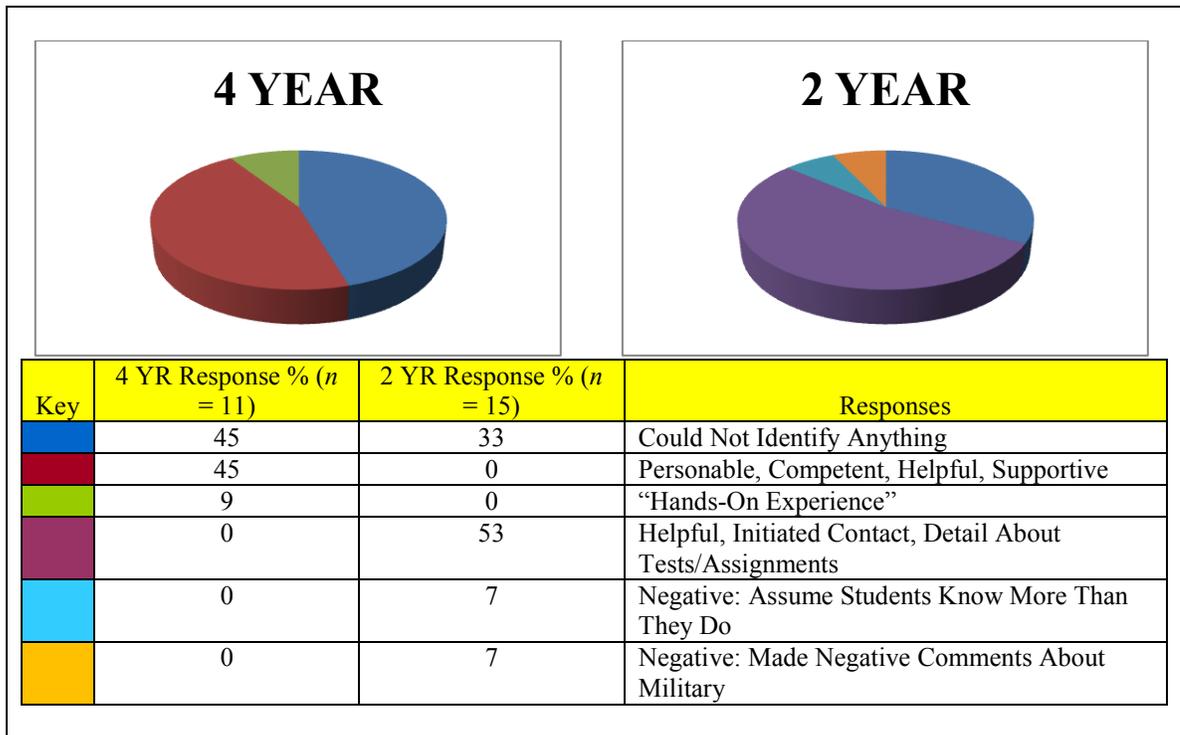
Figure 6. Faculty characteristics: Pie charts.

Question 7: Role of Academic Advisor

How do you perceive the role of the academic advisor in your transition experiences?

Of the 4-year institution student/veterans, 4 of the 11 respondents stated they do not use an advisor and self-advise, 3 of the 11 had no response, and 3 of the 11 identified their faculty, departmental advisor as important to their transition experience. They expanded on this by stating that the faculty departmental advisor assisted them in their emotional, social, and psychological adjustment to college, although they initially contacted the advisor for academic advice about course selection and sequencing.

Over one-half (8/15) the student/veterans at the 2-year college reported that they self-advise and have never met with an advisor and 3/15 students met with someone to seek enrollment, course selection, and course sequencing advice but it was a person in the education office on a nearby military base. These students were aware of the academic advising office on the main campus, but felt more comfortable with the base education office (the base education office is a military function and is not provided by the campus/college). No response was reported by 3/15 students and 1/15 student used the Veterans' Administration in the District of Columbia as their source of academic advisement (Figure 7).

Key	4 YR Response % ($n = 11$)	2 YR Response % ($n = 15$)	Responses
	36	53	I Self-Advised
	18	20	No Response
	36	0	Rely on Faculty Advisor
	0	20	Used Military Advisor (Not From College)
	0	7	Used Veterans Administration Office in DC
	9	0	Office Of Military Services
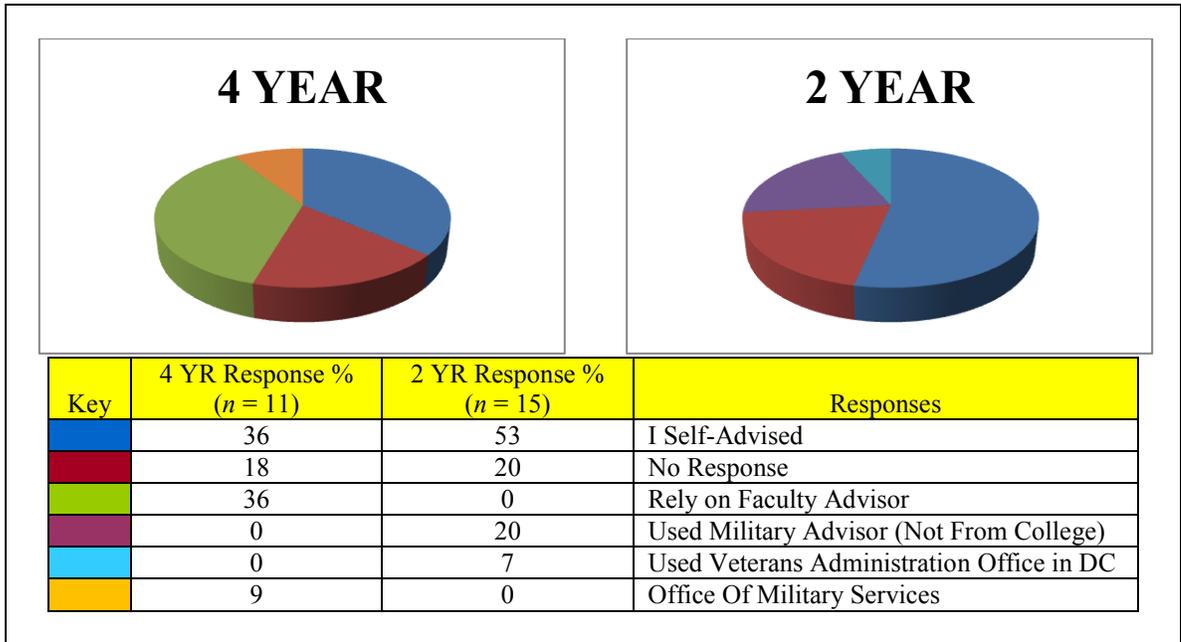
Figure 7. Role of academic advisor: Pie charts.

Question 8: Support Group for Veterans

Does a support group for veterans exist on your campus?

The 4-year college student/veterans responded affirmatively (8/11) that a student/veterans support group existed on their campus, 2/11 did not respond, and 1/11 stated that a student/veterans support group did not exist on the campus. The student/veteran support group is separate from the Office of Military Services which is a campus-provided service for student/veterans. The support group is defined as a group of peers supporting each other and is an extracurricular activity.

The 2-year college student/veterans were about evenly divided in their responses to this question with 4/15 reporting yes, a student/veteran support group does exist; 4/15 reporting that a student/veteran support group does not exist; and 6/15 stating that they did not have any idea whether one existed or not, while 1/15 student did not respond (Figure 8).

Key	4 YR Response % ($n = 11$)	2 YR Response % ($n = 15$)	Responses
	73	27	Yes
	9	27	No
	18	40	Do Not Know
	0	7	No Response

Figure 8. Support group for veterans: Pie charts.

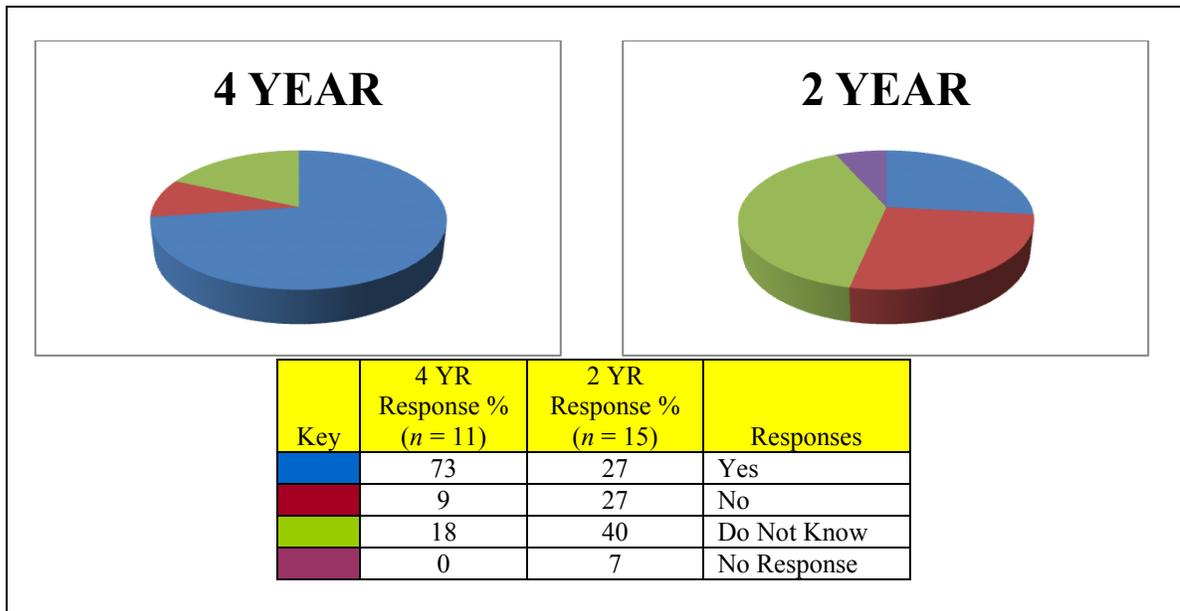**Question 9: Participate in Veterans' Support Group**

Do you participate in a veterans' support group on campus?

At the 4-year institution, "Yes" responses to this question were reported by 5/11, 4/11 "no" responses, while 2/11 respondents did not answer. This is consistent with the previous question in which 2/11 did not answer this question.

At the 2-year institution, "yes" responses to this question were reported by 2/15 while 7/15 reported "no" that they did not participate, 4/15 did not answer and 3/15 indicated they would like to participate, but were not aware of meeting times, dates, and locations for when the support group. Comparing the responses in this question to the previous question which asked if a student/veterans support group existed on campus, 2 of the 4 respondents who indicated it did stated that they did not participate because they did not receive advance notice of meetings (Figure 9).

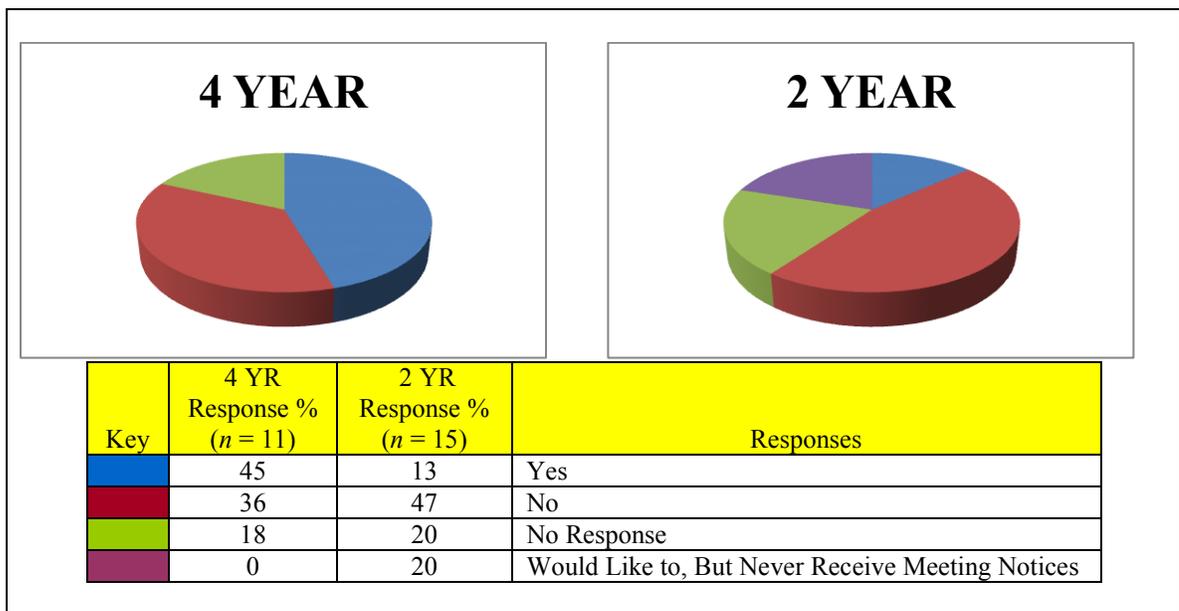| Key	4 YR Response % (*n* = 11)	2 YR Response % (*n* = 15)	Responses
	45	13	Yes
	36	47	No
	18	20	No Response
	0	20	Would Like to, But Never Receive Meeting Notices

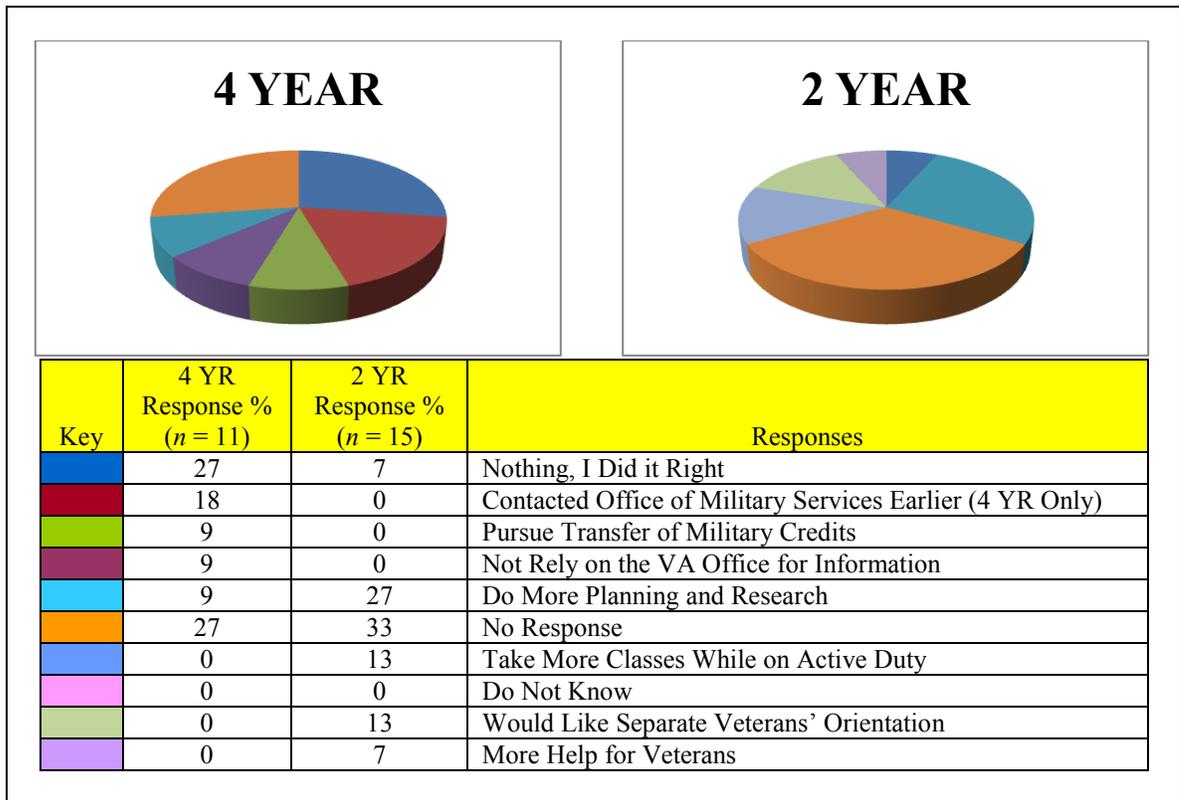*Figure 9.* Participate in veterans' support group: Pie charts.

Question 10: Changes to Transition Experience

What would you do differently if you could redo your transition experience?

This open-ended question elicited a variety of responses and seemed to be considered a "catch-all" question by the subjects because some respondents stated everything they wanted to say throughout the interview but the topics were not included in the questions.

At the 4-year college, 3 of 11 student/veterans stated that they would not do anything differently related to their actual transition, 3/11 did not respond to this question, and of these 6 students—all 6/11—included copious amounts of information which will be discussed in an additional section labeled "other comments." Two students noted that they would have come to the Military Services Office sooner than they did if they had known about it, 1/11 would have pursued more diligently receiving transfer credits for military service, 1/11 would not have relied on the Veterans Administration for information, and 1/11 reported that he had taken unnecessary classes and would pursue more information prior to planning his course load.

At the 2-year institution, this question generated 5 categories of responses from the respondents with 5/15 not responding to this question, 5/15 identified that they would do more planning and research before enrolling in school, 2/15 indicated they would like a separate veterans' orientation, 1/15 would have taken more classes while on active duty and specifically mentioned developmental classes so that he would not need to use the GI Bill money for those classes, and 2/15 stated that they would do nothing differently (Figure 10).

Key	4 YR Response % ($n = 11$)	2 YR Response % ($n = 15$)	Responses
	27	7	Nothing, I Did it Right
	18	0	Contacted Office of Military Services Earlier (4 YR Only)
	9	0	Pursue Transfer of Military Credits
	9	0	Not Rely on the VA Office for Information
	9	27	Do More Planning and Research
	27	33	No Response
	0	13	Take More Classes While on Active Duty
	0	0	Do Not Know
	0	13	Would Like Separate Veterans' Orientation
	0	7	More Help for Veterans

Figure 10. Changes to transition experience: Pie charts.

Summary of Findings

The student/veterans in the study did indicate a desire for an opportunity to socialize with other veterans and frequently mentioned how much they missed the military community. They expressed overall appreciation of the teaching and learning conditions on their respective campuses. They also indicated a need for more assistance in adjusting to college life. Unfortunately, despite this expressed need, the majority of the 2-year college students self-advised and did not report interaction with academic advisors. Some of the students sought assistance from nearby military base education offices and/or the Veterans' Administration. They indicated their contact with the campus Veterans Office was primarily limited to benefits processing issues. Comments about campus administrative processes included receipt of conflicting information which caused confusion and frustration for the students.

In open-ended questions, students mentioned the 2-year institution's policy of dropping students within 24 hours of registration for nonpayment. They perceived this policy to be unfair to veterans using the GI Bill, and disruptive to their studies. It added several steps to the registration processes, because they needed to keep reenrolling in the classes until the administrative issues were resolved. In some cases, they were unable to reenroll in the desired or necessary classes, because the class had reached enrollment capacity during the time the student/veteran was dropped. This policy was extended to all veterans whose GI benefits were delayed because of national Veterans Administration backlog issues with payments. Several of the veterans were self-funding to bridge the gap between registration and receipt of GI benefits. Other students were unable to do this and

were limited in the number of credits they could take or were forced to withdraw for a semester.

The 2-year college students reported the most frequent contact on campus with faculty members, while the 4-year college respondents reported the most frequent campus contact with fellow student/veterans. It is important to note that the 2-year college students were recruited through announcements from faculty members, so the possibility exists that this might have affected their responses. The veracity of this response, however, is strengthened when comparing it to responses and comments relating to other questions. The 2-year students presented their time on campus as primarily consisting of attending class. They had very little opportunity or desire to interact with other students. They reported visiting the Veterans' Service Office only for recertification procedures. The 4-year college students were notified of the study through the Office of Military Services (OMS). The student/veterans' reasons for deciding to attend their respective schools were notably different. The majority of the 4-year college respondents indicated that they decided to attend their school based on its location. The 2-year college respondents were about evenly divided between open enrollment, location, and prior attendance. The data collected from the 2-year college students indicates a low level of interaction with the offices of academic counseling and administration. The subjects expressed interest in finding jobs while in school, but all 15 respondents were unaware that the campus had a dedicated student/veterans employment counselor. Contact with the campus veterans' office was primarily limited to the once per semester requisite sign-in for benefits processing. A high level of contact with faculty members on campus was

reported and very little interaction with other students. Like the student/veterans at the 4-year college, those at the 2-year college reported feeling lost, adrift, out of place, and unable to identify with nonveteran fellow students.

Student/veterans have a unique identify as college students; they differentiate themselves from the general college population, which they attribute to the experiences and individual growth which occurred as a result of their military service. While the student/veteran population may chronologically be the same age as their fellow college students, they do not identify with this population. Each student/veteran expressed feeling much older than their classmates, unable to relate to the interests of their classmates, and frustration at the fact that they often thought the classmates were wasting time. As one 2-year college respondent stated,

> These kids just don't get it. They're lucky to be here and they're just screwin' [sic] around—they're wasting everybody's time and it really makes me mad that they're taking the place of some other kid who might really want to be here. (TY 7)

The respondents described themselves as coexisting, but not being part of the general student population. Each student/veteran in the study described a feeling of "separateness" and indicated that when they recognized a fellow veteran in class or on campus there was an immediate sense of identity. Asked how they recognized fellow veterans, they described "just knowing" by looking at another students' haircut, posture, style of dress, placement in the room, or verbal cues. The experience of the military appears to leave imprints on the participants that become a permanent part of their self-

identify. Each study participant expressed a desire to find a group of veterans on campus

and each mentioned a feeling of being alone in a very crowded and confusing

environment.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter begins with a summary of the transition experience for student/veterans on two college campuses in the greater Washington, DC metropolitan area. The purpose of this study was to create a foundation for future study. The data collected indicates that students at both the 4-year and 2-year participating institutions need assistance making the transition from active duty military service to college student. The information collected from the study participants was varied and reflected the individual experiences of a small group of student/veterans on two large, metropolitan college campuses. A discussion of the needs of the student/veterans based on the finding of this research follows. Finally, recommendations concerning further study and suggested interim interventions for this population are presented.

In general, data collected and analyzed reflected a group of individuals who are used to highly cohesive organizations, regardless of the branch of service in which they served. The adjustment from military culture (Harmeyer, 2007) to the college culture presented multiple challenges for each of the study participants. A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the difficulty in adjusting to what each participant perceived as unstructured and confusing environments. Students at both institutions reported feeling lost, adrift, out of place, and unable to identify with nonveteran students. They expressed feeling out of place in the college classroom and described themselves as

not being able to relate to their peers. Students expressed confusion about how to navigate college systems, but most of the respondents did not attend a campus orientation. The student/veterans who did attend a campus orientation indicated they would have preferred an orientation for veterans only and reported that they felt out of place in the general orientation.

This study involved students from an open enrollment, 2-year public college and students from a 4-year and above public college, both located in the greater metropolitan area of Washington, DC. At the time of this study the 2-year institution had a student population of 13,685 (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2010), offered degrees at the associate level, and was considered large. The 4-year institution had a student population of 32,067 (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2010), offered both undergraduate (bachelor level) and graduate degrees through doctoral level, with the exception of no medical or veterinary degrees, and was considered a large institution. The majority of students at both institutions fit the undergraduate profile, according to the Carnegie Classification.

Aside from the obvious differences of size and degrees offered at the institutions studied, it is important to note that the 4-year institution included in the study has a dedicated Office of Military Services (OMS) which is designed to support military students on campus. This office is separate from the campus Veterans' Benefits Office which exists to process veterans' benefits. Also worthy of note is that the Office of Military Services is not a duplication of the campus Veterans Benefits Office, as the

OMS is not involved with processing benefits, but serves as a source of campus support for student/veterans.

Participants at the 4-year campus indicated heavy use of the OMS as a source of socialization and academic assistance. The office provides a quiet venue for the student/veterans in a central location on campus. Faculty and administrators are encouraged to visit this location and interact with the student/veterans. Computers and desks are provided for student use, as well as an open area with comfortable seating for group interaction. The efficacy of this office for the student/veteran transition experience is reflected in the responses of the study participants to the interview questions: They were generally satisfied with the campus situation and did not identify things they felt were needed on campus, with a few exceptions such as longer evening hours for other campus services and a separate student/veterans orientation. They did articulate an inability to relate to fellow classmates. They frequently shared information about their use of the OMS and their reliance on it to provide or compensate for the things they missed about the military. They viewed the office as bridging the gap between the military lifestyle and the college lifestyle.

The 2-year institution had a Veterans Services Office, staffed by a newly hired director who was a 20-year enlisted veteran. Additionally, the office was staffed by three full-time individuals and one student work study position. This office was responsible for processing benefits claims. In addition, a jobs counselor whose services were limited to veterans and their families was located in the campus career services office. Student/veteran respondents reported very limited contact with the Veterans Services

Office. They described their contact as limited to benefits processing and generally reported frustration and discontent at the process. The prevailing response from student/veterans was that college administration was unaware of veterans' issues relating to the Post-9/11 GI Bill and that the course registration process was hindered by that lack of understanding. Further, none of the interviewees were aware of the jobs counselor for veterans, despite the fact that several of them expressed a need for employment to supplement the income received through the GI Bill stipend.

Alternative Explanations for the Findings

The student/veterans at both institutions had not been in an academic situation for periods of time ranging from a minimum of 4 years to a maximum of 20 years. Many of the student/veterans were first-generation college students and some had no prior college experience. Their unfamiliarity with campus culture was a source discomfort for them. As a group, the student/veterans enrolled in their respective school within six months of leaving military service. For many of the student/veterans, the time between leaving active service and college enrollment was less than three months. The short time for decompression from service combined with the stress of relocation, job search, readjustment to family life, and reintegration into civilian life are factors which could impede a smooth transition to college student.

The fact that student/veterans have experienced a significant interruption in the pursuit of education creates additional challenges in for them in their academic studies. They are out of the habit of studying and their college readiness skills may not be current. Educational skills and competencies may be out of date. An additional factor is that all

the 2-year college student/veterans and one-third of the 4-year college student/veterans reported that they were first-generation college students, which are considered students at risk (Bauman, 2009, p. 184). For many first-generation college students, there are dedicated campus support programs. However, the student/veterans (having skipped orientation, and self-advising instead of meeting with academic counselors) were not aware of these programs. They may not be eligible for the programs anyway, and if they are, there is no guarantee that if they had been aware of support programs, they would have applied for them. The prevailing attitude seems to be summed up in a statement by a student/veteran at the 2-year institution: "I've gotten through far worse situations than this and I was able to survive—I just need to figure out a way to make it work." This attitude reflects their military background, in which they do not readily ask for assistance (Hsu, 2010).

Reflective of the prevalence of the self-sufficient attitude encouraged in the military, while conducting this study I had an opportunity to observe an administrator in the office of the 2-year college's veteran services offices who proudly stated that if a student did not know something he would give the student the same advice he gave to recruits while he had served on active duty: "If you don't know, go find out. It's not my job to spoon-feed you…." While that advice may be very effective and appropriate in the active duty military community, it has the potential to contribute to the stress levels of this nontraditional group of students with the unintended consequence of student/veterans leaving school (Forbus et al., 2011). Further, this response is not compatible with the concept of the learning college (O'Banion, 1997) in which the purpose is to create

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helpful, student-centered learning environments; this incident speaks to the need for institutional review of the campus climate for learning. A major finding of this study is that the student/veterans need assistance in transitioning to their new environment and are searching for ways to assimilate into the life of a college student. Inconsistencies between stated institutional philosophy and practice must be rectified if the student/veteran population is expected to succeed.

Colleges with student/veterans must do far more than process GI Bill benefits. Knowledge of what student/veterans experience as they leave military service and enter the academic world is important in understanding the challenges they face and correspondingly retaining them as students. Retention and graduation rates are becoming increasingly important to postsecondary institutions (Talbert, 2012). Applying Herzberg's Theory of Motivation (1959) to the transition experiences of student/veterans, benefits processing could be described as a hygiene factor. This is a necessary, but needed service; the motivating factors are experienced by learning and academic achievement. If the student/veteran is demotivated prior to attending classes, the opportunity for achievement is thwarted. Even in the early days of military education benefits, the original GI Bill in World War II, the needs of student/veterans were clearly different than those of other college students (Titus, 1944). Today's student/veterans, as with most college students, need additional support to successfully matriculate and achieve the goal of completing a course of study. The student/veterans' academic well-being is as much a part of the college's responsibility as processing their Post-9/11 GI Bill educational payments.

Institutions have a responsibility to provide the opportunity for all students—including student/veterans—to function successfully as students, both academically and emotionally. This is a need identified in this study. Numerous programs exist on college campuses nationwide for specific groups; student/veterans need to become part of that conversation for institutions. At one of the institutions studied, that issue had already been addressed and the results clearly indicate a need being met. The 4-year campus which implemented an Office of Military Services is clearly addressing and meeting the needs of the "whole student/veteran." Each participant from that school spoke emotionally and gratefully about finding the OMS and the impact it had on their campus experience. It was so much more than just having a student/veterans social group. The majority of the respondents did not participate in the social events, but relied heavily on the day-to-day interaction with fellow student/veterans in the OMS offices.

Student/veterans have a shared identity (Bauman, 2009; Harmeyer, 2007) and they are a culture within the campus culture. They describe themselves in terms of their identity with other student/veterans, their mutual understanding of a code of behavior, and shared experiences. They describe themselves as being identifiable to each other through observational evidence. As a group they tend to maintain military haircuts, military postures, and use military language patterns. Military service is a source of their individual identity—externalized by visual and behavioral cues. Their student/veteran identity as a college student is secondary to their identity as a veteran, if it exists at all. A common perception was that they had successfully navigated the challenges encountered in the military so they will manage whatever they encounter in postsecondary education.

One student/veteran poignantly reflected on his college experience as "Well, my whole life has been a series of horrible incidents, one after another and I have also gotten through them, so I decided I'd just stick with it and it would eventually get better" (FY 11).

The reality of the college experience is that it is difficult and many of the student/veterans are not prepared either psychologically or academically. One interviewee stated, as an aside, that he entered school with the assumption that it should be a "piece of cake" after all he had been through. However, he went on to report that although it was not a life-and-death situation, "school was no piece of cake—it's really hard and I'm struggling."

The student/veterans with measurable academic deficits are, to some extent, at an advantage because their needs are identifiable through testing and developmental work. Lack of psychological preparation for student/veterans is more difficult to recognize and thus address. The feelings of isolation and not belonging are not readily measurable and yet contribute to the students' academic success.

Student participants acknowledge a need for help, but often do not know what type of help to request, nor how and where to turn for that help. Institutions must address these needs for assistance and help the student/veterans develop methods of identifying what they need from the academic environment. Bauman (2009) discusses the at-risk nature of student/veterans and notes that the student/veteran population brings two possible sources of risk to the academic environment. One is that many of the

student/veterans are first-generation college students and the second is that they "could be considered personally at-risk as a result of their war-zone experiences" (p. 184).

Some student/veterans reported feeling that the college does not care. To leave a combat zone and be thrust into "one of many" without any support can be a demoralizing experience. A 2-year institution student/veteran, first-time and first-generation college student expressed it this way:

> I just came back from Afghanistan [before coming here to school]. Let me say it like this—when I walked through that airport [in Baltimore] in my uniform I was somebody. All kinds of people were stopping me and thanking me. I really liked that—I would have liked to stay in the military, but I couldn't go back again because I got a kid and I just can't leave again. But then when I come here I got to stand in long lines, nobody even knows nothin' about me and treats me bad. I worked my way up to sergeant but so what? Here I'm just another dumb kid who can't get no answers. (TY 7)

This student/veteran had completed three combat tours and had decided to leave the military. He enrolled in school to obtain a 2-year degree for job purposes. He was enrolled in required developmental classes and was determined to move through them so he could start credit classes toward his degree, but self-reported having difficulty already. He also noted that it was discouraging to use such a big part of his GI Bill on classes that, as he described, did not "count." At the time of the interview he was in his first semester of attendance.

For many student/veterans, the college experience strikes them as a confusing maze through which newcomers must intuit a route. The campus environment seems overwhelming and the study participants reported that their interactions with administrative personnel were frustrating and confusing. They reported feeling unwelcome, as if they were bothering staff by being there.

Impact of the Study in Terms of What was Learned

Relatively little information exists about how the Post-9/11 GI Bill Era student/veteran population perceives its transition experiences from military service to college student. The existing studies tend to emphasize quantitative data about the population. Studies of the transition experience from military service to college student are almost nonexistent. This study highlights the need for institutions to study the student/veterans on campus, identify their needs, and then address those needs. This emerging and growing population brings a wealth of experience to the college campus. The student/veterans are positively anticipating the education experience and they intend to succeed. However, they need assistance in transitioning from military service to college student. This applies to both first-time college students and those with prior college experience. Institutions need to identify student/veterans at the time of entry and assist this population with the transition to from military service to college student. The student/veteran population on college campuses is expected to continue to increase (Eckstein, 2009) as a result of the benefits of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and now is this time for institutions to develop programs to help these men and women successfully complete their studies. It is well known that the legislation provides financial assistance for eligible

veterans to attend college. Benefits include tuition payments, fees, a book allowance, and a housing stipend, the amount of which is based on geographic location. Colleges are required to process the paperwork for GI recipients (Farrell, 2008) who enroll in their institution, but the support student/veterans need extends far beyond the benefits processing function. The student/veterans need emotional, social, and academic assistance from the campus.

Postsecondary institutions must deliberately prepare for the enrollment and matriculation of student/veterans. Student/veterans need a centralized source of accurate, reliable information about the campus and college studies. The information provided by the interviews convinces me that institutions must be deliberate in planning and developing campus programs to help student/veterans succeed. Student/veterans display the characteristics of a culture (Harmeyer, 2007), and as a campus culture, they have an identity and those who interact with them must understand their culture to better serve them. This includes personnel in the academic, financial aid, teaching, and counseling support services areas. Student/veterans need to be made aware of support services available to them, and also need a knowledgeable and responsive point of reference on campus who can help them obtain the appropriate assistance. Student/veterans are an at-risk population; a population which needs attention to academic and personal well-being, yet they frequently receive no support beyond benefit processing.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Limitations of the Study

As previously stated, the purpose was to provide data and information for postsecondary educators about the student/veteran population and their perceptions of the

transition experiences from military service to higher education. It is hoped this data and information will serve as a base of knowledge so that further studies can be conducted which may be used to determine development of appropriate campus programs to attract and support this emerging population.

A major strength was the in-depth interviews which resulted in detailed and broad-based information provided by each of the participants. Subjects were not constrained in their responses and were provided ample opportunities to express and elaborate on their individual situations.

The schools in the study are located in the greater metropolitan area of Washington, DC. The locations of the schools were strengths of the study because the student body populations reflect that of the area which is a highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, and age, resulting in sample study populations which were correspondingly diversified in ethnicity, gender, and age. Further, the geographic area is a popular location for both active duty and former military personnel from all services. The study participants included individuals from each of the services: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy.

However, a weakness of the study is this same small sample size. The study was designed to be an exploratory study which focused on an in-depth inquiry of the transition experiences of military personnel to college students. The researcher was limited with the number of interviews which could be conducted due to time constraints.

An additional limitation of the study is that there is no way to authenticate the subjects' responses. The veracity of the respondents' answers is not validated because the

responses were self-reported by each participant. As researcher, I did not have access to any official records or documents which would confirm the subjects' responses. It was not possible to examine tangible evidence which would verify information provided by the study participants.

A third limitation of the study was that it was impossible to determine the size of the student/veteran population at one of the institutions studied, because it does not keep records of student/veteran enrollment. The enrollment of student/veterans was estimated based on the numbers of individuals applying for benefits processing under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. This is not an accurate reflection of the actual student/veteran population because veterans may be attending college through self-financing, veterans' disability programs, the Montgomery GI Bill, or other programs, including service members who are on active duty and attending college. As part of the discussion and recruitment process for study participants at the 2-year community college, I discovered that there were several student/veterans who were deliberately not using the Post-9/11 GI Bill because they needed developmental and/or general education courses and did not want to use their education benefits up on those courses. These students were working full-time and were able to self-fund, in some cases, with employer assistance. It is interesting to note that their long-term education plans included graduate school and they intended to self-fund until they could achieve upper-division status academically. This issue did not arise at the 4-year institution, nor would I have expected it to, because the study participants happened to be in or beyond their third year of study.

Finally, a significant limitation of the study was that despite approval by its Office of Institutional Research, the 2-year institution's campus veterans' office was not helpful in recruiting student/veteran volunteers for the research despite earlier indications that they would support the study. A substantial problem with recruiting subjects at the 2-year institution was the difficulty in communicating with the student/veteran population. The Registrar's Office was unwilling to send a blanket announcement requesting volunteers to all students. This was an unexpected challenge because prior to submitting my research proposal, I had been assured that this would be an avenue to recruit study participants. When it actually came time to recruit volunteers for the study, the registrar deferred to the campus veterans office, and although they agreed to send an e-mail to their list of veterans, there was no way for me to determine whether or not that ever occurred.

All of the study participants at the 2-year institution were referred by word of mouth from campus faculty members, who were thus essential to disseminating requests for study participants. Without the support of the faculty members, this study would not have been possible. Recruitment issues for study participants in future studies should figure prominently in planning. All study participants at the 4-year institution were recruited through and with the assistance of the Office of Military Services who enthusiastically supported the study and provided a quiet campus location for the interviews.

Implications

Student/veterans have varied and often difficult transition experiences from military service to college student. Not only are they nontraditional students, but their

needs differ from those of other nontraditional students in higher education. Student/veterans in this study reported that they would like help with the transition experience, but were not certain of what they needed. Institutions might consider that addressing the needs of this population may increase the likelihood of student/veterans' successful adjustment to college and academic success. This section discusses the implications of these needs for theory and practice at postsecondary institutions.

Theoretical Implications

Given the varied backgrounds, education levels, experiences, physical, mental, and socialization experiences the student/veterans bring to the institution, *applying* selected learning theories is not clear in this research. What does, however, inform this research is the cultural/spiritual family of learning theory described by Tisdell (2003, 2005) and Brooks (2000). The participants' answers to the questions as well as their voluntary contributions about their transition experiences from military service to college student identify one overarching similarity: They all perceive themselves as members of the military culture. That is, they identify a specific set of social and behavioral mores as part of the military culture; they identify with fellow military members, both those known to them and those with whom they are not acquainted. The respondents frequently and uniformly spoke of being able to pick former military members out of the general population. They stated that they gravitated toward these people in classrooms and in five participants' cases on the 4-year campus, this recognition and subsequent discussion with former military members was how they learned about the Office of Military Services on campus, which then became an integral part of their campus experiences.

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As academic institutions welcome increasing numbers of student/veterans, attention to this population increases in the body of adult learning literature (Bauman, 2009; Herrmann, 2008; Herrmann et al., 2009; McBain, 2008). Traditionally student/veterans have been included in the general student population, with the only concession to their unique circumstances being the processing office for the purpose of handling GI Bill benefits. Emerging information about this population is causing a shift in scholarly exploration toward understanding how to assist this group of students to achieve academic success. As understanding grows a new segment of the adult learning discipline is developing, opening a dialogue among the community of educators about finding innovative, effective approaches to assimilating this population into the college community. A significant part of the discussion involves presenting critical questions about how to best serve this population. The conversation requires participation by all members of the campus community. Academic advising, faculty, staff, counseling, disability, and career placement services must work together to develop a holistic approach to serving this population.

The experiences discovered at both institutions in this study are reminiscent of Zmeyov's (1998) work which emphasizes that adult learners come to the academic institution with an established life context. As a result of this established life context, adult learners are more interested in developing a cooperative relationship with the educator than that desired by traditional students. This especially speaks to the findings at the 2-year institution in which student/veterans reported that their most frequent campus contact was with faculty members.

Henschke (2011), who has continued Knowles' work with andragogy, has developed assessment instruments for this theory (Knowles, 1989). This work has application for the student/veteran population, particularly in assessing their needs. Situational considerations continue to enjoy popularity in learning theory, reinforcing the belief that students must be comfortable in the learning environment (Grippin & Peters, 1984), a common belief shared by those who embrace behaviorism.

Although each learning theory has the potential to be relevant to student/veterans in postsecondary education, the broad umbrella under which transformative learning theory operates makes it ideal for designing programs to help student/veterans transition to higher education. Transformative learning draws on key changes in the learner's life and life experiences, resulting in additional changes in the learner. The focus of this research, then, was on transformative learning and how it may be used to facilitate learning experiences for student/veterans.

Practical Implications

It would be helpful for postsecondary institution to recognize the characteristics of today's student/veteran population. Early intervention by the institution will increase the likelihood of student/veteran academic success (Byman, 2007; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Institutions must develop dedicated, proactive programs to assist this population. The assistance needs to extend far beyond a social organization of student/veterans on campus (Herrmann, 2008; Herrmann et al., 2009).

Differences in the findings between the student/veterans at the 2-year campus versus the 4-campus were distinctive. Student/veterans at the 2-year campus reported a

high level of interaction with faculty, but virtually no interaction with other students, or with other student/veterans. They did express an intense desire to socialize with other student/veterans. They also expressed a sense of loss of the camaraderie experienced in the military. Conversely, the student/veterans on the 4-year campus expressed a low level of interaction with faculty members and a high level of interaction with fellow student/veterans. Similar to the respondents at the 2-year college, they reported little to no interaction with other students. They attributed the interaction with other student/veterans to the OMS and described it as "feeling like home."

Student/veterans who are ignored or treated as a number have diminished chances for a successful academic experience (Herrmann, 2008; Herrmman et al., 2009). The information collected indicates that student/veterans both want and need information and assistance about the transition process from military duty to college student (Murphy, 2011). This is evident in the responses from students at both institutions in this study.

Student/veterans miss some aspects of the support system they experienced in the military and seek the familiarity of a similar support group on campus. All respondents indicated that there were aspects of the military which they missed. The 4-year institution, which has established a dedicated Office of Military Services (OMS), fills a need expressed by the student/veterans and their answers to the interview questions indicated a level of satisfaction with their transition experience that they attributed to the OMS. Some of the respondents had been enrolled at the school prior to the opening of the OMS and noted the improvement of their campus experiences with its opening and subsequent growth. Other students had not known about the OMS and were having a

difficult time on campus, but the OMS filled a void in their campus life when they

discovered it. The primary way these students learned about the office was through other

student/veterans whom they said they tend to seek out in classes through recognition of

demeanor, attitudes, posture, grooming, or other attributes that they recognized in former

military personnel.

The students at the 2-year institution reported generally positive and frequent

interaction with faculty. They indicated a desire for more assistance about how to adjust

to college life, but did not identify specific suggestions of ways they could be assisted.

Several of the respondents indicated that they needed help, but did not know what they

needed. This majority of this group of respondents indicated they did not attend

orientation because they thought it was for younger students and they could not identify

with their classmates who seemed younger than they were.

Finally, it is important to recognize that 5 of the 25 student/veterans in this study

self-reported having received a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and

2 student/veterans reported a diagnosis of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). The

student/veterans providing this information at the 2-year college were unaware of the

avenues available to them of reporting this information to the campus Disability Services

Office which would then work with the student/veterans and their professors to provide

an appropriate plan to accommodate and/or support learning. They had not approached

faculty members requesting any accommodations because they did not realize that such a

program might be available. This definitely represents a lack of communication within

the college community and is a major problem. If the student/veterans attended an

orientation it is possible that they would have become acquainted with this information. However, the information needs to be available from multiple sources and repeated so that if they miss the information from one source, it may come again through another source.

The 2-year institution's student/veterans also were not aware that the college has a counseling office which can make referrals and provide short-term mental health assistance while helping the student find a longer-term situation. The lack of knowledge of this information by student/veterans suggests that the student/veterans may lack knowledge of other campus services which could also improve the likelihood of academic success.

Recommendations

First and foremost, institutions must recognize that student/veterans are a subculture of the college culture and they must be able to identify their student/veterans. At the 2-year institution studied, there was no reliable way to identify campus student/veterans, so the current methodology relied on the number of GI Bill certifications processed as the number of student/veterans. This method of self-identification is an artificial number and does not necessarily reflect the actual number of student/veterans who are matriculating. Some student/veterans may self-fund in the early years of their education, especially when developmental work is required. This allows them to reserve their GI Bill benefits for the generally more expensive 4-year institutions and, in some cases, graduate school. Student/veterans also may be funded through disability benefits or some other form of military-related assistance, other than the GI

Bill. The definition of a student/veteran should not be limited to one attending school under some version of the GI Bill, but needs to be expanded to include all those with prior military service.

Colleges and universities can assist student/veterans by recognizing their unique needs and providing services and programs that support them with the transition process from military service to college student. The college environment emphasizes the individual and is significantly less structured than the military. Student/veterans are often lost in this environment which is new to them. In addition to the usual changes associated with leaving military service and transitioning to civilian life such as possible relocation, reintegration into the family, and return to a nonmilitary community, student/veterans face an additional set of challenges in adjusting to college life. Student/veterans, new or returning to the college campus, must learn a new vocabulary related to college terms, create workable academic schedules, and use or develop individual study skills. Assistance with these tasks may be provided through a dedicated office (as in the case of one of the institutions studied), as an add-on to an existing office as in an extension of the Campus Veterans office, added to the advising area, or included as a faculty function.

Training faculty members about the student/veteran population and the campus services available for this population is essential to assisting this population. With respect to the 2-year institution in this study, the student/veterans' positive responses to the faculty and the fact that faculty were the most frequent point of campus contact for this population indicates that equipping faculty with the information necessary to assist the student veterans could facilitate their transition experiences. A training program should

be developed to familiarize faculty members with veterans' issues. The institution would be well-served to capitalize on this existing relationship and equip the faculty members to serve as a conduit for student/veteran information. This gap is not being met by the campus Veterans Services office—nor is it the purpose of that office. In addition to training for faculty members, administrative personnel need to be aware of the needs of the student/veteran population so that they may appropriately refer members of this population to campus support services which can provide appropriate and informed assistance.

Centralizing application, registration, course selection, testing, and veterans' benefits processing services for student/veterans at the 2-year college campus would minimize the likelihood of the student/veterans receiving contradictory information about the enrollment process.

Providing support for student/veterans through recognizing their presence on campus is crucial to creating positive, productive opportunities for this campus population, as well as a smooth transition from actively duty to college student. The student/veterans need a support service in addition to the administrative and benefits processing service of the campus veterans' offices. The piece that is missing in the 2-year college studied is the support structure for student/veterans; the sense of community that such an integral part of military service is suddenly removed and the student is thrust into a situation without that sense of community. The student/veteran participants had been unable to create a support group on their own, although they had made multiple attempts. The research in this study indicates that they need a campus presence dedicated to their

campus experience. The 4-year institution had a dedicated Office of Military Services (OMS) which was frequently referred to by the study participants as "a lifesaver." According to their responses, they were grateful for the office which provided them a place to congregate with other veterans, rest, and experience quiet study areas with computers, snacks, and support from college employees who were ready to advocate on their behalf when appropriate. When student/veterans were asked what could improve campus life, they responded that immediate in-state tuition for student/veterans would be very much appreciated. They discussed the challenge of staying where they were when they left the military versus returning to their point of entry, often in a different state and area of the country. If they maintained residency in their home state, they would be eligible for in-state tuition in that state. However, they may have established ties to their current location and now consider it home. Additionally, they expressed the feeling that the job market may be better in their current location versus returning to their indoctrination location, creating further incentive not to move. Another area of interest was campus housing for former military personnel for both individuals and families, located at or near the institution.

Summary

Postsecondary institutions must recognize that student/veterans bring unique circumstances to the institutions. The benefits of exploring ways to serve this population supersede the challenges, complexities, and considerations presented when we try to make sense of these experiences. The findings of this study indicate that student/veterans at both of the included institutions struggled with the transition experience.

The student/veterans at the 4-year institution relied heavily on the Office of Military Service. Although they expressed some frustration with the administrative aspects of the institution, those frustrations were neutralized and were considered secondary to the positive feelings generated by the support they reported receiving through the OMS. The suggestions and desires expressed by the student/veterans at the 4-year campus can be readily incorporated into the practices of the OMS.

As adult learning educators in the 21st century we face ever-expanding opportunities to explore the discipline and push its boundaries to new limits. The student/veteran transition experiences call upon us to develop and practice a multidimensional approach to assisting this population with their transition experiences by expanding our vision in both practice and theory to promote student-centered learning and success.

Interview Transcriptions

The written transcripts from the recorded interviews are provided here. The 4-year school subjects are designated by the letters FY and the number of the interview. The 2-year school subjects are designated by the letters TY and the number of the interview. Responses are presented in order of the questions, beginning with the 4-year group's responses, followed by the 2-year group's responses.

Question 1: Contact With College Employees

With reference to college employees, with whom do you have the most frequent contact?

FY11: This office is here—it is really—helpful here—before I even started here I found their website and OMS [Office of Military Services] would always answer my questions and then I see the ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] around campus and I really like that because I really liked being on base.

FY10: Student vets comprise almost all of my social network. Obviously, I have friends in class and all that kind of stuff that aren't vets, girlfriends aren't vets, stuff like that, but the majority of my contact is with other vets.

FY9: Military population and here at the office of military services.

FY8: I mostly come here to the Office of Military Services.

FY7: I come to the Performing Arts Center where my children take music lessons. And then I come to Office of Military Services.

FY6: I mostly interact with faculty and students in the Military Services Office. I rarely interact with other students.

FY5: I'm usually here in the center [Office of Military Services] if I have any free time.

FY4: Mostly I interact with students and faculty in the Military Services Office [Office of Military Services].

FY3: All the people in the Office of Military Services. I had to deal with vets' office at _____ [former college], so when I came here, I found this and I ran into my friend and he helped me a lot transitioning from _____ [former college]. For me it was really hard process, lots of paperwork.

FY2: ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] professors.

FY1: No comment.

TY1: Math lab facilitator [faculty].

TY2: Most contact is with my professors. All of my classes are face to face.

TY3: I have the most contact with one of the veterans' assistants. I was sent to their office from admissions. It's on a need-to-know basis, so I go there at various times. They help me with registering for classes, getting my books, and getting my checks.

TY4: Professors. Mostly everything is pretty easy, haven't had problems.

TY5:   The most frequent contact I have is with my professors. I prefer face to face to online. I previously tried that in a master's program and did not like it. It was okay, but the thing I didn't like was the group projects—there were people that did not do the work, but the grade was the same. There were about 3-4 out of 10-12 that did all the work and even though this was brought to the attention of the instructor, there was really nothing he could do about it—that was just the way the course was set up.

TY6:   No comment.

TY7:   Actually, I can pretty much find my own answers—I'm on the Internet or something.

TY8:   Professors.

TY9:   Professors.

TY10: Faculty.

TY11: Professors.

TY12: I would have to say the Veterans' Office. Mostly I go there to verify that I am in the system. I think they call it certification, but I have to do it each semester.

TY13: I use the base education office at _____ [name of nearby military base].

TY14: Professors and Veterans' Office advisor on campus.

TY15: Professors, but when I sign up at the beginning of each semester I go to the VA office. That's all I've needed. When I started, I was in the registrar's office I saw the VA sign so that's how I found out about it.

Question 2: How Respondent Chose the Institution

Why did you choose to attend your institution?

FY11: Location.

FY10: I came to _____ [name of 4-year school] because there was just nowhere
       else I wanted to go. _____ was such an obvious, good choice, that I
       wouldn't go anywhere else. I knew it was very military friendly; I've lived
       in the DVM [DC, VA, MD] area, I'm familiar with the area, I've lived
       around here all my life.

FY9:   The location was convenient.

FY8:   I first came here 3 years ago for 1 semester because of the convenience
       and cost so I just decided to come back.

FY7:   Because it is close to where I live and I liked the programs.

FY6:   We live here in Fairfax. It was the closest place to go to school and it's not
       a bad school.

FY5:   I considered _____ [name of college] and _____ [name of college] but
       um, probably because at that point I was married. I wasn't so concerned
       about where I was going, but at the same time I didn't want to go to an
       online institution. _____ [name of college] was close.

FY4:   Well, I lived in _____ [name of nearby city] and did first 2 years at _____
       [name of local college]. I looked at _____ and _____, but with your
       housing allowance depends on where your school is. The housing

allowance here is about $500/month. More than _____ [name of nearby city].

FY 3:   Came here because I went to _____ [name of 4-year college] before joining the _____ [name of service].

FY2:   Well I applied to lots of schools and got accepted, but they all, with the exception of _____, said I had to wait a year—but _____ let me start right away. And also _____, lots of credits were transferred in—Advanced Placement credits.

FY1:   I was attending school here before I entered the military so I came back here. I went on a tour with my cousin who was the dean of admissions at the time. It was either go to _____ or try something new. I lived on the campus, but the military was still a calling for me and I was cleared medically. [Respondent is referring to reason for leaving the 4-year institution and entering the military].

TY1:   Seemed like good fit, open enrollment, cost, location.

TY2:   This is the closest school to where I live, but it's still a long way. It takes me an hour and a half to get here and two and a half hours to get home. I go by bus, train, and bus to campus and then reverse it when I go home.

TY3:   I came here because I was in the process of moving from one state to another and this was the fastest place that let me in.

TY4:   Well, my original plan when I transitioned from the Coast Guard was to attend _____ [name of selective 4-year research university] and get my

accounting degree and my transcript wasn't up to snuff, let's say so I'm

here to validate my ability. I just did some research and here I am. I still

plan to transfer to _____.

TY 5: My husband and I participated with the _____ [name of program] which is

part of the workforce development program and that's the _____

[location]. It was a 10-week introductory course into the construction

industry whereupon successful completion of the course, you'd receive

various certifications and credentials related to the construction industry.

If you successfully complete the course you get a $2,000 scholarship, an

internship job, or interviews in the construction industry. So we decided to

come to school. We were in church, you have to be a resident of the

county and you have to be unemployed. I am planning to pursue a degree

in fire science and I'm marrying it with the construction in training so I

can become a green auditor and would like to work with businesses so

when they build a new building everything is a green environment. [Very

detailed description of what building materials and processes.] And there

are very few women in the construction compliance industry and I haven't

done any research, but I think there are very few African American

women in the field.

TY6: I got a notice from the VA that there was a new GI Bill and it sounded

good, so I decided to go back to school. I'd attended _____ [name of

school] before I went in _____ [name of service] so I decided to come

back here. And I'm a resident of the county so I could afford it.

TY7:   Well, my mother went here a few years ago and they still send us the

schedules, so I looked in there and they didn't give enough information

like for the veterans and stuff, so I came up here and I saw the office

downstairs [referring to the campus Veterans Office] and I just went in.

TY8:   I have a daughter and son and this school was easier with my schedule.

TY9:   Well, I started planning on my last cruise—and I was looking at _____—

where I'd been before, _____, _____, or _____ [names of colleges]. And

then I thought, the degree is only as strong as the person and I knew I

would do better in a school with smaller classes and more individual

attention so I chose here.

TY10: Saw flyer for police academy and it offered GI Bill, so I pursued it and

was eventually able to be admitted to the program.

TY11: To get used to being in school—I've been out a long time and I was

nervous about going to school. So, I thought this school could help me get

used to being a student. Also, I want to pursue an associate's degree so

this works fine.

TY12: Well, I got a notice from the VA [federal office] explaining the new Post-

9/11 GI Bill and I was eligible for the program for 70% of the education

costs. The fact that I would also receive a housing stipend made it possible

for me to go.

TY13: I was at _____ [name of nearby military base] and had taken some classes

when I was active duty so I just stayed with it. [Note: The 2-year college

in the study has a satellite campus at the nearby military base.]

TY14: Convenient.

TY15: Well—it's close. I live about 7 miles from here.

Question 3: How the Institution Could Facilitate the Administrative Process

What could the institution provide that would facilitate the administrative

processes for you?

FY11: No response.

FY10: I think it should be easier for military that go straight to _____ [name of

school] to get in-state tuition. As it stands now, the state of Virginia says

you don't have to wait the 1-year waiting period, but _____ [name of

school] says, or often says, "Well, you are only living in Virginia for

academic reasons, so therefore, you don't qualify for in-state tuition."

Well, a lot of us…where else are we going to go? I think there should be

an easier way to get that done.

FY9: Nothing—this office really helps.

FY8: Well, I'm _____ [name of service] and I'm really having a hard time with

[the] Post-9/11 GI Bill. It's so complicated and I was supposed to get it

last semester, but the rules are real hard to understand and it's hard to get

stuff from my CO [commanding officer—a noncommissioned officer].

FY7: I really would have liked to have received a pamphlet listing all the college benefits and things to do on campus. I've been out of school for 20 years and lots of things have changed.

FY6: Being open at night and other times when people who work are here.

FY5: No comment.

FY4: I paid the Office of Military Services a visit before I came to school here. But actually doing business is minimal because so much of it is online. If you have questions they're always here for you

FY 4: I would have been nice to have better counseling, but [pause]…maybe somebody from the military side of the house, make sure everything's okay. Like I said, at _____ [previous college name] we had only one very overworked veteran representative.

FY3: Identify veterans and help them.

FY2: Nothing.

FY1: No comment.

TY1: Help us with everything—they are not helpful, they don't know what's going on with vets. Transportation to campus from Metro would help for those with physical injury—like me.

TY2: It would be better if the VA office was more accessible—have longer hours. Also, it would be good to have night hours.

TY3: As far as it goes, enrollment is okay until they have to deal with VA status. They don't really know what's going on. Like, there was one

incident...I hadn't been paid by the VA yet and the people in admissions

were saying I had to get an ID and I told them I was a veteran and that my

tuition was going to be paid, they still didn't know what to do until finally

a representative from the Veterans' Office came over and explained it to

them.

TY4:   The administrative process worked fine for me. There were never any

missed calls or things did not go right. Everything was pretty

straightforward—just show your DD 214 [The DD214 form is the

servicemember's record of separation from the military (Department of

Defense, 2014)] for the GI Bill and get your classes. You know, they

reviewed my transcript and everything was done as per the website. I

registered online. I did come up here _____ [name of 2-year college] to

get some more direction, but I sat like 30 minutes in the VA office, so I

guess they could use more people, but it worked fine for me.

TY5:   So you go online, you pick your classes, and then it goes to Financial Aid

and if you don't pay within 24 hours, you're dropped and then you have to

reregister. There is something missing because they know you're on

financial aid, but you get dropped and have to reregister. There should be

a process where the Financial Aid knows who's in the program. You have

to go on and find out what happened. If you don't check—you don't know

you're dropped.

TY6:   No comment.

TY7:   Mainly, the wait was bad. I mean you'd wait for a couple hours and then leave to go look for a place [to live]. In between registering I was looking for a place and stuff like that and it took me, like, about a week to get done, because I'd come back, make an appointment, then come back and that was the worst part. To be honest, that same thing happens a lot in the military—they call it "hurry up and wait." You get this and then you wait—same with registering. I saw that a lot with the people who wanted to register. They just leave and don't come back—it's discouraging, but because I've been through that a whole lot, but you know, if you want to do it you got to do it, so I'd just come back.

TY8:   Well, I started in spring of 2011 and everything went smoothly; registration, placement tests, used web page to get information, visited campus VA office.

TY9:   No comment.

TY10:   Eliminate conflicting information. Different people tell you different things. Was referred to the VA office and things got better.

TY11:   They could be more accurate in the registration process. There are lots of errors and even though they know that they'll get paid, they drop you from your classes. It really took me a couple of terms to get it down so I knew what to do.

TY12:   No comment.

TY13:   More help with scheduling and looking for a job.

TY14: Have applications at administration and meet with advisor in person, then VA rep. Have everything in one place. It's hard to run all around for tests, books, etc.

TY14: I had to learn to spread my classes out and adjust my schedule for studying time.

TY15: Well, it was really overwhelming for me because I work and go to school. I'd never done anything like this before.

Question 4: How the Institution Could Facilitate the Learning Process

What could the institution provide that would facilitate the learning process for you?

FY11: My first college experience I was really terrified because I did really bad in high school. But when I was at _____ [name of community college] I did really well. It wasn't until I got to _____ [name of 4-year college] that I had trouble. I had marital problems and I took all upper-level classes at _____ and they were a lot harder. I hadn't dabbled much in scholarly journals before then, but now I have a stack of them at home. There was lots of writing, lots of writing. Research is all I do in all my classes. One of my girlfriends told me she went all the way through college and she didn't do any research. But it's my problem to get through.

FY10: When you say learning process, it sounds like it applies directly to classroom and I really don't think that _____ [name of 4-year college] can do anything like that for me.

FY9: I think there are some nonacademic things that wouldn't hurt being changed. Um, but as it is now, at least academically speaking, I've never had any issues or felt like I could use extra help here and there because I'm a veteran of the war, something like that. Even if I weren't a veteran, I feel like college is kind of easy. At least the second semester of your freshman year.

FY9: Well, I view learning as requiring self-motivation so I don't expect anything from the institution.

FY8: I view learning as coming from being self-motivated.

FY7: I'm very self-motivated.

FY6: You know, I hate saying this, but some of the teachers show up and it's like, I'm here just to get a paycheck. There's a lot of times there is a big disconnect between what's being taught and what's being tested.

FY5: I met other veterans in class, those…they were the people I gravitated toward—as soon as I realized that another person [student/veteran] was in the class. And then I started talking to _____ and _____ [veterans who started the Office of Military Services]. They first started in a tiny cubicle in the Admissions Office and then they moved to the lobby of the Admissions Office which was redone into offices and then finally they moved here—which didn't look like it does now. Then they _____ [name of 4-year college] did some construction and when we moved back here, usage really increased. Not only do they come in and ask questions, but

they now have a lounge to hang out in so there are tons of people here now.

FY 4: Really, it's been pretty easy for me. The language and history 300 [junior-level classes] have been the toughest for me. Other than those, it's been very manageable, but I think a lot of that is being older. In the capstone class, there is as much guidance as you want, but you have got to ask.

FY3: Right now, I'm taking _____ [name of subject] classes and half of my professors now are foreigners and I don't know how they passed the screening test or what, because their English is just terrible. If you're going to be in a leadership position you should speak the language. I've had a couple of professors that don't explain anything to you, but a lot of the professors here just expect you to already know everything and it's extremely difficult and that's why I'm going to have to change my major.

FY2: No comment.

FY1: For me it's pretty easy because I'm used to the classroom, but the students can be annoying.

TY1: I think the teachers are pretty good—so I'm okay with that.

TY2: More practice/lab hours. Also, the course supplies are very expensive and the VA payments are slow. Also, I didn't know how to get the VA to pay for my course supplies but then I found out how to ask. Student registration is overwhelming. You wait and wait in line and then they tell you to go somewhere else and start all over.

TY3:   I don't really think there is any problem with the learning process and classes. You can't really control people so each person has to be responsible for themselves. Like I don't think it would be helpful to have a class full of veterans because we are supposed to be getting used to being in the civilian world and we just have to do it.

TY4:   Well, I'm kind of a special case so it's fine—I haven't had any problems. I mean personally I've never had any problems in school or anything, or with learning. Mostly lecture; I'm taking primarily business courses which don't have too much lab work. As far as I'm concerned, I'm getting everything I need from the institution.

TY5:   No comment.

TY6:   I'm doing okay—the developmental instructors are good and helpful.

TY7:   Actually, all my instructors have been positive, positive, positive. One of them he was a teacher of mine in high school. I didn't like him back then, but I remembered him. He still has the same teaching style, but I know why he teaches like that. A lot of the young people, they don't get it, but I know why. It's just to push you, so to say, but back then, I was like, "Nobody talk to me like that," but now, going through life, the way I am now, he's just saying that to push you. The only thing I probably would say, like early in the morning I see a lot of people falling asleep and I think they should at least let you bring something to drink. A lot of my

classes, you can't bring coffee or anything. Just from my experience, it's nice to bring coffee or something. That would help.

TY8:   All of them have been pretty good, quick response times to e-mail and questions. [My program] has all face-to-face classes, no labs.

TY9:   I really don't have any idea. I just know it's a lot to get used to. I guess I'm comfortable.

TY9:   Speed up the payments—because I've been waiting 2 months already. But fortunately, I have a small ice cream business, so I'm okay and I planned for this. But still, it's nerve-racking until you know everything is going to work right.

TY10: Well, I don't know. I feel out of the loop. I just study and go to class. I really miss the guys in the military.

TY11: Tutoring and help doing things. It also would help to have more support from the campus VA office. I'd like to have regular contact from them.

TY12: My best instructors are the ones who love their subject. There are some general ed classes I didn't think I would like and the instructors actually helped me enjoy the topic. The thing is that in my second developmental math class, I have a regular math teacher who has never taught developmental and he doesn't realize that we need more help. Well, we have a math lab, but it's all computerized so it's not too helpful. I'm failing the math class and I don't know what's going to happen. I've never heard anything about the GI Bill helping with tutoring.

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TY13: Well, I like learning, but some of the teachers' skills are off. Some of them

think you know more than you do and assume that the students

understand.

TY14: The ones who told us about the math and writing centers. The teachers

really want students to succeed. I can't say anything negative. They help

motivate us.

TY15: Well, I use the [subject] lab.

Question 5: Institutional Practices or Policies

What specific institutional practices or policies helped you transition to the role of

college student?

FY11: Well, my whole life has been a series of horrible incidents, one after

another and I have also gotten through them, so I decided I'd just stick

with it and it would eventually get better.

FY10: I also think that for the orientations, new student orientations—both in the

summer and in the winter—I think that the military people should have an

option of checking a box and going to a military orientation so that the

orientation group is all other veterans.

FY9: No comment.

FY8: No comment.

FY7: I didn't expect any, so it was like being a freshman again, but there also

isn't any prejudice against older or returning students.

FY6: General Studies were not helpful courses; they were a waste of time. Also, all the services I needed were closed when I was here—they close in the evening.

FY5: None of my credits would transfer which is one of the reasons I went back there _____ [to the community college he had attended] and finished my AA because then the whole thing would transfer as a package.

FY4: No comment.

FY3: No comment.

FY2: There's a law that employers can't discriminate based on service, but some professors I've had aren't flexible with my reserve schedule. Right now, I'm having trouble with my [name of subject] professor—she won't let me make something up that I missed so my ROTC captain is intervening for me and we'll see what happens. But I find that kind of ironic, because the athletes, not to shoot them down, but they get permission to leave classes and I'd kind of like to see something similar with the military so that you can do your reserve duty and not have a problem with classes.

FY1: Well I thought it was an easy transition because you always sit in a classroom in the military—there is always some kind of training. I guess the students are the ones that can be the annoying part. The questions that they ask or the respect, really lack of respect that they show the teacher

and that sort of thing. But then, I've had a great experience with the

professors here.

TY1: Just me being who I am—I ask a lot of questions, but mostly I go to the

VA office downtown.

TY2: No comment.

TY3: Personally, I don't want to say I need hand holding, but I need more

personal adjustment because it's like I've just landed here. It has not been

an easy transition. It's just like "bam" and here I am.

TY4: Yes, they walked me through everything and it was extremely painless.

My official out date was 11/29/2011 and I registered for classes in mid-

December. There wasn't anything to it.

TY5: No comment.

TY6: Nothing from the school—I'm self-motivated and try to stay a step ahead.

TY7: This is my first college experience, because this is like the only thing that

I'm doing. That's one of the benefits, if it wasn't for the 9/11 GI Bill I

probably wouldn't be doing this. Because it benefits me, like I want to be

a millionaire in a few years so I need to learn it and get all the experience

and stuff. It's like I'm doing this for a reason—it's to better myself and for

my family to make them comfortable and you can tell that I feel a little bit

discouraged and then that voice pops in my head and I say, "You know

why you're doing this, right?" I don't want to disappoint them or anything

so that's what keeps me going. They had an orientation, but I didn't go to

it, because for me, it's just straighter that I go to class. Didn't need

somebody to tell me that 'cause I've been through a lot more since then—I

understand what I have to do.

TY8: No comment.

TY9: Well, having the structure from the military has been real helpful.

TY10: Nothing, it's been hard because it's so different. There are so many things

to think about and manage.

TY11: Really, it's what I brought with me that helped. I've learned a lot about

life and that helps. Also, my goal is to create a nonprofit so it helps to have

a goal.

TY12: No comment.

TY13: I'm still adjusting. It's a huge career move to go from working in the

military to full-time student.

TY15: A few of the teachers here are veterans and they recognize another veteran

and so do other students. But, really there is no special treatment, either

positive or negative. It would be helpful to have more evening hours.

Question 6: Influential Faculty Characteristics

What characteristics do you attribute to faculty members who have had positively

or negatively affected your college experience?

FY11: All the professors are very different, but some of them are very helpful. I

had one last semester and he told the class "If you have any special

interests let me know and I'll see if I can work this into the class." So I

sent him a long e-mail telling him how I got here and that I don't know exactly what I'm going to do. So he sat down with me a few times and we talked about various things and physical therapy and he got me set up to observe a physical therapist and to see what the job was like and he also contacted somebody else about one of the master's degree programs and he was really helpful. There was a few days when I was crying in his office—I had a lot of life stresses. I was going to the _____ [name of 4-year college] campus and I wasn't prepared for how much work I'd do.

FY10:   No comment.

FY9:   There is a great disparity in the quality of teachers here. The most positive have experience in the real world but some of them just exist in an academic environment.

FY8:   I like the Military Services Office. Some teachers are really good, one teacher teaches me all than more the other teachers combined. They both have actual experience in the field—so maybe they are adjunct.

FY7:   There is one professor in my program that is exceptionally helpful. She establishes a personal relationship with each student. For example, she asked each of us to send her an e-mail describing what we plan to do with our degrees. Then she met with us individually and had researched our respective interests. She provided personal contacts and ideas for us to consider. She is really great and I would go back to her even though I'm not in her class anymore.

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FY6:   _____ [name of school] has lots of nontraditional students and they don't
            need hand holding.

FY5:   I was really worried about that when I came back to school. I expected to
            have some problems, but every professor I've had has been very receptive
            to the whole veteran thing. I can't think of any professors I've had any
            problems with. Sometimes the professor in class would ask if anybody had
            any experience in the military. I would always raise my hand and it was
            always very comfortable. But I've got the haircut or something comes up
            about the military.

FY4:   I really don't like it when professors bring their own political viewpoints
            into the class. I find it very unprofessional. Most of the time it doesn't
            even pertain to the class...I think the professors have been very bright and
            knowledgeable, but when they bring their view into the class I don't like it
            and it's not the place for it. We're here to learn the subject at hand so that
            kind of raises my hackles sometimes. But I learn from every professor.

FY3:   Well, they're doing public service.

FY2:   I guess the best way to learn through a professor is for them to help us
            work through things—especially like problems. Anecdotes help a lot.
            That's the best way I remember stuff. Most of my classes are lectures.

FY1:   Positively: When I'm pulled away by _____ [name of branch of service]
            to do something during the week, they haven't given me any pushback or
            anything. I think just understanding is a huge characteristic. I think in this

area they are used to the military. Negatively: Some professors ask why you're quiet or why you're sitting in the corner. I guess that's not really negative but it makes me feel uncomfortable. I mean, in front of other students—I don't think they're trying to call me out. It depends on the professor.

TY1: Mostly the faculty are good—they try to help you understand things.

TY2: The instructors are really helpful. That's one good thing. They give you lots of interaction and support.

TY3: No comment.

TY4: The faculty and everybody are very helpful. They are trying to get you where you want to go. I mean there are some teachers who aren't as good, but I mean, as far as I can tell it's always about what you [the student] needs, "How can we help you?" If you just come to class and do your work, they are going to take care of you. That's reassuring. Like when I was in school for three years before [name of military service] service, the professors weren't as forthcoming. This was at a different institution in _____ [city name]. I was in international relations and wanted to be a diplomat, but I didn't know how it worked. And that's something I learned in the military, that you don't just graduate and become a diplomat. You know, have to go through the state department and do duties on somebody's staff and like, do this, do that. I was the enlisted liaison with

different countries and that's how I learned about this. Oh—wow—I wouldn't have gotten here until I was 50 and I'm 23 now.

TY5: Because I'm an instructor as well, I have an understanding of the different types of learners. For me, I'm a combination of visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic as well. My learning style is based on the instructor. So far, the instructors that I have, very seasoned, very engaging and make it easy to learn. It's easy for me to pick up—I have a business class, a criminal justice class, and a construction management class. I'm just getting back from a 2-week break—my mother died. Before I left I had an opportunity to visit each class one time. I can take the book and I can read the text and I can understand what the text was telling me based on the classroom environment. It's easy for me. But then again, I find it has a lot to do with me and my background. I teach [Microsoft] Word 1 and 2 at the _____ library—as a volunteer.

TY6: It was a pleasant surprise. They love their subjects so it helps me learn. Also, the ones with a sense of humor are good.

TY7: No comment.

TY8: No comment.

TY9: No comment.

TY10: Professors want students to interact with material. Personal attention from instructors. Good professors.

TY11: The professors have all been great—they are good teachers and they really

try to get students involved (I really like the _____ courses).

TY12: No comment.

TY13: Just what I said earlier about them thinking we [students] know more than

we do.

TY15: Almost all the faculty are good, some of them are great and I've only had

one bad professor here. It was for _____ [name of subject] and it wasn't

the class, it was that she was a bad teacher. But otherwise, I've been very,

very pleased. So I can't say what makes one teacher better than another,

but I can tell you what's bad. But I do like repetition. One of my teachers

gives lots of problems and you just keep doing them until you get it. That

technique works well for _____ classes. She was disrespectful, she was

always late, she gave no clarification on assignments. There were four

veterans in the class and none of us took what she was throwing at us. The

others—the kids—were asking "Why are you fighting with her?" They

were more timid and just "took it."

Question 7: Academic Advisors

How do you perceive the role of the academic advisor in your transition

experiences?

FY11: Yes, I do—the advisor is in my dept. She deals with all the [name of

subject] students, but I do a lot of it on my own. I just find it easier to

figure it out myself.

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FY10: No comment.

FY9: I really don't use them—I just figured out that [name of major] would work best with my background.

FY8: I use this office [Military Services Office] and myself.

FY7: I like to work with one of my professors.

FY6: I have been assigned an advisor, but my wife is my true academic counselor at _____ University [a local university] and she basically helps me. But my academic advisor here is nice, too.

FY5: Um, no. I know it who it's supposed to be. I just figure my classes out. I went to her two times, just to check in and make sure I'm doing everything right. I was originally a _____ [name of major] at _____ [previous institution] and the last semester I realized it wouldn't transfer so I switched to [name of major] and when I got here I decided to broaden my horizons and break out of the stereotype. I want to do something international. I studied Spanish and Modern Standard Arabic.

FY4: Yes, I'm assigned one. The last time I saw her was at orientation, until today. She helps me make sure I'm taking the right courses to get the degree. She's in the _____ department. [Note: This student is a senior and will graduate at end of semester.]

FY3: I had an advisor at _____ [previous institution] who recommended I stay with Chinese.

FY2: Yes, my academic advisor is the assistant dean at the honors college and sometimes I go to the one in the _____ department. They are both qualified. I'm in the honors program and they have smaller classes.

FY1: I really use the Office of Military Services, but before that I relied on the _____ [name of military service] career counselor.

TY1: Don't use them because they never know the answer to my problems or situation. Plus there is a long waiting time to see them.

TY2: I picked my own classes when I came here, but it was my first time to come to college. I don't have an advisor.

TY3: No comment.

TY4: I haven't really talked to an academic advisor. I mean I talked to some guy when I registered, but that's it. I mean, I've got here a pretty solid plan— XYZ—this will happen. I'm not saying I don't need an advisor, but I'm saying I haven't had any issues. I'm a little older than these other guys [students].

TY5: No comment.

TY6: Well, I use the one at _____ [name of nearby military base] as needed.

TY7: No, because I pretty much know what I have to do. I just signed up for my own classes.

TY8: They're general academic advisors.

TY9: I don't use one, I registered online.

TY10: I've never really used one.

TY11: The VA is my academic advisor. I go to the VA office downtown.

TY12: No comment.

TY13: I still go to _____ [name of nearby military base] for help, so I've never used the advisors here. The [military base education] advisors are real good—they've given me lots of guidance.

TY14: The VA here, though—I've seen like 4 different reps and I always get a different answer. I would like more help with finding a job and help with resumes and some workshops. I'm not working and would like to have a part-time-job.

Interviewer question: Are you aware that the campus has a dedicated veterans' job placement person?

TY14: No, I've never heard about that.

TY15: Not officially, but when I got ready to graduate, I went and found out I can get an AA so that's why I'm taking the history class in addition to the others. I didn't know about it before. But I don't think I'm assigned a specific one.

Question 8: Campus Veterans' Support Group

Does a support group for veterans exist on your campus?

FY11: Not at _____ [name of prior college], but here there is. I have a classmate who was a former Marine so then I started coming up here.

FY10: Well, yes and no. I'm the President and we have the main officers, but the positions that I made up aren't filled. But I requested material from SVA

[Student Veterans' Association] and they were really slow in getting it to me—so I'm going to be really slow in chartering with them. But it would be good because it would really open up our options in the student/veterans community.

FY9: There is one in addition to the Military Services Office.

FY8: I'm sure it does, but honestly I don't feel like a veteran because I have never deployed.

FY7: Not that I know. Never heard of it, but there are some things I've been learning on my own but when I come here [Military Services Office] I find out a lot of things—like the free tickets at the performing arts center. Most vets haven't been in school for 20 or 30 years, so the extra benefit things that most people take for granted are something really nice. I didn't know about the capabilities available through the research librarians. It's wonderful, but I'm stumbling upon it and this office should be like a little home base for us as veterans coming back to school and it would really be nice if there were a packet.

FY6: There is one here in the Office of Military Services.... It recruits by just telling people about it, but I don't participate. Most of the times you can just tell, sometimes it comes up in conversation.

FY5: Yes.

FY4: I haven't been able to do much—I still have a family.

FY3: I know we have a veterans' society group.

FY 2: Yes, we do. The Student Veterans' Association and a separate Semper Fi [Marine] group.

FY1: Yes.

TY1: Yes.

TY2: I never hear from the VA office on campus.

TY3: It might be good to have a support group on campus, but I've never heard of one.

TY4: They are trying to go, from my experience.

TY5: No comment.

TY6: Yes, they have monthly meetings.

TY7: To be honest with you, I don't know.

TY8: I've seen flyers, but I have not attended it.

TY9: Honestly, I have no idea.

TY10: I honestly don't know.

TY11: Yes, I think so.

TY12: I think so, yes.

TY13: I've never heard of one. No—I've never heard anything about it. I'd go if they had day meetings and the time.

TY14: I don't know anything about it. I would go if they had daytime meetings.

TY15: Just recently I've been hearing about it, but I'm almost done here. But if I could, I would participate—especially if it would help out other veterans.

Question 9: Participation in Campus Veterans' Support Group

Do you participate in a veterans' support group on campus?

FY11: Now I'm a recruiter for the veterans' society. I don't really know about the SVA. They do a lot of stuff. We have a race coming up, went to the Shamrock Fest downtown, last Friday of every month have a happy hour, reserved kiosk downstairs so we're going to try to find other ways. Since I've been coming here to this office [Military Services Office] it has totally changed my college experience. I'm a little older, I'm 27 and now I'm a single mom, but since I've been coming here—it kind of feels like when you're in the military and you have a break and you're just kind of hanging out together.

FY10: I'm considered a member. All college vets are members.

FY9: Yes, if they are during the day, I go to the meetings.

FY8: No.

FY7: No, but if they were during the day, I would go to the meetings.

FY6: Last semester I participated in _____ [name of military-related organization] on campus, I was the secretary with that association.

FY5: No, because I don't have the time.

FY4: I haven't been able to do much—I still have family. Never heard of SVA. Advice to other veterans: Know what you want to do and be committed to it. To me, it's [college] a no brainer, but why wouldn't you use it? A degree isn't a guarantee of a job, but it's an opportunity.

FY3:   Yes, I've been trying to make an effort to drag myself to some events. I'm definitely going to continue going because it's a way to connect with people. I'm definitely trying to be less introverted.

FY2:   No, because most of the veterans are older. I think it's kind of geared to older students.

FY1:   No, I kind of like that I have a separate life now. I haven't attended anything, but if they needed anything I would be happy to help.

TY1:   Yes, I'm trying to organize it and get people to participate.

TY2:   No comment.

TY3:   Today [late fall] I went into the VA office and saw a note about a meeting on someone's desk, but it was over. But I don't know anyway—it would depend on what they do there. But it would be good to have someone to confide in or make some friend to go to a movie with or something. But I did just have a bad experience. The instructor said that military people get lots of benefits and that they are unrealistic and they just expect the benefits. That really upset me and I'm going to speak to the professor about it, because that really made me feel bad.

TY4:   I knew that you had to go online and how to structure my classes perfectly, like the benefits of early or late or classes and to account for traffic and everything. Most people who haven't been to college don't know this. It gives you a foundation to know these things.

TY5:   No comment.

TY6:   I don't because they are at night and I'm a day student.

TY7:   Yes, I would.

TY8:   I really don't need it at this point in my life. But I had completed college when I was in the [name of service]. I'm using the GI Bill to get a _____ [name of field] certificate, so I can take the exam. I actually have a _____ [type of] business now. I was in the military for 23.5 years.

TY9:   No, but I would because I think it's a good networking opportunity.

TY10: No comment.

TY11: I would if I got notified, but I never get notified. I miss the military guys—they're different than the real world.

TY12: I don't because they meet at night and my classes are in the day. I don't see well at night. I would like to go if they met in the day and on my class days. It's too expensive to come to campus for just one thing. Well, it would be good to know other veterans and share information, because there are lots of things that would be helpful to know. It would help me to know if I'm missing any information

TY13: I would participate if they had one.

TY14: I would go it they had daytime meetings.

TY15: No, because of my job and schedules. I would suggest recognizing that if the troops have stress, that it's okay to recognize it. But I've been out for a while so I can look at it objectively. It would be good to have some way to recognize when a soldier or Marine needs help—because they

[student/veterans] probably won't ask. Help with PTSD if it could be done.

Question 10: How You Would Redo the Transition if You Could

What would you do differently if you could redo your transition experience?

FY11: I'm kinda of glad that I went to the community college first, but I was in a rush to get here. I was just craving the challenge and the environment. I'm thinking about graduate school, but I would have to go to a different school because they don't have a master's in _____ [name of field] here. I'd love to stay in this area. It's so diverse here and I really like it. There are so many cultures and the history and there are a lot of military here. Particularly difficult would be my situation—it's not easy to be a single mom in college, but it has gotten easier.

FY10: I think the transition went well—I like who I am and if I hadn't had the experiences I've had, I wouldn't be me. But I have been diagnosed with PTSD and I don't like it that a lot of people have preconceived notions about this. They ask insulting questions and usually get it wrong. I can tell you what usually happens. They ask if I'm military—I say _____ [name of branch]—_____ [name of division]—was deployed twice—combat veteran—and then they assume that I'm going to get really violent and can't control myself. I've even had girls ask if it was safe to be with me. People assume I'm going to get in fights. But here is what it's really like—I mean PTSD. The reality is that I get angry, of course, but mostly

I'm sleepy because I have nightmares and wake up. And I'm super-focused; hyperaware, very alert, always looking around me or seeing if someone is following me. It's less now, but it's difficult to make emotional connections. It was really hard to explain to my family—they were less patient. So I like to be around military because they understand. Like when I get on the Metro—I'm always looking around.

FY9: I would apply for more non-GI Bill benefits and I would have used the Office of Military Services earlier and more. I didn't find out about Office of Military Services until a friend told me, but other than that, nothing.

FY8: Well, it's really difficult for soldiers to get information about schools so I might do some of that differently, but really what I've learned as a result of the military is invaluable. The GI Bill is incredibly complicated. If you're a Reservist and you did not immediately get the Post-9/11 GI Bill it makes it even more complicated. If you did deploy then you're eligible for about six different programs. There is the federal assistance, the state assistance, and then the Montgomery GI Bill…select Reserves GI Bill. I'm in the _____ [name of service]. The federal assistance is so complicated—they changed it so I can't apply for it myself—I had to have my commander fill it out and getting anything done between drills is a nightmare because it has to go through about five people before it gets to him. I finally got his signature and I thought I was applying for Federal Tuition Assistance and thought I had, but it turns out that was just for

account creation, to make an account, which blew my mind. Getting that

high an approval, especially for a reservist is such a nightmare and then

the website _____ [name of site]—they have me listed as not having a

high school degree. So I missed the deadline and it's up in the air whether

I'm going to get that. In the meantime, I've been trying to get the

Montgomery GI Bill and that has encountered a number of obstacles as

well. How much you receive for the Mont GI Bill is related to your state

and whether you have a "kicker." A "kicker" is if you scored a certain

level on your _____ [name of service] entrance exams, then you get a

"kicker." It's like $355 per month. I, I, didn't apply for Fall Mont. GI Bill

until after the semester had actually passed. I thought I was going to be

getting the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but I got rejected because they said I didn't

have enough active duty time. And that is so complicated—I phoned and

like each time you phone it's like a 30- to 45-minute wait and each time I

get a different—every single time. I need to appeal that, but I just don't

want to. Honestly, it is so complicated and stressful that I would rather just

pay for college myself. I feel like an idiot for not doing everything I can to

get the benefit, but it is just so stressful. So going back to the Montgomery

GI Bill I would try to track down whatever money I can and then while

I'm waiting for the appeal for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but you have to send

it through the school, but first you have to get a piece of paper from the

VA so you have to apply through the VA website and then you bring it to

the school and the school sends your info to the VA and you don't have

any visibility and you don't know what's going on and you have to wait a

month to get the paper from the VA and another month for the school to

send it off and my problem was that the school sent off incorrect

information so I didn't hear it was rejected until like a month and the

school sent up the information again and it actually did go through, but it

ended up being like a 4-month process and this is just a tiny section of the

benefits to which I'm entitled. All of this is really secondary to trying to

find out what you're eligible for in the first place. It doesn't go through

your unit which is better anyway, because your unit isn't very good at

handling this kind of stuff—it's better to handle it on your own. I had to

go to a bunch of websites set up by soldiers trying to help other soldiers,

maybe a National Guard or Army website here and there—it was just

incredibly complicated. My situation is kind of unique because I was

active duty for over two years but my occupation is kind of unique—it's

_____ [name of field]—trained at _____ [name of base]. And then I was

in California to learn Arabic for 16 months at DLI [Defense Language

Institute] and then I had Basic Training before that so you add all those

together, I was Active/Duty for over two years. Originally I was told the

GI Bill didn't cover training unless the amount of time in training exceeds

24 months or something. The funny thing—if I had flunked out of either

one of my schools and then had to start them over, I would have been

eligible. But—I want to state for the microphone—being in the military was totally worth it and the military has given me more than I could ever really get with the Post-9/11 GI Bill. And I have the sense that people are really trying to help, it's just so complicated that just the way it is. It would take some kind of sweeping reform legislation to fix it. There are people with much bigger problems than me—people in the military go through lots of problems other people don't realize—I've had lots of problems with pay issues with my unit. Like you just don't get paid— certain _____ [name of branch] units have loan funds to help out soldiers who are going through this. I'm not bad mouthing anything—but that's the way it will always be, but that's just the way it is with a workforce that doesn't have a choice but to work—they can't quit. You know, a civilian company would fix things before it got to that point because people would quit, but in the military people can't do anything—they'd go to jail if they quit.

FY7:   Nothing.

FY6:   I would not have relied on the Veterans Administration for information about my benefits. No one is on the same page. There was never any concise agreement on benefits. I wasted three to four semesters relying on their information and not getting my money's worth. The Montgomery GI Bill was just too hard to use. I started school under the Montgomery GI Bill and it took 2 years to get paid and I only completed [transferred] 9

credits. I had three semesters of developmental classes which didn't count for anything. I enrolled in _____ [name of another community college], but was deployed and had to withdraw. That was okay—it wasn't a hassle—just did it, but didn't get any credits. Since 2009 I have be very fortunate to have the Post-9/11 GI Bill. I wouldn't have been able to continue school without it. I applied to _____ [name of 4-year institution] two times and the second time I was accepted. I didn't have time to get the AA [associate of arts degree], because my GI Bill was being used and I am a nontraditional student and have to get through quickly. I would not be here if they had not changed it, but one thing that is a problem is the VA says 36 months to complete a degree and most of us, it takes more than 36 months especially depending on how much time you've spent in service, because when I got out I had to do three to four semesters of review classes to get me back up to where I was when I came out of high school. I'm spending all this time and money where classes don't count. It would be nice if the VA would just say, "We'll get you your bachelor's degree."

Additional Comments

FY 4: I took some classes I didn't need to. I would have approached my semesters differently. I took some classes here [4-year institution] in the summer, and it's just really thrown me off. To get the full benefits, you have to go full time and now I'm running out of credits to take.

Veteran status never an issue in the classroom.

I was in the _____ [name of branch] for 20 years. I was in a ceremonial unit, but I loved the _____ [name of branch]. I auditioned specifically for the musical unit. This is a drum and bugle corps. The Marine Barracks at 8th and I has the last drum and bugle corps left in the service. The drum and bugle corps is the Commandant's Own. I always knew I was going to go into the military. I wanted to do other things in the military, but it just didn't happen. I was able to serve the country and do something I liked. We traveled a lot, but not always long times like deployments. We could spend up to six months out of the year away from home. We did a lot of ceremonies in DC, throughout the country and overseas, too. Right after high school I tried college, but didn't have the drive and motivation to keep going. I didn't go to school while I was on active duty. It would have been the wise thing to do. A lot of guys did, but I didn't want to spend more time away from my family.

When I retired I started my own business as a painting contractor. I'm good at the grunt work, but I've been doing it long enough to know that I'm not a good businessman. I just don't have the passion for it. Chasing down jobs, doing everything—it was just wearing me out. It was paying the bills, but I just wasn't happy doing it. So when the GI Bill came out, I jumped on that right away.

I: How'd you find out about the GI Bill?

FY 4: I can't say for sure. We just heard about it on the news or something and then we looked it up. Once we learned what it was all about, we were good to go. Having your tuition paid for is great, book stipend, but if it wasn't for the housing allowance I wouldn't be able to do this. I'm not interested in making lots of money, I've learned to be satisfied with what I have, but for me personally I think of it as me being in a better position to help support my family. Because once the kids leave the house, they're still going to lean on you. I certainly leaned on my mom and dad.

This institution needs policy changes to really think about the difference between traditional and nontraditional students. We're here for jobs and real-life training. There is a lot of misinformation put out by administrators and faculty. They tell everyone you're going to earn $45,000 with a college degree and that's just not true. It's unrealistic. If a person is going into the public sector, they won't earn that much, so I think faculty are being irresponsible. I think both students and faculty misunderstand who vets are. They really need to think about the future of education for nontraditional students. There was some study that shows that the first two years of college were a waste of time. Growing up it was like "You have to get a college degree." But in reality that doesn't apply. Lots of misinformation.

There is a huge disconnect in transferring credits. If I'd gone as a BIS [bachelor of individual studies] student I could have gotten 30 credits

which is quite a lot, but in other programs you get nothing. So why does one part of the school give military credits and others don't? And the thing that got me about that was, my friend studied here and she paid all this money to go study abroad. And I said, I already have that—I have more than just visiting another country—I've lived and connected people with people and all this and I'd actually pay for that credit if that's what they want, but they don't. And I'm like, that's not education—that's moneymaking.

FY5: I don't think I'd redo anything. I'm very happy with it. I've met a lot of great people here at _____ [name of 4-year institution]. I met _____ and _____ and I started meeting with those guys—I don't remember for what—asking them GI Bill questions. When I started working here I expanded my network. At lot of it has to do with this job—I've met tons of people. I was asked to be a guest speaker for a Global Affairs meeting and ever since they started the 300 class [class specifically for veterans] I've been the TA for that. That's a small class—combination of _____ [name of institution] does not require any type of a student development course. I think if there was a requirement for the college, I think more veterans would take it. Veteran's transition is one section of the regular student 300 course.

FY4: I took some classes I didn't need to. I would have approached my semesters differently. I took some classes here in the summer, and it's just

really thrown me off. To get the full benefits [from the GI Bill], you have to go full time and now I'm running out of credits to take.

FY3: When I joined as a reserve, I wasn't eligible for any educational benefits. But when we were in Iraq and the Post-9/11 GI Bill came out, it applied to me and it was a really great surprise.

I'm different than most people who have lots of fun in college and really had a great time in the _____ [name of branch], but that's not me. I didn't.

When I took this Student Development Course at _____ [name of previous college], we took a sheet and were supposed to mark all the things we had. At the end it said—if you marked three of these you have stress. On that list of 10-20 things I had checked off every single one—so the counselor if you checked more than five raise your hand. I think that was when I was kind of figuring out so I wasn't surprised. I was thinking, wow, I really need to get some help somehow. I had been to doctor about stress. I told him I can't sleep at night unless I drink a lot of beer or booze or whatever and the doctor's like, "Well, you need to eat more vegetables and you need to exercise more" and they even recommended meditation but that was at a point in my life where I was really hurting and I was thinking, "Can you help me. I'm not asking you to give me some weird…[pause] ideas that I could do"—I really wanted help from someone else, 'cause I felt really alone. The doctors were trying to prescribe some

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antidepressant medication and that did not work. No, it did definitely not work. So I haven't been to see a doctor since then. I don't want to go there. I'm not going to go and ask questions about depression—I just don't think they care. I know if I went back to the base doctor they'd just try to give me medicine and that doesn't sound like a good idea either to me. That's why I like studying different ways of thinking and all that and they have some real ways you can help yourself and it feels better when I do it on my own 'cause it find of feels like you're being looked down on when you're in a really rough place and somebody says "Go help yourself," it just kind of sounds like rude. I'm a rough case. From some of the other people I talk to, everyone seems like they got it all figured out and so I'm, maybe I'm humble 'cause I don't have it figured out. But in the rat race around this area it's not a good thing. I find humor and satisfaction in the situation, but I also feel alone because there aren't a lot of people like that, I don't think. People who think about what's really important.

FY2:   I might have gone active duty first because I would have then gotten a full ride on the GI Bill. I thought about that, but I rejected the idea because I wanted to go to college right then.

Time is essential—it really motivates me—my father was a cavalry officer in [name of country], but it was mandatory duty. I always want to do something that will better impact the world and it's an honorable thing to do.

FY1: I would have taken a semester off [after leaving the military]. I just wanted to get back to being a normal person. In the end it just wasn't good. Three to six months they [the military] said everything will be fine and you're anxious. They bring the chaplains and stuff, but there's nothing that really changes—they were nice and they do a good job, but there is only so much they can do. So I just deal with it.

TY1: I would try to plan more and go to school sooner after getting out of service. I waited, but then it was good, because now I have the new GI Bill.

TY2: I would [attend student/veterans campus meetings] if I got notified, but I never get notified. I miss the military guys – they're different than the real world. I'd learn more about VA benefits before coming to college.

TY3: No response.

TY4: Everything is so regulated in the military—they tell you when to eat and to sleep. When you get here you are totally on your own so I can see why my college background is beneficial to me.

TY5: [Note: The comments from this subject were inconsistent and confusing.] Well, I enlisted in the military to go back to school and get my master's degree—but I was misled, actually lied to. I was told that I could enlist and get an educational bonus. The recruiter told me that I could get an enlistment bonus—I would be able to go to OCS [Officer Candidates School], but he said to me that females, women, were not being accepted

at that time. So I said, "Okay, I'll take the enlistment bonus, go to basic training, come out and go to school." Two to three weeks into Basic Training the senior drill instructor wanted to know why I wasn't in OCS. I explained what the recruiter said and she was livid, but nothing could be done. When I got to my duty station, I requested to take part in the GI Bill to get my funds to go to school. I was told that I couldn't apply because that program was only for undergraduates. I wrote to headquarters _____ [name of service] and told them what the recruiter had said. They came back and said "We can't do that, but we can give you a reduced enlistment bonus." My initial bonus was for 6K, but the 2K would be spread over the rest of my enlistment. I said, "This is crazy"—I was not pleased about that. I told them, "You can either come through on your contract or it would be a breach of contract." My options were to stay in and take the 2K or get out with an honorable discharge and I chose to get out and we'll part friends and I will eventually forgive you. But it has never caused me to dislike the _____ [name of service], I mean, I'm still _____ [name of branch] through and through—I just think that there were people in certain positions that were not keyed into…we made a mistake and we need to make this mistake right. So then I never got the GI Bill. [Interviewer note: The information form the subject completed stated that she was attending school under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.]

TY6:   I wouldn't take math [laughs]. I don't know—I'm comfortable on campus and it's convenient. I think it would be helpful if they had a special veterans' orientation.

TY7:   More advisors—to say, what you can do, what you can't do, what you need to do. The transition into school is kind of hard, especially if you're just coming out [of the military]. The paperwork, lots of different stops, versus if you had someone there for that degree that would help. If you got four to five people telling you the same thing, but in different ways, it gets kind of tiresome. It should be someone who has experience that's telling you—it would be a lot more easy to understand. I know in the VA portion, you got some veterans in there, but I didn't have to deal with them, but for somebody else, they might have to.

These kids just don't get it. They're lucky to be here and they're just screwin' [sic] around—they're wasting everybody's time and it really makes me mad that they're taking the place of some other kid who might really want to be here.

So a lot of military people are self-starters in the military, but in the civilian stuff it's way different so if the school had somebody who was there who could help because of course everybody has to get the financial paperwork, this type of stuff. With the military it's a rank structure so there is more, like if you're a private and I'm a sergeant, I'll have more priority than a PFC [private first class]. Lots of people can't break that

down in the civilian life and they just want to demand—but you got to

break that down. Here, you got to sign your name and just wait—but in the

military if you're the highest ranking person, you don't got to wait. I just

came back from Afghanistan [before coming here to school]. Let me say it

like this—when I walked through that airport [in Baltimore] in my

uniform I was somebody. All kinds of people were stopping me and

thanking me. I really liked that—I would have liked to stay in the military,

but I couldn't go back again because I got a kid and I just can't leave

again. But then when I come here I got to stand in long lines, nobody even

knows nothin' about me and treats me bad. I worked my way up to

sergeant but so what? Here I'm just another dumb kid who can't get no

answers.

TY8: No response.

TY9: I'd take more classes while deployed—but really, the schedules were

pretty rough—so I'm not sure how that would work. And one thing is that

it's so different from the military. I do miss my peers [in the military]—

they and the military really give you self-confidence and situations where

you have to make decisions. But, I'll…I'm just going forward with my

goals.

TY10: Well, if I were in charge of the college I would change the length of time

it takes to get our benefits. We have to resubmit the paperwork on the

second week of every semester. It's a lot of duplication and even then it's

a 30-day (or longer) wait. Also, the younger students are really different. They don't make any effort and they are taking the benefits away from other students who might really care about education.

TY11: I'd like to have special registration for veterans. Also, I'd like to have more contact with other veterans—some type of support structure. I'd also try to figure out how the bookstore works because it's always hard to get my books—plus it's too expensive—they're taking advantage of the guaranteed payment for veterans.

TY12: Well, it has been an experience. I was surprised about the different class sizes at _____ [name of 2-year institution]—some are really crowded and in small spaces and some are in big rooms and not very many students. Honestly, I'm still adjusting to being a student. It's kind of a jarring experience, not too helpful. I'm failing the _____ [name of subject] class and I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know what I'd do.

TY13: I would do more research before choosing a school. I'd also have done more classes when I was on Active Duty. I also would have saved more money. It's hard not working—I'd like to have a job to help out.

TY14: Nothing—I'm really content with it.

TY15: No comment.

Additional Discussion With Subject TY15

Subject TY15 continued discussing his employment and his personal life in detail after the end of the interview. Although this conversation was recorded, its relevance to this study is negligible and is omitted from this transcription.

Other Comments

The following comments are other comments made by the subjects during the interviews. They provided additional information and were voluntarily offered by the subjects in the course of conversation. They were not necessarily in answer to an interview question.

FY6: Well, basically I've just learned about the college experience. We're tested on things the faculty never discuss. Any "aha" moments I have had came from my peers and not from inside the classroom.

FY5: I was really worried about that when I came back to school. I expected to have some problems, but every professor I've had has been very receptive to the whole veteran thing.

I can't think of any professors I've had any problems with? Sometimes the professor in class would ask if anybody had any experience in the military. I would always raise my hand and it was always very comfortable. But I've got the haircut or something comes up about the military.

FY4: But I like _____ [name of college], it's a good school. Yes, I got my associates degree and transferred here. They have the agreement with the community college—you get your first two years there and you're guaranteed admission. The first 2

semesters I was able to work, but now I'm just too busy. I have 2 children and my wife and all 4 of us are in college. Nobody in our family has gone to college—so it's a big deal for us. If they get their degrees, and they are parents the chances of their kids going to school is better. My wife is going to go into geology. I hope to end up in a park service. I'm in a general U.S. History major. I'm anxious to leave Northern Virginia. My first stop is going to be Germany.

I: when you started community college, what was that experience like for you?

It was exciting—I was just thrilled. I told you that I was really unhappy in my work as a painting contractor. In fact, I had been out 2 years and I went to the _____ [name of service] and asked if there was any way I could get back in. I felt the loss keenly. It was just like having a limb amputated—my whole identify was in wrapped up in the _____ [name of service]. I keenly felt that loss and I was just unhappy doing what I was doing. But…when the GI Bill came out and I went to school, you know, that got a whole lot easier for me. Now instead of looking back, I'm looking forward. Now my job is temporary for me. As soon as I get my degree I'm done. It's very exciting for me to go to school, it's interesting being in a classroom, but I'm very focused on my studies. I'm excited. It's a marathon and when you can start seeing that finish line it's getting exciting. Going back to school has been real good for me. I'm happier; I'm motivated and feeling better about things.

I: Does _____ [name of college student attended] have a veterans' office?

Yes, I would describe it as kind of modest. Most vets are still working and have other responsibilities.

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FY4: But for me personally, it's a sanctuary. Instead of going out there and competing and trying to find a place to sit down, I come in here and there's a bond between everybody that's in here. You may not even know each other, but it's a bond. It's my hangout and it's a safe place. Like I say, we're social, but it's nice to come up here and chill out. Like that guy sitting out there [in the lobby] right now, I've never met him before but I feel real comfortable sitting with him, where as if I were with some kid I wouldn't feel like that. To me it's important to have this place.

I: Do you meet a lot of veterans here?

Yes, there are a bunch of them—but maybe it's because we notice each other.

FY3: After I was…I spent a tour in Iraq and I was disillusioned about everything. So I went back to _____ [name of 2-year institution] and studied languages and I loved it. I came here because I didn't want to leave the area. I was working at the [name of local museum] and I got to meet all kinds of different people. I really loved it so I wanted to study languages. Futility of whole war, but now nobody knows what we're doing. We used to have a mission, but not there's nothing. So I gave up on religion, my moral compass was broken, so that's why I've been trying to study different cultures and learn from them. I've lived with my grandmother since I was 19 because we kind of really help each other out. It was good because I was in a really dark place.

At one point I considered the military a career because I was really motivated to do a good job, but after I realized my job was driving a tank and getting screamed at through the radios—it was a nightmare. One of the jobs was driving along the wadis (cliffs), but I didn't like the idea of me driving and I had like five of my friends in the

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tank and the thought of hurting them—really ate away at me for a while. It could have

been one of the reasons I really lost it, because I really hated that job, but I had to do it.

FY3: I had to deal with the vets' office at _____ [name of college] so when I

came here to [name of 4-year institution], I found this and I ran into my friend _____ and

he helped me a lot transitioning from _____ [name of 2-year college]. For me it was a

really hard process, lots of paperwork.

I: Are there special programs for veterans?

Well, I don't like telling anyone I'm a veteran. I think they should just want to

help you because you're a new student, like you're a nuisance. But then if I say I'm

trying to figure something out with the GI Bill, then they start to help you just a little bit

more.

FY2: My major is _____ and _____, with a concentration in _____. I found out

about this office during orientation. I saw this on the website so I chose this. I'm actually

a junior—I'll graduate in two and a half years. The _____ [name of service] changed my

orientation—I'm going to do what I have to do—I'm here for an education and then I

want to move on. I take 18 credits a semester, but I'm always busy so this isn't anything

new. It also saves me a lot of money, too. I'm also paying for college on my own with the

_____ [name of service's] help and I'm a work study student here. I actually found out

about that at the orientation because they asked about it. After a semester I applied for the

job because the first semester I wanted to see how my workload went. I really benefitted

a lot from the orientation, they gave me lots of explanations about things I didn't even

know about here.

FY10: Because when I went [to orientation], I was 25 last summer, I was in a small group, and I was older than everyone and I have nothing against 18 year olds, but I think it would significantly help the transition for veterans into school, to have that option, to do some kind of military focused orientation. Not even military focused, but there's this 3-day orientation and the small group you are assigned to is all other veterans. The school wouldn't have to change how they do things—all they would need is a Patriot leader who would be in charge of that and that way the incoming vets it would be good to have that community being built right from the beginning on an individual level. Finally, I think that student government, right now has a veterans or military representative. I don't know how they get appointed or who they are, um, but I know that they are not military. It's ridiculous, they are ROTC, which is great, but my understanding is that they are not prior service ROTC, so how can they know what veterans need if they are not one of us, so I think that if they are going to have that position it needs to be a military person. I understand that only problem with that is that you need to get someone who is a veteran to run for student government, but, I think if that option was open, more people would be interested in doing it. I don't consider myself, _____ [name of 4-year institution] considers me a freshman, but at the same time I've had more life experiences than some of the grad school kids that I know. So, if the freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, if they get individual seats in student government, as veterans we should have our own seat. Identification with veterans: I don't consider myself a freshman; _____ [name of 4-year institution] calls me a freshman because I have under 30 credits.

TY1: Don't use them because they never know the answer to my problems or situation. Plus there is a long waiting time to see them.

TY2: Student registration is overwhelming. You wait and wait in line and then they tell you to go somewhere else and start all over.

TY2: I picked my own classes when I came here, but it was my first time to come to college. I don't have an advisor.

TY3: In hindsight, I shouldn't have came here.

I: Why do you say that?

It's not military friendly—they don't have procedures to help you get jobs and they don't have the Combat to College program. I should have gone to _____ [name of another community college] because they have more of those programs.

TY4: I haven't really talked to an academic advisor. I mean I talked to some guy when I registered, but that's it. I mean, I've got here a pretty solid plan—XYZ—this will happen. I'm not saying I don't need an advisor, but I'm saying I haven't had any issues. I'm a little older than these other guys [students].

TY6: About instructors. It was a pleasant surprise. They love their subjects so it helps me learn. Also, the ones with a sense of humor are good.

TY6: Well, I use the one at _____ [nearby military base] as needed.

TY7: No, because I pretty much know what I have to do. I just signed up for my own classes.

TY7: Well, as far as the business management, I knew who to talk to, but I didn't know how to talk to them. So I'm learning the business part; investors, investments,

inventory. Well, I know a lot about cars and want to get certifications to work on cars, so this GI Bill pays for that.

TY7: One of the reasons why is that I have to do it because I have the opportunity, it's something that might come up—they might call you back to the military but you never know—they change things up every day. In the military we used to have a specific person that does the paperwork for this, this, and this. Now here, you have to do a lot of your own paperwork. That's the only thing I could see would be an issue or a burden for a lot of veterans is coming out—finding all this—I got to do this—I got to do this other thing. The responsibility falls on you—you got a lot more jobs in a sense. Another thing—like if we had a VA person on campus where we could visit them here—that would really help. That's one of the things I had to do was to go back home and get the paperwork—it was available on line, but the computers were all backed up. A computer just for veterans, but you see everybody is using the computers right there. Because you can get it online.

TY8: They're general academic advisors.

TY 9: Because, seriously, going to school is really hard work. I know my job now is to be a student and I have my goals in mind, but it's harder than being in the military. Before, when I went to _____ [name of a university] (pre-[name of service]), I really needed direction. And now, I much more serious and the _____ [name of service] gave me a lot of direction, plus the educational benefits are great.

TY9: I don't use one, I registered online.

TY10: I've never really used one.

TY10: Well, I don't know. I feel out of the loop. I just study and go to class. I really miss the camaraderie of the military.

TY11: Tutoring and help doing things. It also would help to have more support from the VA office. I'd like to have regular contact from them.

TY11: The VA is my academic advisor. I go to the VA office downtown

TY12: I don't have a job right now. So, I decided to come back to _____ [name of 2-year college]. I had attended to _____ [name of 2-year college on nearby military base] before, so I already had some credits. So I talked to the lady at _____ [name of 2-year college on nearby military base] and she helped me register. I take day classes and it's convenient although I drive one hour round trip.

TY13: I still go to _____ [nearby military base] for help, so I've never used the advisors here. The advisors are real good—they've given me lots of guidance [referring to the offsite assistance].

TY14: The VA here though—I've seen like 4 different reps and I always get a different answer. I would like more help with finding a job and help with resumes and some workshops. I'm not working and would like to have a part-time job.

I: Are you aware that the campus has a dedicated veteran's job placement person?

No, I've never heard about that.

TY15: I feel ancient even though I'm not that old—but it's been a long time since I've done this.

TY15: Re: faculty attributes. So I can't say what makes one teacher better than another, but I can tell you what's bad…. She [the instructor] was disrespectful, she was

always late, she gave no clarification on assignments. There were four veterans in the class and none of us took what she was throwing at us. The others—the kids—were asking "Why are you fighting with her?" They were more timid and just "took it."

TY15: No officially, but when I got ready to graduate, I went and found out I can get an AA so that's why I'm taking the history class in addition to the others. I didn't know about it before. But I don't think I'm assigned a specific one.

TY15: Arrogance—they tell you you'll be the best and they don't lie—I turned out to be a really cocky person, just like the recruiter. I didn't consider changing from being a _____ [branch of service], I could have gone into the _____ [branch of service] as a medical officer, but I didn't want to.

Things I learned in the military: 1. You aren't all that; 2. Get over yourself; 3. Lots of people have done it before; 4. We are different, but not better.

Well, I took a sociology class at _____ [name of college] and I just couldn't wrap my head around the fact that not everybody can do it. I grew up dirt poor, with food stamps and welfare, but my parents really cared about us and helped us. Well, everybody can do it, but not everybody will if you will get over your pride. It's difficult, but you can do it.

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